

# I've Got Their Numbers

I began going to movies when I was about four years old. I still recall that two of the first ones I ever saw back in Chicago were an Abbott & Costello comedy and a pirate movie involving galley slaves. That was 70 years ago, and although my love affair with the movies didn't have a particularly auspicious beginning, it even managed to survive a 13 year period during which I reviewed them, first for the UCLA Daily Bruin and then for Los Angeles magazine.

To suggest, in the words of Cole Porter's "It Was Just One of Those Things," that the love affair was too hot not to cool down is putting it mildly. Over the past 25 years, I have rarely liked more than one or two movies a year. By this time, I would probably stop seeing new ones altogether except that, because of my membership and voting privileges in the Writers Guild, the studios continue to send me a batch of DVDs at year's end.

Alas, this year was no exception. They sent me 16, all of which, I assume, they believe are worthy of writing awards. I, on the other hand, think, judging by this assortment, 2014 may be the worst year in movie history. And that's no easy trick, as I assumed 2013 would retire the crown. It's a lot like assuming that Jimmy Carter would be our worst president ever, and then along comes Barack Obama to snatch away the title.

One failing that most of the 16 shared is that they were under-lit. In recent years, directors and cinematographers have come to believe that movies should resemble radio shows as much as possible. But assuming it isn't for demented aesthetic reasons, my only other conclusion is that after over-paying the actors, there's nothing left in the budget for light bulbs.

Another thing these movies have in common is that they're all

too long, considering their plots or what has come to pass for a plot. The shortest of the 16 is also probably the one that will get my vote, "Still Alice" (Julianne Moore and Alec Baldwin). I can't say I enjoyed it because it deals with the early onset of Alzheimer's. As soon as you know the subject matter, you know it's going to be a very sad movie with a tragic ending, but at least at 101 minutes, it didn't milk it for an additional hour, as the others did.

The other 15 were "Foxcatcher," "Into the Woods," "Unbroken," "A Most Violent Year," "Boyhood," "Love is Strange," "Whiplash," "The Judge," "Wild," "Nightcrawler," "American Sniper," "Inherent Vice," "Get On Up," "Chef" and "The Hobbit." I will first confess that in the case of "Boyhood," which was apparently 12 years in the making, I gave up after about 12 minutes because it already felt like 12 years. Also, I skipped "The Hobbit" because I already knew that I wouldn't care for it. "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings" belong to a genre that I refer to as pretentious fantasy, which I simply can't abide.

People who buy their books by the pound might appreciate the fact that the movies make up in length what they lack in quality, averaging 130 minutes. By comparison, during the same few weeks, thanks to Turner Classic Movies, I saw the following seven movies: "Meet Me in St. Louis (1944)," "The Shop Around the Corner (1940)," "The Bachelor & the Bobby-Soxer (1947)," "City Lights (1931)," "Hoosiers (1986)," "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946) and "Bachelor Mother (1939)." Not only did they star the likes of Judy Garland, Jimmy Stewart, Margaret Sullavan, Cary Grant, Myrna Loy, Charlie Chaplin, Gene Hackman, Ginger Rogers, David Niven and Charles Coburn, but the seven classics, which included a musical and four comedies, genres that have pretty much disappeared over the past few decades, averaged a civilized 103 minutes.

While we're on the subject of numbers, I am getting sick and tired of hearing liberals dismissing the GOP as the party of

old white men. It is certainly the party of this old man, but the evidence, by and large, is that the Democrats are the party of old white men and elderly white women, although one of them advanced her academic and political career by pretending to be a Native American.

Consider that the three frontrunners for the Democrats in 2016 are Hillary Clinton, 67, Elizabeth ("Pocahontas") Warren, 65, and Joe Biden, 72. On the other hand, the leading Republican contenders include Jeb Bush, 61, Chris Christie, 52, Rand Paul, 51, Scott Walker, 47, Ted Cruz, 44, Paul Ryan, 44, and Mike Lee, 43.

These days, the GOP isn't even particularly WASPish. Unlike the Democrats, who have no minority senators or governors to point to, the GOP can boast of the aforementioned Ted Cruz, along with Senators Marco Rubio, 43, and Tim Scott, 49, and Governors Susana Martinez, 55, and Bobby Jindal, 43.

Even when it comes to party leadership, Harry Reid is 75 and Nancy Pelosi is 74, whereas Mitch McConnell is 72, and John Boehner, a sprightly 65, making the Democrats equally white, but 12 years older.

Finally, a friend of mine let me know that it annoys him when I refer to the Democratic Party when, as he insists, it should be the Democrat Party.

Assuming he's not alone in his objection, I will explain myself. It so happens that the Democrat Party sounds awful to my ear and looks like a misspelling to my eye. So while I acknowledge that my friend is correct, I'm not about to change. In time, I can only hope that my way prevails.

It's not that I'm a grammatical scofflaw. It irks me when people confuse "me" and "I" or write "there" for "their" or "their" for "they're," but it bothers me just as much or more when people ignore the music of words, treating them as mere utensils. For me, reading what passes for political

commentary, even when I agree with the perspective, is often as painful as listening to a tone-deaf singer who confuses sharps with flats.

Although I believe most of the rules governing grammar and syntax are sensible, I think the one that insists it's a sin to end a sentence with a preposition is the sort of thing only a terminally constipated pedant would impose on an unsuspecting world.

As far as I'm concerned, if the least convoluted way to end a sentence is to end it with, say, "with," one would be silly not to end it with with.

Which reminds me that when Richard Loeb, one half of the thrill-killing duo, Leopold and Loeb, supposedly made sexual advances on a fellow con at Statesville Penitentiary, and was killed for his troubles, a Chicago newspaper reported that the well-educated Loeb should have known better than to end his sentence with a proposition.

**Burt's Webcast is every Wednesday at Noon Pacific Time.**

**Tune in at [K4HD.com](http://K4HD.com) His Call-in Number is: (818) 570-5443**

©2014 Burt Prelutsky. Comments? Write  
[BurtPrelutsky@fastmail.com](mailto:BurtPrelutsky@fastmail.com).