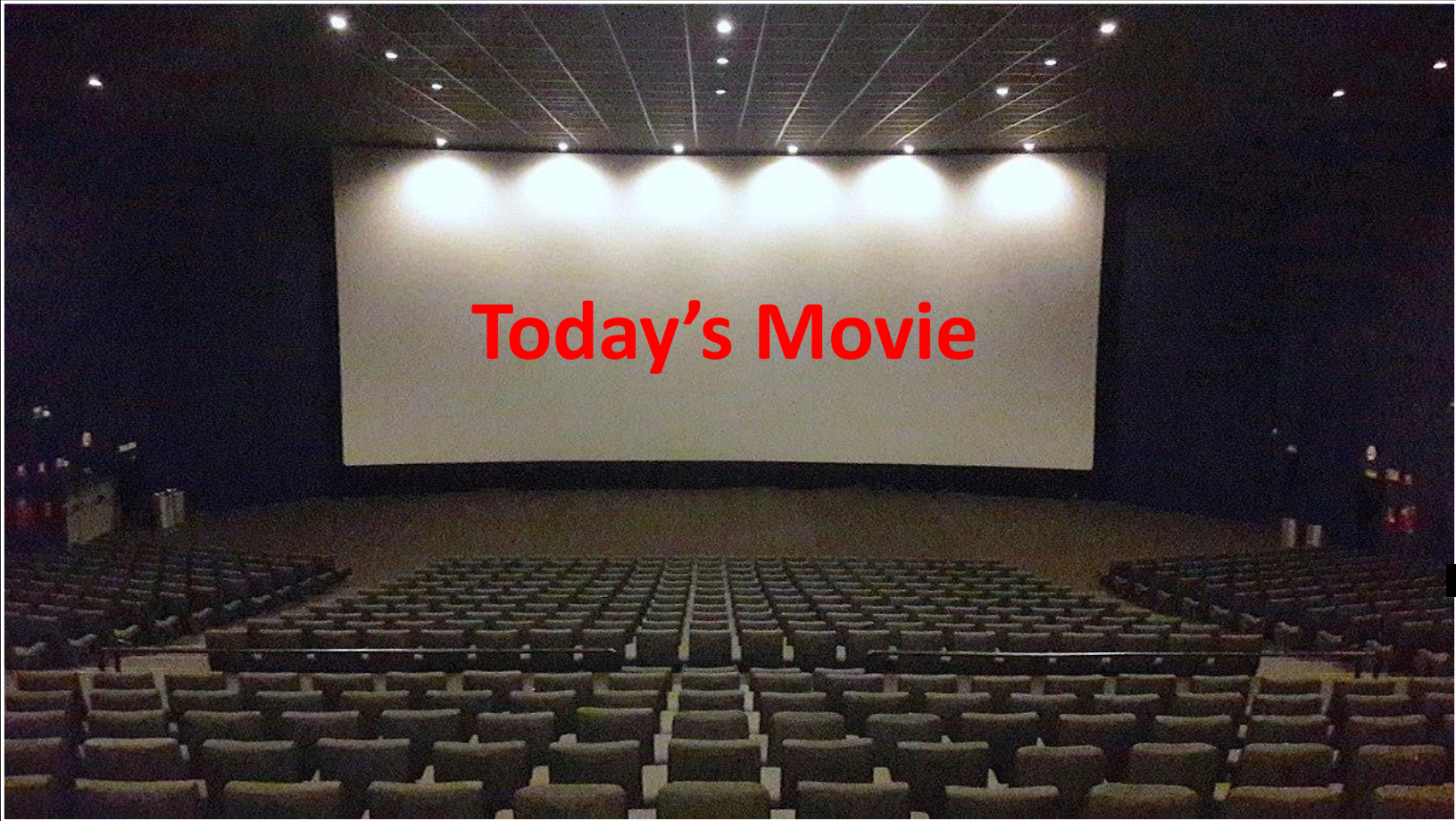


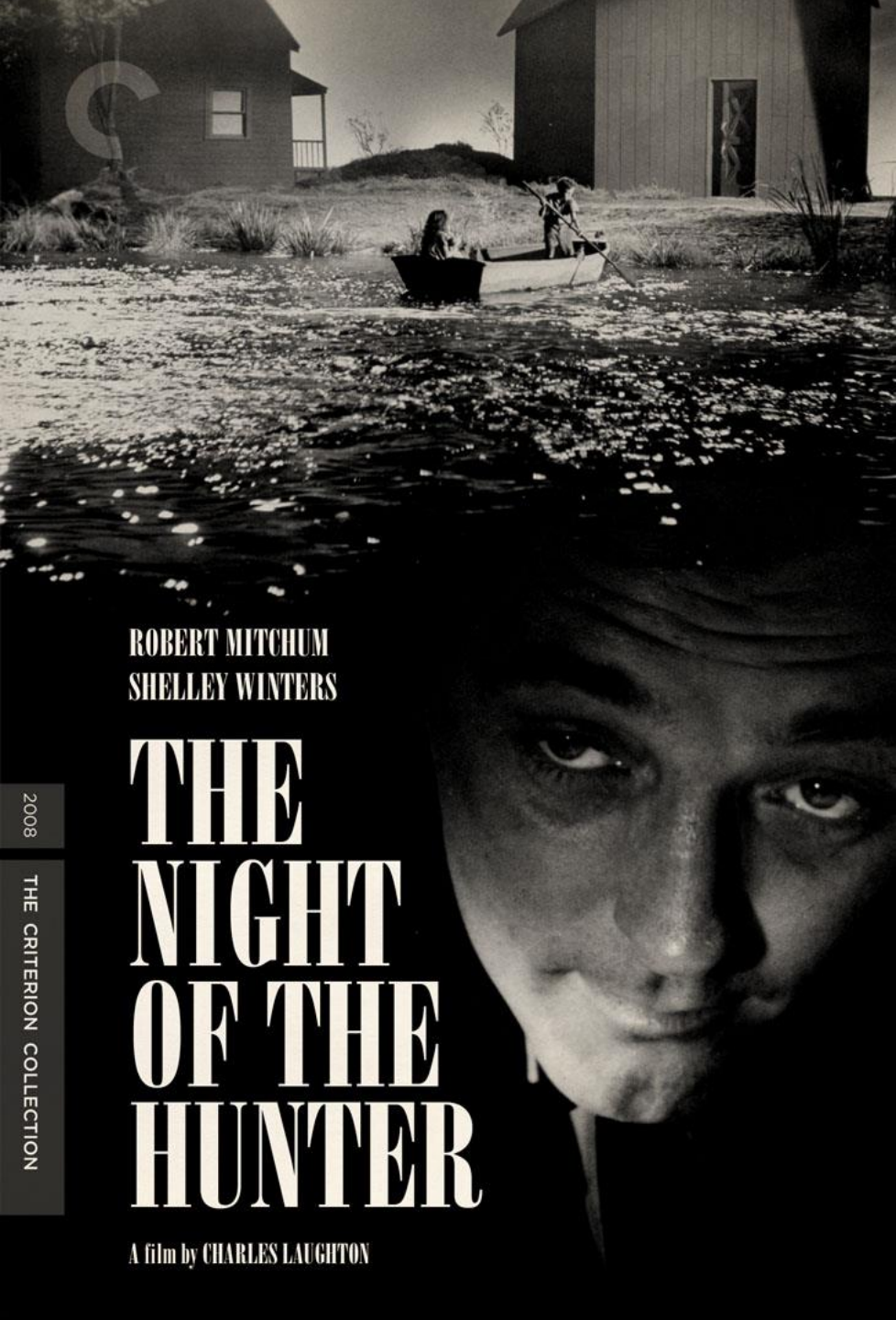
Welcome to...



FILM NOIR







ROBERT MITCHUM
SHELLEY WINTERS

2008
THE CRITERION COLLECTION

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER

A film by CHARLES LAUGHTON

“One of the
greatest of all
American films.”

