

MT VOID 12/31/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 27, Whole Number 2204



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
12/31/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 27, Whole Number 2204

Table of Contents

- [Science Fiction \(and Other\) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. \(NJ\)](#)
- [My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for January](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
- [CYRANO](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [THE PAST IS RED by Catherynne M. Valente](#) (book review by Joe Karpierz)
- [FALLING FOR FIGARO and Operas](#) (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Dorothy J. Heydt, and Paul Dormer)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (James Fenimore Cooper, my family and books, editions of Bibles, and AUTHORIZED: THE USE AND MISUSE OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

Both groups have returned to the B.C. (Before Covid) schedules, and the films will be shown as part of the Middletown meetings.

- January 6, 2022 (MTPL), 5:30PM: Stanislaw Lem Centennial:
PILOT PIRX'S INQUEST (1979), short story "The Inquest"
by Stanislaw Lem
<https://tinyurl.com/Pirx-More-Tales>
- January 27, 2022 (OBPL) 7:00PM: THE TIME MACHINE by H. G. Wells

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for January (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER was released in 1958 and up until 1997 it was the iconic film telling the story of the sinking of the RMS Titanic. It was over-shadowed by the 1997 TITANIC and now is rarely ever seen. The 1997 version had guns blazing and even a bit of nudity. I still prefer the earlier film. The more recent film has lots of digital effects work, but the older film has familiar British actors including Kenneth More, Honor Blackman, Michael Goodliffe, David McCallum, and Alec McCowen. It was directed by Roy Ward Baker who later also directed QUATERMASS AND THE PIT.

[A NIGHT TO REMEMBER, Monday, January 3, 2002, 12:45PM]

TCM also has a day of horror on January 28:

- 01/28/2022 11:30 AM Them! (1954)
- 01/28/2022 01:15 PM The Mummy (1959)

01/28/2022 03:00 PM The Curse of Frankenstein (1957)
01/28/2022 04:30 PM The Fly (1958)
01/28/2022 06:15 PM House of Wax (1953)

And finally, TCM will be running the rarely shown Kenju Mizoguchi epic, THE 47 RONIN, on January 17 at 2:00AM.

[-mrl]

CYRANO (film review by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

There were many adaptations of classic literary works in 1990, but for both production quality and pure entertainment value I gave the edge to that year's CYRANO DE BERGERAC, giving it a +3 (-4 to +4 scale), and said that that was likely to remain the best adaptation of the story to film we would see in our lifetimes and very likely the most entertaining, even if we included Steve Martin's popular modern reframing ROXANNE. I still stand by that.

CYRANO DE BERGERAC, and this year's film of similar title, CYRANO, are of course adaptations of Edmond Rostand's popular play, first presented in 1897. (Rostand took some poetic liberty, incidentally, but Cyrano was a genuine historic figure who was soldier, expert swordsman, poet, playwright, philosopher, and even a science fiction writer. His best-known literary work today is A VOYAGE TO THE MOON, which is why Rostand put so many references to moon travel in the play. Cyrano suggested several means of extra-terrestrial propulsion, mostly absurd, but on one he got lucky. Cyrano de Bergerac was the man who first suggested that space travel might be possible using rocket propulsion.) The story is of the noble swordsman who would like to woo his beautiful cousin but is stigmatized by his own prodigious nose. When it turns out that an inarticulate but handsome soldier under Cyrano's command also loves her. Cyrano agrees to help the soldier. The soldier will provide the good looks and Cyrano will provide the words. The story packs into a surprisingly small space comedy, tragedy, drama, action, and adventure.

This year's version, titled simply CYRANO, it does everything it can to make the nobility repulsive, visually as well as character-wise. We see the Count De Guise (played by Ben Mendelsohn) giving instructions and orders to his fiancée, Roxanne (played by Haley Bennett). De Guiche does not know that he will soon be losing his safe control over the woman in his own coach. Let De Guise rest in peace.

Cyrano is played by Peter Dinklage, and as a result, almost all the nose jokes are dispensed with in favor of remarks about his height. This means, among other things, that the marvelous scene in which Cyrano comes up with dozens of insults to his nose. Apparently screenwriter Erica Schmidt (Dinklage's wife) did not feel she could do that scene justice with height jokes--or maybe decided that height jokes were a bit too insulting in real life to put a whole scene of them on the film. Dinklage is immensely talented but his singing voice leaves a lot to be desired. (On the other hand, the same could be said of Rex Harrison in MY FAIR LADY.) Christian is played by Kelvin Harrison, Jr., with no comment being made about his race--I'm not sure if we are supposed to acknowledge it or not. (One reviewer felt that having a Black character be inarticulate and rescued by what is in some sense a white savior was a bad choice.)

Kudos for the very detailed sets and production design.

Released theatrically 12/31/21. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12889404/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/cyrano>

[-mrl/ecl]

THE PAST IS RED by **Catherynne M. Valente** (copyright 2021, tordotcom, 150pp, hardcover, \$20.99, ISBN 978-1-250-30113-0) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

The world was introduced to Tetley Abednego in the short story "The Future is Blue", which first appeared in Jonathan Strahan's anthology DROWNED WORLDS, published in 2016. (Is it that old already? It's still on my to be read stack.) I'd read it in one of the "year's best" anthologies, and liked the story enough that it did stick with me for a period of time (and let's be honest, I think that it's true for most people that read enough of this stuff that after a short period of time, most works drop out of memory, especially short works).

