

MT VOID 08/18/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 7, Whole Number 2289



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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net

Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net

Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com

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Mini Reviews, Part 3 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the third batch of mini-reviews for this season.

WIND RIVER (2017): WIND RIVER is described as a "neo noir"; it is a murder mystery set on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. The atmosphere reminds one of FARGO, being a cold, bleak landscape, although with more vegetation. The investigators are the tribal police chief (played by the great Graham Greene), a fish and wildlife ranger (shades of LAKE PLACID, but without the humor) (played by Jeremy Renner), and an FBI agent (played by Elizabeth Olsen) who has no experience in the area, but happened to be attending a conference nearby and so was the nearest agent to the scene (also a bit like LAKE PLACID). [-mrl/ec]

Released theatrically 04 August 2017. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5362988/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wind_river_2017

BOILING POINT (2021): BOILING POINT has some similarities to THE MENU. Both are to some extent about kitchen stress, although the restaurant in BOILING POINT is several status notches below the one in THE MENU. But BOILING POINT has its own points to make. There's a celebrity chef that also seems to be a reviewer, and as a reviewer he gets more recognition than the head chef

of the restaurant. And the reviewer is so smug that he not only requests additional seasoning from the kitchen, he throws it on his dining partner's dish as well, without asking and even as she is asking him not to. When Rich did this in *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*, it was a clear sign that he was a boor.

You know how in *HOT SHOTS!*, one of the flyers says he'll sign the insurance forms when he gets back from this mission? Well, something like that happens early on in this film and the viewer spends the entire film waiting for the other shoe to fall.

While there are a fair number of unlikable characters, it turns out that almost everything can be blamed on one person, and unfortunately this is a person I think we are supposed to sympathize with, which makes the whole movie a bit problematic. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 19 November 2021. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4), or 4/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11127680/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/boiling_point_2021

FUNNY FACE (1957): *FUNNY FACE* was on a list of films recommended for book lovers, or at any rate about bookshops. Okay, there is a scene in a marvelous used bookshop. It consists of a bunch of brainless fashion models, their editor, and their photographer charging into the shop and pulling books off the shelves because they think everything looks too organized. (It must be the same mentality that has models walk down the runway dragging their coats behind them on the floor.) When the manager (Audrey Hepburn) tries to stop them, they shove her out the front door and lock her out. Eventually they leave, and leave the place a mess, without ever even suggesting they should pay for the privilege of using the shop or the inconvenience they have caused. (And damage, based on how they are handling the books.) This doesn't need a recommendation, this needs a trigger warning.

There's also a scene where a man and a woman are arguing, but when he slaps her, she suddenly becomes very affectionate towards him. Add to that that Hepburn was 28 years old and her love interest (Fred Astaire) was 58.

I didn't like the songs, either. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 28 March 1957. Rating: -1 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050419/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/funny_face

Women Scientists at Los Alamos:

In the [OPPENHEIMER review](#) in the 08/04/23 issue of the MT VOID, we mentioned the dearth of women scientists portrayed. The Washington Post just had an article, "Female scientists who worked on A-bomb mostly absent from *Oppenheimer*". It is available free (not paywalled) at <https://wapo.st/3sb519f>.

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

Someone recommended *THE WAR THAT ENDED PEACE: THE ROAD TO 1914* by Margaret MacMillan (Random House, ISBN 978-0-812-98066-0). (I really have to start noting who it is that puts a book on my reading list to start with. I mean, obviously *I* put it on my list, but whose recommendation got me to do that?)

Anyway, MacMillan begins by covering the major players in the lead-up to World War I, including all the heads of state of the countries that ended up in it. (The United States shows up more as a secondary participant which, given that we did not play as active a role as England, France, Germany, Russia, or Austro-Hungary, this is not unexpected. As for the title, Europe had been (basically) at peace since 1815--if you didn't count the revolutions of 1830, 1848, 1871, the Greek War of Independence, the Crimean War, and the Franco-Prussian War, as well as several Balkan wars which may have been just early parts of World War I. (I know--who am I to criticize MacMillan's definition of peace? As Mark once replied to a similar albeit less academic question, who do I have to be?)

One chapter introduces Kaiser Wilhelm II. He is described as ill-tempered, apt to insult other countries (and monarchs), believing himself to be smarter than anyone else, turning on anyone who contradicted him (or even didn't support him sufficiently), loving to give speeches (and prone to ad lib when speaking), and considered all the political parties who opposed him as traitors.

This sounded familiar to me, and when I Googled, I found I was not alone. Miranda Carter wrote "What Happens When a Bad-Tempered, Distractible Doofus Runs and Empire?" (6 June 2018). Stephen M. Walt wrote "The Donald Trump-Kaiser Wilhelm Parallels Are Getting Scary" (12 October 2017). And these were just the first two that turned up.

But while Kaiser Wilhelm may have been the least qualified of the bunch, there were no brilliant statesmen among the rest of them either. Any brilliance seems to have been on a lower level, and inevitably the person who actually knew what was going on managed to annoy his head of state enough to be removed, or at least ignored.

So countries spent money they didn't have on the wrong military equipment to put in the wrong location under officers with no real training. And diplomats thought they were being clever in keeping their plans secret when in fact they (and their motivations) were obvious to everyone.

Another chapter, titled "What Were They Thinking?", sounds so contemporary:

- "Muriel or JeanOld institutions and values were under attack and new ways and new attitudes were emerging."
- "And change of the sort that Europe was experiencing comes with a price. Europe's economic transformation brought terrific strains and repeated cycles of boom and bust raised doubts about the stability and future of capitalism itself."
- "The old upper classes, whose wealth largely came from landowning, distrusted much of the New World and feared with reason that their hold on power was weakening and their way of life was doomed."
- "Intangible yet very precious, honor was, so the upper classes believe, something that came with birth; gentlemen had their honor and the lower classes did not."
- "It is striking just how many fears rippled through European society in the period before 1914. In an unsettling parallel with our own times, there was considerably anxiety about terrorists who were implacable enemies of Western society yet who lived anonymously in its midst."
- "Men, or so it was feared, were getting weaker, even effeminate, in the modern world and masculine values and strength were no longer valued."
- "And homosexuality, it was suspected, particularly among the upper classes. That would surely undermine the family, one of the foundation stones of a strong state."
- "Women, on the other hand, appeared to be getting stronger and more assertive and were abandoning their traditional roles as wives and mothers."

The decline in fertility also raised another concern about the future of European society: that the wrong sorts of people were reproducing."

And best of all:

- "Education was seen as particularly important in giving the young the right ideas, perhaps because it was feared that they might so easily get the wrong ones. ... In 1897 80 percent of the candidates taking the higher secondary-school qualifications, the baccalaureat [sic], stated that the purpose of history were primarily patriotic. ... In Germany ... a leading educator told teachers that their purpose should be to develop 'a patriotic and monarchial spirit' and make the young aware that they must be prepared to defend Germany against its many enemies."

I commented on Mike Duncan's *THE STORM BEFORE THE STORM: THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC* and Cullen Murphy's *ARE WE ROME? THE FALL OF AN EMPIRE AND THE FATE OF AMERICA* in the 06/05/2020 issue of the MT VOID, and discussed how the authors of those books saw parallels between current events and ancient Rome. Now I find that there are also a depressing number of parallels between current events and pre-World War I Europe. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Of those men who have overturned the liberties
of republics, the greatest number have begun
their career by paying an obsequious court to
the people: commencing demagogues, and ending tyrants.
--Alexander Hamilton

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