

A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE MOTION PICTURE IN THE UNITED STATES
AS A DRAMATIC ART FORM

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Writing a thesis, the writer believes, is in some respects like following an obscure path, winding its way among bushes, under fences, and across ditches. The traveler follows wearily, with difficulty but with determination. Obstacles would prove too great, the path would be lost, and the traveler would sink in despair, if the journey were a lonely one. But not unpleasant is the pilgrimage to the traveler who finds trained guides to point the way and kind friends to listen patiently to his tales of hardship.

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INTRODUCTION

THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

An industry which so commands the attention of a country that approximately six and one-half million people daily pay admissions to see the product of that industry,¹ such a business is without doubt worthy of consideration. But the motion picture is more than an industry. It has developed from a technique frankly the stepchild of the superior legitimate theatre² to what may now be classed as the individual dramatic art of the cinema. Such an art well deserves the critical study of its patrons.

The growth of the motion picture from a mere toy to the proportions of an international recreation is in itself spectacular, but that story as such presents only the glamour of a success story. The motion picture deserves a more profound consideration than a glance at its phenomenal growth. The cinema, as it matures, is finding its soul and becoming

¹Mrs. Thomas G. Winter, The History of Picture Making (Motion Picture Study Program, No. 1. Hollywood, California: n. d., apparently after 1935), p. 12.

²Richard Watts, Jr., "All Talking," Theatre Arts Monthly, 13:702, September, 1929.

conscious of certain standards of excellence as a dramatic art, certain possibilities for inspiration. These elements are ultimately the measure of the true greatness of the new art.

I. THE PROBLEM

Such a rapid development of motion pictures has resulted in numerous problems, many of which are yet unsolved. The purpose of this study, however, is not to attempt a solution of problems associated with motion pictures. The purpose is rather to study step by step the growth of the motion picture in the United States in order to note especially the elements of dramatic art in screen presentations today. Throughout the study, references to specific motion pictures will illustrate the elements discussed. Comparisons with drama on the legitimate stage will appear wherever such comparisons seem appropriate and valuable.

II. SOURCES OF DATA

For a subject as alive and rapidly changing as the motion picture, the number of books available is limited. The writer has made use of those books which were available at the time of the study. The majority of sources, however, are of the periodical type, and not many of these periodicals

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are scholarly in nature. Neither is the motion picture itself. It is a popular entertainment.

An important source of material, in fact, practically the only source of illustrations to clarify the discussion, is the motion picture itself. The writer has tried to make the scene specific through title and description. While this method is not so definite as a page reference, it is as accurate as possible when one is dealing with a drama of shadows.

Completely adequate research on this subject would include unlimited time in a projection room with a large film library at one's disposal. The best source of information about the motion picture is the art itself. However, since this ideal situation is not possible, this study must confine itself to material from available books and periodicals and to the films appearing upon the screens of the local motion picture theatres.

III. ORGANIZATION

The present study divides itself into three parts. Part I presents a brief history of the development of the motion picture in the United States through a discussion of outstanding steps of progress. Part II deals with the motion

picture of today as a dramatic art form with certain definite characteristics which distinguish it from other dramatic forms. Part III devotes itself to the goals of the motion picture as seen by its friends and its opponents. A brief summary and conclusions bring the study to a close.

The first of these parts presents only the high points in the development of motion pictures in the United States. Chapter I shows the situation of the rudimentary moving pictures at the beginning of the twentieth century. This situation is represented by the film, The Great Train Robbery, as a concrete example of this stage in the history of the cinema.

Chapter II of Part I concerns the position of motion pictures in 1915. In that year appeared The Birth of a Nation, a picture which was hailed as marking a new era in motion picture production.

Chapter III of Part I deals with the coming of sound, not so much as a discussion of the mechanical inventions as a consideration of the effects of this innovation upon screen presentations.

In Chapter IV Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs appears as a specific example of the best in animated cartoons, another important development in motion picture technique.

The use of technicolor, together with its possibilities in achieving dramatic effects, is the subject of Chapter V.

Part II considers the motion picture of today as a distinctive dramatic art form. Various phases of the art are considered in separate chapters, as the theme of the picture, the acting, the directing, the photography, the scenario, and the use of music, always with emphasis upon standard dramatic elements. The picture as a whole leads to a discussion of the editing and the social values. Numerous examples from specific films illustrate the phases of the art which make it unusual in the dramatic field.

The goals of the motion picture discussed in Part III of this study are based on opinions of leaders of the industry and views of adverse critics. The last chapter summarizes the growth of the cinema and attempts to show that the motion picture has become a "universal art" as well as a leading industry.³

³ Gilbert Seldes, "Motion Pictures," Scribner's Magazine, 103:66, March, 1938.

CHAPTER I

THE MOTION PICTURE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

As early as 65 B. C. Lucretius commented on persistence of vision,¹ the fact that the image of an object remains a fraction of a second after the object is removed. This is the fundamental idea underlying all motion pictures, an idea which inventors have found challenging for more than a century.²

One of the earliest devices to give the illusion of motion pictures appeared in 1825 in England as a toy called the "Thaumatrope."³ This toy was merely a card with a picture of one object, perhaps a bird, printed on the front and the picture of another object, perhaps a cage, printed on the back. The card could be whirled end for end by means of a string fastened at the center of the card. Bringing these objects before the eye in quick succession made the bird appear to enter the cage. This toy became extremely popular,

¹Ben J. Lubbock, The Story of the Motion Picture (New York City: Reeland Publishing Company, Inc., 1920), p. 10.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 13.

and many other toys were invented making use of the principle of persistence of image. This study, however, must not concern itself with the other early experiments which did not exceed the proportions of interesting toys. One picturesque story before the beginning of the twentieth century deserves attention because of its great importance in the history of the photographic motion picture.

In 1872 some horsemen in California wanted to discover whether a racing horse ever had all four feet off the ground simultaneously.⁴ The only method of deciding the question was photography. Muybridge, an Englishman employed in survey work for the United States government, set up twenty-four cameras in a row. He attached threads to the shutters and stretched them across the race-track. The running horse broke the threads and released the camera shutters. After repeated trials using a white horse against a black painted fence, Muybridge obtained clear images, which proved that at one moment the horse did have all four feet off the ground. With the financial assistance of Governor Leland Stanford, Muybridge continued his experiments until he achieved remarkable results in instantaneous photography.

⁴
Ibid., pp. 29-30.

The first moving pictures to be shown widely were outdoor scenes. In the decade of the 1890's appeared such pictures as The Buffalo Horse Market, Feeding the Doves, and The Black Diamond Express. Then came travel pictures taken from the back platform of a train or other moving vehicle.⁵ In addition to these there were a few comedies. A favorite comic showed a man sneezing violently, then discovering the small boy with the pepper, and spanking the boy in punishment.⁶ Such pictures are but simple, childish forms of entertainment when viewed in the light of the modern screen play; but they were indeed important as the infant entertainment began feeling its way toward maturity.

The last days of the nineteenth century were busy days and bitter days as well. Men looked ahead and saw money in the infant business.⁷ One after another men forsook their business as clothing merchants, fur dealers, and glove salesmen, as they saw the possibilities of this great new business.

⁵Ibid., p. 52.

⁶Lubschez, loc. cit.

⁷Will H. Hays, See and Hear (n. p. : Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, 1929), p. 14.

Adolph Zukor, a fur dealer in Chicago, had lent three thousand dollars to a friend. The money was invested in a penny arcade, which was not proving profitable. Zukor investigated, transformed the penny arcade into a Kinetoscope Theatre, and more than saved his endangered loan. He then forsook the fur business for the picture industry.⁸

One evening a glove salesman, Samuel Goldfish, visited a little kino booth on Broadway. He was a young man of thirty with an income of fifteen thousand dollars a year and every reason to be satisfied; yet as he left the Broadway picture house, he saw a new career opening for him. His brother-in-law, Jesse Lasky, agreed to join Goldfish (Goldwyn) in starting a film factory.⁹

Thus did the new industry draw from all walks of life men who gradually became conscious of the possibilities of the film. Among the early films of a narrative nature one finds The Life of an American Fireman by Edwin S. Porter, but this was a meager attempt at story telling.¹⁰

⁸ John Anderson, The American Theatre, (New York City: The Dial Press, 1938), pp. 106-107.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 107-108.

¹⁰ Hays, op. cit., p. 18.

Then came the world-wide sensation of The Great Train Robbery, generally regarded as the screen's first effort to tell a story in pictures.¹¹ It was made in 1903 by the Edison studios and started a great development of making pictures with stories. Showmen took the picture on the road in black tents.¹² From this picture the screen world received its first star--Max Aronson, later known as "Broncho Billy."¹³ Since then the star system has been ever present.

The Great Train Robbery was followed by such pictures as The Great Bank Robbery, Raffles--The Amateur Cracksman, and Trapped by Bloodhounds, or a Lynching at Cripple Creek.¹⁴ The titles suggest the nature of the pictures.

The Great Train Robbery was the first long film, eight hundred feet as compared with two or three hundred feet of the early films.¹⁵ Its production cost the unbelievable sum of approximately four hundred dollars.¹⁶

¹¹Hays, loc. cit.

¹²Loc. cit.

¹³Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵Lubschez, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 53. Cf. post, p. 14.

About 1905 appeared the first motion picture studio. Built by the Edison Company, it was pivoted at one end, with the other end on a circular track so that it might be swung toward the sun. The roof could be opened to the sky. Since the studio was covered with black tar-paper, it was called "Black Maria."¹⁷

The first places for showing motion pictures in this country were tents, stores, and legitimate theatres. In November, 1905, a real estate operator in Pittsburgh furnished a vacant room with a movie projector, a piano, ninety-nine seats, and the film, The Great Train Robbery. The admission was only five cents, but admissions poured in as fast as the one-reel show could be ground out. The experiment was so successful that hundreds of "nickelodeons" opened every week. By 1907 there were five thousand of them.¹⁸ All of these "nickelodeons" were increasing the demand for motion pictures, a demand which put an extraordinary strain on the producing industry. Studios had to be built. The organization became more stable, for hit-and-run methods were no longer adequate.¹⁹ The Great Train Robbery had been epoch-making, as it brought with it the use of plot to the motion picture screen.

¹⁷Lubschez, loc. cit.

¹⁸Hays, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 18.

CHAPTER II

THE MOTION PICTURE OF 1915

This chapter discusses the motion picture as it made its next significant step forward, the improvement which was embodied in the picture, The Birth of a Nation, in 1915. The years between 1903 and 1915 must not be ignored. Motion pictures were appearing and technical improvements were being made. While the new form of entertainment was becoming increasingly popular, there appeared some good pictures and some rising stars. The year 1915, however, overshadows the preceding years. Says Mr. Mackaye, "The whole course and direction of the entertainment world was to be changed by a bloodless revolution."¹

The discussion of the picture, The Birth of a Nation, aims to show the motion picture of 1915 at its best. To be sure, there were other films of that year. The writer feels, however, that a detailed discussion of this one outstanding film will serve the survey purpose of this chapter better than a scattered consideration of many pictures. With the

¹Milton Mackaye, "The Birth of a Nation," Scribner's Magazine, 102:40, November, 1937.

appearance of this picture, "the screen," Mr. Hays believes, "had caught up with its older brother, the stage."² Perhaps this is an absurd claim. At least facts are needed to support such exclamations of praise. Around such facts centers this discussion of the nature of motion pictures by the year 1916.

The Birth of a Nation was the first film to run twelve reels and the first to receive a two-dollar admission price. Estimates of H. E. Aitken, president of the company which financed the picture, show a gross income of eighteen million dollars and profits varying from twelve million to thirteen million dollars.³ These figures may be compared with the two million dollars received by an outstanding picture today. The picture ran forty-seven weeks at the Liberty Theater in New York and almost a year in Boston and in Chicago.⁴ For three years the picture was shown in the leading cities of the United States, of Europe, of South Africa, and of Australia, although until this time motion picture entertainment had not been rated high by intelligent people. For a year or two after its original tours it came to regular motion-picture

²Will H. Hays, See and Hear (n. p. : Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, 1929), p. 20.

³Mackaye, loc. cit.

⁴Loc. cit.

houses at a lower price than that charged when it was first released. That it was even more popular in the southern states than in the northern sections of the country is shown by the fact that it played in the South continually for fifteen years.

A musical sound track was added to the film after the coming of sound, but this innovation was not successful because it was inferior to the beautiful music once played with the picture by traveling symphony orchestras.⁵

Mr. Mackaye attempts to correct several erroneous legends which have grown up around The Birth of a Nation. According to him it was not the first picture to be "road-showed,"⁶ nor was it the first film with a synchronized musical score.⁷ Likewise costs of the film have been exaggerated. Mr. Mackaye gives the cost as between ninety thousand and one hundred thousand dollars and the size of the case as six hundred.⁸ The actual "shooting" of the picture occupied nine

⁵ Mackaye, loc. cit.

⁶ Ibid., p. 42. D'Annunzio's Cabiria and Quo Vadis had been road-showed previously in America.

⁷ Loc. cit. In 1908 Saint-Saens arranged the music for L'Assassinat de duc de Guise.

⁸ Loc. cit.

weeks rather than one year, as is sometimes reported.⁹

But regardless of the legends, The Birth of a Nation marked the birth of the modern motion picture. According to Mr. Mackaye, "there for the first time was the scope for amalgamating and elevating a brilliant virtuosity into art."¹⁰

Early in the twentieth century David Wark Griffith, later the director of The Birth of a Nation, came from Kentucky to New York. There he worked as an actor, a writer, and a day laborer. Finally he began submitting scenarios to the motion pictures, and at last the Biograph Company agreed to let him direct a picture himself. This picture, Dolly's Adventure, gave evidence of the ability of its director.

Mr. Griffith was the first to realize that conventions of the stage play must be changed for the screen.¹¹ He sought naturalness in acting and looked for talent not hardened by the technique of the legitimate stage. He then left the Biograph Company for the Mutual, at one thousand dollars a week and received a contract to make two independent productions a year.¹²

⁹ Mackaye, loc. cit.

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Loc. cit.

¹² Ibid., p. 43.

In 1914 a scenario writer called Griffith's attention to a novel and play by Thomas Dixon--The Clansman.^{*} Griffith had a desire to present the Southern view of Reconstruction. Dixon granted an option on the story and reluctantly agreed to take as payment a twenty-five per cent interest in the picture. The result was the largest sum any author has ever received for a motion picture story--one million dollars;¹³

An unending struggle for money complicated the difficulties of the production. H. E. Aitken advanced twenty-five thousand dollars from resources of Mutual but was forced by the directors of the company to take over the investment himself.¹⁴ Griffith's agents even found difficulty in securing horses for the picture because of the German and Allied agents who were buying horses for the World War. The responsibility of this early director is shown by the following brief summary of his daily activities:

¹³ Mackaye, loc. cit.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

^{*}This novel presents the story of Reconstruction from the viewpoint of the South.

In the end, Griffith was passing the hat in Pasadena and Los Angeles, rising at 5:30 to go on location, spending the evening going over "rushes"* and rainy days seeking finances.¹⁵

Members of Griffith's company remained loyal even without salary, and the story is told that Lillian Gish and her sister offered their last three hundred dollars as a help to the production.¹⁶ But at last Griffith interested William Glune, a theatre owner of Los Angeles, who invested fifteen thousand dollars in The Birth of a Nation.¹⁷

To realize in part the difficulties of production involved, one must remember that there was no artificial lighting, there were no set-designers, no wardrobe mistresses, hairdressers, or maids. Lillian Gish came to the studio every day with many cumbersome parcels and bags, a fact which gave rise to one of the most famous scenes of the drama.¹⁸ In this scene Miss Gish visits a Union hospital where the Little Colonel is a patient. A soldier on duty gives her a lovesick,

¹⁵Mackaye, op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁷Loc. cit.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 45.

*Studio term for scenes in a picture taken one day and processed and shown to the director or producer the next day.

wistful glance. Not even Griffith, when questioned, could give the name of the extra who played the part of the soldier. Miss Gish, however, remembered that he was a sailor named Freeman, who helped her every morning with her parcels and bags. Griffith saw Freeman's yearning glance one morning while the soldier and Miss Gish were both in costume. He shouted to the cameraman, "Get that." Thus Sailor Freeman was immortalized, and the picture brought forth an international laugh.¹⁹

Although the source of the story was The Clansman, there is more Griffith than Dixon in the picture.²⁰ The first part of the story deals with the love of a girl from the North and a man from the South. A second love story uses as characters a southern girl and a northern man. The second half of the picture concerns Reconstruction in the South. There was no written scenario. Griffith described the story to the actors a single scene at a time, including the emotions the scene should produce. A specific incident may illustrate the way in which Griffith worked.

¹⁹ Mackaye, loc. cit.

²⁰ Loc. cit.

Miss Gish was really a "stand-in"²¹ for a better-known actress who was to play the part of Elsie Stoneman. In the rehearsal of the scene where Lynch, the mulatto, lifted the girl to his shoulder, Miss Gish's long blonde hair fell down her back. Griffith was alert and immediately saw the emotional possibilities of that contrast between "black villainy and blonde innocence."²¹

For the mass scenes Griffith appointed straw bosses, explained to them what he wanted, and left them to rehearse with their own men. In photographing the battle scenes, Griffith and Billy Bitzer, his cameraman, were on a sixty-foot tower. Griffith announced orders through an amplifier. The rides of the Ku Klux Klan were carried out by California cowboys, some of whom were circus and rodeo riders.²²

In spite of today's advance in camera technique, the battle scenes of The Birth of a Nation are still outstanding. The panoramic views seem to be scenes of actual war. One example of the effectiveness of the photography is the scene in which Griffith tells the story of Sherman's march to the sea.

²¹ Mackaye, op. cit., p. 46.

²² Loc. cit.

*One who takes the place of the real actor for experiments with lighting, adjustment of cameras, etc.

The camera shows a starved mother and two crying children standing on a hill top. The scene shifts so that the audience may look with the mother down upon a valley where an army column moves along while haystacks and houses burn in the distance.

This screen play makes use of intense dramatic moments, which suggest far more than dialogue could express. One such dramatic moment occurs when the returned hero stands facing his sister, the two realizing all the suffering since he went away. That, according to James Shelley Hamilton, is one of the most eloquent bits in the play.²³

With The Birth of a Nation Griffith brought several innovations to motion picture technique. He realized that even past action could be presented visually. For that purpose he invented the "flash-back," a view of a past or distant scene inserted almost as an illustration would be placed in a book.²⁴ He made use of the "close-up"* to give

²³James Shelley Hamilton, "Putting a New Move in the Movies," Everybody's Magazine, 32:677-86, June, 1915.

²⁴Loc. cit.

*Any photograph in a motion picture in which the major subject occupies a large portion of the total space.

emphasis.²⁵ He introduced simultaneous action with all its possibilities of increasing dramatic tension. In the last part of the picture he kept three currents of action moving: a girl imprisoned, a band of refugees fighting for their lives, and horsemen gathering for the rescue.²⁶

The picture opened in Clune's Auditorium in Los Angeles under the title The Clansman. When Dixon saw the picture, however, he exclaimed that it was bigger than the book, The Clansman, and needed a more inclusive title.²⁷ It was Dixon who then thought of the title which has become famous.

