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The fearmakers, Tourneur, Jacques, 1958

Berlin express, Tourneur, Jacques, 1948

Night of the demon, Tourneur, Jacques, 1957



Jacques Tourneur lights up
Jane Greer on the set of *Out of the Past*

WHISPERS IN A DISTANT CORRIDOR: THE CINEMA OF JACQUES TOURNEUR

through September 12

Jacques Tourneur, son of the pioneering director Maurice Tourneur (who is a featured character in Bertrand Tavernier's upcoming *Laissez-passer*), was French-born and made a few films in Paris before he emigrated to America in the 30s. He began working for MGM, doing shorts and second-unit work, and eventually graduated to B-movies. But it was at RKO, where he began working with visionary producer Val Lewton on his low-budget horror unit, that Tourneur's quiet, concentrated genius became evident. His enormously successful 1942 *Cat People* is one of the most artful and psychologically penetrating 70 minutes of film ever made, and his follow-ups for Lewton, *The Leopard Man* (Manny Farber's favorite) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (the director's own favorite among all his films), are arguably better. Tourneur regretted being kicked upstairs to A-pictures, but he continued to make excellent films right up to the end of his career in the mid-60s, including the watermark noir *Out of the Past*, the beautiful period melodrama *Experiment Perilous*, the gorgeous color western *Canyon Passage*, the underrated *Nightfall*, and the British horror classic *Curse of the Demon*.

Jacques Tourneur always insisted that he was nothing more than a good, conscientious craftsman. Which he was. As you'll see in this series, he was also a great artist.

Thanks to Mike Schlesinger (Columbia Pictures), John Cocchi (JC Archives, Inc.), Warner Bros., and the British Film Institute.

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Film Society of Lincoln Center, Walter Reade Theater, Sept. 2002

Out of the Past

USA, 1947; 97m

Out of the Past is almost synonymous with the term film noir, and it might come as a shock to first-time viewers with visions of rain-soaked city streets at night and cross-hatched lighting pouring in through Venetian blinds that the most striking sequences of Tourneur's 1947 classic take place in bright sunshine, photographed by the great RKO cameraman Nicolas Musuraca. The flashback-driven plot is, as Chris Fujiwara has put it, "notoriously complex," but here's the basic idea: Jane Greer runs away from mobster Kirk Douglas, who sends Robert Mitchum to track her down in Mexico, where they fall in love. It is easily one of the greatest films of the 40s, probably one of the greatest American films ever made, and Tourneur's touch here is as deft as that of a great jazz pianist like Bill Evans or Bud Powell. Mitchum is at his early peak, and Jane Greer is the loveliest actress you've never heard of. With former child star Dick Moore as the deaf-mute teenager who takes down Mitchum's would-be assassin with his fishing line.

Sun Sept 1: 1, 5 & 9; Mon Sept 2: 3 & 7

Nightfall (New 35mm print)

USA, 1956; 78m

Tourneur's terrifically compact, low-key adaptation of the David (Shoot the Piano Player) Goodis novel. A man and a woman (Aldo Ray and Anne Bancroft) strike up an acquaintance and decide to have dinner together. After they're fin-

ished, the man is suddenly hijacked and spiraled away by two thugs, played by Brian Keith and Rudy Bond. In an extended flashback, we learn that Ray had crossed paths with the two men a year earlier during a camping trip, where they had accidentally left a bag holding \$350,000. Now they want their money back. As always, Tourneur sifts the action into the settings, in this case an L.A. beachfront and the open spaces of Wyoming. Ray and Keith, both subtle, gruff-voiced, and amiable actors, fit perfectly into Tourneur's oddly unsettled universe.

Sun Sept 1: 3:10 & 7:10

Mon Sept 2: 1, 5:10 & 9:10

Curse of the Demon aka Night of the Demon

USA, 1957; 90m

Tourneur's last genuinely great film (and one of his own favorites) is set in England, and stars his old friend Dana Andrews as a psychologist who comes face to face with a demonic supernatural entity. Tourneur was (probably) forced to actually show the demon, but he cloaks it in atmospheric shadows, and the overall effect is haunting. But the sudden appearance of a storm at an outdoor children's party, conjured up by the devil-worshipping Karswell (Niall McGinnis), is one of the finest things Tourneur ever directed. Written by Hitchcock's early 30s collaborator Charles Bennett, with production design by Ken "James Bond" Adam.

Tue Sept 3: 1



Out of the Past



Nightfall

The Leopard Man

USA, 1943; 66m

Lewton and Tourneur felt that they had gone a little too far, revealed a bit too much grisly detail in their second collaboration. But today this film about a series of grisly murders in a New Mexican city (based on Cornell Woolrich's *Black Alibi*) looks like the sleekest, most streamlined of their films. Tourneur makes astonishing use of sound in this film — the clicking of castanets has never sounded more haunting. And darkness has never felt darker. With Dennis O'Keefe, Margo, and Abner Biberman. Manny Farber wrote in 1951: "A nerve-twitching whodunit giving the creepy impression that human beings and 'things' are interchangeable and almost synonymous and that both are pawns of a bizarre and terrible destiny."

