NOTE TO USERS

The Emergence of Film Criticism in North American Film Trade Journals, 1907-1912

Santiago Hidalgo

A Thesis

In

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Abstract

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This thesis traces the emergence of film criticism discourse in American film trade publications between the years 1906 and 1913, giving particular attention to the most prolific of these journals, *Moving Picture World*. Early film criticism is a discourse of complex determinations, influenced in part by progressive ideology, film as art discourse, industry objectives, and individual creativity. Film scholars so far have concentrated on the differences between early and later criticism but this has led them to erroneously conclude that early film criticism is in fact not "criticism" proper. In the first instance, my research shows that early film criticism shares an interpretive gesture with contemporary film criticism, and should therefore not be excluded from the history of this discursive practice. Moreover, a close analysis of early film criticism within its own historical, cultural and institutional context shows that it also followed its own standards and discursive logics, making the modern concept of "film criticism" an unnecessary standard for judging the value of these early texts.

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Introduction

In North America, the practice of "film criticism," as a form of review or commentary on specific films, began in 1906 when *Film Views and Index* began publishing regular reviews under the heading of "New Films."[1] Over the following years other trade publications began a similar practice. In these texts, one can discern the development of a diverse and heterogeneous discourse on film. One of the central questions this thesis intends to answer is if this early discourse on film constitutes "film criticism." If we take into account what the key figures on early film criticism have to say, the answer is already at hand. Consider, for example, the seminal anthology *American Film Criticism* of Stanley Kauffman who gives us a fairly clear indication of his answer by making this rather disparaging remark: "in the earliest years, reviews worth reprinting hardly exist." [2]

Most scholars writing on film criticism hold a similar position, respecting the fact that some have much more elaborate arguments and others different objectives in mind. Nevertheless, the consensus seems to be that film criticism is not present in the early period. It is this judgment that I contest here by developing two themes: one is an analysis of the literature of film criticism in the field of film studies showing that a narrow and ambiguous definition of film criticism has discounted the possibility of early film criticism; the other is an

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[1] The exact date is 16 June 1906. *Film Views and Index* was later renamed *Film Index*.
[2] Stanley Kauffmann, *American Film Criticism, from the Beginnings to Citizen Kane*: *Reviews of Significant Films at the Time They First Appeared* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1972), x. Despite Kauffman's comment, he was one of the first scholars to draw attention to early film criticism texts. The irony in this statement is that his motivation for publishing this anthology was to dispel the myth that serious film criticism only began in 1943 (with James Agee).

analysis of the commentary on film produced in the early period and its qualities, which seem to me precisely to constitute film criticism when that discourse is viewed within its own historical, cultural and institutional context.

This thesis will contribute to an understanding of early cinema and the history of film criticism. Early film criticism is often used as evidence for making claims about early cinema, particularly in relation to spectatorship practices, exhibition modes, and audiences. This thesis will provide a context for and analysis of this evidence, supplying an additional means for either legitimizing or questioning the validity of these claims.[3] Secondly, the history and study of film criticism is clouded by confusion about what texts count as "film criticism." On the other hand, there seems to be widely held agreement about what texts *do not* count as "film criticism." This thesis will attempt to clarify the status of film criticism by considering both sides of the argument, and examining some of the standards—such as film interpretation—that are presented as conditions for this status.

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[3] In *Interpreting Films*: *Studies in the Historical Reception of Cinema*, Janet Staiger makes a problematic use of early film criticism for drawing conclusions about spectatorship practices. In one example, Staiger claims that "evidence indicates that when those [early cinema] audiences failed to recognize an intertextual reference necessary for the plot, they might evaluate the film as unsuccessful" (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 121. However, the "evidence" Staiger presents in support of this general conclusion consists of a single film review (of *The "Teddy" Bears*, 1907). The problem is that film reviews are rhetorically constructed texts, with specific objectives in mind, and therefore not necessarily representative of audience reception.

A different example is Eileen Bowser's "transparent" use of *Moving Picture World* in *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990). Charlie Keil's review of Bowser's book explains the problem: "ideally, sources like *Moving Picture World* should be treated as forms of discourse which, though valuable for the information they contain, must also be understood as representational instances themselves. (Thus, by not discussing to what degree *Moving Picture World* was aligned with Trusts interests, Bowser fails to indicate how this might have colored its editorial policy on the MPPC's formation and conduct)." Charlie Keil, "Book Review: Primitive No More: Early Cinema's Coming of Age," *Persistence of Vision*, no. 9 (1991); 107-117.

Periodization of Early Film Criticism

Though a general field of study called "early film criticism" exists within Film Studies, there is little consensus about what period or texts this term refers to. For many scholars, the period ranges from anywhere between 1895 to the Second World War.[4] In the years surveyed for this thesis there are at least four distinct but overlapping periods of "early film criticism" that can be identified prior to 1912: *pre-1895* (before film); *1895-1897* (initial responses); *1898-1905* (downtime); and *1906-1912* (the emergence of film trade journal criticism):

(1) Pre-1895 – A practice of "moving picture criticism" (magic lanterns, dioramas, kinetoscopes, etc.) existed before film was first projected in 1895. Patricia King Hanson and Stephen Hanson credit Nathaniel Hawthorne as the "first writer to critique an instance of projected moving images" in 1838.[5] Just as "screen practices" are historically and technologically connected to the emergence of cinema,[6] so to is "moving picture criticism" discursively related to the emergence of early film criticism as a practice.

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[4] For David Bordwell, the "early" portion of the concept refers to the period before the Second World War; for Myron Osborne Lounsbury it is more specifically the period between 1909 and 1939; and for Sobchack and Bywater it implicitly refers to the years before the 1930's. In all cases the vague use of "early film criticism" is understandable; the field of film criticism does not currently have clearly demarcated historical moments like film history (ex. German Expressionism, French Poetic Realism). David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989); Myron Osborn Lounsbury, *The Origins of American Film Criticism, 1909–1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1973); Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism: Major Critical Approaches to Narrative Film* (New York: Longman, 1989).

[5] Hanson, Patricia King and Stephen Hanson, eds. *Film Review Index*, v.1, 1882-1949 (Phoenix: Oryx, 1986-1987); vii. See Appendix A for full Hawthorne text and for an explanation of the confusing status of King Hanson's and Hanson's claim.

[6] Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: the American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner; Toronto: Collier Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1990).

(2) 1895-1897 – The reaction to the first film projections in 1895 produced a flurry of commentary in newspapers (such as *New York Times*). The conventional view of this film criticism is that it treated film projections as newsworthy events, concerning itself as much with the reception of the new technology as with the actual film.[7]

(3) 1898-1905 – According to Anthony Slide, "there were no film reviews published in any national periodical" between 1897 and 1905.[8] During these years, films were exhibited in vaudeville shows and did not receive much coverage. A few variety show trade publications like *Billboard* and the *New York Clipper* occasionally published some film related material, but "much of that information was promotional, coming as it did from the ads of manufacturers and rental exchanges."[9] The nickelodeon "boom" of 1905 had a series of important effects on the emergence of film publications. By significantly increasing film exhibitions across the United States, nickelodeons created a greater demand for

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[7] Since my research does not cover this period, I have relied on Matthew Smith's thesis *Introducing a New Medium: Newspaper Reviews of The First Film Screenings in Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto and New York In 1896* for an account of this film criticism. In Smith's view, the first "reviews" did not address "plot development, acting, editing techniques, directing styles and the like as do modern reviews" (Smith, 31). In any case, "no real reviews of the first screenings were possible:" first of all, "reviewers nor readers had anything to compare films to, as no one had ever seen a projected motion picture before" (Smith, 31). Considering the possibility of a "moving picture criticism" that existed prior to the first projections, this point is questionable. Smith's second point seems more on the mark: "films in 1896 were of such short duration...that no real story line could be developed, hence the typical theme [in the review] was movement or visual effects" (Smith, 32). Matthew Smith, "Introducing a New Medium: Newspaper Reviews of The First Film Screenings in Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto and New York In 1896" (M.A. thesis, Concordia University, 1996).

[8] Anthony Slide, *Selected Film Criticism 1896-1911* (Metuchen N.J. and London: The Sacrecrow Press, Inc.), ix. Stanley Kauffmann's anthology includes at least one review from 1904 (of Lubin's *The Great Train Robbery*) that was originally published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. But Kauffman indicates that this "review" was lifted directly from Lubin's catalogue, hence supporting Slide's contention that newspaper and journal reviews were practically non existent during this time.

[9] Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); 80.

media coverage.[10] Another important effect is that film exhibitions immediately became direct competitors to variety shows. In the aftermath of these shifts in the entertainment industry, *Billboard* and *New York Clipper* decided to reduce their coverage of film.[11] By 1906, conditions were ideal for the emergence of trade publications dedicated exclusively to cinema.

(4) 1906-1912 – Primarily based in New York where the majority of North American films were produced, the trade press attempted to cover the ephemeral, sprawling and, quite often, unstable formation of the film industry. Directed mainly toward exhibitors, exchanges and filmmakers, the film trade press reported on nearly all aspects of the film business—equipment and technology, patent litigations, films available for rental, preproduction information, cultural status, exhibitions, production companies and personalities. The trade press also functioned as a forum for discussion, with readers submitting weekly questions and comments, critics analyzing different aspects of the industry, and editorials adamantly defending film from public criticism. Film critics also published essays on cinema, and of course, criticism on specific films.[12] While trade journal criticism continued well beyond 1912 (*Variety* is still in publication today), newspapers opened regular film criticism departments around 1913,

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[10] Estimates vary about the number of nickelodeons that existed. According to Eileen Bowser's research, "*Variety*'s 'conservative estimate was 2,500 nickelodeons for the entire country at the beginning of 1907. In May 1907, *Moving Picture World* said there were 2,500 to 3,000, and in November, the number cited by [Joseph] Patterson was 'between four and five thousand.' By July 1908, an approximate figure of 8,000 was given by an Oakland, California, newspaper." (Bowser, 4)

[11] Abel, 82

[12] *Moving Picture World* also reviewed Song Slides (see FIG. 5), but the intention in this case, as was the case with their first "Film Reviews," was to provide an accurate description of the piece. *Moving Picture World*'s early "Film Review" phenomena is explained below.

marking the beginning of a different early film criticism period.[13] In what follows I deal exclusively with the early film criticism published between 1906 and 1912 when a regular film criticism practice can first be observed.[14]

Corpus

The material considered for analysis in this thesis can be divided into three groups—the primary material, the film studies literature on early film criticism, and "theory." Since the majority of early film criticism was published in *Moving Picture World*, both in terms of quantity and range, the bulk of the primary material is from this journal. The formative years of *Moving Picture* World, between 1907 and 1912, are moments of intense transformation and significance to the history of film criticism. The constant physical change of the journal over the intervening years, in terms of format, length, column headings, and cinematic terminology, reflected the journal's internal struggle to establish a critical paradigm appropriate to cinema. Film critics published a number of articles and editorials treating the subject of film criticism and film aesthetics. The self-conscious attitude of early critics is all the more remarkable considering the volatility of the period; while keeping track of nearly weekly changes to film aesthetics, exhibition practices, and new releases, early critics regularly reflected on the relationship between cinema and film criticism. The film criticism published

[13] King Hanson and Hanson, vii.
[14] By "practice," I mean the consistent publication of film criticism by a community of practitioners. It was only with the advent of film trade journals that film criticism was published with any consistency.

in *Moving Picture World* during these years delineated many of the central themes that Film Studies would later take as its object of study.

The literature on early film criticism consists mainly of anthologies that provide little actual commentary, though a few notable exceptions exist: Myron Osborn Lounsbury's dissertation *The Origins of American Film Criticism 1909 – 1939* (1966) is the first and only book dedicated to the analysis of early film criticism, but only a small portion of the book is on the early years (1909-1912); George C. Pratt's *Spellbound in Darkness: A History of the Silent Film* (1966) reprints a few examples of early criticism with no additional commentary;[15] Stanley Kauffmann's *American Film Criticism, from the Beginnings to Citizen Kane*: *Reviews of Significant Films at the Time They First Appeared* (1973) is an oft cited anthology that reprints both reviews and essays on cinema; Anthony Slides' anthology *Selected Film Criticism 1895-1912* (1982) focuses on the crucial early years; Richard Stromgren's essay "The Moving Picture World of W. Stephen Bush" (1988) offers a detailed biography of an important early film critic (Bush);[16] the most useful material in relation to my thesis are brief sections from Richard Abel's *The Red Rooster Scare* (1999) and Charlie Keil's *Early American Cinema in Transition* (2001).[17] These works constitute the total body of literature on the subject of early American film criticism.

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[15] *Spellbound in Darkness; A History of the Silent Film* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973)
[16] Richard Stromgren, "The *Moving Picture World* of W. Stephen Bush," *Film History* 2 (Winter 1988); 13-22.
[17] Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 27-44.

I have also consulted several books that provide definitions, analysis and commentary on the subject of film (and literary) criticism. David Bordwell's *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (1989) is a unique but controversial investigation into the practice of film criticism and interpretation within Film Studies. Bordwell's study highlights (and is representative of) many conventional beliefs held about film criticism and interpretation. Thomas Sobchack and Tim Bywater's *An Introduction to Film Criticism: Major Critical Approaches to Narrative Film* (1989) offers a simple, though useful, description of various film criticism approaches. While not being a Film Studies work, perhaps the most important theoretical text I discuss in this thesis is Richard Shusterman's *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*.[18] As opposed to Bordwell's narrow definition of criticism and interpretation, Shusterman provides a much broader understanding of these practices.

Methodology

Discourse Analysis

Though modern film criticism and early film criticism share many of the same vocabularies, early film critics occasionally used these terms to indicate different objects. Accounting for similarities in language, but differences in language use, has meant that in many cases I have been engaged in describing

[18] Richard Shusterman, *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

two sets of distinct but interrelated discourses—the substantive language adopted by early film critics and the actual meaning of this language. The following example illustrates the problem these disjunctions can create in researching and describing historical communities.

In their first year of publication, between March 1907 and September 1908, *Moving Picture World* published a weekly feature called "Film Reviews."[19] *Moving Picture World* offered no explanation for the status of the texts. To the unfamiliar reader, these examples of "film reviews" confirm the standard views held about the period (discussed in Chapter 1)—that early film criticism was primarily a descriptive discourse. However, further research and a closer analysis reveals that the term "film review" was not being used in a current sense. As opposed to addressing the public, offering evaluations, and being authored by critics, these *Moving Picture World* "film reviews" were addressed to exhibitors, (intentionally) summarized the plot, and most importantly, were probably authored by production companies.[20] Therefore, while being labelled as one form of discourse (reviews), these texts functioned in the capacity of another discourse (advertising). Since the general appearance of these texts conforms to conventional views about early film criticism, the possibility exists that these texts could be mistaken for *actual* early film criticism (though I have not directly observed this particular mistake in my research). Nevertheless, the point this example illustrates is that the presence of a particular language in early film

[19] See Figures 1-4. Note: "Film Reviews" began as "Film Chat" (lasted only one issue), and were later renamed "Stories of the Films."
[20] The author status of "Film Reviews" is confusing. Please see Appendix B for a full explanation.

criticism (especially familiar terms like "film review") does not necessarily indicate a shared conceptual understanding of that language.

In order to avoid the problems raised by the "film review" example, my objective in this thesis has been to approach discourse from several perspectives. In *L'archéologie du savoir*, Michel Foucault offers such an approach, arguing that the identification and description of discourse entails the recognition of different types of statements.[21] At its most basic level, a discourse is constituted by statements that refer *directly* to the object being placed under analysis.[22] For instance, my initial research strategy for describing the formation of "film as art" discourse (discussed in Chapter 4) entailed identifying direct references to film as an object of art: "the moving picture maker who is thoroughly imbued with the sentiment of his subject will not send out a picture, unless it is a work of art."[23] This approach to the analysis of discourse emphasizes the presence of particular terms that visibly indicate the central idea of the discourse. In this example, the term "art" is used to refer to "film;" in the previous example, the term "film review" was used to present a series of texts about a series of films.

A second approach Foucault discusses is the identification of a "system of

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[21] Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969).
[22] "Première hypothèse – celle qui m'a paru d'abord la plus vraisemblable et la plus facile à éprouver – : les énoncés différents dans leur forme, dispersés dans le temps, forment un ensemble s'ils se réfèrent à un seul et même objet" (Foucault, 45).
[23] Thomas Bedding, "The Sentiment of the Moving Picture," *Moving Picture World* (3 September, 1910); 509.

permanent and coherent concepts" that "underlies" the discourse.[24] The direct presence of the central concept is not necessary for the description of the discourse. In the following passage, the "film as art" discourse is referred to indirectly: "consciously or unconsciously every person looking at a moving picture applies the same test as to its excellence. The critical faculty, which in varying degrees is present in every mind, looks for the harmony of the whole or, to use a phrase in more common use, the unity of design."[25] Since "harmony" and "unity of design" are classical standards used to judge the value of art (in Wittgenstenian terms, they form part of the "language game" of art), the views expressed in this excerpt form part of the "film as art" discourse.[26] Statements that refer to film in terms of "beauty," "the good," in relation to "feelings" (as effects of the film) or deeper "meanings" can also be construed as forming part of "film as art" discourse.

Finally, discourse can be identified on the basis of formal or stylistic connections that exist between the statements and the object of the discourse.[27] For example, Foucault argues that when medical discourse emerged in the nineteenth century it was generally organised around "descriptive" statements.[28] Similarly, "film as art" discourse can be understood to be organised around

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[24] "Autres directions de recherche, autres hypothèses : ne pourrait-on pas établir des groupes d'énoncés, en déterminant le système des concepts permanents et cohérents qui s'y trouvent mis en jeu?" (Foucault, 48).
[25] W. Stephen Bush, "The Compelling Harmony of the Whole," *Moving Picture World* (22 July 1911).
[26] See footnote 186 and pages 85-86 of this thesis for more on Wittgenstein's theory of the "language game."
[27] "Seconde hypothèse pour définir, entre des énoncés, un groupe de relations : leur forme et leur type d'enchaînement" (Foucault, 47).
[28] Foucault, 47

interpretive statements and attitudes. The concept of art is characterized by traits that seem to encourage interpretive discourse; for many it is an object invested with "deeper" (or less obvious) meanings. Of course, interpretive statements in early film criticism do not always indicate "film as art" discourse; however, the presence of interpretive statements does raise the possibility that film is being conceived of as an object of "art." Taken as a whole, these approaches to discourse allow for a more unified and complex description of it.

Historical Materialism

Another common fallacy in the study of reception statements is the view that (film) texts are the sole determinants of meaning. In *Interpreting Film*, Janet Staiger encourages a research methodology she characterizes as "historical materialism:"

> The reception studies I would seek would be historical, would recognize the dialectics of evidence and theory, and would take up a critical distance on the *relations* between spectators and texts. It would not interpret texts but would attempt a historical *explanation* of the event of interpreting a text.[29]

According to Staiger it is the film historian's responsibility to map out the interconnections a particular reception statement (in this case, film criticism) holds in relation to other cultural texts, discourses and events.

A text-centered approach does not consider the context of reception, nor the intertextual relationships that form part of the spectator's (or critic's) horizon of meaning. Staiger offers the example of Edwin Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

[29] Staiger, 81.

(1903) to illustrate this point: "to today's film viewer, the event chain in the 1903 film of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is somewhat obtuse [because the] causal motivation of a number of actions is unspecified and [...] little textual information is given to describe the character's traits and the relations among the individuals."[30] Though for today's viewer the narrative might seem fragmented and incomprehensible, it would be a mistake to conclude that early spectators also found the narrative inaccessible: "for an urban, middle-class audience in 1903 nothing could be more obvious."[31] As Staiger explains, early spectators were already quite familiar with the story and imagery of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*;[32] therefore, spectators had little difficulty in constructing a coherent story from the fragmented narrative cues provided by the film.[33] My approach to early film criticism is comparable to Staiger's, in the sense that my research aims are to explain early film criticism from the point of view of early film critics.

Trade Press Criticism

However, unlike Staiger my approach has not been to research intertextual connections that may have determined particular receptions. I have also not engaged in comparing and contrasting the receptions of films, as is

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[30] Ibid., 105.
[31] Ibid., 105.
[32] "In the 1890's, one estimate was that more than five hundred companies were 'Tom Troupes,' and in 1902 sixteen groups were on the road in addition to any number of repertory and local companies producing the play [....] One reviewer estimated that in that year alone 1.5 million Americans (or one in every thirty-five) would see the play [....] Knowledge of the story by a 1903 film audience [...] was not limited to dramatic exhibition. In 1899, the novel was the most frequently borrowed book from the New York Public Library" (Staiger, 108).
[33] "It is difficult to believe that the film version would have been as opaque to them as it may be to a present day audience [...] on the contrary – all sorts of referencing of cultural codes and gap filling would have been operating for these spectators." Staiger, 109.

customary in "reception studies." Rather, my objective has been to describe the contested formation of an early film criticism discourse as determined by the interests and standards of the "trade press" (conceived of as institution) on the one hand and the interests of individual critics on the other. Though individual and institutional interests often coincide, there were nevertheless significant tensions between them, particularly in terms of how cinema was conceived. As an economically motivated institution, the trade press had a vested interest in seeing the industry succeed; accordingly, the trade press encouraged a standard of criticism that sought to improve the product value of cinema.

Charlie Keil's account of early film criticism follows from this view. The rhetorical strategies and aesthetic preferences that Keil observes in early film criticism—even when "film as art" discourse is implied—are explained as effects of economic motivations. For this reason, Keil tends to highlight the prescriptive attitudes of early film critics, as opposed to their interpretive, impressionist, or progressive tendencies. While I agree that economic motivations played a significant role in the emergence and development of early film criticism, I disagree with Keil's homogeneous characterization of this discourse (keeping in mind that Keil's larger objectives are to explain the collaborative relationship between the trade press and the film industry, not to provide an account of early film criticism). The evidence suggests that early film critics also conceived of cinema as instruments of knowledge and objects of art. Accounting for the heterogeneity of early film criticism therefore implies a consideration of ideas that may have contradicted trade press discourse. Nevertheless, I consider this thesis

as building on Keil's approach and analysis of early film criticism. Keil's reframing of early film criticism as "trade press criticism" is significant to the study of these texts, since the outcome is to focus attention on real, analyzable material conditions that can be seen to have important effects on the development of film criticism practices; far too many assumptions about early film criticism have depended solely on the analysis of film criticism texts alone.

