

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

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If the movies have a 'pedagogic mission with the masses?' ^{Of} course they do! Every form of art has a pedagogic mission. All artists hope that their works may mean to the people something ~~more~~ more lasting and significant than mere entertainment; something that may stimulate the human imagination, amplify and deepen the human concept of life. And isn't the film, too, a form of art - at least theoretically? What would be the sense of producing moving pictures if we had no faith that they can influence the ~~characters~~ ^{emotions} and the ideas of ^{the} people? ~~everywhere~~ How could I have ventured to perform such outstanding characters as those of Pasteur and Zola, if I did not believe in what you call 'the pedagogic mission of the films?'
/... This is my first reaction and spontaneous reply to ^{your} ~~the~~ question. ~~you asked me.~~ But then I reconsider the problem, or rather, I begin to consider its second part - "...and if so, did the Hollywood production of the last decade live up to it?"

Well, that's a different matter...

I don't want to "judge" Hollywood where I have so long lived and worked. Honestly, I do not believe in the pretentious pose of the highbrow actor who looks down at ~~the rest~~ his 'unsophisticated' colleagues and knows everything much better. Yet, I cannot help wondering, sometimes, if "Hollywood" has the faintest idea of what that means - a 'pedagogic mission.' By saying 'Hollywood' I refer, of course, to those powerful men who actually control our movie industry.
Do they care, really, for anything except business - big business at a minimum of risk and intellectual effort.

No doubt, it is natural that a man expects to get something out of an enterprise in which he has invested his time, his capital and

whatever ~~of~~ intelligence he possesses. Not only the manufacturers of tooth paste or of stockings feel that way but, I suppose, publishers or art dealers as well. But the publisher, the art dealer, even the fellow who runs a theatre, have not yet renounced completely that fine ambition to promote, indeed, to discover something new, original, exciting, and to force it upon the people. The art dealer looking at a canvas - the publisher perusing a manuscript still experience that magnificent little twinge ~~will~~ well-known to all artists and all explorers: Here is something! Why not take a chance...?

But Hollywood doesn't like to take chances. The big producers are afraid of experiments. All they try to do is to produce exactly what the public wants. That is why they are so fond of "reviving" old pictures that have once proved successful. The story of Mr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was a hit with both John Barrymore and Frederic March? Why not try it, for a change, with Spencer Tracy? Valentino was magnificent in "Blood and Sand." Let's revive it with Tyrone Power! - It seems an unshakable axiom in the minds of Hollywood producers that everything, even the stalest stuff, is better than a serious story dealing with timely ~~problems~~ issues. 'No controversial topics!' is the ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ parole, ~~in the studios.~~ ^{The public is} 'People are fed up with politics. Thrillers, love stories, comedies, escape from the boredom of their daily live - that's all they are asking for.'

True, some of the serious pictures have been financial flops, whereas the silliest stuff proves often a sweeping hit. Yet, there are encouraging exceptions. The public is, perhaps, not quite as bad as the producers presume. Besides, I don't see ^{any} ~~the~~ reason why a serious picture should necessarily be a bore. Some of the French pictures that I admire so much, keep the highest standards, artistically as well as intellectually, and are, at the same time, more fun

than many a Hollywood farce.

Sometimes, when I am in a gloomy mood, I cannot help thinking that Hollywood is doomed - a monster sucking out the talent of all actors, writers, directors - and will never bring about anything good enough to cope with the finest European productions. Also, that the silent pictures when they were at their best, surpassed everything ever released as a "talkie." What I feel in such moments, very strongly and ~~very~~ painfully, is just that something must be wrong - fundamentally. I don't pretend that I know the methods to improve the picture industry, or rather, to transform into an art what is an industry now. Nor could I indicate who the culprits are - the public? the critics? the producers? The main trouble is, perhaps, that all three of them - public, producers and critics - seem to have [✓] forgotten completely what that really is - an actor, and the art of acting. Who is still able, here and now, to grasp the essential difference between a great actor and a pleasant personality? The public sees in ^a ~~the same~~ picture real artists like Charles Laughton or Albert Bassermann and, in the same production, some silly Oomph girl or glamour boy. Don't they feel the abyss ^{gaping} between the two types - the professional ^{the ham,} actor and ^{the} non-actor (with ~~any~~ sex appeal)?

Then, again, I am inclined to believe that ^{our present} ~~it is the whole~~ system of distributing and presenting films ~~that~~ is chiefly responsible for the fiasco. It is obnoxious that the owner of a movie theatre should be forced by the Hollywood companies to accept Anna Karenina if he wants Shirley Temple - or vice versa. I can't imagine the audience that is crazy after the Micky Rooney or the Ritz Brothers, and still would appreciate the screen version of a novel by Flaubert or Dostojewsky. ^e ~~I think~~ ^{might} It ~~may~~ be a good idea to classify the movie theatres much more ^{clearly} according to the type of pictures they show.

The Baker's Wife, or certain Russian productions, ~~or~~ would hardly have been a success if they were presented to an average audience in an ordinary theatre. An extraordinary picture requires an unusual frame: otherwise it is bound to fail.

Why not try the same tactic with American films? I am sure there are plenty of people who would be willing to go out of their way, and even to pay ^{a higher} ~~an extra~~ price for their seats, if they only knew that ~~there~~ ^{at a certain place}, there is always something ^{unusual} ~~worthwhile~~ ^{to be seen.} ~~seeing~~. After all, people don't mind to travel from Newark or the Bronx for a particular show on Broadway. Why should they take it for granted that all pictures - good or bad, vulgar or sophisticated - are available in ^{their familiar} ~~the~~ little movie theatre around the corner? - It would increase both the curiosity of the public and the dignity of the pictures if the distribution ^{was somewhat} ~~were a little~~ less mechanic and a little more exclusive.

It is my opinion that there are much too many pictures produced. Something like five hundred pictures each year! What a staggering ^{figure} ~~output~~! Inevitably, the bulk of them is poor stuff. If I had the power to dictate my own will to the Hollywood studios, I would reduce the ^{yearly output} ~~amount~~ ^{pictures} to seventy-five ~~a year~~, five of which may be really good... But this, of course, would increase the unemployment... Things are utterly involved and complicated in a sphere where the interests of big business and the aspirations of artists are so insolubly intermingled. I suppose ^{to possess} a dictator's power would turn out to be quite a nuisance, particularly in the movie industry...

Besides, I am not as critical and gloomy all the time. There are ^(more confident) ~~brighter~~ hours - at least as frequent as the bitter ones. Then I feel that it is futile to keep hankering for conditions or institutions

that don't exist any more, or exist not yet... We must ^{face} reality as it is and try to make the best out of it. And that huge factory of popular dreams, Hollywood, certainly is a reality, and a very vigorous and lively one, too - abundant with the vast potentialities of youth. It is comforting to remember that Hollywood's vices and mistakes are those of immaturity, of youth - not the symptoms of a senile decline.

I dare foretell that Hollywood, like other institutions of our endangered civilization, is to pass through a major crisis, not too long from now. This crisis may turn out to be fatal: in this case the center of our movie production would shift from the shores of Southern California to other parts of this country or even to another continent. If Hollywood, however, survives and overcomes the terrific trials that may be in store for ~~the~~ all of us, she will emerge from the ordeal better and more mature than she was before, and will live to fulfill, at last, her great task and mission as a democratic art for the masses all over the world.