

France (Star) 14m Silent BW

Director: Georges Méliès

Producer: Georges Méliès

Screenplay: Georges Méliès, from the novel *Le Voyage dans la Lune* by Jules Verne

Photography: Michaut, Lucien Tainguy

Cast: Victor André, Bleurette Bernon, Brunnet, Jeanne d'Alcy, Henri Delannoy, Depierre, Farjaut, Kelm, Georges Méliès

LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE (1902) A TRIP TO THE MOON

When thinking about *A Trip to the Moon*, one's mind is quickly captured by the original and mythic idea of early filmmaking as an art whose "rules" were established in the very process of its production. This French movie was released in 1902 and represents a revolution for the time, given its length (approximately 14 minutes), as compared to the more common two-minute short films produced at the beginning of last century.

A Trip to the Moon directly reflects the histrionic personality of its director, Georges Méliès, whose past as a theater actor and magician influences the making of the movie. The film boldly experiments with some of the most famous cinematic techniques, such as superimpositions, dissolves, and editing practices that would be widely used later on. Despite the simplicity of its special effects, the film is generally considered the first example of science-fiction cinema. It offers many elements characteristic of the genre—a spaceship, the discovery of a new frontier—and establishes most of its conventions.

The movie opens with a Scientific Congress in which Professor Barbenfouillis (played by Méliès himself) tries to convince his colleagues to take part in a trip to explore the moon. Once his plan is accepted, the expedition is organized and the scientists are sent to the moon on a space ship. The missile-like ship lands right in the eye of the moon, which is represented as an anthropomorphic being. Once on the surface, the scientists soon meet the hostile inhabitants, the Selenites, who take them to their King. After discovering that the enemies easily disappear in a cloud of smoke with the simple touch of an umbrella, the French men manage to escape and return to earth. They fall into the ocean and explore the abyss until they are finally rescued and honored in Paris as heroes.

Méliès here creates a movie that deserves a legitimate place among the milestones in world cinema history. Despite its surreal look, *A Trip to the Moon* is an entertaining and groundbreaking film able to combine the tricks of the theater with the infinite possibilities of the cinematic medium. Méliès, the magician, was an orchestrator more than a director; he also contributed to the movie as a writer, actor, producer, set and costume designer, and cinematographer, creating special effects that were considered spectacular at the time. The first true science-fiction film cannot be missed by a spectator looking for the origin of those conventions that would later influence the entire genre and its most famous entries.

In a more general sense, *A Trip to the Moon* can also be regarded as the movie that establishes the major difference between cinematic fiction and nonfiction. During a time when filmmaking mostly portrayed daily life (such as in the films of the Lumière brothers at the end of the 19th century), Méliès was able to offer a fantasy constructed for pure entertainment. He opened the doors to future film artists by visually expressing his creativity in a way utterly uncommon to movies of the time. **CFe**