Structure

Chapter 1 examines the standard view of film criticism expressed by film scholars, that early film criticism was not "film criticism," and that "film criticism" is conditional on "film interpretation." An important argument in this thesis, touched upon in the middle chapters, but more fully developed in Chapter 5, is the view that early film critics engaged in film interpretation; and that moreover conditions were available to make this event a possibility. As argued in the final chapter, a broader understanding of film interpretation allows early film criticism a place within the category of "serious film criticism."[34]

The analysis of film trade journals, film criticism and early discourses on cinema in the middle chapters (2, 3, and 4) present another kind of argument. Whether one subscribes to a narrow or broad view of film criticism, early film criticism can still be appreciated as a distinct discourse with its own set of standards and discursive logic. As these chapters illustrate, early film criticism is

[34] Sobchack and Bywater refer to modern film criticism as "serious film criticism" (Sobchack and Bywater, 5).

not irrational or primitive discourse. Early film critics openly commented on film critical strategies, aesthetic standards, and the overall value of film criticism in relation to the development of cinema. The evidence offered in these chapters provides a different reasoning for early film criticism to be thought of as "film criticism." My view is that film criticism is more than just the sum of its statements; it is also an attitude toward cinema, constituted by method, self-reflection and experimentation, which early film critics unquestionably displayed.

Chapter 1

"Description, Inc."[35]

Film scholars have generally struggled to find an appropriate set of terms for defining early film criticism. This is partially due to the polymorphous nature of these texts, as well as the desire to establish a primitive moment in the history of film criticism; by definition, primitive texts are conceived of as vague, unformed representations in relation to their more evolved relatives. The attitude and language adopted by film scholars toward early film criticism has served to construct a frame of reference that has implicitly negated its distinct status. This chapter examines the "standard view" of early film criticism, as expressed by several film scholars, and attempts to explain the rationale underlying it. One of the main conditions placed on "evolved" film criticism is that it be constituted by "interpretative" statements.

In *The Origins of American Film Criticism, 1909—1939*, the first and only book exclusively dedicated to early film criticism, Myron Osborne Lounsbury argues that early American film criticism is characterized by a "liberal" tendency.[36] By "liberal," Lounsbury means the view that film critics evaluated films on the basis of their moral messages (or as Lounsbury expresses it, "the comparative 'goodness' or badness' of its message"), as opposed to aesthetic standards. However, while Lounsbury's argument is valid (at least in relation to

[35] This is a reference to David Bordwell's heading "Interpretation, Inc." in *Making Meaning*, and is particularly apt in describing the attitudes of film scholars toward early film critics.
[36] Lounsbury, xiii

the early years), his book barely treats the years between 1909 and 1912; moreover, his study focuses on general articles and essays on cinema instead of the criticism of specific films. The reason for Lounsbury's exclusion of this material is that

> These "reviews" [...] were simply plot summaries of recent films from the major companies. Printed as useful journalistic information, the reviews did not apply any critical standards but left the reader to judge the scenario from the liveliness or sentiment of the action described by the reporter.[37]

By placing "reviews" in quotation marks, Lounsbury is indicating that this term does not accurately represent early film criticism texts. The reason these texts are not considered real reviews by Lounsbury is because they only provided plot summaries and did not apply "critical" standards. Since "film criticism" is usually regarded as superior to reviews (see below), "early film criticism" is twice removed from the status of "film criticism."

Anthony Slide's anthology, *Selected Film Criticism 1896-1911*, draws on a similar vocabulary. Even though the anthology offers over a hundred examples of compelling film criticism, Slide believes that "what passed for a 'review' then might not be considered a review by the standards of today nor for that matter, by the standards of the teens or twenties."[38] Evoking Lounsbury's views, Slide argues that "most early film criticism was little more than a detailed synopsis of a new film, with no opinion whatsoever expressed."[39]

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[37] Ibid., 3.
[38] Slide, x. The majority of film criticism in this anthology is taken from *Moving Picture World* (well over half). The remainder are mostly from *New York Dramatic Mirror*, and a few other journals: *Film Reports*, *The Film Index*, *Motography*, *The New York Clipper* and *The Illustrated American*.
[39] Slide, x.

The same kinds of terms continue to appear in more recent "meta-critical" works. In Thomas Sobchack and Tim Bywater's *Introduction to Film Criticism*, early film criticism is ascribed a primitive status in relation to modern film criticism; in the process, the critical language used by Sobchack and Bywater acquires a *strong* value judgment connotation:

> The development of journalistic reviewing and its evolution into serious criticism is tied to the development of film showings to a theatre audience [...] Early pieces of this so-called criticism were, in reality, a combination of reportage (describing the film event in factual terms) and review (giving the audience, yet to see the film, advice as to its entertainment value).[40]

For Sobchack and Bywater, film criticism today is "serious criticism" while early film criticism is "so-called criticism." In their view, early critics did little more than describe films, and give advice as to its entertainment value. Maintaining the same pattern as the film scholars preceding them, Sobchack and Bywater present their views on early film criticism as matter-of-fact, and with no supporting evidence for the justification of these claims.

In the same year that Sobchack and Bywater published their book on film criticism, David Bordwell published one of his most ambitious works, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*. While Bordwell's objective was to undermine the epistemological value of film interpretation, and in this manner lead the discipline of Film Studies toward the safer terrain of "historical poetics" and "middle-level theory," Bordwell offers the following observation on early film criticism:

> "Film criticism was born from reviewing, and the earliest prototypes of the "film critic" were journalists charged with discussing, on a weekly basis, the

[40] Sobchack and Bywater, 5.

> current output of the film industry. ...As long as film criticism was tied to mass journalism, interpretation in the sense in which I am using the term, could not flourish."[41]

Taking Sobchack and Bywater's views one step further, Bordwell's account in effect equates "so-called criticism" with "reviews" and "serious criticism" with "film criticism." The "review" is not only portrayed as inferior to "film criticism," but also described as occupying a historically anterior moment from which film criticism was born. Bordwell is also expressing the conventional view that early film critics were not critics in the modern sense (by placing the term "film critics" in quotation marks), and that interpretive film criticism was not present at this time (films were merely "discussed"). [42]

Similar views have continued to appear in more recent studies on early film criticism (albeit in reference to other types of publications in the following case). In their analysis of early Montreal publications (consisting mostly of newspaper material), André Gaudreault and Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan observe that "Des vraies critiques des films, il ne saurait y en avoir à cette époque."[43]

The consensus among film scholars is that early film criticism consisted of either "reviews" or texts inferior to "reviews." Moreover, these "reviews" are characterized by particular traits: they "described the event in factual terms," "did not apply any critical standards," "expressed no opinions," and were not "serious" or "real" film criticism. The use of "review" in the above examples is partially

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[41] Bordwell, 21.
[42] In Bordwell's view, film interpretation did not emerge as a "practice" until 1940. Bordwell provides a history of interpretation in chapters 3 and 4 of *Making Meaning*.
[43] André Gaudreault and Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, *La vie ou du moins ses apparences: Émergence du cinema dans la presse de la Belle Époque (1894-1910)* (Montréal: Cinématques Québécoise/Grafics, 2002), 12. My translation.

meant to indicate "not film criticism." This is not to say that early film criticism cannot be legitimately classified as "reviews" in the contemporary sense of the term. For instance, "review" can be used in a general sense to denote all film criticism texts concerned chiefly with individual films (reviews, "serious" film criticism, or commentary) published in daily or weekly periodicals.[44] In cases where "review" is used to denote film criticism, its probable function is to clarify that the film criticism in question is not theoretical or essay "film criticism," but rather the criticism of individual films. This neutral use of "review" is harmless, since it implies no judgment on the qualities of the criticism, only functioning to discriminate between two broad categories of film criticism.

However, as the "standard view" of early film criticism illustrates, "review" is typically used to indicate "inferior" film criticism (of individual films), in cases where "serious film criticism" might apply. In these judgments, the distinction between "reviews" and "serious film criticism" is dependent on the presence of certain statements in the texts that triggers one or the other categorization. The attempt to describe, summarize or evaluate films usually prompts the category of "review," while the attempt to interpret, or apply "critical standards," usually prompts the category of "film criticism." Therefore, to classify early film criticism

[44] Sobchack and Bywater offer a fairly standard, and I believe widely accepted, definition of "review:" "The reviewer's major functions are to give the unaware reader the information that a specific film has been released and is available (or will be shortly) for viewing, to indicate generally what the film is about and who is involved in the production behind and in front of the cameras, and to evaluate the film so that readers who are sympathetic to the reviewer's tastes have an idea whether or not they wish their time and money to see it" (Sobchack and Bywater, 4). Sobchack and Bywater also indicate that the film review is generally published in daily or weekly publications and intended for a "mass audience." "Reviewers" are defined as "working journalists writing on deadline, with no special qualifications except consistent film viewing of new releases" (Sobchack and Bywater, 3).

as "reviews" (with or without quotation marks) is to indicate the type of discourse to be found (writing about films published in weekly periodicals) *and* the nature of the content.

If these accounts are taken as accurate, then the "standard view" is that early film criticism was a purely descriptive discourse. However, given that descriptions are determined by a broad range of cognitive schemes, and are complicated by the variability of stimulation, film narratives are rarely described in the same way twice. Acts of perception are mediated by language and concepts specific to the culture (or "community") of the perceiver, meaning that differences across various descriptions can sometimes be accounted for by "interpretation."[45] In other words, even descriptions are to a certain extent "interpretive." In *Making Meaning*, Bordwell counters this view by suggesting that while descriptions are legitimately interpretive, there are still important differences between criticism texts that need to be accounted for in some form or another and that classifying all critical statements as either "interpretation," or, in the case of scholars commenting on early film criticism, as "description," levels off any differences.[46]

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[45] Some film scholars have argued that not all forms of perception are mediated. In *The Reality of Illusion: an Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory*, Joseph Anderson argues that the perception of "illusions" (such as apparent motion in cinema) are caused by universally shared, "hard-wired" rules (mental "short-cuts") that govern human perception. According to Anderson, these rules date back to the earliest moments of human consciousness. While this may be true, Anderson's attempt to apply this model to other forms of illusion (such as "suspension of disbelief" in film), and conclude that human experience of film is likewise universal, strikes me as highly questionable. (Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press, 1998, c1996)

[46] "The chief notion behind the broad usage [of 'interpretation'] is that any act of understanding is mediated; even the simplest act of perceptual recognition is "interpretive" in that it is more than a simple recording of sensory data. If no knowledge is direct, all knowledge derives from 'interpretation.' I agree with the premise but see no reason to advance the conclusion" (Bordwell, 2.)

On this point, I believe Bordwell is completely justified. Consider these three early film criticism excerpts:

> **The "Teddy" Bears**. In a lonely part of the forest stands a peculiar looking house, the ground and surroundings being covered by snow. In front of the house is a little bear, holding a "Teddy Bear" and dancing with glee. The mother bear emerges from the house and orders the little one inside, to which he pays no heed. As she approaches to compel obedience, the little one runs around in a circle, pursued by the mother [....] [47]

> **The Minister's Daughter** (Kalem).— An interesting melodrama dealing with the love affairs of the daughter of a minister who is lured to the city by a villain and begins a course of dissipation which makes her invalid. Then she is deserted and finds her way back to the parsonage, where she is welcomed home [....] [48]

> **His Only Child** (Essanay).—A graphic illustration of what occurs when a man becomes so engrossed in business he forgets his family, or, perhaps it is better to say, overlooks the fact that they need affection or attention [...] And even this picture, which seemed a bit forbidding at the beginning, ended happily with the father realizing that children need something more than stocks and bonds to make them grow up into well-balanced men and women. This picture possesses an unusual in interest in its suggestion of what may occur, and what probably what does occur, under certain conditions.[49]

The first example is taken from a 1907 "Film Review" published in *Moving Picture World*; the other two were published under the heading "Comments on the Films" in a 1910 issue of *Moving Picture World*. Each of these examples illustrates a different approach to film that would otherwise be effaced were they to be classified under the same monolithic category of "description." The review of *The "Teddy" Bears* provides a factual, scene by scene description of the film that does not really attempt to summarize or synthesize the plot. While this "Film

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[47] "Film Review," *Moving Picture World* (March 16, 1907); 31. See Figure 2 for complete version.
[48] "Comments on the Films," *Moving Picture World* (22 January 1910); 91. See figure 10 for complete version.
[49] "Comments on the Films," *Moving Picture World* (22 January 1910); 92. See figure 11 for complete version.

Review" corresponds exactly with the "standard view" of early film criticism already discussed, one should keep in mind (as explained in the introduction and Appendix B) that these particular statements were not offered as "criticism" or "reviews" by *Moving Picture World*; furthermore they were likely written by production companies.

In the second example, the statements provide an actual summary of the plot, and moreover, the critic ascribes causes to the observed actions. The daughter is "lured" to the city; the character is defined as a "villain;" and her state of invalidity is caused by "dissipation" (indulgence in pleasure). In other words, progressive views are inscribed into the language chosen for the actual description.[50] In the third example, particularly in the last two sentences, there is a clear attempt at explaining the implied meaning of the story. The critic interprets the story elements as representing a particular ideology (essentially, that "money can't buy happiness"). In the final statement the critic even makes reference to the ability of films to represent the causes behind certain behaviours (consequently requiring explanation from the critic).

Each of these examples clearly displays a different approach to film, even though the statements might justifiably be characterized as "descriptive." The first example is a scene by scene description, the second is a plot summary that uses "loaded" terms to describe the actions (and implicitly ascribe causes), and the

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[50] A common theme in George Lakoff's body of work (such as *Metaphors We Live By*, and *Woman, Fire, and Dangerous Things*) is that language frames reality in terms that reveal and elicit specific ideological point of views. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987). I believe this is the case with this "comment."

third example attempts to explain the story in relation to a preconceived idea. Consider as well that my analysis has not compared these statements to my own observations of the films; nor have I investigated the intertextual connections that may have determined the criticism. Further differences could become apparent were this to be the case. The point of this example is to show that even a decontextualized reading of early film criticism displays a plurality of statements and approaches that are not usefully accounted for by a blanket idea of "description." To classify early film criticism as "description" (or as "reviews" in the judgment sense) renders the variations in this discourse invisible.

Another related form of classification is to label the authors of early film criticism as "journalists," "reporters," or in the case of Bordwell, as "film critics" in quotation marks (meaning, not real film critics). These categorizations legitimize the view that early film criticism was not "film criticism." Since the category of "film critic" can be used to indicate the presence of "film criticism," regardless of its textual features, then the erasure of the film critic status likewise diminishes the possibility of "film criticism."[51] The rationale against the idea of an early film critic is partially predicated on the view that these authors lacked sufficient qualifications for being "film critics;" some had worked as drama critics or published in photography journals; others emerged from the film industry (as lecturers, scriptwriters, exhibitors...); and a few had no special qualifications

[51] This is analogous to the relationship that exists between "artist" and "art." Though "artists" never fully determine the category of "art," established "artists" can certainly complicate the category if their work happens to conflict with standard definitions. Likewise, established film critics can complicate the category of film criticism by producing unconventional criticism. If an author is considered a "film critic," the substantive output of this author might be recognized as film criticism, even if deviates from conventional definitions (for instance, in some cases a new category might be invented to account for the deviation, such as "impressionist film criticism").

whatsoever, other than having a strong interest in cinema and an ability to write. However, though the backgrounds of early film critics varied, the assertion that "film critics" were absent from these early years is inaccurate and premised on an essentialized sense of the term. If history is any indication, there is no specific background that results in being labelled "film critic."[52] Typically, this label emerges from consistent publication of "film criticism" (yet to be defined), and as with any profession, the label is meaningful only if other members of the same community recognize it. The reality is that early film critics recognized each other as "film critics," and also classified their work as "film criticism."[53]

"Film Criticism"

There are very few definitions of "film criticism" that clearly state the conditions for meeting this status. For instance, in *The Origins of American Film Criticism*, Myron Osborne Lounsbury provides a series of ambiguous definitions that served as his determining criteria for the inclusion of particular film criticism texts into his study. One definition is taken directly from *The Film Index* (an index of film literature produced by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in 1941): "In determining the nature of 'serious film criticism', the present work [*The Origins of American Film Criticism*] has applied the criteria suggested by Harold Leonard,

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[52] Even early film critics were aware of this: "We are all critics, more or less, with varying degrees of qualification. After all, criticism is merely the manifestation of trained intelligence." "The Critic," *Moving Picture World* (15 January 1910); 48.

[53] There are several examples of early film criticism articles that discuss "film critics" and "film criticism." But even a quick glance through trade publications reveals a vast amount of references to film critics: W. Stephen Bush, "Suggestions to a Worried Critic," *Moving Picture World* (9 December 1911); "Critic, Producer and Exhibitor," *Moving Picture World* (16 November 1912); 637; "The Critic," *Moving Picture World* (15 January 1910); 48; Louis Reeves Harrison, "Mr. Critic," *Moving Picture World* (28 October 1911); 274.

the editor of the *Index*, 'to include only such titles as dealt preponderantly with the creative, as against the production, technological, or purely sociological elements of the film medium."[54] Once again, there is a reference to "serious film criticism;" however, Lounsbury does not seem aware (or concerned) that Leonard's definition was meant to discriminate "film as art" criticism, not "film criticism" generally.[55] In any case, Lounsbury's criterion for including and excluding film criticism does not really offer much clarification.

In another section, Lounsbury attempts to offer a more elaborate definition of "film criticism." Drawing once again on the work of other scholars (in this case, F.O. Matthiessen), Lounsbury argues that "film reviews" need to meet certain standard in order to be considered film criticism. Quoting Matthiessen, Lounsbury explains that reviews (as "film criticism") should "furnish exposition and description," give an "evaluation," and offer "analytical insights."[56] Lounsbury concludes, "reviews meeting these basic criteria have been combined with more theoretical writing [in this book] under the single category of 'film criticism.'" Considering that most of these criteria are also common to the film review, the distinction between film reviews and film criticism appears to rest on the presence of "analytical insights" in the latter discourse.[57] "Analysis," along with interpretation, reappears as one of the key words for defining film criticism.

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[54] Lounsbury, xiv. The excerpt cited by Lounsbury is from *The Film Index, vol. 1, The Film as Art*, ed. Harold Leonard (New York: Museum of Modern Art Film Library and H.W. Wilson, 1941); xvi.
[55] The subtitle of the *Film Index* is "Film as Art," and Leonard makes reference to this category in the context of the definition that Lounsbury cited.
[56] F.O. Matthiessen, *The Responsibilities of the Critic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); quoted in (Lounsbury, xv). A fourth criterion Mathiessen refers to, and that Lounsbury accepts, is that "criticism" places the work within the context of "what has been previously accomplished in the same field." However, my objective in this section is to discuss the "analytical" or

For Sobchack and Bywater, "film reviews" and "film criticism" are both "forms" of "journalistic criticism."[58] The main difference between these discourses, as was the case with Lounsbury, is in the nature of the critical statements: "[film criticisms] closely interpret and analyze a single work of merit."[59] There is nothing controversial about these definitions of film criticism; in fact, most scholars would accept them as conventional. As David Bordwell observes, "criticism is sometimes identified with interpretation."[60] Since serious "film criticism" is conditional on the presence of interpretive statements, an understanding of the "standard view" of early film criticism requires further investigation into the nature of film interpretation (as conceived by film scholars).

Making Meaning

The only book exclusively dedicated to the analysis of film interpretation (as practiced in Film Studies) is David Bordwell's *Making Meaning*. For Bordwell, film interpretation can refer to at least two different objects: first, the cognitive activity of constructing the narrative through the selection of pertinent visual and aural cues (what Bordwell usually refers to as "making sense"); and the substantive output of the "making sense" process, described as a rhetorically organized set of statements, such as an essay, that attempts to prove a preconceived hypothesis, the results of which are understood to explain the

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"interpretive" standards because these are standards that are used to discriminate film criticism (as review) from film reviews.
[57] Lounsbury, xv.
[58] Sobchack and Bywater, 3.
[59] Ibid., 11.
[60] Bordwell, 1

meaning of the film (or group of films). Since the second definition of "film interpretation" is the one that stands as "film criticism," my analysis will focus on this aspect of Bordwell's argument (though, inevitably some references are made to the "making sense" processes).

For Bordwell, film interpretation is an argument constructed through a quasi-scientific process of "hypothesis testing," in which propositional statements are tested against the "facts" of the film. The propositions eventually converge on or link to a final conclusion that stands as the explanation for the film's meaning(s). However, Bordwell concedes that the scientific model is an unattainable ideal (hence, its "quasi-" status), since film interpretations cannot be proven either true or false:

> Unlike a scientific experiment, no interpretation can fail to confirm the theory at least in the hands of practiced critic. Criticism uses ordinary (that is, no formalized) language, encourages metaphorical and punning redescription, emphasizes rhetorical appeals, and refuses to set definite bounds on relevant data—all in the name of novelty and imaginative insight.[61]

In other words, the ambiguity of language and its ability to morph into a diverse range of valid propositions is problematic for Bordwell. In his will to restrain the relativity of language, and funnel it back toward a more scientific approach, Bordwell places the entire slippery terrain of language-use under the more rigid and manageable heading of "rhetoric." For Bordwell, the activity of interpretation, even of being-in-the-world, is always "goal-oriented," in the same manner that rhetoric is the use of language to achieve specific ends. The tension between the relativity of rhetorical arguments and the universalism of cognitive inferences

[61] Ibid., 4.

leads Bordwell to draw on a metaphor of interpretation that can accommodate both conditions: "constructivism" (specifically, the metaphor is "film interpretations are like buildings"):[62]

> An interpretation is built upward, as it were, gaining solidity and scale as other textual materials and appropriate supports (analogies, extrinsic evidence, theoretical doctrines) are introduced. Another critic may come along and add a wing or story to the interpretation, or detach portions for use in a different project, or build a larger edifice that aims to include the earlier one, or knock the first one down and start again. Yet every critic, as I shall try to show, draws on craft traditions that dictate how proper interpretations are built.[63]

For Bordwell, the "film interpretation as building" metaphor manages to explain both the cognitive process of interpretation and its substantive outcome (a rhetorical argument). Just as a building requires a blueprint, so too does a film interpretation require a theory or "semantic-field" (in the form of an initial hypothesis) that can be "mapped" onto the film.[64] For instance, one could interpret Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* as an argument against boxing. The interpretation would prove that *Million Dollar Baby* exposes the underlying mechanism that transforms barbaric violence—with fatal consequences— into public spectacles that legitimate it. The semantic fields in this interpretation would be "barbarism/civilization" and "media/spectacle." The interpretation might then cite textual features in the film that prove boxing is represented as barbaric (the death of the boxer, foul play, blood and gore, the blindness of the trainer).

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[62] Readers familiar with George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* will notice the resemblance between the "construction" metaphor and the "Theories (and Arguments) are Buildings" metaphor that Lakoff and Johnson discuss. For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors "partially structure our everyday experience;" thus, the use of metaphor can have a powerful effect on our conception of abstract ideas and reality (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 46).

[63] Bordwell, 13.

[64] "A semantic field is a set of relations of meaning between conceptual and linguistic units…thus city/country can be said to constitute a semantic field" (Ibid., 106).

Secondly, the interpretation would examine the spectacle mechanism that legitimizes the sport in the eyes of the public (the tradition of boxing, ring entrances, stage names, belt titles, international federations, international public consent, literature on boxing, promoters, money, and television media).

