FILMS FANTASTIC 15

The Journal of the NFFF Film Bureau

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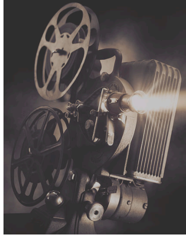
CINEMATIC GHOSTS

LOVING

—AND—

POSSESSIVE



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FILMS FANTASTIC

The Journal of the NFFF Film Bureau

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Editor's Note:

In my first issue as editor I commented that I had no desire to write all the contents of *Films Fantastic*. It seems I need not have worried; plenty of reviews showed up pretty soon after that first issue appeared, and you can see some of them in what follows. We've got everything from long-form critical pieces to medium length reviews to 'Cine-Minis'— very brief (150 words or less) personal takes on single films, used in the manner of fillos in a non-film fanzine. There are many ways to examine films, and plenty of films to examine, so sit back, start reading, and enjoy the cinematic conversations. Do let us know what you think; I'd like to feature a lettercol in future issues.

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Films Fantastic is a quarterly publication of The National Fantasy Fan Federation, appearing in March, June, September, and December.

The Federation offers four different memberships. Memberships with *The National Fantasy Fan* via paper mail are $18. Memberships with TNFF via email are $6; these memberships include electronic editions of all N3F fanzines, including *Films Fantastic*. Additional memberships at the address of a current member are $4. Public memberships are free. Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah, Nevada 89049. Pay online at N3F.org. Our PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org. Send phillies@4liberty.net your email address for a public membership.

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Time is the Enemy of Love:
Problems of Romance in The Ghost and Mrs. Muir

By Emily Alcar

A romance? Perhaps— but the beginning of the film already raises doubts. We see the famous 20th Century Fox logo, searchlights ablaze against the sky, but of the equally famous fanfare we hear nothing. In its place Bernard Herrmann's music surges stepwise from an unknown depth toward an equally uncertain motif, high in the violins, descending slowly from its peak but refusing to resolve in any clear manner. Perhaps this is a romance, the music seems to say, but surely no conventional one; the music offers little sign of the hope or happiness audiences would surely expect in a traditional romance and its musical evocation. This film, the music proclaims— although it will be some time before the viewer will be able to recognize the fact— is a movie about the impossibility of lasting earthly love.

The opening credits are shown over an image of an unpopulated seashore, waves ceaselessly rolling up and draining away; the significance of the sea will become apparent only later. Following the credits, a panoramic shot reveals London "at the turn of the century." As the music fades out, the camera moves across a busy street toward a curtained window. We meet three women, two in deep mourning. "And now my mind is made up," one informs the others (her unsupportive, and in fact outraged, mother-in-law and sister-in-law). She is Lucy Muir, whose husband died nearly a year ago, and she has decided to get on with her life. "I've never had a life of my own," she says. She plans to move to the seaside and there support herself, her young daughter, and her devoted servant on the income from shares in a gold mine left by her husband.

Leaving the in-laws at last, she finds her daughter and servant Martha listening in at the kitchen door. "Well," she tells them, " it's done." The servant is thrilled: "It's a blooming revolution, that's what," the servant replies. Revolution or not, it won't be easy.

Arriving at Whitecliff-by-the-Sea, Mrs. Muir visits a house agent, one Mr. Coombe; he is not wholly helpful. Flipping aside one listing as unsuitable, he responds to her wish to see the property by assuring her that he knows better. "My dear young lady, you must allow me to be the judge of that." Only her threat to visit another house agent brings him up short. Soon afterward, accompanied by the music from the opening credits, they arrive at the mysteriously forbidden Gull Cottage, where much of the film's action will take place.

What follows emphasizes the ghostly aspects of the film in the classic manner: the nervous house agent trying to persuade Mrs. Muir that the house will not suit her; eerie music, often little more than dissonant chords and a fragment of melody; the darkly romantic portrait of Captain Gregg, the house's late owner, reported to have committed suicide, a portrait at first mistaken for an actual person by Mrs. Muir; sounds heard by Mrs. Muir but not the agent; the discovery of scattered food and dishes left behind by a fleeing charwoman; a telescope in the seaside master bedroom, clean despite the house not having been dusted in four years; maniacal laughter from an unseen source; and a desperate dash by the two visitors down the stairs and out of the house, pursued by the laughter, along with mocking music on the soundtrack.

The outcome is atypical: Mrs. Muir, having caught her breath, looks back at the house with an an odd expression. "Haunted," she whispers, and then, a smile illuminating her face, "How perfectly fascinating."

Then and there she decides to take the house, Mr. Coombe's warnings notwithstanding. His reaction is predictable. "In my opinion," he tells her, "you are the most obstinate young woman I have ever met." Her response is not what he expects; "Thank you," she says; "I've always wanted to be considered obstinate."

Thus ends the prelude of a traditional ghost story.

*

The prelude having been traditional, Act One goes in quite a different direction, as the ghost story turns into full-blown romance, albeit one with a very untraditional obstacle facing the potential lovers: one of them is dead.

Lucy, although thrilled with the house, is less thrilled with her own life. "I feel so useless," she tells Martha. "Here I am, nearly halfway through life, and what have I done?" Martha, she says, has led a very useful life; "I've nothing to show for all my years," she comments wearily. She can't take credit for her daughter, who "just— happened" (an amusing dig at the common Victorian unwillingness to consider sex too closely, though one with obvious relevance to what will happen presently). She goes upstairs to take a nap, and the audience at last meets the ghost. It's a very effective shot; the camera moves from Lucy's sleeping form to the mantel clock, over the dog on the sofa, growling at something as yet unseen, then pulls back and up to reveal, first Lucy's recumbent figure and then a dark silhouette, an absence more than a presence, clearly masculine but with no distinguishable features, which moves toward Lucy, leaning over her in curiosity as the camera moves away. An hour later Lucy is awakened by the a breeze and the flapping of the window, which she had shut securely before napping. Puzzled, she moves toward the window, accompanied by a hint of the brooding opening music on a harp. Her speculations are interrupted as Martha returns to fetch her for tea, but there is a disturbance in the air; as she leaves the room, a storm breaks out over the sea.

A strange little sequence follows: Lucy is seen putting her daughter to bed; the daughter, with a broad smile, wishes her mother good night in a rhyme: "Good night, mummy. I *love* the sea, and so does Rummy. [the dog]" This marks the first time anyone has expressed love for anyone or anything, and it is for an abstraction— the sea— not a person or even a pet. Lucy simply agrees: "And so do I." Under the scene we hear a faster version of the stepwise sequence with which the music began. There are deeper currents here than the brevity of the scene, or its apparently lighthearted nature, would at first suggest.