The setting is a Earth devastated by climate change. As implied by being included in the "Drowned Worlds" anthology, the planet is essentially entirely covered by water. Tetley lives on a floating clump of junk called Garbagetown. Tetley is generally happy, given her plight. However, while she may be happy, no one is happy with her. "The Future is Blue", included in this volume, not only sets up the world that Tetley lives in--including, for example, how children get their names--tells the story of just *why* people are unhappy--check that, *very* unhappy--with her. And while the story is more than five years old at this point, there may be readers out there who have not read it, and so I won't spoil then end of the story, but suffice it to say that she does a thing that is not ... well-received.

I would not have expected that there was much more to tell about Tetley, but that is after all why writers write and people read: to tell and experience stories. "The Past is Red" picks up many years later. Tetley is still reviled for her deed at the end of "The Future is Blue". She is 29, lives on a pontoon boat moored to a port, and doesn't venture on land because of a law enacted-- although given the society she lives in it's unclear how the law came into being and how it's enforced, but it probably doesn't matter given the state of the world--back when she did the thing. She loves her world, just as much as she did when she was young and just getting her name, and the world hates her just as much as it did then.

"The Past is Red" opens the wings of Tetley's story more than the original. She finds technology, love, a friend or two, and surprisingly, a husband. Her husband is a character from "The Past is Blue", and I can't say much more than that without spoiling the thing that Tetley did. Yep, it all comes back to that. But the technology she finds leads to a surprising discovery that I sure didn't see coming. It's a discovery that makes the plight of those on Earth that much more sad, I think, and at the same time makes whoever is left angry, if they were to find out. Given that I didn't see it coming, the reveal worked for me, although I can see why it might take some readers out of the story.

It's been hard to describe the book without giving anything away, which is probably the best kind of story. Sure, stories can be summarized enough to give readers an idea of what's going on without spoiling them, but some are better just left to be discovered on their own. This is one of those. [-jak]

FALLING FOR FIGARO and Operas (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Dorothy J. Heydt, and Paul Dormer):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of FALLING FOR FIGARO](#) (and people falling asleep during operas) in the 12/24/21 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

There's a folksong about someone who always falls asleep watching Wagner's "Goetterdaemmerung". Understandable, since it's one of the longest operas in the regular repertoire. [-gmg]

Dorothy J. Heydt responds:

Indeed.

I'm blanking on the name of the famous 20th-century conductor who habitually conducted without a score, having memorized the whole enchilada.

One day he was preparing to conduct "Goetterdaemmerung" (where "preparing" consisted of things like finding his cufflinks and checking to make sure the soloists had all shown up), and a friend of his suggested that he have the score on hand "to keep track of all the tempo changes."

"My dear Ermintrude," he answered, "there *are* no tempo changes in 'Goetterdaemmerung'. It plods along from 7 p.m. to quarter past midnight like a damned old cart-horse." [-djh]

Paul Dormer adds:

Which reminds me of the comment by an American music critic: "Parsifal" is one of those operas that start at 6 p.m. Four hours later, you look at your watch and it's a quarter after 6." (I now like "Parsifal", but it took me a long time to get into it.) [-pd]

Gary also adds:

[Mark and Evelyn write,] "The film has a nice selection of operatic arias, with the ones "sung" by the two leads actually voiced by Stacey Alleaume and Nathan Lay."

Marnie Nixon's ghost is glad they got credited. [-gmg]

Evelyn notes:

The contractual requirements for credits have changed a lot since Marnie Nixon's day. That's why ending credit sequences last forever--even the company that supplies the Porta Potties has to get credit. [-ecl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The "Classical Stuff You Should Know" punted last week on a full-length podcast in favor of a reading of Mark Twain's "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses". It's a good choice, but it got me thinking more about my family and books than about Fenimore Cooper per se.

What started that train of thought was the fact that my father mentioned only three books he really liked: THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (James Fenimore Cooper), MY ANTONIA (Willa Cather), and LOST HORIZON (James Hilton). The latter was a lifetime love, but the first two were more books of his younger years, and he didn't own a copy of either of them.

For that matter, we didn't have a lot of books in the house, just two small bookcases with an odd assortment of books and magazines. These including a four-volume set of Homer in Spanish as well as Dante's DIVINE COMEDY, also in Spanish, with the Dore illustrations. He also had a couple of books that ended up as mine: Jules Verne's MYSTERIOUS ISLAND and Franz Werfel's STAR OF THE UNBORN. The latter was a science fiction novel by an author best known for THE SONG OF BERNADETTE; how my father ended up with I never did find out.

However, my parents respected books, and we always had library cards. (I think I was five when I got my first library card.) Accumulating books when you were in the military and moving a lot was inconvenient, and there was always a base library, as well as town libraries and school libraries. But we never talked about books that I can recall--reading was a solitary avocation. And in any case, I doubt I would have shown Twain's comments on Fenimore Cooper to my father.

(The only time I can recall talking to my father about my reading was when I wanted to know if the "compass" ["brujula"] in Jorge Luis Borges's "Death and the Compass" was the navigational device or the geometric tool. It was the navigational device.)

Our house was also one which did not have the King James Version of the Bible like everyone else had, but rather the Revised Standard Version. It occurs to me only now that this was probably not a real conscious choice by my father to spurn the KJV, but the effect of his growing up in a Spanish-speaking environment. Because there was not the entrenched use of quotations from the KJV version in everyday speech, and no history of its use in his family, there was nothing that made that the obvious choice. (I came to this realization reading AUTHORIZED: THE USE AND MISUSE OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE by Mark Ward (Lexham Press, ISBN 978-1-683-59055-2.) [-ecl])

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Quote of the Week:

There were so few people at the concert that if one
more person were missing, there wouldn't be any room
for him.

--Guillermo Juan Borges

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