There followed in New York an advertising campaign,²⁸ which, according to Theodore Mitchell, the chief publicity man, cost more than \$47,000. The play opened at the Astor on March 6, 1915. It received enthusiastic reviews from the best dramatic critics. Immediately the picture sold out for two hundred eighty performances.²⁹

²⁵Hamilton, op. cit., p. 682.

²⁶Loc. cit.

²⁷Mackaye, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁸Loc. cit.

²⁹Loc. cit.

When the film opened in Boston, there were riots because of the treatment of the race question. Negroes threw eggs at the screen. The next morning about seven hundred colored people gathered on the steps of the State House, listened to speeches, and sang songs. A committee saw the governor. The legislature even passed a bill which provided that the mayor, the police commissioner, and the chief magistrate of the municipal court, or any two of them, might revoke licenses for public amusements at will.³⁰ Mr. Mackaye sums up the adverse criticism of the play:

Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard, charged the picture with tending to pervert white ideals. Jane Addams was "painfully exercised over the exhibition." Francis Hackett in The New Republic called Thomas Dixon a "yellow clergyman." Oswald Garrison Villard in The Nation said that the picture was a "deliberate attempt to humiliate 10,000,000 American citizens and portray them as nothing but beasts." Booker T. Washington wrote indignant letters to the newspapers.³¹

Francis Hackett's scathing comments in The New Republic indicate how bitter was the criticism launched against the picture, The Birth of a Nation, because it presented the viewpoint of the South. Mr. Hackett says:

³⁰"progressive Protest against Anti-Negro Film," The Survey, 34:209, June 5, 1915.

³¹Mackaye, op. cit., p. 46.

We know what a yellow journalist is. He is not yellow because he reports crimes of violence. He is yellow because he distorts them. In the region of history the Rev. Thomas Dixon corresponds to the yellow journalist. He is a clergyman, but he is a yellow clergyman. He is yellow because he recklessly distorts negro crimes, gives them a disproportionate place in life, and colors them dishonestly to inflame the ignorant and credulous. And he is especially yellow, and quite disgustingly and contemptibly yellow, because his perversions are cunningly calculated to flatter the white man and provoke hatred and contempt for the negro.³²

On the other hand, Woodrow Wilson's statement is typical of the favorable attitude toward the picture. Rising from a private showing of the picture in the White House, he said, "It is like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is that it is all so terribly true."³³

Even by the middle of the year 1915 some far-sighted persons saw the moving picture as a new art of the day. In that year James S. Hamilton expressed his ideas of the motion picture:

It isn't every decade or every century, that has a chance to watch the birth and growth of a new art form. The art of moving-pictures is here, leaping forward as nothing artistic ever leaped before.³⁴

³²Francis Hackett, "Brotherly Love," The New Republic, 2:185, March 20, 1915.

³³Mackaye, op. cit., p. 69.

³⁴Hamilton, op. cit., p. 67B.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF SOUND

In the years between 1915 and 1928 the organization of the motion picture industry became more complex. New production companies were formed, and in 1921 the industry committed itself to a policy for the improvement of motion pictures.¹ The result of this new objective was the formation of The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. Aside from the growth of the industry, the decade following the World War saw many technical improvements in the screen play. The period was by no means static, but the next revolutionary change was the coming of sound to the screen.

This chapter deals with this innovation and its effect upon the nature of the film art. The proper balance between the appeal to the eye and the appeal to the ear is a problem sufficiently challenging for any dramatic art. The motion picture is no exception. Opinions vary, some critics favoring an emphasis upon sound at the expense of the visual aspects of a picture. Equally fervent are those who

¹Will H. Hays, See and Hear (n. p. : Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, 1929), p. 20.

believe that sound should be only subordinate to pantomime, never obvious in itself. This moot question forms a part of the discussion of Chapter III. It is as the first step of primary significance after 1915, that this study considers the coming of sound to the motion picture. The change marks a definite stride upward from the plateau period of the preceding decade.

The coming of sound to the motion picture may be compared to the addition of dialogue to the dances and pantomimes which were the forerunners of stage drama. Both arts originally used action and movement as the fundamental elements for presenting the story, then added the spoken word as a later development. In both cases this addition of dialogue met with protests from numerous critics.²

Alexander Bakshy summarizes these protests.³ Critics held that dialogue was foreign to the screen, which should appeal to the eye rather than to the ear. They argued that dialogue intellectualized the theatre or the screen play; whereas the true art should express itself through visual forms.

²Alexander Bakshy, "Concerning Dialogue," The Nation, 135:151, August 17, 1932.

³Loc. cit.

Another chief objection to the "talkie" was that it was "mechanical."⁴ But these defenders of the silent motion picture were forgetting that a motion picture itself is in its very nature mechanical. Such critics were accepting the mechanical appeal to the eye but rejecting any mechanical appeal to the ear.

What was the cause of these protests against dialogue? A glance at the nature of the first talkies will give the answer.

In the last few years of the 1920's people were becoming tired of silent pictures, and for that reason they turned with astonishing enthusiasm to the motion picture with the additional marvel of sound.⁵ August 6, 1926, is generally considered the date of this revolution in pictures.⁶ On that day Don Juan, a Warner Brothers film with musical accompaniment but no speech, first appeared. Later in the fall The Jazz Singer with Al Jolson, a full-length film containing dialogue, really started the upheaval. Then when Jolson's second film, The Singing Fool, appeared in 1928, the stampede in favor of sound began.

⁴R. E. Sherwood, "Renaissance in Hollywood," The American Mercury, 16:435, April, 1929.

⁵George Kent, "New Crisis in the Motion Picture Industry," Current History, 33:889, March, 1931.

⁶Loc. cit.

The silent picture, however, did not go to its doom unwept and unsung. Many who had looked condescendingly upon motion pictures arose to point out the virtues of the silent pictures as an artistic medium far excelling the blatant "talkie."⁷

Some of these criticisms were just, for the sound pictures of the first few years lacked the balance of our present-day films at their best. How is this true? Both the producer and the public wanted to hear the actors talk; so talk they did, far too lengthily.⁸ Talking became the main thing. It kept the picture from moving as it should have moved. About the year 1929 motion picture experts began to realize this serious fault of the talking picture, as is shown by the following quotation:

We are appealing very definitely to one sense-- the sense of hearing but we are neglecting the visual side of pictures. This must stop, and we are already taking measures to stop it.⁹

Besides talking too much, early sound pictures had other serious faults. How did they talk? Voices frequently

⁷ Bakshy, loc. cit.

⁸ Monta Bell, "The Director," Theatre Arts Monthly, 13:648, September, 1929.

⁹ Loc. cit.

sounded unnatural. The heroine lisped. There came a hissing sound with the occurrence of every "s." Worse still, the sound at times came just a few seconds too late as the hero moved his lips in an intense speech at the climax of the play. All of these disturbing deficiencies were the result of mechanical imperfections, which kept sound pictures in the realm of an experiment and a novelty for several years after their first appearance. For after all, the first consideration in a talking picture is an absolutely faultless reproduction of human speech.¹⁰ Without that, the entertainment could never enter the realm of art.

The immediate effect of the popularity of the sound picture was almost unbelievable so far as Hollywood was concerned. The Singing Fool made five million dollars. Then came The Letter, The Broadway Melody, Bulldog Drummond, and many others--hurriedly made.¹¹ In the panic to produce sound pictures quickly, many directors, actors, and writers were recruited from Broadway because there they had had experience

¹⁰ Alexander Bakshy, "A Year of Talkies," The Nation, 128:773, June 26, 1929.

¹¹ John S. Cohen, "This Year of Sound," Theatre Arts Monthly, 13:650, September, 1929.

with the spoken word,¹² Screen stars rushed to elocution teachers and learned to talk in stiff, characterless voices.¹³ Those who attained real success in the new medium were the child actors, unconscious of the microphone; negro performers, not interested in the technique of acting; some experienced stage and screen players, such as Lionel Barrymore.¹⁴

The new arrivals in Hollywood, those who were familiar with stage productions, were encouraged to make adaptations from stage plays rather than to write original stories for the screen. The result was far from satisfactory, for lines from a stage play usually do not make convincing dialogue for a motion picture. That was a lesson which the "talkies" soon learned, as they felt their way toward their own art form.

These differences between the dialogue of the stage and that of the screen no doubt need more specific explanation and illustration. Mr. Bakshy helps clarify the difference.¹⁵ Of course even the most realistic stage play does not reproduce

¹² Sherwood, op. cit., p. 433.

¹³ Richard Watts, "All Talking," Theatre Arts Monthly, 13:709, September, 1929.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

¹⁵ Bakshy, "Concerning Dialogue," op. cit., p. 152.

life as it is. It molds it to fit the stage. In the speech which the stage play uses, characters are enabled to inform the audience of action taking place off stage. The motion picture may present such action visually by a change of scene and thereby eliminate such lines of explanation. Dialogue elaborates and fills out the action of the stage play. This use is possible in the screen play, too; but pictorial devices, such as close-ups and dramatic shifts of the camera, supplement spoken lines. On the stage a character makes the audience aware of his thoughts by dialogue. The motion picture may insert a "fade-in"* or "fade-out"† to indicate a character's thoughts. Stage dialogue adds wit and in some plays glories in its own imagery and music. Since the screen has so many other means at its command for achieving the ends for which stage speech is used, even the most "natural" stage lines appear inflated and artificial on the screen.¹⁶

The way in which screen speech differs from ordinary conversation or from stage dialogue in rhythm and tempo may

¹⁶Bakshy, loc. cit.

*The gradual appearance of a projected picture from darkness to brilliancy.

†The gradual disappearance of a screen image.

be illustrated by the following lines.¹⁷ Mother and daughter are discussing the problems of a Fifth Avenue business, just started by the daughter. The younger woman is afraid that the money will give out before they attain success.

Mother: What a wonderful show window we have! It cost eight hundred dollars to fix it up, but it will repay us.

Daughter: People do stop and admire it. But--will they come in and buy? I wish I could be sure of that.

Mother: Of course they'll come in. Not at first, to be sure. But after a few days. They always shy away from new shops, until they feel they belong.

Daughter: But can we wait? Think how much this shop is costing us every twenty-four hours. How much cash have we?

Mother: Quite enough to keep things going smoothly for two more weeks, even if we don't make a single sale. Don't worry, dear.

Daughter: I read in a book that it takes months and months for a business like this to establish itself. Suppose we take that long?

Compare this with the much faster rhythm built around the unit of talk-gesture-silence. No sound picture has time for such leisurely, commonplace talk as the above.¹⁸

¹⁷Walter B. Pitkin and William M. Marston, The Art of Sound Pictures (New York City: D. Appleton and Company, 1930), p. 121.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 123.

Mother: Great window, that!
(Peers out. Both silent an instant)

Daughter: Bah! It won't pay.
(Shrugs shoulder and turns back to mother)

Mother: Give it a week. People will come.
(Daughter laughs hysterically. Both women silent a moment)

Daughter: How's cash?

Mother: Good for two weeks.
(Silence again, then daughter laughs hysterically)

Mother: What's wrong, child?

Daughter: Two weeks! Ha! We need enough for six months.¹⁹

The industry gradually learned that "sound is not something to be added to the silent picture. It is, rather, a basic factor in a wholly new art which also makes use of motion pictures."²⁰

Soon the tendency was to minimize the importance of speech in the film. Eisenstein, the Russian director of Potemkin, may have started the movement, when he stated that for the art to remain pure cinema, speech must be reduced and sound used only to enhance the effectiveness of pantomime.²¹

To understand the effects of the coming of sound upon the motion picture itself, one needs to look first

¹⁹Ibid., p. 124.

²⁰Ibid., p. 11.

²¹Kent, op. cit., p. 889.

at the opinions of critics of the time. Charlie Chaplin stood out against the "talkies." He favored the use of music and sound effects rather than speech.²² Some of the most impressive scenes of present-day moving pictures are based upon this very principle. The shrill sound of the bullet as it pierces the cheerful sounds of spring in the picture, All Quiet on the Western Front, is an example of the effect of sound other than that of the human voice.

The effect of sound upon the style of acting will be considered more completely in the chapter on acting in Part II. It should be mentioned here, however, that the apparently exaggerated gestures of the players in silent pictures were the result of an attempt to make the audience understand without the aid of speech. This obvious nature of the acting of the silent picture contrasts with the subtle acting possible with the new element of sound. Such an advance in the art of acting was of course not immediately apparent. Critics, consequently, occupied themselves with less fundamental results of the changed screen play.

For fostering an international spirit, George Kent considered the silent picture the most powerful unifying force

²²Kent, loc. cit.

of modern times.²³ It was universal in its appeal through pantomime. The addition of sound made the cinema national because of the barrier of language. Riots and disorders frequently accompanied the showing of talking pictures in the language of a country against which feeling at the time was running high. Each country wanted films in its own language or dialect.

As late as 1932 Alexander Bakshy considered the coming of sound as a detriment to the art of the screen play. In the following words he explains his reasons:

Years of slow development have gained the film a freedom from set scenes, and a power to select and order its primary material that are peculiarly its own. The stressing of dialogue as the main vehicle of dramatic narrative has thrown the film back to the long scenes of its early youth.²⁴

William DeMille thought of the "talkie" as the child of Mother Movie and Father Stage, a child that was causing distinct alarm for both parents.²⁵ A part of this alarm was reflected in the panic to change Hollywood in accordance with the new sound medium.

²³Ibid., p. 887.

²⁴Bakshy, "Concerning Dialogue," op. cit., p. 152.

²⁵William DeMille, "The Screen Speaks," Scribner's Magazine, 85:367, April, 1929.

In addition to the change in motion picture personnel made necessary by the coming of sound, Hollywood changed physically to a complex organism of soundproof stages, recording apparatus, mixer and monitor rooms, and an intricate system of controls and playbacks.²⁶ The theatres all over the country had to be equipped with apparatus for reproducing the sound. The cost of changing Hollywood was estimated between ten million and fifteen million dollars. The cost to theatre owners was between fifty million and one hundred million dollars.²⁷ But since the public was fascinated by the innovation, the people really paid for the Hollywood revolution with the increased admission price at the theatres.

One of the first problems for producers and directors was to find the proper relation between the camera and the microphone. The camera is extremely mobile; whereas the microphone is practically stationary, that is, it must be in a fairly fixed position when recording the words of a speaker or the sound of a musical instrument.²⁸ At least that contrast in mobility was the difficulty encountered by early directors.

²⁶Kent, op. cit., p. 889.

²⁷Loc. cit.

²⁸Gilbert Seldes, "The Mobile Camera," The New Republic, 60:298, October 30, 1929.

In the early "talkies" the microphone immobilized the camera. The early talking picture, The Trial of Mary Dugan, was almost a literal photograph of the play.²⁹ Gentlemen of the Press seemed to have been photographed in two rooms, thus neglecting the screen's great attribute in the art of pictorial movement.³⁰

The percentage of eye-drama to ear-drama is considerably greater in the screen play than on the stage. In moments more subtle or intense a talking picture can sustain itself by sheer pantomime because the audience seems so close to the character that facial expression tells the story. This element of delicate pantomime has not been lost in the new technique of sound.³¹ This intimacy of the cinema compels the spectator to look at the essential point, which is the dramatic focus of the moment.³² Perhaps the reaction of the person addressed is of greater importance than the sight of the person speaking. In that case the camera easily reveals the facial expression of the listener at the same time that the audience hears the words of the speaker.

²⁹ Cohen, op. cit., p. 650.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 653.

³¹ DeMille, op. cit., p. 371.

³² Ibid., p. 372.

Some directors of early talking pictures failed to grasp the relationship of camera and microphone. For example, a character opens a letter and reads every word of it to the audience when a close-up of the letter could easily have been inserted. The director has obviously obeyed the law of the stage instead of that of the screen.³³

By way of contrast, one may look at a bit of effective photography in the show, Applause.³⁴ A mean lover of a fading burlesque queen turns to her and tells her she is old and ugly and finished. The camera hovers over the actress's face, then moves slowly to a framed picture of her in her youth, then back to her as she is now. The contrast, as the bitter voice continues, is immensely effective. This is only one of hundreds of examples of such moments when the camera speaks louder than the microphone.

The effect of the talking picture upon the legitimate stage has been widely discussed. Mr. Sherwood welcomes the "talkie" as being profitable enough that it can be made for a smaller, more appreciative group. Moreover, it can now discriminate between one type of audience and another just as

³³ Sherwood, op. cit., p. 433.

³⁴ Seldes, op. cit., p. 299.

the stage does. It will not be so much concerned with pleasing people in all parts of the world.³⁵

John Galsworthy, when asked the effect of the "talkie" upon the regular theatre, said that it might reduce audiences for the coarser and more melodramatic type of play and consolidate the more fastidious playgoers.³⁶

Several critics have felt that even the addition of sound would not enable the motion picture to take the place of living actors. The eagerness of persons to see a screen actor in person has been given as evidence that the pictures or photographs of the actor do not satisfy.³⁷ Such a conclusion may be open to question. Whether or not this desire to see an actor in person indicates a preference for the stage play, the immediate effects of the sound picture upon the legitimate stage seem to have been more imagined than real.

Unquestionably upon the art of the motion picture itself, the effects of sound were ultimately beneficial.

³⁵ Sherwood, op. cit., p. 436.

³⁶ "Galsworthy on the Talkies," The Living Age, 338:350, May 15, 1930.

³⁷ George Jean Nathan, "The Play Is Still the Thing," The Forum, 86:37, July, 1931.
 Prince Henry of Reuss, "Talkies and the Stage," The Living Age, 339:298-300, November, 1930.

As the mechanical deficiencies were overcome, other improvements followed. Scenes ran more smoothly into one another; acting was less stiff; and effects were increasingly cinematic.³⁸ "Unostentatiously and clumsily," says Richard Watts, "but guided distantly by the influence of the Chaplin greatness, there was born a new technique that was cinema, as opposed to stage acting."³⁹

Foreign markets for American films did decline, but perhaps that was in reality a blessing because pictures could then be made for a more limited public. Before the coming of sound, America supplied from thirty-five to ninety-five per cent of the film needs of the European countries. With the addition of sound this figure declined to ten per cent and even less.⁴⁰

One distinct improvement which the talking picture brought to the industry was a better type of director. No longer could the director be anyone who had had a little experience, even with a medicine show. Production of sound scenes required forethought and intelligent planning. The director had to make talking pictures or return to his medicine show.⁴¹

³⁸Bakshy, "A Year of Talkies," op. cit., p. 773.

³⁹Watts, op. cit., p. 707.

⁴⁰Kent, op. cit., p. 890.

⁴¹Sherwood, op. cit., p. 432.

