

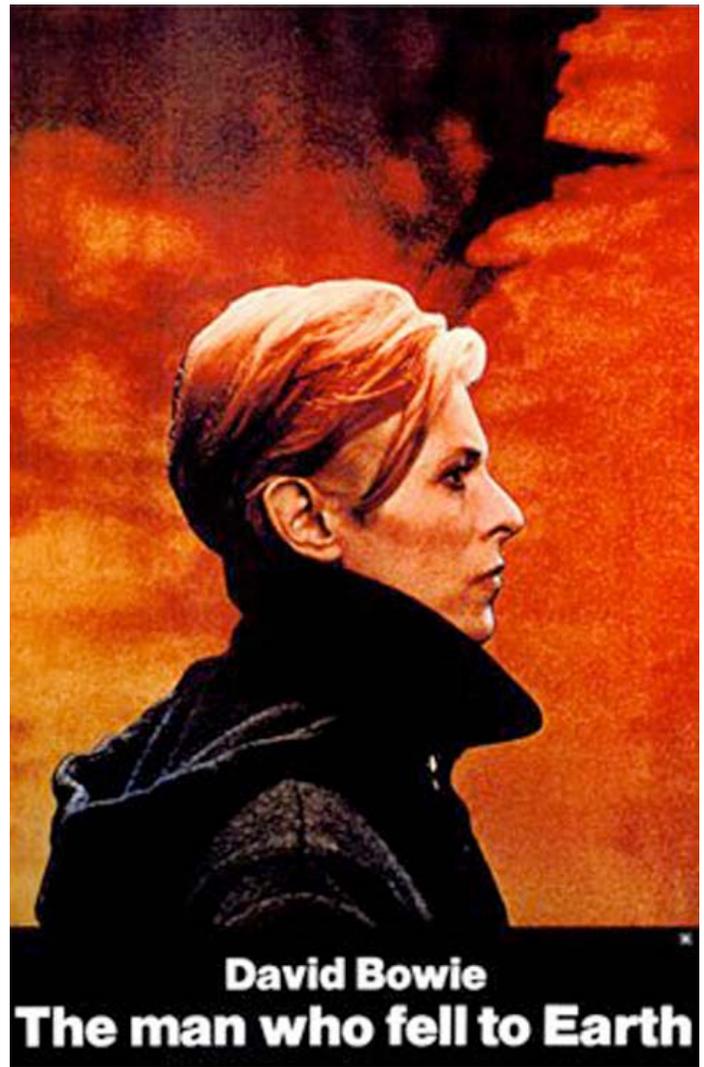


November 21, 2006 XIII: 12

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH 138 min (1976)

Directed by Nicolas Roeg
 Script by Paul Mayersberg
 Based on the novel by Walter Tevis
 Produced by Michael Deeley and Barry Spikings
 Cinematography by Anthony B. Richmond
 Film Editing by Graeme Clifford
 Production Design by Brian Eatwell

David Bowie...Thomas Jerome Newton
 Rip Torn...Nathan Bryce
 Candy Clark...Mary-Lou
 Buck Henry...Oliver Farnsworth
 Bernie Casey...Peters
 Jackson D. Kane...Professor Canutti
 Rick Riccardo...Trevor
 Terry Southern...Reporter at space launch (uncredited)



NICOLAS ROEG (15 August 1928), the most recent of which is *Puffball* (2006, in post-production). Some of the others are *Two Deaths* (1995), *Hotel Paradise* (1995), "Heart of Darkness" (1994, TV), *The Witches* (1990), *Castaway* (1986), *Bad Timing* (1980), *Don't Look Now* (1973), *Walkabout* (1971) and *Performance* (1970). He was cinematographer or director of photography for *Don't Look Now* (1973, uncredited), *Walkabout* (1971), *Performance* (1970), *Petulia* (1968), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), *The Caretaker* (1963), and *Jazz Boat* (1960), and a dozen other films.

DAVID BOWIE (8 January 1947, London) has acted in 28 films; his music has been featured in 128 soundtracks. He is best known as a rock musician under his own name and also his alter ego, Ziggy Stardust. His most recent film is *The Prestige* (2006). Some of the others are *Basquiat*

(1996), *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1983), *The Hunger* (1983), and *The Image* (1967).