Roger Ebert

LIFE magazine:

-
- “the creepiest noir of all time.”
- **Otto Penzler, owner of the Mysterious Bookshop in NYC**

- “Set in Depression-era West Virginia...” but the physical location is almost beside the point, since **the film seems to rise from the deep wellsprings of the unconscious, the liminal place where nightmares breed.** In fact, it has often been called a horror film.

The scene where Mitchum's character pursues the children reflects the look of F.W. Murnau's silent masterpiece, *Nosferatu*, (the attached picture) the first vampire film which terrified audiences in 1922.



- The film is **defiantly expressionistic**, reflecting the noir genre's roots.
- "It's really **a nightmarish sort of Mother Goose tale we are telling,**" Laughton (the director) said.

From *Movies of the 50s*:

- The actor Charles Laughton directed only one film and there is nothing else like it. *The Night of the Hunter* is a work of horror and enchantment, a hypnotic fairy tale for grown-ups. It's the very stuff of nightmare...
- Hollywood's most charismatic bad guy (**Mitchum**) gives another **brilliant performance** as the mysterious Harry Powell.
- From the very start, he **dominates every room** he enters, **every space** he inhabits...And he's **irresistible**.

-
- *The Night of the Hunter* gives us a child's eye view of the world, in which nocturnal terrors become manifest in the person of a monstrous man.
 - Lillian Gish is another glory of this film. She is the antithesis of Harry Powell, the light that banishes the darkness.



Roger Ebert:

- Charles Laughton's "**The Night of the Hunter**" (1955) is **one of the greatest of all American films**, but has never received the attention it deserves because of its lack of the proper trappings. Many "great movies" are by great directors, but **Laughton directed only this one** film, which was a critical and commercial failure long overshadowed by his acting career

- Many great movies use actors who come draped in respectability and prestige, but Robert Mitchum has always been a raffish outsider. And many great movies are realistic, but “**Night of the Hunter**” is an expressionistic oddity, telling its chilling story through visual fantasy. People don't know how to categorize it, so they leave it off their lists.

- Yet what a **compelling, frightening and beautiful film** it is! And how well it has survived its period. Many films from the mid-1950s, even the good ones, seem somewhat dated now, but **by setting his story in an invented movie world outside conventional realism,** Laughton gave it a timelessness.

ROBERT MITCHUM
SHELLEY WINTERS


THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER

A film by CHARLES LAUGHTON

- ...the scene where the Reverend stands at the top of the stairs and calls down to the boy and his sister has become the model for a hundred other horror scenes.

- It is one of the most frightening of movies, with one of the most unforgettable of villains, and on both of those scores it holds up as well after four decades ...

What religion do you profess, preacher?



The religion the Almighty and me worked out betwixt us.

- In 1992, *The Night of the Hunter* was deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" by the United States Library of Congress and was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry. The influential film magazine Cahiers du cinéma selected *The Night of the Hunter* in 2008 as the second-best film of all time, behind *Citizen Kane*.

Memorable Dialogue from *The Night of the Hunter*

- Q: “What religion do you profess, preacher?”
- A: “The religion the Almighty and me worked our betwixt us.”
- -----
- “Well, now, what’s it to be, Lord? Another widow? How many has it been --- six? Twelve? I disremember. You say the word and I’m on my way.”

- “I can hear you whisperin’, children, so I know you’re down there. I can feel myself getting’ awful mad. I’m out of patience, children. I’m coming to find you now.”

- -----

- “Chilll . . . dren?”

“I’ll be back...when it’s dark!”

•BEFORE
•THE
•MOVIE



Suggestions to help you understand the movie:

- 1. The movie is, in part, from the **children's viewpoint**.
- 2. The movie is a **mixture of the real world and a mythical, magical world, partly light, partly dark, restrained, understated characters and over the top characters.**
- 3. **"Expressionism is an attempt to break down reality and get at some inner state of mind."**
- **The world as a dream is captured in the expressionistic viewpoint.**
- **The mythical, magical world is the children's world.**

