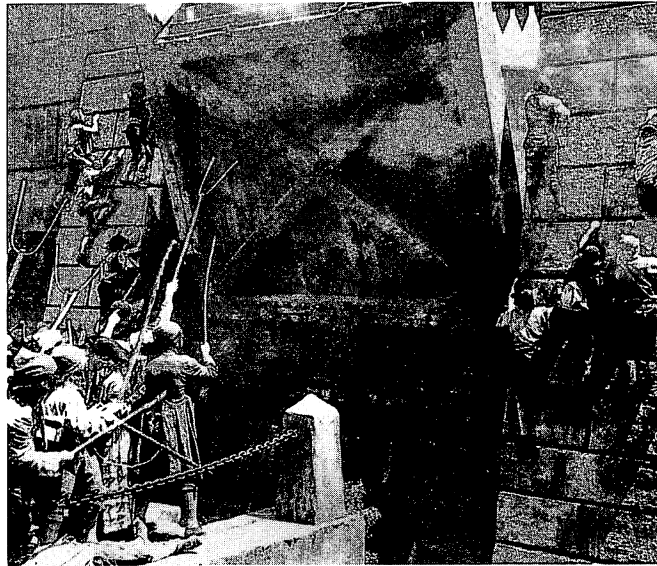


Initially cinema, for all its novelty and its power to thrill and enthrall, had a mission to explain, instruct and educate, and film-makers devoted themselves almost exclusively to documentary shorts. By the early 1900s, however, storytelling had taken over, and the medium had come to be regarded as a vulgar amusement: cheap, cheerful and culture-free fodder for the burgeoning immigrant populations of both Old and New World cities and for a working class which, thanks to the mechanisation of industry, had more spare time on its hands. Fantasy, action and broad comedy quickly became the staples. Men in flying machines, journeys to the moon, locomotives colliding head-on, drunks and messy babies found favour with an audience who had not been brought up on opera, theatre and other 'improving' art forms and so did not realise that fun and the appreciation of art are supposed to be mutually incompatible. Naturally, it was agreed by those who decide such things that the upstart medium was just a passing phase.

Yet cinema is still here, still a dominant cultural force, still a dark cave into which we love to descend to be entertained by the dance of light flickering on a screen, and its staples are still fantasy, action and broad comedy. Clearly, then, the medium strikes a chord so deep within us that its attraction is almost impossible to intellectualise, and to his credit Christie, beyond describing the experience as a 'collective dream of spectatorship', does not try. His purpose, rather, is to show how the influence of cinema has shaped the century, and in finding parallels between cinema and everything from the Futurist movement to Windsor McKay's *Little Nemo* comic strip he puts forward a plausible case. Here, he says, is a medium in which the audience rather than the creator determines what it wants to see. Consequently, on account of cinema's massive popularity, those things the audience wants to see become socially and culturally important. Cinema is self-reflexive. It feeds on what it grows, and it grows what it feeds on, and, as anyone who has seen a Quentin Tarantino movie can tell you, such is its appetite that it won't stop at cannibalism.

There is much here, much more than a book of this brevity can contain, and one gets the frustrating sense that were *The Last Machine* not tied in with a BBC series, it would be a longer, more detailed and more engrossing read. As it stands, it is a skilful synopsis of the subject rather than an in-depth, frame-by-frame analysis, which, given



Early cinema: queuing for the one-and-nine pennies

Christie's breadth of knowledge and easy, engaging style, would have made for a book well worth reading. (The review copy lacks the illustrations and the introduction by Terry Gilliam that will no doubt make the finished product an attractive package.)

The final chapter, incidentally, forms a coda that will offer little comfort to anyone despairing of the current state of British cinema. Just before the First World War, when almost every other developed nation could boast an expanding, dynamic and ambitious film industry,

plucky little Britain had lost most of its top creators and innovators to the United States, where pay and prospects were better, and was busy dismantling what had once been a highly profitable export, reducing it to little more than a cottage industry. Snobbery and a lack of foresight were to blame. People wanted adventure stories, producers gave them literary adaptations. *The Last Machine* amply and, in this instance, depressingly illustrates not how much has changed since the days of Edison and his kinetoscope, but how little.

ALEXANDER ROSE

## ABOVE THE LAW

DUELING: THE CULT OF HONOR IN  
FIN-DE-SIECLE GERMANY

★

By Kevin McAleer

(Princeton University Press 268pp £19.95)

KEVIN MCALEER HAS dispelled any romanticism surrounding the nineteenth-century German duel. Consisting less of nimble parries and Errol Flynn-style thrusts with rapier or épée than of drunken students and vicious officers bludgeoning each other with cavalry sabres, the duel was a cross between a barroom fight and a tiff at the Drones Club.