Soon afterward, with the storm still raging in the background, Lucy descends to the kitchen to prepare a hot water bottle. Her matches go out, followed by the gas lamp. The window snaps open, rain pouring through; after she closes it, Lucy attempts to light a candle with no success. Frustrated, she speaks out. "I know you're here," she declares to the darkness. "Is that all you're good for: to frighten women? Well, *I'm* not afraid of you. Who ever heard of a cowardly ghost?"

"Light the candle," a harsh voice commands, as Lucy and we first hear the ghost. After a few more exchanges, she does so, and the ghost, that of Captain Gregg, the former owner of the house, appears out of the dark (though the image is still dominated by the ghost's shadow, cast by the light from Lucy's candle). Despite her brave words, she is frightened, just a little, but soon she is delving into Gregg's situation. He did not, he tells her, commit suicide; he kicked the fireplace gas switch in his sleep. She is rather pleased to discover this, and asks the obvious question: "If you didn't [commit suicide], why do you haunt?" His answer is rather more practical than one might expect: "Because I have plans for me house, which don't include a pack of strangers barging in and making themselves at home." As Gregg expands on his intention to scare Mrs. Muir, and attempts to answer her probing questions, his voice rises and his cursing grows more frequent (covered by the all-purpose word 'blast' in various forms), and he begins to shout at her. This proves too much, and she snaps back at him. "I won't shouted at," she insists. "Everyone shouts at me and orders me about, and I'm sick of it, do you hear? Blast! Blast!" Gregg is impressed, yet still insists she must leave.

Lucy suddenly breaks into tears and turns away. “I love this house,” she says, in the second reference to love in the film. “I felt I must stay here the moment I saw it. I can’t explain it. It was as if the house itself were welcoming me, asking me to rescue it from being so empty.” Gregg admits she may have a point. “I felt that way about a ship once, my first command. [….]. Always swore she sailed twice as sweetly for me as she would for any other master. Out of gratitude.” Lucy loves the house, and she did not frighten easily, points in her favor. She may stay, on probation as it were. Lucy is grateful, but immediately starts bargaining over the terms.

Gregg agrees that, if Lucy leaves the master bedroom as it is he will remain there and leave the rest of the house to Lucy, Anna, and Martha. Lucy sees a problem.

“But if you keep the best bedroom, where should I sleep?”

“In the best bedroom.”

“But—.“

“In heaven’s name, why not? Why, bless my soul, I’m a spirit. I have no body, I haven’t had one for four years, is that clear?”

“But I can see you.”

“All you see is an illusion, like a blasted lantern slide.”

“Well, it’s— it’s not very convincing. But I suppose it’s all right.”

It is indeed all right, although not for the reasons Captain Gregg has laid out.

*

The next time we see Captain Gregg he is in a foul mood; Lucy has had a tree he planted in the front yard chopped up for firewood, replacing it with a rose garden. He blusters angrily, but to little effect. Although neither knows it, the crux of their subsequent relationship— and therefore of the film itself— has been reached. Step by step each of the two will reveal unexpected things about themselves to the other, revelations urging them ever closer to an impossible relationship.

Lucy is calm, in control; such fear as she may once have felt is long past, and she responds to the Captain’s wrath, liberally flavored with ‘blasts,’ without rancor of her own. “Captain Gregg,” she says, “if you insist on haunting me, you might at least be more agreeable about it.”

“Why should I be agreeable?”

“Well, as long as we’re living— I mean, if we’re to be thrown together so much—. Life’s too short to be forever barking at each other. [….] Try to say something pleasant for a change.”

“Ah, that’s a— that’s a pretty rig you have on. [….] Much better than smothering yourself in all that ugly black crepe.”

“I happen to have been wearing mourning for my husband.”

“Whom you didn’t love. [….] You were fond of him perhaps, but you didn’t love him.”

[….]

“Why did you marry him?”

“Edwin? I don’t really know.” Edwin, an architect, had visited to plan an addition to Lucy’s father’s library when Lucy was seventeen. She had just read a novel “in which the

heroine was kissed in the rose garden and lived happily ever after. So when Edwin kissed me in the orchard—."

"But it was different after you left the orchard." She nods, gently and sadly. "Poor Edwin. He never did anything. I'm afraid he wasn't even a very good architect. He couldn't have designed a house like this. Who did?"

"*I* did."

"It reminds me of something," says Lucy, smiling in much the same way she had as she recognized that the house was haunted. "An old song or— or a poem."

"[M]agic casements, opening on the foam/ Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

"That's Keats, isn't it?"

"*The Nightingale*."

Lucy expresses surprise to hear a sea captain quoting poetry, only to be assured that there is much time for reading while one is at sea. In between bouts of correcting Lucy's misuse of nautical terminology, Gregg describes something of his career, including his early years as an ordinary seaman. "It is hard to imagine you being an ordinary anything," Lucy replies. The two lock gazes, and the spell is cast.

The scene is beautifully written, filmed, and acted. No one is making the slightest effort to make the other fall in love; it simply happens over the course of a rambling conversation which nonetheless seems always to return to the key point: these two individuals, who cannot possibly pursue an ordinary earthly romance, are nonetheless deeply in love with each other.

*

The rest of the film is mainly an expansion and amplification of these early scenes, scattered throughout with clues regarding the deeper, darker, truth embedded within the romance. Lucy's in-laws show up, happily bearing the bad news that the gold mine has gone bust, and Lucy's shares are worthless. Captain Gregg decides that he will dictate what amount to his memoirs to Lucy, who will edit them, producing a book which will make enough money to solve the problem. The idea launched, the Captain grows expansive: "Since we're to be collaborators, you can call me Daniel. [….]. And I shall call you Lucia," he declares. "My name is Lucy," Lucy points out. "Doesn't do you justice, my dear. Women named Lucy are always being imposed upon, but Lu*ci*a, now there's a name for an Amazon, for a queen." Note what has happened: just as Lucy (henceforth Lucia) has gently reshaped Daniel's personality, rubbing away some of the gruffness and bluster, Daniel returns the favor by giving her a name fit for the challenges she is facing. Each has helped recreate the other; neither could exist, as they have now become, without the presence of the other.

