

Yale Film Bulletin

PUBLISHED BY THE YALE FILM SOCIETY

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A GREETING AND AN EXPLANATION

The Yale Film Society has for some time considered the possibility of publishing a film magazine, whose goal would be to give fuller expression to the thoughts of those at Yale interested in the cinema. We would like first to emphasize, therefore, that this is not the "Yale Film Society Film Bulletin," but simply the "Yale Film Bulletin." Authorship of articles is by no means restricted to members of the Film Society; in fact, they will be ardently welcomed from any source. Because the goal of this Bulletin is to establish a critical atmosphere, and not to impose any single set of standards on its readers, we will gladly publish any article of suitable size given to us, on the sole condition that it appear to have been written in good faith.

We hope, also, that those who read this issue will tell us their impressions of it, their suggestions and criticisms. Interesting letters will be printed in the next issue, which will appear some time in April. It need hardly be said that we hope soon to expand our format, including reviews of films showing at the New Haven theaters, notes on films presented by the Film Society, and so forth.

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Printed by the Yale Film Society: Editor, Gary L. Davis;

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Notes from the Editor

The series of films by David W. Griffith presented recently at the Film Society has proven, I hope, not only Griffith's historical stature in the development of the cinema, but also, more importantly, his unsurpassed artistic stature. Nothing is more false than to concede his historical importance and yet to consider his films outdated museum pieces. Their great visual strength and emotional power are still overwhelming. Unlike the Russians, whom he greatly influenced, Griffith is not a theoretician or an intellectual. It is, rather, his sensitivity, his profound understanding and love of his people and of their world, which mark his genius. No director can surpass him in handling of actors and decor; each of his landscapes is somehow a revelation. These virtues seem most in evidence in True-Heart Susie, surely the most profound and moving, yet also the simplest, of all the romances in the cinema's history. The shot where William pauses in a large, barren field, with a cow in the distance, always reminds me of Antonioni.

This film, like all of Griffith's work, is all the stronger in that Griffith is himself a part of the world which he is presenting. This beautiful world is his own, so that there is no nostalgia in his treatment of it. One need only compare Griffith's approach to John Ford's to realize this. While Ford's films are a reconstruction of a society and a decor which are forever vanished, Griffith's films present this same world as the present one, in which the director himself is living, so that they possess a truth and a dignity which Ford can never attain. It is the same sort of difference, if you like, as exists between a newsreel and a reconstructed documentary.

The vision of Howard Hawks, on the other hand, is completely different. Although his subjects are similar to Ford's and Griffith's, his treatment is very different - far more abstract, somehow more European. I hope that a large audience saw his magnificent Rio Bravo on television last week. While Ford and Griffith want to present a precise view of a certain society, so that the decors, the costumes, the landscapes, and the social backgrounds all assume a great importance in their films, Hawks is concerned only with the moral stature of the individual. He is now making a film on auto racing, Red Line 7000, perhaps to be released next summer.

I suspect that most people don't realize the large number of excellent films which may be seen on television. Judicious television viewing can give a better idea of the history of the American cinema than the Museum of Modern Art could imagine. If this Bulletin is successful, we would like to inaugurate a periodical listing of worthy films to be shown on television.

To make a sudden jump from the classical cinema to the modern, our cover is

a still from Jean-Luc Godard's Le M^opris (Contempt). We have chosen it partly as a protest against the unspeakable treatment given the film by the New York critics and partly in the hope that the film will soon be shown in New Haven and well appreciated (although this last hope, admittedly, is a rather feeble one, since the New Haven theaters could hardly be more irresponsible). Contempt is surely a major work of one of the contemporary cinema's major artists. I would say that its main theme is the lostness of modern man, although the film contains none of the triteness which such a subject almost inevitably leads to. The characters wander through strange landscapes, speaking mutually unintelligible languages, watched over by gods made of stone and paint, seeking, like Ulysses, their homeland, Ithaca, which, in the film's final shot, turns out to be a vision of endless space. The film also well reveals the nostalgia which runs through all of Godard's work, represented here by the presence of Fritz Lang playing Fritz Lang (although Godard insists that it is not cinéma-vérité) and by the many references to great films and directors of the past (although the film does not contain a single "private joke," as most of its detractors have claimed). A final irony is that, while the film was a complete critical and popular failure in the United States and Italy, it was one of the year's biggest box-office smashes in France.

- Gary L. Davis, Editor
2005 Yale Station

BONUS FILM

The Yale Film Society is pleased to announce the selection, by a poll of its Associate Members on February 26 and 27, of Ingmar Bergman's

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

as its Spring Bonus Film, to be shown at 3:00, 7:00, and 9:30 P.M. on May 12 and 13, 1965.