The problem for Bordwell is that any "semantic-field" can be proven correct. *Million Dollar Baby* could also be interpreted as *supporting* boxing. This interpretation would show that the boxer is given a unique opportunity to define her identity and achieve self-worth, thus allowing her to die in peace (the semantic field would be "authenticity"). The sport of boxing is also absolved of responsibility in the boxer's death since the immediate cause is not represented as boxing per se. The blame is carefully placed on the "foul play" of the German boxer (striking from behind, and after the bell) and on an "accident" (the trainer prematurely placing a stool in the ring). Furthermore, one could argue that *Million Dollar Baby* itself transforms boxing into a spectacle that ultimately romanticizes the sport for the public. Since Hollywood cinema also legitimizes violence through spectacle, a critique of violence from the industry could be interpreted as undermining the message of the film (ideological semantic field).

There is no theoretical resolution to these contradictory interpretations—both are potentially valid. If the facts agree with the propositions and the propositions agree with the conclusion, then the interpretation cannot be declared false. One could argue that the interpretation is irrelevant, uninteresting, unpersuasive, or poorly made—but not false. Since film interpretations merely produce plausible confirmations of "semantic-fields," the meanings of

interpretations are always predetermined—and therefore, as Bordwell argues, epistemologically unsound.

For Bordwell, film interpretations construct either "implied" or "symptomatic" meaning. Interpretations that construct implied meaning are offered as explanations for messages or themes in the film that are not self-evident to all viewers. The construction of "symptomatic" meaning involves "reading against the grain," and is usually the outcome of interpretations that assume the meaning of the film to be in contradiction with the messages or themes (ex., ideological, feminist, psychoanalytic, structuralist interpretations). In the above example, the first interpretation (that *Million Dollar Baby* is against boxing) constructed "implied" meaning and the second interpretation constructed "symptomatic" meaning.[65] The main difference between symptomatic and implied interpretations is in the "model" that is used to interpret the film. A "transmission model" assumes that the "text acquires meaning much as a conversational utterance does" passing "from a sender to a receiver, who decodes it according to syntactic and semantic rules and according to assumptions about the speaker's intent in this context" (Bordwell 65-66). By contrast, symptomatic interpretations conceive of the text as an autonomous object "cut off from the maker's intentions" (Bordwell, 65-66). In other words, implied meanings are intentionally "deposited" into the film by the author; and symptomatic meanings

[65] Of course, one could justifiably argue that the first interpretation is symptomatic and that the second one is implied—the point, for Bordwell, is that symptomatic meanings are usually in contradiction with implied meanings: "such meanings [symptomatic] are assumed to be at odds with referential, explicit, and implicit ones" (Ibid., 9).

preclude author intentionality because the meanings are "repressed" in the author.[66]

Conclusion

My objective in this chapter has been to provide an understanding of the background of knowledge and assumptions that inform any current research on early film criticism. Based on the analysis of secondary sources in this chapter, the exclusion of early film criticism from academic attention seems to be premised on the view that these texts were neither analytical nor interpretive. For David Bordwell, film criticism is essentially a process of explaining the meaning of films, regardless of whether these meanings are thought to be implied or symptomatic.[67] In this sense, it is the "explicative" status of modern film criticism that separates it from film reviews, and by extension from early film criticism.

In the following chapters, I will provide a more detailed understanding of early film criticism and the ideas that motivated its form. The issue about whether or not some aspects of early film criticism constitute film interpretation is more fully developed in Chapter 5. My objective along the way is to gradually erode the myths and misconceptions surrounding early film criticism, and to draw attention to the value of these texts independently of their relation to academic interests or

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[66] The construction of symptomatic meaning is a practice that continuous with "hermeneutics of suspicion." For this reason, Bordwell characterizes it as "repressed meaning" (i.e., a meaning not apparent to consciousness) (Ibid., 72).

[67] "Explicatory criticism rests upon the belief that the principle goal of critical activity is to ascribe implicit meanings to films" (Ibid., 43). Since the construction of implicit and symptomatic meaning are identical processes, with the exception of the hypothesis applied, then both processes are clearly "explicative."

discourses. In this manner, the analysis of early film interpretation in the final chapter will be appreciated as forming part of a more complex and equally interesting network of responses to film; and perhaps not be seen as merely a rhetorical device for the purposes of refuting the standard view of film criticism.

Chapter 2

The Film Trade Press

Launched on 26 April 1906, *Views and Film Index* was the first journal dedicated exclusively to cinema in North America (later renamed *Film Index*). Less than two months later *Views and Film Index* began publishing film reviews under the heading "New Films," marking the beginning of a regular film criticism practice in North America.[68] Between 1906 and 1909, several other trade journals arrived on the scene, including *Moving Picture World* (1907), *Show World* (1907), *Motion Picture News* (1908), *Nickelodeon* (1909—renamed *Motography* on 1 August 1910) and *Film Reports* (c. 1910).[69] Vaudeville and theatre journals, such as *Variety* and *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, opened film criticism departments during these years as well.[70]

Trade journals immediately had to contend with one of cinema's most intense periods of transformation. The move from single reel to feature length films involved significant changes to film aesthetics, narrative construction, production practices, exhibition conditions and spectatorship. The status of cinema underwent a dramatic change during this time as well, shifting from wide

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[68] In a technical sense, *Variety* (as the name indicates, a variety show trade journal) was the first trade journal to review films. With films forming part of vaudeville acts, *Variety*'s reviews occasionally included references to the films. An interesting footnote: these reviews were authored by a seven year old boy named Skigie (see Fig 16-17).

[69] *Views and Film Index* was acquired by *Moving Picture World* in June 1911. Annette D'Agostino, *Filmmakers in the Moving Picture World : An Index of Articles, 1907-1927* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1997); 13.

[70] *New York Dramatic Mirror* started publishing film criticism on 30 May 1908 under the guidance of the most well known early film critic, Frank Woods. *Variety* opened a section on 19 January 1907 but discontinued film reviewing between March 1911 and January 1913.

spread public condemnation, to tentative approval. The relative novelty of film criticism produced an array of unstable cinematic terminology.[71] In the midst of this volatility, film critics were left with the difficult task of defining cinema and delineating an object of criticism, while also developing a practical and standardized form of criticism that served the aims of the journal and the film industry.

Bad press, poor exhibition conditions, and "immoral" subject matter threatened the economic viability of cinema during the early years of the trade press. For these reasons, middle and upper class audiences, a valuable source of revenue, preferred avoiding nickelodeons (or if they did attend, "they hoped not to be seen there"). [72] The main ethos guiding the trade press during the early years was the improvement of cinema. Thus, aside from commenting on films, film critics also commented on the quality of the projections and exhibitions, and consistently made efforts to associate cinema to values the public perceived to be positive, like art and theatre. With this objective in mind, critics encouraged the adaptation of more classic literature (like Shakespeare), and gradually began

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[71] A nice example of this is when Essanay held a contest to determine a proper name for film. In an article called "There Is Everything In A Name: What the Essanay Contest Means," *Moving Picture World* encouraged the selection of a name that was going to be "clean, good, ennobling [...] and if possible universally understood." *Moving Picture World* remained convinced that "the very life of a business [was] going to be helped or prejudiced by the result." The name that was eventually selected was "photoplay." *Moving Picture World* (20 August 1910); 400. See as well *Moving Picture World*, "The New Name, Photoplay" (October 22, 1910); 933. Another example is the use of "Film Reviews" by *Moving Picture World* as discussed in the introduction (page 8-9).

[72] Bowser, 1-2. Other relevant observations: "This does not mean that respectable people in 1907 could not see moving pictures if they wanted. For one thing, they could see them at the high-class vaudeville show [...] museums [...] town halls [...] in legitimate theaters between the acts of plays or Sunday-evening 'concerts'...and churches [...] In the country or the smallest towns, they had to wait for the touring show to book into the local opera house, or the grange hall, or YMCA, or await the arrival of the old style black-tent show [...] By 1908 or 1909, only the very smallest towns lacked a moving-picture theatre of some sort."

discussing the possibility that cinema should be viewed as art.[73] As Charlie Keil argues, placing "cinema on a cultural continuum with those forms already granted social approval," increased the likelihood of wealthier audiences accepting film.[74] With religious and conservative groups voicing displeasure about the moral value of films, trade journals were especially concerned about the possibility that outside censorship would be imposed. In response to this threat, film critics began focusing more attention on the "subject matter" of films.

According to several editorials published in *Moving Picture World*, the majority of bad publicity directed toward film emerged from the newspaper press (what they referred to as the "lay press"): "We have observed with regret for some time that many important sections of the American press, either through ignorance or some interested motive, assume towards the moving picture an attitude that can only be described as condemnatory, unfavourable and unfair."[75] In an attempt to undermine the authority of the "lay press", *Moving Picture World* claimed that newspapers were generally misinformed about the realities of cinema. For instance, one criticism was that newspaper journalists were quick to ascribe wrongful causes to events like nickelodeon fires, so as to give the impression that nickelodeons—and cinema generally—were inherently dangerous: "An unfailing source of misrepresentation in the press is an accident or a fire at a moving picture theatre [...] rarely does the film catch afire [...] the

[73] Art discourse discussed in Chapter 4.
[74] Keil 2001, 40
[75] "The Press and the Moving Picture," *Moving Picture World* (20 March 1909); 325.

alarmist press, however, seldom takes the trouble to ascertain the facts."[76]

While these unfavourable news items may have stemmed from poor journalism, or a desire to increase circulation by sensationalizing events, *Moving Picture World* was under the impression that behind these news items lurked the manipulative hand of conservatives and religious institutions wanting to impose a moral agenda:

> Then as to the alleged obscenity or unsuitability of the pictures shown; the dreadful behaviour of the people in Nickelodeons—the "immorality," the "vice," and all the rest of the wild farrago of abominations that take place, nine-tenths of all this we unhesitatingly declare to exist in the imagination of the reporters, and the Pharisaical clergy whose utterances they print, these, and these alone.[77]

Aside from insinuating a connection between newspapers and the clergy, this passage also illustrates the severity of cinema's public image during this time. While *Moving Picture World*'s harsh reaction had obvious intentions—to undermine the biased opinions of the press—it also allowed them the opportunity to publicly establish themselves as an authority on cinema. *Moving Picture World* regularly published reminders, in the form of articles, editorials, or advertisements that their superior knowledge of cinema could be trusted to extend to the concerns of international and rural readers as well. In fact, as expressed in another editorial, *Moving Picture World* considered their "worldliness" to be an important part of their journalistic identity; "there must still be an authoritative paper that goes everywhere, in order that the exhibitor may know what is coming to him, and that paper we expect will be, as it has been in

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

the past, *The Moving Picture World*."[78] Of course, one of the most important effects of establishing a strong reputation was to ensure that the film criticism published in their pages would be taken seriously.

Moving Picture World Film Criticism

Between 1907 and 1913, *Moving Picture World* published film criticism in a number of sections and under a range of different headings. The renaming of headings, and the appearance and disappearance of sections, were likely due to the relative novelty of cinema and film criticism. Nevertheless, the film criticism published in *Moving Picture World* can be divided into two broad groups: the regular weekly commentary and descriptions of current releases; and the essays and articles published on general aspects of cinema (dealing with aesthetics, spectatorship, the practice of film criticism, and so on). As a whole, *Moving Picture World* produced a vast and unequalled amount of film criticism during the early years of the trade press.

Comments

While *Moving Picture World* unofficially began publishing film criticism in the early part of 1908 in a few editorial columns called "Our Visits," it did not formally begin doing so until October 1908 with the introduction of the "Comments on the Film Subjects" section: "Yielding to the requests of many

[78] "Film Criticism and the Lay Press, *Moving Picture World*, (20 May 1911); 1113. See also FIG. 13 for more views on the *Moving Picture World*.

readers to take up criticism of some of the film subjects, we invited two capable newspaper men to make the rounds of theatres with us last week. They were asked to be guided in their expression of opinion by the remarks overheard among the audience and to particularly note how the film was received or applauded."[79] Extending anywhere from two sentences to three paragraphs in length, *comments* offered a variety of commentary and information on new releases, including evaluations, impressions, prescriptions, and even interpretation.[80] *Comments* were usually published anonymously, organized according to production companies, and covered nearly every new release. Their consistency and range of coverage made it one of the most popular features of *Moving Picture World*.[81]

The *comments* section was renamed three times during the first fifteen months of its existence; these name changes were linked to changes in the way film was being conceived by film critics.[82] Initially called "Comments on the Film Subjects," the section was renamed "Weekly Comments on the Films" in 1909, and "Comments on the Films" in early 1910. As the title indicates, film was initially thought of as a medium that "contained" the story or subject; for this reason, the object of criticism was the "film subject," and not the film as a whole. The shift to "Comments on the Films" corresponded with a more unified sense of

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[79] "Comments on the Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* (10 October, 1908); 279. See Figures 8-12 for layouts (especially 10-12 since it's complete).
[80] There were no references to actors or directors in the early years, since films had not yet begun listing actors in the credits in a consistent fashion. (King Hanson and Hanson, viii).
[81] Along with weekly *comments*, film criticism could also appear in other less consistent features, such as "Weekly Comments on the Shows—by our own critic," and "Notable Films."
[82] See FIG. 8-10.

film that began to emerge around 1910.[83] Therefore, the gradual and subtle alterations to heading names in *Moving Picture World* (and other trade journals) are important indicators about the views that were held about cinema at any given point in time.

Stories of the Films

Published roughly two weeks before the new film releases, "Stories of the Films" were similar to *comments* in terms of layout (organized according to production companies), format length and breadth of coverage; however, as opposed to comments, stories were intended to be neutral and detailed plot descriptions.[84] *Stories* allowed exhibitors to "preview" upcoming films, and pre-select titles according to their clientele's tastes. As discussed in the introduction, the authorial status of *stories* is not altogether clear.[85] During the first few years, they were likely written by the actual production companies, but by around 1912 *Moving Picture World* had added the sub-heading "by our own critics," indicating a change in authorship status.

While intended as "neutral" descriptions of the narratives, *stories* nevertheless offered positive evaluations of the films. Of course, this is logical considering that they were written by production companies and essentially functioned to advertise upcoming releases to exhibitors. The advance publicity

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[83] This shift is well represented in the "film as art" discourse discussed in Chapter 4.
[84] As explained below, *comments* initially attempted to represent public views—and in this sense were "neutral" as well—but critics quickly adopted a more personal approach given the implausibility of this project. "Stories of the Films" hereafter referred to as "*stories*".
[85] See Appendix B for detailed explanation.

they provided, in the guise of "neutral" descriptions, made them a significant influence on the selection process of exhibitors; perhaps more so than the criticism and evaluations provided by *comments*.[86] *Stories* also had an important effect on spectators. While the public was not the target market, they clearly read film trade journals, particularly *stories* and *comments*.[87] Aside from providing a detailed account of their readership, a 1910 *Moving Picture World* article called "The Stories of the Films" showed the possible effects *stories* may have had on the public:

> THE *MOVING PICTURE WORLD* has a very varied circle of readers indeed. Not only is it read by all sections of the trade, including the largest body of all—the exhibitor—but it goes into the hands of professional men, travellers, lecturers, literary men and other whose interest in the picture is of a slight or possibly of a momentary nature. Then, we have amongst our readers a very considerable number of the general public. By the general public we mean those who simply go to the moving picture theatre for amusement. This section of our readers turns infallibly, week by week, to the stories of the films we print. In fact, over and over again we hear some such remarks as these: "Those little stories that you print are just like condensed novels. We enjoy reading, and if there is a story that we like very much, we go and see the picture." On other occasions we have been told that a visitor to a theatre has actually taken a copy of the *Moving Picture World* with him or her and endeavored to follow the film by the story.[88]

As this excerpt indicates, the public read the *stories* because they were intriguing stories in themselves and because they afforded a narrative coherency

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[86] I suspect that some film scholars may have interpreted *stories* as examples of early film criticism, no doubt contributing to the views expressed in Chapter 1 that early film criticism was descriptive. The reason I believe that *stories* held a greater influence on exhibitors than *comments* is that they were published well in advance of the new releases—allowing exhibitors more time to decide; *stories* also provided far more detail about the content of the films than the *comments* did. As indicated below, *stories* also influenced spectator reception.

[87] Frank Woods of *The New York Dramatic Mirror* gives a sense of how significant this portion of the audience may have been in: "*The Mirror*, at any rate, is published not alone for managers and the profession but also for the great element of the public which desires authoritative information regarding amusement affairs and it numbers among its readers many thousands in all parts of the country who come legitimately within the description, the "show-going public." ("'Spectators Comments,'" *The New York Dramatic Mirror* (27 November 1909). Frank Woods published his film criticism under the pen name "Spectator."

[88] "The Stories of the Films," *Moving Picture World* (2 April 1910); 502.

to the films that might not otherwise be present.[89] By organizing the disparate narrative elements of the film into linear, fluid, and intriguing storylines, the stories were capable of providing more information than the film could possibly convey.[90] In this sense, stories were able to determine audience reception by filling in narrative gaps, altering expectations, and situating the film within specific genres or moods. In so far as stories advertised for future releases, added scenes or texts that might not actually be present in the film, and framed films according to desirable generic categories, *stories* can be thought of as the written ancestor to "film trailers."[91]

General Film Criticism

Early film critics discussed a broad array of topics relating to cinema, ranging from spectatorship, art theory, film aesthetics, cognitive effects, and even the practice of film criticism. It is through these articles and essays that the motivations of film critics, and the standards they applied, can be partially understood. Two of the most important *Moving Picture World* film critics—in terms of discussing film aesthetics and film criticism—were W. Stephen Bush, and Louis Reeves Harrison.[92] Though there is very little written on these

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[89] Supposing, of course, that this account is just.
[90] See Figures 2-4.
[91] Since film trailers are usually made before the picture is locked, they often contain scenes or shots that were eventually edited out.
[92] D'Agostino (page 11) offers a comprehensive list of writers that worked for the journal, though most of them are not discussed in this thesis: "Hanford C. Judson, Hugh Hoffman; Thornton Fisher; James McQuade, the Chicago correspondent; Epes Winthrop Sargent, who founded the 'Selling the Picture to the Public' column, and ran the "Scenario Department"... F.H. Richardson, who ran the 'Projection Department' for 17 years; Carl Louis Gregory, photography expert; Edward Weitzel, who joined in 1915; Merritt Crawford; Charles Edward Hastings, Sumner Smith;

important historical figures, Richard L. Stromgren's "The *Moving Picture World* of W. Stephen Bush" nevertheless manages to fill in some blanks.[93]

As with many early film critics, W. Stephen Bush held a second profession within the film industry (as a film lecturer). A reoccurring theme in Bush's discourse was the instrumental value of film, and the possibility that it might become corrupt in the hands of unethical production companies. One of his greatest concerns was that this might eventually lead to outside censorship. Many of his articles (discussed in more detail next chapter) revolved around these themes: "The Film of the Future" (5 September 1908), "New Functions of the Moving Picture" (6 July 1912), "Problems in Pictures" (16 December 1911), "The Question of Censorship" (9 January 1909), "The Compelling Harmony of the Whole" (22 July 1911). In Stromgren's words, "Bush became a combination strategist, guru, and conscience of the exhibitor, and champion of the cause for higher standards and respect for the medium. His unflagging support for the aesthetic and educational functions of film, was matched by an equally uncompromising position on censorship and controls from outside the industry."[94] Though Bush's essays would often tend toward moralization, this attitude, as Stromgren suggests, was partially underpinned by his interest in combating external censorship.

James L. Hoff; Georges Blaisdell, who joined in May 1912; Lynde Denig, who joined in 1915; Tom Waller [....]"

[93] Richard Stromgren, "The *Moving Picture World* of W. Stephen Bush," *Film History* 2 (Winter 1988); 13-22.

[94] Stromgren, 15

Like Bush, Louis Reeves Harrison shared a similar interest in the instrumentality of film. However, Harrison was far more concerned about the conceptual and artistic status of cinema, and the relevance film criticism held in relation to these ideas. During *Moving Picture World*'s formative years, Harrison wrote a number of important articles and essays that developed these themes: "The Elusive Quality" (20 August 1910), "Fishing for Compliments" (6 May 1911), "Mr. Critic," (28 October 1911); "Why We Go To The Picture Show" (17 August 1912); "Realism," (December 6, 1913); 1125. "The Art of Criticism" (31 January 1914); "Reviewing Photoplays" (19 December 1914). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, Harrison's most important contributions to film criticism included drawing attention to the art value of cinema, and promoting an interpretive form of criticism. Both Bush and Harrison wrote on the practice of film criticism, and in this sense they offer a valuable inside look into the critic's approach and way of thinking about film.

The Critic as Public Representative

When in 1908 it launched "Comments on the Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* offered the following disclaimer: "In defence of the critiques we say that they must be taken as an expression of public opinion, and as it is or should be the aim of the film manufacturer to please the public, we will try to hold up the mirror of public opinion as the surest and safest guide to success and future

stability of the business."[95] Since one of the main concerns of the *Moving Picture World* was to ensure the economic stability of the business, setting standards that corresponded directly with consumer opinions was a logical approach. As one *Moving Picture World* critic noted, "In many instances the critics seek to establish their impressions as those of the audience about them."[96] For this reason, journals encouraged critics to include direct references to the audience in the actual commentary or review: "[the critics] were asked to be guided in their expression of opinion by the remarks overheard among the audience and to particularly note how the film was received or applauded."[97] This approach, as Charlie Keil argues, "proved that the trade press had developed a superior sense of what audience members wanted by listening directly to their comments."[98] In the following example taken from *Moving Picture World*, the majority of the criticism consists of a report on audience reception:

> **The Selfish Man**.—This film tells a good moral story and enforces it so vigorously that almost anyone can see the application. It is watched with intense eagerness by the audience and when the man reforms and changes his manner of living there is applause.[99]

While in theory this approach was the most logical, in practice critics had difficulty gauging audience opinion. In one article, Louis Reeves Harrison observed "it is extremely difficult for experienced critics to tell what those in front think of this or that presentation.[100] With narrative cinema becoming a more absorbing experience, and film exhibitions moving from the boisterous crowds of

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[95] "Comments on Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* (10 October 1908); 279.
[96] *Film Reports* (1 October 1910); 8-9. Quoted in Slide, 116.
[97] "Comments on Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* (3 October 1908); 253.
[98] Keil 2001, 30.
[99] "Comments on the Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* (9 January 1909); 36.
[100] Louis Reeves Harrison, "The Highbrow," *Moving Picture World* (16 September 1911); 775.

nickelodeons to tamer upscale theatres around 1910, critics could no longer count on external gestures or commentary alone to discern the judgment of the audience.[101] As one MPW critic remarked, the audience was "in a more thoughtful mood, and their enjoyment and appreciation cannot be translated into applause."[102]

The situation became even more complex when critics realized viewing conditions were affecting the reception of films, and that audiences were comprised of a heterogeneous public:

> A picture that is received in stony silence at one theatre is very often applauded in another. There are many reasons for this. The temperament and mental calibre vary with different localities. Where vaudeville is interspersed with the pictures, the act preceding a picture has an effect on its reception. If it was a good act and applauded, the picture following may suffer by comparison. Just as frequently the contrary is the case.[103]

Critics responded to these new circumstances by advancing their critical paradigm to the next logical step—attending multiple screenings of the same film: "it is our aim to see the films under as many circumstances as possible and report on them as to their capacity to win applause or other marks of appreciation from the audience"[104] However, this led to further complications; as one critic

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[101] Harrison offers a nice example of the difficulties implied by this approach: "In illustration of this I may cite a peculiar instance, rarely found, of two plays by the same author, performed by the same company under the same director, and both favourably reported by the critics. The first was received in silence and evoked faint applause. The second awakened enthusiasm from the outset and an unusual demonstration at the end. The natural conclusion was that one was partially successful, while the other met with emphatic approval, yet careful inquiry among members of the audience discovered widespread preference for the unapplauded piece." (Louis Reeves Harrison, "The Highbrow," *Moving Picture World* (16 September 1911); 775.
[102] "The Picture the Audience Likes, *Moving Picture World* (11 February 1911); 310.
[103] "Commenting on the Films, *Moving Picture World* (15 April 1911); 814.
[104] Ibid.

observed, "he [the critic] often finds it impossible to agree with himself after seeing a picture again under different circumstances."[105]

While the trade press initially conceived of the public as a stable reference point, heterogeneous audiences and diverse viewing conditions made the collection of data more complicated than what critics had originally imagined. Consequently, this form of criticism began to diminish in popularity by 1910. In any case, by this point critics were more interested in asserting their own opinions than merely reporting on audience reactions. Perhaps one of the more fascinating consequences of this "public representative" strategy is that early film critics were forced to seriously consider the problems raised by diverse audiences and viewing conditions; in one sense, they arrived at many of the same conclusions that are characterized as "postmodern" today.[106]

Bias

The issue of "bias" emerged as a cautionary discourse in response to the obvious overlap between trade press and film industry interests. Editors and critics were sufficiently concerned about the possibility that readers might perceive biases, that they felt compelled to make bold and alarming announcements declaring their impartiality. In their first issue, *Variety* published a lengthy front page statement declaring their impartiality (a practice they

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[105] Ibid.