The sound picture eliminated subtitles, too, together with the possibilities of retitling* before a picture was released, thus causing a character to express a thought which was not in his mind when the scene was acted before the camera.⁴² In 1931 Mr. Kent thus summarized improvements in the quality of sound films: dialogue is more real; new stars are on the whole a more capable and intelligent group of actors than the old; methods of recording have improved; direction is far better after a mastery of the new medium has been attained.⁴³

The coming of sound meant chaos in the motion picture industry for a time--a period of experimentation in which dialogue was given so prominent a place in the picture that it overshadowed pantomime. When the balance between microphone and camera was discovered, the motion picture stepped forward into a new era. In 1929 Mr. Cohen looked back over the first year of sound;

Nor is there any question but that the past year--chaotic and eventful as it has been with a medium changing bodily in form and content and potentialities--has been the most interesting year in the cinema since that momentous time when The Great Train Robbery startled the world.⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., p. 433.

⁴³Kent, op. cit., p. 891.

⁴⁴Cohen, op. cit., p. 655.

*Changing the words spoken by a character.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANIMATED CARTOON

A glance at the top-ranking film of the "Best Pictures of 1938"¹ will reveal what a wide chasm separates the present-day picture from the picture of pre-war days. In addition to the coming of sound, two obvious innovations present themselves--the use of technicolor and the development of the animated cartoon.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs has been hailed as the beginning of "the second great revolution in the history of the movies."² The first revolution was the coming of sound. Some would analyze the second upheaval as the threat which this first animated cartoon of feature length presents to living actors and their studios. In the words of Mr. Seldes the force of this new power is apparent:

For it seems to me that Mr. Disney has dug deep under the foundations of the Hollywood feature-picture industry and successfully placed his dynamite, so that now it requires only the striking of a match to blow the whole thing up.³

¹"The Ten Best Films," Newsweek, 13:25, January 23, 1939.

²Miriam Stillwell, "Walt Disney's \$10,000,000 Surprise," The Reader's Digest, 32:25, June, 1938.

³Gilbert Seldes, "Motion Pictures," Scribner's Magazine, 103:65, March, 1938.

Of course the threat to the great studios is not immediate, for the popularity of living actors will not wane over night.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is not the first animated cartoon, not even the first cartoon in color. It is the culmination of the development in the field of the animated cartoon because it is the first picture of this type to attain the proportions of a full-length feature. It is used here only as an example of the best in this type of picture.

A look at the methods by which Mr. Disney produced Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs will indicate how great is the triumph of this picture in the light of present-day screen technique. The dialogue is natural, never intrusive.⁴

Mr. Disney has gone back to one of the first principles of moving pictures, that movement must express the essentials of the picture rather than fine phrases.⁵ He has taken a character from a fairy tale and created a Snow White who is convincingly human in movement and in thought.

Disney, however, looks upon this first feature as an imperfect experiment.⁶ He discovered that human beings are

⁴Seldes, loc. cit.

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶Stillwell, op. cit., p. 26.

harder to animate than animals because their movements are slower. Even after the film was running in New York, Mr. Disney made a new animation for the Prince. He sent it in and required the theatres to use it, too.⁷

Another lesson which the picture taught its creator was the importance of an appropriate musical background. Each dwarf had his own musical theme, and the music was designed to bring forth smiles or tears from the audience at suitable places in the story.⁸

Even a few of the amazing facts about the production of this film may serve to justify its importance to the picture industry of 1938. More than one and one-half million individual pen-and-ink drawings and water-color paintings were used in making the film.⁹ The sense of depth and distance, which this cartoon gives for the first time, was secured by the use of a camera eleven feet tall and six feet square to photograph the drawings in layers, thus giving the illusion of foreground, central action, and background. In making cartoons in color, the camera takes three exposures on each

⁷ Stillwell, loc. cit.

⁸ Loc. cit.

⁹ Andrew R. Boone, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," Popular Science, 132:50, January, 1938.

set of cells, recording red, green, and blue separately. To complete the 7,560-foot picture, three times that much film was really required.¹⁰ Later a print of each color was made, and the three were printed, one above the other, on a single negative.

The experiments for sound in this picture are a story in themselves. Five hundred voices were tested, so that nine might be selected for the characters of the cartoon.¹¹ Such devices as crashing glass, tumbling boxes to the floor, and walking in mud were all part of routine experiments. The artists then drew pictures to synchronize with the noises.¹² The noise of seven dwarfs washing their faces was produced by seven men splashing their heads in a tank of water and singing with their faces under the surface.¹³

The following description of the process of making drawings for one scene in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs may help clarify the steps in the production of any animated cartoon. Suppose Snow White is photographed singing. The

¹⁰ Boone, loc. cit.

¹¹ Loc. cit.

¹² Ibid., pp. 50-52.

¹³ Loc. cit.

lowest cell contains the "setting"--perhaps the wall of the house. Next above appears her body, minus arms and head. To show the necessary movements, two cells, one containing a drawing of her head and the other her arms, are placed in series above her body. These cells are replaced with new ones after each exposure to give the effect of movement. This process continues for perhaps sixty frames, enough to complete a well-rounded word. At the rate of twenty-four pictures a second, these paintings blend together to produce the illusion of motion in color. It is not surprising that this film has been called the world's biggest and most exacting job of painting.¹⁴

These have been but a few glimpses into the production of one of the world's most amazing moving pictures. Some claim that it is the most successful picture ever made. In the past year it received eight million dollars in world rentals and smashed the long-standing record of The Singing Fool, which has received five million dollars since 1928, the year of its release.¹⁵ The popularity of Disney's cartoon

¹⁴Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁵"The Ten Best Films," Newsweek, 13:25, January 23, 1939.

abroad is shown by the fact that it played for thirty-seven weeks in London, a movie run outstripped only by Ben Hur.¹⁶

It is perhaps too early to indicate any definite effects of animated cartoons upon the technique of the screen play. It is significant to note the balance that has been achieved between the camera and the microphone. Meaningful pantomime has taken the place of much of the verbosity of early sound productions. The technical perfection of this feature-length cartoon is amazing, a picture which has not one living actor, not one real background or stage setting, no lighting, no labor problems--nothing, as one critic says, save imagination and brains and beauty and love all set to music.¹⁷ Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs has seemed to open up an entirely new medium for screen stories. It is a medium unquestionably original, not in any way imitative of stage technique. It is important, too, as for the first time it adds movement to the realm of painting.

Many other animated cartoons furnish comedy on our screen today--films about Felix the Cat, Oswald the Rabbit,

¹⁶ "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," Theatre Arts Monthly, 23:5, January, 1939.

¹⁷ Stillwell, op. cit., p. 25.

Mickey Mouse, and Pop Eye. These are not silly things to be enjoyed only by children, for the source of these ridiculous actions of our screen cartoons is found in life itself. In the recent cartoon, Mickey Mouse's Trailer, a character greedily ate his corn from the cob to the accompaniment of sound produced by a typewriter, even to the ringing of the bell and the shifting of the carriage at the end of the ear. The laugh which that scene produced was no less hearty because it was at the expense of human greed and lack of refinement. In that same cartoon Mickey Mouse took down and folded up the beautiful scenery which formed the background for his home. And from behind that peaceful country view, there appeared the city dump. All of the apparently substantial improvements were folded compactly, and the trailer moved down the road. Obvious was the reflection of the modern tendency to live in trailer houses.

Perhaps then the animated cartoon should not be looked down upon by the sophisticated playgoer. It is reflecting for us a picture, perhaps exaggerated for comedy, a picture of life in twentieth century America. In the same way Ben Jonson held a mirror to the life of London as he saw it in Elizabethan England. Jonson was using human beings as his characters; the animated cartoon more frequently uses

animals, drawings which are made to act like human beings. The animated cartoon is a distinctive type of screen presentation. It brings to the audience all of the charm of the old beast fables, perhaps in streamlined form, but nevertheless a charm which links sophisticated America with the England that enjoyed "Chaunticleer and Pertelote."¹⁸

¹⁸The Nun's Priest's Tale in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

CHAPTER V

THE USE OF TECHNICOLOR

Technicolor, although not a part of every feature picture, appears frequently enough to deserve consideration. Color movies are a permanent feature of modern screen presentation.¹ Today technicolor is true color, for the color camera is now capable of reproducing whatever is placed in front of it, not only as to color but also as to light and shade.²

Experiments with color pictures began fifty years ago when Frederick E. Ives demonstrated the additive process for reproducing natural colors.³ Albert G. Smith then developed a process known as kinemacolor. He reduced the three primary color sensations to two, dividing the spectrum so the colors in each half corresponded to red-orange and blue-green.⁴

By 1928, technicolor engineers devised a process by which the dye was transferred from a gelatin relief or

¹"Miracle of New Color Movies," Popular Mechanics Magazine, 71:338, March, 1939.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 128A.

⁴Loc. cit.

matrix to a gelatin film. A two-color process was used in early pictures, such as The Ten Commandments in 1922 and 1923, The Vikings, and the Black Pirate. Photography of this type was not very realistic, for the reds and the blues were extremely brilliant.⁵ Pictures such as The Trail of the Lonesome Pine and Becky Sharp attracted much attention for a year or two; but not until shades were subdued to approximately the real colors of nature, did color contribute greatly to the enjoyment of a screen play. The three-component process now in use makes possible a more skillful use of color than the early methods permitted.⁶

In the present color camera a system of prismatic mirrors and light filters shunts red, green, and blue rays of light to three different negatives as they are exposed simultaneously through a single lens. The result is three films recording in black and white the intensities of these colors. Three gelatin reliefs are prepared from these films and dyed with their complementary colors. The dye next is transferred to another film strip which receives its images, one above the other, and contains a faint key image in gray

⁵ Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), p. 275.

⁶ "Miracle of New Color Movies," op. cit., p. 129A.

to aid in definition and registration. The finished product is a series of colored pictures, blended in every hue.⁷

Background effects for a color picture have proved an unusual problem. For example, while the main action goes on in the foreground of a picture, other action may be seen outside a window. In a black and white film this background action is frequently made by projecting the desired scene on the screen outside the window. Color pictures require so much more light than black and white ones that three projectors must be used to get the proper background effects. One projector shoots directly at the background screen. The other two project against mirrors set at a forty-five degree angle. Because of the intense heat, ordinary silvered glass mirrors could not be used. The problem has been solved by the use of fused quartz aluminized mirrors. These mirrors have operated many months with complete satisfaction.⁸

Perhaps an example will clarify the above explanation. In a motion picture there is a scene representing an old southern gentleman arguing with his negro servant about some

⁷ Ibid., p. 338.

⁸ "Fused Quartz Solves Color Movie Problem," Scientific American, 160;106-108, February, 1939.

pork chops, while through the dining room windows can be seen several thoroughbred horses grazing peacefully in a beautiful green Kentucky meadow. The dining room is a motion picture stage. The meadow and horses are projected on a screen from the back in such a way as to appear natural. This was a simple process in black and white pictures; but a picture in natural colors brings difficulty because it requires two or three times as much light.⁹ The fused quartz mirrors, however, have apparently solved the problem.

When a story is to be put into production, the first step is to determine its color key, that is, the proper colors to fit the story and the persons to play in it. Color combinations are worked out so as to build toward a climax. Color highlights are sometimes used to add to the dramatic effect.¹⁰ Such emphasis through color occurs in The Adventures of Robin Hood when King Richard and his followers throw off their somber black cloaks and hoods, revealing the red and white Crusaders' tunics and shining armor. This change from a somber to a brilliant color may be considered as symbolic of the change from despair to courage, hope, and faith.¹¹

⁹"Fused Quartz Solves Color Movie Problem," loc. cit.

¹⁰"Miracle of New Color Movies," op. cit., p. 128A.

¹¹Loc. cit.

The use of color in pictures complicates the photographing of natural scenes, particularly those scenes involving sunsets, flowers, and snow.¹² But movie assistants frequently help nature out of these difficult situations by painting the flowers or by using tinted filters to remove troublesome glares. The Trail of the Lonesome Pine was the first outdoor feature to be filmed in natural colors. In making this picture, the camera crew got up on four separate mornings to be on hand when the sun rose. In black and white pictures, a sunrise when reversed makes a better sunset than the real thing because of the absence of dust in the air. But for color pictures they found that they had to use a real sunset in order to get the indescribably beautiful colors.¹³ In this case nature allowed no substitute.

Scenes showing broad fields of flowers at first revealed that brilliant near-by tones "killed" those of the more distant flowers. Many workmen spent a half day thinning out the blooms within four hundred feet of the camera so that nature might be in "balance."¹⁴

¹² Andrew R. Boone, "Hollywood Improves on Nature in Making Outdoor Movies," Popular Science, 130:58, February, 1937.

¹³ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

Snow has peculiar effects upon color photography. Near Truckee, California, a cameraman took several tests and found that the snow gave off a dark blue color. The dark leading man had become blond; the blond leading lady had become brown. Reddish-brown make-up was applied, a yellow filter fitted to the camera, lenses of the cameras opened wider, and the snow's strange light effect was overcome.¹⁵

Some critics hail color photography as the art form of tomorrow; as yet it has not reached a state of perfection. The progress which has been made, however, is plainly evident when one compares the soft, natural tones of a recent picture in color, Jesse James for example, with the brilliant colors of some of the first technicolor pictures.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has merely suggested the high points in the development of motion pictures in America. It has omitted many progressive steps in the intervening years. Even this brief consideration, however, indicates that the development has been a series of upward steps with intervening

¹⁵Boone, loc. cit.

plateaus. Thus The Great Train Robbery was the first attempt to present a story on the screen. A "plateau" period followed, in which other films of this type were made.

In 1915 came The Birth of a Nation, which was an innovation in several ways: length, dramatic qualities, colossal dimensions, cost of production, admission price, and development of a new technique for screen acting.

The coming of sound about 1928 marked a revolutionary stride forward. Finally comes Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, showing the marvelous precision and beauty which have entered the motion picture industry. The future lies hidden, but the motion has become more than a leading industry. It is now a "universal art."¹⁶

¹⁶ Gilbert Seldes, "Motion Pictures," Scribner's Magazine, 103:66, March, 1938.

PART II

THE MOTION PICTURE OF TODAY
AS A DRAMATIC ART FORM

INTRODUCTION

The second part of this study leaves the historical development of the motion picture and turns to a consideration of the dramatic art form as it appears daily on thousands of local cinema screens. The various phases of this art are discussed in separate chapters, as the theme and the story in the first chapter, the acting in Chapter II, and the directing in Chapter III. The fourth chapter considers the element of photography as it contributes to the dramatic effects achieved by the film play. Chapter V devotes itself to the nature and the value of the scenario and the musical score. In Chapter VI is considered the process of editing as related to the ultimate social values of a picture and to its dramatic tone. While these final steps of completing a picture are less picturesque than the actual photography, they are not less important.

In order to follow through this plan of organization, one must first understand certain attributes of the terms "drama" and "art." Although critics do not agree on definitions, their discussions may prove enlightening as well as interesting.

To Moliere is attributed the idea that good drama is anything that interests an intelligently emotional group of persons assembled together in an illuminated hall.¹ The critic

¹George Jean Nathan, The Critic and the Drama, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922, p. 33.

George Jean Nathan describes in poetic terms his understanding of great drama, offering more explicit requirements than the preceding definition. One must notice that Moliere speaks of good drama, Nathan of great drama. They are not defining precisely the same dramatic entertainment.

Great drama is the rainbow born when the sun of reflection and understanding smiles anew upon an intelligence and emotion which that drama has respectively shot with gleams of brilliant lightning and drenched with the rain of brilliant tears. Great drama, like great men and great women, is always just a little sad. Only idiots may be completely happy. Reflection, sympathy, wisdom, gallant gentleness, experience--the chords upon which great drama is played--these are wistful chords....The aim of great drama is not to make men happy with themselves as they are, but with themselves as they might, yet alas cannot, be.²

Mr. Nathan continues to analyze drama as an art composed of all the other arts. "It is a snatch of music, a bit of painting, a moment of dancing, a slice of sculpture, draped upon the skeleton of literature."³ A rather more practical definition defines drama as "that production of art which represents action by introducing the personages taking part as real and as employed in the action itself."⁴

²Ibid., pp. 30-32.

³Ibid., p. 34.

⁴Mrs. Thomas G. Winter, The Art of Motion Pictures (Motion Picture Study Program, No. III, Hollywood, California: n. d., apparently after 1935), p. 14.

Since drama is thus defined as an art which makes use of acting as an important medium of expression, it behooves the would-be critic to explore the possibilities of the word "art."

Some may say that art is an evocation of beautiful emotions,⁵ or the embodiment of beautiful thought for the purpose of appealing to the senses. There is no doubt that these are of the utmost importance. But, while recognizing this aesthetic quality of art, one must not forget that it is produced by means of certain tools and that a certain amount of practical understanding of materials is necessary for its fullest appreciation. To the person who possesses both the love of art and the mechanical skill needed to produce it, the cinema today offers a challenging opportunity. One may speculate that if Leonardo da Vinci were alive today, he would find endless delight in sound pictures because their technique requires that rare combination of art and engineering.⁶

This study will consider the motion picture as a dramatic art because it is a production which, at its best, makes use of action and dialogue to evoke beautiful and powerful emotions in the audience.

⁵ Nathan, op. cit., p. 36.

⁶ Walter B. Pitkin and William M. Marston, The Art of Sound Pictures (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1930), p. 194.

CHAPTER I

THE THEME AND THE STORY

This chapter considers a basic element of any drama-- its theme and its story. The first part of the chapter deals with the sources of the themes and stories of moving pictures, as they are found in published fiction. Following the discussion of the search behind the selection of a theme from fiction appear illustrations of moving pictures based upon novels and short stories. These examples from a countless number have been chosen chiefly because the writer was familiar with them and had been especially impressed by them. They are by no means intended to comprise a complete list.

After the consideration of themes from fiction, the possibilities of deriving themes from legitimate stage plays are explored and illustrated. The field of biography furnishes the next source of themes considered. Then come themes based upon the development of country. The chapter closes with a few examples of ideas given to the screen by poems.

The term "theme" may require definition, inasmuch as it is used loosely with varying shades of meaning. It is used here to designate the general subject which holds throughout

a play, whether for stage or screen.¹ The theme may often be stated very briefly, usually in a single sentence.

The story of a play, on the other hand, is the dramatic treatment by which the theme is developed--the succession of incidents which carry forward the central ideas.² Hence, this chapter is to be concerned with the adoption of the central idea of a story and the essential plot-pattern. The question of the extent and nature of the alteration of details is apart from the present consideration. The outstanding motion pictures of the past decade have, it will be discovered, turned for their themes and stories along some five or six plainly marked paths.

One of the important sources for themes and stories of motion pictures has been novels and short stories, all the way from literary classics to "best-sellers." A long story of organized research lies behind the selection of a theme from published materials. Around this adaptation of ideas from fiction centers the discussion of the next few pages.

¹W. T. Price, The Analysis of Play Construction and Dramatic Principle, (New York: W. T. Price, Publisher, 1908), p. 19.

²Mrs. Thomas G. Winter, The Art of Motion Pictures (Motion Picture Study Program, No. III, Hollywood, California: n. d., apparently after 1935), p. 14.