Crab Monsters, Masques, Tombs, and the Undead

Unless that critic from Newsweek who suggests that Roger Corman's mind has been taken over by the insanity of his films proves correct, Corman is willfully elevating the status of the horror film to a new sophisticated high. Included on Evergreen Review's list of new esoterics for the cafe intellectuals, Corman also takes honors as being represented in the Museum of Modern Art's series honoring the horror genre - with his recent The Masque of the Red Death.

Corman joins that small group of American directors (including Stanley Kubrick and Blake Edwards) who began work in the mid 1950's and have now reached that lucrative producer-director-writer position that marks popular and critical success. Yet, unlike the others, Corman has directed over forty-four films in the last ten years, with production schedules as short as three days. No one, in fact, ever saw cause to take him seriously until a considerable way through his series of Poe adaptations. Of course the horror genre has always held a Saturday matinee sort of position in the cinema. It is Corman's career that makes us now consider the aesthetic possibilities of his genre. Corman's early films such as Attack of the Crab Monsters, She-gods of Shark Reef and War of the Satellites were not particularly visually significant and are, as they sound, rather typical of the 1950 monster revivals. However, in view of his recent maturity, these early films do

ROGER CORMAN'S MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH



mark the beginnings of a thematic consistency out of which such as his current Tomb of Ligeia arise.

Corman's films almost always deal with the necessity of man to accept life's limitations. His themes inevitably involve the case of the man who defies the natural laws of the universe-- the constants of time (The Undead), light (X, the Man with X-ray Eyes), and death (The Tomb of Ligeia). It is in these characters' success in defying these universal laws that the "horror" is generated and in this new, secret vision that his characters meet their doom. Ray Milland in X discovers a process by which he can see beyond the normal bounds of vision into a new unearthly dimension; but in his own inability to bear the ultimate secrets of his new vision, he gouges his own eyes out. The hero of The Undead devises a method by which he can go back in time via a hypnotic state and actually alter history by his maneuverings in the 15th century; but he finds that he cannot return to the present, and he and all of his re-incarnated lives die forever in the past. And it is Vincent Price's belief in The Tomb of Ligeia that his wife's will to life has granted her power over death that precipitates his wife's resurrection and his death.

Superimposed upon all his works, then, is a religious morality, a commitment to powers that are beyond those of the scope of man and that are to remain beyond man. A prime question might be as to whether Corman considers this power to be good or evil. Is the universal order controlled by a benevolent deity or an evil one? It seems that the power may well be evil - although Corman seems to worship this power as a necessity toward earthly order. It seems that Corman is literally in alliance with the Devil. It is the Devil who gives the prologue of The Undead and certainly messengers of the Devil who spread the plague of The Masque of the Red Death. That Corman should save those characters who profess belief in the traditional god seems more to value their acceptance of a life limited and controlled by some power than this belief in a benevolent power. The main characters are destroyed not because they believe in an evil power, but because they dare attempt to see beyond what they are limited to on earth into the realm of this power.

This thematic stand begins, as mentioned before, in some of Corman's earlier films. It is not until his series of Poe adaptations (Pit and the Pendulum, Tales of Terror, The Fall of the House of Usher) that his visual style really begins to develop. With the critical success of The Raven, a spoof on the tradition of the horror genre, the thematic consistency and the visual style begin to merge into artistic maturity. The Masque of the Red Death and The Tomb of Ligeia are his two most recent and most mature works, in which the pure horror evolves into a vivid surrealism of symbolic color and event. With a certain

Satanic attraction, Corman pulls the viewer into communion with the blood and ambiguity of his undead, his unliving. See The Tomb of Ligeia; see if you can deny the attraction.

- John H. Dorr

The Four Fallacies of Film Art

Cinema is the youngest of the visual arts. It was born into a community of artistic media that were centuries. The other visual modes, as painting, sculpture, and architecture, existed in pre-historic times, and appear to have evolved from a basic human need for graphic expression. Film, however, was devised as a technical novelty of a highly materialistic era, and gradually sought to enter the realm of visual art. Born, in a century when the hoary and traditional visual media began to question their own identities, the cinema groped about like a young child trying to determine its nature and personality. Cinema has sought to assert itself as an autonomous being, not at all dependent on the older arts as painting or theater, who were in no way its ancestors. The young films reached puberty and began to read at too early an age, and even the more mature cinema suffers often from extremes of sensationalism or literaryism.

What is cinema? "Not theater, Not literature, Not painting"; this is the title of an article about films written in 1927. These distinctions are quite valid, for Film, as any medium, must maintain its integrity, its endemic mode of perception. Of the four major fallacies of films, the Theatrical Fallacy seems to have the most impact. The basic terminology of the popular vernacular in reference to films contains such terms as: director, actor, screenplay. Film is not a simple translation of theater into recorded document.

Theater is a rather literary mode presented in an unreal, connotative setting (the stage) with actual people assuming false identities. It is fixed in space and can only give the illusion of movement by changes of scenery. The playwright communicates his literary meaning through the rapport created between actor and audience. Film is quite a different case and presents only the images of the physical world. The settings used may be connotative, but can be chosen from any site, and brought to the audience via a recorded image. A film can move freely in space and change locus with complete liberty and spontaneity. The basic means of communication in a film are visual and necessitate a visual liaison between the eye of the filmmaker and that of the viewer. The theatrical fallacy will be discussed again below in another context.

