



OUR NEAREST NEIGHBOR, IV

By Walt Robinson

It is not really known, other than by explicit literature about the Moon, when the Moon was first introduced to the world of literature, film, music and art. A reference to the Moon is seen in the Biblical story of creation. “And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also.” (Gen. 1:16).



The Moon has been used to symbolize lunacy (top) and as the catalyst that brings out the Wolfman.

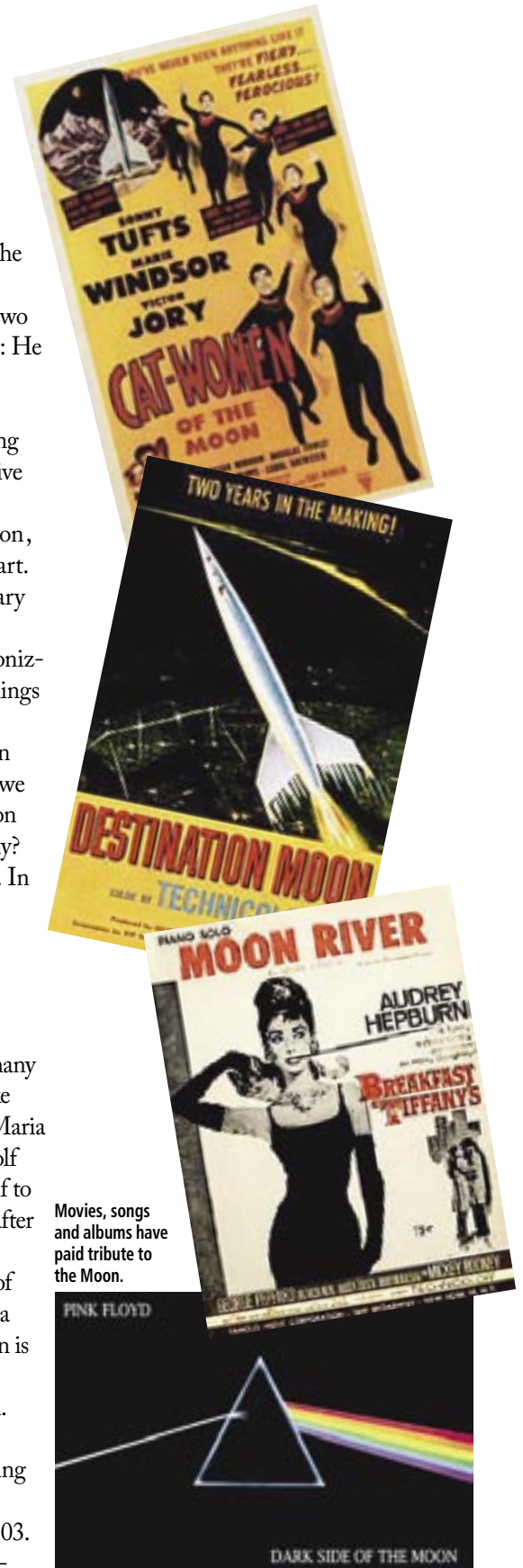
“Even though a man be pure of heart and says his prayers by night will turn to a wolf, when the wolfbane blooms and the Moon is bright,” said Lord Talbot (Claude Rains) in Universal Pictures’ “The Wolfman” (1941). It is interesting to note that in the film version, the Moon was never shown.

The Moon has also been the topic of many science fiction books. Jules Verne wrote “From Earth to the Moon” in 1867 in which the Boston Gun Club, running out of targets, decides to target the Moon. The twist comes when they decide to “ride the bullet” to the Moon. H.G. Wells wrote “First Men in the Moon” in 1903. It was one of Wells’ first science fiction novels. The thriving convention of imagi-

satellite’s widely recognized utility as a rhyming word, than to use it in a scientifically descriptive capacity. The Moon has been portrayed as an isolated world. The congenial Man in the Moon, in all his silence, can be found in all forms of art. Moonlight is considered an emblem of visionary capacity, a symbol of the revelation of God in nature, a cause of mental breakdown, a harmonizing power and, above all, a model of the workings of the imagination.

