



"There will always be those who love old movies . . . But, many moviegoers and video viewers say they do not "like" black and white films. In my opinion, they are cutting themselves off from much of the mystery and beauty of the movies. Black and white is an artistic choice, a medium that has strengths and traditions, especially in its use of light and shadow. Moviegoers of course have the right to dislike b&w, but it is not something they should be proud of. It reveals them, frankly, as cinematically illiterate. I have been described as a snob on this issue. But snobs exclude; they do not include. To exclude b&w from your choices is an admission that you have a closed mind, a limited imagination, or are lacking in taste."

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Roger Ebert, film critic

Scene: Saint Helena Island, SC, on a hot summer Friday. Characters: Jack and Jane, married 34 years. Their sons are home in Boston. Backdrop: Jane's new car, a luxury "garnet red pearl" Audi A6, sits in the garage, ready to go. J&J have no prior commitments for the day. What to do?

We hadn't been out to the movies in eons, noon was approaching, and the A6 beckoned. Off we drove to have a leisurely lunch in Hilton Head and then see a movie in Bluffton. Jane suggested *The Beguiled*, with Nicole Kidman and Colin Farrell. I teetered on the fence, but wishing to shoot for another 34 years agreed to the movie. Besides, I got to drive and with the sun out gloriously our Lowcountry drive would be pretty. Not to mention the car's terrific handling and sound system.

Lunch at Claude and Uli's Bistro was excellent as usual (I had the French onion soup, Jane loves their souffles). The movie, after we were *pummeled* with crushingly loud trailers, was dreadful - though the woman with the bathtub sized popcorn may have been adequately

Rotten Tomatoes, Killer Mushrooms and Restoration

Written by Jack Sparacino

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distracted even if she didn't strain her back. Breaking a longstanding rule, I sat patiently waiting for something to happen. At home, we give a movie about 15 minutes to pique our interest, then bail out if it doesn't deliver. We're more flexible in a theater. You know, with \$15 or so on the line and all.

Speaking of trailers, if you've already seen the one for *The Beguiled*, hold the phone. You've seen the movie. While critics generally liked it - director Sophia Coppola won best director at the Cannes Festival and the Rotten Tomatoes composite score was 7 out of 10 - only 51% of casual moviegoers liked it as of this writing. The most common regular folks' complaint I saw on Rottentomatoes.com was that the movie is slow

. Here's my quick rendition of the plot. (Spoiler alert!) Late in the Civil War in Virginia, a girl from a religious school run by Martha Farnsworth (Nicole Kidman) is out picking mushrooms in the woods. She comes across a Union soldier, Corporal McBurney (Colin Farrell) who sports a badly wounded leg. The girl helps Farrell back to her school where Kidman and company nurse him back to health. The school is all female and the ladies find their romantic fantasies kindled by Farrell. One of them gets upset (jealous, presumably) and pushes Farrell down the stairs. His leg is nastily reinjured.

Kidman, stunning as ever, decides that amputation is in order. She calls for ether, a saw, cloths and an anatomy book (can't just wing it with serious surgery, right?). Farrell wakes up afterward and, de-legged, freaks out over the shocking loss. He turns nasty, takes over the house and frightens the ladies. They send mushroom girl back to the woods to pick poisonous specimens. They feed said specimens to Farrell at a fancy dinner. He gags on the mushrooms (no onion soup or souffles to interfere), then dies. The ladies bag him up and deposit him in front of their gate. Roll credits. Our audience was silent leaving the theater. Jane is still bothered by this film, one of her least favorites among the hundreds spanning our time together. I'm working on getting over it and saving \$15 somewhere to make up for the tickets (so far I'm up to \$11, not bad).

OK, that was a bit long winded for a quick review. As a fellow "regular" viewer wrote, *"This movie was SO bad that I felt compelled to leave my first ever movie review. Incredibly slow and stupid storyline. Don't waste your time or your money. You will never get either back!"*

Still seeking a cure for the aftereffects of this movie going disaster - not to mention my remaining four bucks - we happened upon one of the wonderful old Andy Hardy films starring Mickey Rooney, *Andy Hardy's Private Secretary*, on TV. There were nineteen films in this popular series. Three of the best ones also starred Judy Garland and if you're ever down in

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the dumps, flop on the nearest couch, call popcorn tub lady, pour some wine and drift to a nicer place. *Private Secretary*, in black and white, also featured Lewis Stone as Andy's dutiful, benevolent father, Judge Hardy. As a special treat there's also the lovely songbird Kathryn Grayson as Kathryn Land. And get this. On a budget of \$329k, the box office was \$2.4M, the profit \$1.3M ... pretty great when you remember that movie tickets sold for 25 cents in 1941 when *Secretary* was released.

We really liked this old classic, perhaps me especially. I love well done corny old black and white films and can't imagine not experiencing a real treat when Grayson belted out a tune, even a hokey one. There are no subtitles, a giant plus for me, and the plot is straightforward and easy to follow even if your attention drifts. Days away from his high school graduation, Andy ([Mickey Rooney](#)) is putting too much time and energy effort into his assorted student committees and not really studying for his exams; his graduation is in jeopardy. His father, Judge Hardy (Stone), learns that Andy has been funneling tuition cash to classmate Kathryn Land (Grayson), discovers that she comes from a poor family, and the goofy hijinks unfold from there. Which include Andy hiring Kathryn as his private secretary and Judge Hardy trying to secure her father a terrific job in South America.

Rooney lived to be 93, Grayson 88, so they must have been doing something right. Maybe all that applause (hers including that for her work in *Anchors Aweigh* with Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly and *Showboat* with Howard Keel). Since no one I know likes Sinatra better than my lovely bride, I'm betting she's just one anchor away from a complete recovery from *The Beguiled*.

In the meantime, we've been enjoying a quirky reality show called *OutDaughtered*. It stars Danielle and Adam Busby and their six daughters - six year old Blayke Louise and her five (count 'em) quintuplet sisters who are now (oy!) aged two. For the first few minutes we were watching this show, which included a trip to New York City to appear on *Good Morning America*, my hair nearly caught fire. There are the cute strawberry blond girls, bumping into each other and the furniture, having bathroom mishaps, shrieking, slobbering . . . the works. Fortunately, as Jane reminded me, they're funny. And little Blayke is not only precious but virtually a third parent, she is so terrific handling the squirts (no pun).

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When we turned this beguiling show off after two episodes, I felt completely recovered from *The Beguiled*

. All it took, really, was a wonderful black and white jolt from 1941 and a salvo of icky but adorable, well-handled toddlers from the present. My faith in mankind has been restored.

Signing off for now, your beguiling (well, someday) correspondent.