

Simran Hans on *To The Moon*

Tadhg O'Sullivan's otherworldly essay film unfolds under the Moon's watchful gaze. The Irish filmmaker understands that although our Earth pivots around the Sun, it is the Moon that circles us.

It is an act of a reimagining to declare a barren rock more poetic than a star. Yet this is precisely what O'Sullivan does. Indeed, the film's title is borrowed from the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley:

*Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth*

Shelley imagines the sky to be a lonely place, but for O'Sullivan it is a site of connection. Glimpsed from Earth, the Moon is a collective experience shared across geography, time and space. The film patchworks clips from 25 different national archives that stretch from Japan to Estonia, as well as newly commissioned footage of the Moon. In various cultures, the Moon serves as a creative canvas for the mediums of art, literature, cinema, and song. From the silent cinema of Alice Guy-Blaché to Czech filmmaker Petr Weigl's 1977 interpretation of Antonín Dvořák's moonlit opera *Rusalka*, his reference points are enjoyably broad.

The film uses the lunar cycle as an organising principle, which is structured as a kind of ebb and flow. Instead of moving through a single night, the film journeys from fat, radiant full orb to a slim, waning wisp. 'Let me begin again,' says O'Sullivan's voiceover, partway through the film.

A woman wakes from a dream and walks to her moonlit window. She parts her curtains; a clever cut imagines her view; a person rides a horse through a rocky canyon, led by a crescent Moon. The film collages together images of those beckoned, beguiled, and illuminated by *La Luna's* glow. It provides cover for furtive kisses; a montage that celebrates the Moon's romantic potential is soundtracked by the twinkle of Claude Debussy's *Clair de lune*. It is the backdrop to longing: lighting up mountains, sending flowers exploding into nighttime bloom. Nocturnal creatures are awakened by moonlight, too. In archive footage that delves into Estonian folklore, we learn of a sprite known as Mother Twilight.

O'Sullivan is equally entranced by darker aspects of the Moon's tidal pull. Its strange, feminine power arouses all sorts of superstitions. She induces 'lunacy', summoning witches and vampires and werewolves. She rules the ocean. She is an altar; we see birds soar towards her face, and hands raised in supplication.

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