

Tuesday next: "NO MAN OF HER OWN" (1933, dir: Wesley Ruggles) with Clark Gable, Carole Lombard, Dorothy Mackail; and "SO THIS IS HARRIS" (1933, dir: Mark Sandrich), a surprisingly risqué featurette with Phil Harris, and an Academy Award winner for 1933; and, to round out an all-1933 program, George Stevens' snappy and quite charming 2-reeler, "FLIRTING IN THE PARK".

Note: last week's program, cancelled because of the snow tie-up, is being rescheduled in April. The new 3-month schedule will be available at next Tuesday's showing, and will be mailed out in the regular way on Wednesday of next week.

Tuesday February 14th 1967

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Fritz Lang: The Beginning (nearly) and The End (Almost)

DESTINY (1921)

THE INDIAN TOMB (1950)

"DESTINY" ("Der Mude Tode"--"The Tired Death") Germany, 1921

Directed by Fritz Lang for Decla-Bioscop; Story and screenplay by Lang and Thea von Harbou; Camera: Erich Nitschmann, Hermann Salfrank and Fritz Arno Wagner; Lighting, Robert Hegewald; Settings and design: Walter Rohrig (the framing story); Hermann Warm (the Bagdad and Venetian stories); Robert Herlth (the Chinese story).

With Bernard Goetke (Death); Lil Dagover (The Girl); Walter Jansen (The Boy); and Rudolph Klein-Rogge (in both the Bagdad and Venetian stories), Hans Sternberg, Karl Ruckert, Max Adalbert, Wilhelm Diegelmann, Erich Pabst, Hermann Picha, Karl Platen, Georg John, Grate Berger, Lydia Potechina, Eduard v. Winterstein. Original length: 8 reels; this print: 7 reels.

It has always been a source of some amazement that Lang progressed so rapidly from the pictorially fascinating but dramatically rather turgid films of the early 20's to the dynamo-paced slickness of "Metropolis" only a few years later. "Destiny" is perhaps the most primitive of the Lang films available to us, but since it is also the earliest Lang film available to us, it is hardly surprising. It is however, difficult to base reliable impressions of the film on the rather inadequate prints that exist today. Tonight's version, originating in France, is a bit choppy than the Museum of Modern Art version (although it contains one or two odd scenes I don't recall seeing in that version), but is roughly of the same generation, which is to say that it is rather flat and clearly a dupe several times removed. The one time I saw an original toned 35mm print of "Destiny" - this back in the mid-40's - I was quite stunned by it, and even admitting that I was more impressionable in those days, and had seen far fewer silents, I still am inclined to the belief that this is one film where a first-class print is really essential. It is also a film that never quite lives up to the promise of its stills, which have a tendency to make the sets look even more bizarre than they actually are, especially those of the Chinese episode.

The framing story is the most sophisticated and meaningful, and still fares best - just as the modern story of "Intolerance", itself also a frame, works best in that film. The symbolism is more eloquent here, and less strained than in the Chinese story, which also suffers from overdoses of rather heavy Teutonic humor. (In much the same way, the allegedly humorous Jannings Arabian Nights sequence was the weakest of the stories in "Waxworks"). And although consistently interesting - if sometimes more in concept than execution - it must be admitted that "Destiny" as a whole does not stand comparison with roughly parallel films of earlier vintage from the Scandinavian countries, most specifically Sasstrom's "Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness" and Dreyer's "Leaves from Satan's Book". Its much-heralded trick photography has been somewhat over-boasted too, undoubtedly by the stories that they influenced Douglas Fairbanks in the making of "The Thief of Bagdad". It is more than likely that their trick scenes involving the flying carpet and the miniature army gave Fairbanks the inspiration for a much more elaborate utilisation of those devices in his later film, but after the superb trick work (much of it still unsurpassed) in his own "When The Clouds Roll By" of 1919, it is difficult to give any credence to his being staggered by the simple and indeed rather crude effects that "Destiny" has to offer. The film did continue to be of influence through the years however, and the opening turns up again virtually intact in one of the better horror films of the early 30's, "White Zombie". The print, as we have indicated, leaves something to be desired, although we make no apologies for it as we are glad to have it. The only major deletions however appear to be in the rather abrupt transitions, in which the shots of the individual candles are missing, as are the subtitles linking each story to a flickering candle.

