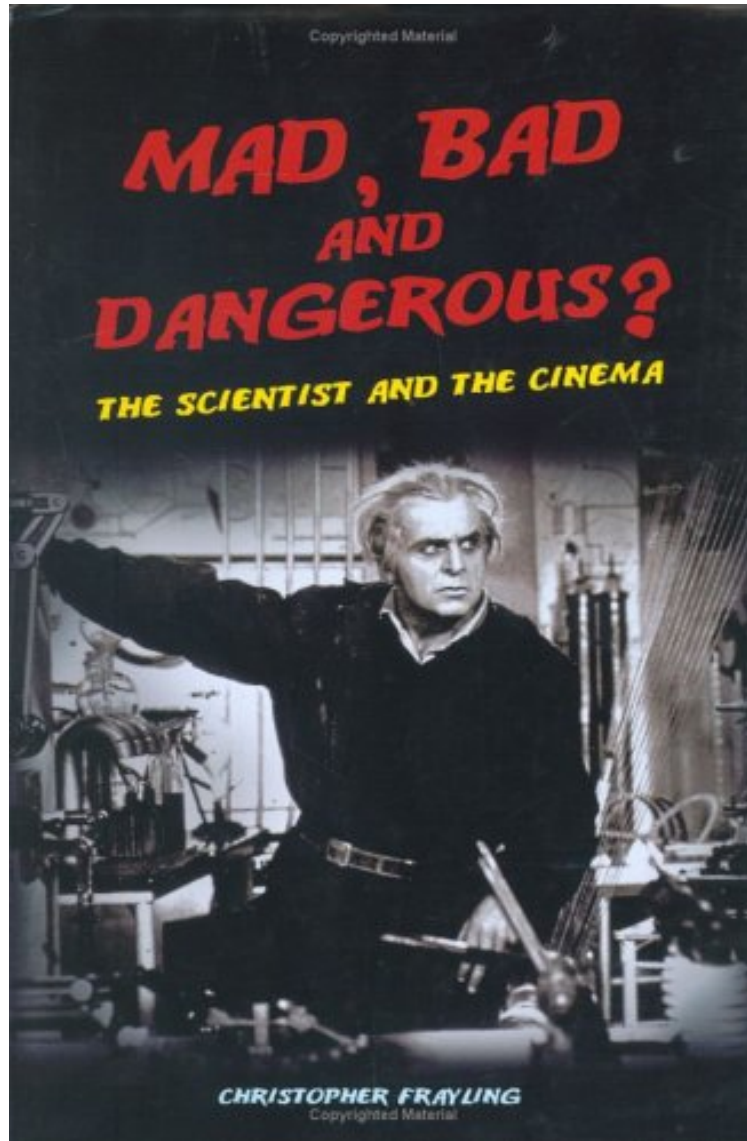


[Free read ebook] Mad, Bad and Dangerous?: The Scientist and the Cinema

## Mad, Bad and Dangerous?: The Scientist and the Cinema

*Christopher Frayling*

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**Christopher Frayling : Mad, Bad and Dangerous?: The Scientist and the Cinema** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mad, Bad and Dangerous?: The Scientist and the Cinema:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. How the Movies Made Our Image of the ScientistBy Timothy HaughIn this book, Mad, Bad and Dangerous? The Scientist and the Cinema, Mr. Frayling has put together a fascinating study of how public perceptions of the scientist have been molded by movies. As a long time physics and

