

Magic in the Moonlight

Presentation from Wikipedia by Peter Anderson

Magic in the Moonlight is a 2014 American romantic comedy film written and directed by Woody Allen. The film stars Colin Firth, Emma Stone, Hamish Linklater, Marcia Gay Harden, Jacki Weaver, Erica Leerhsen, Eileen Atkins, and Simon McBurney. Set in the 1920s on the French Riviera, the film was released on July 25, 2014, by Sony Pictures Classics. *Magic in the Moonlight* received a generally mixed reception. Critics praised the performances of Firth and Stone, but criticized the clichéd scriptwriting.

Critical response

Magic in the Moonlight has received mixed reviews from critics. On Rotten Tomatoes, the film has a rating of 50%, based on 151 reviews, with an average rating of 5.8/10. The site's consensus states: "While far from a failure, *Magic in the Moonlight* is too slight to stand with Woody Allen's finest work." Review aggregator Metacritic assigns the film a score of 54 out of 100, based on 40 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".

Rex Reed, writing for *The New York Observer*, gave the film a largely positive review, calling it "a masterstroke of enchantment" and praising Colin Firth's acting. Jordan Hoffman of Film.com also enjoyed the film, stating, "This picture isn't as showy or obvious as one of his (many) masterpieces, but it is quite good and deserves your time and respect." In *The New Yorker*, David Denby agreed that Colin Firth "carries [the film] through." (to carry sth through: *sostenere e salvare*). He added that one scene is reminiscent of *To Catch a Thief*. In *The Wall Street Journal*, Joe Morgenstern complimented Emma Stone and concluded, "Think of it as a 97-minute séance (*séance*: /seːns/ *seduta spiritica*) that draws you in, spins you around, subverts your suppositions, levitates your spirits and leaves you giddy with delight".

However, in *Vanity Fair*, Richard Lawson criticised Emma Stone's acting, arguing, "her line delivery is too modern to really work convincingly in the period, and like many other nonetheless talented actors, she has trouble with Allen's stilted (*stilted*: *affettato, ampolloso, pomposo, artificioso, innaturale*), formal cadence." He added that the age gap between Stone and Firth was "a little gross" (*gross*: *indecent, obscene*) and "icky" (*icky*: - *fam USA - sdolcinato, svenevole, stucchevole or disgustoso, repellente*). Alan Scherstuhl of the *Village Voice* disliked the film, criticizing its familiarity to Allen's previous work and believing the writing was uninspired. Chris Nashawaty of *Entertainment Weekly* gave the movie a "B-" grade (from A+ to F), remarking that it was funny and "pleasant" but also forgettable. Salon's Andrew O'Hehir felt that the characters were not drawn out (*draw out*: *far venire fuori, far esprimere*) enough because of poor writing.

Writing for the *Catholic News Agency*, Carl Kozlowski pointed out that Firth's skepticism about God was "very much in keeping with Allen's openly atheistic worldview."

Plot

In 1928, a globally famous illusionist, Wei Ling Soo, performs in front of a crowd in Berlin with his world-class magic act. As he walks off stage the film audience sees that he is actually a British man named Stanley (Colin Firth). He berates (*berate*: *sgridare, rimproverare*) his employees and is generally curmudgeonly (*adverb* /kɜːmˌdʒʊdʒənli/: *bisbetico, intrattabile, stizzoso*) towards his well-wishers. In his dressing-room, he is greeted by old friend and fellow illusionist Howard Burkan (Simon McBurney). Howard enlists Stanley to go with him to the Côte d'Azur where a rich American family, the Catledges, has apparently been taken in (*take in*: *imbrogliare, ingannare, fregare*) by a clairvoyant (*chiaroveggente*) and mystic, Sophie (Emma Stone). In fact, the son of the family, Brice (Hamish Linklater), is smitten

(**innamorato cotto**) with Sophie, and his sister Caroline (Erica Leerhsen) and brother-in-law George (Jeremy Shamos) are concerned Brice is considering proposing marriage. Howard says that he has been unable to uncover the secrets behind her tricks and he admits that the more he watched her the more he believed he really has supernatural powers. So he would like Stanley, who has debunked (**debunk: sfatare, dimostrare la falsità di**) charlatan mystics in the past, to help him prove she is a fraud (**fraud: impostora, imbrogliona, truffatrice**).