The following paragraph is a rather drastic condensation of some of the most interesting highlights from a lengthy and authoritative program note on Lang once prepared by Charles Shibuk:

"In structure and content "Destiny" was undoubtedly influenced by Purnan's "Satanas" (1919)... and we can surmise that Lang was deriving some of his ideas from the work of the famous Richard Oswald, who personified Death in several films including "Unheimliche Geschichten" ("Unholy Tales", 1919) with Conrad Veidt as Death. Two other specific influences may be noted. First, in PASSION (1919) Lubitsch shows us a flickering and dying candle after the death of each of his three protagonists; Second, the heavenward-ascending staircase was used by Robert Wiene in "Genuine" (1920) ... "Destiny", together with "Passion" and "Caligari", was one of the first German films to win international acclaim. Yet it was not well received when it first appeared in Germany, one critic going so far as to entitle his review "The Tiresome Death". In France the reception was more enthusiastic, critics praising it as being "truly German", and a hasty reassessment of "Destiny"'s merits followed in Germany. Contrary to false rumors that still persist, "Destiny" was publicly shown in the US. Following the success of Lang's "Siegfried", "Destiny" was released under the titles of "Between Worlds" and "The Light Within". After "Metropolis" was shown here, "Destiny" was re-edited (the Bagdad episode cut in toto) and retitled (changing the story-line) and reissued in 1927 as "Beyond the Wall".

..... Charles Shibuk.

JOURNEY TO THE LOST CITY (American International release, 1960)
Directed by Fritz Lang for Arthur Brauner Productions; screenplay by Warner Joeg Luedecke, from an original story by Theo von Harbou; Art Directors, Willi Schatz, Helmut Neutwig; music by Michel Michelet; Camera: Richard Angst; US length: 10 reels; in Color
With Paul Hubschmidt, Debra Paget, Walter Reyer, Claus Holm, Rene Deltgen, Inkinjoff, Sabine Bethman, Luciano Paluzzi.

"The Indian Tomb" is one of the perennials of German movie hoke; it is to the Germans what "The Four Feathers" is to the British and "The Spoilers" to the Americans. Always made as a spectacular two-parter (part one titled "The Tiger of Eschnapur", part two "The Indian Tomb") it was first made as a silent with Joe May directing and Lang and Von Harbou writing. (The condensation of the two, released in the US as "Above All Laws", was shown at one of our Sunday morning shows a few years ago). It was remade in the 30's, with Philip Dorn in the lead. This third version, marking Lang's return to German production in 1959, for the first time since "The Testament of Dr. Mabuse" in '32, was filmed largely in India. Traditionally released in this country in a single condensed version, it was literally cut in half - though those who have seen the full version claim that it is very slow-paced, and that the cutting has not hurt it as much as might be supposed. However, there were two further assaults even on this already severely edited version. First, Legion of Decency pressure forced the excision of a dance in which Debra Paget performs almost nude, other than for a few strategic spangles. It must have been a lulu of a dance, for she goes into the sacred chamber expecting to be condemned to death, and comes out as the betrothed of the Prince! And finally, in order to place it as a second feature on the Rko chain in NY, the distributors then voluntarily hacked another couple of reels. It is principally because of this that we are showing it tonight - our version does include that missing two reels of footage. Ten it gives us an opportunity to study Lang at the two ends of his career (he has made only one film since, "The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse") and to see how much the serial-like roots of his earlier scripts influenced his later works, for the entire Bagdad episode of "Destiny" is really nothing more than a drastic condensation of "The Indian Tomb".

"The Indian Tomb" is a handsome, colorful, quite spectacular affair, unusually well dubbed, and visual in the best old Lang tradition - a tradition that he had abandoned in his last few American films. It doesn't try consciously to recreate the spirit of the original work, and in that sense is less successful than Franju's "Judex", which succeeds admirably in duplicating with respect and fidelity, without amplification or the tongue in the cheek. Instead, this "Indian Tomb" is more of a nostalgic recollection of the past for Lang ... like Ford in his later westerns, he is effortlessly treading well-worn paths, not needing to make any special effort because he knows the way so well, thus falling short of inspiration, but coming up with enjoyable competence, affection and know-how. Despite the familiarity of the story, which is changed not one whit, it's such a good basic story that it still works -- and will probably work as well another 15 years hence, when the next remake comes around.