For more on him go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Bowie



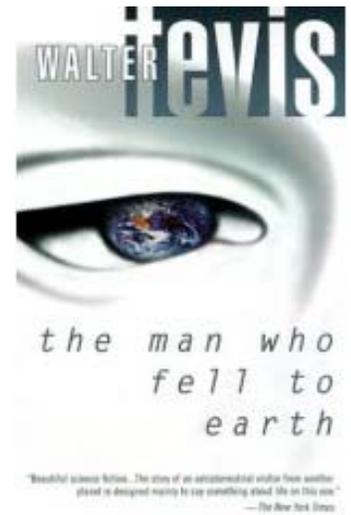
RIP TORN (6 February 1931, Temple, Texas) has acted in 169 films and television programs and series. He currently has four films in pre- or post-production. Some of his films are *Zoom* (2006), *Yours, Mine and Ours* (2005), *Welcome to Mooseport* (2004), *Men in Black II* (2002), *Men in Black Alien Attack* (2000), *Wonder Boys* (2000), *Men in Black* (1997), "The Larry Sanders Show" (1995-1996), *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995), *Nadine* (1987), *Cross Creek* (1983),

Heartland (1979), *Song of Myself* (1976), *Crazy Joe* (1974), *Tropic of Cancer* (1970), *Maidstone* (1970), *Beyond the Law* (1968), *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1962), and *Baby Doll* (1956).

CANDY CLARK (20 June 1947, Norman, Oklahoma) has acted in 47 films and tv programs, among them, *The Big Empty* (2005), *Niagara, Niagara* (1997), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), *The Blob* (1988), *Blue Thunder* (1983), *National Lampoon Goes to the Movies* (1982), *When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder?* (1979), *The Big Sleep* (1978), *American Graffiti* (for which she won a best supporting actress Oscar nomination; 1973) and *Fat City* (1972).

BUCK HENRY (9 December 1930, NYC) has acted in 58 theatrical and tv films, directed 3, and written 19 screenplays. Some of his acting roles were in *Breakfast of Champions* (1999), *The Real Blonde* (1997), *To Die For* (1995), *Grumpy Old Men* (1993), *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993), *Short Cuts* (1993), "Tales from the Crypt", *Defending Your Life* (1991), *Eating Raoul* (1982), *Gloria* (1980), *Heaven Can Wait* (1978), *Taking Off* (1971), *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1970), *Catch-22* (1970), *Candy* (1968), and *The Graduate* (1967). Some of his screenplays were *First Family* (1980), *The Day of the Dolphin* (1973), *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1970), *Catch-22* (1970), "Get Smart" (creator), *Candy* (1968), *The Graduate* (1967) and *The Troublemaker* (1964). He directed *First Family* (1980), *Heaven Can Wait* (1978) and *I Miss Sonia Henie* (1971).

WALTER STONE TEVIS (28 February 1928, San Francisco—8 August 1984, lung cancer). From Wikipedia: "After serving in the Pacific Theatre during World War II...entered the University of Kentucky. While a student there, Tevis worked in a pool-room and published a story about pool written for A.B. Guthrie's writing class. After being awarded a Masters degree from the University, Tevis wrote for the Kentucky Highway Department and taught school in Science Hill, Hawesville, Irvine, Carlisle, and then at the University of Kentucky. He was an English literature professor at Ohio University (in Athens, OH) from 1965 to 1978, where he received an MFA. He wrote seven novels, three of which were the basis of major motion pictures of the same names: *The Hustler* (1959), and *The Color of Money* (1984)—both about fictional poolhall hustler "Fast Eddie" Felson—and the science fiction novel *The Man who Fell to Earth* (1963). He also wrote *Mockingbird* (1980), *Far From Home* (1981), *The Steps of the Sun* (1983), and *The Queen's Gambit* (1983)."



"Nicolas Roeg" from World Film Directors V. II. Ed.
John Wakeman, H.H. Wilson Company, NY, 1988

British director and cinematographer, was born in London, the son of Jack Roeg and the former Gertrude Silk. He "always wanted to make films" and tried to launch a film society at the Mercers School in London, where he was educated. He entered the army at the very end of the war and served as his unit's projectionist, a position that allowed him to see "masses of movies."