Howard and Stanley travel to the French Riviera, but Stanley is soon astonished by Sophie's ability to go into a fugue state and apparently pull out highly personal details about him and his family. Stanley witnesses a seance in which Sophie communicates with the deceased patriarch of the American family. A candle floats up from the table and Howard grabs it to try to discern what trickery is at play, but is astounded to find no apparent subterfuge. Stanley begins spending time with Sophie. He takes her to visit his aunt and they drive a convertible along the picturesque rocky corniches (**corniche /kɔ̃niʃ/: a road built along a coast = strada panoramica**). When caught in a rain storm, they end up at an observatory that Stanley had visited as a child. After the rain subsides, they open the roof up and view the stars.

When Stanley and Sophie visit his aunt Vanessa (Eileen Atkins), Sophie is seemingly able, after holding aunt Vanessa's pearls, to somehow relate secret details of Vanessa's one great love affair. This finally convinces Stanley of Sophie's authenticity and he has an emotional epiphany (**grande rivelazione, momento illuminante**), feeling that his lifelong rationalism and cynicism have been misguided.

At a Gatsby-esque party, Stanley and Sophie dance. As they walk together later that night, Sophie asks him if he has felt any feelings for her "as a woman". Stanley, who has admired her talents as a mystic and is grateful to her for opening his eyes to a new worldview, is taken aback and admits that he has not thought of her that way. She leaves upset. The next day Stanley holds a press conference to tell the world that he, who spent his life debunking charlatan mystics, has finally come to find one who is the real deal. The reporters drill him with questions, but the grilling (**grill: spremere, torchiare, sottoporre ad un severo interrogatorio**) is interrupted when he receives news his aunt Vanessa has been in a car accident.

Stanley rushes to the hospital, and in an emotional scene in a waiting room considers turning to prayer for solace. That is, if he now has come to believe in divination and mysticism, perhaps he should believe in God and prayer. He begins to pray for a miracle to save his aunt, but is unable to go through with it. The rationality that has been his whole life comes back and he rejects prayer, the supernatural and by extension, Sophie and her powers. He decides once more to prove she is a fraud.

Using a trick seen earlier in his stage act, Stanley appears to leave the room but stays to overhear Sophie and Howard discuss their collusion in what has been an elaborate ruse. He discovers that Sophie was able to know so much about him and his aunt because she and Howard collaborated to fool Stanley. Sophie was indeed a charlatan tricking the rich American family and was quickly discovered by Howard. Rather than unmask her and stop the ruse, he enlisted Sophie to help him one-up his best friend and rival, Stanley.

Stanley is initially angry at Howard and Sophie but decides to forgive them. In a conversation with his aunt Vanessa, who by then has recovered from her car accident, Stanley comes to the self-realization that he is in love with Sophie. He finds her and asks her not to marry Brice, but marry him instead. Sophie is taken aback and finds his haughty, awkward proposal unsuitable. She tells him she still plans to marry the wealthy Brice. Returning dejected to his aunt Vanessa's, Stanley is surprised when Sophie follows him there and he proposes. They embrace and kiss as the film ends.

Séance

A **séance** /**seɪ.əns**/ or **seance** is an attempt to communicate with spirits. The word "séance" comes from the French word for "seat," "session" or "sitting," from the Old French "seoir," "to sit." In French, the word's meaning is quite general: one may, for example, speak of "*une séance de cinéma*" ("a movie session"). In English, however, the word came to be used specifically for a meeting of people who are gathered to receive messages from spirits or to listen to a spirit medium discourse with or relay messages from spirits; many people, including skeptics and non-believers, treat it as a form of entertainment. In modern English usage, participants need not be seated while engaged in a séance.

One of the earliest books on the subject of communication amongst deceased persons was *Communitation With the Other Side* by George, First Baron Lyttelton, published in England in 1760. Among the notable spirits quoted in this volume are Peter the Great, Pericles, a "North-American Savage," William Penn, and Christina, Queen of Sweden. The popularity of séances grew dramatically with the founding of the religion of Spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps the best-known series of séances conducted at that time were those of Mary Todd Lincoln who, grieving the loss of her son, organized Spiritualist séances in the White House, which were attended by her husband, President Abraham Lincoln, and other prominent members of society. The 1887 Seybert Commission report marred the credibility of Spiritualism at the height of its popularity by publishing exposures of fraud and showmanship among secular séance leaders. Modern séances continue to be a part of the religious services of Spiritualist, Spiritist, and Espiritismo churches today, where a greater emphasis is placed on spiritual values versus showmanship.