The Literary Fallacy involves the problem of literary elements in the visual arts as discussed by such writers as Scott and Fiedler. Film is obviously

visual art, and, as such, is not a mode appropriate to the same topics as the literary arts. Cinema involves the transmission of visual perceptions through the camera, while literature is based on communication through the more intellectual and abstract medium of films. The most prevalent manifestation is the story film, which also involves the theatrical fallacy. In such films all visually sensitivity is subjugated to the primary function of narration. The istoria of the film is the end; all visual concerns are the means to this end. Hollywood, capitalizing on the materialistic mentality of its audience, stresses story and star in a deluge of films, devoid of vision. This concern for istoria also influences editing techniques so that all splices are made for their literary significance. Other ramifications of literaryism include the symbolic, and philosophical fallacies. In the symbolic fallacy vision is now the servant of a literary iconology. Cutting techniques are again limited to non-visual concerns, and the methods of selection and arrangement of motifs are restricted to literary compositions.

The philosophical fallacy, as the symbolic fallacy is based on the false belief that addition of these non-cinematic elements will give a higher purpose to films. Cocteau, for example, will often juxtapose gifted vision with weighty philosophical discourse, the result being a negation of vision. The eye cannot receive attention necessary for perception while the psychic energy is being drained by a puzzled intellect. These distracting literary elements detract from any cinematic sensitivity and negate the essentially visual nature of film.

The Painterly Fallacy is somewhat subtler than the two mentioned above. It involves a basically visual approach to film, but a sort of vision which is more appropriate to painting than to cinema. While painting, no matter how much motion it may depict, usually

occurs as a single moment in time and space, film exists in a time-space continuum. Cinematic vision should operate in this continuum, and not exist as a sequence of paintings. For example, Sergei Eisenstein composes according to a rather painterly aesthetic. He uses a very still sensitivity in his arrangement of figures and settings in many scenes. Each frame seems to be calculated with a sort of painterly eye. The camera will concentrate on fixed segments of space-time for many frames. Space is not cinematically explored. Composition is considered in terms of the frame, not in terms of a continuous montage. His compositional techniques, in other words, are not an attempt to fulfill the time-space continuum of films.

The fourth fallacy is derived from a complete misunderstanding of the creative process of the arts. This is the Realistic Fallacy. This type of thought will not recognize film as a mode of art, since the photographic process involved in film-making is viewed as a simple record of reality. This fallacy overlooks the selective and compositional process involved in artistic production. Marcel Duchamp vividly proclaimed the nature of artistic selection in his famous urinal sculpture. By the simple act of his selecting a urinal for inclusion in a Dada show he felt that he had made this rather mundane object an object d'art. The role of the artist in relation to the physical world was less bizarrely expounded by Paul Klee in his metaphor of the tree. He saw the artist as the trunk of a tree, gathering materials from the roots--the physical world--and transforming them into the work of art--the foliage above. The branches of course cannot be an exact duplication of the roots, and the artist therefore transforms what exists in the physical through the predilections of his vision into a work of art.

This process also holds true in cinema. The selection of vision and the editing of photographed scenes, as well as the singular uses

of camera transform the physical world into art. Even the most didactic documentaries involve the selection and arrangement of shots and therefore distinguish them from simple records of events or places. The cinematic gimmick is a grossly obvious example of this transformation. Cocteau, also guilty of gimmickery, can create the illusion of floating by slow motion techniques as by splicing in a section of film backwards. In his Orpheus, a glove jumps on a hand, as if by its own free will through this latter technique. All films have this intrinsic quality of transformation beyond reality in the selective and editing processes; and, when controlled by a sensitive eye, become visual art.

Films then are the artistically controlled composition of images of the physical world. Cinema is an independent artistic medium with its own aesthetic. The process of film-making, as defined by Eisenstein, simply consists of:

Primo: photo-fragments of nature are recorded.
Secundo: these fragments are combined in various ways.
Thus the shot (or frame), and thus, montage.

Films are a public art. The excessively esoteric nature of the other contemporary arts has alienated the majority of the modern community from artistic creations. The art of pre-Romantic times, before the cult of the genius, was available to some extent to all strata of mankind. The Gothic cathedral and the Renaissance fresco cycles share a spiritual bond with their respective communities. The twentieth century has evolved a mass-produced culture which Shils has labeled the "brute culture" of the common man. Film artists like Hitchcock, however, have proved that aesthetic sensitivity need not be sacrificed to produce works of art suitable to our people. With a shift in the arts back toward a more universally appreciated mode, it is the film, the most public art, which should provide the vanguard, assert a firm aesthetic system of its own, and restore the former greatness of public art.