Some 5,000 instruction manuals were available about the duel in Germany at the end of the last century. Ranging from definitions of what constituted an insult to the difficult business of consoling a grieving mother, these

manuals transformed the duel from a pagan brawl into a pseudo-aristocratic obsession with an inflexible etiquette of killing.

McAleer wholeheartedly enters into the fascinating intricacies of duelling. Pistols or sabres? Just what should our laughing cavaliers wear to a duel? Answer: shirts with detachable sleeves to avoid the ill-bred habit of rolling them up. When should the seconds intervene to staunch the blood-letting? How should one die in a manner befitting one's social station? And most pertinently, how does one cheat? For pistoleers, the number of paces was a yardstick of bravery — really brave duellers blazed away at an alarming five paces.

McAleer keeps his moral indignation at bay, with a tone of ironic humour throughout. It is hard not to feel sorry for poor Ernst Zenker, who, during a jaunt on the Kaiser's yacht in 1895, discovered his wife puffing full steam ahead with a naval officer. A challenge was duly delivered, and Zenker was killed with a ball through the heart at twelve paces.

Conveying as it does the essential sickness of the duel, Zenker's story goes some way towards explaining the peculiarities of German history. Bourgeois notions of order and due process mattered little to these descendants of Lohengrin, who thought themselves above the law. Although duelling was illegal, combatants were rarely sentenced, and even then a pardon from Wilhelm II was usually forthcoming. The very idea of justice being meted out to the guilty, or the restraining influence of conscience, was inimical to the machinery of the duel,

which relied upon a drive to satisfy honour.

Those aspects of the German duel that truly horrify are its brutality and masochism. Why else would the pretty boys of the *Corpsstudenten* (the university drinking-and-duelling societies) dress in swathes of protective silk and leather guards, and then stand stock-still whilst up to 800 sabre blows were rained upon their heads? Gaping maws and hideous *Schläger* scars, although hot items among the young ladies, were surely the outward signs of collective madness.

In an illuminating final chapter, McAleer contrasts this organised barbarism with the flashy French method of satisfying honour. Duels there (although despised by the Germans) were skilfully fought with épées. They doubled as a public display of virtuosity and showmanship. At the first drop of blood, the duel was declared over — a far cry from the zero-sum game the Germans played.

And what of the English? Whereas to the *arriviste* and erratic regime of the Kaiser the duel glorified power and confrontation, Britain extolled the happy benefits of tolerance and compromise and gentility. Germany, in sum, suffered from a deficit of bourgeoisness.

And who was the more honourable in 1914? The Teutonic knights of the duel-worshipping *Kaiserreich*, who thought nothing of tramping through the neutral Low Countries? Or the *unsatisfaktionsfähig* Mr Pooters, who volunteered for the First World War determined, for honour's sake, to defend helpless and virginal Belgium?

## DISCOVERY OF THE MIND

YOU ARE A famous scientist. You have captured the highest laurels in your field. What do you do as an encore? Well, you could ease into a seemingly unrelated field — philosophy, say — and have a go at its greatest and most vexing problem — the mind-body problem, say. You might find that you are able to achieve what seems to you a stunning breakthrough without undue effort. But do not be surprised if professional philosophers are unappreciative of your contribution.

Francis Crick and Gerald M Edelman were surprised. Both are Nobel laureates: Crick discovered (with James Watson) the structure of DNA; Edelman mapped the key antibody molecule that makes our immune system work. Both recently published books in which they claimed to have solved, in broad strokes, the mind-body problem; Edelman's was *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire* (1992), and Crick's

## Jim Holt Unveils the Platonic Mind of the Physicist Roger Penrose

was *The Astonishing Hypothesis* (1994). Both seem to feel they have landed powerful blows on the vast blockheadism of philosophy. Curiously, however, neither has got much notice, let alone adulation, from philosophers.

There is a third famous scientist who has been trafficking in the philosophy of mind these past few years without a proper licence: Roger Penrose. Unlike the other two, Penrose is not a biologist: he holds the Rouse Ball chair in mathematics at Oxford. From Plato to Putnam, philosophers have adored mathematics and have aspired to the status of mathematicians. Perhaps that is why the philosophical interloping of this esteemed mathematician has evoked, in addition to some predictable resentment, a certain amount of awe.

To be sure, it is mostly uncomprehending awe. In 1989,