Tue Sept 3: 9

The Fearmakers (New 35mm print)

USA, 1958; 85m

Dana Andrews insisted that his old friend Tourneur direct this 1958 film about a Washington PR man named Eaton (Andrews) who returns from his stay in a Chinese POW camp during the Korean war to find that his old partner has been killed in a car accident after selling out to a man named McGinnis (Dick

Foran). Eaton infiltrates the firm and uncovers the truth about his friend's death and McGinnis' political motives. *The Fearmakers* has a vaguely anti-communist theme, but the predominant tone of the movie is one of sadness and resignation. It's an oddly compelling movie. With Mel Tormé as McGinnis' statistician.

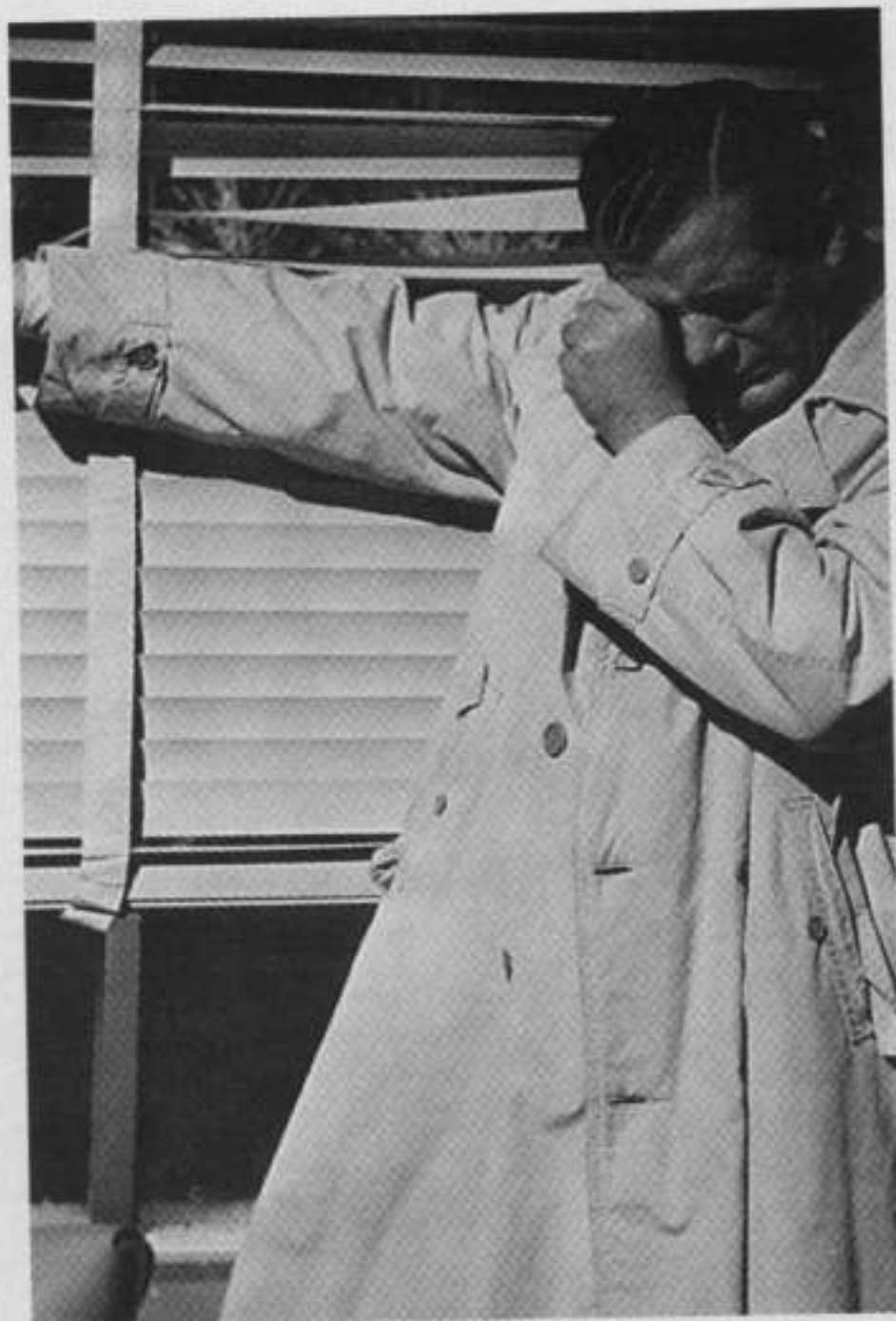
Wed Sept 4: 1, 4:45 & 8:30

Stars in My Crown

USA, 1950; 89m

Tourneur always claimed that he was the consummate Hollywood professional, the man who never turned down a script. Once, though, he fought for the chance to direct one, and took a sizable pay cut to do so. *Stars in My Crown*, which is unlike any other Tourneur film, is made up of scenes in the life of a small town in 19th century America called Walesburg, centering around its parson (Joel McCrea, Tourneur's old high school friend), his son John (Dean Stockwell) who becomes sick with typhoid, the local doctor (James Mitchell), and a man named Uncle Famous (Juano Hernandez) who is nearly scared off his land by a band of vigilantes that resembles the Ku Klux Klan (in an episode that recalls *Young Mr. Lincoln* and antedates *To Kill a Mockingbird*). A lovely, delicate and at times deeply moving film.

Wed Sept 4: 2:45 & 6:30; Fri Sept 6: 3 & 7



The Fearmakers



Stars in My Crown

Cat People

USA, 1942; 73m

In *The Bad and the Beautiful*, there's a sequence in which Kirk Douglas and Barry Sullivan, young and fledgling producers, have a revelation: rather than trying to do the impossible and make the catsuits for their low-budget horror movie believable, they'll make creative use of darkness. The episode is based on this 1942 classic. Tourneur and Lewton, working from a script by DeWitt Bodeen, use sound and shadow to make the moments between the moments, the things we can't see, disquietingly tangible. The preternaturally feline Simone Simon is the woman whose sexual urges bring out the cat in her, Kent Smith is her ordinary, uncomprehending husband, and plain Jane Randolph is the other woman. There are many classic scenes in this movie: Simon leaving her fingernail scratches on the couch, Randolph's frantic walk through Central Park, and the scene where she's menaced by shadows (produced by Tourneur making a fist in front of a light) on the wall behind a swimming pool.