The writing process is lengthy, allowing ever greater opportunities for the two to connect emotionally, leading to a sombre scene entailed by the conclusion of the writing. Lucy is tired, and steps out onto the fog-shrouded porch, ushered out by the opening music and its subsidiary yearning motif. They note the presence of a ship in the Channel, "too close, by the sound," Gregg comments. "It's the loneliest sound," Lucia responds, "like a child lost and crying in the dark." Gregg speculates on the ship's captain's mood, but Lucia's response is distracted. "Still,

it's honest, the sea," she says. "It makes you face things honestly, doesn't it?" Gregg at last realizes that she is more than just tired: "There's something on your mind." Her words, and the conversation which follows, touch directly on the sadness at the film's heart.

"Yes," she says sombrely. "What's to become of us, Daniel? Of you and me?"

"Nothing can become of me. Everything's happened that can happen."

"But not to me." Writing the book had allowed her to feel productive, happy, but now that it is finished she cannot see a way forward; it's "like trying to see into the fog." Daniel understands the problem, although he is likewise not happy about it. Lucia— Lucy— needs to get out into the world more, to engage with other mortal beings, men in particular.

And so she does; in delivering the book to a publisher Lucy meets Miles Fairley, a smarmy author of childrens' books, who flirts with her, apparently on the assumption that, having made it possible for her to meet the publisher he now has a claim on her affections. Lucy, who has seen scarcely any men besides Mr. Coombe and Captain Gregg in quite some time, finds his attentions "rather charming." Daniel is irate; when Lucy points out that it was he who advised her to meet other men, his response is brusque: "I said men, not perfumed parlor snakes."

Fairley pursues Lucy, his unctuous charm having its intended effect. He confesses to behaving "quite idiotically towards a certain young lady that I fell in love with while passing on a stair." This, the film's third mention of love, is different from the first two. Those were assertions of a genuine feeling; Fairley's is a description of an emotion he does not in fact have. Yet his words, the picture he has painted of of her bathing in the sea, and the fact that he calls her "Lucy," a name she has not heard for some time, combine to wear away such resistance as she might have possessed. He kisses her, observed, unbeknownst to Lucy, by Captain Gregg, whose warning is poignant: "The living can be hurt." Lucy assures him that she does not intend to be hurt, but he remains skeptical. "No captain intends to pile his ship up on a reef, but it happens."

Martha is even less welcoming, dismissing the claims of 'Uncle Neddy' claims abruptly when questioned by Lucy. Lucy admits Fairley's imperfections, yet insists that he is "real," a term which Martha, not privy to the larger situation, does not understand. Lucy expands the point. "I need companionship and laughter, and all the things a woman needs" (an elision of any reference to sexuality, no more to be acknowledged in a 1947 film than early twentieth century England). "I suppose I need love."

Captain Gregg, confronting Lucy's— his Lucia's— increasingly intense involvement with Fairley, stands at the porch window watching her sleep, gives vent to some of his more cynical opinions regarding women, but he also recognizes the truth behind her behavior: "You've made your choice, the only choice you could make. You've chosen life, and that's as it should be, whatever the reckoning." He must let her find her own path, even though he can see that her path is fraught with danger and betrayal. "I can't help you now," he says. "I can only confuse you more and destroy whatever chance you have left of happiness. You must make your own life, amongst the living." Bending over her as if to kiss her, he casts a reverse spell, removing his presence from her memories of the last year. "And in the morning and the years

after you'll only remember it as a dream, and it'll die, as all dreams must die at waking." He crosses to the window to leave, then turns back to gaze upon her one last time as he evokes the sea voyages they could, under vastly different circumstances, have enjoyed together. His voice drops sadly as he concludes. "What we've missed, Lucia," he says as he dematerializes (the only time we see such an effect in the entire film). "What we've both missed." He departs, allowing Lucy to seek her own happiness, in whatever form it might come, among the living.

This she will not find. Miles Fairley is married, with children.

*

The rest of the film is essentially a long coda. Lucy remains in the house with Martha, going for long walks alone up and down the seashore, where a post, which had earlier been carved with Anna's name, sags into the sand, at last toppling over altogether, with the opening music pounding darkly as the camera slowly approaches the sodden wood, an image ominously reminiscent of a tombstone.

Anna returns from college with her fiancé, Sir Evelyn Anthony Peregrine Scathe (whom she loves "ever so much," a term not wholly clear in its application or, in her bubbly delivery, of uncertain gravitas). She and her mother discover that they shared a strange dream of a sea captain who haunted the house, a dream her mother assures her could not have been real, despite its peculiar power over their joint imaginations. Anna and Sir Evelyn marry; in due course their daughter becomes engaged to an airplane pilot. Lucy grows older and wearier, as does Martha; at last she dies, as much from loneliness as anything else.

Only then does Captain Gregg return. He approaches, not in shadow this time. Come, Lucia," he bids her, holding out his arms. "Come, my dear." Silently she stands, restored to her appearance as she had been many years before, and the Captain escorts her down the stairs, past Martha (to whom she tries, briefly, to speak), and out the open front door into a mist of uncertainty.

The ending, depending upon one's tastes, may be seen as happy, but it comes at a high price, and with a reminder of an even higher one paid by those not fortunate enough to have a romance with a ghost. Outside of Lucy/Lucia and the Captain, and possibly Anna and Sir

Evelyn, who remain married but whose subsequent emotional life we do not see, there is no successful love in this film at all. Edwin died long ago, and does not have an opportunity to return. His mother and sister are at best helpless in his absence, and the latter is presented as a bitter spinster. Martha's husband is dead as well, long before the film begins. Mr. Coombe, clearly attracted to the widow Muir, is mocked and dismissed. Miles Fairley loses not only Lucy but his wife and children as well; Lucy saw him once again, years after their momentary passion; "He was bald and fat. He drank too much, and then he cried."

And then there is time, the enemy of love.

Time encompasses everything: the coincidence of meetings, disparities in age, small decisions with significant consequences, comparisons between one potential lover and another, life and death and everything in between. Time reminds us how little of the world in which we find ourselves we understand, let alone control. Time demonstrates, again and again, that most lives occur against a backdrop of ignorance and uncertainty, nowhere more than in matters of love. Just listen to the music.

The music in *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* is not merely an addition to the visuals; it both symbolizes and embodies the passage of time itself. The climbing motif which opens the film, heard repeatedly throughout the film, stands for hope itself, forever reaching outward and upward despite the near certainty of failure. For every Captain Gregg and Lucy/Lucia there are a thousand, a million, others who will never find a secure base whence to explore genuine passion and mutual love (the Edwins of this world far far more common than the Greggs, even though both are identically dead). Time pushes us onward inexorably, stripping away possibilities, until at last all that remains is death.

