

The Daily Movie Magazine

FOR THE FILM FAN'S SCRAPBOOK



EDITH ROBERTS

We will be glad to publish the pictures of such screen players as are suggested by the fans.

THE MOVIE FAN'S LETTERBOX

By HENRY M. NEELY

"C. M. O'H." writes: "As you seem to be in close contact with the movie game, may I ask a question expecting an honest answer? Have the movies ever accomplished anything artistically?"

"It has been said that 'Life is not a holiday, but an education.' Could the intellect possibly be stimulated by the maudlin sentiment and heroics, all maudlin, which the average motion picture has as its plot? It is not fair to answer that the movies cater to a low class of intelligence, and the producers produce rubbish because rubbish is demanded."

"The movies are the principal amusement of educated and uneducated Americans. To prove my point that they have a completed little or nothing artistically, take the movie version of 'Lilium.' Surely you will grant that it was terrible. Le Gallienne's characterization of the stage was the more poignant appealing by her pitiful disregard of theatrical effect, her pitiful lack of make-up. The screen girl looked and acted like a chorus girl."

"But suppose Schickel and Le Gallienne had played 'Lilium' on the movies. Could they have made that strange, thrilling drama, which was truly poetic, a living, vital thing as they did on the stage? I doubt it. Could even the art of Le Gallienne bring to the movies the successful girl Julie, accepting her lover's fatality and looking above it and beyond it, striving only to be a force for good in the life of the man she loved?"

"Even Schickel and Lilium could not tear the heart as it did on the stage. We would not then be able to weep for the man who beat Julie because, first, she, her tears were breaking his heart. I think that the movies would replace the almost irresistible beauty of the second scene with a mediocre sentiment. What would the movies do with that fantastic scene in which Lilium and The Starrook play the mad night murder? I shudder to think about what they would do. You do agree with me I am sure, as your president believed in the most artistic extravagance to call American's greatest actress. In the movies she is but a glittering gilded butterfly on the stage her art is almost non-existent. There there was Peter Hubson, that almost overthrown my convictions, but in over twenty years there is only one 'Peter Hubson' in there much longer."

"I think not. At least I hope that"

Ethel Barrymore will remain on the stage, and not again succumb to the lure of the movies. And I also hope that 'Anna Christie' will be spared the brutality of the Danish version. Of course this is an exaggeration, but it holds few consolations when all your most cherished illusions are dispelled by movie versions."

"The cinema may be, as Mr. Hays says, 'a national stabilizer,' but they certainly are not artistic, and the question is, can they ever be? Even Bernard Shaw, who seldom, if ever, things in terms of art, concerning his own plays, refused to have them filmed. How can our so-called culture endure if our chief intellectual food is the movies, with their commonplace, hackneyed plots?"

"Tell me, tell me, why do you, why do I, why does not one go to the movies?"

for amusement? Our mental faculties would be far more stimulated by staying at home and going on a literary debauch with Nick Carter."

"You give the movies a pretty heartless dressing down, but, in a way, there is a lot of truth in what you say. As examples of high art, I am afraid the successes have been few and far between. But I think you overlook an important point. Your unfavorable criticism, if you analyze it, is confined to successful stage plays attempted in movie versions. Now the fact that a play like 'Lilium' is wonderful on the stage does not imply that it should be good in the movies. In fact, I believe that the truth is just the opposite. What gives the most heart-rending appeal in 'Lilium'? Wasn't it the hopeless, tragic, melancholy monologue of Eva Le Gallienne's voice? The author didn't write that. It was her contribution to the Melnor play. The movies couldn't possibly reproduce it. And they couldn't reproduce the questioning voice of the old woman nor the scene between Lilium and The Starrook. In other words, 'Lilium' is not screen material, so far as reproducing its art appeal is concerned."

It is so with most great plays and most great books. They are conceived as plays or books by men whose medium of expression is plays or books, and (speaking generally) they cannot be translated into another medium without either losing in art or being entirely done over as original material."

I believe it is possible to reach a high art form with stories written by men and women whose natural medium of expression is the screen. I think 'Callaghan' and 'The Golden' point the way to home. And I believe that, when the screen has been with us long enough, it will take its legitimate place among the arts."

You speak of twenty years as a long time. But it took the other arts twenty centuries to develop from their crude beginnings."

Just at present the movies are a popular amusement and the producers have earned their money. I have no wish to gratify a craze either for a star, a book, or a play, on the screen. Hence the wild scramble for the "box-office appeal."

But I'm not discouraged by any means. If the movies do nothing more than give us such fine, simple human documents as 'The Good Provider,' they will justify themselves, whether they become one of the fine arts or not."

"Gore Jay" has been to apologize for my former neglect. I have been out at your feet and all that sort of thing."

"Beyond the Rocks" was made entirely in California-Alps, Sahara Desert and all that, they interpreted 'stock' shots of Versailles and once or twice did some clever double platting with the actors' apparently in the streets of Paris."

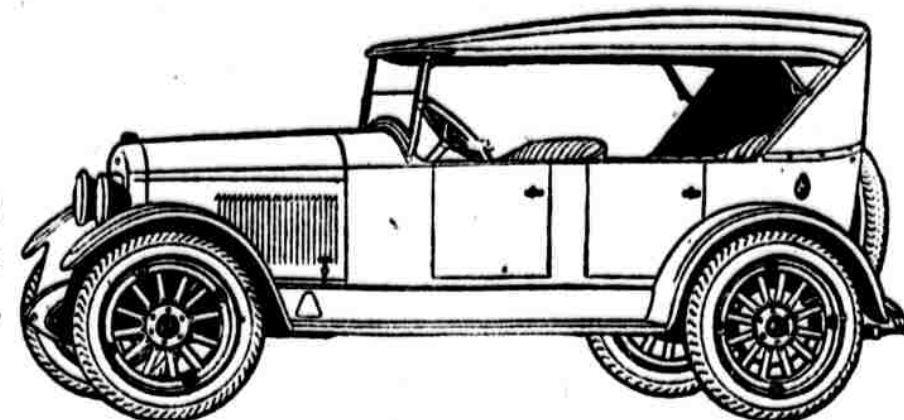
"I'm glad, after you say you thought the picture 'splendid,' that you admit one or two parts 'missed connections.' Yes, they did—my first one or two—because you actually suppose of my refusal to print Von Stroheim's picture. Listen! If many more fans write in and approve of it, I'm likely to turn right around and print the darn thing. I'm a contentions old man."

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