[106] In *Interpreting Films,* Janet Staiger ascribes the notion of "ideal readers" to New Historicism, predating postmodernism's acknowledgment of heterogeneous audiences (Staiger, 24-34). A similar shift can be observed in the way early film critics treated reception in these early years, at first imagining ideal readers, and then recognizing the complexity and variability of audiences.

maintained throughout the early years): "The first, foremost and extraordinary feature of [*Variety*] will be FAIRNESS. Whatever there is to be printed of interest to the professional world WILL BE PRINTED WITHOUT REGARD TO WHOSE NAME IS MENTIONED OR THE ADVERTISING COLUMNS [....][107] *Moving Picture World* also made similar announcements in their early years (albeit less lengthy) and continued to draw attention to the issue in subsequent issues.[108]

In his article "Advertising and Criticising", Stephen Bush openly declared, on behalf of *Moving Picture World*, that advertisements in the journal would not sway the opinions of the critics:

> For the benefit of numerous readers and advertisers *The Moving Picture World* desires to make it as plain as English words can wield that the buying of advertising space in small or large quantities confers no right to praise and condemnation, or indeed to any notice at all in the editorial or critical columns of the paper. While this is true of all and any products offered in the advertising portion of the *Moving Picture World*, it is especially true in regard to films. The judgement of *The Moving Picture World* is not for sale.[109]

The concern was so great that "impartial film criticism" became regarded as the quintessential example of serious film criticism.[110] However, the intense vigilance among film critics fostered an environment of constant suspicion, leading some journals to openly and directly state their specific concerns about each other. In a scathing article called "Films and Critics," published in *Film Reports* (apparently a

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[107] *Variety* (December 23, 1905); 1. See Figure 15 for complete announcement.
[108] *Moving Picture World* (11 May 1907); 4. See Figure 14 for announcement.
[109] W. Stephen Bush, "Advertising and Criticising," *Moving Picture World* (23 November 1912); 750.
[110] "The critic's first duty is to formulate a careful opinion for those who trust his judgment and place dependence on what he says. He will forfeit confidence of all who support the paper if he lavishes indiscriminate praise upon every one of the thousands of plays announced in the advertising columns" Louis Reeves Harrison, "Mr. Critic," *Moving Picture World* (28 October 1911).

"watchdog" of other trade journals),[111] the writer takes film trade journals to task on the basis of bias and incompetence:

> There are now the [Moving Picture] World, News, Variety, Mirror and Telegraph conducting columns wherein somebody gives his or her opinion of pictures that appear on the market. A study of these departments fails to win one's regard for critics who conduct them. Fortunately, it has become generally known that three of the publications are biased, the fourth fears to give adverse criticism, while the fifth, besides being afraid to say anything that might hurt Vitagraph Company's feelings, is absolutely unreliable, the critic being incompetent to judge the merits of the production.[112]

Within the context of historical research, the issue of trade journal "bias" is not necessarily straightforward. In his analysis of the trade press, Charlie Keil warns that trade journals "must be approached with trepidation by the historian" since they were "subject to the editorial biases and sociocultural constraints of the time."[113] The problem, however, is that Keil does not offer any local knowledge about the nature of the bias in terms of its configuration (what companies or nationalities were being favoured by which journals). In the *Red Rooster Scare*, Richard Abel offers a little more detail, though several of his points rest on unstable and inconclusive evidence. For instance, Abel regards the fact that *Moving Picture World* did not publish any Pathé advertisements during the first years as indicating a bias against French films. Abel also claims that *Moving Picture World* was "critical" of some French films during this same period. However, during the first year (from 1907 to 1908) *Moving Picture World* did not

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[111] Though not explicitly stated, the author implies that *Film Reports* is independent from advertising and can thus speak freely: "In other respects it is plainly manifested that no publication in the country is independent enough to comment on films on their merits and without regard for its advertising columns." The author goes on to explain how their impartial status allows them to criticise companies like the Motion Picture Patents Company. *Film Reports* (11 June 1910); 11; quoted in (Slide, 8).

[112] *The Film Reports* (11 June 1910); 11; quoted in (Slide, 8).

[113] Keil, 28

publish any regular film criticism, and a cursory glance of the journal during this time does not reveal much negative commentary about French films. However, if in fact such a bias existed, it may have actually been based more on the fact *Moving Picture World* was catering to manufacturers not already served by the other major journals.[114]

Abel sees *Moving Picture World* becoming one of the more neutral film trade journals by 1908.[115] Trade journal bias was situated along two axes: the nationality and "licensing" status (in relation to Edison's trust, the Motion Picture Patents Company) of production companies. According to Abel, *Moving Picture World* "secured its dominant position by staking out a middle ground" between publications that favoured "licensed" companies (*Views and Film* Index) and those that favoured the "Independents" (*Variety*, *Billboard*, *Show World* and *Moving Picture News*).[116] Nevertheless, the connection between a particular "bias" (already tentative in status) and the film criticism remains unclear. Early film criticism was determined by a host of conditions, including different conceptions of cinema, ideological beliefs, standards imposed by the journal, economic interests and personal convictions; these circumstances would also have to be considered in assessing the bias of any given statement.

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[114] For instance, *Film Index* was partially owned by *Pathé* and *Vitagraph* (note: D'Agostino claims *Film Index* was founded by the Vitagraph Company (William T. Rock) and Pathé Frères (Jacques A. Berst); Richard Abel seems less certain about this fact, but acknowledges that these production companies "undoubtedly influenced its editorial direction"). (D'Agostino, 11), (Abel, 82).
[115] Abel 84-85.
[116] Ibid.

Conclusion

Considering that trade journals emerged at a moment when cinema underwent significant changes, early film critics had little time to develop a common vocabulary and shared view of cinema. In this sense, early film criticism is visibly marked by a process of change and transformation similar to what the film industry experienced. The result is an uneven, occasionally illogical, form of criticism that rarely lacked enthusiasm or initiative. In the midst of this volatility, a strong pragmatic current can be discerned in the trade press, particularly in how they manoeuvred to establish "authority": one of the earliest concerns of *Moving Picture World* was to attack the competence of the newspapers; film trade journals encouraged a standard that essentially correlated film evaluations to public opinion (thus ensuring a favourable reception among their readership); and finally, they gained public trust by constantly declaring their own impartiality, while condemning the biases of others.

As Charlie Keil argues, early film critics found themselves inextricably tied to the transformation of cinema by offering advice and solutions to the film industry.[117] The collaborative relationship between trade critics and the film industry is highlighted by the dual roles of film critics: W. Stephen Bush was a film lecturer; Louis Reeves Harrison, Epes Winthrop Sargent (another *Moving Picture World* critic), and Frank Woods (the well known *New York Dramatic Mirror* critic) were all screenwriters.[118] The end result is one of the most dynamic

[117] Keil 2001, 27-44.
[118] Frank Woods was a screenwriter for Biograph and is credited as a writer for *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Many other early film critics were film industry professionals.

and exciting dialogues between film critics and the industry in the history of cinema. The following chapter will examine the different functions of early film criticism in relation to the film business, and the ideological concerns of film critics that gradually began to conflict with the economic objectives of the trade press.

Chapter 3

Early Film Criticism

With advertisement revenues and journal circulation tied to the commercial success of cinema, early film criticism can be seen to perform important functions in relation to these interests, such as prescribing aesthetic changes that made films more attractive and encouraging exhibitors to select crowd pleasing films. It is in this sense that Charlie Keil sees the trade press as advancing "the cause of the industry while also shaping and dictating that agenda."[119] However, there are many examples of early film criticism that are not necessarily accounted for by this model. For instance, the profound commitment early film critics had to progressive ideology produced a criticism that lacked a clear purpose within the established critical paradigm. Overall, these beliefs had a significant influence on the shape and direction of early film criticism. My intention in this chapter is to provide an understanding of early film criticism's "functional" status, and also to begin drawing out some of the variations and contradictions in early film criticism that reveal an uneasy relation between the trade press and film critics.

Prescriptive Criticism

One of the most common conceptions of film criticism, as expressed by a *Moving Picture World* critic, was that "whenever direct criticism on any picture is

[119] Keil 2001, 28.

made in these columns ["Comments on the Films"] it is done with the intention of stimulating the manufacturer to more care in the future."[120] In this sense, one of the main functions of early film criticism was as a *prescriptive* discourse. Within this model, film criticism was understood to initiate a circular chain of events: in the first stage, the critic conducted a survey of audience opinion by attending multiple screenings; on the basis of this research, the critic would then prescribe changes to films with the intention of increasing positive responses and reducing negative ones; since the criticism was offered as public opinion (in other words, as consumer demands), manufactures listened and integrated the prescriptions. In this *comment* on *The Two Rivals* (1908), the critic clearly recommends a change to the narrative that conforms to general progressive views held at that time (that films ought to provide positive experiences):

> A pathetic dramatic film in which the perfidy of man and the devotion of woman is clearly portrayed. One can scarcely understand why the teller of the story allowed the woman to be killed in the last scene. It would have added strength to let her live and care for her blinded husband. As it ends now the sensation is disagreeable. One wonders what is to become of him blind and alone. If the last scene could be changed so that she might take him away after he has received his cross for bravery it would be a much happier ending. It is a strong story, well told. The pictures are clear and the actions scenes perfectly natural.[121]

In this *comment* on *Hidden Treasure* (1908), the underlying belief motivating the prescription is even more directly stated:

> Another well worked film from Selig Polyscope Company with their good photography and some very fine scenic effect. As this film was the third one in the same show ending with a murder, we cannot say that we did

[120] "Commenting on the Films, *Moving Picture World* (15 April 1911); 814.
[121] *Moving Picture World* (28 November 1908); 423.

> appreciate the subject. We are sorry that manufacturers, able to produce such good work, would not try to uplift and give a brighter side to humanity by showing some good deeds.[122]

While the effects of prescriptive criticism were meant to be observed over a set period of time, several critics viewed this as a source of deep frustration. The need to observe immediate effects in the films partially stemmed from the practice of theatre criticism. The organic nature of theatre meant that in theory critics were able to modify individual productions. Not so with film. The immutable status of film closed the possibility for change, and for some critics, the possibility of criticism altogether:[123]

> Perhaps the film critic of a metropolitan paper will never be able to work as much havoc in the picture trade as he has done before in the theatrical line. By this edict the dramatic critic has done, or undone in the past, many productions costing thousands of dollars. This he will not be able to do with the film play. If the critic comes out in the morning edition with a scathing comment and manages to show why and wherefore the film is not worthy, the said film, if it is below advertising, can be put into the "can" and another substituted for it much easier than a whole production of theatrical people can be disbanded and scenery sent to the storehouse and another production substituted in its place.[124]

By 1911, at least one trade journal had closed their film criticism department based on this condition. In an editorial titled "Film Criticism," *Motography* claimed that "criticism of a film after that film has been released, or at best just before it is released, can by no possible means help that particular subject [....]"[125] Seeing no further use for film criticism, *Motography* made the pragmatic and logical decision of simply ending the practice: "it is with a great sense of regret that we

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[122] Ibid.
[123] I have not found any examples or information that might indicate exhibitors edited films based on film criticism.
[124] "Film criticism in the Lay Press," *Moving Picture World*, (20 May 1911); 1113
[125] *Motography*, August 1911; 56. Quote in Slide, 121

announce the discontinuance of that department. *Motography* will criticize no more films." Considering the outcome, the *Motography* case convincingly illustrates the importance this "theatre" image of film criticism had for early film critics.

Comments as Reviews

Aside from being prescriptive, early film criticism also functioned as "reviews," offering exhibitors information and evaluations about current releases. One *Moving Picture World* critic proudly claimed that "hundreds of exhibitors have stated to us that they depend almost entirely upon the 'Comments on the Films' in *The Moving Picture World* for the selection of their program."[126] The *comment* of *The Selfish Man* cited in the previous chapter (p. 44) is an example of this function, since it offered an evaluation (that "the film was a good moral story") and emphasized the positive audience reaction. However, without a standardized system for rating films, the evaluative component of early film criticism was not always obvious (at least to the modern reader); in some cases, the precise function of the criticism was left ambiguous:

> **The Bobby's Dream** (Lux).—It was only a dream, but it scared the policeman so he determined never to do the same thing over. It was, of course, decidedly unpleasant to be frightened at such simple occurrences, but then he was off duty and didn't understand these features of every-day life. His bravery was enclosed in his uniform. It is not a bad film and supplies opportunity for a good laugh.[127]

In this comment, there are no references to the public, prescriptions or plot

[126] "Commenting on the Films," *Moving Picture World* (15 April 1911); 814.
[127] "Comments on the Films," *Moving Picture World* (24 September 1910); 690.

summaries. Aside from the lukewarm closing evaluation, there is in fact very little mention of the film at all. The film seems to be about a policeman who has had a frightening dream that has caused him to doubt his sense of "bravery." While the "aboutness" of the film is difficult to discern through these statements, the objective of the comment is even more perplexing. The critic appears to ascribe both a reflective and thoughtful mood to the film, as evidenced in the first three sentences, but also indicates that the film is a comedy in the last line ("supplies an opportunity for a good laugh"). Early film criticism provides many examples of this sort of "impressionist criticism," not really appearing to serve a function within the critical paradigm of the trade press. Part of the adventure of reading early film criticism is discovering texts that seem to slip outside established models and that defy easy explanation. Nevertheless, *The Bobby's Dream comment* shares a resemblance with the review form, on the basis of its evaluative component.

Standard of Realism

According to Charlie Keil, "the demand that film provide access to a believable fictional world became the most dominant strain in most trade press criticism, especially from 1909 onward."[128] This standard was partially determined by "cinema's reliance on photography" that consequently "promoted an aesthetic predicated on reproductive realism and believability."[129] Several film criticism articles from the period corroborate Keil's conclusion. Frank Woods of

[128] Keil 2001, 31
[129] Ibid.

New York Dramatic Mirror, widely regarded as the most well known early film critic, noted that "the strange power of attraction possessed by motion pictures lies in the semblance of reality which the pictures convey; that by means of this impression of reality the motion picture exerts on the minds of the spectators an influence akin to hypnotism or magnetism by visual suggestion."[130] Critics that applied the standard of realism isolated those features in film that could potentially disrupt its "illusion" of reality, such as incoherent narratives, implausible character motivations, technical flaws and projection quality.[131] By 1911, the standard of realism had become universally accepted as a major critical paradigm. In an article that examined the aesthetic and narrative tastes of the audience, nearly every preference observed by the critic corresponded with the standard of realism:

> After setting [sic] in literally hundreds of audiences, sometimes as many as a dozen a week, the writer is prepared to lay down two rules producers must follow to make a picture popular. First, it must tell a story so plainly it can be followed and understood without too great mental effort. The plot, if there is a plot, must be simple, and every move made by the actors must be concentrated upon the development of that plot. Probably the best is where the picture ends with a climax [....] The second requisite is mechanical perfection. This means not only good photography, but proper staging [...] Pictures supposed to represent the interior of millionaires' residences are often ruined by showing the same rooms as have appeared in pictures of common dwellings...The audience sees this incongruity, and it often spoils the whole program.[132]

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[130] Frank Woods, "'Spectator's' Comments," *New York Dramatic Mirror* (14 May 1910). Quoted in Kauffmann, 39.

[131] Keil provides one interesting example where a critic expresses displeasure with the close-up ("enlarged views") because it made the "human form exceed 'life size,' thereby violating cinema's claim to verisimilitude" (Keil 2001, 33).

[132] "The Picture the Audience Likes," *Moving Picture World* (11 February 1911).

In *The Red Rooster Scare*, Richard Abel offers a complementary explanation for the standard of realism. Within American-French political discourse, Abel believes that "realism" came to stand in for "American" productions and "artifice" for "Frenchness." This pattern of signification emerged partially because "Pathé's foreign subjects provided one of the principal 'others' against which to construct an American difference."[133] With French/American politics displaced onto differences of aesthetics, the preference for realism was consequently inscribed with political and economic meaning. In this sense, the emphasis placed on realism by film critics can be construed as a strategic move—that while being ideologically determined—also functioned to help shift control of the film industry from French to American companies.

As with many generalizations made about early film criticism, there are also contradictory views that ought to be considered. The critical paradigms discussed in this thesis may seem stable from a historic point of view, but these formations were usually contested, even by critics that in other instances may have seemed to support them. Jay A. Gove of *Moving Picture World* regarded realism as an overused standard:[134] "One of the indictments most persistently brought against photoplays is that their situations are often unnatural. Unfortunately this allegation merely betokens the critic's experience."[135] Foreseeing an absurd end to the fascination with realism, Gove argued that "if

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[133] Abel, 122

[134] While there is a difference between naturalism and realism, the argument offered by Gove, along with the title, indicates that "natural" is to be understood as "realistic." Jay Gove, "Photoplay Realism: an optimistic view" *Moving Picture World* (8 July 1911); 1556-7.

[135] Ibid.

criticism continues its present strange course, the time must soon come when writers and producers will be expected to submit affidavits containing details of when, where and how the events occurred on which plays are based."[136] Therefore, even as the enthusiasm for realism permeated early film criticism, dissenting views were still visible.

Louis Reeves Harrison also expressed dissatisfaction with realism, arguing that a distinction needed to be drawn between the "realism" already present in film and the "realism" created by the filmmaker. While in Harrison's view the former sense of realism was suitable, it being "only a matter of good sense and good taste to preserve [the] realism of 'atmosphere' in moving pictures [that] is already provided," the latter sense was not.[137] By "realism of atmosphere," Harrison meant the cinematographic verisimilitude and on-location settings.[138] Harrison believed that once "the characters and backgrounds are what the swaddling critic calls 'true to life,'" the filmmaker should consider exploring other forms of representations and storylines.[139] In this manner, the possibility exists that the spectator might be drawn into a state of reflection: "realism may cease if it fails to stir the imagination, if it does not give us thoughts and emotions worth entertaining."[140] Though these examples do not necessarily falsify the generalization about the standard of realism, they nonetheless indicate a contested discourse that contained a wide range of differing points of view.

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[136] Ibid.
[137] Louis Reeves Harrison, "Realism," Moving Picture World (6 December 1913); 1125.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid. Harrison here evokes many of the criticisms that are usually made of "Hollywood Realism," in the sense of connecting conventions of realism to "passive" spectators.

Progressive Standards

Progressive criticism usually focused on the moral value of films. The overarching belief that cinema represented the greatest and highest examples of (American) culture, and that it thus must be protected from immoral content and use, was directly related to the "uplift" of cinema: "If, as conceded everywhere, the moving picture is the greatest product of the times, its best advocates and users are filling the conditions of true progressiveness in applying its uses to the good of the people."[141] Scenes and images in films that showed the "darker side" of culture (crime, prisons, adulterous activity, etc.) were viewed with condemnation; conversely, representations that corresponded with American values were praised. The segmentation of culture into good and bad elements was underpinned by a xenophobic attitude, with comments in the criticism frequently underscoring the connection between immoral values and foreign culture.

Many early film critics, such as Frank Woods, W. Stephen Bush, Louis Reeves Harrison (and *Moving Picture World* generally) consistently returned to the theme of "progress," typically expressed through the use of transcendental metaphors. In 1908, Bush announced "no invention since the discovery of movable type has done more for the entertainment and education of mankind than the moving picture. This great art is still in its very infancy."[142] Drawing on

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[141] "Who are the True Progressives?" *Moving Picture World* (14 September 1912); 1055.
[142] W. Stephen Bush, "Lectures on Moving Pictures," *Moving Picture World* (22 August 1908); 136.

analogies from the steam engine, printing press, literature, art and language, Frank Woods enthusiastically praised the arrival of a truly transcendental medium:

> The motion picture is already an engine of human progress too great and powerful to be long or appreciably affected by regulators, enemies, or promoters. It will continue to move forward of its own force, and those who seek to absolutely direct its course can have about as much influence on it as a child would have damming Niagara with a toy shovel. As it is developing it is a new form of combined literature and art. It is a new and universal language in which the artist, the actor, the author of fiction, the historian, the traveller, the philosopher, and the theologian may convey ideas and information to his fellow men. Naturally enough, the first efforts in addressing the public in the new picture language are crude and unpolished, but he must be blind who cannot perceive the constant advancement that is being made in character of subject and elegance of style. This advancement was bound to come with experience, and is bound to continue as actor and others of greater ability are attracted to its use. Like the printing press, it has opened up a vast opportunity for the dissemination of human thought, and, like the printing press, it can only move onward and upward.[143]

In this description, Wood ascribes film the status of universal cultural form and instrument of progress; moreover, cinema is described as being self-determined, moving "forward" and "upward" regardless of the barriers that may impede its path.