Om 1947 Roeg went to work at the Marylebone Studio in central London, making the tea, helping to dub French films, and learning the rudiments of editing. In 1950 he moved on to MGM's London studios at Boreham Wood, where he worked as a clapper boy and as an assistant on Joe Ruttenburg's camera crew. He also "used to take stills and do a lot of work on my own at night, just because I was interested in learning about photography." Roeg spent the 1950s in this way, slowly working his way up through the hierarchy of the camera crew. In 1960 he did some second-unit location work in Australia for Fred Zimmermann's *The Sundowners* and in the Middle East for David Lean's *Lawrence fo Arabia*.

Roeg received his first credits as director of photography for two undistinguished films by Robert Lynn, *On Information Received* (1961), and *Dr. Crippen*

(1962). Two more interesting assignments with Clive Donner followed—*The Caretaker* (1963), and *Nothing But the Best*—and then Roger Corman's memorable horror film *The Masque of the Red Death* (1963). Roeg says that Corman "created a feeling that made you want to really astonish him with good stuff....He says what he wants and it's got to be done, and he makes you somehow want to improve on it." John Cutts called the result "boldly cinematic and full of wonderfully realized effects; I can't remember when I've seen (outside a Minnelli or Cukor film) such a stylized use of color before. Blues, Yellows, whites, greens, blacks (notice how red is withheld until the climax)—the film is literally awash in colors. Visually the film is stunning."

After three routine assignments (of which the most notable was Richard Lester's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*) came Francois Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966)—not among the director's most successful films but an exciting project for Roeg, who greatly admires Truffaut and thinks that the picture was underestimated, He had similar feelings about his next project John Schlesinger's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, which was praised more for Roeg's "brilliant color

illustrations of the lovely countryside” than for its direction. *Petulia* (1968), another Richard Lester movie, and one that acquired a certain cult reputation, was Roeg’s last film as a director of photography for others (though he retained this function in the first two films he directed himself.)

Although he had become one of the most admired cinematographers in Britain, Roeg had entered that profession only as a step on the road towards making films of his own. After *Petulia* he decided to wait no longer. He found a story that he wanted to do, James Vance Marshall’s Australian novel, *Walkabout*, and persuaded the British dramatist Edward Bond to write the adaptation, then went off to Australia for eight weeks, scouting locations. Roeg could find no one to back the project, however, and it was temporarily shelved. At this point he was approached by Donald Cammell, an old friend, who had an idea for “a film about a gangster in London’s underworld, and the relation of that specific kind of violence to the violence in human nature.” Warner Brothers agreed to finance *Performance* largely because the Rolling Stones’ superstar singer Mick Jagger (a friend of Cammell’s) accepted a major role in it.

In an interview with Tom Milner, Roeg says that *Performance* “was a curious film in that we went on the floor and the construction came after. That’s why Donald and I never separate our contributions. It became like our lives. We went on the floor with an outline, an idea, and about the first three scenes; there wasn’t a script; and then two of us were doing all the jobs of writer, director, cameraman; it was perfect. We got together in a mysterious way, just worked night and day, day and night, and it began to live.”...

The film’s speculations about identity, role-playing, and “performance” are expressed or adumbrated in strikingly cinematic terms—in visual puns and echoes, color motifs, and the ubiquitous presence of mirrors. Mirrors are the stock-in-trade of the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, whose story “The Old Man and the Mountain” (which Turner reads) is one of the sources of the film’s plot. When Chas shoots Turner, we follow the path of the bullet into his brain and find there a photograph of Borges. Such allusions to literature, art, and the cinema abound in Roeg’s work.... Its reception was, to say the least, mixed. Many thought it a corrupt and decadent work; others found it “deeply moral”—a serious exploration of the correlation between sex, violence, and power.... Only moderately successful at the box office on release, it has since become a cult classic, endlessly discussed and analyzed.

Roeg’s next film—and his first as sole director—could scarcely have been more remote from this claustrophobic essay, at least in its settings. *Walkabout* (20th Century-Fox, 1971) begins with a restless, fragmented montage expressing the sterility and alienation of life in a great Australian city. A product of this society drives his

small son (Lucien John) and teenage daughter (Jenny Agutter) into the desert for a picnic, and tries to kill them. Failing, he kills himself instead in his burning car. The children in their school uniforms, carrying a portable radio, set off into the wilderness, the girl bravely attempting to hide the truth from her little brother.