Literature has seen many uses of the Moon from romanticism to horror. How often have we been shown scenes of romantic lovers sitting on the beach with a full Moon hanging in the sky? Shakespeare used the Moon numerous times. In *Romeo and Juliet* during the famous balcony scene Juliet exclaims “O, swear not by the Moon, th’ inconstant Moon, /That monthly changes in her circled orb, /Lest that thy love prove likewise variable” (II.ii.109-111).

Even though the Moon has been used in many romantic settings, it has also been used to strike terror and fear in the hearts of man. In 1941, Maria Ouspenskaya wrote her famous book “The Wolf Man,” which brought the Hollywood werewolf to the screen. The Moon was the catalyst when, after being bitten by another werewolf, a human becomes a wolf. “Even though a man be pure of heart and says his prayers by night will turn to a wolf, when the wolfbane blooms and the Moon is



Movies, songs and albums have paid tribute to the Moon.

nary voyages to the Moon, of which there are at least 200 examples from Lucian's "True Histories" through Cyrano de Bergerac's "Histoire Comique" ("The History of the Stars") to Jules Verne and Wells, have tended to be either satirical or quasi-scientific. Even Dante's trip to the Heaven of the Moon (cantos 2-5) in "Paradiso" must count as "scientific" given the knowledge of his day.

Films have used the Moon in a variety of ways. Whether as the subject or the backdrop, the Moon has inspired screenwriters. Most have been of the sci-fi genre such as "Destination Moon", "Rocketship X-M", "Women in the Moon" and "Commando Cody and the Radar Men From the Moon". Early films were very non-scientific and relied on notions of life on the Moon and other misconceptions. After the Apollo missions, we discovered just how desolate a place the Moon really is and the film industry began to take a more realistic view. As public interest in the Moon dropped after the Apollo missions, so did the number of sci-fi films which used the Moon as the stage setting. Possibly with the renewed interest in returning to the Moon, there will be ingenious writers who will bring about a revival of the Moon in movies.

The Moon has been the subject of music over the years, from classical to hard rock. Whether just the title or the theme, it has inspired musicians. Such songs as "Moon River", "Fly Me To The Moon", "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" and Pink Floyd's epic "Dark Side of the Moon" album have crossed the space and boundaries of time. Even further back in time, ancient cultures surely had songs about the Moon which were spiritual in nature, calling on the Moon to protect and guide their way through the night.

The representation of the Moon in paintings and photography, including all those great shots from the Apollo missions,



has commonly been concerned with the effects of pallid nocturnal light, or with a far-flung extrapolation of the concerns of landscape painting; the Moon being the one "landmark", so to speak, familiar to every sighted person on our planet. The Flemish painter Jan van Eyck (1385-1441) was probably the first ever to portray the Moon as it really appeared in the sky in his famous painting "The Crucifixion." This painting preceded Leonardo's sketches, which appeared in The Codex Leicester, written between 1506 and 1510. What was amazing about van Eyck's piece is that it was rendered with such precision that the Moon looks real, unlike early astronomers' attempts at depicting the Moon.

With its subtle light illuminating the night sky, the Moon has always been an object of fascination for humanity. As John Keats so aptly wrote in "Endymion," "What is there in thee, Moon! /That thou should'st move my heart so potently?"

Next month, I will attempt to show how the Moon, in all its ancient mystery, is still used by modern man in his daily life. In the meantime keep watch on the "Cold-hearted orb that rules the night/Removes the colors from our sight," as Graeme Edge of the Moody Blues described it on the album "Days of Future Passed." (Deram, 1968).

Famous works of art have included the moon. Pictured here, top to bottom, are Jan van Eyck's "The Crucifixion", Ansel Adams' "Moon and Half Dome" and Vincent van Gogh's "Landscape with Couple Walking and Crescent Moon".



Walt Robinson has been a member of the Astronomical Society of Kansas City since 1987. His present duties include Webmaster for the society's Web site. He has presented many programs at the public nights at Powell Observatory and in Bonner Springs, Kan. where he lives.

Walt also runs the "Robinson Lunar Observatory" to spur interest in the moon among amateur astronomers. His recent "lunar light ray" program brought many amateurs together from across the United States and abroad to study and observe these events. An article written in the Astronomical League's Reflector explained the program, and as a result recruited many more interested amateurs into studying the moon.