A.O. Scott, Film Critic, *NY Times*

The New York Times

 **Critics' Picks**

with A. O. Scott

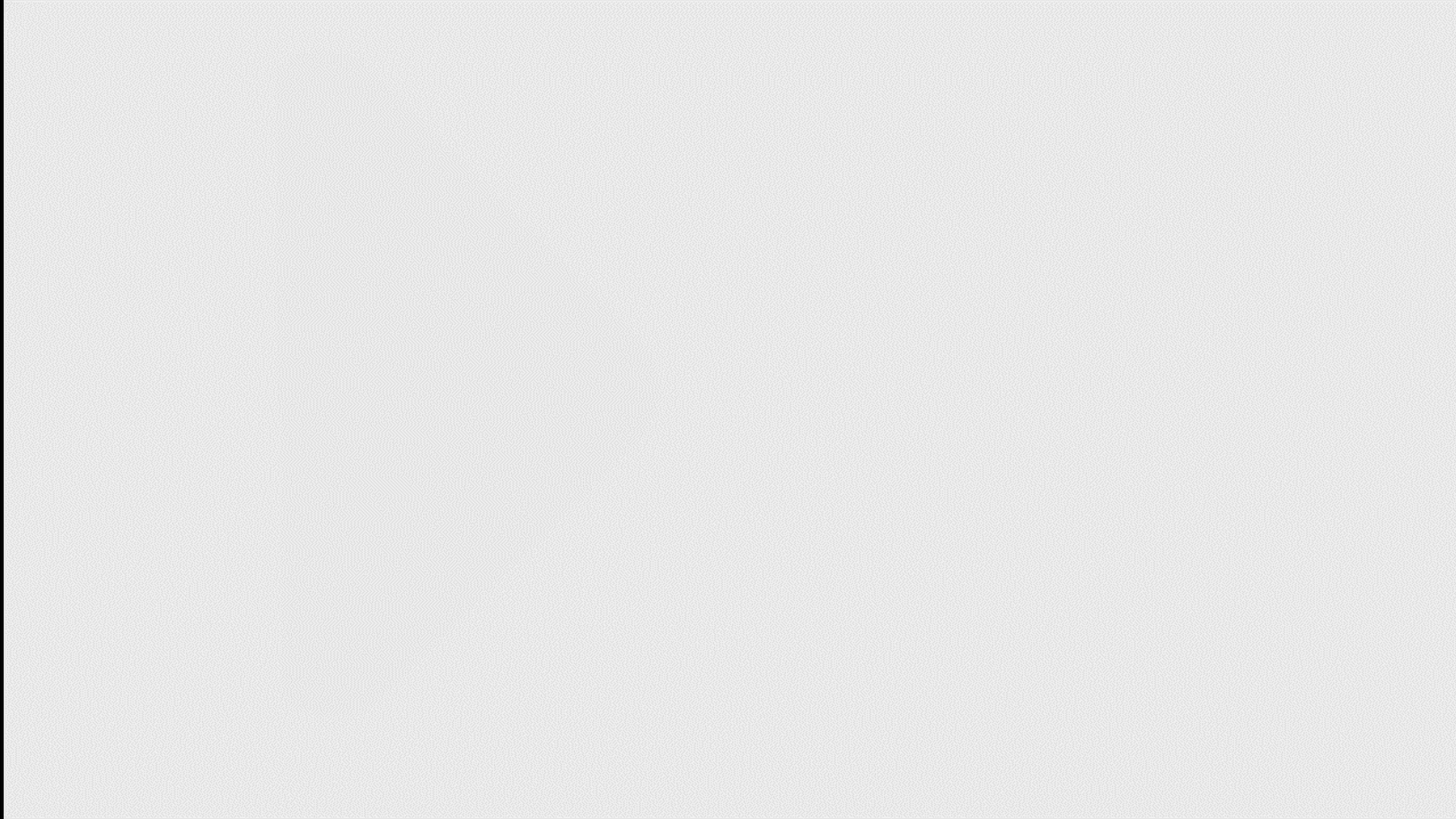
The New York Times

 **Critics' Picks**

with A. O. Scott

Eddie Muller – “Noir Alley”

William Friedkin (Director), Robert Englund
(Actor), Spike Lee (Director)