It is soon clear that they cannot survive. They have given up the struggle when a young Aboriginal appears (David Gumpilil). He is undergoing a walkabout, a solitary sojourn in the wilderness during which he must rely on tribal lore for survival. Well able to cope with the desert, he befriends the two children, showing them how to find water and supplying them with lizards and other creatures to eat. Together the three set off on a long trek back to civilization....

Don’t Look Now (1973) is an Anglo-Italian co-production based on a short novel by Daphne de Maurier. Pauline Kael wrote that in this film Roeg “employs fast, almost subliminal imagery. . . . The unnerving cold ominousness that he imparts to the environment says that things are not what they seem, and one may come out of the theater still seeing shock cuts and feeling slightly disassociated.” She goes on to call the picture “a masterwork” but “also trash,” saying that “Roeg’s vision is as impersonal and noncommittal as Warhol’s. But with the gloss and craftsmanship of Losey.” Molly Haskell found a complete contempt for logic, verisimilitude, and character psychology,” and John Simon complained of pretension and pointless overelaboration.”...

One critic called *Don’t Look Now* the most subtle and sophisticated horror film ever made,” and there were comparisons with Hitchcock. David Robinson wrote that the movie established Roeg “as the outstanding talent to have emerged in British cinema in at least the past decade.”

Among the claims to distinction of his next film is the fact that it was filmed in the United States with British money. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (British Lion, 1976), centers on “Thomas Newton” (David Bowie), who comes to earth in search of succor for his drought-stricken planet. All he knows of our planet is what he has learned by studying out television programs, and we share his sense of the strangeness of our society and behavior. With his superior technological knowledge, Newton rapidly conquers the American electronics industry and becomes a multimillionaire and a recluse on the *Citizen Kane* pattern—the film is full of cinematic references, including long passages from some of the old movies Newton watches on his battery of televisions. He discovers the pleasures of alcohol and forms an affectionate liaison with a blowsy, likeable young woman named Mary Lou (Candy Clark). Worried by this mysterious interloper’s success, the government intervenes. Newton’s lawyer and his bodyguard are murdered—defenestrated in a scene of spectacular violence. Newton is arrested and tortured in a series of “tests,” one of which permanently damages his

sight. Incapacitated and unable to make his way back to his own planet, he is freed to find what comfort he can in gin.

The relatively straightforward story is given a far from straightforward telling. It goes forward, as Roeg says, "in fits and starts," and we are presented not with a coherent narrative but with something closer to a series of isolated scenes whose significance we have to interpret as best we may. Paul Mayersberg, whose script was based on a novel by Walker Tevis, says the film "has dozens of scenes that go together, not just in terms of plot, but like circus acts following one another: the funny, the violent, the frightening, the sad, the horrific, the spectacular, and so on." There are a number of scenes that do not further the action at all but comment on it (like one of a Japanese duel intercut with one of lovemaking). ...In the United States, in spite of damaging cuts, it was a long-running hit.

In *Bad Timing* Roeg chose for the third time as his star a hero of popular music. Dr. Alex Linden (Art Garfunkel) is an American psychoanalyst teaching at the University of Vienna, is the shadow of his master, Freud....With *Eureka* (1983) Roeg turned to a historical incident as the basis for a kind of cosmic thriller....

Roeg seldom provides us with protagonists that we can comfortably identify with. He deliberately "plays with film grammar" and denies us "the crutch of time" in movies that go "in fits and starts." His work is full of "perceptual assaults" and his elliptical editing suppresses transitions and withholds narrative information and value judgments, forcing us to ponder, speculate and reassess what we are taking for granted. "Of course I *could* make a film in the realist tradition," he told Brian Baxter, but, Roeg explains, "it would not be me and I could only do it once. People would see through it."

Like Alex Linden, Roeg is said to be unnervingly percipient about the people around him, so that "actors and others feel naked in front of his observations." He himself is elusive, and puts up "a constant smokescreen of manners, humor and outrage for anyone who tried to put a finger on his own personality." Asked to contribute a statement to this volume, he responded: "I feel very strongly that every thought about the past, even in documentary detail, destroys the imagined or real facts about the present and certainly about the future of any human being. It has always been my opinion that, in order to know something about an artist (or indeed anybody) it is better to build up one's own picture from other people and odd snippets of biography and then come to some personal conclusion. I think the artist can't help but use his own imagination and dreams of the things he might wish to have been or probably become. I am sure everyone's sense of self-invention becomes so real to them that they must believe in it, and that this applies both to very straightforward historical detail and also to the hopes and desires, rethought, of the past." Roeg's feature films have not made him rich, and he supplements his income by making television commercials.

from *Nicholas Roeg Film By Film* Scott Salwolke, McFarland & Co, Jefferson N.C. & London, 1993

Nicholas Roeg has taken risks with his films that few other directors have taken and he has paid a price for this decision. Although he has directed some of the most innovative films of the past quarter century, he remains an anonymous figure, seldom mentioned in most histories of film. He has yet to have a major commercial success, and critics have always been divided about his work. . . .

In their color scheme and in their presentation of themes, his films most recall the works of Michael Powell and like Powell's films, Roeg's films were often neglected on release only to be reexamined more favorably at a later date. Roeg's editing and battles with censorship are the direct result of his fascination with French films, particularly those of Alain Resnais.

. . . He has held to the belief that film is not just a commercial medium, but also an art form. He says, "I believe film is an art. I believe it. I truly believe that. Thought can be transferred by the juxtaposition of images, and you mustn't be afraid of an audience not understanding. You can say things visually, immediately, and that's where film, I believe, is going. It's not a pictorial example of a published work. It's a transference of thought."

The Man Who Fell to Earth was reduced by twenty minutes for its American release, and many of Roeg's other films have been similarly altered, although none quite so dramatically.

Roeg often remains as inaccessible as many find his films. He does not make the traditional rounds of the media when a film is released because he believes a film should stand on its own. An intensely private man, he has given few details of his personal life and, with the exception of a handful of interviews, has told little of his early life. One can often see Roeg, however, in the characters in his films, and he has described this relationship between his own life and his directing:

"With film, certainly the way I approach it, one has to delve into one's life to put "truth" onto the screen. One delves into one's emotions and tries to translate that to the story one wants to tell. All our imagination is bound by experience. And when all that is ultimately portrayed in the characters of the film, it becomes a melancholic affair.. . .

"I don't believe my films are inaccessible. If they were, I would be inaccessible myself. What I am trying to do, like anyone who works in any form of art, is to express an emotion. The film audience is so curiously demanding in conservatism. People never say of dance or theater, "I don't understand what is happening." Yet film is the newest and should be the freest of all....

"I am concerned with breaking barriers, challenging assumptions, and moving the possibilities of

film on a bit. Part of my job is to show that the cinema is the art of our time and can break through previous terms of reference. That doesn't mean ignoring them so much as expanding them as far as possible. Usually producers read scripts, and they want something rooted in the reality they know. I'm more anxious to look for what we don't know."

Roeg remains disappointed that his films have not received the acceptance that they deserve or that he desires. "As I've said before, all I hope from my work is that someone out there will say, 'Hey, I've got a sort of curious, twisted mind like yours, so I know what you're talking about.' That's all we're doing with our work anyhow is saying, 'Hey, is anybody out there?' That's all we're doing with our lives, really. 'Is there anybody out there who understands me?'"

The story of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is emblematic of many science fiction films: an alien arrives on earth and assumes a human form. On paper, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* story line closely resembles that of Roeg's film: a visitor from a distant planet arrives and seems to possess skills much more advanced than ours....The aesthetic differences in the two works seem to remove any comparison, however....Although many similar elements had been contained in their source material, Roeg and screenwriter Paul Mayersburg eliminated them in the film....Roeg could later argue that the film might all take place in the mind of a wealthy recluse. In fact, it was not the science fiction elements which attracted him, but the sense of isolation surrounding the central character....

The source was a 1963 novel written by the author of *The Hustler*, Walter Tevis, a work Roeg had come across in the early seventies. For the script he turned to English film critic Paul Mayersburg, whose screenwriting career had so far been unsuccessful. Much attention has been paid to Roeg's use of singers to play the leads in many of his films, but he has also shown a willingness to work with first-time screenwriters....

From *Performance* on, Roeg has demonstrated a strong interest in the sound track, experimenting as much with sound as with visual effects. As Newton sits by the river, the music turns ominous, as if forecasting danger, but in fact the sound emanates from the stereo of Oliver Farnsworth, a patent lawyer Newton visits. Roeg will frequently overlap sequences, as if Newton's attention is already focused on what is to happen. There is no indication of how much time has passed, but Newton's suit and manner indicate he is no longer the wanderer he was in the previous sequence....

The resemblance between Farnsworth and Newton will continually be brought out in the film, from their appearance (both men wear glasses and seem physically fragile), to their intellectual capacity, to their willingness to trust others. Farnsworth is also a portent of a series of startling relationships which make up the film. He is involved with his male secretary, Trevor, while Newton

will live with an Earth woman. There is also a relationship between a black man and a white woman, and relationships between a college professor and his students. If these relationships do not seem as shocking as they did when the film was released, they still create comment. None of these couplings are found in the book, where most of the relationships are strictly platonic, almost maternal in the case of Betty Lou.

...Although the scenes of the planet would seem to confirm Newton's identity, Roeg's interpretation is different: "You in the audience think perhaps he's from outer space. I don't think that's definite. Perhaps he's from inner space. All we see is what's in his mind."

Newton's nostalgia continues, as he returns to the hill he had stumbled down in the opening scene to take a picture of it. He demonstrates an ability to see across spatial and temporal distances as he looks out the window of his limousine and suddenly sees a pioneer family, who are equally startled by his appearance. It is Roeg's reminder that the past is always present, and the next scene seems to continue this discourse. Looking out over the lake he had crashed into, Newton's memories seem to overpower him, and he goes into a trance. Instead of crashing into the water, he imagines himself emerging from it, as if he is wishing he could turn back time....During the film, the characters will age at varying rates, with the exception of Newton, who remains eternally youthful. Roeg describes his interest in the question of aging: "I'm fascinated by the interchange between aging and time. People age at different speeds. Bowie didn't age at all. Perhaps aging begins when people betray themselves in one way or another, when they start living by other people's lights."

...A shot of the two of them (Newton and Mary Lou) in profile emphasizes the resemblance between them. This profile shot was modeled after the famous shot from *Persona*, and Roeg would reuse it in many of his films. It would most often show the protagonist's doppelganger, or double, but here it serves to emphasize the resemblance between the two species. Following this scene, Mary Lou and Newton turn toward the camera, looking directly out at the audience, as if they are aware we are examining them. The viewer has become the watcher.

The presentation of the telescope and the resulting sexual intercourse is the moment when Newton and Mary Lou are closest, and in Roeg's films sexual contact is always a precursor to misfortune. In *Don't Look Now*, the lovemaking preceded the boy's accident; in *Walkabout* the aborigine's declaration of love is followed by the girl's rejection of him and his remembrance of the white hunter; in *Eureka* Tracy's break with her father comes after she makes love to Claude; and in *Insignificance* the actress' miscarriage follows her decision to have a family with her husband. In the present film, the lovemaking anticipates the dissolution of Newton and Mary Lou's relationship....

Newton does admit that he is not the first visitor to have come to the planet saying: "I've seen them. I've seen their footprints and their places." These statements recall the pioneer family he had earlier seen, but his words lack the significance they would have if Roeg had kept to his original intentions. The script had included references to ancient carvings, sculptures, and landing strips, which would have been in keeping with Roeg's fascination with other cultures. Traces of other cultures appear in *Performance*, *Walkabout*, *Eureka*, and other Roeg films.

In the exchange between Newton and Bryce, the latter says: "I've seen those things, we've all seen them. That's for theorists, I'm a scientist." Newton then replies,

W.H.Auden, "Musée Des Beaux Arts"

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;

How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
At the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

From the Criterion DVD notes (2005): "Loving the Alien" by Graham Fuller

Science-fiction drama, western, love story, metaphysical mystery, satire of modern America—*The Man Who Fell to Earth* is the most beguiling of the films that, in a dozen years embracing the 1970s, established Nicolas Roeg as a mainstream heir to such 1960s experimentalists as Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard, and Chris Marker. With its fragmented narrative, its genre hopping, its strategic crosscutting, and its dense tapestry of disassociative visual and musical allusions, the film was an enigma for many of the British critics who warily reviewed it in April 1976, and no less so for their American counterparts when it was released in the United States, minus twenty crucial minutes, two months later.

