Tuesday next: "NO MAN OF HER OWN" (1933, dir: Wesley Ruggles) with Clark Gable, Carole Lombard, Dorothy Mackaill; 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, "THE WAVE 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.

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Tuesday February 14th 1967

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

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

DESTINY (1921) THE INDIAN TOMB (1925)

"DESTINY" ("Der Nuda Todt"—"The Tired Death") Germany, 1921

Directed by Fritz Lang for Decla-Bioskop; Story and screenplay by Lang and Thea von Harbou; Camera: Erich Mittelmann, Hermann Salfrank and Fritz Arno Wagner; Lighting, Robert Hagewald; Sound and design: Walter Rohrig (the framing story); Hermann Warm (the Bagdad and Venetian stories); Robert Herlit (the Chinese story), with Bernhard Goetzke (Death); Lil Dagover (The Girl); Walter Janssen (The Boy); and Rudolph Klein-Rogge (in both the Bagdad and Venetian stories), Hans Sturberg, Rolf Suckert, Max Adalbert, Wilhelm Diegelmann, Sonja Pabst, Hermann Ploha, Karl Platen, Georg John, Fritz Berger, Lydia Potechina, Eduard v. Winterstein. Original length: 8 reels; print length: ? 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 dynamos-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 longest 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 choppier 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 few foreign 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 overtones 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 Scandinavian "Swedish Shall Bear Witness" and Dreiser's "Leaves from Satan's Book". Its much-hailed trick photography has been somewhat over-boosted 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 utilization of those devices in his later films, but after the superb trick work (much of it still unsurpassed) in its own "When The Clouds Roll By" of 1938, 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.
In structure and content "Destiny" was undoubtedly influenced by Furrer's "Satanae" (1919) ... and we can only suppose that Lang was deriving some of his ideas from the work of the famous Austrian painter Richard Riemerschmid by personifying with in several films including "Unheimliche Geschichten" ("Vudus of Darkness", 1921) and 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 stairsman 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 so well received when it first appeared in Germany, one critic going so far as to call it "The Timecon Death". In France the reception was more enthusiastic, critics predicting it as being "truly German", and a hasty reassessment of "Destiny" was 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 released in 1927 as "Beyond the Wall".

Charles Shuluk


"The Indian Tomb" is one of the encapsiles of German movie hok, he is to the Germans what "The Four Feathers" is to the British and "The Spoilers" to the Americans. Always made as a spectacular two-caster (part one entitled "The Tiger of Schehariz", 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 assimilations even on this already severely edited version. First, Legion of Decency presentations were forced to cut a dance in which Debra Paget performs almost nude, other than for a few strategically placed flowers. But that might not matter so much as a lull of a dance, for she goes into the sacred chamber expecting to be condemned to death, and comes out as the riddler of the Prince! And finally, in order to place it as a second feature on the Eko 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. But it gives us an opportunity to study Lang at the end 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 works influenced his later works, for the entire Baghad 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 it less successful than Franju's "Juder", which succeeds admirably in duplicating with care and fidelity, without amplification of 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 knowledge. 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.

William E. Ferssen