Fantômas

The silent crime serial *Fantômas* (1913), is considered to be one of the best and most influential works of French director Louis Feuillade, alongside his *Les Vampires* (1915) and *Judex* (1914, released 1916). Here Feuillade first experimented on a large scale with techniques that would go on to be staples of the thriller and other genres. It is the first and most famous of many films based on the eponymous villain created by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre in a long series of hugely popular books published beginning in 1911. In a foreshadowing of modern studio wars, Pathé and Gaumont fought for the rights to develop *Fantômas* into a movie (Abel 373). The character of Fantômas was an inspiration for writer Norbert Jacques’s master criminal Dr. Mabuse, while modernist director Fritz Lang’s films, including his adaptations of Jacques’s work, seem to bear the mark of Feuillade’s realist fantasies (for example the striking similarity between the opening sequence of Lang’s 1922 *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* [*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*] and that of *Fantômas*), although there is no definitive evidence that Lang himself acknowledged such a debt. Surrealists were fascinated by the character, in particular René Magritte, who made direct studies of Feuillade’s film (Walz 71).

Magritte, René. *L'Assassin menace* (The Menaced Assassin) 1927

Oil on canvas, 59 1/4″ x 6′ 4 7/8″ (150.4 x 195.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Kay Sage Tanguy Fund. Charly Herscovici—ADAGP—ARS, 2013

Fantômas, dir. Louis Feuillade, France, Gaumont

René Magritte posing with his (no longer extant) 1927 painting *Le barbare* (The Savage), a clear likeness of Fantômas. (1938) ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London

**References and Further Reading:**

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Jeremy Harley

Independent researcher