In this search for themes for motion pictures a staff of trained readers go over every short story of every monthly or weekly magazine of high or low degree.³ Usually the studio maintains a large room furnished with comfortable chairs as the headquarters for the readers. These readers are former dramatic or literary critics or advanced graduate students in literature. They must have a general knowledge of literature of all ages.⁴

The five tests to which each story is submitted are these: First, do the central characterizations fit one or more of the stars or featured players under contract to the studio? Second, can the story be adapted easily to the talking picture form? Third, are the pictorial elements reasonably attractive? Fourth, does the story have a wide public appeal? Fifth, can it be shown within a limit of two hours?⁵

A studio reading department works hard. If a good novel or play is overlooked, it will probably be bought quickly

³ Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (New York: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), p. 43.

⁴ Loc. cit.

⁵ Loc. cit.

by a competitor. Should one of these prove an outstanding success, the oversight would remain a blemish on the professional name of the reader.⁶

Studios usually seek writers who have proved their ability by publication, for the industry is too busy to teach lessons in writing. To protect themselves from unfounded plagiarism suits, studios do not read unsolicited manuscripts unless the writer has obtained a copyright, either directly or through publication.

The keeper of the story-files in the largest American studio boasts that no one has ever named an author whose works she does not have recorded in her files. In this one library alone there are two million stories filed.⁷ From the realm of publication and stage production alone a studio has a choice of forty manuscripts for every picture filmed.⁸

A registration office in New York prevents the possible production of several versions of a story at the same time. When a producer decides to make a story, he writes or wires to the registration office. His request is stamped with the

⁶Ibid., p. 45.

⁷Ibid., p. 38.

⁸Ibid., p. 40.

day, hour, and minute of its arrival. The producer first making the request is given the right to film the story.⁹

From the pages of books and magazines troop the characters of the screen. Now it is the pathetic story of David Copperfield unfolding upon the screen. Peggetty is telling David of his mother's death. Now David is alone in London. Again he is praying to God that he may remain with Aunt Betsey. It is so easy to smile with Macawber; to play with pretty, little Dora; and to shrink from the cold, slimy hand of Uriah Heep. Thus the screen has brought to life a great classic, a classic that is dramatic in its sympathetic treatment of the struggles, the sorrows, and the triumphs of its chief character, David Copperfield.

From books by Charles Dickens come also the pictures, Great Expectations and A Tale of Two Cities. Although the author wrote especially for Victorian England, his characters are human enough to be popular with twentieth century America.

The camera turns now upon the Mississippi River with its gay throngs talking and laughing, as they welcome the Show Boat. But all is not gaiety, as the weary negroes "tote" the bales of cotton along the docks. Then suddenly bursts

⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

forth the unforgettable song "Old Man River." With the fading of the last scene, Edna Ferber has given to the silver screen a theme and a story, a story the more dramatic because of its setting and its music.

The selection of motion picture stories frequently is influenced by current events. One studio released The Prince and the Pauper, with its ritual of an English coronation, just before the coronation of King George VI of England.¹⁰ This picture brings to the screen one of Mark Twain's novels, not one of his most popular novels, however.¹¹ The screen preserves the spirit of the novel although it changes the details at times. The lavish coronation scene brings the play to an intense climax although Amy Loveman sees in that event only a spirit of wild burlesque.¹² Mark Twain's better-known novels, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, have lent their immortal characters in the motion picture's recent dramatization of successful novels.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

¹¹ Amy Loveman, "Mark Twain on the Screen," The Saturday Review of Literature, 16:10, June 12, 1937.

¹² Loc. cit.

Under the brilliant lights of the motion picture studio now comes the idealistic philosophy of Dr. Hudson, as he says, "It's all used up." He seeks no material reward for service, asks only that the indebted person go his way helping another person, as he himself has been helped. Although this "golden rule" philosophy could be so didactic as to ruin a motion picture, such is not the case with Magnificent Obsession. The doctor's philosophy of life permeates the play, softening the deep regret of the young Dr. Merrick, the tragic blindness of Mrs. Hudson, and the long struggle for success in the field of medicine. Unexcelled for sheer pathos is the scene of Mrs. Hudson's daily outing in the park, her independent spirit as she feels her way with a parasol, the expression of deep thought as she learns a new language--the language of the blind, and the new-found friendship with Dr. Merrick. A popular novel of the present day becomes drama on the screen. Similarly the motion picture has told visually the story of Green Light, another novel by Lloyd C. Douglas.

Through the dense fog slips the sailing ship of a Gloucester fisherman to bring before the camera Kipling's moving sea story, Captains Courageous. Aboard the ship is Manuel, an earnest, hard-working fisherman, who loves God, the sea, and his fellow-sailors. Out in a small fishing boat,

he gives Harvey, the son of wealthy Mr. Cheyne, his first lesson in fair play. Can the boy ever forget the pain of losing his first big fish, as Manuel swiftly releases the fish when he learns that Harvey has taken an unfair advantage of the rival fishermen. Rough, courageous, and sincere, Manuel wins the admiration of the boy and leaves his courageous spirit enveloping the picture long after he has disappeared beneath the wreckage of his ship. This is only one example of the way in which the cinema is finding drama in novels of the sea.

Kidnapped brings to the motion picture a theme by Robert Louis Stevenson, changed, however, in many respects. David Balfour's experiences in the gloomy, bat-infested castle are among the most vivid in the picture. This production is a good example of the way in which a motion picture may take its theme from a novel but change the details of the story to fit the needs of the picture.

No less interesting are the adventures of the novel Wuthering Heights. To many, for the first time the picture has brought the grim, stormy atmosphere of the Yorkshire moors. "Although the film has been on exhibit only a few weeks," says Maxine Block, "it has already resulted in the sale of more copies of the book during the past three weeks than in any

five-year period since it was first published ninety-two years ago!"¹³ This increase was reported before the film had been widely distributed. The New York Public Library undertook its first survey to determine the exact ratio between the release of a film and the popularity of the book upon which it is based. On April 27, 1939, twenty-three days after the check was begun in several branches of the library system, it was announced that there was a greater interest in reserves for Wuthering Heights than for any other book ever filmed.¹⁴ Cathedral Branch Library reported that all Bronte biographies had been checked out, and of course there was no way of knowing the number of oral requests for the book that could not be filled or the number of persons who looked for the book but did not inquire for it. The Fordham Branch announced a seven hundred per cent increase in the number of reserves for the book between March and April.¹⁵ Thus does the new visual story stimulate interest in its source.

Novels with their settings in remote lands have given themes and stories to a sister art. Examples are Spawn of the North, with its setting in the icy waters of the Arctic region;

¹³Maxine Block, "Films Out of Books," Wilson Bulletin for Librarians, 13:698, June, 1939.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 699.

¹⁵Loc. cit.

Drums, with its native Indian music and dancing and its marvelous technicolor views of the Khyber Pass; The Good Earth, with its hard-working Chinese peasants and its reverent feeling for the soil. From Russia comes the theme of Anna Karenina, from the great novel by Tolstoy. These few examples indicate the variety of themes from fiction which have been adapted for screen presentation.

In the realm of the short story the classic example is Scrooge from Dickens's "A Christmas Carol." It is truly a lesson in how to keep Christmas but a lesson so artistically presented that it does not in any way detract from the story and the characters.

Indeed, the motion picture has entered upon one of its richest fields of material in the realm of fiction, both classic and modern, a realm which has given themes and stories to many box-office attractions as well as to numerous "prestige pictures."¹⁶ From the time of famous early pictures, such as The Birth of a Nation and Ben Hur, fiction has beckoned openly to the film world. To realize the success of this alliance, one has only to recall the titles of a few productions: Les Miserables, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Moby Dick, and Crime and Punishment.

¹⁶"prestige Picture," Time, 30:34-35, August 16, 1937. "Prestige pictures" are intended primarily to stimulate self-respect rather than to make money for the producers.

A second great source of themes and stories beckons to the motion picture for consideration. Broadway successes, and even Broadway failures, have been turned into outstanding motion pictures. From this source, for example, comes the screen version of Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude. Its theme is Nina's struggle to bring happiness to her husband and to herself, her attempt to meet the baffling problem of insanity in her husband's family. The motion picture keeps the unusual psychological device of the play, that of having the characters speak their thoughts in a modified soliloquy.

From Noel Coward's play Cavalcade, Frank Lloyd brings the motion picture of the same name. The twenty-one scenes of the play present no difficulty for the mobile camera. The theme of the play is the life of a typical English family from the Boer War in 1899 until the chaos of 1930.

Mary Queen of Scots derives its theme and action from Maxwell Anderson's play concerning English history of the sixteenth century. The story is biographical in nature, presenting the Queen of Scotland as the victim of the jealousy and fear of Queen Elizabeth of England.

Another Broadway success by the same playwright has given to the motion picture the theme for Winterset, which presents the case of a son of an innocent man executed for

murder during robbery. The poetic content of the play was a problem, but the original New York stage cast gave a convincing performance before the cameras.¹⁷

The adaptation of Robert Sherwood's play, The Petrified Forest, was so successful that the author planned to revise the ending of the play according to the screen version.¹⁸ The play ends with the solicited murder of Squier, an itinerant novelist. The motion picture ends with the slaying, too, but according to this revision Squier is killed as the bandit tries to escape from a posse, not as a prearranged act by Mantee. Furthermore the picture is remarkable because most of the significant action takes place in a lunch room. Surprisingly few changes were made for the screen.

Robert Sherwood's comedy-drama, Idiot's Delight, was adapted for the screen by its author. The play named nations and rulers in its attack upon war. The film avoids names and has its characters speak Esperanto, the international language. The setting is in an indefinite Alpine land rather than in

¹⁷"Fantastic Promotion for Two Films," The Literary Digest, 122:22, November 28, 1936.

¹⁸"On the Current Screen," The Literary Digest, 123:19, February 6, 1936.

Italy, and the play is given a happy ending.¹⁹ All of these changes indicate Hollywood's eagerness for profits although the play was not released until after Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer stopped exporting its products to Italy.²⁰

Russian royalty forced to live in exile abroad and even stooping to accept roles as domestic servants--this is the subject of Tovarich. The director is a Russian-born Parisian, Anatole Litvak. Comedy results from the special interest which each member of the wealthy family takes in the new servants, really the Grand Duchess Petrovna and Prince Mikail.

Pygmalion has come to life on the screen more completely than it ever did upon the stage, some critics believe.²¹ More significant perhaps than its popularity among critics and patrons is the fact that it pleased its author, George Bernard Shaw. The playwright had steadfastly refused to allow his plays to be screened, but he was won over to grant to Gabriel Pascal the right to produce Pygmalion.

¹⁹"Idiot's Delight; The Film Doesn't Name Names, but It Still Carries Anti-War Punch," Newsweek, 13:24-25, February 6, 1939.

²⁰"Cinema," Time, 33:29, February 13, 1939.

²¹"Old Show, New Trick," Time, 32:28, December 5, 1938.

Shaw insisted upon writing the dialogue for the motion picture himself. He took it verbatim from the play except for two new scenes showing Eliza's first bath and her first ball.²² He even changed the conclusion of the play for the movies. In the sequel to the play, Mr. Shaw denounces the sentimentalists who would have Higgins marry Eliza. In the play Eliza married Freddie Eynsford-Hill, and Higgins went his own independent way. But in the movie, although the denouement is changed, Henry Higgins has not changed. He still seems to bear a special relationship to Shaw,²³ as with his back to Eliza he calls in his independent, unemotional way for his house-slippers.

So that Pygmalion may not seem out of date, the emphasis is shifted from the importance of studying phonetics to overcome class distinctions, to the importance of personalities and their effects upon others.²⁴ In "leavening its acid wit with warmth and poignance the film surpasses the play."²⁵ George Bernard Shaw admits that the production of

²²"Old Show, New Trick," loc. cit.

²³George Stevens, editor, "Shaw on the Screen," The Saturday Review of Literature, December 24, 1938.

²⁴Loc. cit.

²⁵"G. B. Shaw's Pygmalion Is the Best Motion Picture G. B. Shaw Has Ever Seen," Newsweek, 12:25, December 5, 1938.

Pygmalion is a fine transcription. "Before this," he told Bennett Cerf, Random House publisher, "I could only say that Shaw's plays were the best I've ever seen. Now I can also say that Shaw's movies are the best I've ever seen."²⁶

William Shakespeare has furnished for the screen some elaborate spectacles, including Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, and Romeo and Juliet. The numerous scenes and various backgrounds suggested in the lines of a Shakespearean play present a challenge which the screen is meeting with productions to interest the masses as well as the scholars.

Not only does the motion picture take ideas from Broadway plays, but in some cases film money finances the New York stage production. This was true of the play, Grand Hotel, which had been bought for motion picture production months before its appearance on the stage in New York.²⁷ Grand Hotel is an example of a threefold use of theme--novel, stage play, and moving picture. It is only one example of many novels that have enjoyed similar popularity.

²⁶"G. B. Shaw's Pygmalion Is the Best Motion Picture G. B. Shaw Has Ever Seen," loc. cit.

²⁷Kiesling, op. cit., p. 37.

In screen adaptations of biography, writers, directors, and actors usually seek to portray the spirit of the person represented; but they do not hesitate to add and subtract details from the life history. A good picture does not inevitably result from photographing happenings merely because they happened.²⁸ An example of such selection of material is seen in the picture Juarez. Certainly this is not a complete biography of Mexico's national hero. Disregarding the drama of Juarez's rise from an orphan Indian lad to the President of Mexico, the film begins with the arrival of the ill-fated Maximilian in the time of the American Civil War. The theme of the conflict between autocracy and democracy is so evident that it almost overshadows the biographical phase of the picture.

The subject of film biography would not be complete without mention of other famous persons whose life stories have appeared in dramatic form upon the screen. Among these one may recall Henry VIII of England, Queen Christina of Sweden, Catherine the Great of Russia, Napoleon, Rasputin, Cardinal Richelieu, and Strauss.

²⁸ Otis Ferguson, "Bring Them Back Alive," The New Republic, 92:48, August 18, 1937.

The past few years have produced a wealth of pictures with the emphasis upon patriotism, pride in the development of country. Many of these deal with American expansion as seen on the frontier. Famous in early days was The Covered Wagon. More recently, Wells Fargo tells the story of an express company and its mastery of the frontier. The Plainsman depicts the life of a pioneer on the plains of the Middle West, the fear of the Indians, the courage of a pioneer woman.

The Buccaneer is both historical and biographical, as it shows the life of Jean Lafitte, the New Orleans pirate who helps Andrew Jackson in the battle of New Orleans. It is the steadfast patriotism of the outlaw band that makes the picture larger than the events in the life of one man.

The year 1939 brings two pictures showing the railroad as it pushes ever westward across plains and mountains. Dodge City represents that Kansas town in the lawless days when the Sante Fe Railroad had reached that point in its westward movement. It shows the noble spirit of the pioneer who encountered danger to life and property in his effort to maintain a home in a frontier town. Union Pacific shows the westward progress of another railroad, as it battles the evils of drink and gambling, the treachery of the Indians,

and the snows of the mountain passes. It is indeed a great day when the golden spike is driven in Ogden, Utah, a spike which symbolizes the unity of a vast nation. What true American can fail to feel a thrill of pride and satisfaction as he sees the screen link triumphantly the East and the West?

In Old Chicago is a film which builds up to a climax of destruction that is a necessary catastrophe before a greater and more beautiful Chicago is possible. The re-creation of the terrible two hundred million dollar holocaust lasts for twenty-five blistering minutes.²⁹ The story of the O'Learys is no doubt somewhat changed and enlarged for the sake of screen drama, but it fits neatly into the motion picture program of presenting romanticized history.

Small in number are the films based upon poetry. The difficulty of adaptation to the screen medium is obvious. The beauty and music of lines of poetry do not translate easily into a medium which is essentially visual in its appeal. Tennyson's poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," furnishes a notable exception.

²⁹ "In Old Chicago," Time, 31:45, January 17, 1938.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!
 Charge for the guns!" he said;
 Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.³⁰

These immortal lines of Tennyson's poem give the theme to a motion picture concerning the Crimean War, more specifically concerning a gross military blunder which sent six hundred British cavalymen to certain death at the hands of the enemy. Since the poem is not actually narrative, the motion picture turns elsewhere for most of its action; yet the event related in the poem does figure at the climax of the story. Certainly the picture has caught a spark of the fire of the stirring lines of the English poem.

"Gunga Din" is another poem which has given inspiration to a screen play representing war. The title is borrowed from Kipling's poem, but the motion picture is criticized for being totally lacking in the spirit of Kipling. In the end Kipling appears and writes his poem to be read over the body of the stupid Hindu water-carrier. Some critics regard this as a bad joke.³¹ Poems are in general not very easily adapted for screen production. Apparently "Gunga Din" is no exception.

³⁰ Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poetical Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1898), p. 226.

³¹ Franz Hoellering, "Films," The Nation, 148:158-159, February 4, 1939.

The motion picture Cynara finds its theme in Ernest Dowson's poem, "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae."³² The incidents are not based upon the poem, but the suggestion is that it is possible for a man, very much in love with his wife, to be attracted at the same time by another woman and feel a sincere affection for her as well. One must not ignore an intermediate step between poem and picture in the case of Cynara. During the early season of 1931-1932, the three-act play Cynara by H. M. Harwood and R. Gore Browne achieved popularity in the New York theatre. This success of the stage play no doubt had more direct influence upon the choice of the motion picture theme than did the original source of the idea, Dowson's poem.

A poem of epic proportions lends its title to the screen in Dante's Inferno. The motion picture, however, has little in common with the Italian poet's work, an epic which is too vast, too powerful for a convincing visual presentation. The motion picture concerns itself chiefly with a business man who constructs a flimsy concession by the name of "Dante's Inferno." The scenes within this concession are the only parts of the film even remotely connected with the Italian epic.

³² Burns Mantle, editor, The Best Plays of 1931-32 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1934), pp. 356-359.

From all types of literature--from novels, short stories, biography, plays, and poetry--from the pages of history, and from the imagination of producers and directors are born the millions of shadows which troop across the screen to tell their stories. And what varied stories they are! Few themes are barred to the motion picture because of difficulty of production. The pony express, the railroad, the Indian massacre, the Charge of the Light Brigade--each has a story to tell, a story which is sometimes masterfully told by the new dramatic art at its best, the art of the photoplay.

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CHAPTER II

ACTING

Concerning the subject of acting there are as many opinions as writers, actors, or even spectators. The fact, however, that few persons agree on this phase of dramatic art need not bar the subject from consideration. In fact, to George Arliss this very difference of opinion adds interest to the subject. He says:

It is this difference of outlook that makes the stage so fascinating. The lock that opens the door to public approval has a very tricky combination, which is frequently stumbled upon only by chance.¹

George Arliss refers to the legitimate stage; yet his observation is equally true of the motion picture.