math teachers well as a movie-lover, I am familiar with much of the background material he goes through. Still, I was impressed by the wide scope of Mr. Frayling's work and the well-drawn conclusions he makes. One of the techniques I sometimes use in my classroom is to have students identify math and science mistakes in the movies. This book opens with a classic--the Scarecrow's recitation of "the Pythagorean Theorem" in *The Wizard of Oz*. But this book really isn't concerned with such obvious mistakes. It is much more powerful in piecing together how mistakes and simplifications have led to a shorthand stereotype of the scientist we see in the movies: lab coat, glasses, disheveled hair, etc. This scientist may be the classic "mad" scientist, the distant pronouncer of hard to understand ideas, the nerd, as so on. And yet, this shorthand, often necessary for the success of a film, has become how people often actually view scientists. After briefly looking back to the classics of stage and fiction that will heavily influence the earliest silent films (*Faustus*, *Frankenstein*, etc.), Frayling digs deep into one of the most influential characterizations of a scientist on film: Rotwang in *Metropolis*. Half alchemist, half scientist, Rotwang is the prototype of the impossible to understand, yet powerful man who made decisions that impact all those around him. This characterization and the graphic style of *Metropolis* had a huge impact on the movies that followed up to the present day (see *Flash Gordon* to *Dr. Strangelove*). If you've never seen the movie *Metropolis*, watch it (it is excellent) and then go to chapter 3 of this book. It will open your eyes. Starting in the 1930's, there is a split. The "mad" scientist movie, which have their first peak in *Frankenstein* countered by the more "true" science movies like *Things to Come*. Both styles are still with us, though the first probably peaked with the sci-fi/horror films of the 60's while the second (a harder sell) probably peaked with the bio pics of the 40's (*Madame Curie*, *Louis Pasteur*, etc.). Frayling shows how these movie styles impacted each other and influenced our view of the scientist, particularly in the aftermath of WWII, with the arrival of the boffin movies in England and the Nazi rocket scientists in the U.S. All of which influences we still see today, as Frayling reminds us, in movies like *A Beautiful Mind*, *Contact*, *The Relic*, etc. There is a ton of information and analysis in the pages of this book. Insight into a number of movies as well as, more importantly, insight into our understanding of the scientist. Anyone interested in either would be foolish to pass up this book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. pointless and rambling  
By Col. William Russell (ret)  
The first chapter rambles and has very little to actually say on the topic. He frequently loses his way and often has wrong information. He loves the word "probably" and it doesn't read as if he's seen many of these films. If you find this on a used table for under a dollar, it might be ok. Otherwise, don't waste your money.

6 of 8 people found the following review helpful. "You're Fu Manchu, aren't you?" "My friends call me DOCTOR."  
By Found Highways  
Mad, Bad and Dangerous: The Scientist and the Cinema is about scientists in the movies, but not just about MAD scientists in the movies. Christopher Frayling covers not only fictional new Prometheuses like Dr. Frankenstein and Andre Delambre (the scientist whose malfunctioning teleportation device turned him into *The Fly*), but "real" scientists like Madame Curie and Louis Pasteur. Somewhere on the seesaw between "mad" movie scientists and "good" movie scientists are what you might call the "political" movie scientists - - sometimes they're evil, sometimes they're good. (A lot depends on which side of the year 1945 it is, and whether the scientists work for the Soviets or the US.) In any event, whether they're mad, good, or political, it's important to remember these are movie scientists, and even their so-called true life stories are full of half-truths at best. They have what Frayling (referring to *The Story of Louis Pasteur*) calls "surface realism with a formulaic plot about the triumph of common sense." It shouldn't be surprising that a lot of twentieth-century scientists whose work intersected with the political realm were German. Frayling's chapter about the "biography" of Wernher von Braun, *I Aim at the Stars*, is one of the best parts of the book. (A British review of the movie biography starring Curt Jurgens was titled "I Aim at the Stars - - But Sometimes I Hit London." Even by 1960, when the movie came out, Londoners hadn't completely forgotten the V-2 rockets.) World War II affected actors and filmmakers in a similar way to the way it did scientists. In a parallel to von Braun, who first built rockets for the Nazis and then for the Americans, Jurgens himself as an actor had different identities depending on whether he was working in European or American productions. In European movies he often spoke German and was credited as Curd. In American war movies like *The Longest Day*, where he played "honorable" German officers, he could speak English and was known as Curt. (Jurgens wasn't a Nazi. My only point here is that European, especially German-speaking, actors - - for instance Maximilian Schell, who played the defense attorney in Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg* - - had to speak English and "act" a kind of foreigner that American movie audiences would recognize.) Later movies continued the fiction that once Hitler committed suicide the morality of German military scientists changed. In *The Right Stuff* one of President Lyndon Johnson's advisors says, "Our Germans are better than their Germans." But a director as perceptive (and cynical) as Alfred Hitchcock was unable to let his audience off the hook. He knew the lie he had to perpetuate in order to update a thriller like *Notorious* to the Cold War. (The "lie" being that there is much difference between the two sides.) So Hitchcock rubbed the audience's nose in it. In *Torn Curtain* the scene everyone remembers is Paul Newman as a handsome young (of course) American scientist holding a communist agent's head in a gas oven, taking an uncomfortably long time to kill him. Frayling shows that British war movies didn't put accuracy first any more than American scientist-as-savior movies like did. Movies like *Spitfire* and *The Dam Busters* made heroes of the "boffins." And you can see how the "real" scientists portrayed in these movies by Leslie Howard and Michael Redgrave turned into the heroes of later British sci-fi and horror movies like *Quatermass and the Pit* and the recent British TV