Thurs Sept 5: 1, 4:30 & 8

I Walked with a Zombie

USA, 1943; 69m

Val Lewton was one of the most literate people in Hollywood, and this story about zombies in the Caribbean is loosely based on Jane Eyre. Frances Dee is the Jane figure, and Tom Conway is a kind of country club Rochester. The real stars of *I Walked with a Zombie* are Jacques

Tourneur and his camera. Tourneur believed in the supernatural in real life, and you can certainly feel it in this movie, not least during the extraordinary sequence of Dee following Conway's catatonic wife as she's summoned to a voodoo ceremony. Like all the Tourneur-Lewton projects, a profoundly eerie experience, as well as a lesson in superior craftsmanship and artistry making the most of limited means.

Thurs Sept 5: 2:45, 6:15 and 9:30

Canyon Passage

USA, 1946; 92m

Most westerns are about loners crossing vast expanses of desert space. Tourneur's neglected 1946 classic is set in the lush forests and fields of Oregon, and is centered around a community. Dana Andrews is the owner of Jacksonville's general store, Brian Donlevy is the amiable but weak-willed banker who siphons off his depositors' gold dust to pay off his gambling debts, Ward Bond is the outsider who carries a grudge against Andrews, and Susan Hayward is Donlevy's fiancée who slowly falls for Andrews. This is a movie of extraordinary visual beauty, shot in gorgeous, dark-hued Technicolor (by cinematographer Edward Cronjager), with emotional shadings to match. The set pieces — an Indian massacre, a barn-raising — are as thrilling as the relationships are carefully drawn. With Hoagy Carmichael, singing his immortal "Ole Buttermilk Sky."

Fri Sept 6: 1, 5 & 9; Sat Sept 7: 6:45



Canyon Passage

Experiment Perilous

USA, 1944; 91m

A gorgeous gothic thriller in the vein of *Rebecca*, *Gaslight*, and *The Spiral Staircase*, but far more mysterious and unsettling: where Hitchcock, Cukor and Siodmak underline every thrill and chill, Tourneur works from eerie suggestibility, concentrating on the spaces between things. The action takes place in 1903 New York, where George Brent's doctor befriends a woman on a train who later dies. When he goes to meet her brother (Paul Lukas), he becomes charmed by his wife (Hedy Lamarr) and slowly understands that her insanely jealous husband is a threat to her life. A finely drawn, typically muted thriller with images of spidery beauty, *Experiment Perilous* belongs probably to one of Tourneur's four or five best films.