Since the coming of sound, acting for the motion picture might be thought to be just the same as acting on the legitimate stage. In both dramatic arts action consists of pantomime and speech. But there is a difference. How great a difference is indicated by George Arliss in his description of his first screen test in 1918, while he was

¹George Arliss, "Realism on the Stage," The Atlantic Monthly, 131:433, April, 1923.

still acting on the stage.² He was told to act before the camera as if he had received a letter offering him an opportunity to make a motion picture. He was to think about it then decide to accept and to look over programs of his stage successes in order to decide which one to attempt on the screen. He was to decide upon the production of The Devil. He describes what he saw when the test film was projected upon the screen:

This is what we saw: A gentleman seated at a table trying not to look nervous. He picks up an envelope with exaggerated nonchalance, opens it with a flourish, takes out the letter as though he were producing rabbits from a hat, reads the letter with a series of varying facial expressions such as no man ever accomplished before; looks out into space and thinks for so long that he appears to be listening to the angels singing; reaches for book of programs; turns over the leaves, with much shrugging and shaking of head. Stops suddenly; starts as though he had read that the British Isles had been swallowed up and every soul lost; thinks, "Shall I commit suicide?"--reaches for note paper--writes a farewell letter--seals it--thinks, "Shall I stab myself now with a steel pen, or shall I go out and drown myself in the Hudson?" Decides on latter course and goes off.

This description of his first experience acting in front of the camera shows one of the chief differences between acting on the stage and in the motion picture.

²George Arliss, "Up the Years From Bloomsbury," The Ladies' Home Journal, 44:154, May, 1927.

George Arliss had always believed that for the movies, acting must be exaggerated. He thus saw that restraint was the chief thing the actor had to learn in transferring his art from the stage to the screen. A broader method, the actor suggests, is required for the stage, perhaps because of certain distractions on the stage that do not accompany the movies. Expression and gesture are much more clearly defined on the screen, and there is always the telltale close-up.

Experience in the movies, Mr. Arliss believes, taught him many things that were useful in the theatre.³ One of the most important of these was the value of sincerity. Every flicker of an eyelash and every shade of thought was reflected on the screen, he learned. The keynote of screen acting was restraint. This art, he decided, might be studied by watching Charlie Chaplin on the screen, for that comedian seemed the ideal moving picture actor.⁴ According to Mr. Arliss this cultivation of restraint was practically the only difference between the method of acting required by the screen and that which he had always practiced on the stage. That, however,

³ Ibid., p. 157.

⁴ Arliss, "Up the Years From Bloomsbury," loc. cit.

does not mean that success in one dramatic medium insures success in the other. Quite the contrary, for an actor with certain physical attributes requires less ability to achieve popular success upon the screen than upon the legitimate stage.⁵

Any discussion of restraint in acting brings to mind the exaggerated acting of most silent pictures. The obvious nature of the acting in these pictures resulted from an eagerness to tell the story to the audience without the aid of speech. When contrasted with the restrained acting of present-day talking pictures, this early exaggeration appears not only useless but even laughable. This change in screen acting is perhaps in accordance with a similar growth of restraint in stage acting. Such development from the crude to the refined is the story of the progress of any art.

Since action is the password of all drama and especially of moving pictures,⁶ that acting merits discussion from the standpoint of casting as well as movement. If a photoplay does not move forward dramatically, it lacks entertainment

⁵ Arliss, loc. cit.

⁶ Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), p. 42.

value. The legitimate stage drama has a considerable psychological advantage because the actors and actresses are appearing before the audience in flesh and blood.⁷ Of course this is offset by certain disadvantages which the stage must overcome, such as the matter of movement.⁸ Nevertheless, a "drama of shadows" requires careful casting to give convincing presentations of the characters of the play. The human background of a motion picture is no less important than the scenic background, for it must relate itself accurately to time, place, and customs; and it must merge quietly into the general pattern. This "human atmosphere" was outstanding in Eskimo, Men in White, Anna Karenina, and The Plainsman.⁹

Many and varied are the complaints which constantly reach the studios. For example, "You cast Miss Such-and-Such as a society girl when she looks more like a fat laundress." The casting director of the studio, however, goes ahead selecting actors and actresses, relying upon his intuitive judgment, his memory, and his familiarity with plays and players.¹⁰

⁷Ibid., p. 58.

⁸Kiesling, loc. cit.

⁹Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁰Loc. cit.

A glance at the casting department reveals cross-indexed files for reference. These list the names, abilities, and physical characteristics of hundreds of players. The front of each card gives the following: name, address, telephone, weekly salary, daily salary, age, weight, height, general appearance, color of eyes, carriage, wardrobe, class, subclass, coloring, parts played. On the back of each card is a picture of the player.¹¹ Thus one might find under "character women": "'Mary Ames' is thirty-six years old, five feet eight inches tall, weighs 138 pounds, prim, stern, society grande dames, or hard-hearted old aunts."¹²

If an unusual type of character is needed, the casting director by means of a few telephone calls can usually locate the player. A young interne in a Los Angeles hospital frequently helps the studios find men or women having arms or legs missing, a man with the "shakes," or a woman with a harelip.¹³

The Central Casting Corporation, organized in 1925, aids the studios in getting specialized types not frequently

¹¹Ibid., p. 131.

¹²Ibid., p. 133.

¹³Ibid., p. 131.

used.¹⁴ Casting offices keep special records of persons closely resembling historical characters. Thomas Pogue resembles Benjamin Franklin; Sidney Blackmer plays Theodore Roosevelt; Frank McGlynn has played Abraham Lincoln for years.¹⁵

In the average picture there are about twelve "principals," leading persons in the development of the story. The outstanding two or three of these are called "stars," the others "supporting players."¹⁶ About eighty per cent of these principal players are recruited from those under contract to that studio from one to seven years. The remaining twenty per cent are "free lance" players.¹⁷

In the secondary rank are the background players, those essential for human atmosphere in the picture. The term "extra" to apply to such competent minor players is not used in the studios because it implies unimportance; whereas the typical background player is really a trained artisan.¹⁸

¹⁴Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵Kiesling, loc. cit.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁷Loc. cit.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 130.

A list of "atmosphere" players needed for the following day is made out in the afternoon. The players are notified by telephone, told what to bring and when to report.¹⁹

The casting director of the studio actually selects only three levels of players: the stars, the secondary principals, and the atmosphere players. Actors for the fourth level, "crowd people," are supplied through the Central Casting Corporation to fill bulk orders, such as "forty-five police officers," "five hundred members of an Irish mob."²⁰ The Casting Corporation places about six hundred players a day.²¹

The casting director has an immense responsibility, for even a minor part badly cast is as disturbing as discordant music to a musician.²²

A few of the screen's outstanding character actors have been cast in a great variety of parts. Paul Muni has followed a zig-zag path to glory since he went to Hollywood. "From a machine-gun artist to a captain of industry, a fugitive

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 134.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

²¹ Ibid., p. 136.

²² Ibid., p. 137.

from justice to a news reporter, a Mexican tough-boy to a coal-miner, a French man of science to a Chinese peasant-- this sounds like a theatrical game of hop-scotch."²³ One may add to this list Muni's great character portrayals of Emile Zola and Juarez. Muni is in a class by himself, as Hollywood's foremost character actor.²⁴ There is little chance of this actor ever being miscast.

Casting directors find in Spencer Tracy an ability to be at home on land or sea--as the kindly Father Flanagan or as the rough, courageous fisherman, Manuel. A deep understanding of human nature frequently reveals itself in the characters he portrays.

Leslie Howard as Romeo is a far different character from Leslie Howard as Professor Higgins in Pygmalion. The warmth and sincerity of emotion which this actor frequently portrays are entirely lacking in the very nature of Shaw's unsympathetic Professor Higgins. It would be unfair to say that Leslie Howard was miscast as the latter character, but the role of the unsympathetic professor is entirely different

²³"Muni," Scholastic, 31:39, September 18, 1937.

²⁴"Biography Projects Living Portrait of Novelist," Newsweek, 10:19, August 14, 1937.

from the actor's performance in such pictures as The Scarlet Pimpernel, The Petrified Forest, and The Animal Kingdom.

Some pictures require actors familiar with foreign customs or backgrounds. Thus directors wisely chose chiefly English players for Wuthering Heights. Certainly no American boy could have taken the place of Sabu as the Indian prince in Drums.

Barbara Stanwyck was borrowed from RKO by DeMille for Mollie Monahan in Union Pacific.²⁵ Such a character, speaking dialect or rather broken English, presents problems to the casting director. George Arliss says that a broken-English part is seldom played as effectively by a foreigner as by an American or an Englishman.²⁶ The difficulty is that the real dialect may be so good that it will be hard for an audience to understand. These are only a few of the problems that arise when directors select "stars" for their motion pictures, for every person who buys his ticket at the box office sets himself up as a legitimate and competent critic.

"The word 'star' in its broader meaning concerns any man, woman, child, or animal who becomes a definite and

²⁵ Frank J. Taylor, "Hollywood, Calif., Mar. 1," Scribner's Magazine, 105:16-19, March, 1939.

²⁶ Arliss, "Realism on the Stage," op. cit., p. 439.

outstanding leader in whatever he, she, or it may be doing."²⁷ As applied to the motion picture the word is related to screen personality. Two equally charming persons may be photographed. For some reason the photograph brings out, strengthens the personality of the one, while the personality of the other "fades out." This fact is at the basis of the system of motion picture stars. It is the reason some few can command large salaries.

Salaries of stars, however, do not form so great a per cent of the production costs as many persons imagine. The picture production dollar is spent approximately as follows: stories, 15.95; directors and cameramen, 13.20; sets, 9.90; costumes, 2.75; locations, 2.75; raw materials, 7.70; administration, 23.10; and players, 24.65, that is, for players from stars to members of crowd scenes.²⁸

Stars are not original with the motion pictures. The Roman arena had star gladiators. Star minstrels traveled from castle to castle in the Middle Ages. The stage has had stars for hundreds of years. And today we speak of star ball players.²⁹

²⁷ Kiesling, op. cit., p. 138.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 140.

One may ask how directors are made aware of new talent for the screen. Hollywood maintains a nation-wide "scout" system which takes note of any outstanding amateur performers. A thorough test of the person "discovered" consists of scenes from an actual picture. Actors are hired to support the candidate. The cost of even a cheap test is several hundred dollars. If the test is satisfactory, the candidate enters a studio "school," where he is trained in acting and voice.³⁰

Before turning to the actual qualities of acting, one should be aware of the part played by make-up in creating the illusion of reality. One of the most recent discoveries will serve to indicate the progress that has been made in make-up technique. In the picture, The Good Earth, white players had to be transformed into Chinese. The old method of securing slanted eyes was to pull back the corners and fasten them with invisible fishskin. This method was painful and not very realistic. The new method, invented by Jack Dawn, uses molded sections of thin, skinlike material over the actor's own skin. The dimensions for building up an actor's face in this way are obtained from a clay model of the

³⁰Ibid., p. 141.

face desired. By this means an exact duplication of another's face can be obtained.³¹ Make-up artists need long experience with cameras to understand how a make-up will photograph. Even then sometimes the costume the actor is wearing will reflect enough light to distort the photograph of the make-up.³² The art of the screen can advance only as fast as the art of make-up. The Good Earth would not have been possible ten years ago.³³

For popularity an actress need not possess "glamour," that much overused word; she does need to seem natural. Marie Dressler, when over sixty years old, became "the greatest money-maker the screen has ever known."³⁴ She acted with a simplicity and a naturalness that won all hearts. "She could enter our hearts with a quick lift of her massive, homely face, with a quiver of her big lips, and there she remained enthroned."³⁵

For an example of an actor who studies to be natural, one immediately turns to Paul Muni. He spends much time

³¹Ibid., p. 149.

³²Ibid., p. 151.

³³Ibid., p. 154.

³⁴Ibid., p. 143.

³⁵Kiesling, loc. cit.

learning to walk, talk, and even think like the character whom he is portraying. He thus learned the gestures and characteristic habits, which made his presentation of Zola convincing. Zola's stoop-shouldered walk, his unusual laugh, his habit of tucking his napkin in his collar when he ate, his mannerism of holding his hands in front of him when standing or moving slowly, the irritated twirling of the prince-nez--all of these Muni mastered.³⁶ For perfecting his lines, Muni speaks into a dictaphone and then listens to the recording. That is the secret behind the masterful reading of Zola's fiery editorial, "J'Accuse," and the effective pauses in his courtroom speech.³⁷

Once Muni went to a Warner Brothers producer and complained that he did not understand the role. The director explained that he thought they had gone over it quite carefully. "I know," replied Muni, "I understand the character all right. But I have no idea about his ancestors."³⁸ Yes, it may take even a knowledge of the ancestors to give the quality of naturalness to the presentation.

³⁶"Muni," op. cit., p. 39.

³⁷Loc. cit.

³⁸"prestige picture," Time, 30:35, August 16, 1937.

Naturalness includes the manner of speaking as well as the mannerisms and gestures of the character. Freddie Bartholomew's English speech helps him to take the part of a refined, cultured boy, brought up in a wealthy home but through misfortune forced to associate with street urchins or hardy seamen. Likewise, the Irish accent added greatly to the natural presentation of Mollie Monahan in Union Pacific.

To be natural does not always mean that a character must seem at ease. Wendy Hiller's portrayal of Eliza in Pygmalion required that she be ill at ease, fearful of doing wrong, conscious of every word she spoke. Her problem was to be unnatural in a realistic way.

Related to naturalness is the quality of subtlety in acting, the use of a slight movement or a significant facial expression to reveal to the audience a character's entire reaction to the situation. Juarez's reaction to the story of the dogs killing the wolf by surrounding it and tiring it out--something about the movement of his head, the look in his eyes tells the audience he is thinking of using those tactics to conquer Maximilian.

What a world of understanding passes between father and son, as Harvey Cheyne touches his father's hand after the memorial service for Manuel!

At the end of the reception at the home of Professor Higgins's mother, the professor merely clears his throat. But that significant act suggests the hours of preparation for Eliza's public appearance, the warnings, the commands. Eliza's reaction is even more significant. At that sound from Mr. Higgins she stops in the middle of a sentence, replaces the cracker she has just taken, and says quickly that she must go now. It is a simple gesture--the replacing of the cracker--but it shows her eagerness to please, her willingness to obey, perhaps even her desire to win the approval of the unsympathetic Professor Higgins.

One more example of subtlety. Jesse James, living under the name of Mr. Howard, stoops over his son, who announces that he is playing Jesse James and is now dead. The outlaw indicates by his expression, by the tenderness with which he picks the boy up and carries him into the house, that he realizes for the first time his full responsibility to his son. After that there can be no doubt that he will turn down the offer to join in another robbery.

Timing is an important part of the technique of both acting and directing. Timing involves both pause and suspense. Frequently it is the pause that is remembered as vividly as the uproar. Such is the case in the silence immediately

following the chaos of the earthquake in San Francisco, and again in the pause after the wrecking of the train by the Indians in Union Pacific.

Effective examples of the use of timing to build up suspense are the hesitation of Anna Karenina, her struggle as she watches the wheels of the moving train and thinks of hurling herself beneath them. David Balfour builds up a crisis in Kidnapped, when he ascends the stone steps of his uncle's gloomy castle. It is the accurate timing that makes the audience gasp, as he steps upon the loose stone which becomes unbalanced and goes hurtling to the pavement below. In much the same way, as Juarez climbs the steps in spite of the guns leveled at his back, the tenseness comes through a pause in all action except that onward movement of Juarez.

A less exciting example of timing in the movements of the individual actor occurs when Dreyfus tries to comprehend his pardon in the picture, Emile Zola. His expressions indicate that he is passing through stages of failure to understand, unbelief, suspicion, and at last comprehension.

Timing, the Waterloo of many amateur dramatic productions, is a mastered art in screen productions, at least among the works of leading directors.

Actors express emotion in various ways. Many times the quiet, unobtrusive way seems the most sincere. No one can doubt the sincerity of Juarez when he reads the news of the assassination of Lincoln. He rises, takes a few steps forward, removes his hat as if in salute, as he stands looking toward the United States. Similarly the song "La Paloma" brings to the faces of Maximilian and Carlotta expressions of sadness and resignation mingled with a sincere love for each other.

Pantomime is a phase of emotional expression. Madame Alberti defines acting as pantomime combined with speech. "Pantomime is the emotional element of acting; speech the intellectual."³⁹ The very foundation of spoken drama then is pantomime. A failure to comprehend or abide by this principle caused the artistic deficiency of the early talking pictures. Pantomime and gesture are not synonyms. Movements are classed as pantomime only as they are associated with the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the actors.⁴⁰

Pantomime may be a means of getting humorous effects. Such is the pantomime associated with Mr. Smith's actions in

³⁹ Madame Eva Alberti, A Handbook of Acting (New York: Samuel French, 1933), p. 176.

⁴⁰ Loc. cit.

The Awful Truth, his persistence in bringing to his mistress articles, especially men's hats, which she has purposely hidden. Her struggles to appear at ease in spite of such incriminating evidence form much of the humor of the play.

Through pantomime, apparently insignificant, a character may try to hide his real emotional tenseness. Mollie Monahan serves tea to Jeff Butler and to those who have held up the train and taken the pay roll; she even offers to read their fortunes from the tea leaves left in their cups. Why? She is trying vainly to keep peace, to postpone the crisis when Jeff and his trouble-making opponents will decide matters with bullets.

Pantomime frequently is the chief element in characterization. Frank James in the production Jesse James chews his tobacco with a determination and a finality that are as significant as almost any lines he speaks.

An unusual emphasis upon pantomime occurs in Juarez with the first appearance of Mexico's president. He is seated with his back to the audience. He remains that way for several scenes. Nevertheless, from the time the camera focuses upon his hand as he writes, the force of the character is felt. The very evenness and strength of his writing indicate

his calm, stoic character. The sight of his face merely verifies the first impression made by pantomime.

This chapter has considered acting from the standpoint of naturalness, subtlety, timing, emotion, and pantomime. Although the proper relationship of these elements may be a matter of opinion, the importance of acting in any dramatic production is indisputable. Upon the acting depends much of the art of the moving picture. It is not correct costumes and sets that make the vital force of a play. The heart of the production is the actor.⁴¹

⁴¹"Artists of the Movies," Theatre Arts Monthly, 23,424, June, 1939.

CHAPTER III

DIRECTING

The director of a talking picture is the person completely in charge of all production activities on a studio stage.¹ All motion picture directors seek essentially the same goal, the translation of a story into a realistic, appealing work of art by means of pictures. Yes, they all seek the same goal, but how varied are their personalities and their methods. There is one point, however, where all meet on common ground. Every good director has an abiding interest in people. He must love people.² But perhaps that is a key to success in any line of work. A successful director cannot be a grouch. He must believe in the importance of the picture he is making, for it is fatal to believe that if a picture is really serious in nature, it will not be popular.³

This chapter considers first the personality and training of a director, then his duties and his assistants.

¹ Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), p. 307.

² Ibid., p. 156.

³ Gilbert Seldes, "Motion Pictures," Scribner's Magazine, 102:63, November, 1937.

The main part of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of various phases of the art of directing: coordination, handling of humor, sympathetic tone, emphasis, repetition, parallel action, and imagination. Examples of scenes from motion pictures illustrate the general discussion.