Moving Picture World editorials were influenced by similar progressive values, urging film critics to "educate the public into the acceptance of the good, the artistic and the beautiful [value of cinema]."[144] The education of the public was made easier by the fact that "throughout the whole of the United States of America there is an earnest desire to uplift the moving picture; to make it clean,

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[143] Frank Woods, *New York Dramatic Mirror* (1 May 1909); quoted in (Kauffmann, 26).
[144] "The Lay Press and the Picture," *Moving Picture World* (14 January 1911); 60.

bright, dramatically and photographically beautiful."[145] Believing that they had been entrusted to defend and promote the inherent good of cinema, early film critics also conceived of themselves as forming part of the transcendental and progressive continuum of cinema: "Truly for its progress, its splendid development, its marvellous rise and a moral influence in our civilization the moving picture owes no thanks to the daily press."[146]

Following from these views was a criticism that placed significant importance on moral content and uplifting messages. Moreover, progressive criticism targeted specific images (usually images that displayed some form of "criminality") that were viewed as "moral content," regardless of whether the images appeared in films that were deemed to have a an obvious moral message (such as a comedy or documentary). This tendency can be observed in the earliest issues of *Moving Picture World*. In 1908, W. Stephen Bush argued "criminology in pictures should be left to the museum of horrors and banished forever from the moving picture theatre."[147] In December of that year, a *Moving Picture World* editorial mournfully observed that "there is too much murder, and bloodshed, and kidnapping in the films which have been exhibited this week...one wonders if there is no good in the world and if everybody is ready to murder his friends or strangers."[148]

Progressive standards were motivated by at least three interrelated beliefs: that films influenced public behaviour; that representations altered the

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[145] "The Press and The Moving Picture," *Moving Picture World* (20 March 1909); 325.
[146] "The Moving Picture and the Public Press," *Moving Picture World* (6 May 1911); 1006.
[147] W. Stephen Bush, "The Film of the Future," *Moving Picture World* (5 September 1908).
[148] "The Films," *Moving Picture World* (12 December 1908); 471.

perception and understanding of one's own culture; and that industry-regulated censorship was preferable to state and clergy-administered censorship. The kind of film criticism that emerged from progressive standards can be observed in this 1908 *comment* of Vitagraph's *A Guilty Conscience*:

> **A Guilty Conscience.**—The plot is perhaps true, but should not be shown to children. The little girl stealing pennies to go to the moving picture show is a very bad example, and can teach children to steal pennies to satisfy a fancy. The woman teaching a little girl how to steal in our stores is a deplorable example. It is not a wonder that ministers and city officials are after moving pictures as demoralizing children when they see such films [...][149]

The progressive standards of critics dovetailed with the more economically motivated opposition toward state-controlled censorship. Since critics believed that self-censorship would reduce the possibility of outside intervention, they set out to establish the precise norms that the film industry should follow. When in early 1909 there was talk of setting up an industry-supported censorship board, W. Stephen Bush seized the opportunity and published a list of scenes and images that filmmakers should omit. If these suggestions were followed, Bush believed "there would soon be no weapon left in the hands of our enemies."[150] Though Bush was addressing the future members of the censorship board (the National Censorship Board eventually formed in March of 1909), he made it clear that these scenes and images were also offered as standards for critics to use in the evaluation of films:[151]

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[149] *Moving Picture World* (10 October 1908); 279..
[150] The "enemy" was state censorship.
[151] Eileen Bowser claims that *Moving Picture World* "was caught off guard" by the announcement of a censorship board and that this initially caused a hostile reaction from *Moving Picture World* (Bowser, 49). However, my research indicates otherwise. A full two months prior to the announcement of a censorship board, Bush explained that "The Moving Picture World suggested some months ago the creation of a board of censors" (W. Stephen Bush. "The Question of

> I. The interior of prisons; the detailed description of life in prison; the introduction of convicts in stripes; revolts and mutinies in jail; in short, everything connected with these plague spots of civilization; likewise the doings in police stations; the display of cells and iron bars, etc. [...]This morbid tendency of the filmmakers should be suppressed by the board of censors.
> II. The portrayal of contemporary sensational crime; the film showing or rather pretending to show the trial of a rich murderer in New York; the presentation of the doings of notorious outlaws [...]
> III. Any thing that could in the least wound the religious sensibilities of the public [...]
> IV. The lingering over the details, such things as murders and executions.
> V. The needless piling on of horrors.
> VI. Every comic picture which depends for its effect on the degradation or on the personal defects of any human being.[152]

This list offers a good illustration of the dual objects of progressive criticism; on the one hand, Bush notes several subject matters that go against progressive values; but these are presented as independent from images that might convey the offence (degradation of human beings, wounding religious sensibilities); on the other hand, specific images ("convicts in stripes") are presented as offensive regardless of the subject matter.

Like the standard of realism, Abel manages to connect progressive standards to French-American cultural discourse. By framing French films as morally undesirable to American audiences, critics helped American production companies gain more control of the industry. Just as "artifice" indicated "foreign aesthetics," so to were immoral values representative of foreign cultures. Situating the campaign against foreign products within a cultural discourse allowed the trade press to gain support from conservatives. Unfortunately, as Richard Abel points out, this strategy involved the construction of a menacing

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Censorship," *Moving Picture World*, 9 January 1909; 32), meaning that not only was *Moving Picture World* aware of the censorship board being formed, they also encouraged it.
[152] W. Stephen Bush, "The Question of Censorship," *Moving Picture World* (9 January 1909); 32.

foreign "other": "Because many theatres were owned or managed by immigrant Jews, and their programs were full of French Pathé films, this concerted attempt to regulate or repress moving pictures shows has to be read, I think, within this wider discourse linking the "foreign" and the "criminal" or "diseased" as a serious threat [to American culture]."[153]

This attitude toward foreign productions is evident in one of the first *comments* published in *Moving Picture World*. As per Bush's instructions, several images from Vitagraph's *Wages of Sin* (1908) were isolated for criticism: "Graves, funerals, coffins and pestilence are no doubt all right in their proper places. The pictures might entertain a convention of undertakers, but not the audience of the ordinary electric theatres."[154] Notice that the offending images are not connected to the storyline; rather the mere presence of "coffins" is sufficient to draw criticism. Though the *comment* appears to follow usual progressive standards, the critic's additional point that "the story is of foreign conception and repulsive to American ideals" reframes the criticism within a cultural discourse, implying that foreign conception in itself was already "repulsive" to American values.

The Concept(s) of Cinema

Film critics conceived of film in at least two different ways—as a "product" that helped achieve economic ends; and as an "instrument of knowledge" that

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[153] Abel, 121.
[154] "Comments on the Film Subjects, *Moving Picture World* (3 October 1908); 253.

served to educate the public. While these categories are flexible and in some cases difficult to differentiate from one another, they are nonetheless useful for organizing many of the tendencies, rhetorical strategies, and features present in early film criticism. This is not to say that critics consciously applied these concepts of cinema as distinct ideas or that no overlap existed between them. However, many examples of early film criticism seem to correspond to either one or other concept, or in some telling examples, to both concepts at the same time.

As a product, film was valued for its ability to generate revenue. Within this view, the film critic is understood to serve the interests of the film industry. Conveying the concerns, tastes and reactions of the public to the manufacturers, early film critics offered prescriptions in order to promote the production of commercially successful films. Prescriptions were partly based on the critic's privileged access to public opinion and on their ability to connect general tendencies in audience reception (such as an interest in "realism") to specific aesthetic choices (close-ups, acting styles, etc.). Film criticism also functioned as reviews, allowing exhibitors to select commercially successful films. Critics who conceived of film as a product focused on those aspects of cinema that were thought to have the greatest impact on commercial success—technical quality, narrative coherence, and exhibition conditions.[155] Insofar as this conception obtained, film criticism functioned to maintain and improve the system of production and exhibition.

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[155] François Albera makes a similar observation about early French film criticism: "L'appréciation des qualities *esthétiques* du film est donc liée à une promesse de *succès* public, question qui n'intéresse que l'exploitant. "L'Objet de la Critique (1908-1916)," *1895* 30 (2000); 6.

Critics who thought of film as an "instrument" tended to serve the public good, though the criticism was generally framed in terms that were congruent with industry aims. While documentary films were literally used as pedagogical tools to teach students (even in Sunday schools), many critics considered fiction films to be instruments of knowledge as well. Critics following the instrumental view of cinema focused almost exclusively on "subject matter" (in the sense of moral content). While the criticism of "subject matter" also served the interests of the film industry—in the sense of preempting government-controlled censorship—it was also clearly motivated by progressive beliefs. Many critics strongly believed that it was their civic duty to criticize story lines that deviated from progressive values.[156]

In some cases, differing conceptions of cinema could produce conflicts in the criticism, particularly in relation to French productions. Widely regarded as superior to American productions at the level of technical achievement, critics frequently commented on the quality of French films. As a "product," French films were regarded as superior to American ones because they satisfied the standards usually associated with "products," such as technical quality and consumer (audience) approval. However, as an "instrument," critics disapproved of the values represented by French productions. The result was film criticism sometimes determined by both conceptions:

> **Bewitching Woman**.—A French production which is based upon infidelity of a lover. The way the French take on new loves and discard them and then accept the old one again is astonishing to American audiences. The acting

[156] It should be noted that "progressive" values could also be quite conservative.

> and staging of this are both good and the film is as interesting as any based on this subject [...].[157]

In this *comment*, the technical quality is praised, while the moral content is criticized. However, the presence of inappropriate "subject matter" does not necessarily produce an unfavourable evaluation. In other cases, the preference for one of the conceptions could be more noticeable:

> **Pere Milon** (Pathé) — [...] This may be an interesting subject for the French, on the same principle as a dime novel is interesting, but a film in which nineteen deaths are either shown or suggested is much too bloody to be tolerated in America. Good staging, good acting and a smooth running film cannot atone for these defects. It should be suppressed.[158]

While these examples display strong feelings about foreign productions, the attitude early film critics adopted toward foreign productions was complicated and not altogether straightforward. There are too many examples of early film critics showing appreciation of French productions for a general rule regarding their position to be abstracted. In terms of *Moving Picture World* criticism, the occasional negative (pejorative) comments about foreign cultures may have been the work of one critic; however, it is impossible to know for sure considering the majority of the criticism was published anonymously. As explained in Chapter 2, Richard Abel believes *Moving Picture World* was one of the more neutral film trade journals.

Early film criticism is an elusive discourse that corresponds to more than one single concept of cinema. In some cases, the functional standards encouraged by the trade press were more apparent in early film criticism, such

[157] "Comments on Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* (9 Jan 1909); 36.
[158] "Comments on Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* (5 June 1909); 713

as with prescriptive criticism and reviews; in other cases, progressive beliefs seemed more important and influential. Finally, there are instances of film criticism, such as the *comment* on *The Bobby's Dream*, that elude both of these categorizations. The next chapter will examine another possible concept of cinema—"film as art"— and some of the possible effects it may have had on the development of early film criticism.

Chapter 4

"Film as Art" Discourse

An important development in the trade press was the emergence of "film as art" discourse starting around 1908. Since critics did not necessarily share a common critical language for dealing with either film or art, the formation of the discourse can sometimes be difficult to trace. Nonetheless, two intertwined but distinct strands can be identified. The first strand is characterized by the way it used the term "art" to improve the status of cinema. The association between "film" and "art" was generally regarded as positive by members of the trade press, the film industry and the middle-class public; hence, a precise definition of "art" was not necessary. The basic rule of this language game was to successfully use "art" in reference to film. In other words, the presence of "art" in early film criticism does not necessarily indicate an associated conception of "film as art."[159]

A second strand emerged around 1910, whereby critics attempted to define the specific terms that made film an object of art. This implied identifying attributes of film that satisfied a preconceived idea of art. However, as is the case today, there were several ideas of "film as art"; nevertheless, these ideas usually derived from one or several of the following understandings of "film as art": that

[159] This problem can be seen in Eileen Bowser's account of "film as art." In several of her examples (that are presumably evidence for "film as art" discourse) the film critic uses the term "art," but the context indicates that the critic does not necessarily have the "concept of art" in mind.

discrete aesthetic elements—such as photography, setting, editing, lighting, acting, and story—form part of a unified design; that discrete elements are purposefully selected by the author (or artist) as opposed to being arbitrary; that images (and sounds) are aesthetically pleasurable and follow similar compositional rules to that of other art forms (such as painting or theatre);[160] that the object is created and invested with powerful feelings; that an artist forms part of its process of being; that important cultural values are conveyed, including transcendent concepts like "truth," the "good" and the "beautiful;" and finally, that deeper meanings are concealed by the film from the general public (thus necessitating explanation from specialized individuals like critics).

The Uses of "Art"

In early film criticism, the term "art" could refer to a range of different objects, values and ideas. One of the most common uses of "art" was as "craft." In the review of *Vanity Fair* (1911) the critic praised the film for being "an uninterrupted delight and a revelation in the art of picture making."[161] "Art" could also be used to mean "quality" films. If the acting, staging, setting, photography, and plot appealed to the critic's sense of quality, then the film might be characterized as "art." The term "art" also appeared more often in relation to

[160] This is essentially the history of "film as art" offered by Charlie Keil and Eileen Bowser. In Keil's history, the process of placing cinema "on a cultural continuum with those forms already granted social approval," implied comparing and contrasting film to an already established artistic form: theatre (Keil 2001, 40). Bowser's history indicates that around 1910 some film critics began writing about cinema's unique pictorial qualities. For Bowser, this tendency eventually led to comparisons between film and painting, a tendency that became more prevalent in 1913. In both accounts, Keil and Bowser describe the emergence of "film as art" discourse as a discourse that sought to create meaningful connections between cinema and other art forms.
[161] "Vanity Fair," *Moving Picture World* (16 December 1911); 886-887.

French productions than American ones, since French films were considered technically superior. By 1908, French manufacturers had begun promoting some of their productions as "films d'art," consequently encouraging American critics to use "art" in their appraisal of these films.[162] Notice in the following *comment* how the critic "picks up" on Pathé's advertising of the film as art:

> "**Incriminating Evidence**" is what the Pathe Freres claim to be "a film of the art." Mr. Severin proves himself master of the dramatic art and is well supported by his [indiscernible] company. The photography and all the staging details are up to the standard of these well known manufacturers. On the other hand, the subject is possibly too sensational to meet the approval of the present reform movement. It is a brutal murder in which blood is shown and, although it is presented in a vision, the apparition of the guillotine is too gruesome. Especially when the instrument of death is shown in all its working details. But as a masterpiece of mimetic action and photographic presentation, it is a specimen of the highest development of the art of moving pictures.[163]

Though used in the sense of "craft," the critic in this *comment* is also using the term to indicate the film's quality. "Subject matter" was also considered an important standard for judging the art value of films. Adaptations of "classic" literature, such as Shakespeare, were often referred to as "art;" conversely, though the above comment on *Incriminating Evidence* shows otherwise, films that offended American sensibilities tended to diminish their chances of being referred to on these terms. In one of his earliest statements on the idea of "film as art," W. Stephen Bush connected the art view of cinema to progressive discourse:

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[162] "Comments on Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* (6 February 1909); 144. The expression *film d'art* was almost certainly taken from a French production company by the same name (Film d'Art). As part of their strategy to secure a higher class niche in the American market, as well as combat the backlash against the alleged inappropriateness of subject matter, French companies like Film d'Art began producing "art" films in 1908 (usually through the adaption of literary classics). See Richard Abel, 127.

[163] See Figure 12 for another example.

> It seems eminently fitting that in the crusade against those who would for money stoop to any prostitution of the noble art, the lead should be taken by the journal which represented the highest aspirations of the art and its followers. Criminology in pictures should be left to the museum of horrors and banished forever from the moving picture theatre. Whenever the film makers attempt creation of their own, let them steer clear of murder and suicide. It is all very well to hold the mirror up to nature, but let the great builders of the drama do it, commit that task to Shakespeare and his lesser stars [....][164]

The main condition that Bush places on "film as art" is that it should be of appropriate subject matter. Criminal or immoral acts that lead to the exploitation or "prostitution" of cinema diminish its art value. The contradistinction between "art" and "product" (implied in the line, "those who would for money stoop to any prostitution of the noble art") is, as can be imagined, a common theme in the "film as art" discourse and reappears in a number of different contexts. Placing the value of "art" solely on the content of the film, Bush conceives of film as two distinct unities—the mechanism that "records" and the "subject" that is recorded. Since classic literature already carried the value of "art" (within public discourse), for Bush, adaptations of classic literature consequently raised the art value of films. Notice as well that Bush is open to the possibility that art and "immoral" subject matter can coexist, so long as the filmmaker has the status of "great builder of dramas"—in other words, has the status of artist.[165]

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[164] W. Stephen Bush, "The Film of the Future," *Moving Picture World* (5 September 1908).
[165] According to Eileen Bowser, D.W. Griffith may have been the first filmmaker to have achieved the status of artist: "If film were to be considered as art, then there must be an artist, and, according to the nineteenth century romantic tradition, an artist who is a creative genius. The title of artist in this sense was awarded to D.W. Griffith by Louis Reeves Harrison when Griffith left Biograph in 1913" (Bowser, 269)

An Editorial published in October 1908, titled "Better Action and Expression Needed in the Films," offered another definition of "film as art," this time framed in terms of national discourse. Inquiring about the success of foreign films in the U.S. market, the editorial begins: "what is it in the films of some foreign manufacturers that makes them in such demand in this country? It certainly is not the subjects, the plots of which are, as a rule, mentally (and often morally) below the level of those attempted by American producers."[166] According to the editorial, foreign films were far more proficient in preserving the illusion of reality, particularly in relation to acting: "It is obvious that the people liked to be fooled. They like to sit in their chairs and see the plays enacted in a manner that is so real that they need to pinch themselves to realize that it is not real, but they do not like to be told they are being fooled by noting mainly the failure of the green actors to enter into the spirit of their parts."[167] As a solution to the problem, the editorial recommended American production companies to spend more time rehearsing actors. However, the conclusion of the editorial reframes the argument within a "film as art" discourse:

> As long as the present conditions prevail and the manufacturer can dispose of his regular quota of prints he will be slow to realize his shortcomings, and only when the demand has fallen so low that something has to be done to save the situation will we see real Art in their productions – art that conceals the fact it is Art.[168]

"Art" is here used in at least two different senses. Lower case "art" refers to "artifice," while upper case "Art" refers to a representation that conceals its status

[166] "Better Action and Expression Needed in the Films," *Moving Picture World* (17 October 1908; 295).
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.

as "artifice." In other words, within the context of this passage "Art" connotes a similar film aesthetic to that of "Cinematic Realism" (that of preserving the illusion of reality). As was the case with Bush, this definition of art allows it to co-exist with the main aesthetic standards and interests of the film industry. The implied association between "realism" and "art" in this passage functions to conflate their contradictions; in the process, it produces a unified and economically motivated discourse of "film as art."

Whether it is used in the sense of "craft," a judgment of "quality," or to indicate a "realist aesthetic," the constant in the above examples is that "art" is defined in both *negative* and *positive* relation to the commercial aims of the film industry. In his statement on art, Bush explicitly criticised industrial practices for having a counterproductive effect on the development of "film as art." *Moving Picture World* editorial criticizes typical industry practices ("the regular quota of films") for inhibiting the progress of art. However, considering that the trade press had a vested interest in the success of the film industry, critics were not in a position to set unattainable standards that could conflict with industry practices. Even as critics recognized that the art value of cinema was being tarnished by the film industry, critics were obligated, at least from a business point of view, to frame their arguments in terms that were congruent with industry interests. An ambiguous use of "art" (and "industry") allowed critics to point out the harms caused by the industry, while also making it seem that "art" was a realistic possibility.

Perhaps the real issue is why "art" was used in these contexts, when clearly other equivalent and less ambiguous terms were available ("artifice," "craft," "quality"). In my view, this is explained by an interest in associating positive qualities, such as "art," to film. This strategy made economic sense from the point of view of the public perception. Of course, this does not preclude other causes that may have motivated the presence of "art" in early film criticism.[169]

For instance, the *Film d'Art* production company (through name alone) encouraged the use of "art" in relation to the criticism of their film productions (but again, in order to increase product value). Film critics may have also been interested in expanding their critical vocabulary, and in this sense began arbitrarily introducing the term into their discourse; or perhaps it may even have been the result of experimentation, a practice well within the range of early film critics,—just to see if "film as art" statements might also count as criticism or be accepted as interesting by the public—in the same manner a poet might compose a particular phrase to test an idea, and develop others. Nevertheless, it is fairly evident that "film as art" discourse appears to have been partially determined by economic interests.

Art as Art

The second strand of "film as art" discourse approached film in terms that more closely resembled modern conceptions of film and art.[170] This strand of the discourse became visible around 1910, a few years after the "art" term began to

[169] For instance, as discussed below, an actual concept of "film as art."
[170] This is not to say that this strand of the discourse is better than the other one. Their values are relative. However, within Film Studies the second strand would certainly be viewed as more valuable, considering many of its ideas are still applied within the field today.

be used in the other strand. In a series of articles published in *Moving Picture World*, several film critics—including W. Stephen Bush, Thomas Bedding, and Louis Reeves Harrison—offered unique reflections on the status of film as art. Taken as a whole, these articles represent the emergence of a "film as art" discourse, characterized by a love for the medium, ideas that resemble modern day conceptions of art, and recognition that the film industry was hindering the development of art.

In "The Compelling Harmony of the Whole," W. Stephen Bush introduces the concept of "harmony" as a standard for defining the art status of films, a significant difference from his earlier view that the subject matter ought to be the main determinant:

> Consciously or unconsciously every person looking at a moving picture applies the same test as to its excellence. The critical faculty, which in varying degrees is present in every mind, looks for the harmony of the whole or, to use a phrase in more common use, the unity of design. To the extent to which the parts of a picture are coherent with and subordinated to one central idea, the picture is good. The very moment any of the parts show a centrifugal tendency, or in other words drifts ever so slightly away from the central governing idea, the picture deteriorates. There is no realm in art to which the same rule does not apply. The painting, the statue, the work of the architect must abide by this supreme test, but nowhere is the criterion more inexorable than in the drama.[171]

The classical standards of "harmony," "unity of design" and "symmetry" are invoked as standards for film to be considered art. In this sense, film is conceived of as a network of interconnected and meaningful elements that function to produce a central idea. This concept of film continues to be prominent in modern day film criticism; for instance, the formalist film criticism that David Bordwell and

[171] W. Stephen Bush, "The Compelling Harmony of the Whole," *Moving Picture World* (22 July 1911).

Kristin Thompson encourage in text books like *Film Art* places a great deal of emphasis on identifying unifying principles that organize the aesthetic choices and narrative structure of films.[172] However, perhaps the most significant point in this passage is the view that film be judged by the same standards as those applied to other forms of art, such as "painting, the statue, [and] the work of the architect."

Nevertheless, there are two points that need to be qualified. Despite the invocation of "unity," Bush continued to conceive of film as being primarily a medium that contained a "drama." In the closing remarks of his article, Bush presents film aesthetics as complementary—and not central—to the meaning of the film: "good acting is needful, good staging is indispensable, good photography is a delight, every proper technical equipment helps—but "the play's the thing."[173] Secondly, Bush continues to conceive of "art" as a standard of "excellence."