miniseries *Invasion: Earth*. (*Invasion: Earth* is an old-fashioned British end-of-the-world story in the style of John Wyndham, updated to the age of terrorism.) It's too bad Frayling wasn't able to write about "their" Cold War scientists. "Ours" might be good (the Disneyfied Wernher von Braun) or monsters (*Dr. Strangelove*), but scientists on the other side of the Iron Curtain are nonexistent. There may be Soviet films about hero scientists from the post-Stalin era, but I'm not aware of any. Soviet scientists in American movies are usually trying to escape to freedom. In American movies the scientists are avuncular prophets whose warnings about the dangers of technological progress ultimately support the military-industrial complex by giving us the delusion that individual Americans could stop the Pentagon and Lockheed if we chose. Like Edmund Gwenn's speech at the end of *Them!*, a movie about ants turned into giant monsters by nuclear testing. This phony dystopianism hasn't changed. Hollywood is still lulling us to sleep, telling us we have control. When *The Day After Tomorrow* (a movie about ecological disaster brought on by ignoring the effects of global warming) came out in 2004, the character of the vice president was made to look and act like Dick Cheney, and to be responsible in large part for the catastrophe. Publicity made it seem like the film was a risky slap at the Bush administration for not signing the Kyoto Accords and for its energy policies in general. But at the end of the movie the fictional vice president (now president) apologizes to the American people for his mistakes and expresses gratitude to the foreign country (Mexico) that has taken in American refugees fleeing the new ice age. Who believes our present leaders would do anything like that? In that situation they would probably declare war on Mexico and confiscate its oil industry. Then they would build concentration camps for anyone who dissented. As the reporter warns us at the end of *The Thing from Another World*, we should "Keep watching the skies!" But it might be a good idea to pay attention to things a little closer, too.

From Victor Frankenstein to Dr. Moreau to Doc Brown in *Back to the Future*, the scientist has been a puzzling, fascinating, and threatening presence in popular culture. From films we have learned that scientists are either evil maniacal geniuses or bumbling saviors of society. *Mad, Bad and Dangerous?* puts this dichotomy to the test, offering a wholly engaging yet not uncritical history of the cinematic portrayal of scientists. Christopher Frayling traces the genealogy of the scientist in film, showing how the scientist has often embodied the predominant anxieties of a particular historical moment. The fear of nuclear holocaust in the 1950s gave rise to a rash of radioactive-mutant horror movies, while the possible dangers of cloning and biotechnology in the 1990s manifested themselves in *Jurassic Park*. During these eras, the scientist's actions have been viewed through a lens of fascination and fear. In the past few decades, with increased public awareness of environmental issues and of the impact of technology on nature, the scientist has been transformed once again into a villainous agent of money-hungry corporate powers. *Mad, Bad and Dangerous?* also examines biographical depictions of actual scientists, illuminating how they are often portrayed as social misfits willing to sacrifice everything to the interests of science. Drawing on such classic and familiar films as *Frankenstein*, *Metropolis*, and *The Wizard of Oz*, Frayling brings social and film history together to paint a much larger picture of the evolving value of science and technology to society. A fascinating study of American culture and film, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous?* resurrects the scientists of late night movies and drive-in theaters and gives them new life as cultural talismans.

From Publishers Weekly Frayling (*Vampyres*), chairman of the Arts Council of England, goes beyond horror films like *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* to survey Hollywood's scientist-as-savior films of the 1930s and '40s (*Madame Curie*), lesser-known British "boffin" films of the '40s and '50s (*The Dam Busters*) and films of space exploration (1902's *Voyage to the Moon*). His extensive study, which occasionally sidetracks into books, comics and television, charts the evolving public perceptions of scientists. His conclusions are occasionally surprising: Rotwang in *Metropolis* is "the most influential scientist in the history of cinema" a prototype who contributed the iconography of white lab coat, unruly hair and physical disability (a damaged hand); at the same time, Frayling shows how the appearance of celebrity scientists like Einstein and Stephen Hawking reinforced that imagery. An examination of students' artistic depictions of scientists will probably appeal mainly to scholars, and the overlong treatment of Wernher von Braun, whose appearances on a series of 1950s specials about space exploration, has a detectable British resentment of the German's history with the Nazis and his rehabilitation as a U.S. space program hero. But given Hollywood's abiding interest in sci-fi, this is a timely and insightful book. (Nov.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Funny, insightful, and a delight to read, Christopher Frayling's *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous?* is a fascinating examination of society's changing view of science and scientists through popular culture. . . . This book illustrates our own forever evolving view of progress.--John Landis