Behind the screen sit persons who are frequently more interesting than the screen players whom they are directing.⁴ These persons are best seen in the various methods of directing. One director may impatiently begin photography after one rehearsal. He may be very brusque and businesslike.⁵ Another may patiently explain each scene in detail, rehearse many times, and spend hours in getting the exact expression he wants on a player's face.⁶ Sidney Franklin is an example of a director who speaks in such an unusually quiet voice that players give him exceptional attention.⁷

The director must consciously or unconsciously be a master of psychology, for he must convince players that a

⁴Rosalind Shaffer, "Who's Who Among the Movie Directors," Chicago Tribune, February 24, 1935, Part 7, p. 6.

⁵Kiesling, op. cit., p. 156.

⁶Ibid., pp. 155-156.

⁷Ibid., p. 156.

certain interpretation of emotion is proper for a particular scene.⁸ The player who has apparent potentialities but little actual experience is the hardest to deal with.

The story is told of how Cecil B. DeMille cast an unknown girl to play the lead in an important picture.⁹ She was a beautiful girl who could do little but smile. In the picture she was supposed to be the center of a tragic situation. Talking and explanation of the part failed. At last DeMille decided upon harsh methods. He summoned her brother to come to the studio with the girl. In his presence he told the girl she was discharged. The reaction was instant. Tearfully the girl fell to her knees by DeMille's chair. He handed a mirror to her and told her to look at herself then at the pictures she had been making. The actress stood up saying she could act the part because she understood the emotion. She later became well known for her emotional acting.

Some directors specialize in making one type of picture. Some do their best work with men, others with women. Cecil B. DeMille is famous for his spectacle pictures, while

⁸ Kiesling, op. cit., p. 157.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 157-159.

Norman Taurog is known as a fine "kid" director.¹⁰ Some stars respond better to the methods of one director than to those of another. For this reason a star sometimes has the same director for several consecutive pictures.¹¹

What is the best training for a motion picture director? That question can hardly be answered, for they come from all vocations with various types of education and qualifications. Josef von Sternberg holds a Ph.D. degree from the University of Vienna. Clarence Brown has degrees in electrical and mechanical engineering from the University of Tennessee. Rouben Mamoulian has a degree in jurisprudence from the University of Moscow.¹² These degrees, however, are by no means a prerequisite for the profession, for from the fields of music, writing, engineering, and acting come equally successful directors. The overwhelming majority of directors were once actors--D. W. Griffith, Cecil B. DeMille, Robert Z. Leonard, Jack Conway, Harry Beaumont, Charles Brabin, Richard Boleslawski, and W. S. Van Dyke.¹³

¹⁰Shaffer, loc. cit.

¹¹Kiesling, op. cit., p. 157.

¹²Shaffer, loc. cit.

¹³Kiesling, loc. cit.

Ex-cameramen now in the field of directing include Mervyn LeRoy, Victor Fleming, and Sidney Franklin.¹⁴

From various careers by various methods the directors push on toward the goal of successful films. Each one realizes that upon him alone rests the responsibility for artistic quality,¹⁵ for getting the finest dramatic and emotional effects for the least expenditure.¹⁶

Important assistants for the director are the unit manager and the assistant director. The unit manager is responsible for inspecting sets as they are constructed and for spacing them properly. He has charge of arranging for transportation of food, supplies, and personnel. He is seldom actually on the set during the making of a picture. The assistant director, on the other hand, seldom leaves the set. He directs the "background action" of big scenes, gives cues to taxi drivers, messenger boys, and truck drivers to come casually into the scene from different directions. The assistant director and unit manager are trained to prepare against any possible emergency. For example, if an actress

¹⁴Kiesling, loc. cit.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 162.

is required to run down a flight of stairs, two or three duplicate gowns may be ordered for her. Should she fall and rip her gown, the delay would cost many times the price of a second dress. A director and assistant director frequently become so attuned to each other that they work together for years.¹⁷

Among the various phases of the art of directing, coordination is one of the most essential. A good picture, filmed as it is in many separate scenes, must give the effect of a unified whole. Suppose a picture is historical. Is it to emphasize the development of country? Or is it to deal with domestic scenes in the lives of its chief players? The director must know the aim of the picture and hold to it. The picture, Juarez, must have presented definite problems of coordination, for it has within it the story of Juarez and the story of Maximilian, two famous political opponents who never meet. The stories are almost entirely separate, and yet the transitions between scenes are so smooth that the frequent changes of scene are not disturbing. It is the director's responsibility to see that each scene joins

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 159-162.

smoothly with the preceding scene, although much of the actual work of arranging sections of film is done in the process of editing.¹⁸

The handling of the humor of a play is another element of directing. Is the humor delicate or slapstick in nature? Some directors depend for their comedy effects upon subtle pantomime or upon the humor of certain lines. Others emphasize the slapstick type which sends characters plunging down the stairs, hanging precariously to ropes high above a chasm, or being buried by a shower of boxes. Laurel and Hardy comedies are examples of the latter type. Contrast these with the "tea-party" scene in Pygmalion. The humor of this scene arises partly from the "it-was-my-belief-they-done-her-in" dialogue, partly from the artificiality of the society people, but largely from the subtle reactions of the various characters to the situation. Nothing but a delicate handling of humor could be responsible for the look of wonder and surprise which marks Mrs. Eynsford-Hill's reaction to Eliza's story of her aunt. It was indeed a delicate touch which directed Eliza to replace her cracker at the sound of the professor's signal that it was time to leave.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 156-157.

Some directors give a story a much more sympathetic tone than others. Frank Capra frequently alters the tone of satirical plays to make them more pleasing for the wide screen audience.¹⁹ Thus he changed You Can't Take It With You from a satire on folkways and events in the United States to an endorsement of many of the things at which the play laughed. O'Neill's Ah, Wilderness! and the play, Stage Door, similarly received a modified tone. This does not always mean that a play must be changed greatly to show the director's sympathetic treatment. In Pygmalion the part of Eliza is acted in such a way that the audience sympathizes with her and likes her from the very first of the play.

A similar sympathetic portrayal of a character occurs in Jesse James, for only such treatment could win for the outlaw the admiration of the audience. The careful representation of the events which started Jesse on his career as an outlaw is an important factor in this kindly treatment.

A director has at his disposal several devices for gaining emphasis--color, music, the close-up, repetition, and an unusual angle of camera. The costuming of characters

¹⁹ Frank Daugherty, "He Has the Common Touch," The Christian Science Monitor, No Vol. 15, November 9, 1938.

many times follows the colors desired for emphasis. Main characters will naturally wear the more attractive colors; whereas minor players may appear in more drab costumes. Such a use of color for dramatic emphasis occurs in The Adventures of Robin Hood, when King Richard and his followers throw off their black cloaks and hoods to reveal the brilliant red and white uniforms of the Crusaders. This use of color may be considered symbolic of the new courage, hope, and faith.²⁰

Although music is generally kept in the background, sometimes it is brought forward for emphasis. A very dramatic scene consisting chiefly of movement, especially the steady advancing of a character or a group, usually has a stirring musical accompaniment. Such a scene occurs in Juarez, when the President of Mexico advances bravely in the face of the leveled guns.²¹

Infinite are the possibilities of the close-up for gaining emphasis. The close-up of a paragraph in a letter is far more effective than the reading of the letter by a player. The camera focuses upon the ring a player is wearing, then moves to reveal the same type of ring in a portrait on

²⁰"Miracle of New Color Movies," Popular Mechanics Magazine, 71:338, March, 1939.

²¹"Juarez," Time, 33:66, May 8, 1939.

the wall. The relationship is apparent at once, stamped indelibly upon the mind of the spectator, at least such was the forceful revelation in The Scarlet Pimpernel. The director has achieved emphasis. The possibilities for emphasis through facial expression are even more varied. Every variation in a player's reaction to a situation may be emphasized by the close-up. The wise director chooses only the expressions which will give to the audience a better idea of the progress of the story.

A skillful director frequently uses contrast for emphasis. Of the men honored by being called upon to strike the golden spike in Union Pacific, the first two swing the mallet awkwardly and ineffectively. In contrast the official from the Southern Pacific grasps the mallet and skillfully drives the golden spike. The contrast recalls to the audience the scenes in which this same official has been compelled to walk over miles of Union Pacific track and drive in many loose spikes which might otherwise lessen the stability of the railroad. Contrast gives the emphasis.

Sweeping, panoramic views may emphasize more than the setting of a picture. The views of the wide expanse of

ocean separating Maximilian from his wife heighten the tragedy of their lives by emphasizing the distance that separates them.²²

Repetition is really another device for gaining emphasis, a device which lends its help to comedy as well as to tragedy. The "follow-the-leader" repetition of the simple act of stirring sugar in a cup of tea, this repetition in Pygmalion is humorous because it emphasizes the artificiality of society manners. Similarly in Jesse James the repetition of the publisher's eagerness to write editorials furnishes comic relief. The humor in this case is not unmixed with pathos, for the owner of the newspaper has a sincere desire to better the country but knows no effective way to accomplish it.

Repetition with an entirely different effect occurs in Juarez in the recurrence of strains of the song "La Paloma." Each repetition recalls the scene when the song is first heard, the scene in which Carlotta expresses her love for the song and her desire always to be with her husband. The song thereafter heightens the tragedy of their separation.

²²Juarez, Warner Brothers, William Dieterle--Director.

Parallel action as it is used in the motion picture is related to symbolism. The story of the killing of the wolf in Juarez parallels almost completely the story of the democratic tactics for overpowering Maximilian. The same motion picture furnishes an example of a single movement which might be insignificant except for its parallelism. The wounded boy who brings the copy of Maximilian's decree to Juarez takes the paper from the right side of his shirt. After the boy's death Juarez thoughtfully folds the paper and with a look of determination places the paper in his own pocket, corresponding to the place where the boy has carried it. Juarez is to carry on the cause of democracy.

The ending of the comedy, The Awful Truth, illustrates parallelism through a symbol. The divorce of the Warriners is to become effective at midnight. Comedy arises from the difficulties resulting from the weakly latched door between their private rooms. The rapid shift of scenes from one room to the other showing both Jerry and Lucy with attention fixed upon the troublesome door--all builds toward a climax. Occasionally a close-up of the novelty clock indicates the time, as the hour of midnight approaches. The door between the rooms blows open again. The camera focuses upon the clock.

As the clock strikes, out from two small doors come two wooden figures, not the traditional cuckoo, but figures of a man and a woman. As the clock finishes striking, the two figures turn and enter the clock by the same door. By means of parallelism the motion picture has achieved a delicate touch which would have been impossible with the more limited technique of the stage.

Motion picture directors usually place the climax at the end of the play. Recall the point of highest interest in Romeo and Juliet, Anna Karenina, and Juarez. Death in each of these pictures marks the peak of intensity, the point at which all the problems of the play have reached a solution. A part of the technique of both tragic and comic motion pictures is to build to a climax, then end abruptly. In this way the attention of the audience is held to the very last.

Some directors reveal far more imagination than others. The beauty of A Midsummer Night's Dream springs from a vivid imagination. Upon the director of a motion picture rests much of the responsibility of imagination which the audience assumes in watching a stage play. When A Midsummer Night's Dream is played on the stage, most of the fairy-like touches arise in the imagination of the spectator of the legitimate

drama. But in the motion picture the imagination of the director has crystallized those dreamy elements into delicate wings, brilliant jewels, and soothing music. The spectators see rather than imagine.

With an endless variety of devices at his command, the motion picture director becomes a creator of art. One critic says, "I have always considered the director a writer; in other words, a person who writes with pictures, rather than with words."²³ Is he a painter, a writer, or a musician? Perhaps he is all of these, to which qualities he adds a sensitiveness to the dramatic and an unusual ability to manage people. Of him as of the actor the audience is the teacher and the infallible critic.²⁴

²³Monta Bell, "The Director," Theatre Arts Monthly, 13:649, September, 1929.

²⁴George Arliss, "Up the Years From Bloomsbury," The Ladies' Home Journal, 44:97, February, 1927.

CHAPTER IV

PHOTOGRAPHY

Since a motion picture can be only as good as its photography, that element must have a very important relation to the dramatic production. The purpose of this chapter is to discover that relationship, to find out how photography contributes to the drama as well as to the art of a film. The first part of the chapter describes the method of photography employed in a motion picture studio. In the second part various representations of movement are discussed. The chapter closes with a consideration of the dramatic effects of such devices as the use of light and shadow, unusual angles, the "fade-in," the "fade-out," and the "close-up."

The changed attitude toward photography is represented in the following quotation from Gilbert Seldes:

The false notion that the moving picture is a series of photographs and therefore that you can photograph any play and have a movie was also one of the early heresies; and while it has been abandoned as a method, it still persists as a mental hazard, so that directors often fail to make movies when they begin with the script of a successful play.¹

¹Gilbert Seldes, "From Griffith to Garbo," The Saturday Review of Literature, 18:13, May 21, 1938.

Today a glimpse into a studio where photography is in progress reveals the marvelous coordination necessary to the making of a photoplay. When the set, or the background, is ready and all the technicians are in their places, the "stand-ins"* appear for final adjustments of the lights. The director goes over his plans for the day. The players are called before the camera. Rehearsals start, varying in length from a few minutes to several days. If the players know their lines and the director is satisfied with rehearsals, photography starts. The head cinematographer takes a last look at his lighting through a "blue glass" which gives colors their eventual black and white photographic values. A man stands ready to swing the microphone so as to follow the movements of the players. The director calls, "Ready! Everybody quiet!" The sound engineer pushes a button which automatically sets different pieces of machinery into action. Thus the stage telephone is cut off; a red light outside the stage warns that the stage is "live." The motors of the recording machines and those of the camera start. A tiny light within the camera flickers to mark the place in the same

*Those who take the place of the real actors for experiments with lighting, adjustment of cameras, etc.

way that the beginning is indicated on the recorder. Within a few seconds camera and recorder are perfectly synchronized. When all of this has occurred, a signal bell indicates the actual start of photography and recording.² The director calls, "Camera!" The scene begins.

In this completely soundproof stage the filming of a "scene" usually takes less than a minute. The average talking picture contains about three hundred scenes.³ Usually a director tries to get three perfect negatives of a scene-- one for making prints for use in the United States, one for foreign use, one for reserve. But the scene may be photographed more than eight times.

Many interruptions occur in "shooting" a picture. An amusing, but expensive, incident delayed the filming of David Copperfield. After hundreds of tests, Freddie Bartholomew received the part of the young David. Director George Cukor was delighted with the boy's performance the first morning before the camera. Then lunch time came. After lunch Freddie came to Mr. Cukor proudly displaying a gap in the middle of his upper row of teeth. He had lost

² Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), pp. 175-179.

³ Ibid., p. 180.

a tooth in a hard roll! The result was confusion. Dentists were called. By working all night preparing a tooth, they had it ready by nine o'clock the next morning. But the company had lost a half day's work.⁴

Movement recorded by the camera divides itself into three types. First, a relatively stationary camera may record the actual movement of players, animals, and things. Second, the camera itself may move. Finally, the picture may represent in various ways the movement through time or space between one scene and the following one.

An example of the movement of a player before an apparently stationary camera occurs in the scene showing Carlotta, as she loses her mind.⁵ She flees away from the camera down a long corridor and disappears in a blackness as dense as her mental eclipse. In a similar way at the ball in *Pygmalion* the duke and the duchess proceed between the long rows of guests. The players seem to move rather than the camera.

In the opposite type of "shot" the camera moves to give the illusion of movement of the spectator's eyes.

⁴Ibid., p. 182.

⁵Juarez.

Camera equipment is so constructed that noiseless movement in any direction is possible. A "rotumbulator," is a camera platform which makes it possible to move the camera noiselessly to the top of an eight-foot post. The whole structure can move backward or forward on special aluminum rails. The picture resulting from this movement is called a "trucking shot."⁶ Movement of the camera in a quarter or half circle on its stationary axis is known as "panning." The camera platform known as the "boom" can extend some twenty feet from its base to record pictures of a person ascending the stairs or climbing a tree.⁷

A visual recording of almost any great disaster furnishes examples of this movement of the camera among the scenes of wreckage, focusing here and there upon some bit of especial interest. Of this type are scenes following the earthquake in San Francisco and those recording the actions of the Indians, as they plunder the wrecked train in Union Pacific.

The motion picture is not bound by the unities of time and place, to which some dramatists have faithfully

⁶ Kiesling, op. cit., p. 168.

⁷ Loc. cit.

adhered. But the relationship of one scene and the succeeding one must be clear. Several devices appear frequently to show the passing of time. Pages blow from calendars like the autumn leaves. Close-ups of newspaper headlines follow each other in rapid succession. Or as in the case of Zola a writer's books one after another appear upon his table. In Pygmalion Eliza's troubled dreams of vowel sounds, voice recordings, musical tones--all indicate the days of drill and intensive study which transform her from a flower girl to a society lady. The story of a war is sometimes dismissed with a hasty movement of colored pins or tacks upon a map. The motion picture is a fast-moving record of a story. What it records it must record in pictures.

The matter of light and shadow is no simple one. Dan Sayre Groesbeck, one of the artists of moving pictures, says that every picture seen on the screen should have as many square inches of light as of dark and that the light should be placed so as not to tire the eyes of the spectators.⁸ Paintings are prepared along that line with details scaled to counteract the diminishing effect of the camera.⁹

⁸"Paintings Guide Film Workers in Big Scenes," Popular Mechanics Magazine, 69:95, January, 1938.

⁹Loc. cit.

Unusual light and shadow effects arouse various emotional responses. The pictures of Carlotta praying at the shrine are unusual because of the slow, shadowy movements.¹⁰ In the same picture the long, black shadows cast by the mourners increase the tragedy of the ruthless slaying by the autocrats. Beautiful shadows form part of the artistic technicolor filming of Jesse James. Intense are the silhouettes of Jesse against the blue of the sky, as he crawls along the top of the coaches to the engine. The substance of the motion picture is light and shadow. Its artistry depends greatly upon the harmonious use of these two complementary elements.

Unusual angles in photography add drama and pathos to many a scene in the motion pictures. Scenes looking through an open fire in a fireplace are not unusual variations of the customary angles. But views from below a train as it approaches or scenes beneath the thundering hoofs of cattle in a stampede sometimes mean danger to the cameraman. Such danger was encountered in filming the outbreak in the stockyards in the picture, In Old Chicago.¹¹ In an unusual introduction of a leading character, the camera keeps steadily behind Juarez.

¹⁰ Juarez.

¹¹ "Packing Drama into the Films," Popular Mechanics Magazine, 69:72, January, 1938.

This persistence arouses suspense and an eagerness to see the face of this stoic Indian leader. Views showing the wounded boy telling his story to Juarez are made more impressive by the way in which the boy's face appears through a tear in the decree he is holding up. Newsreels make use of unusual angles to add oddity to the news.

In addition to the unusual angle, the camera has at its command several other devices whereby the dramatic quality of a picture may be enhanced. The "fade-in" is the gradual appearance of a projected picture from darkness to brilliancy. The opposite technique, the gradual disappearance of a screen image, is known as a "fade-out."¹² When a "fade-in" is superimposed upon a "fade-out," the result is known as a "dissolve."¹³ The "close-up," which has already been mentioned, is another one of the unique and valuable assets of motion picture technique.¹⁴ A "close-up" is any photograph in a motion picture in which the major subject occupies a large part of the total space.¹⁵ These "close-ups" are woven in with various scenes, taken in the studio or "on location."

