overwhelming. Like Pauline Kael, whose tastes and prose style he frequently emulates, he is at his best when dealing with the immediacy of the acting moment. His discussion of the forgotten Roman Bohnen’s performance in *Of Mice and Men* is a revelation. On the other hand, 300 pages of showy prose style is a bit much, and there is an additional problem: like the people he writes about, Vineberg is sometimes guilty of showing off for its own sweet sake. What dreadful thing did Geraldine Page ever do to deserve slurs like “the puffiest apple cheeks in show business” and “shoot the poor crazy bitch”? Kim Stanley and Sandy Dennis are equally abused. Vineberg does find room to praise such neglected female players as Julie Harris, Eva Marie Saint, Kim Hunter, and Blythe Danner, but Dyer’s comments on the sexism of the Method’s advocates still comes irresistibly to mind.

There are other problems: careful attention to camera, editing, lighting is largely absent from *Method Actors*, even though such key directors as Elia Kazan and Martin Ritt, central to the careers of such Method stars as Marlon Brando and Paul Newman respectively, taught at the Actor’s Studio. We learn of Kazan’s brief acting career, and he’s frequently quoted. But crucial questions of how Method acting came to be transferred to Hollywood cinema go by the board. To take the less well-known Ritt as an example, I didn’t learn that he had a Method background from Vineberg’s work. All *Method Actors* says is that the part of “Marty” was written for him, but that Ritt couldn’t create the role on television because he was blacklisted. Also, that Ritt directed Newman in *Hud* (“expertly”) and Rip Torn in *Cross Creek*, period. Vineberg admires these performances; of how Ritt’s Method background might have helped him work with or even shape Newman and Torn’s performances he gives no clue.

Vineberg tends to read Method actors as auteurs, autonomous creators of their stage and screen performances, and his showboat prose style and single-focus attack are, ultimately, more exhausting than exhaustive. Still, this is a useful book on an important subject, and if it sends more of us back to original films and kinescopes (and to the theater itself) its enterprise will be justified.

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**GREGG RICKMAN**


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**The Movie That Changed My Life**


Compared with the thickets of reception theory and a deal of heavy speculation about constructing subjectivity at the Bijou, relatively few serious inquiries have been undertaken into filmic responses of real, live subjects. David Rosenberg—translator/co-author of *The Book of I*—recently asked 23 novelists, literary critics, and fellow poets to comment upon a seminal picture whose influence, in most cases, was keenly felt during childhood or adolescence. His added proviso: whenever possible, “the movie that changed my life” would be re-viewed to assess its current power to move. The results are consistently provocative, although the brief space permitted by the project often frustrates. Only a few essays seem unworthy of their better company.

Rosenberg intends his book to “honor the act of discovery.” In this vein, many participants do marvelously summon up (sometimes to wistfully deconstruct) the unguarded freshness of the silver screen’s impact upon a youthful *mentalité*. One is impressed by the wide range of uses to which favored films could be put for good, for ill, or for ambiguous purpose (intriguingly, the same film often served several agendas). Movies negligible or famous furnished escape from harsh reality, but also could offer a spur for genuine, positive change both within the self and the wider world. Thus, *The Wizard of Oz* tutored Terry McMillan in the art of coping with her impoverished childhood, particularly in standing up to her hardworking, tough-minded mother.

Philip Lopate muses on the distressing possibility that cinema might provide a *cordon sanitaire* for creative or spiritual aspirations far better fulfilled outside the Bijou. He suspects a yearning to recuperate his Jewish heritage (still unresolved) may have been diverted by too comfortable a meditation on the possibilities for the hero’s redemption in Bresson’s transcendental cinema, rather than on the condition of his own soul.

On the unambiguous dark side, much firsthand testimony fleshes out familiar cultural theory on how potently questionable notions about sex, class, race can be purveyed to unquestioning minds under the guise of harmless entertainment. Seeing *Bambi* as an adult, Russell Banks awakens to its Victorian distortions about gender. A dismayed Francine Prose now finds
Seven Brides for Seven Brothers “a buoyant, light-hearted, genial hymn to the joys and the social necessity of rape.”