Sat Sept 7: 1 & 4:45; Sun Sept 8: 9

Stranger on Horseback

USA, 1955; 66m

In the great tradition of *Rio Bravo*, *High Noon*, and *My Darling Clementine*, *Stranger on Horseback* is about a circuit judge (Joel McCrea) who arrests the son of a powerful man (Kevin McCarthy) for murder, and then tries to keep him in jail before he goes to trial – in other words, the establishment of law and order in a predominantly lawless state. Shot in three weeks on a low budget, this is one of Tourneur's most minimal films, and also one of the most difficult to actually see. "A visually accomplished work that mobilizes high angles, long shots, tracking shots, and frames within the frame with Tourneur's customary intelligence, giving a cer-

tain dry grandeur to the story and its low budget trappings." – Chris Fujiwara
preceded by

Harnessed Rhythm

USA, 1936; 11m

A Pete Smith Specialty short about a harnessed race horse named Dixie Dan.

Sat Sept 7: 3 & 8:45; Sun Sept 8: 3

Berlin Express

USA, 1948; 74m

Tourneur shot this tense little melodramatic thriller in bombed-out post-war Frankfurt and Berlin – in fact, *Berlin Express* was the first American production filmed in Germany after the war. Dr. Heinrich Bernhardt (Paul Lukas), poised to re-unify the German nation, is kidnapped on the express train from Paris to Berlin. His secretary (Merle Oberon) asks a Russian, an Englishman, a Frenchman, and an American (played by the great Robert Ryan) on board the train to help her track down her boss. At a plot level, it's relatively standard. But in terms of mood (unsettling, subtly nightmarish, in the best Tourneur manner) and visual beauty, and also as a document of Germany in ruins, it's invaluable.

preceded by

Killer Dog

USA, 1936; 11m

Tourneur himself disliked this story of a dog forced to prove his worth before he is wrongfully "executed" for the slaughter of some sheep, but it is probably one of the best and most characteristic of his shorts. "It's at once one of Tourneur's most lyrical and one of his darkest films." – Chris Fujiwara

Sun Sept 8: 1 & 5; Mon Sept 9: 1 & 4:30



Experiment Perilous



Berlin Express

Easy Living

USA, 1949; 77m

One of Tourneur's most unusual films, and probably one of his most undervalued, *Easy Living* is both a study of marriage under pressure and an unusually sensitive examination of how it feels to be an athlete past your prime. Victor Mature is the star quarterback of the New York Rams, in the days before football players received multi-million-dollar signing bonuses. When he develops a heart murmur, he grudgingly leaves the game, rethinks his future and tries to rekindle his marriage with his ambitious wife (Lizabeth Scott). Tourneur, who had never been to a football game in his life, brings the most delicate touch to the material, and Mature gives a very touching performance. With Sonny Tufts as his best friend, Lloyd Nolan as the sympathetic coach, and Lucille Ball in a beautifully understated performance as the team secretary who carries a torch for the fallen quarterback.

Sun Sept 8: 6:45; Mon Sept 9: 2:45 & 6:15

They All Come Out

USA, 1939; 70m

When Tourneur came back to America, he worked at MGM, first as a second-unit director (on *A Tale of Two Cities*, among other things, where he first met future partner Val Lewton), then on a series of shorts. His first feature is an expansion of a *Crime Does Not Pay* two-reeler, about the trials and tribulations of juveniles in prison and then coping with life on the outside. It's a nice, modest semi-documentary (with striking sequences shot inside actual federal prisons), but you can see that it's made with the same eye and sensibility as the later classics. Starring Tom Neal, who would make film history

without knowing it just a few years later as the lead in Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour*.

preceded by

Grand Bounce

USA, 1937; 11m

A "neat, ironic tale" (Fujiwara) about a check for \$1,000 floating from one person to the next.

Tue Sept 10: 1; Thurs Sept 12: 3:45 & 7:15

Phantom Raiders

USA, 1940; 70m

Tourneur's second and third feature assignments at MGM were filmed versions of the then popular Nick Carter stories, starring Walter Pidgeon. They are classic B-movies (albeit opulent ones — this is MGM after all), made with remarkable zest, dynamism and visual panache. In *Phantom Raiders*, Carter and his sidekick Bartholomew (Donal Meek) go for a vacation in Panama, only to find trouble in the form of disappearing merchant ships, being destroyed by a gangster (Joseph Schildkraut) to make a killing off the insurance claims. "Throughout *Phantom Raiders*, we find the visual style that Tourneur would develop in his subsequent films, a style marked by atmospheric schemes of décor and lighting and a subtle drawing out of scenes of silence and expectation." — Chris Fujiwara

preceded by

Romance of Radium

USA, 1937; 11m

In this Academy Award-nominated 1937 short, Tourneur traces the 40-year history of the discovery and development of radium. "One of the densest and most satisfying of Tourneur's short films." — Chris Fujiwara

Tue Sept 10: 2:45

Thurs Sept 12: 2, 5:30 & 9



Easy Living



Phantom Raiders