¹²Kiesling, op. cit., p. 309.

¹³Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁵Loc. cit.

Going "on location" refers to the moving of stars, properties, cameras, and all equipment, outside the gates of the studio. Many exterior settings are built within the studio. For scenes that must be photographed elsewhere, southern California offers a variety of backgrounds that may represent the Sahara Desert or the Arctic Circle. A company may go "on location" for only a day, or a director may take his company to darkest Africa for fourteen months. W. S. Van Dyke has traveled over half a million miles during his career as director.¹⁶ During such trips problems of housing, feeding, maintaining comfort--all are offset by the social value of learning to realize that fellow-workers are human beings. The story of a motion picture company while exterior scenes are being filmed is an interesting tale in itself, but one which would add little to a discussion of the contributions of photography to the dramatic aspects of the motion picture. Although the importance of artistic photography was temporarily eclipsed by the coming of sound, directors now realize that one basic structural difference between stage drama and the screen play is the greater mobility of the photoplay.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁷William DeMille, "The Screen Speaks," Scribner's Magazine, 85:371, April, 1929.

CHAPTER V

SCENARIO AND MUSIC

To many of the assets of the stage and the novel the talking picture adds its fluidity, its ability to tell a story with rising intensity and without a break.¹ Words of Mr. Kiesling may well introduce a discussion of the necessary changes made in stories for the screen:

No story reaches the screen without changes. Even if the dialogue remains the same and the essential dramatic sequences are unchanged, there still remain important physical changes which mark a definite dividing line between the appeal of the story in pictures and in its original form.²

The motion picture is like the novel in its canvas of unrestricted size.³ Novels, therefore, require the least change to be represented visually. Condensation is the important change, for example, in Anthony Adverse and in David Copperfield. This condensation is done so skillfully in these pictures that many persons have difficulty in recalling which episodes are left out of the screen versions.

¹ Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), p. 59.

² Ibid., p. 66.

³ Ibid., p. 60.

Most stage plays require numerous changes, not in theme, but in amount of dialogue and rapidity of movement. Dialogue on the screen can be only about half as long as on the stage before being broken by action or close-ups.⁴ In The Barretts of Wimpole Street some dialogue was deleted, and some new scenes were added. An example of the latter occurs in the scene in which Mr. Barrett exerts his will to make Elizabeth fail in her effort to climb a long flight of stairs.⁵ The camera flashes back and forth between the faces of Mr. Barrett and Elizabeth in a mounting dramatic crisis.

The plays of William Shakespeare are an exception to the generalization that stage plays require much changing for the motion picture form. Shakespeare has been called "a natural born scenario writer."⁶ Practically no changes were made in the quarto of Romeo and Juliet.⁷ Professor William Strunk, Jr., of Cornell University asserts that the film version of this play is the first opportunity for the tragedy to be heard and seen almost exactly as Shakespeare

⁴Ibid., p. 76.

⁵Ibid., p. 64.

⁶Ibid., p. 65.

⁷Kiesling, loc. cit.

wrote it.⁸ Why are this Elizabethan dramatist's plays so suitable for motion pictures? The literature student replies that Shakespeare did not confine his plays to the traditional three or four acts. He made many scenes. He changed scenes and locale so frequently that his plays have the fluidity and rapidity necessary for the modern motion picture.⁹ Romeo and Juliet is painted upon too large a canvas for the best stage presentation. On the screen, however, the Plaza at Verona can be reproduced in full size; and the balcony scene and the beauty of the garden present no insurmountable problems for the cinema.¹⁰

Another reason for changing some stories before they appear on the screen arises from the attempt of the motion picture art to "clean its own house."¹¹ Certain rules known as the "Code" have been adopted to regulate moral and aesthetic factors. Thus the Code bans profanity, demands respect for the clergy, and eliminates objectionable allusions.¹²

To be sure, some motion pictures are based upon original scenarios, that is, upon script written originally for the screen.

⁸ Kiesling, loc. cit.

⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 68.

¹² Loc. cit.

However, the process of adapting themes and stories from material originally published in another form is quite frequent. At least a discussion of this process will indicate the duties of the scenario writer, as well as the nature of the scenario. The actual process of producing a scenario is threefold. The first part of the structure is the basic story or play, that from which the screen takes its theme.¹³ The last form is the completed scenario, but between the two is the important step known as "the treatment."¹⁴

The treatment is frequently written by the scenario writer but sometimes by the author of the original material. In writing a treatment, the writer places in sequence the action of each scene as he visualizes it on the screen. The treatment is written in paragraph form with very little dialogue. It is not supposed to be a finished piece of literature. The writer then consults many persons, including the associate producer, the director, and frequently other writers. Faulty points are corrected. He then makes a second treatment with more dialogue and more detailed characterization.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁴ Kieselring, loc. cit.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

The treatment passes into the hands of the scenario writer, who fits the paragraphs into scenes, noting various dramatic possibilities.¹⁶ The scenario writer becomes an expert largely through experience. He must know the actual facilities of the studio for which he is working, the skill of the cameraman, and the technique of the director who will handle the script.¹⁷

"Comedy constructionists" or "gag men" are employed to inject humor into a script designed to be humorous. Laughs are far more difficult to judge than are reactions to romance or tragedy. Screen comedians usually try out their humor before actual audiences by traveling in a stage show to several cities. Laugh reactions of the audiences will cause them to emphasize a bit of humor, shorten it, or leave it out entirely.¹⁸

The completed scenario goes to the stenographic department, where about fifty copies are made and sent to the heads of various departments which will have a part in the making of the picture.

¹⁶Kiesling, loc. cit.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 76.

This process of preparation for a motion picture occupies about one-half the time required for its making. This period includes the adaptation of the story as well as the making of sets and costumes. The actual photography requires only about one-sixth of the total time. The remaining two-sixths of the time make up the period of assembling, editing, and manufacturing of release prints.¹⁹

The scenario writer is a very important person in the making of a motion picture. He is more than a good author. He must have a keen sense of dramatic values and the ability to visualize a story in terms of the materials and personalities of his own studio.

Sharing honors with the scenario writer is the musician, the composer who writes the score that is successfully mingled with the dialogue and sound effects of the picture.

Since the first public exhibitions of films, music has been an inseparable companion.²⁰ In the days of the nickelodeon the assistant pianist held an important place. The nature of the piano selections varied. The young lady usually played the latest ragtime. Methodically she went

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

²⁰ Boris Morros, "Motion Pictures Turning to Music," The Musician, 43:154, September, 1938.

through the music placed on the piano. Occasionally a realistic touch complemented the scene of falling off a cliff, a custard pie warfare, or the inevitable chase by the police.²¹ For death scenes the piano gave forth "When I Lost You," and for sadness the music shifted to "Hearts and Flowers."²² The man pianist frequently played minor salon pieces of the nineteenth century, with a staccato theme announcing the entrance of the villain.²³

Next came the pipe organ to furnish musical accompaniment for the silent film. The appearance of the movie orchestra led to a demand for especially composed music to accompany the picture.²⁴ The Birth of a Nation was one of the early pictures to have a synchronized score. Joseph Carl Briel composed the score, of which one motif has become the air signature for Amos 'n' Andy.²⁵ To this musical score should go some credit for the success of the picture.²⁶

²¹ Morros, loc. cit.

²² Loc. cit.

²³ Loc. cit.

²⁴ Loc. cit.

²⁵ Milton Mackaye, "The Birth of a Nation," Scribner's Magazine, 102:46, November, 1937.

²⁶ Morros, loc. cit.

With the coming of sound, music became an actual part of the film. As a rule the music should remain in the background, making itself felt without effort, but nevertheless, augmenting the emotional passages.²⁷ "There is no end to the musical possibilities of the cinema, especially where music is employed to deepen and enrich the whole meaning of life."²⁸

In pictures today music is used in two distinct ways. In the so-called musical picture the selections played or sung are of equal importance with the story. Such pictures are The Girl of the Golden West, Naughty Marietta, and The Firefly.²⁹ The second use of music in pictures is to increase the dramatic effects of a photoplay. The process of playing music under a dramatic scene is called "underscoring."

The studios maintain extensive music libraries, one of which has more than eighty thousand numbers.³⁰ Use of a musical selection in a dramatic scene frequently increases the meaning of the selection for the average person. Dvorak's "The New World Symphony," so frequently requested, set the

²⁷ Morros, loc. cit.

²⁸ Loc. cit.

²⁹ Kiesling, op. cit., p. 209.

³⁰ Loc. cit.

emotional tempo in the scene of The Ten Commandments which shows Moses leading twenty-five hundred Israelites out of Egypt. The impressiveness of the scene increased the popularity of the musical selection.³¹

The scoring which accompanies the introductory and credit titles of a picture and that which follows the words, "The End," has remained unchanged from the days of the silent picture.³² The music which precedes the first scene of the screen play is important, for it sets the tone for the coming picture. The musical director selects these scores with care, for tragedy, comedy, romance can all find an appropriate reflection in music.

Dramatic underscoring occurs on a darkened stage with orchestra and choruses as required. The photoplay is flashed on the screen. The leader raises his baton and directs his musicians. The music is recorded by the sound department. Preceding the recording hours have been spent in research and in study of the scenario. Music must harmonize with the

³¹ Ibid., p. 210.

³² Ibid., p. 211.

picture in every way. The director cannot use a piece of music which will be recognized as a composition of later date than the story.³³

An example of an original composition in motion pictures is the score written by Herbert Stothart for the picture, Night Flight. The music is used to offset the monotony of the airplane motor. So skillfully is it composed that few persons realize where the motors stop and the music begins.³⁴

The question of musical copyrights demands the attention of motion picture producers, for musicians are protected in the same way as authors. Only music in the public domain may be used by motion pictures without the payment of royalties. Roughly, most numbers by composers who have been dead fifty years or more are in the public domain, that is, copyright restrictions have expired.³⁵

Outstanding in the coordination of music and pictures is the production Alexander's Ragtime Band. This picture used the music of Irving Berlin to show the evolution of American popular music from ragtime, through romantic waltzes, to jazz and swing.³⁶ Great were the demands upon the music

³³Ibid., p. 212.

³⁴Ibid., p. 213.

³⁵Ibid., p. 214.

³⁶Verna Arvey, "Worth While Music in the Movies," The Etude, 56:496, August, 1938.

department, for it was necessary to be faithful to the period in matters of orchestra, inflection, and manners of singing.

Walt Disney realized the importance of music in motion pictures when he produced Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Each dwarf had his musical theme. When all were together, the theme had seven notes. The music was designed to bring forth tears in the scene of Snow White on her bier.³⁷ And spectators wondered why they wiped their eyes over a fairy-tale! The answer? The musician said, "Let them weep."

³⁷ Miriam Stillwell, "Walt Disney's \$10,000,000 Surprise," The Reader's Digest, 32:25-26.

CHAPTER VI

EDITING FOR SOCIAL VALUES

Since the process of editing a film is less picturesque than the photography, few persons understand the importance of the work of the film editor or "cutter." This process of editing, however, requires one-third of the whole time necessary to transfer a story from the printed page to the screen of the local theatre.¹ The minimum time required "after photography" is two months, but some films have taken as long as two years from the end of photography.² A color picture requires a longer time for completion than does a black and white film.³

Before the picture starts, a film editor is assigned. His duty is to help arrange close-ups, long-shots, angleshots--in fact, all of the exposed film--so as to give the greatest dramatic emphasis. He receives two developed films after every scene is taken. These are filed in metal boxes in the cutting room. In the beginning he shows the preparatory film

¹Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), p. 216.

²Ibid., p. 217.

³Loc. cit.

tests over and over to assist the producer and director in making decisions concerning cast, make-up, sets, and other preliminary arrangements. In this period, however, the film editor is little more than a film librarian.⁴ His real work begins after the actual photography starts.

Although the majority of film editors are men, some women are successfully engaged in the profession. The Good Earth was edited by a man, but Romeo and Juliet was edited by a woman.⁵

Each day the film editor shows to the director scenes made the day before, and the director indicates the best "take" of each scene, based upon standards of acting and of photography. The film editor usually assembles the scenes day by day, as each dramatic sequence is photographed.⁶

The mechanical aid of the film editor is a device which reproduces the sound of the sound track just as audiences in the theatre will hear it. The film passes behind a two and one-half inch lens which magnifies each

⁴Ibid., pp. 217-218.

⁵Ibid., p. 219.

⁶Ibid., p. 220.

separate frame to a size that will reduce eyestrain. Through this device the editor is enabled to check the absolute synchronization of sight and sound.⁷

The "first rough cut"* of a completed picture contains as much as twice the amount of film that will later be shown in the theatre. The "rough out" contains the scenes in full length as well as the new "business," action photographed by the director but not written into the scenario.⁸

When this assembled film is projected, the producer or director dictates to his secretary suggestions for improving the picture, perhaps by retaking certain scenes or by rearranging a sequence. This process is repeated again and again until it is ready for trial before a public audience.⁹

The first preview is a secret showing of the picture to a non-professional audience at some distance from Los Angeles. Only the producer, his secretary, the film editor, and the audience are present. The reactions of the audience guide the film makers in further editing. Postal cards are provided so that persons in the audience may send their criticisms to

⁷Kiesling, loc. cit.

⁸Ibid., p. 221.

⁹Ibid., p. 222.

*The first assembly of the individual filmed scenes.

the studio. Some of these criticisms are very helpful. One suggestion even furnished a sentence which became the center of a million dollar advertising campaign for the picture.¹⁰

Producers may change a film considerably after the first audience preview. Frequently they enlarge the role of some inconspicuous player, in whom the audience has shown unusual interest. This is the story of Deanna Durbin's appearance in Three Smart Girls.¹¹ Careful inserting of retakes may carry a picture to greatness far exceeding its original merit.¹² Producers provide other theatre previews to settle minor points and to introduce the play to the press.

The position of film editor requires a keen sense of dramatic situations, as well as an ability to maintain the unbroken unity of a film and yet protect it from the possibility of censorship. While the question of censorship is not strictly a part of the work of the film editor, all film makers have become increasingly aware of the possibility of censorship and constantly attempt to conform with the requirements.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 223-224.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 225.

¹² Kiesling, loc. cit.

This increased interest in censorship is only an indication of the growing realization that the motion picture has a social responsibility, a responsibility which its wide influence makes it impossible to shirk. The relationship of this social responsibility to the dramatic elements of the art may not at first be apparent. Only when one meets the charge that censorship is deadening the motion picture, does he pause to consider the possible effect of a rigid censorship upon dramatic qualities of a picture. Does the required omission of certain scenes, action, and language make the moving picture less dramatic? That is the question that justifies the discussion of censorship in the next few pages of the present study.

Besides the Hays office of the industry itself, many self-appointed groups and state boards in several states censor films.¹³ In the United States censorship centers around questions of morals rather than politics.¹⁴ Hollywood has consistently avoided controversial subjects, perhaps partly for the sake of popularity and profits. The motion picture Blockade, based on the war in Spain, however, was

¹³"The Rash of Censorship," Newsweek, 13:34, March 13, 1939.

¹⁴V. F. Calverton, "Cultural Barometer," Current History, 50:47, March, 1939.

released in spite of General Franco's "resentment."¹⁵ Some critics hailed the picture as a real test to determine whether or not American audiences wanted thoughtful films on serious social and political themes.¹⁶ The release of the picture, Idiot's Delight, apparently indicates Hollywood's unwillingness to cater longer to the foreign film market.¹⁷ The screen production, however, lightens with considerable comedy the play's bitter attack upon war. A similar test of the popularity of a political picture has been made with Confessions of a Nazi Spy.

Unusually interesting is the story of the powerful censorship which the motion picture industry has imposed upon itself. Much of the credit for "cleaning up the movies" goes beyond Will H. Hays to the real power, Joseph I. Breen.¹⁸ The law which he enforces is known as the Production Code. It has been in existence for some ten years under the leadership

¹⁵"Blockade," The Nation, 146:688, June 18, 1938.

¹⁶Winchell Taylor, "Secret Movie Censors," The Nation, 147:38-40, July 9, 1938.

¹⁷"'Idiot's Delight': The Film Doesn't Name Names, but It Still Carries Anti-War Punch," Newsweek, 13:24-25, February 6, 1939.

¹⁸J. P. McEvoy, "The Back of Me Hand to You," The Saturday Evening Post, 211:8-9, December 24, 1938.

of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. The rules were there, but power to enforce them was lacking.

With the coming of sound, pictures became more lavish and more objectionable.¹⁹ In 1932 and 1933 Martin Quigley and Joseph Breen pointed out the growing feeling against motion pictures throughout the country. Then in October of 1933 came the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Charities in New York City. There the Most Reverend Amleto G. Cicognani named the motion pictures as "an incalculable influence for evil."²⁰ The Legion of Decency was quickly organized, backed by other church groups, as well as by the millions of Catholics. The box office suffered. The result was that producers asked Joseph Breen to enforce the rules of the Production Code.²¹

Today Joseph Breen and his assistants approve of nearly all original material before it is bought by the studios. The reward for conforming to the Production Code is the Purity Seal. Without this seal a picture will be rejected by ninety-eight per cent of the theatres of America.²²

¹⁹ McEvoy, loc. cit.

²⁰ Loc. cit.

²¹ Loc. cit.

²² Loc. cit.

The unofficial censorship in America causes as much difficulty as the questions of moral implications. Protests are sure to follow the showing of a motion picture which uses as a villain a drugstore clerk, a lawyer, an insurance man, an aviation employee, a doctor, a clergyman, a Catholic, a Jew, or a Protestant, an Elk, an Eagle, or a Knight of Columbus, a member of the Rotary Club or the Boy Scouts. Thus Breen says the field is narrowed down "to either Charlie McCarthy or Donald Duck."²³

Last year three hundred sixty million persons paid to see American movies. One incident indicates the extensive influence of the motion picture. Dead End was a "hit" on Broadway, but comparatively few people saw it, practically no children. In the motion picture of that name is a scene in which a "kid" slashes the face of a playmate with a knife. After the showing of the motion picture, New York Schools reported an epidemic of children with slashed faces.²⁴ When an entertainment is so interwoven with the lives of the persons

²³ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁴ McEvoy, loc. cit.

who enjoy it that they imitate even its most deplorable features, the need for regulation of that entertainment becomes obvious. Not only the pictures themselves but all publicity, press books, advertising, and "still" photographs must be approved by the Breen office before they are released.²⁵

Hollywood has imposed upon itself this rigid censorship. The results may be seen in the marked decrease of poor and questionable films since the middle of 1934. Figure 1 illustrates the actual trend of motion pictures in the years 1927 to 1936, inclusive. The chart on the following page is based upon a survey of film estimates as compiled by Nelson L. Greene and printed in The Educational Screen.

The following explanation should aid in reading Figure 1: Within each vertical column of the chart the right-hand number is the number of films in that group; the left-hand number is the percentage to the total output of the year. The upper number outside each column at the right is the number of best-paying films in that group; the lower is the percentage of those to the total films in that group.