And with death we find, *on the film's own terms*, the cessation of passion. Captain Gregg is a spirit, his body— and all that having a body implies— an illusion. And now Lucia is one as well. What the two lovers in mind will do without bodies to feel and express and enjoy the physicality for which each clearly yearns remains utterly unclear.

Love is never certain, even in the afterlife, a fact of which time reminds us ceaselessly.

Cine-Mini: *Fantasia*

The work of fantasy that I most admired as a child - and that I still admire - was that old movie *Fantasia*. And the part of that movie that thrilled me the most was "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." Walt Disney's old standby, Mickey Mouse, tries to cheat himself out of a job of mopping the floors as instructed by his master, the Sorcerer, by having enchanted mops do the work for him. The fact that he nearly ends up drowned in the process until he is saved by the angry Sorcerer only adds to the thrill of the movie. Yes, this is the flick to see. Masterful score as well.

Will Mayo

Reviews in Retrospect

SCREENED AT THE GLOBE

Reviews by Heath Row

In the heart of Los Angeles, about half an hour from Hollywood—traffic willing—there's a very small movie theater some call The Globe. My family lives on Globe Avenue. That theater is our TV room and futon. And it's the site of many a screening, usually accompanied by ice cream. Almost every week, a friend and I gather in my home—not far from Columbia Pictures, The Culver Studios, and Sony Pictures Entertainment—for a Tuesday night showing. We usually watch science fiction, monster, horror, or other B movies. The reviews in this periodic column will focus on those—and other movies I watch of interest to Neffers.

Curse of the Undead (1959)

If you like westerns, and you like vampires, you'll *love* this vampire western: *Curse of the Undead*. For the most part, it *could* be a straight-ahead western. A local ranch is being threatened by a neighboring land baron, fences are destroyed, land boundaries are contested, and cattle are lost. At the same time, a wandering gunhand aligns interests with the owners of the threatened ranch to protect their property and livestock from the rustlers, and young women—including the rancher's daughter—take mysteriously ill, showing signs of blood loss. That wandering gunhand, Drake Robey, played by the understated Michael Pate, spends quite a bit of time around the ranch's burial ground, is sensitive to the light of the sun, and is much more than he seems to be. The earnest character Preacher Dan, performed by Eric Fleming, discovers some land grant documents that suggest Robey's relationship to the land's original owners might be more direct than initially suspected, even with hundreds of years in between. There's a reason Robey survives so many gunfights despite being slower to the draw. In the end, the two plotlines intersect, and the ranch is saved (Hooray!). The movie is well written by Edward and Mildred Dein, who wrote it as a jape, and is beautifully filmed in black and white. (Kino Lorber's transfer was quite well done). And the scene in which Robey pursues Preacher Dan through the town square to the church, with its looming shadow of the cross, is visually wonderful.

Availability: DVD and Blu-ray (Kino Lorber, 2020); streaming on Tubi

Christmas Evil (1980)

Halloween's success in 1978 led to a rash of holiday-themed horror movies, including *April Fool's Day*, *Friday the 13th*, and *My Bloody Valentine*—and perhaps best represented by the 1981 *Mad* parody "Arbor Day." Even though Halloween (the holiday, not the movie) inspired a sizable number of horror movies, so has… Christmas. *Black Christmas*; *Silent Night, Deadly Night*; and even *The Nightmare Before Christmas* are all worth exploring. But *Christmas Evil* ranks

among the best Christmas-related horror flicks. The 1980 movie, originally titled *You Better Watch Out* (and alternatively titled *Terror in Toyland*) focuses on the character Harry Stadling. After seeing his mother become intimate with his father dressed as Santa Claus in the late 1940s as a child, Stadling grows up to work as a manager at the Jolly Dreams toy manufacturer in Queens. As Christmas nears, the protagonist becomes increasingly angry at children in his neighborhood—he maintains Good and Bad logbooks of their behavior, obsessing over a boy named Moss Garcia, who wishes for a lifetime subscription to *Penthouse* magazine—duplicitous coworkers, company management, and other people he encounters. He eventually erupts, killing multiple people on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day while dressed as Santa Claus driving around in a hand-painted Chevy van decorated with a sleigh motif. (He also takes a break to donate toys to a local children's hospital, so he's not *all* bad).

The story can be interpreted as a critique of the commercialization of Christmas and features a very human horror rather than science fiction or fantasy elements—similar to *Mumsy, Nanny, Sonny & Girly* below. Regardless, the ending's *Repo Man*-like events—as well as the presence of a full moon—introduce an element of the fantastic and are subtly inconclusive. Highlights include vintage television footage of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade (complete with an Underdog balloon), footage from Laurel and Hardy's 1934 *March of the Wooden Soldiers*, and the *Frankenstein*-like mob of neighborhood residents holding torches aloft as they search for Stadling.

Availability: DVD and Blu-ray (Vinegar Syndrome, 2014); streaming on multiple platforms (https://tinyurl.com/2p8azscn)

Destination Moon (1950)

Based on a novella by Robert A. Heinlein originally published in the September 1950 issue of *Short Stories*, this movie was produced by George Pal and co-written by Heinlein.[1] *Destination Moon* details humanity's first successful attempt to reach the moon. A retired general enlists the owner of an independent aviation construction company to build a rocket designed to leave Earth's orbit, land safely on the moon, and return. The crew is hastily assembled when area government leaders and residents try to quash the launch because of concerns with the rocket's atomic-powered engines. The crew uses too much fuel finessing the landing and face serious challenges returning to Earth, resulting in some high drama.

The movie, while relatively slow and sedate, features several distinctive elements in

[1] According to Tom Safer, speaking at Loscon 47 during a screening of this movie, after co-writing the screenplay for this film and 1953's *Project Moon Base*, Heinlein reportedly vowed to never work with Hollywood again. Regardless, there have been several Heinlein adaptations on the big and little screen over the years—perhaps most notably *Starship Troopers*—most occurring since the late '80s. One solid exception is the 1950-1955 TV series *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*, which was based on the novel *Space Cadet*.

addition to Heinlein's contributions to the adaptation. Walter Lantz offers a Woody Woodpecker cartoon—later retooled and reused by NASA—explaining the mission to potential financial backers, and Chesley Bonestell provides absolutely grand astronomical artwork. The special effects are swell, as well, particularly the acceleration stress during liftoff and the extravehicular activity while repairing an antenna. It's a quiet movie, but enjoyable.

