

A TRIP TO THE MOON (1902)

The eye remembers—at least for an instant. Lucretius called it persistence of vision. Sixteen times a second, each frame sears into the retina just long enough for another to take its place, and *voilà!* The dead come alive.

For Méliès, persistence populated the moon, albeit not with the sturdiest of denizens. Hit a Moonite with your arm, tap him with an umbrella, and poof! Obliterated. A ball of smoke. The same cloud hovered over Star Film Studios when Méliès, watching his fortunes fall, set every reel, every mask, every prop ablaze.

Just to be clear, it's a myth. Not Méliès, nor his fire. Both are real. The eyes. They do not remember, as lovely as it sounds. A rational explanation debunks the theory, makes perfect sense, does well with test audiences. It is reasonable and best ignored, keeping persistence of vision persistent.

Follow the beam. It is a rare kind of monster up there, roaming the moon, ghosting the screen. It is the product of daily sacrifice, where frames sear and claws tear and eyes forget until eventually, the dead just stay dead.



FIGURE 3: Thomas Edison's employees stole early copies of Georges Méliès' movie *A Trip to the Moon* and sold it in America for substantial profits. Méliès was never compensated and was ultimately reduced to selling toys and candy to earn a living.

THE EUROPEAN REST CURE (1904)

It is the gravity of elsewhere, the Lake Isle of Innisfree, the Boeing gassed on the runway, all pulling all calling all aboard and *au revoir*.

Hearts are not absent, they just hate where they are. And so you take them somewhere else and they hate that too. But the idea of elsewhere is a tidal wave that can be neither resisted nor ridden.

The light flashes on. It isn't the plane, it is the world, dropping. The pilot calls the storm slight turbulence and you say, reassuringly, I've lived a good life, and on the screen inside you're kissing the Blarney Stone, doing Paris, climbing the Alps, one misadventure after the next in Italy, Egypt, and Germany. Everyone has to go some time, you say, because you saw it somewhere and where else can you learn to die if not at the movies.

Thing is, you land. If this is your final destination, there's nowhere else to go. We know you have choices and we are glad you chose us. Beware that luggage might have shifted during the flight and *Life: The Movie* can, but rarely does, end.

For this you are quietly grateful, mildly miserable.



FIGURE 5: Travel is how we practice dying.