²⁵ Elizabeth Yeaman, "The Catholic Movie Censorship," The New Republic, 96:238.

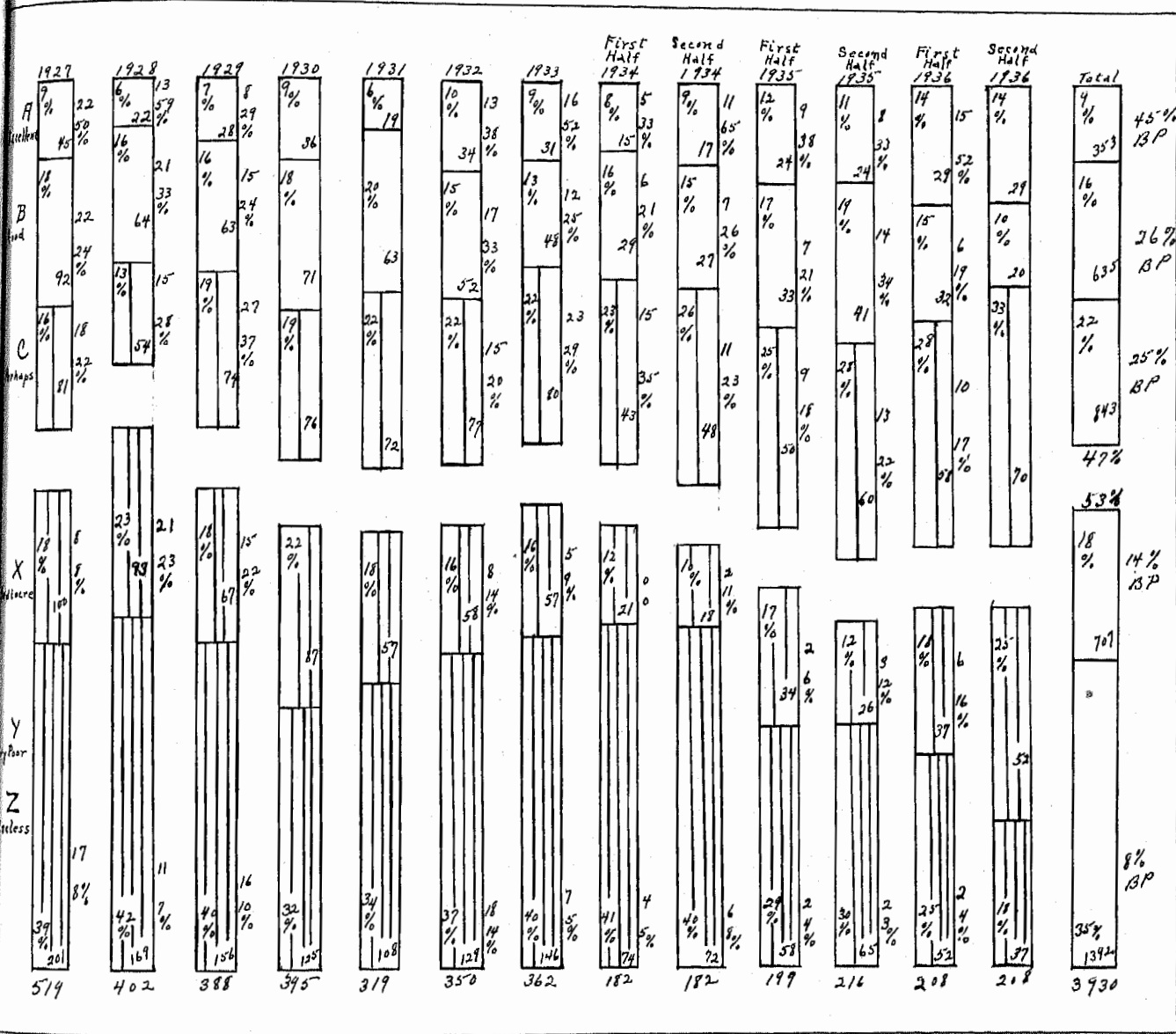


FIGURE 1

SUMMARY OF FILM ESTIMATES FOR ADULTS²⁶

²⁶ Nelson L. Greene, "Ten Years of Film Estimates," The Educational Screen, 16:47, February, 1937.

Completely outside the realm of dangerous propaganda are other social influences of the motion picture. Cecil B. DeMille once labeled the motion picture as a great medium for banishing war and bringing peace.²⁷ The more one sees his fellow-men, the better he will understand them, even if he sees them only upon the screen. Upon the motion picture this assumption places the great responsibility of bringing to foreign peoples accurate pictures of the lives of people in America.

The influence of the motion pictures upon dress is well known. Even matters of technique occasionally start styles. In 1915 solid color shirts were used instead of plain white because of the better photographic results obtained. The custom spread until within two years the vogue was international.²⁸

It can hardly be doubted that the average feminine grooming is far in advance of what it was five years ago.²⁹ Much of this improvement may be attributed to motion pictures, which give to the alert woman the indirect advice of experts in the realm of dress.

²⁷ Kiesling, op. cit., p. 236.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 238.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

The effect of the moving picture upon interior decoration and architecture is no less evident.³⁰ The trend to modernistic furniture received impetus from the motion picture backgrounds. The popularity of manners and customs appearing on the screen is not surprising, for great architects, great gown designers, and great artists are highly sensitive persons who are giving the best they have to the motion pictures.

This chapter has brought together two diverse elements in motion picture production--dramatic elements and social values. A sense of dramatic value and a realization of social responsibility do not necessarily conflict. Makers and editors of motion pictures must have an understanding of both forces. Certainly the possible social effect of a scene may lay a restraining hand upon a dramatic crisis. It is not the purpose of this study to decide whether or not this relationship is an asset to the motion picture. It is only possible here to point out the existence of the two forces, each demanding its share of consideration. For example, no doubt dramatic scenes in war pictures can be filmed without the use of profanity. Would they be more dramatic if the language were

³⁰Ibid., p. 241.

more crude? The answer no doubt depends upon personal opinion. Obviously the actor must bring drama to the scene in ways other than dialogue. If he succeeds, the picture has lost little in dramatic force; and it has gained much in the way of respect from many of its patrons.

PART III

GOALS FOR THE MOTION PICTURE

CHAPTER I

DIVERSITY OF OPINION

According to Mr. Hays, "The true measure of improvement in motion pictures, as in any other art, is progress, not perfection; an industry which offers no further room for improvement is on the way out, not on the way up."¹ Since the motion picture is an art, a science, and a business, it combines characteristics of all three.

To some there seems a great waste in the motion picture industry. These critics should remember:

For every masterpiece of literature, painting or music produced, miles of paper have been "wasted," if you please; oceans of ink have been spilled, and tons of paint have been put on canvas. Yet the world cannot afford to dam the flow of the creative mind. It cannot order the artist to create an unbroken flow of masterpieces.²

The vast amount of public criticism focused upon the motion picture is of great benefit to the industry. "When no voice is raised against this or that picture, when no hand is lifted in protest against this or that theme, the time will have come

¹ Mrs. Thomas G. Winter, Motion Pictures and Their Public (Motion Picture Study Program, No. IV. Hollywood, California; Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., n. d., apparently after 1936), p. 5.

² Ibid., pp. 5-6.

for the industry to pack up and give way to a more vital form of entertainment."³

Indeed, a great number of voices are constantly raised against the motion picture, as well as in its behalf. Improvement in technique and in use of dramatic elements has silenced, to a certain extent, criticisms heard ten years ago. In 1929 Alexander Bakshy presented a typical criticism. Accusing the talking picture of being generally thin and lacking in substance, he said, "In the talkies, much as you may be moved by the drama, you feel it is a dream in a world of ghosts."⁴

George Jean Nathan expresses a similar idea when he says that for a spectator to live the imaginary life of the play as presented on the screen is much harder than for him to identify himself with the characters on the stage.⁵ As evidence of this failure of the motion picture to satisfy, Mr. Nathan cites the eagerness of patrons to see a screen actor in person. This eagerness, he believes, will gradually

³Ibid., p. 6.

⁴Alexander Bakshy, "A Year of Talkies," The Nation, 128:773, June 26, 1929.

⁵George Jean Nathan, "The Play Is Still the Thing," The Forum, 86:36, July, 1931.

turn people back to the legitimate stage, for "it is human nature's way seldom to be satisfied long with imitations and second-hand copies of any real thing."⁶

More recently, the motion picture has been the object of attacks charging that it is bound by a fear of offending someone. That is the reason, Mr. Redman charges, that Hollywood has steadfastly avoided contemporary issues in motion pictures.⁷ Foreign governments have exercised very real censorship over American films. Since Hollywood cannot say anything without offending, it has become the rule to say nothing.⁸ Mr. Redman continues to charge the cinema with inefficiency. The studio heads command the greatest aggregation of talent that has ever been gathered together on the earth's surface. Do they know how to use it? Mr. Redman answers:

They command the most powerful medium of expression that has ever been known in the history of the world, but it is just possible that they do not know that they are using this medium to say nothing. It may be possible, even, that they have nothing to say. And if these things are so, they need not worry about the future of pictures, for they will have nothing to do with it.⁹

⁶Ibid., p. 37.

⁷Ben Ray Redman, "Pictures and Censorship," The Saturday Review of Literature, 19:13, December 31, 1938.

⁸Ibid., p. 14.

⁹Loc. cit.

The subject of motion picture goals Eric Knight considers in the Theatre Arts Monthly. Believing that the best criticism of films in America has been half-hearted and ineffective, he says, "Cheering for the second-rate because, clearly, it is better than the third-rate, doesn't make it first-rate. And in the field of the film the really first-rate lies in the future."¹⁰

Mr. Knight adds his protest to rigid censorship and editing of pictures, even the newsreels, so that they will offend no one. He cites the March of Time as an indication of the strength of the film method of portraying news. This feature reacts the news rather than catches it when it happens. The March of Time, he believes, is one of the few goals which have been reached by the moving picture.¹¹

One goal of the motion picture which has been clearly seen but greatly neglected is that of the educational film as a method of teaching.¹² The demand for non-Hollywood films will probably increase in the future, says Mr. Knight. New life may come to the films as it has to the stage through energetic non-professionals.¹³

¹⁰ Eric Knight, "Moving Picture Goals," Theatre Arts Monthly, 23:57, January, 1939.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 62.

¹² Loc. cit.

¹³ Ibid., p. 64.

Many critics commend the picture industry for its progress in making "cleaner" pictures. But the work is not perfect. Can the producers get together and solve the problem of making finer pictures just as they got together and solved the problem of making cleaner ones?¹⁴

Glen Hughes takes up the question of the influence of the motion picture upon the legitimate stage.¹⁵ The new industry has proved a serious competitor of the stage and has practically killed the road show. In some ways, however, the influence of the motion picture upon the theatre has been helpful. The screen can supply the violent action and superficial realism demanded by some patrons. In doing so, the cinema lifts from the legitimate theatre the necessity of providing these qualities.¹⁶

Mr. Hughes further compares the two forms of drama by means of statistics showing the scope of the two types of entertainment. Yearly production of full-length feature films is close to one thousand, in addition to hundreds of short subjects. In the United States alone there are more

¹⁴J. P. McEvoy, "The Back of Me Hand to You," The Saturday Evening Post, 211:48, December 24, 1938.

¹⁵Glen Hughes, The Story of the Theatre (New York: Samuel French, 1938), p. 388.

¹⁶Loc. cit.

than twenty thousand motion picture houses, more than in all other countries of the world combined.¹⁷ Today in America, on the other hand, there are not more than five hundred playhouses devoted to legitimate drama. About one-third of these are located in New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles.¹⁸ Very few first-rate companies go on tour, for to remote sections of the country the motion picture has brought satisfactory entertainment at a reasonable price.

With the increase in leisure time one might think that the problem of the motion picture would be to supply a greater quantity of entertainment. Mr. Hays believes it is a sounder prediction that such circumstances will demand of the screen more informative and cultural services than before.¹⁹

Barrett C. Kiesling gives a brilliant outlook for the motion picture, an opinion which may be colored by his great devotion to the art, but one which is, nevertheless, sincere. The motion picture can never supplant the stage play, he believes; but stage technique has definitely profited from the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 388.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 392.

¹⁹ Will H. Hays, Fifteen Years of Motion Picture Progress (New York City: Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., 1937), p. 29.

accomplishments of the motion picture. The increased number of scenes in many modern stage productions is an admission that the cinema's ability to shift locale easily provides a distinct advantage over the old stage technique.²⁰ Likewise, one may note in the stage play of today less exaggerated action than in the legitimate play of years before the motion picture. No cause and effect relationship necessarily exists in this development. Perhaps it is only parallel growth of stage and cinema. But in some ways the theatre does seem to have been spurred to new accomplishments by the motion picture. Undoubtedly the lighting and sound effects of the legitimate play have advanced to keep pace with its new rival. Naturally competition between the two arts would have certain beneficial effects upon each of them.

One may wonder about the permanency of the motion picture as a popular entertainment. To show that it is not just a passing fad, Mr. Kiesling gives a few statistics which indicate the size of the industry.²¹ Twenty-eight thousand persons in the United States are engaged in the production of motion pictures, and three hundred thousand aid in their

²⁰ Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them (Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), p. 21.

²¹ Ibid., p. 22.

distribution and exhibition. This industry pays the government more than one hundred million dollars in annual taxes, spends thirty million for insurance and seventy-seven million for advertising in the United States. But film making has traveled only part of its road. The great accomplishments lie ahead.²²

In the motion picture field, as in any other art, those who succeed are the ones devoted to the art itself. The insincere persons who saw in the infant industry only a quick way to make money contributed little to the screen and soon disappeared from its purlieus.

Wise commentators avoid making positive prophecies for the motion picture, for "the film has caught up with its prophets many times."²³ Prophecies of new developments may become laughable within a year. It is safe to venture that in the cinema of tomorrow there will be opportunities far beyond those of today. In the words of Mr. Kiesling:

These then--perfected color, perfected television, and perfected third dimension--are goals which loom invitingly before the eyes of the coming generations. These are achievements whose greatest fruition must await a genius who may be at this moment kicking his toes in a nursery crib, or running to a touchdown on some high school football field.²⁴

²²Ibid., p. 23.

²³Ibid., p. 273.

²⁴Ibid., p. 288.

CHAPTER II

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study of motion pictures considered in Part I the growth of the motion picture industry. The Great Train Robbery, marking the screen's first attempt to tell a story in pictures, illustrated the status of motion pictures at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the production of The Birth of a Nation in 1915 critics began to write of the art of the motion picture, a term which has been used with increasing justification during the past quarter century.

At a time when the silent picture had apparently reached its zenith, a bomb exploded in filmland in the coming of sound to the screen. Confusion was the immediate result, but gradually the industry was rebuilt to take advantage of the innovation. Although in the eagerness to use the new medium of sound, the early talking pictures neglected the mobility of the camera, gradually a balance was found which seemed satisfactory to the new art form.

The development of the animated cartoon is distinctly an American contribution to the field of the cinema. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs illustrates the beauty and

perfection possible in an animated cartoon of feature length. This picture foreshadows the great future of color upon the screen, for today technicolor marks a trend in motion picture development rather than a perfected accomplishment.

Having arrived by successive steps at the motion picture of today, the study proceeds in Part II to analyze the screen play as a dramatic art form. For theme and story the producer turns frequently to a novel or short story, a stage play, a poem, biography, a patriotic or historical event or era. Of course some pictures are based upon original scenarios written especially for the screen without ever being part of the current reading material, but the wealth of published writing seems to beckon ever more invitingly to the new art.

Since one of the chief elements of a dramatic art is the acting, the selection and performance of actors is of the utmost importance. One chief difference in acting between the technique of the screen and that of the stage is the increased restraint necessary for the motion picture. The camera records such intimate details of expression that pantomime can be subtle yet extremely effective. Matters of timing, suspense, and pause are problems for both actor

and director. It must be remembered, however, that the tempo for the screen play is more rapid than that of the stage drama.

In considering the directing of a motion picture, one should realize that the director of the cinema is of far more ultimate value to the production than the producer of a stage play.¹ Among the dramatic elements for which the director is responsible are the coordination of elements, the handling of humor, emphasis, repetition, parallel action, climax, and a tone either sympathetic or harsh. The personality, training, and methods of directors vary; but their responsibilities are essentially the same. The director alone bears the burden of attaining artistic quality, the task of welding together the arts necessary to make a photoplay and thereby producing a unified structure.

The mobility of the camera and the infinite possibilities of photography form no doubt the greatest advantage of the screen over the stage. Light and shadow effects, unusual angles, symbolism and suggestion, these are but a few of the photographic means of adding drama to a film. The "close-up" gives to the film an intimacy which the stage drama can never attain.

¹ George Arliss, "Up the Years From Bloomsbury," The Ladies' Home Journal, 44:167, May, 1927.

No stories are translated into pictures without some changes. Novels require the least change because of the wide scale upon which the action usually takes place. Dialogue of most stage plays must be cut and a greater variety of scenes introduced. A story goes through three steps in its transformation into pictures: the original story, the treatment, and the scenario. A scenario writer must know his studio, its personalities and its materials.

Related to the scenario is the musical score of the motion picture. Music has had a definite relation to the motion picture from the days of the nickelodeon and the pianist. Today, however, a synchronized musical score forms a part of almost every motion picture. This is an acknowledgment of the effects of music upon emotions. Music in films is of two types--background music and music which is of equal importance with the story. The large musical libraries maintained by the studios bear witness to the fact that producers are realizing the great importance of music to the photoplay.

After a picture has been photographed, it is by no means complete. The process of editing can determine whether the motion picture will be superior or mediocre. The film editor arranges scenes with a keen sense of the dramatic.

In consultation with the director and the producer, he shortens some scenes, eliminates others, recommends that certain parts be re-photographed, and sees that the unity of the picture is maintained and that pictures and sound are perfectly synchronized. After this assembling process, prints of the film are made and released to the theatres.

The social responsibility of the motion picture exceeds that of the stage because it reaches an audience many times greater. Besides the obvious effect of the screen upon dress, manners, and interior decoration, the photoplay has a wider responsibility in supporting established social institutions and in avoiding dangerous propaganda. Because of a fear of offending, the industry has carefully avoided controversial subjects in pictures. However, recently the release of several films with present-day significance indicates a trend toward the production of pictures with serious political and social implications. It is still a question whether or not the public will like this type of entertainment.

John Anderson sums up the value of drama in terms which may apply to the motion picture as well as to the stage:²

² John Anderson, The American Theatre (New York: The Dial Press, 1938), p. 100.

Call it escape, illusion, or an experience in art, it is time made stationary on a separate calendar, man's temporal measure of himself. By it a country may see its own image.

The goals of the motion picture are hidden in the clouds of tomorrow. One may stand like Mirza, looking out over the valley of today, when suddenly through a break in the clouds he gets a glimpse into the future. It is a beautiful future, filled with promise, hope, and achievement. Not satisfied, he turns and asks the genius to reveal more of the hereafter. But the genius is gone. The land of tomorrow has disappeared. And he stands looking once more out over the beautiful valley, thankful for the opportunities and achievements of today.

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