In a poignant homage to cinema, Thomas Bedding's "The Sentiment of the Moving Picture" defines "film as art" as an object that can provoke powerful and transcendent feelings in spectators, a quality he finds lacking in contemporary films. Bedding's appreciation and love of film aesthetics resembles modern film as art discourses:

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[172] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004).
[173] W. Stephen Bush, "The Compelling Harmony of the Whole," *MPW*, 22 July 22, 1911). A year later, Bush showed signs of recognizing the differences between film as a complete aesthetic object and film as a medium that contained dramas: "Nothing is more certain than the new motion picture and above all the feature must strike a new path, if it is to fulfill its highest destiny. It must labor not alone as an imitative, but also as a creative art. It must do the one and not neglect the other. The possibilities are unbounded in either field" (W. Stephen Bush. "New Functions of the Motion Picture," *Moving Picture World* (6 July 1912); 21.

> The sentiment of the picture does not seem to be so rife in the moving picture field, as I for one would like to see it. It is rare indeed that you meet anybody associated with this branch of work who seems to love the picture for itself—another definition of sentiment.[174]

The view that one should "love the picture for itself" represents a distinct break from the other strand of the "film as art" discourse where the value of the film is placed on commercial success. In fact, Bedding's position contradicts the mandate of the trade press that films are to be judged according to public opinion and box office potential. Bedding proceeds to divide filmmakers into two distinct classes; those that have a genuine appreciation of film as art ("picture men"); and those that use film as "mere commodities for making money" (the film industry):

> The latter class are not picture men in the proper sense of the term. That is to say, they have no love for the picture as such; they have not studied its genesis; they are indifferent as to what is to become of it, so long as for the time being they are making money out of it.[175]

In Bedding's definition of "picture men," a modern sense of "film as art" can be discerned. As opposed to the usual attention given to the subject matter, story, or drama, "picture men love the picture for what it is, namely, a beautiful combination of technique and artistry."[176] By "artistry," Bedding means "pictorial composition, good staging, good acting, good producing and all the rest of it."[177] For the "picture man," every moment is an opportunity to continue developing the cinematic imagination and researching aesthetic possibilities. While wandering the streets, "he will find himself pausing, watching a group of people or the

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[174] "The Sentiment of the Moving Picture," *Moving Picture World* (3 September, 1910); 509. This section on Thomas Bedding's view of art has many brief quotes. Rather than footnoting each one separately, I will indicate here that they are all from this source.
[175] Ibid. This distinction between "picture men" and "non-picture men" is similar to the distinction made by *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950's between *auteur* and *metteur en scène.*
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.

movement of life generally."[178] Like the roving eye of the avant-garde artist, the "picture man" appreciates every visual detail the world has to offer, "some particular tone or colour in art or nature would strike him; a moonlight effect, a sunset, an effect of tones or contrast of light and shade."[179] Of course, other visual arts should be included in this aesthetic investigation as well; in describing the thought process of the picture man, Bedding muses that while looking "at the greatest paintings or engravings in the shop windows or galleries...he would say to himself: 'That is how I would like my picture to look.'"[180]

Bedding's portrayal of the "picture man" is essentially that of the filmmaker as artist; a person willing to dedicate his or her life to the development and experimentation of the cinematic form. While an object of art may eventually become a product for sale, Bedding believes that the pursuit of art must occur outside the boundaries of the industry: "your true picture man would live in, by, and for the picture. In so doing assuredly he would at least make an artistic and technical success of his work, the sale of which would then become a matter of business in the proper hands."[181]

Bedding explains that his love for cinema emerged from his passion for photography. Recalling his days working in a photography journal, Bedding says that "all through this phase of my life I *felt* photography, I had the sentiment of it."[182] For Bedding, it is the film critic's responsibility "to persuade picture men, so-

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[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.

called and self-styled, that there is more in the moving picture than they seem to be aware of"[183]—in other words, that film is more than a mere "recording device" serving commercial ends. Bedding suggests that it is only when film is understood as a complete aesthetic object that it becomes a work of art. Were filmmakers to become conscious of its artistic possibilities, then the public would "rise to the occasion and look upon the picture as it looks upon other manifestations of graphic art, such as painting, etching, pencil and pen drawings."[184] Bedding concludes his homage to cinema with one of the most powerful statements about "film as art" from this period: "the moving picture maker who is thoroughly imbued with the sentiment of his subject will not send out a picture, unless it is a work of art."[185]

Louis Reeves Harrison's contribution to the "film as art" discourse, and to film criticism generally, spanned across many articles between 1910 and 1914. An important theme in Harrison's body of work is the view that interpretive film criticism is inscribed in "film as art" discourse. Though this view became more apparent in his later criticism (1913-1915), Harrison's interest in the "meaning" of films was already visible in 1910. In an article called "The Elusive Quality," Harrison explains that films are of "little value" when they are unable to "get beyond the canvass:"

> It seems to me, and I am only giving my impressions as a lover of fine motion pictures, that these silent dramas might be made a power to work on the human spirit so as to afford us fellows in the audience some genuine pleasure. That's what we go to the show for. Some of us need relief, others

[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.

> would like a play that acts as a stimulus to thought. We want something that exerts a strong influence on the mind. [186]

For Harrison, a film's lack of meaning is not necessarily related to the photography or the "scenic picture to be photographed," since "nearly all producers seem to have a thorough knowledge of these two arts."[187] The real problem, according to Harrison, is that production companies were making films that lacked any resonance with the public: "Very few of us are interested in remote questions set forth in the classics, especially when we have questions of our own to deal with in every-day life."[188] As opposed to W. Stephen Bush's 1908 view that "classic" adaptations provide films with "art value," Harrison stressed the importance of "modern ideas."[189]

The connection between "art" and modernity is best articulated in an article Harrison published the following year: "if the photoplay is to live and flourish as an art by itself, if it is to become one of the forces in our evolution, it must draw its nourishment from what is fresh and vigorous in our time rather than from well-dried classics in literature [...]"[190] For Harrison, this process entails attending to every day existence, such as "the terrible tragedies now, here and right in our midst."[191] In this view, art is conceived of as a social instrument that can help transform public perception and draw attention to the importance of dealing with

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[186] Louis Reeves Harrison, "The Elusive Quality," *Moving Picture World* (20 August 1910); 398.
[187] Ibid. "Art" is being used in the sense of "skill" in this passage.
[188] Ibid.,
[189] In his 1913 article "Press, Producer and Public," Harrison asks: "Why not utilize moving pictures to portray the grandest ideas of the age...? The art of making moving pictures has been brought to a high state of development, only one of the essentials to complete success is usually lacking, the modern idea."
[190] Louis Reeves Harrison, "Mr. Critic," *Moving Picture World* (28 October 1911); 274.
[191] Ibid.

human crisis. Nevertheless, Harrison does not dismiss classic adaptations altogether, but only on the condition that they be modernized, since "they will surely meet with appreciation if they deal with existing conditions in our own times."[192]

In two of his later essays, Harrison clarified his interest in meaning, art, and film criticism. In "Art of Criticism," an article that uses a "question and answer" format, Harrison asked: "What is the first and most important requisite of a photodrama to be classed a masterpiece?" The answer he provides is "that it shall contain a vital meaning."[193] For Harrison, "vital meaning" existed in films that dealt with universal issues, like "the purpose of our existence; the significance of what we are doing; [and] our own artificial creations, such as religion, law and society."[194] Invoking the film industry/art opposition, Harrison believed that the critic must assume the responsibility of finding and promoting films that conveyed "vital meaning": "A good critic must be able to collect evidence of power successfully exercised and use it to guide this new art out of mediocrity. Such men will be hard to find as long as production is more sincerely commercial than artistic."[195]

In another article published that year, Harrison argued for an interpretive form of film criticism, while also presenting a strong challenge to the functional model (discussed in the previous chapters) that had become so dominant in the trade press:

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[192] "This means that we must incorporate modern thought even if we utilize classic setting." Ibid.
[193] Louis Reeves Harrison, "The Art of Criticism," *Moving Picture World* (31 January 1914).
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.

> Criticism has its compensations aside from the splendid training it gives. There are shining moments in every critic's career, such as the discovery of a true spiritual element in a story. When he is no longer dealing with misshapen images of lifeless clay, but with the fascination of a new soul animating the structure before him, then he feels a glow of satisfaction that irradiates his work. It is no longer necessary to consider the audience—keep faith with the exhibitor and disarm the advertiser—he may elaborate to his heart's content on a true expression of life or an artistic expression of life's ideals in terms that fly with wings of light.[196]

In this passage, Harrison expresses the radical view that film has value independent of its connection to the audience, exhibitor or advertiser (production companies). Though the "discovery of a true spiritual element" did not serve the exhibitor or production company—at least not in an immediate sense—Harrison believed that this approach was the most important and gratifying expression of film criticism. For Harrison, "interpretive film criticism" served to animate the artistic value of film as well as offer it a medium for expression; it is in fact through film criticism, Harrison suggests, that cinema achieves its status as art.

In this strand of the film as art discourse, early film critics articulated many views about film that continue to resonate today. For instance, as we have seen, W. Stephen Bush argued that a film should be judged according to its unity of design—the same standard applied to other art forms. Displaying all the traits of the modern cinephile, including a devotion to the aesthetic beauty of cinema, Thomas Bedding recognized film as an aesthetic object constituted by a network of distinct elements—such as photography, lighting and staging—that were indispensable to its status as art. Moreover, Bedding stressed the importance of filmmakers rising up to meet the challenge of cinema's artistic potential. For

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[196] Louis Reeves Harrison, "Reviewing Photoplays," *Moving Picture World* (19 December 1914); 1652.

Harrison, film achieves the status of art by virtue of its containing a "spiritual element" or "vital meaning;" in this regard, cinema's potential as art is conditional on interpretive film criticism.

"Film as art" discourse, as expressed in this second strand, was also much clearer about its position in relation to the film industry. The mechanical and standardized mode of production adopted by the film industry is openly criticised, and most importantly, not framed as congruent with the aims of film as art. However, the effect of "film as art" discourse on film criticism is less clear than the other concepts of cinema already discussed. This is partially attributable to the elusive and vague status of art. As discussed in relation to Harrison's view of "meaning," the film criticism that followed from the concept of "film as art" likely encouraged film interpretation. Considering that art is ascribed an affective and sentimental quality, that as Bedding says needs to be *felt*, "film as art" discourse may have also encouraged "impressionist criticism." Conceived of as an art-form, film critics can be understood to serve the interests of the filmmakers (as artists), cinema (as an aesthetic object), and indirectly, the film industry, since the association between art and cinema was considered positive in relation to their interests.

Chapter 5

Early Film "Interpretations"

First becoming visible in North American film trade publications between 1909 and 1912, interpretive film criticism was a discourse of complex determinations, partly influenced by the progressive beliefs of early film critics and the emergence of "film as art" discourse. Conceiving of film as an instrument of knowledge and object of art gave rise to a film criticism that attempted to explain the underlying meaning or messages that cinema conveyed. This formation was by no means homogeneous or concerted; among the vast amounts of film commentary published in *Moving Picture World* during these early years, "pockets" of interpretive criticism can be discerned. The existence of interpretive criticism, as well as the impressionist, prescriptive and progressive criticism already discussed, is problematic to the "standard view" of early criticism. This is the view that early film criticism was primarily a descriptive, non-critical discourse, absent of any opinions.[197] My objective in this chapter is to challenge this narrow, exclusionary, view of film criticism and film interpretation by presenting a broader view of these practices, and demonstrating the presence of film interpretation in early film criticism.

[197] Discussed in Chapter 1.

The Logics of Interpretation

In *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*, Richard Shusterman considers a broad range of cultural practices that fall under the category of "criticism," noting that each is premised on a distinct understanding of interpretation. Shusterman's "pluralist" account of interpretation is useful to the study of early film criticism because it allows for different kinds of discourses to justifiably be construed as "criticism." Moreover, Shusterman explains that no foundation exists, at least within the Humanities, for granting absolute authority to a single interpretive practice; rather, critics can be observed to play many interpretive "games":

> There is no one logic of interpretation, but rather many "logics" of interpretation. Different critics play different interpretive "games" with different sets of rules or "logics" implicit in the games they practice. These games reflect and serve different ends, and the diversity of the games and their variant logics is concealed by the fact that they are not explicitly formulated or demarcated and tend somewhat to overlap. The diversity of interpretive logics is further concealed by their sharing much the same terms in different senses (e.g., "the poem," "the right interpretation"). Analyses of interpretive logic diverge because they are analyzing different logics. They take as their objects different interpretive games.[198]

Shusterman approaches the problem of interpretation from a Wittgensteinian point of view, in the sense of conceiving of "interpretation" as a "language game."[199] To define interpretation according to a general attribute (an essence),

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[198] Shusterman, 35

[199] I interpret Wittgenstein's notion of "language-game" to be a set of rules, concepts and attitudes that are shared by groups of people and that create the conditions for "understanding" one another (or as Wittgenstein says, "to go on"). Thus, the meaning of language exists in discourse as opposed to in its relation to reality. Shusterman's argument is that "interpretation" obtains different meanings depending on the "language-game" it forms a part of. As Shusterman points out, different critical communities may *seem* equivalent uses of "interpretation," but this

means that some instances of "film interpretation" (defined by what a community of practitioners like Film Studies might define as "film interpretation") are left unaccounted for (in this case, what falls outside of Film Studies). It is the desire to find a commonality between all instances of "film interpretation" that leads to generalizations like Bordwell's; however, Wittgenstein's consideration of language is meant to subvert just these kinds of impulses:

> Instead of producing something common to all that we can call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language."[200]

Wittgenstein's definition of language is of course applicable to any concept that is conceived as essential, including interpretation and "serious" criticism. Following Wittgenstein, Shusterman considers a wide range of critical practices that are recognized by distinct communities as "interpretation." For Shusterman, it makes no sense to declare a single interpretive practice as the most essential, since no community holds absolute authority over the concept: "If each one of these different games is coherently and successfully played, how can the philosopher as mere analyst crown only one as the logic of interpretation?"[201] As opposed to theorists like David Bordwell, Shusterman considers three different "logics" of interpretation—*descriptivism*, *prescriptivism*, and *performativism*—with the possibility for more logics, given further investigation.

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resemblance is due to different language games sharing the similar vocabularies (such as, the "right interpretation"), not on equivalent uses of "interpretation."

[200] Wittgenstein, PI, §65.

[201] Shusterman, 49.

Descriptivism

According to Shusterman, descriptivism "treats interpretive statements as expressing propositions;"[202] therefore, this is the logic that most closely corresponds with Bordwell's characterization of interpretation. However, *descriptivism* is not a "unified" logic, since several different and contradictory interpretive statements can be classified under this general heading. At one end of the spectrum, there is the "subjectivist critic" who offers his or her "impressions" of the object or text *as* the interpretation (ex., "the underlying truth of the film emerges in the final scene, when the dying man sits in solitude among the ruins:—authenticity is that fleeting moment when memories come alive one last time, just before the unforgiving and relentless force of temporality erases them forever."). The subjectivist takes the position that interpretations do not necessarily require evidentiary justification; the justification, according to Shusterman, is in the sincerity of the interpretation—if the proposition corresponds to the sensations of the critic, then the interpretation is true. Disagreements among subjectivists tend to be resolved with statements like, "we just have different interpretations of this film." In other words, the term "interpretation" stands in for "feelings" (thus, "we just have different feelings about the object"). The outcome of the subjectivist position is the absence of any "objective" standards for judging (the truth value) of an interpretation; therefore no grounds exist for challenging their validity.

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[202] Ibid., 36.

The practice of "challenging" interpretations is in fact a common one among the descriptivists situated on the other end of the spectrum called "strong descriptivists." Generally intolerant to subjectivist critics, the theoretical aim of "strong descriptivism" is to establish common standards for determining the validity of interpretations. The strong descriptivist offers his or her interpretation as an objective statement that can be potentially verified or falsified (ex., "as the man sits among the crumbled ruins of his home, a painting of Sisyphus hangs in the background, revealing the true meaning of the scene—'regardless of its consequences, existence always remains absurd'").[203] The subjectivist and the strong descriptivist fall under the same category (descriptivism) because they are both making claims about the (true) meaning of texts.

In Shusterman's view, the strong descriptivist aims to satisfy Mathew Arnold's view of interpretation, "to see the object as in itself it really is."[204] Consequently, "the interpreter either correctly describes the true meaning of the work or else he is not successful."[205] Since the interpreter sees the object "as in itself it really is," only one true interpretation can exist. Furthermore, as with Bordwell's theory, a strong descriptivist can either be intentionalist or non-intentionalist.[206] However, whether one holds an intentionalist or non-intentionalist position, strong descriptivism leads down the same problematic path of having to exclude "false" interpretations, even if the interpretation may

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[203] My example. The strong descriptivist position is similar to the "referential" and "explicit" meaning discussed by Bordwell, in that the assumption is that no "interpretation" has actually taken place.
[204] Quoted in Shusterman, 37.
[205] Shusterman, 37.
[206] Ibid., 37.

"strike one as acceptable, and, in some sense, apt."[207] "Weak descriptivism" occupies the middle ground between strong descriptivism and subjectivism by applying different standards to the evaluations of interpretations; weak descriptivism "abandons the notion of absolute truth and falsity for the logically weaker notions of plausibility and adequacy."[208] More specifically then, the logic of interpretation that most resembles Bordwell's theory of interpretation is "weak descriptivism."[209]

Since "descriptivism" stresses propositional and hypothetical statements, reasons offered in support of interpretations are usually evidentiary and factual in nature. This can be observed in the "verification language" commonly adopted by descriptivists—"plausibility," "probability," and "adequacy." The possibility of comparing factual claims to the "fact-of-the-matter" is what allows for the practice of "challenging" interpretations. If upon closer inspection the painting of Sisyphus turns out to be a painting of Dionysus, then sufficient grounds exist for issuing a "challenge" to the interpretation. A second kind of challenge is when the "logical relations" between the evidence and the conclusions are put into question; in other words, true premises can also lead to false conclusions (ex., "while it's true that a painting of Sisyphus hung in the background, the character clearly indicated his intentions of moving on, not rebuilding the destroyed remains of his

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[207] Ibid., 37.
[208] Ibid., 37.
[209] Bordwell's view that interpretation is inferential and rhetorical leads to the conclusion that "plausibility" is the highest standard possible. "How is the critic to make an interpretation sufficiently persuasive? [...] Call it the problem of *plausibility*" (Bordwell, 30).

home; far from showing the absurdity of existence, this film suggests that it is our capacity for change that makes existence meaningful").

Within the context of early film criticism, several instances of descriptivist interpretations can be observed. Consider the following *comment* published in *Moving Picture World* in January 1910 (author unknown):

> **The Highlanders' Defiance** (Selig). – While it is difficult to repress a feeling of pride that men should be as brave as those who play the principal parts in this drama, one cannot restrain the further feeling of sorrow for those at home, waiting silently and hopefully for the loved ones who gave up their lives to defend a position from an attack by the Boers. War is glorious, when one reads about the dashing bravery and wondrous gallantry of the soldiers who do the fighting, but it takes on quite a different appearance when one sees the men fall in battle. Perhaps along with its other beneficent offices the motion picture will help the peace society advocates in their crusade against war. The graphic representation of deaths in battle, followed almost instantly by the equally graphic reproductions of the broken-hearted mourners at home will emphasize, more than mere words can do, the horrors of war, with its waste of life and money. War pictures may be thrilling, but they may convey a deeper meaning, and exert a more powerful and beneficial influence than their makers suspected.[210]

Premised on the view that films "may convey a deeper meaning...than their makers suspected," the critic attempts to *explain* the meaning of the film. Noting that images have an emotive power that words cannot necessarily convey, the critic proceeds to make a fairly common descriptivist interpretation. In the juxtaposition of two sets of images—"deaths in battle" and "broken hearted mourners"—the critic finds a "deeper" meaning that expresses the central message of the film— "war is a waste of life and money." Moreover, the critic allows that the authors may not be conscious of this meaning, since war films, as his introduction implies, can be understood to glorify the deaths of soldiers. Were

[210] *Moving Picture World* (22 January 1910), 91.

Bordwell to examine this interpretation, he would likely indicate that "progressivism"—and its humanist, anti-war position—is the semantic field being applied. And while Bordwell could argue that "war is a waste of life and money" is actually an explicit meaning, it should be noted that the critic specifies that *from his point of view* it constitutes a "deeper" meaning.

Furthermore, in this *comment* on *The Highlanders' Defiance* the critic makes no attempt to summarize, evaluate or prescribe changes to the film. The initial portion of the criticism consists of a commentary on war and its romanticized public representation. For the critic, it is the juxtaposition of powerful "images" that ruptures this false perception of war. It is precisely these analytic and interpretive instances of criticism that problematize conventional beliefs about early film criticism (such as the "standard view of early film criticism"). Moreover, this *comment* recognizes that some films require interpretation since the deeper meaning is not self-evident (even to the filmmaker).

The presence of a (descriptivist) interpretive tendency in early film criticism can be observed in the critical language that became more prominent around 1909—"illustrates," "represents," "theme," "suggests," "central thought," "inference," "purpose," "intention."[211] Such terms are common in descriptivist criticism because they provide a discursive form for the "explanation" of objects Of course, I am not suggesting that early film interpretations are identical to those

[211] See Figures 10-12 for examples.

produced within Film Studies today (or those discussed by Bordwell);[212] however, I am suggesting that early film interpretations and "serious" film criticism share a strong resemblance in "logic," to use Shusterman's term.

Prescriptivism

Prescriptivism's logic of interpretation dispenses with a need for "truth" or "meaning," though "truth" and "meaning" might be one of the outcomes of the interpretation.[213] Instead, the objective of the critic is to offer an interpretation that will strongly recommend a "way of seeing" the object:

> Prescriptivism regards interpretive statements not as expressing true or false propositions nor even adequate or inadequate hypotheses, but rather as expressing decisions or recommendations about how to regard an artwork...According to prescriptivism, the interpreting critic is recommending which manner of regarding the work we should adopt, and his arguments to support his interpretation are attempts to get us to accept this recommendation and see the work as he does.[214]

For instance, a critic might argue that a film should be seen as a work of art, or as a certain genre, or within a particular category (such "experimental" or "postmodern"). Within this interpretive game, the objective of the critic is to contextualize the object (or recontextualize it, such as when a classical film is re-interpreted as modernist) in terms that will increase the value, appreciation and pleasure of the film. One of the outcomes of following the recommendations may

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[212] Another common standard for "serious" film criticism is that the text be of a certain length (such as an essay); by nature, *comments* are obviously not of this length.
[213] Though sharing obvious resemblances, "prescriptivism" is not the same as "prescriptivist criticism" discussed in Chapter 3. The intention of the latter criticism is to recommend changes to the film; the former is interested in recommending ways of seeing the film.
[214] Shusterman, 38.

be experiencing "meaning" or "truth," but these should not be regarded as the central objective of the critic's interpretation.