Availability: DVD (Image Entertainment, 2000); streaming on The Roku Channel

Mumsy, Nanny, Sonny & Girly (1970)

An odd little horror movie without any fantastic elements, this quiet movie focuses on an at times brutally threatening family ensconced in a rundown mansion. Its screenplay was based on a play by Maisie Mosco called *Happy Family*, which was in turn reportedly inspired by the Shirley Jackson novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. The setup is reminiscent of families such as those in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *House of 1,000 Corpses*, but the family is much less outwardly horrific. Comprising the family matron (Mumsy), two children (the mature but much younger portrayed Sonny and Girly—the United States release was retitled *Girly* to focus on actress Vanessa Howard), and a housemaid and caregiver (Nanny), the family lives isolated from society except for the children's occasional foray to the park or zoo looking for "new friends." Those friends, forced to play children's games, aren't always willing to abide by the elaborate authority and rules established by the foursome, even if they are initially, perhaps lured by Girly's charms—as represented by the ill-fated Soldier and No. 5. For the most part, the film focuses on the family's welcome and embrace of a male prostitute who's renamed No. 2—assigned that room in the decaying, sprawling house—after his employer of the night meets a fatal end in a playground, as well as his navigation of the family and the social system they've established. Somehow, he's able to escape the family's machinations to trap him into misbehaving, going on trial, and being sent to the angels. In fact, he plays them off each other with some dexterity, and the ending is unclear. Why doesn't he just leave when the primary threats are removed? Has he found a new home? Is he now complicit as a new member of the family somehow? At times irritating, the movie isn't always clear about its intent or direction. It is, however, an intriguing narrative that suggests that social isolation can lead to a decline in morality and outbursts of violence.

Availability: DVD (Scorpion Records, 2010); streaming on Prime Video

The Shadow (1994)

There haven't been very many film adaptations of pulp fiction or comic strip heroes that didn't play up the mistakenly presumed goofy, cartoony nature of the subject material. Which is a shame. The 1975 *Doc Savage: The Man of Bronze* over-indexed on humor, aiming for a younger audience—the movie was, after all, rated G—not at all sticking to the substance of Lester Dent's original pulp stories. Similarly, the 1996 *The Phantom*, based on Lee Falk's classic adventure comic strip, was similarly silly—perhaps in part because the production stayed true to the jungle hero's purple bodysuit, a challenge to suspending disbelief. (The costuming in the 2010 Syfy miniseries looks slightly more realistic.) So *The Shadow*, starring Alec Baldwin, came as a welcome surprise.

The movie, perhaps inspired by the success of the 1989 *Batman* and 1990 *Dick Tracy*, resonates more with Tim Burton's comic book adaptation than with *Doc Savage*'s missteps 15 years earlier. And the movie works relatively well, combining elements of The Shadow's origin story as revealed in the 1937 episode of the radio program, "The Temple Bells of Neban," and Walter B. Gibson's pulp archenemy Shiwan Khan, who first appeared in *The Shadow Magazine* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Sept. 15, 1939) in a story titled "The Golden Master." Tonally, the movie and hero are somewhat dark and brooding, a la *Batman*, with Baldwin's youthful insouciance as alter ego Lamont Cranston—and Tim Curry's somewhat hapless, corruptible character—bringing some levity. Penelope Ann Miller is stylish and lithe as Margo Lane, but Ian McKellen is largely wasted in his role as her scientist father. The movie's city scenes and backdrop paintings are wonderful, and highlights include the Ray Harryhausen-like stop-motion animation of the Tulku's Phurba (a sentient ceremonial dagger) and Baldwin's makeup as The Shadow—perfectly capturing the hero's profile. The idea of hypnotizing an entire city to hide a hotel is also intriguing. A surprisingly excellent pulp movie, *The Shadow* is well worth seeing.

Availability: DVD (Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2015) and Blu-ray (Shout! Factory, 2014); streaming on multiple platforms (https://tinyurl.com/3mpf796c)

Cine-Mini:

Iceman (1984) has to do with a prehistoric man found frozen in the mountains. Scientists bring him back to life, give him a fresh shave and a haircut, some clothes, and introduce the fellow to modern society. The man from that ancient time takes one look around at the modern world and says, "Hey, guys, this is not for me." He asks to be taken back to the mountains where they found him; once there, he flies. This marks the end of the movie but not the end of the story. About 20 years after this movie aired, hikers in the Alps found a man frozen in the mountains. He didn't fly and they weren't able to bring him back to life (most likely the man had been murdered by a spear thrust in the back) but nevertheless they did find him and they continue to study him to this day. *Iceman* is a neat prequel to reality.

Will Mayo

Possessions:
Fear, Desire, and Ownership in The Haunting

By Justin E.A. Busch

The Haunting begins with an eerie narration and equally eerie images of a looming mansion. The narration turns out to be an encounter between the owner of Hill House and an enthusiastic academic, the rather pompous Dr. John Markway (Richard Johnson), "a trained anthropologist, a respected member of the University faculty." Respected, perhaps, but not in control; it is he who will engineer the confrontation with the supernatural that forms the core of the film, but it is others who will experience the consequences of that confrontation.

Dr. Markway turns out to be largely irrelevant, not only in his academic capacity but even in his presumptive status as leader of the group of ghost hunters he attempts to assemble; only two of the six assistants who originally agreed to work with him remained committed. We witness his limitations early on: he offers a demonstration of the peculiar construction of the house, which is, he assures his listeners, such that doors always close on their own. He opens one, only to be confounded by its staying open. A few moments later, ostensibly guiding the others to the dining room, he stumbles into a broom closet. Although he laughs these fumbles off, it is clear that his knowledge of the situation is much less than he thinks.

The true center of the film is occupied by Eleanor Lance (Julie Harris), a timid and downtrodden woman saddled with guilt about her dead mother, who has scarcely any life, inner or outer, of her own. She is the opposite of Markway; where he is overconfident she is uncertain, where he is enthusiastic she is hesitant, where he is forceful she is withdrawn. Her exact character is uncertain, for she is basically a person with no qualities, defined by what she is not rather than by what she is.

Eleanor has no home of her own. She is dominated by her sister, whose living room doubles as Eleanor's bedroom. When we first see her she is embroiled in a dispute with her sister over whether or not she, Eleanor, will be permitted to use a shared car to travel to meet with Dr. Markway. Eleanor takes the car surreptitiously, and drives out to Hill House, fantasizing about having her own apartment and speculating on the nature of what lies ahead. There is an absence of self-identity evident in her thoughts, which, given in a voice-over, a technique limited to Eleanor's on-screen appearances, are constantly driven by her utter

uncertainty about any aspect of her future life.