Mediums

Popular 19th century trance medium lecturers include Cora Scott Hatch, Achsa W. Sprague, Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–1899), and Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875).

Among the notable people who conducted small leader-assisted séances during the 19th century were the Fox sisters, whose activities included table-rapping, and the Davenport Brothers, who were famous for the spirit cabinet work. Both the Foxes and the Davenports were eventually exposed as frauds.

In the 20th century, notable trance mediums also include Edgar Cayce and Arthur Ford.

Attendees

Notable people who have attended séances and professed a belief in Spiritualism include the social reformer Robert Owen; the journalist and pacifist William T. Stead; William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada for 22 years, who sought spiritual contact and political guidance from his deceased mother, his pet dogs, and the late US President Franklin D. Roosevelt; the journalist and author Lloyd Kenyon Jones; and the physician and author Arthur Conan Doyle.

Scientists who have conducted a search for real séances and believed that contact with the dead is a reality include the chemist William Crookes, the evolutionary biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, the inventor of radio Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of telephone Alexander Graham Bell, and the inventor of television technology John Logie Baird, who claimed to have contacted the spirit of the inventor Thomas Edison.

Debunkers

Among the best-known exposers of fraudulent mediumship acts have been the researchers Frank Podmore of the Society for Psychical Research, Harry Price of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, the professional stage magicians John Nevil Maskelyne (who exposed the Davenport Brothers) and Harry Houdini, who clearly stated that he did not oppose the religion of Spiritualism itself, but only the trickery by phony mediums that was being practiced in the name of the religion.

The psychical researcher Hereward Carrington exposed the tricks of fraudulent mediums such as those used in slate-writing, table-turning, trumpet mediumship, materializations, sealed-letter reading and spirit photography. The skeptic Joseph McCabe documented many mediums who had been caught in fraud and the tricks they used in his book *Is Spiritualism Based on Fraud?* (1920).

Magicians have a long history of exposing the fraudulent methods of mediumship. Early debunkers included Chung Ling Soo, Henry Evans and Julien Proskauer. Later magicians to reveal fraud were Fulton Oursler, Joseph Dunninger, and Joseph Rinn. The researcher Trevor H. Hall debunked the fraud of many mediums including the tricks of Daniel Dunglas Home. Tony Cornell exposed a number of fraud mediums including Rita Goold and Alec Harris.

Psychic

A **psychic** is a person who claims to use extrasensory perception (ESP) to identify information hidden from the normal senses. The word "psychic" is also used as an adjective to describe such abilities. Psychics may be theatrical performers, such as stage magicians, who use techniques such as prestidigitation, cold reading, and hot reading to produce the appearance of such abilities. Psychics appear regularly in fantasy fiction, such as in the novel *The Dead Zone* by Stephen King.

A large industry and network exists whereby psychics provide advice and counsel to clients. Some famous psychics include Edgar Cayce, Ingo Swann, Peter Hurkos, Jose Ortiz El Samaritano, Miss Cleo, John Edward, and Sylvia Browne. Psychic powers are asserted by psychic detectives and in practices such as psychic archaeology and even psychic surgery.

Critics attribute psychic powers to intentional trickery or to self-delusion. In 1988 the U.S. National Academy of Sciences gave a report on the subject and concluded there is "no scientific justification from research conducted over a period of 130 years for the existence of parapsychological phenomena." A study attempted to repeat recently reported parapsychological experiments that appeared to support the existence of precognition. Attempts to repeat the results, which involved performance on a memory test to ascertain if post-test information would effect it, "failed to produce significant effects", and thus "do not support the existence of psychic ability."

Etymology

The word psychic is derived from the Greek word *psychikos* ("of the mind" or "mental") and refers in part to the human mind or *psyche* (ex. "psychic turmoil"). The Greek word also means "soul". In Greek mythology, the maiden *Psyche* was the deification of the human soul. The word derivation of the Latin *psūchē* is from the Greek *psūchē*, literally, breath, derivative of *psūchein*, to breathe, blow, hence, live.

French astronomer and spiritualist Camille Flammarion is credited as having first used the word psychic, while it was later introduced to the English language by Edward William Cox in the 1870s.