Guillermo del Toro (Director) e.g. *The Shape of Water* (2017)

AFTER THE MOVIE



What we learn from the Movie Rushes/Dailies (the raw, unedited footage shot during the making of a motion picture):

- **History of the Rushes/Dailies** of **“The Night of the Hunter”**
- **Laughton directs:** Sally Jane Bruce, Billy Chapin,
- Shelly Winters – “Lie there, Shelly, and be seraphic.”,
- Robert Mitchum
- What we learn about **Laughton’s relationship with the children.**

More Info

- 1) **Role of the preacher**: Laughton, then Olivier, finally Mitchum
 - Davis Grubb. Author: “Too sexy.”
 - Laughton: “Davis if you’re going to sell God, you have to be sexy.”
- 2) **Movie deals with repressed sexuality**, e.g., “You need a man,” then
 - the train; switch blade scene.
- 2) **Davis Grubb, author**: his drawings – “Send more.”
- 3) **James Agee, screen writer**: movie’s ending becomes its beginning.

-
- 4. **The Influence of Silent Films, especially. D. W. Griffith, e.g., *Intolerance, Birth of a Nation* etc.**
 - 5. How'd it do at the **Box Office**? It was **popular and a critical failure**.
 - It got lost once released because the studio didn't know how to sell it to the public or the critics. **"It's too arty!"**
 - **Laughton** was so depressed by this he swore he would **never direct another film** and he never did.



The shot of Winters at the bottom of the river is one of several remarkable images in the movie, which was photographed in black and white by Stanley Cortez, who shot Welles' "**The Magnificent Ambersons**," and once observed he was "always chosen to shoot weird things." He shot few weirder than here



where one
frightening
composition shows
a street lamp
casting Mitchum's
terrifying shadow
on the walls of the
children's bedroom.



The basement sequence combines terror and humor, as when the **Preacher** tries to chase the children up the stairs, only to trip, fall, recover, lunge and catch his fingers in the door.





Nosferatu

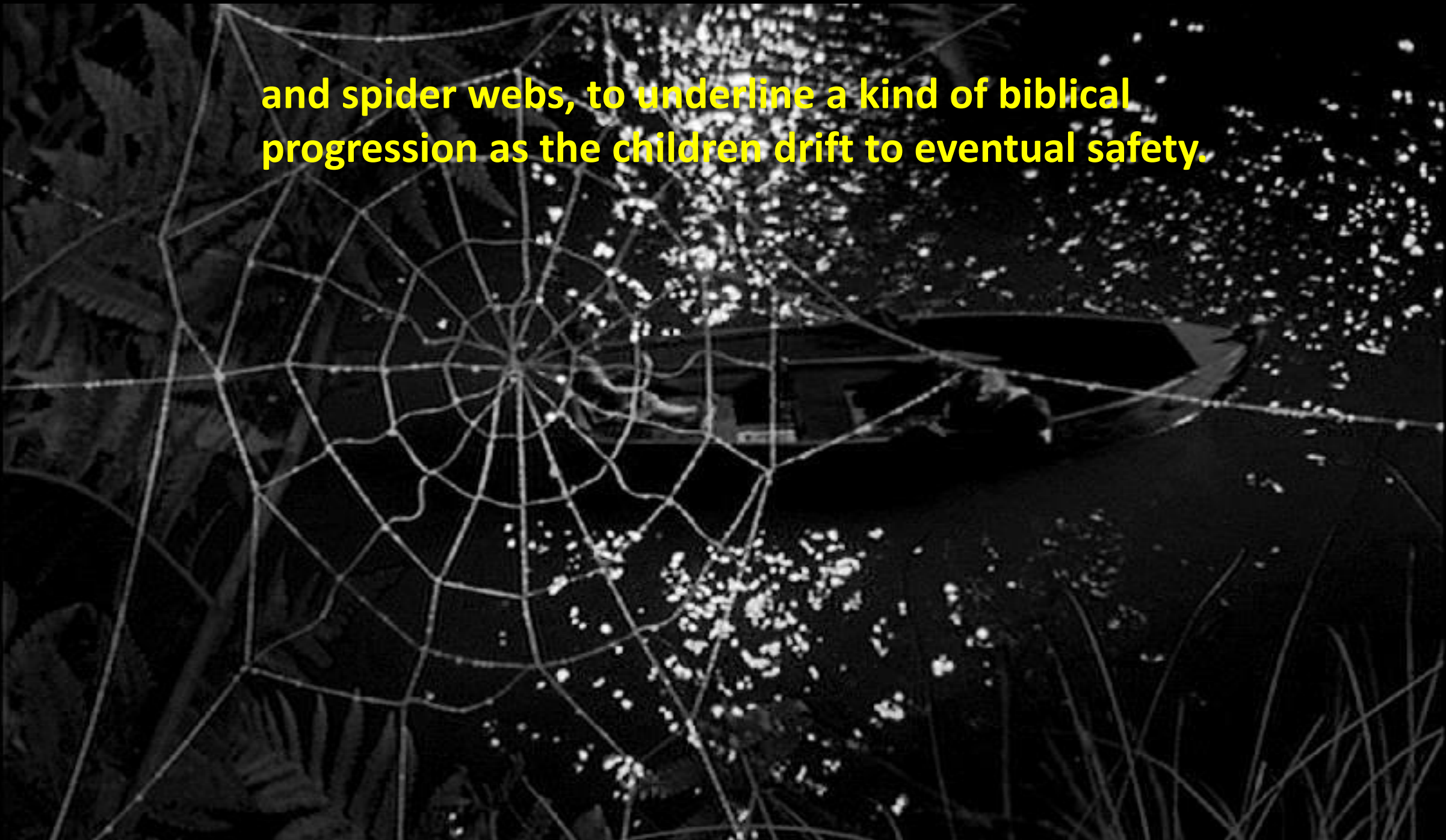
**And the masterful
nighttime river
sequence**