As she arrives at Hill House (photographed on infrared film so as to have an especially uncanny appearance), Eleanor feels an immediate connection ("It's staring at me"), stressed by an intense close-up of her blinking eyes, after which comes an equally strong revulsion: "Get away from here," she thinks, "get away at once. It's my chance. I'm being given a last chance. [....] Anyone has a right to run away." Her personal situation then reasserts itself; "But you are running away, Eleanor," she realizes, the third person revealing that she thinks of herself as an object as much as a person. "And there's nowhere else to go." Nowhere but forward; she drives to the front of the house and enters, pushing aside brooding fears: "It's waiting for me. Evil. Patient."

There is an additional complication to Eleanor's tale. At Hill House she meets Theodora (Claire Bloom), a confident, intelligent, and attractive lesbian. Eleanor's response is fraught with uncertainty; that she feels something for Theodora is clear, but whether she is capable of recognizing the feeling, let alone acting upon it, remains uncertain. Nonetheless, the links between the two women supply a deep emotional undercurrent to the supernatural goings-on.

Eleanor's introduction to Hill House suggests that what will happen is already determined by the emptiness inside her, an emptiness prone to panics and fears and desires she cannot fully comprehend. Eleanor is the human equivalent of Hill House, empty and lonely; Hill House, then, will take possession of her, even if it must scare away those who would be her friends. Theodora herself acknowledges the point; "It wants you, Nell," she comments after the two women share their first encounter with the force of the house; "the house is calling you." One might see here a classic love triangle in which one angle happens to be occupied by a supernatural force, yet one which is just as obsessive in its attachment as a person might be. Hence the central equivocation between the two senses of possession, the natural and the supernatural. To possess in either sense is to control, and where possession is of fundamental importance any attempt to counter it will be resisted with all possible strength.

That night Eleanor and Theodora are tormented by tremendous booming knocks, sounds unheard by either Dr. Markway or the fourth member of the party, Luke (Russ Tamblyn), the ne'er-do-well relative of the house's owner, there to keep an eye on the property he expects to inherit and profitably exploit. The next morning a message scrawled in chalk on a wall is found: "help Eleanor Come Home." Eleanor has been telling Dr. Markway, who has been flirting with her and to whom she obviously feels some attraction, that she is excited by the prospect of finding something extraordinary at Hill House and scared he will send her away, so the message is especially disturbing. Eleanor's response is revealing. "It's my name, it belongs

to me, and something is using it," she wails. Eleanor is uncertain of her identity, but at least she knows her name, one of the few things in her life she can truly call her own.

Eleanor knows more than she realizes, more even than Dr. Markway realizes there is to be known. Later that day, Eleanor is staring up at the house's main tower, imagining a death about which we have not otherwise heard. "That's where she did it" Eleanor thinks. "From that window. Climbing out through the bars, hanging on for an instant. Hanging on." A moment later an extremely rapid vertical zoom from the tower's perspective nearly hurls Eleanor over the balcony. She is saved by Dr. Markway, who grasps her in something of a parody of a romantic clinch. His suggestion that she should leave is met with a strong demurral, even after she realizes that his concerns are for the experiment rather than her. Theodora and Luke arrive, with Luke commenting on the tableau, and Dr. Markway, perhaps to assuage his own conscience, prompts Theodora to move in with Eleanor. Again the latter's reaction is revealing; "Oh, but that's my room, my very own room." Dr. Markway, oblivious to the emotional undercurrents, insists. Theodora is happy to oblige.

The next scene is key. Theodora has convinced Eleanor to take a drink (or several), and Eleanor is tipsy enough to admit some of her own dreams, albeit as lies. Asked by Theodora where she lives, she fantasizes. "I haven't had it long enough to believe it's my own," she says. "It's a little apartment [....] I live alone. I'm still furnishing it. Buying one thing at a time to make sure I get everything absolutely right. Took me two weeks to find the little stone lions I keep on the mantle." The description could fit her mental space as well as the imaginary apartment (the stone lions come from a pair, much larger, she saw while driving to Hill House); Eleanor is creating herself one thing, one thought, at a time. Her rapid changes of mood are evidence of this; she has no secure base from which to choose one action, or even one state of mind, over another. Theodora's comment that she needs to get Eleanor back to her apartment as soon as possible provokes an angry outburst about the others picking on Eleanor. She throws herself against the pillow and declares, "I don't want to leave Hill House. Ever, ever, ever."

That night she hears voices, murmuring just below the level of intelligibility. Clutching Theodora's hand for comfort, she stares in fear at a pattern in the plaster which takes on an increasing resemblance to a face. Hearing a child whimper, she grows angry; "I will take a lot from this filthy house for his sake, but I will not go along with hurting a child, no I will not."

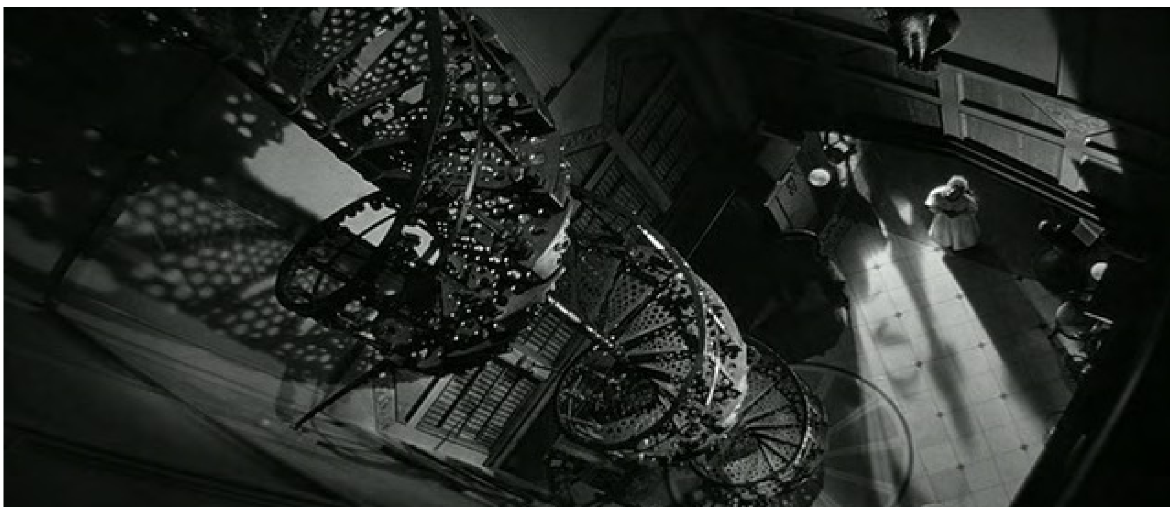
She verbalizes her resolve, convincing herself at last to scream as she switches on a light. It is then that she discovers that she has moved in the night to a fainting couch across the room from the two beds, in the furthest of which

Theodora is just waking up. "Whose hand was I holding?" Eleanor asks, holding her hand out in terror. The scene is filmed very carefully, such that we scarcely see Eleanor's hand connected to her body, either because it is all we see (the first shots are startling cuts from hand to face and back again) or because the angle is such as to exclude Eleanor's elbow; the hand becomes an alien object which does not belong to her.