Pieces by the lit/crit heavy hitters strike the requisite intellectual sparks—notably Harold Bloom’s astringent take on W. C. Fields’ “aesthetic of outrage” in The Fatal Glass of Beer. But these worthy avades much self-revelation (Geoffrey Hartman in particular), refusing to describe the coil of personal experience around the movie’s armature which comprises some of the collection’s most attractive writing. I especially recommend David Bradley’s scarifying account of first exposure to The Birth of a Nation as the token black at an Animal House smoker, and an equally infuriating later viewing when a lecturer at an Ivy League film festival advised him to “get beyond history and deal with the aesthetics.”

Assorted other pleasures:

Meg Wolitzer and Bharati Mukherjee on how two adolescent girls from disparate cultures were resorted, comforted by Shadow of a Doubt and Love Me or Leave Me. Mukherjee, daughter of a wealthy Calcutta family, says she “Bengalized” Ruth Etting’s story with wonderful ease. Her aperçu felicitously captures the universal process of cutting foreign custom and environs to the individual psyche’s fit.

Leonard Michaels on the zipper as erotic trope in Gilda; on the obscure frisson compelled by the conflation of Hayworth’s undomesticable sexuality and her grinding humiliations throughout that film.

Amy Hempel on the thesis that a privileged movie may initiate change by ineluctably defining one life phase or another, engendering an intense awareness of where one has gotten to, through identification with character and/or mise-en-scène.

Gordon Lish, on the quite extraordinary—and eerily uncomfortable—intimation that the actors in a pornographic film might be watching him from inside its frame.

As previously noted, such recognitions are attractive, but singularly frustrating because they cannot be overmuch developed. To the psychoanalyst, The Movie That Changed My Mind suggests a far more ambitious project, on the order of Norman Holland’s Five Readers Reading. Imagine a large cohort of viewers, life histories explored in depth, shown the same film (or films, perhaps of several different genres), free associations duly recorded, the tools of my trade then deployed to probe and truly grasp the complex articulations between the movie on the screen, and—paraphrasing William Carlos Williams—the poem we have been trying to become all our lives.

One notes with a special pang how often the memory of a movie treasured by Rosenberg’s subjects was bound up with the ambience of the theater—now long gone—in which the picture was first seen: Z at the Gilles in Wahpeton, North Dakota, for Louise Erdrich; Gone With the Wind at the Breeze in Beaufort, South Carolina, for Valerie Sayers. She saw GWTW from the beginning—unlike most other films of the day, which were likely to be entered in media res, and similarly concluded. The practice required a cockeyed narratological suppleness, so routine it was never questioned when I walked through the Art Deco doors of the Renel Theater during my own Philadelphia childhood. Years from now, recalling the delights of Thelma & Louise, who is likely to brim with such nostalgia for the barren box of the Loews 84th Street sixplex?

Harvey R. Greenberg

Reel Women
Pioneers of the Cinema 1896 to the Present


As a labor of love over the last eight years, through production of a documentary, public lectures, and now a reference book of film history, Ally Acker has been publicizing the oft-forgotten and/or ignored work of women pioneers within the film industry. In Reel Women she has brought together in one accessible place material previously available only by combing through diverse, frequently hard-to-obtain sources. Additionally, she has herself conducted numerous interviews with many of the women in question. As an opportunity for these “‘pioneers’ . . . who blazed trails . . . where . . . others[s] . . . had not gone before” (xx) to speak for themselves, Reel Women is exceptional, a major contribution to women’s history generally as well as to the history of film-making in the United States.

Using the format of biographical/professional sketches followed by filmographies, Reel Women covers directors, producers, writers, animators, stunt women, women behind the scenes, and “one-of-a-kind reel women.” Where appropriate, Acker divides her