uses giant foregrounds of natural details, like frogs

and spider webs, to underline a kind of biblical progression as the children drift to eventual safety.







- The screenplay, based on a novel by Davis Grubb, is credited to James Agee, one of the icons of American film writing and criticism, then in the final throes of alcoholism. Laughton's widow, Elsa Lanchester, is adamant in her autobiography: “Charles finally had very little respect for Agee. And he hated the script, but he was inspired by his hatred.” She quotes the film’s producer, Paul Gregory: “. . . the script that was produced on the screen is no more James Agee's . . . than I'm Marlene Dietrich.”

- Lanchester and Laughton both remembered that Mitchum was invaluable as a help in working with the two children, whom Laughton could not stand. **But the final film is all Laughton's, especially the dreamy, Bible-evoking final sequence, with Lillian Gish presiding over events like an avenging elderly angel.**

- Robert Mitchum is one of the great icons of the second half-century of cinema...
- David Thomson, in his *Biographical Dictionary of Film*, to ask, “How can I offer this hunk as one of the best actors in the movies?” And answer: “Since the war, no American actor has made more first-class films, in so many different moods.” “*The Night of the Hunter*,” he observes, represents “the only time in his career that Mitchum acted outside himself,” by which he means **there is little of the Mitchum persona in the Preacher.**

- **Mitchum is uncannily right for the role**, with his long face, his gravel voice, and the silky tones of a snake-oil salesman.
- And **Lillian Gish** and Stanley Cortez quite deliberately, I think, composed **that great shot of her which looks like nothing so much as Whistler's mother holding a shotgun.**



SUMMARY

- Charles Laughton showed here that he had an original eye, and a taste for material that stretched the conventions of the movies. It is risky to combine horror and humor, and foolhardy to approach them through expressionism. For his first film, Laughton made a film like no other before or since,...

Critics were baffled by it, the public rejected it, and the studio had a much more expensive Mitchum picture (“Not as a Stranger”) it wanted to promote instead.

- But nobody who has seen "The Night of the Hunter" has forgotten it, or Mitchum's voice coiling down those basement stairs: "Chilll . . . dren?"





Robert Mitchum (1917-1997); Charles Laughton (1899-1962); Lillian Gish (1893-1993)

- **And next week...**

