

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Presents: Lost and Found

THE WHITE SHADOW

It may be said that there are no such things as white shadows, but just as the sun casts a dark shadow, so does the soul cast its shadow of white, reflecting a purity that influences the lives of those upon whom the white shadows fall.
Selnick

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Thursday, September 22, 2011 7:30 p.m. Samuel Goldwyn Theater

SCENES FROM THE WHITE SHADOW



Tonight's films were preserved through a partnership of the New Zealand Film Archive, the American archival community, and the National Film Preservation Foundation.

Preservation of **THE WHITE SHADOW** was completed by Park Road Post Production in New Zealand and the New Zealand Film Archive with support from the Academy Film Archive and the National Film Preservation Foundation.

Preservation of **WON IN A CUPBOARD** was completed by Colorlab Corp, under the direction of the Library of Congress.

Preservation of **OIL'S WELL** was completed by Colorlab, under the direction of the Museum of Modern Art with support by Turner Classic Movies. It is preserved as part of a project supported by Save America's Treasures, a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

The nitrate source material is courtesy of the Jack Murtagh/Osbourne Collection (N.Z.).





Myron Selznick and Alfred Hitchcock in England, circa 1924.

Photo courtesy of Mary Mallory.

THE WHITE SHADOW (Balcon, Freedman and Saville, 1924) – Produced by Michael Balcon, Victor Saville. Directed by Graham Cutts. Assistant Director Alfred Hitchcock. Screenplay by Hitchcock and Michael Morton. Cinematography by Claude L. McDonnell. Art Direction by Hitchcock.

Cast: Betty Compson (Nancy Brent/Georgina Brent), Clive Brook (Robin Field), Henry Victor (Louis Chadwick), A.B. Imeson (Mr. Brent).

A description of the concluding scenes from THE WHITE SHADOW, on reels that are still lost, will be read by Academy Award® winner Eva Marie Saint.

Musical accompaniment composed by Michael Mortilla and performed by Mortilla on piano and Nicole Garcia on violin.

THE WHITE SHADOW

Film stills are no substitute for moving pictures, but even static images from THE WHITE SHADOW convey a sense of Alfred Hitchcock's early gift for creating drama by purely visual means. Betty Compson's impish smile and half-open eyes framed by a jauntily angled hat and a wreath of artfully positioned smoke; the motley crew of men she effortlessly controls at the poker table; Clive Brook's steely gaze set off by a slash of light across an otherwise dark background; the graceful shading of an ivy-draped window framing a wistful face. These and many other images confirm Hitchcock's precocious talent for silent storytelling.

They also indicate why Hitchcock advanced so rapidly in the British film industry. Although he broke into the business as a designer of title-cards conveying plot information and dialogue, he knew that one eloquent picture is worth a dozen printed texts. Learning to conceptualize and create such pictures was the project he successfully completed during his two-year tenure as assistant director to Graham Cutts, with whom he worked on five movies, starting with WOMAN TO WOMAN in 1923. All were made on economical six-week schedules. The first three were vehicles for Compson, an important star at Paramount who came to England when Balcon, Freedman and Saville, the enterprising production company that employed Cutts and Hitchcock, offered her a dazzling salary of a thousand pounds a week.

Hitchcock said later that WOMAN TO WOMAN was "the first film that I had really got my hands onto," and it proved to be a major hit. Reviews were good too; it was deemed the "best American picture made in England" by the *Daily Express* critic, who shared the British consensus that Hollywood movies were livelier and more entertaining than English ones. WOMAN TO WOMAN was among the very few British films to do excellent business in the United States, and it also fared well in Germany, where previous British exports had sunk under the weight of lingering resentments from the World War. Dazzled by their own success, producers Michael Balcon and Victor Saville rushed a second Compson picture into production – THE WHITE SHADOW – and whisked it to theaters with a conspicuously clunky advertising tag: "The same Star, Producer, Author, Hero, Cameraman, Scenic Artist, Staff, Studio, Renting Company as WOMAN TO WOMAN." The box office results were definitely not the same, however: "It was as big a flop," Balcon wrote in his memoir, "as WOMAN TO WOMAN had been a success." This notwithstanding, plans proceeded for three more Cutts-Hitchcock pictures, commencing with THE PASSIONATE ADVENTURE in 1924.

The financial failure of *THE WHITE SHADOW* was regrettable, but it paradoxically helped advance Hitchcock's career. The film's British distributor was C.M. Woolf, who owned the "rental company" referred to in the promotional tag. Woolf was famous for despising "artistic" moviemaking, and thanks to Cutts and Hitchcock, *THE WHITE SHADOW* was far too artistic for his taste. Seeing its poor financial performance as proof of his wisdom, he used the occasion to withdraw his investment in Balcon, Freedman and Seville, which went out of business before long. Balcon then set up Gainsborough Productions, which went on to become one of England's most respected, successful – and, yes, artistic – production companies. Among its first ventures were two Cutts-Hitchcock films: *THE BLACKGUARD*, also known as *DIE PRINZESSIN UND DER GEIGER*, shot at Germany's great UFA studio for release in 1925, and *THE PRUDE'S FALL*, also known as *DANGEROUS VIRTUE*, released in 1924. Soon thereafter, Gainsborough and two German companies would co-produce Hitchcock's first film as director, the 1925 romance *THE PLEASURE GARDEN*.

Cutts was fourteen years older than Hitchcock, and he had a complicated love life that distracted him considerably during the younger man's apprenticeship, leading to rivalry and envy on Cutts's part. He belittled Hitchcock behind his back, according to Hitchcock biographer Patrick McGilligan, and matters didn't improve when *THE PRUDE'S FALL* turned out so badly that moviegoers "practically hooted it from the screen," in a *Variety* critic's words. Hitchcock had limited amounts of sympathy for Cutts – he later said he was "running even the director" when they worked together – but in the 1930s, when Hitchcock was a rising star and Cutts was looking for any work he could get, Hitchcock quietly helped him out.

Hitchcock's experiences as a "general factotum" on *THE WHITE SHADOW* and other silent films paid rich artistic dividends for many years to come. His goal as a filmmaker was to create "pure cinema," meaning cinema that blends story, style, and technique into an expressive, suspenseful whole. As film scholar Sidney Gottlieb has vividly shown, the lessons Hitchcock learned from silent film never faded in importance for him. Even decades later and a continent away, he energized his greatest Hollywood pictures with lengthy stretches of unadulterated visual storytelling – think of the crop-dusting scene in *NORTH BY NORTHWEST* (1959) and Scottie shadowing Madeleine in *VERTIGO* (1958); Jeffries spying on the killer in *REAR WINDOW* (1954) and the extended sequence showing Marion's fatal shower and Norman's obsessive cleanup in *PSYCHO* (1960). These are only a few examples from a career that produced as many heart-pounding, soul-stirring visual sequences as any in the history of film.

Critics found the story of *THE WHITE SHADOW* far-fetched when it premiered, but they applauded the acting, the style, and the look of the production – precisely the elements that meant most to Hitchcock even at this early stage. With more than half of the movie in our hands for the first time since it was new, we are in a better position than ever to study and assess his monumental creativity when it was first taking shape in his imagination.

THE WHITE SHADOW notes by **David Sterritt**, chairman of the National Society of Film Critics and author of *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* and *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard: Seeing the Invisible*.