Markway's reaction is basically a pep talk lecture on not fearing the unknown. His professional enthusiasm aroused, he wants to keep Eleanor there for the sake of his experiment. He needs her, and is not above making an implicit personal appeal; "there's certainly something going on in Hill House. We're getting close, Eleanor, very close to finding out what it is." He is closer to one aspect of the mystery than it occurs to him to see. Eleanor at last reveals the nature of her guilt about her mother; the old woman, an invalid for over a decade, had pounded on the wall to command Eleanor's attention the night she died, but Eleanor had been too exhausted to respond. In Eleanor's eyes, all her years of submission, servitude, and care had failed in that moment. In the eyes of the house, it is precisely this fact, quite similar to one of the deaths which had already occurred, which makes Eleanor family, so to speak. Markway succors her verbally while leading her on emotionally. "Goosebumps," she says as she shivers; "There isn't by any chance a cold spot [a supernatural manifestation of which we have already seen an example] in this room, is there?" Markway denies the presence of one, but the viewer by now sees it in Markway's heart, which is open more to the supernatural than the natural (he has not bothered to tell Eleanor that he is married even as he toys with her).

The growing tensions spill over into a spat between Theodora and Eleanor. Theodora, who has discerned Markway's flirtation with Eleanor and wants to warn her that he is married, never gets to do so, for the argument is interrupted by the arrival of Grace Markway (Lois Maxwell), who has come to warn her husband that a reporter has learned of his project and that his reputation as a serious academic is threatened. Markway is unwilling to stop his work, and encourages her to leave, but she, having expected this, announces that she is joining the ghost hunters and will be disappointed not to see a ghost. Markway assures her there is nothing "romantic" at Hill House (she clearly suspects otherwise), but Eleanor, prompted by jealousy, interjects that "There's the nursery," the one room in the house which has remained locked throughout the investigation. Grace, who is even more of a skeptic than Luke, is thrilled, and announces her intention to stay there; Dr. Markway attempts to dissuade her by assuring her he has no key, but the door, of course, is now wide open (its menace jabbed home with a horizontal zoom shot into the darkness).

Catastrophe follows. Huddled in the parlor the four ghost hunters are trapped by a force pressing at the door, which bulges as if about to give way. Grace Markway disappears from the nursery, and Eleanor at last surrenders to the house's desire, running through the



darkened hallways until she reaches the library. She climbs a tottering spiral staircase toward the balcony whence the woman had leapt, Markway slowly following, the fragmented and unbalanced shots of her hand on the railing and her bare feet on the steps attesting to her unsettled mind. As Eleanor is coaxed away from the top, Grace Markway, spooked and confused by the atmosphere of the house and looking quite disheveled and distraught, opens a trap door, startling Eleanor into fainting.

As Eleanor recovers, Dr. Markway decides that she must leave; at last, but too late, he has recognized the consequences for her should she stay, though he still sees them mainly in relation to himself. "I can't take any more chances," he assures her; "I realize now what a terrible thing I was asking of you all." Eleanor is anguished and pleads with him to reconsider; "It isn't fair," she says; "I'm the one who's supposed to stay here." Playing her last card, she admits lying about her apartment. There isn't one; everything she owns is in her car. "So you see, there's no place you can send me. I have to stay here." Markway and the others will have none of it, and hustle her down the stairs and out the front door. Sadly she tells Markway, "It's the only time anything's ever happened to me." Getting in the driver's seat, she brushes off Luke's attempt to take over; "I'll drive, it's my car. At least half mine." At the last minute she calls out to Theodora, who is clearly touched; the last encounter between the two is poignant. "I thought you weren't going to say good-bye," Theodora says breathlessly; "Oh, Nellie my Nell, please be happy. Everything's going to be all right." Markway curtly bids Eleanor farewell yet again.

Luke has forgotten the key to the outer gate. "What fools they are," Eleanor thinks. "The house tricks them so easily." She puts the car into motion. "So now I'm going. But I won't go. Hill House belongs to me." At precisely that moment the steering wheel jerks in her hand, suddenly making her aware of the price she must pay to fulfill her desires. She fights it for a moment, only to relax suddenly as she thinks, "it's happening to you, Eleanor. Something at last is really, really, really happening to me." Moments later, startled by Mrs. Markway, who runs in panic across the road, she smashes the car head-on into a tree, the same tree, as Dr. Markway portentously reveals a few moments later, "Where the first Mrs. Crain was killed in an 'accident'." Markway makes what amounts to a graveside speech, ending with a reference to "Poor Eleanor." Theodora, who has seen most deeply into Eleanor's heart, is dubious. "Maybe not, 'poor Eleanor.' It was what she wanted, to stay here. She had no place else to go. The house belongs to her now, too. Maybe she's happier." As the film ends Eleanor's last voiceover is heard describing the solidity of the house and the fact that "We who walk here walk alone." It is impossible to tell her emotional state from either her words or her tone.

The film ends ambiguously; there is no formal closure, not even death, for the central characters, yet neither is there any plausible space for continuing the story as a story. What matters are the complex emotional resonances, which linger long afterward.