Unlike descriptivism (excluding subjectivists), the reasons provided in support of a prescriptivist interpretation are not evidentiary in nature; rather, they function as "causal explanations or motivational justifications."[215] This is because prescriptivist interpretations are interested in transforming the reception of the object into a more pleasurable, valuable or even "meaningful" experience; not in proving the validity of a hypothesis.[216] According to Shusterman, prescriptivist interpretations are typically evaluated in terms of "right/wrong" or "proper/improper", "but right and wrong or proper and improper must not be confused here with true or false [since the critic] is essentially asserting that the artwork should be taken or seen as he sees it rather than that it factually is what he describes it as."[217]

In the following early film criticism example, both a prescriptivist and descriptivist "logic" of interpretation are visible:

> **Her Terrible Ordeal** (Biograph). —A love story; the interest in which is heightened by the fact that the girl is locked in a safe; an absent-minded business man who leaves important papers behind and must, perforce, return to his office to get them, and a general mixup which keeps up the interest throughout the film. The girl is finally rescued and the picture ends happily, with the young people united and probably all pleased, rather than *otherwise, that the aforementioned business man was absent-minded. Maybe the central thought of this picture may be taken to be the inference that sometimes those things which seem all wrong in reality are blessings in*

[215] Ibid., 39.
[216] Of course, facts ought not to be dismissed altogether. In Shusterman's will to create a clear distinction between the different logics of interpretation, he neglects to recognize that prescriptivist critics also depend on "facts." For instance, the critic's recommendation might require drawing connections between formal patterns, intertexts, or historical data—all considered "facts." However, this does not negate that descriptivism and prescriptivism are distinct logics with different interpretive aims.
[217] Shusterman, 39.

> *disguise.* Or, to make this idea specific, if the business man in the picture had not been absent-minded the girl would have died in the safe. *Not all in an audience will reason out or appreciate these subtleties, but when they do interest in the picture is increased proportionately.*[218]

In this example, the critic refers to a "central thought" in the film that requires "inference" (interpretation) in order to be discerned (that "sometimes those things which seem all wrong in reality are blessings in disguise").[219] Furthermore, as with the criticism of the *Highlanders' Defiance*, the last line once again alludes to the importance of interpretation for understanding the "central thought" of the film (the critic uses the term "reason out" instead of interpretation, but these terms are obviously equivalent within this context). Another interesting part of this passage is that interpretation is described as a cognitively more pleasurable form of spectatorship (the last line could be expressed thusly, "when they [interpret the meaning] interest in the picture is increased"). In other words, the critic is implying that if the spectator were to see the film as he sees it, the value and interest of the picture would be increased. The terminology and logic of this passage corresponds precisely with the features of prescriptivism. Considering that the value of the film was not ascribed to public approval or commercial potential, this *comment* further indicates that early film criticism did not necessarily follow the standards of the trade press.[220]

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[218] "Comments on the Films," *Moving Picture World* (10 January 1910); 91. My emphasis

[219] "Inference" is an important term in Bordwell's theory of interpretation: "Psychologically, and socially, knowledge involves *inferences*. In the chapters that follow I shall use the term *interpretation* to denote only certain kinds of inferences about meaning" (Bordwell, 2). His emphasis.

[220] The "film as art" discourse discussed in the previous chapter also displays traits that are typical of prescriptivist interpretations. The argument that cinema should be viewed as an art form, for instance, was intended to transform the reception experience, and increase the value of the object.

Performativism

Performativism does not claim to be about the text in the same way as the other logics of interpretation, and for this reason is perhaps more complicated to understand. Shusterman defines the performativist interpretation as a creation in itself that forms part of the text's continuum of meaning:

> *Performativism* holds a different view of interpretive statements. They are neither descriptions nor quasi-imperative recommendations but rather performances [...] The performativist's point is that critical interpretation, like interpretive performance, is to some extent creative in the sense of helping to determine the qualities and meanings of the work of art rather than merely revealing them.[221]

On the surface it might seem as though Bordwell's theory of interpretation (in the sense of "making meaning") also fits with this logic. However, Bordwell does not use "making" in the sense of "creating," since for Bordwell interpretations are always predetermined by a theory or semantic field. In other words, while "making" may imply "creation" in some contexts (I "made" this film), Bordwell is using "making" in the detached and entirely predetermined sense of "building" or "assembling" (I "made" this table). In any case, Bordwell's characterization of interpretation is clearly excluded from the performativist category by virtue of his objectivist position toward "facts": "The performativist denies that there is a clear description/interpretation dichotomy, much as many philosophers of science reject the observation/theory dichotomy, for both hold that 'the facts' are

[221] Shusterman, 40-41.

themselves theory- or interpretation-dependent."[222] The performativist critic recognizes that the status of "facts" changes relative to different conceptual schemes, language-games and culture. Performativist interpretations are not interested in explaining the meanings of objects, or recommending ways of seeing them; rather, the objective of the interpretation is to guide (not unlike a map) the reader toward a shared experience of the work.[223] There are no limits to the strategies available to achieve this end; the interpreter can use poetic statements, metaphors, rhetoric, and even "performance." The performativist critic envisions the outcome of the interpretation to be a series of evocative "signs" that guide the reader toward a shared perceptual experience. The example that Shusterman provides may help clarify this point:

> Suppose that in presenting an interpretation of a love poem as harsh and insincere, the critic cites the predominance of voiced plosives and the similarity of its imagery to some bawdy song. Neither the plosives nor the similarity of its imagery are themselves what cause the reader to perceive the poem as harsh and insincere, but the act of citing these reasons may focus attention on the work in such a way that the perception of harshness and insincerity is induced.[224]

Another way of thinking about performativist interpretations is to consider the work of musicians. The performance of a composition is an interpretation of it.[225] This is to say, a pianist does not explain the "meaning" of the composition, nor recommend a way of appreciating it; rather, the pianist performs the interpretation in a manner that will bring the audience to share his or her

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[222] Ibid., 40-41.
[223] In this sense, performativism shares some resemblance to prescriptivism.
[224] Ibid., 45.
[225] This is an observation made by Martin Lefebvre in his film interpretation seminar, Concordia University, January-April 2005.

perception of it (sad, thoughtful, playful). Performativist interpretations have an affective quality to them, since one of their functions is to "induce" the reader to "feel" what the interpreter "feels" about the work. Finally, as opposed to Bordwell's "blueprint" conception of interpretation, one might say that the performativist is interested in the creative possibilities offered by the interpretive process. The performativist gives herself up to the possibility of transformation, even of "losing" herself, or being strange; the outcome is not unlike a "creation." Performativism is riskier than the other logics because the interpretation might be considered pretentious, even inaccessible. Perhaps the main trait of performativism, and one I believe Shusterman does not mention, is that performativist interpretations also need to be interpreted in order for them to be "meaningful." In this sense, the experience of the reader in relation to the interpretation becomes analogous to the experience of the interpreter in relation to the work. It is in this analogical sense that the two experiences can be understood as "shared."

Within this logic of interpretation, Myron Osborne Lounsbury's analysis that reviews "left the reader to judge the scenario from the *liveliness or sentiment of the action described by the reporter* [my emphasis]," becomes an astute observation of an early interpretive practice, not a pejorative comment. Consider the following excerpt, a review of the first film screening (Lumière) in Canada (1895) from Montreal's *La Presse*:[226]

[226] No film title provided; but the film is more than likely *Charge of the Seventh French Cuirassiers* (1896).

> Les invités ont ensuite assisté à une charge de cuirassiers. Au premier plan le général donne des ordres à un officier : son cheval se cabre, piaffe, s'agite : à l'horizon, un point noir : c'est le régiment. Il se met en mouvement sur un signal : il avance au grand gallop des montures : bientôt, chaque cavalier devient distinct : les drapeaux flottent au vent, les armures étincellent: cette masse se balance sur la plaine soulève des nuages de pussières. Elle approche, elle approche, vous voyez chaque homme dans toute sa grandeur: ils sont un millier: ils arrivent à toute vitesse jusque sur le devant de la scène; vous allez être écrasés; mais non, tout disparait à ce moment critique et vous restez là, bouche bée. [227]

While also offering a description, the author attempts to evoke aspects of the viewing experience for the reader through shifts in verb tense, reader address and poetic style. The description takes the form of brief, rhythmical, sentences that emphasize the immediacy of the experience. As the tension mounts, and the cavalry approaches, a poignant metaphor is offered: "cette masse se balance sur la plaine soulève des nuages de pussières." The repetition of "elle approche" leads to a shift in address from third to second person ("vous"). Perhaps the last two lines are intended to provoke the reader into an experience analogous to that of the author. The author does not say—"when they rode toward the screen, it was as if they were going to come on stage, which would mean that the audience would have been crushed." Instead, the author tries to draw the reader into sharing his perceptual point of view, through his *liveliness* and *sentiment*: "ils arrivent à toute vitesse jusque sur le devant de la scène; vous allez être écrasés; mais non, tout disparait à ce moment critique et vous restez là, bouche bée."

In this review, the author both states and describes the sensation a spectator might feel; thus, the variations in verb tense, poetic descriptions,

[227] *La Presse* (June 29, 1896); front page.

shifting audience address, and metaphorical passages can be construed as "performative." For instance, the author *could* have used a simile to describe the sensation of the horses coming onto the stage, but instead used a metaphor, rendering the comparison invisible and making the experience more immediate. This criticism illustrates some of the possibilities of performativist interpretations, and its presence in early film criticism. In theory, there are no rules for inducing readers into sharing the interpreter's experience, though perhaps some strategies work more consistently than others. The strategies vary depending on context, a knowledge of the audience, and most importantly, on the ability of the author to be creative with language.[228]

Conclusion

While the material conditions of the trade press explain the presence of prescriptive, descriptive and evaluative statements in early film criticism, the presence of film interpretation (especially of the descriptivist variety) appears to have been motivated by other conditions. Film interpretation does not seem to serve a purpose within the "functional" paradigm of criticism encouraged by the trade press. The following are some preliminary hypotheses that may partially explain the presence of interpretation in early film criticism.

First of all, "film as art" discourse likely encouraged critics to conceive of film as an "interpretable" object. This process played out in a number of forms. In

[228] While this commentary from *La Presse* is not precisely the view of *performativism* Shusterman has in mind, this logic of interpretation, as I have shown, can never the less be used to account for such commentary.

some cases "film as art" discourse led to conceiving of film as a unified aesthetic object constituted by distinct aesthetic elements. In this sense, critics placed a greater emphasis on the analysis of individual aesthetic elements, such as editing or photography, in the explanation of the central meaning or thought present in the film. Gradually this process transformed film from a transparent window onto the world into an opaque representation of reality that required interpretation. In the case of Louis Reeves Harrison the connection between "film as art" discourse and interpretation is even more clearly stated, when he says that film as art is constituted by "vital meaning."

Secondly, progressive discourse led to the view that films disseminated moral values. In order to control and regulate the dissemination of these values, film critics may have begun to consider the idea that some moral values were not self-evident (this can be seen in the criticism of *The Highlanders' Defiance*). The interpretation of moral values also fit with the film industry's interest in self-censorship; screening out films the government and conservative groups found morally objectionable removed the need for outside interference.

Thirdly, some film critics seem to have been interested in experimenting with criticism (as in the *comment* on *The Bobby's Dream* in chapter 3). In my view, this partially stemmed from the possibilities created by the *comments* category of criticism found in *Moving Picture World*. Comments allowed for a disengagement from the stricter, functional demands connoted by "reviews," thus creating a discursive space that encouraged experimentation and the expression

of subjective impressions. The critical attitudes promoted by the *comments* category undoubtedly influenced the development of interpretation.

Fourthly, as cynical as it may seem, the emergence of film interpretation may have been motivated by economic self-interest. The development of a critical discourse that essentially claimed the presence of hidden or inaccessible meanings situated the critic along a more privileged and specialized continuum. Since interpretive criticism helped transform film criticism into a more lucrative vehicle (allowing film critics entrance into university institutions and professional venues), film interpretation is necessarily determined by economic causes.

In this chapter, I have tried to show that early film criticism is characterized by several different logics of interpretation; and that moreover, early film critics displayed a keen awareness of the possibilities presented by these forms of criticism. The most compelling evidence is the fact that film critics engaged in the logic of interpretation that is most commonly associated with "serious" film criticism—*descriptivism*. As a whole, the evidence presented in this chapter is in contradiction to the judgments that have been made on this material and community. The main premises underlying the "standard view of early film criticism" do not hold together; neither in its logic nor in its assessment of the historical facts. For this reason, there is no rational basis for continuing to exclude early film criticism from the category of film criticism.

Conclusion

One of the central concerns of this thesis has been to determine the status of early film criticism in relation to academic discourse. As discussed in Chapter 1, the standard view held by most film scholars is that early film criticism does not constitute "film criticism." Over the course of this thesis, I have attempted to develop several themes that challenge this view. One theme is the idea that early film criticism is characterized by statements, attitudes and logics that correspond precisely to the view of film criticism held by these film scholars. Although early film criticism is generally shorter in length than current film criticism, both kinds nevertheless belong to the same *discursive continuum*.[229] Film scholars so far have concentrated on the differences between early and later criticism but this has led them to erroneously conclude that early film criticism is in fact not "criticism" proper. The goal of this thesis, instead, has been to show the "family resemblance" that unites them.[230]

Secondly, the argument that early film criticism is descriptive and uncritical not only implies a judgment on the substance of early film criticism, but also on the identities of the individuals producing it. These individuals have been typically ascribed labels that correspond to their supposedly descriptive (and uncritical)

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[229] This was demonstrated in Chapter 5 by the similar discursive logics shared across early and later film criticism.

[230] Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblances" follows from his discussion on language games in paragraphs 64-67 of *Philosophical Investigations*. Rather than defining concepts (and behaviours) according to absolute and necessary conditions (the problem Wittgenstein identifies when we attempt to find all that is common to "games"), definitions should recognize the resemblances that exist across a spectrum of particular phenomena -- in this case, "film criticism" conceived and practiced by early film critics, and "film criticism" conceived and practiced by later film critics.

endeavours— "journalists" and "reporters." The absence of "film critics" from the commentary of film scholars on early film criticism has implicitly negated the possibility of critical thinking. As opposed to the myth of the primitive spectator, standing in awe at the spectacular sight of moving pictures, the myth of the early film critic is of a mechanical, literal-minded entity incapable of formulating personal or critical opinions. Rather than responding to the complex ideas and stimulation presented by cinema, the mythical "reporter critic" resorts to summarizing plot points that even primitive audiences could apprehend. Perhaps the most convincing evidence this thesis offers is that early film critics were actually intelligent, rational and creative individuals.

As demonstrated in the middle chapters, film critics consistently applied the most logical standards appropriate to their objectives. Shifting between prescriptions, reviews, commentary and even interpretation, film critics displayed a capacity to adapt to cinema's transformation and elusiveness. Early film critics also discussed many issues usually identified with film theory, including the idea of film as art, spectatorship and the practice of film criticism. Finally, film critics recognized each other as forming part of a dynamic critical community. While one could claim and perhaps still defend the view that early film criticism was a primitive and uncritical discourse, the organization, diversity and rationality of the discourse is undeniable.

Research and Methodological Implications

Early film criticism's status as "trade press criticism" has made it ideally suited to institutional analysis. In my view, Charlie Keil's work on early film criticism is the most comprehensive account to date; however, Keil also tends to characterize early film criticism as a homogeneous discourse motivated strictly by economic interests. There is certainly truth to Keil's claim. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I argued that "film as art" discourse, progressive standards, and film interpretation can partially be explained by economic motivations: "film as art" discourse served to elevate the commercial value of cinema; progressive standards regulated the moral content of films (as a form of self-censorship) and helped shift control of the industry from French to American interests; film interpretation was an instrument of progressive criticism that served to disclose hidden moral messages; interpretive discourse also helped transform film critics into more attractive commodities from the point of view of specialised journals or academic institutions. There is little doubt that economic causes strongly influenced the development of early film criticism. However, to reduce these discourses—and their effects—to strictly economic vehicles is a mistake in my opinion; as this thesis has shown, film critics were clearly idealistic individuals committed to transcendent beliefs, formal experimentation, and the idea of art as art.

As a field of research, the situation of early film criticism today is analogous to the situation of early cinema scholarship 25 years ago. There has been very little research conducted on the history of film writing prior to 1915 (the

year Vachel Lindsay and Hugo Münsterberg published seminal works);[231] and like early cinema, the field has also been consistently characterized as "primitive" in one form or another. Just as dispelling the myth of a primitive early cinema entailed reframing it within new categories and observing its interconnections to other representational forms, early film criticism likewise requires a similar intervention.

Charles Musser (and others) has described the emergence of cinema in relation to a larger history of screen practices.[232] In this sense, cinema was reconceived not so much as a sudden invention, but rather as a continuation of earlier technologies, spectatorship practices and forms of representation that converged on cinema and its public spectacle. As suggested in the introduction to this thesis, early film criticism can similarly be understood as forming part of an earlier practice of moving picture criticism.[233] In their *Film Review Index*, Patricia King Hanson and Stephen Hanson implicitly suggest that the practice of reviewing moving images dates back to 1838 with a piece written by Nathanial Hawthorne.[234] This implies there is a fifty year period between the first observed

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[231] Hugo Munsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: Dover, 1916); Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Liveright Publishing Co., 1970 [1915]).
[232] Charles Musser. *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner; Toronto: Collier Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1990).
[233] See introduction to this thesis, page 3.
[234] A review of Eadweard Muybridge's zoopraxiscope included the following observation in 1882: "This subject is worthy of the earnest consideration of those gentleman whose inclination and taste may induce them to devote some portion of their attention to art, and who appreciate its progress." *Scientific American Supplement* (28 January 1882); 5058-5059. The writer makes several other comparisons to Muybridge's "animal motion" experiments and "art" in this review. However, it should be noted that it is not so much the zoopraxiscope itself that is categorized as "art" as it is the fact animals are captured in motion. Muybridge's presentation, published several months later, clarifies this point: "The attempts to depict the attitudes of animals in motion probably began with art itself, if indeed, it was not the origins of art itself: and upon the walls of the ancient temples of Egypt, we still find pictures of, perhaps, the very earliest attempts to

moving picture criticism and the emergence of early film criticism. It is hard to say what types of connections might exist; for instance, the idea that these new technologies and representational forms (photography, magic lantern, etc) could be thought of as art may have begun to emerge before cinema.[235]

Tom Gunning's and André Gaudreault's concept of "cinema of attractions" challenged the view that early cinema was a formless and primitive aesthetic that evolved into modern narrative and aesthetic conventions.[236] The "Cinema of Attractions" concept managed to reframe early cinema in terms that allowed the relationship between film aesthetics and modernity to become visible. Seen under one set of terms (the "standard view" for instance) early film criticism seems like a primitive discourse that displayed occasional flashes of modern film criticism. Seen under a different set of terms, such as the ones presented in this thesis, early film criticism seems both distinct and rational. The lesson to be learned from Tom Gunning is that the process of "recovering" history does not only entail further research; it also entails reframing the object of investigation in terms that produce new questions and research avenues. For this reason, part of

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illustrate animals in motion. But artists of all ages seem to have followed peculiar grooves in this matter, and to have adopted uniform motions as to the movement of animals. How inaccurate the notions have been, I shall endeavour to demonstrate to you this evening." *Scientific American Supplement* (28 July 1882); 5469-5470. These are simply some initial observations and starting points that obviously require further research to become substantial. The point is that there is material available to begin tracing a moving picture criticism and determining its connection to later discourses on cinema.

[235] An interesting example of this type of research is Vanessa R. Schwartz's "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris" in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997). Though touched upon in Chapter 3, another important area of research that would shed light on the emergence of film criticism is the relationship between film criticism discourse and other forms of criticism (such as theatre and art criticism).

[236] "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde", *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3 & 4 (Fall, 1986).

my objective in this thesis has been to rethink the concept of film criticism and perhaps even to reformulate the relevant research questions. For instance, is it actually necessary to think of early film criticism *as* "criticism" in order to find these texts meaningful? Unfortunately, from the point of view of Film Studies this has often been the case.

The underlying problem I believe I have identified in the study of early film criticism is the unproblematic use of concepts from one discursive community (institution of Film Studies) to explain the discourse of another community (early film criticism), in the sense that the concepts are thought of as essential. The effect of such a move is to either render the differences between the two discourses invisible or to implicitly frame the other discourse as lacking qualities that would make them equivalent. Such is the case with scholars that have tended to define early film criticism as instances of "so-called criticism" or "reviews" (in quotation marks). Instead of examining early film criticism within its own context—in relation to its own critical practices, objectives, standards, material conditions and discourses of cinema—film historians have decontextualized the texts and analyzed them in relation to their modern sense of "film criticism," thus producing a comparison in which the earlier texts invariably fail to meet the imagined standards. This behaviour, more than any other, has excluded early film criticism from serious academic attention. Film criticism, as we have seen, is a complex network of attitudes and statements that do not necessarily correspond to the concepts of film scholars today. By opening early

film criticism to a broader analysis that includes recognizing various forms of criticism, the excluded portions of the network become visible and interesting.

In the end, maybe the best way to think about early film criticism is in the terms *Moving Picture World* already seemed to encourage: as *comments*. The "comment" is a flexible category that can account for many of the differences and variations that existed in early film criticism, while still retaining some of the qualities found in either the "review" or "film criticism." Several of the definitions ascribed to "comment" capture the unpredictable, dynamic and exciting features of early film criticism: "explanation," "remark," "impression," "criticism" "invention," and "interpretation."[237] Thinking about early film criticism as "comments" leads us away from making comparisons between our two communities, and moves us toward appreciating the diversity early film criticism had to offer—on its own terms.

[237] Robert Barnhart, *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* (Bronx, N.Y.: H.W. Wilson Co., 1988); Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Elsevier, 1966); Walter Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of The English Language* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961)

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Appendix A

Nathanial Hawthorne's Review of a Diorama (1838)

Originally published in Hawthorne's *American Notebooks* (1838):

> "There were views of the cities and edifices in Europe, of Napoleon's battles and Nelson's sea-fights, in the midst of which would be seen a gigantic, brown, hairy hand (the Hand of Destiny) pointing at the principle points of conflict, while the old Dutchman explained. He gave a good deal of dramatic effect to his descriptions, but his accent and intonation cannot be written. He seemed to take interest and pride in his exhibition, yet when the utter and ludicrous miserability thereof made us laugh, he joined in the joke very readily. When the last picture had been shown, he caused a country boor, who stood gaping beside the machine, to put his head within it, and thrust out his tongue. The head becoming gigantic, a singular effect was produced."[238]

While this Hawthorne review is justifiably one of the first examples of "moving picture criticism," there is some confusion surrounding the origins of this claim. The only text I have come across that makes reference to Hawthorne's piece as the first "movie review" is Patricia King Hanson's and Stephen Hanson's *Film Review Index, v.1, 1882-1949*. The problem is that King Hanson and Hanson credit film historian George C. Pratt as being the first to make this claim:

> Although the origin of what we now recognize as the "movie review," is shrouded in obscurity, at least one film historian, George C. Pratt, author of *Spellbound in Darkness*, attributes it to Nathaniel Hawthorne, already famous as the 'father of American Literature,' who was apparently the first writer to critique an instance of projected moving images.[239]

However, George C. Pratt does not make this claim, nor does he refer to the Hawthorne piece as a "review." His interest in the Hawthorne piece (as with the other reviews he publishes) is in the historical information they provide about cinema. It could be that King Hanson and Hanson are drawing on other information or sources, but what is certain is that Pratt makes no such claim in *Spellbound in Darkness*. For this reason, despite the factual error, I credit King Hanson and Hanson as being the first to make the connection between Hawthorne and film criticism.

