

when the muse strikes

Omnivore

Icicles like tyrannosaurus teeth, dripping from power lines — one two three many lengths, thick and crowded, sharkmouthed...

Iced rain spikes down on the grass, forcing each blade into white cocoon glass, pulping lawns to earth, to mud: a beast on its prey.

I, the vagrant, eyeglasses beaded and smudged, sing what songs I know for warmth, hope some dry farmer, eventually, somewhere, will profit

From this thundering needle chill, this storm of night crazed assault on green, warm flesh, the gored tenderland now shocked and submitting:

No ark this time, just something a bit more like hearthside Tended by an old god fallen far enough into love to be kind

By Eric Wurzbacher

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The Top Ten

Renoir, Chaplin cap year's best

1977 will almost certainly be remembered more for its deaths than for its films. Among the dead were a culture hero, Groucho Marx, and four great and influential directors, Fritz Lang, Howard Hawks, Charles Chaplin, and Roberto Rossellini. The obituary pages didn't report only losses, though; "novelist"-screenwriter James M. Cain, who created a forgettable assortment of tough guys, scuzzballs, and creeps, finally joined the Great Double-crosser down below.

The film year itself was pretty impressive, more for depth than for quality; it's a rare year indeed when a minor but by no means negligible film by a genius of the magnitude of Orson Welles is not even a serious contender for Top 10 honors. As to technical details: eligible films include any I saw during the year that premiered locally in 1977. Films I reviewed here are given an * and discussed only briefly.

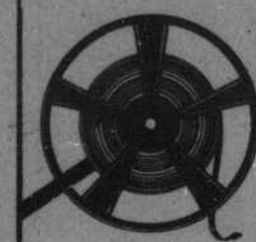
1. *The River*. * Jean Renoir's 1951 masterpiece, warm, lyrical, and absolutely brilliant.

2. *A Woman of Paris*, (1923) directed by, but not starring, Charles Chaplin. Distinguished acting, precise direction, and an almost perfect structure make this much more than a Victorian melodrama. Perhaps the absence of star Chaplin to build the film around forced director Chaplin to extend himself creatively; *Woman* is one of his finest directing efforts.

3. *Twilight's Last Gleaming* — An indifferent cast, headed by the thinking man's Charlton Heston, Burt Lancaster, and a muddled script that fails to deliver the punchline it promises still equal a great film under the incredibly forceful direction of Robert Aldrich. *Twilight's* flaws are simply overwhelmed by a pace so intense it transforms a device as hackneyed as the split screen into a frenzied explosion of action too frantic to unfold sequentially. Aldrich orchestrates the action so effectively that the ending is

numbing and you leave the theater drained. The director's best film since his 50's H-bomb, *Kiss Me Deadly*, and almost as apocalyptic.

4. *Annie Hall* — Woody Allen on falling in love and separating.



By DAVID COURSEN

Allen is funnier than ever and far more controlled, possibly because the gags are tied together by a story that comes from his experience, rather than his movie-memory. Diane Keaton gives an inspired performance in the title role. The Marshall McLuhan sequence (done, with solid cinematic sense, in single-take), everyone's dream of how to deflate a pompous bore, is my favorite Allen gag. With the exception of George Cukor's made-for-TV *Love Among the Ruins*, *Annie Hall* may be the best American comedy since the mid-fifties.

5. *Alice in the Cities*, * — the local debut of German Wim Wenders. Intelligently crafted, with a fine feel for character and setting and a sly sense of humor.

6. Werner Herzog, possibly the finest director making films today. Listed here for three fine shorts, *The Great Ecstasy of the Sculptor Steiner*, a lyrical hymn to the magic of ski flying, and *Last Words and Precautions Against Fanatics*, two wry celebrations of human folly and persistence.

7. Rainer Fassbinder, director of *Fox and His Friends*, * a coldly dispassionate look at personal and social manipulation among West German gays. Fassbinder plays the title character with a perpetually and appropriately wrinkled brow, and directs with a fine eye for visual textures and

expressive compositions. Fassbinder also directed *Effi Priest*, a fascinating, if not wholly satisfying look at nineteenth-century German social conventions. 8 & 9 are vacant.

10. Tie; after each title is the

reason it didn't place higher: *Three Women*, * Robert Altman's dream film (too pretentious). *Harlan County, USA*, * a warm and perceptive look at a coal miner's strike, directed by Barbara Kopple (too good-hearted). *Le Plaisir*, (1950), a minor film by great director Max Ophuls, that took only a quarter of a century to reach Eugene (too clever). *Mahler*, which nosed out *Valentino* * as Ken Russell's best film; imaginative and uncompromisingly personal (too Russell-esque).

Honorable mention: *Small Change*, (Truffaut), *F for Fake*, (Welles), *Bound for Glory*, (Ashby), *Le Chat*, (Granier-Deferre), *Cria*, (Saura), *Providence*, (Resnais).

Best Revival: *Marnie*, (Hitchcock); runner-up, *Gun Crazy*, (Lewis).

Best film visually (though one of the stupidest in most other respects): *Exorcist Two: The Heretic*, (Boorman).

The Worst: Busby Berkeley: a rotten crate of bananas for *The Gang's All Here* and nothing whatsoever for *Gold Diggers of 1935*, possibly the worst film in the history of the University's Acme-Bijou series.

A special award for worst line of dialogue goes to *Telefon*, a generally commendable film, well-directed by craftsman Don Siegel but abominably written by hack Sterling (*The Towering Inferno*) Silliphant. The line comes as two Russians discuss the consequences of a prisoner's escape: "If he's escaped, God help us." "God, comrade?" Subtlety, thy name is Silliphant.

And a special The Majesty of the Law award to the person or persons responsible for the prosecution of Bernardo Bertolucci for the heinous crime of "having made a film called 1900, during the production of which diverse live frogs were tortured."

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