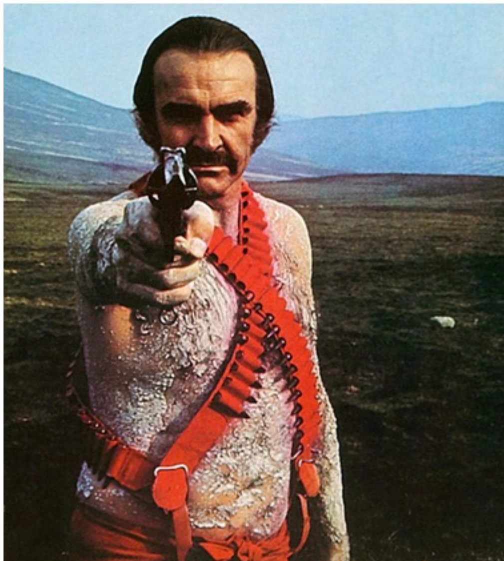
The key here is found in Eleanor's emotional isolation and confusion; remember, she has spent the last eleven years, her entire adult life, taking care of her ailing mother, and thus has no friends, no love, no job, and no room of her own. She is not just lonely; she is profoundly ill-equipped to engage with the world. *The Haunting* is not only frightening but also, perhaps even especially, a very melancholy film, as much about the pain of a life empty of meaning and an imagination starved of viable material upon which to work as the search for the supernatural. Eleanor's relation with Hill House is remarkably similar to that of many an abused woman with her abuser; the latter provides at least a sense that the woman he is abusing is truly desired ('he wouldn't be so jealous if he didn't love me,' and similar sad fallacies), and he often acts so as to isolate her, to control her, to possess her. Had Eleanor been able to respond positively to Theodora she might have been able to save herself, but her negative response is rooted not so much in repression as in a lack of self-knowledge, a lack of imagination about the possibilities of human love. Eleanor's life is so devoid of positive stimuli that the only way for her to feel alive is to die. Hill House, unlike Theodora or Dr. Markway, told Eleanor who she really was; unfortunately, Eleanor listened.

Zardoz:
Cinemagination Run Wild

Artemis van Bruggen

"Zardoz," the trailer promises, "speaks to you." Not many listened; John Boorman's *Zardoz* (1974) was not well-received when new and is not well-regarded today. Boorman himself admitted that the film was too ambitious for its budget (a million dollars), and critics have been happy to agree. The film, a conscious attempt to create an entire mythology in two hours, is commonly thought to have reached too far, and to have toppled into absurdity.

Most viewers (and reviewers) have concentrated on the mythological elements generated by, and developed within, the plot: the flying stone head; the conflict among the Eternals, the Exterminators, and the Brutals; the debates among the Eternals about what to do with Zed (Sean Connery), the Exterminator who has made his way into the stone head and thence into the Vortex, the protected enclave wherein live the Eternals, and so on. Along with these analyses, there are occasional comments about the literary forebears of the film: *The Time Machine*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and suchlike. But little noticed is the fact that the film itself, *as a film*, contributes to the mythologization of the plot and its development. As part of this process. *Zardoz* uses imagery drawn from previous films.



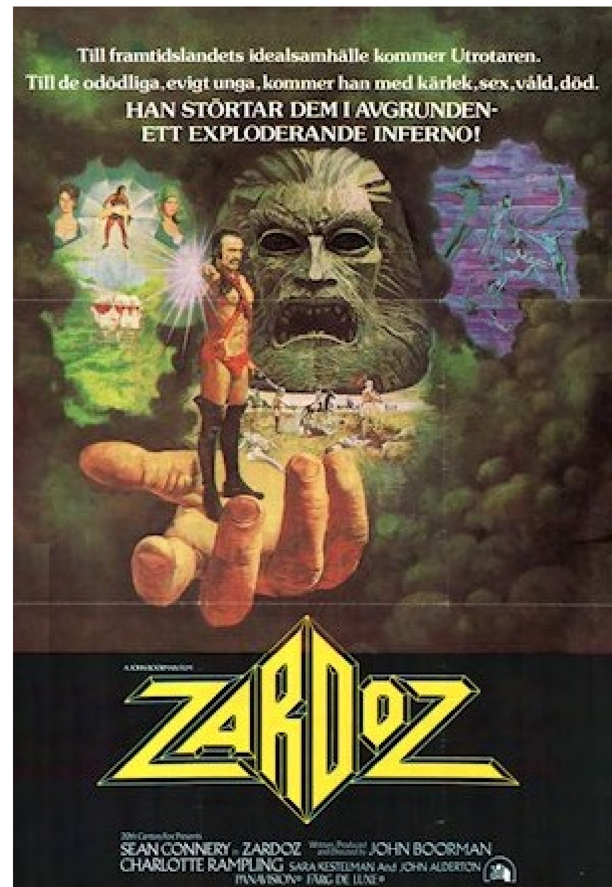
Examples are not hard to find. The opening of the film, in which the apparently disembodied head of Arthur Frayn drifts through the screen toward the viewer, is a direct reference to an image used by Busby Berkeley both in black and white and in color (*42nd Street* (1933) and *The Gang's All Here* (1943)). Not long afterward, Sean Connery points a gun directly at the viewer and pulls the trigger, a direct quotation from Edwin S. Porter's groundbreaking 1903 film *The Great Train Robbery*, at the end of which one of the robbers points his gun at the audience and pulls the trigger. There are also, perhaps less unexpectedly, visual links to other Boorman films. The result of these sorts of references to events within the world of the viewer (whether they realize it or not) is to create the sense that the far future (the year 2293) may already have been determined by events closer to, and even preceding, our own time.

Zardoz is flawed, no doubt, but even its flaws are set within a thoughtful cinematic structure which both allows and invites the viewer to participate in disentangling the roles of its several mythologies, whether visual or dramatic, as well as to think about the role of the past— theirs or humanity's — in creating the present and the future. Give it a chance; you might be pleasantly surprised.

ALEC BALDWIN
„Das unterhaltsamste Action-Abenteuer seit Indiana Jones"!
NBC NEWS
Shadow
und der Fluch des Khan
UNIVERSAL

Gene TIERNEY
Rex HARRISON
George SANDERS
IL FANTASMA
E LA SIG.RA MUIR
Regia: JOSEPH L. MANKIEWICZ
Prod. FRED KOHLMAR
EDNA BEST · VANESSA BROWN · ANNA LEE · ROBERT COOTE
NATALIE WOOD · ISOBEL ELSOM · VICTORIA HORNE

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER
PRESENTS
A ROBERT WISE PRODUCTION
THE
HAUNTING
STARRING
JULIE HARRIS
CLAIRE BLOOM
RICHARD JOHNSON
RUSS TAMBLYN
DIRECTED BY
ROBERT WISE
SCREENPLAY BY
NELSON GIDDING
BASED ON THE NOVEL
THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE
BY SHIRLEY JACKSON
AN ARGYLE ENTERPRISES PICTURE


Till framtidslandets idealsamhälle kommer Utrotaren.
Till de odödliga, evigt unga, kommer han med kärlek, sex, våld, död.
HAN STÖRTAR DEM I AVGRUNDEN-
ETT EXPLODERANDE INFERNO!
ZARDOZ
SEAN CONNERY ZARDOZ JOHN BOORMAN
CHARLOTTE RAMPLING