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[238] Quote in King Hanson and Hanson, vii.
[239] King Hanson and Hanson, vii.

Appendix B

"Film Reviews" Explained

From 16 March 1907 to 19 September 1908, "Film Reviews" were published weekly in *Moving Picture World*. However, no direct statements have been made (to my knowledge) about the author status of these texts; neither by film historians nor by *Moving Picture World*. Based on the following sets of facts, my conclusion is that "Film Reviews" were not written by film critics, and were probably written by production companies (at least during the first few years):

- One of the first "Film Reviews" (originally called "Film Chat" – see figure 1) began its "review" of Biograph's *Fights of Nations* with the words "Our latest production," indicating that it was being written from the point of view of the manufacturer.

- When *Moving Picture World* opened its first film criticism department, "Comments on the Film Subjects" on 3 October 1908, they announced: "Yielding to the requests of our readers to take up criticism of some of the film subjects, we invited two capable newspaper men to make the rounds with us to the theatre last week" (253). This statement implies that everything that came before this moment was neither criticism, nor written by journalists.

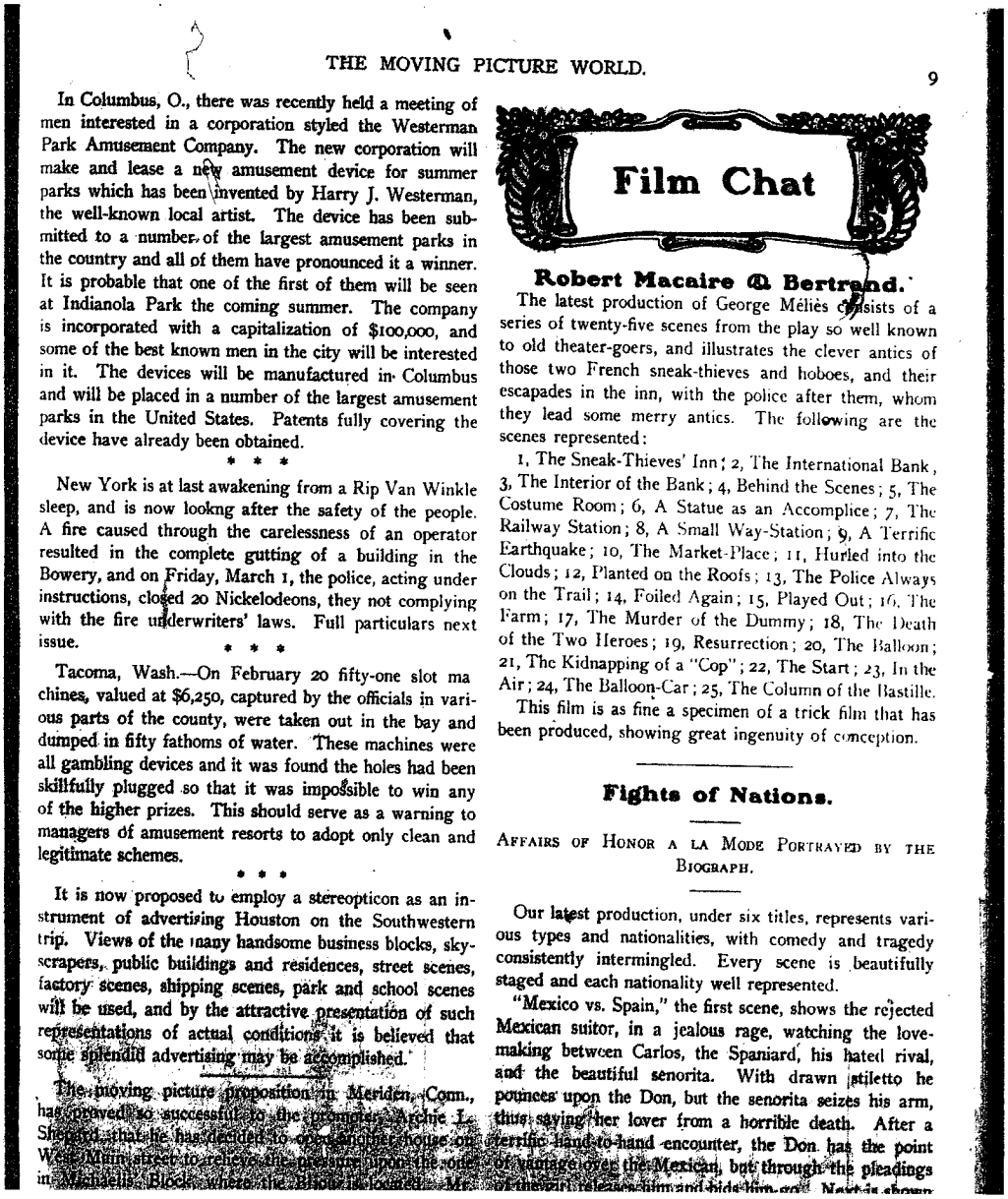
- In the later years, *Moving Picture World* added the sub-heading "by our own critics" to this section.

- In his early film criticism anthology, Anthony Slide states that *Moving Picture World* did not begin publishing film criticism until 18 January 1908, "when it introduced a short lived column titled 'Our Visits'"[240] (see Figures 6 and 7). The implied conclusion is that everything that came before this date was not film criticism.

- Patricia King Hanson's and Stephen Hanson's *Film Review Index* does not cite any of these "Film Reviews," despite covering many films from the period.

[240] Slide, ix.

Figures



THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD. 9

In Columbus, O., there was recently held a meeting of men interested in a corporation styled the Westerman Park Amusement Company. The new corporation will make and lease a new amusement device for summer parks which has been invented by Harry J. Westerman, the well-known local artist. The device has been submitted to a number of the largest amusement parks in the country and all of them have pronounced it a winner. It is probable that one of the first of them will be seen at Indianola Park the coming summer. The company is incorporated with a capitalization of $100,000, and some of the best known men in the city will be interested in it. The devices will be manufactured in Columbus and will be placed in a number of the largest amusement parks in the United States. Patents fully covering the device have already been obtained.

* * *

New York is at last awakening from a Rip Van Winkle sleep, and is now lookng after the safety of the people. A fire caused through the carelessness of an operator resulted in the complete gutting of a building in the Bowery, and on Friday, March 1, the police, acting under instructions, closed 20 Nickelodeons, they not complying with the fire underwriters' laws. Full particulars next issue.

* * *

Tacoma, Wash.—On February 20 fifty-one slot machines, valued at $6,250, captured by the officials in various parts of the county, were taken out in the bay and dumped in fifty fathoms of water. These machines were all gambling devices and it was found the holes had been skillfully plugged so that it was impossible to win any of the higher prizes. This should serve as a warning to managers of amusement resorts to adopt only clean and legitimate schemes.

* * *

It is now proposed to employ a stereopticon as an instrument of advertising Houston on the Southwestern trip. Views of the many handsome business blocks, skyscrapers, public buildings and residences, street scenes, factory scenes, shipping scenes, park and school scenes will be used, and by the attractive presentation of such representations of actual conditions it is believed that some splendid advertising may be accomplished.

The moving picture proposition in Meriden, Conn., has proved so successful to the promoter, Archie L. Shepard, that he has decided to open another house on West Main street to relieve the pressure upon the one in Michaelis Block, where the Bijou is located. Mr. [illegible] of the girl, releases him and bids him [illegible]

Film Chat

Robert Macaire & Bertrand.

The latest production of George Méliès consists of a series of twenty-five scenes from the play so well known to old theater-goers, and illustrates the clever antics of those two French sneak-thieves and hoboes, and their escapades in the inn, with the police after them, whom they lead some merry antics. The following are the scenes represented:

1, The Sneak-Thieves' Inn; 2, The International Bank, 3, The Interior of the Bank; 4, Behind the Scenes; 5, The Costume Room; 6, A Statue as an Accomplice; 7, The Railway Station; 8, A Small Way-Station; 9, A Terrific Earthquake; 10, The Market-Place; 11, Hurled into the Clouds; 12, Planted on the Roofs; 13, The Police Always on the Trail; 14, Foiled Again; 15, Played Out; 16, The Farm; 17, The Murder of the Dummy; 18, The Death of the Two Heroes; 19, Resurrection; 20, The Balloon; 21, The Kidnapping of a "Cop"; 22, The Start; 23, In the Air; 24, The Balloon-Car; 25, The Column of the Bastille.

This film is as fine a specimen of a trick film that has been produced, showing great ingenuity of conception.

Fights of Nations.

AFFAIRS OF HONOR A LA MODE PORTRAYED BY THE BIOGRAPH.

Our latest production, under six titles, represents various types and nationalities, with comedy and tragedy consistently intermingled. Every scene is beautifully staged and each nationality well represented.

"Mexico vs. Spain," the first scene, shows the rejected Mexican suitor, in a jealous rage, watching the love-making between Carlos, the Spaniard, his hated rival, and the beautiful senorita. With drawn stiletto he pounces upon the Don, but the senorita seizes his arm, thus saving her lover from a horrible death. After a terrific hand-to-hand encounter, the Don has the point of vantage over the Mexican, but through the pleadings

(FIG. 1)

First "Film Review" in *Moving Picture World*.

(9 March 1907); 9.


THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD. 31

Film Review.

THE "TEDDY" BEARS.

[illegible] a lonely part of a forest stands a peculiar looking house, the ground and surroundings being covered with snow. In front of the house is a little bear, holding a "Teddy Bear" and dancing with glee. The mother bear emerges from the house and orders the little one inside, to which he pays no heed. As she approaches to compel obedience, the little one runs around in a circle, pursued by the mother. Unable to catch the little rascal, she calls the old father bear to her assistance, both of whom are pelted with snowballs by the young scamp. The youngster is finally captured and led by the ear into the house.

All three soon reappear, dressed for a walk in the forest. Shortly after they disappear, little Goldilocks, out on a ramble in the wood, comes upon this queer-looking house, and, being inquisitive, she approaches, finds the door open and walks in. The first thing that meets her gaze upon entering is three bowls of porridge on a table. After sampling each, the smaller one seems to suit her taste and she eats the entire contents. Having satisfied her appetite, she proceeds with her investigation, and presently finds her way into a strange-looking room. In searching for a door leading therefrom, she unexpectedly discovers a peephole, through which she sees something that astonishes and pleases her. In the room beyond are a number of "Teddy Bears" performing all sorts of tumbling, balancing and numerous other acrobatic feats. Becoming impatient, she endeavors to open the door leading into this room, but being unable to do so, tries a nearby door, which she succeeds in opening, but finds herself in another room. Climbing the stairs before her, they lead her to a sleeping room containing two large and one small bed. Becoming tired and sleepy, she gets upon the first bed, but finds it too hard; tries the next and finds it not to her liking, but when she reaches the small bed, to her surprise, she spies, sitting on a chair at the head, a "Teddy Bear," takes it in her arms, pulls down the bedcovers, gets into bed and soon is fast asleep.

Having finished their walk, the three bears return home. As soon as they enter, discovery is made that someone has been eating their porridge, which had been prepared for their meal upon return. The little fellow, finding his bowl empty, starts to cry, but is soon consoled. All three then leave the room, but almost immediately the little one returns for his "Teddy Bear," and sits down in a rocker to amuse himself. His mother opens the door and calls him, but he refuses to accompany her, the consequence of which is a lively chase around the table. At this moment old Bruin enters, captures the young rascal, leads him over to his mother, who administers a good sound spanking.

Preparations are now made to retire, and dressed in their night clothes, led by father Bruin with a candle, they start upstairs, but the little one falls down, and after considerable crying and wiping of tears, they proceed. On entering the bed chamber, father Bruin [illegible]

bears in the room, but grasps the "Teddy Bear," jumps up, runs over the three beds, pursued by the bears. She gets to the door but finds it locked, darts around the foot of the beds, spies an open window, reaches it, throws the "Teddy Bear" out, hurriedly crawls through and drops to the ground, runs down through the forest with the three bears in pursuit. An exciting chase leads over hills, through deep snow, until finally Goldilocks strikes a road, which she follows. She soon has the good fortune to meet the great hunter, "Teddy," to whom she hurriedly explains her predicament. The bears soon come within range. Teddy takes good aim, fires and kills old father Bruin; fires again and drops the mother bear. The little bear, bringing up the rear, seeing the hunter ready to shoot, drops on his knees and begs to be spared. Goldilocks also pleads with the hunter not to shoot. He accedes to her wishes, approaches the little fellow, fastens a chain to his neck and under the guidance of little Goldilocks return to the bearhouse. Goldilocks waits outside while the fearless Teddy, with his captive, enters the house. He returns and, after assuring her there is no danger within, they re-enter. In a few moments they all appear, including the hunter and the little bear. Each carries a "Teddy Bear," while Goldilocks has her arms full of "Teddy Bears."

Sale and Exchange

All readers having films, slides, cameras or other apparatus, wishing to exchange for others of equal value or the balance paid in cash can advertise their wants, and to safeguard each party from loss a deposit of full value of articles can be placed in the hands of the editor until he learns that both parties are satisfied, when cash will be sent on; in case of dissatisfaction, on return of goods, money will be refunded.

(FIG. 2)

"Film Chat" renamed "Film Review"

Moving Picture World (16 March 1907); 31.

F. W. GING, Secretary and Treasurer.
Bijou Amusement Co.

each other's arms, bathed in the golden rays of a setting sun—indeed a most beautiful scene. Length, 1,014 feet.

THE HEART OF O YAMA (Biograph).—Pretty Miss Chrysanthemum has but little to say as to the disposal of her heart—at least, such is the custom in Japan. Her parents attend to that for her. However, pretty little O Yama Sum had a will of her own, and casting tradition to the winds, insisted upon making her own choice, so the Biograph camera here records the outcome. The Grand Daimio has long loved the pretty O Yama and presents himself before her mother in quest of her hand. His offer is scorned by O Yama, for she loves another, a low-born but worthy warrior. She writes to him to meet her by the Great Lamp of Savatiya that night, and they are nearly caught through the treachery of one of the butterflies of the court, who tells the Daimio of his rival. The lover escapes by hiding in the great lamp and afterwards being conveyed in a large hamper to the Bower of Roses, where he is eventually captured and thrown into the torture chamber. The Daimio, to render his revenge more complete, conveys to O Yama a false message from her lover, with his, the Daimio's, permission to see him. She is conducted to the chamber, and the sight that greets her fairly paralyzes her; for here is her lover hung by the wrists, dangling over a treacherous bed of upturned knife-blades, which inflict ugly wounds at the slightest move of his body. Besides this, there is a sword lying across a fire to be used at

...ee is employed to help move some furn... the listless manner in which he handle... secures his discharge. Then in rapid suc... find him a waiter, a bartender, etc., fr... which positions his lack of energy soon... dismissal. Finally he becomes a policem... job he holds without making any partic... In fact, this seems to be the only posi... able to hold. Length, 500 feet.

Film Import and Trading Co. issue:

HIS SWEETHEART'S BIRTHDAY (N...

This comedy is a fresh and lively one... ging in any moment or in any of the sit...

A young chap secures a number of ... clothing and jewelry for "His Sweethea... day," among the many articles are a pai... shoes. "His Sweetheart," not knowing ... of these presents, throws them out of ... dow to the street. The servant, who is ... up the front steps, picks up the vario... and takes them up into the house agai... meantime the young chap arrives and ... in. Questioning "lovie-dovie" he disco... has happened; they rush out to recover ... ents, but they are gone. Not knowing ... maid has taken them in, they rush down ... stopping every individual, violently if ... who has a pair of white shoes on.

The many laughable episodes in this m... finally close back in the house of "... heart," pursued by a howling mob of t...

Stories of the Films.

THE RED GIRL (Another Soul-stirring Story of Life on the Frontier by the Biograph).—The Biograph Company, pursuant of its policy of studying the public's taste, produced some weeks ago "The Redman and the Child," a story of Western life among the Indians, and "The Greaser's Gauntlet," a tale of the Mexican border. The unprecedented success of those two subjects induced us to present another, which in locale may be said to combine the elements of both those pictures, the resultant being the production of the most thrilling and soul-stirring film ever made. The scenic splendor of the picture will alone commend it to popular favor, besides which there is a rapid succession of the most exciting and novel incidents ever incorporated into a moving picture story.

The plot, while powerfully dramatic, is most clearly defined, and while we will attempt to describe it, our narration must, in a measure, be bald and unconvincing as compared with the merits of the subject. Kate Nelson, a girl miner who has been working a claim in the mountains, runs into the office of the frontier hotel with the tidings that she has at last struck paydirt, showing a bag of valuable nuggets to admiring friends. Having just returned from the appraiser's office, and it being late, she puts up at the hotel for the night. In the office at Kate's arrival there is a Mexican woman who has just lost her money at Faro. At sight of Kate's gold she becomes desperate and at once plans to secure it. Kate is shown to a room, and is soon asleep with the bag of yellow nuggets reposing under her pillow. Suddenly the face of the Mexican woman is seen at the window, and she has little trouble in forcing it open. Her intrusion awakens Kate, but she overpowers her and gains the gold. In the struggle, Kate manages to fire her revolver, with a view

(FIG. 3)

"Film Reviews" renamed "Stories of the Films."

Moving Picture World (19 September 1908); 221.

(page 1 of 2)

passers-by, who are ultimately driven out. Length, 540 feet.

IN THE TIME OF REBELLION (Norwood).—An episode is selected from one of the rebellions against British rule in India, which is both interesting and novel.

In a British barrack is confined a tamed gorilla which has conceived a hatred for one of the Hindoo attendants, owing to the barbarous treatment which the Hindoo accords the beast. This attendant proves to be a traitor to the British interests, and avails himself of his opportunities to possess himself of military papers and secrets which he carries to his friends in the rebel camp. His treachery is given scope in an ambuscade that he arranges, to entrap one of the officers of the barracks. This officer is shot and dangerously wounded, but is assisted back to the barracks by his aide. The traitorous Hindoo goes back to the barracks by a short route and betrays the camp to his friends who are to depart with prisoners, when a party of British troop arrive in time to save them and to see the traitor about to abduct a small child of the superior officer.

All these barrack scenes have been witnessed by the caged gorilla, which has become furious with rage and excitement, and succeeds in breaking the bars as the Hindoo is taking the child away. The infuriated beast seizes the traitor by the throat and after a struggle in which the Hindoo gives a good account of himself by wounding the gorilla the traitor is strangled. Length, 480 feet.

THE LADY WITH THE CAMELLIAS (Great Northern).—The famous production of Alex. Dumas, immortalised by Sarah Bernhardt, Eleonora Duse and Rejane, the ever-enchanting lady with the camellias, who has to suffer so much for the sake of her love, and who must die just as she is going to enjoy her happiness, has in these pictures been displayed as close as possible to the drama as it is exhibited on the stage. Unfortunately we have to do without the text, but the pictures are so real that the action of the play can be followed without the least difficulty.

Armand and Marguerite meet first in her home, where she is giving a party for the easy-living Paris ladies and gentlemen. Armand at once falls in love with her, and as Marguerite is taken ill during the dancing, he is the only one who is taking care of her.

In the second act the two have grown more familiar, although Marguerite has not quite given up her old acquaintances. One day, for instance, Armand has to leave her for the sake of a count, who has invited her for a drive. From the street Armand has watched the count's visit, and in a fit of passionate jealousy, he writes a letter to Marguerite, saying: "I have seen the count enter your place. You must choose between him and me." Marguerite's friend gives her the letter. One minute later the agreement is made, and the count drives off alone.

The lovers now go into the country to live in an unpretending villa, where they are enjoying their happiness as a young married couple.

Amand's money does not suffice, and quite secretly Marguerite sells her horses, carriage and jewelry. One day Prudence comes out to Marguerite to help her to dispose of some of the jewelry, and now Armand learns how matters stand. At once he starts off for Paris in order to procure money. During his absence his father arrives and tries to induce Marguerite to give up Armand. He succeeds, and for the sake of Armand's future she promises to go away, and only to leave a letter, in which she says: "All must be over, but whatever happens do not condemn me too hard."

One year later the two meet again in a gambling house. Very much excited, Armand starts gambling with Marguerite's new lover and wins from him again and again. When all the gamblers have left the hall, Marguerite remains, calls Armand and tries to explain the matter to him, but he gets into a perfect rage, throws her down on the floor and in front of all the people he flings her a heap of money in the face.

Only once more the lovers meet again—at Marguerite's deathbed. Her only comfort is that Armand's father regrets his hard-heartedness and gives Armand permission to go back to her. He arrives just in time to see her die happy. Length, 886 feet.

Pathe Freres Issue:

PARIS FIRE BRIGADE AT DRILL.—Fire fighting, like a great many more things, is liable to strike us as a mere everyday event, and that there is no science connected with the wonderful task of saving human life and property. In this interesting picture we are brought to the understanding that the Paris fire department is made up of wonderful athletes and the discipline is as strict and the training as rigorous as in the army. Everything seems to work like machinery in the drilling of the men to make them equal to all occasions where heroic deeds must count.

The first picture shows the men in a wonderful feat of climbing hand over hand up ropes to the top of a high tower, and descending in various ways. We next see them at practice on the [illegible] bar leaping, jumping over a rope placed at different heights. Their horizontal bar work is [illegible] clever, also their many difficult feats performed on the parallels. Then we see them doing the extremely difficult act of climbing up the side of a high wall, using only their hands in ascending and descending by getting a grip in the crevices. Then climbing up ropes to a high platform and sliding down ladders.

Finally we see the men at mass drill, and it is a wonderful thing to see several hundred men going through the gymnastics with the precision and rhythm as the movement of one man. Their work is artistic in the extreme and shows the men to be all wonderful examples of human strength and endurance as all fire departments should be. Length, 688 feet.

BEGINNING OF THE GAME OF DIABOLO.—This game seems to have taken the country by storm, and every child is more or less of a diabolo expert, and for that reason this film should prove very popular with the rising generation.

In the first picture we see the devils originating the game and forging and making the spool in the infernal regions. There is a transformation scene, and we see a number of skeletons dancing around and all playing the game skillfully. They disappear and we behold numerous beautiful girls appearing and disappearing and all are dancing and spinning the spool in clever fashion.

Next we are introduced to the royal family of Hades and the King and Queen seated on their throne are being amused by all their courtiers playing the game. