

## Robert Wiene, *Fear* (1917)

### Abstract

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Director and screenwriter Robert Wiene (1873-1938) was born in Breslau, Silesia (today Wrocław, Poland). After working in theater in Vienna, he moved to Berlin and began directing films in 1912. Today he is best known for his landmark Expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) starring Conrad Veidt. This is a clip from a silent horror film titled *Furcht* [Fear], one of four films Wiene directed in 1917. While the German film industry mainly produced patriotic films in the early years of the war, from 1917 onwards, production companies increasingly shifted to entertainment and adventure films made for a war-weary audience. *Fear*, whose screenplay was also written by Wiene, tells the story of wealthy Count Greven, an art collector who stole a sacred statue from a temple in India on his travels. Haunted by the temple priest's curse, he now lives in constant fear and is eventually driven to suicide. (The film was retitled "Revenge of the Buddha-Priest" in its Danish edition, from which this clip is taken.) The clip shows the Indian priest, played by Conrad Veidt in an act of racial parody, appearing to Greven as a supernatural vision. This fictional portrayal of an exoticized foreigner played by a white actor was by no means rare at the time. The theme of looted ancient cult objects bringing misfortune to those who stole them was used repeatedly in popular literature and film of this period, perhaps inspired by the boom in archeological excavations at the time. Some have seen it as perhaps a metaphor for colonialism itself, where the greed of the European in the Orient leads to corruption, and the consequences of that corruption then follow him back to Europe to cause his undoing.

### Source

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Source: *Furcht* (clip), dir. Robert Wiene, 1917. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv;  
<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/61269/700163>

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