"I'm not a scientist, but I know all things begin and end in eternity."

Roeg cuts to the sun radiating heat, and Newton imagines that his family is dying. He confides to Bryce that he trusts both him and Mary Lou, but it is only Farnsworth who remains loyal to him.....

Ironically, Roeg's film anticipated a new revival in science fiction films and would be released at the same time as *Logan's Run* and *Star Wars*, the latter of which overshadowed all films for the year in popularity. In contrast to these works, Roeg's work is more introspective and thought provoking.

Indeed, it was a puzzle to many of those involved in bringing it to the screen. David Bowie, who claimed he never read the script, experienced it primarily as a love story. Buck Henry thought it might be a metaphor for the misunderstood artist. Donald Rugoff, who paid \$800,000 to acquire the U.S. distribution rights to the \$4 million project and then oversaw its butchering after taking advice from a psychiatry professor and college students, among others, admitted that he didn't understand it and felt "it was one of the weirdest films I've ever seen."

The premise is simple enough. Thomas Jerome Newton, a clairvoyant alien, played with gentleness and reserve by Bowie, falls to Earth in New Mexico. Carrying a British passport and nine lucrative electronic patents, he makes his way to Manhattan and pays a business call on Farnsworth (Henry), a patent lawyer, whom he hires to

establish and run a global communications corporation that will generate massive wealth through its technological innovations (which include a predecessor to digital photography). Newton becomes deeply involved with two other earthlings: Mary-Lou (Candy Clark), the blowsy, garrulous hotel maid who becomes his lover, and Dr. Bryce (Rip Torn), a cynical, disillusioned Chicago chemistry professor who renounces his life as a campus womanizer to become Newton's chief scientific consultant.

Newton's mission, stated more explicitly in Tevis's 1963 source novel than in Roeg and screenwriter Paul Mayersberg's adaptation, is to develop sources of energy and then a space program, with which he seeks to deliver his planet's few survivors. These include his wife and two kids, who carry, in tubes wrapped around their bodies, what little water remains to them. Successive nuclear wars have inflicted droughts on the planet, the book tells us.

The film offers us a few glimpses of Newton and his family plodding around the dunes of their dying planet, and what strikes us is the conventionality of these rote sci-fi images. Roeg is more interested in showing how life on Earth is stranger and more disconcerting than anything in outer space. An early shot of Newton lying on his back on a bench outside a bric-a-brac store and looking up at us—our topsy-turvy world—sets a mood of abstruseness and disorientation that Roeg invites us to fall into. In a sense, Newton is Alice and late twentieth-century America is a corrupt Wonderland defined by a government that orders Farnsworth's execution, by television culture, which enslaves Newton; and by the panaceas of sex, which Bryce indulges in with his students, and alcohol and religion, which enable Mary-Lou to stave off self-awareness.

As both panorama and chamber piece, the film is beautiful to look at, and beautiful, too, in its mysteriousness, in the challenge it sets us as viewers. It is as kaleidoscopic as Roeg and codirector Donald Cammell's *Performance* but painted on a much broader scale, and so needs to be experienced in its full glory if comprehensibility is an object, which is why the cuts made to the American release were especially moronic. Prompted by an effort to sanitize the movie, Rugoff cut the sequences of Bryce fooling around with his students, the shot of Mary-Lou urinating from the shock of seeing Newton in his alien state; the crucial sex-and-guns sequence in which Newton, in captivity, destroys his relationship with Mary-Lou; and the scene of Bryce dressed absurdly as Santa Claus. These excised scenes are concerned with the characters' ability to evolve, or not, through their interaction with Newton. Their absence leaves the characters' stories incomplete.

Playing Newton as pale, gaunt, and tremulous, Bowie made his exquisite film acting debut in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, in a role that chimed iconographically with his androgynous, futuristic pop persona of the early seventies. Until his apparent genderlessness is revealed

(and causes Mary-Lou's accident), his most striking characteristic is his orange hair, a beacon that seems at times to confer an amber glow on the mise-en-scène. Shots of his head from behind underscore Newton's vulnerability, presaging his eventual capture and brutal humanizing by the State Department, which moves to terminate his corporation's destabilizing effect on the American economy, and fleetingly dips the movie's tope into the political paranoia thriller.

As critic Tom Milne has suggested, this defenselessness is central to the exchanging of identities and the shifting of power dynamics between the characters in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. This also occurs in *Performance*, *Walkabout*, *Don't Look Now*, *Bad Timing*, and *Track 29*, the other films on which Roeg's reputation as an auteur is based. As Newton becomes progressively more human, he becomes susceptible to the same vices that taint his intimates: the aggrandizement of power and wealth (Farnsworth), alcoholism and emotional dependency (Mary-Lou), abusive sexual behavior (Bryce). They, in turn, in Milne's words, "rediscover something of that vulnerability," shedding their protective carapaces even as they variously let Newton down, because, as humans, that is what they are fated to do.

Alien or human or both, Newton is a fallen angel, in the old sense of angel as messenger. (He has much in common with the visitor who masquerades as the long lost son of a fantasizing housewife in *Track 29*, based by Dennis Potter on one of his "angel" plays.) He is inscribed as Icarus in a shot of Brueghel's painting and through W.H. Auden's rueful poem about it (contained in a book Bryce sends to his daughter). Roeg presumably had in mind, too, William Blake's satirical vision of Sir Isaac Newton, the English philosopher and scientist, as an angel of darkness who appeared as "a mighty spirit" leaping from the land of Albion [England] "to awaken the dead to judgment. Also in the mix is Blake's time-traveling Christlike alter ego, Los, "that Shadowy Prophet who Six Thousand Years ago/ Fell from my station in the Eternal Bosom...I return! Both Time & Space obey my will."

And time in the movie obeys Roeg and Mayersberg's will. Their use of omissions and abrupt transitions in the structuring of the narrative, as it follows Newton's stream of consciousness, causes time to become elastic: years, decades, centuries pass us by in a single cut, and without warning. A little history of man unfolds before us. Stuck on Earth, unable to save his people, unable even to age, Newton becomes a passive receptacle for everything that everyone in the film, and everyone watching, wants to bring to him—as well as a vehicle for the Englishman Roeg's scathing critic of America's materialistic culture.

Newton, of course, is not only from the "ancient time" of Blake's "Jerusalem"—which he sings distractedly in Mary-Lou's church—but also from the future. His memories of his planet could certainly be of Earth

centuries (or less) after the events depicted in the film. Thirty years after Roeg filmed *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, over six weeks in July and August 1975, mostly around Lake Fenton, in New Mexico, it seems eerily prophetic of Earth's own fate should global warming remain unchecked. Should we seek "outside" help, as Newton does? Roeg has that base covered: when Bryce apologizes to Newton for the way he has been betrayed and corrupted on Earth, Newton says a visitor to his planet could have expected the same treatment. The idea that human nature is the same the universe over, even when it's nonhuman, is a bitter cosmic joke. But the joke doubles back on itself, because Newton's planet is our own.

"How strange your trains are," Newton says in one of his many reflective moments. They thread through the movie, connoting the passage of time, the kind of fulfilling future that Mary-Lou suspects is closed to her (as she walks toward the tracks after her first date with Newton), and the doomed future that Newton knows. One of the first things he sees on Earth is a deceptively locomotive that triggers a memory of the futuristic little engine he boarded as he set

out on his journey to the "present." It's a train to now but ultimately to nowhere—the one, Roeg's glittering film implies, we're all on. And it's already left the station. *Graham Fuller is arts editor at the New York Daily News and film columnist for Interview magazine.*

About the digital restoration

The Man Who Fell to Earth is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1... Director Nicolas Roeg supervised this new high-definition digital transfer, which was created on a Spirit Datacine from an interpositive of the complete uncut version of the film struck from the original camera negative. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, and scratches were removed using the MTI Digital Restoration System. To maintain optimal image quality through the compression process, the picture on this dual-layer DVD-9 was encoded at the highest-possible bit rate for the quality of material included. The sound track was mastered from the 35mm magnetic print master, and audio restoration tricks were used to reduce clicks, pops, hiss, and crackle.



PIETER BRUEGEL, *LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS*, C. 1558

THE FINAL TWO COMING UP IN BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XIII, FALL 2006:

Nov 28 Spike Lee **Do the Right Thing** 1989

Dec 5 Peter Greenaway **Prospero's Books** 1991

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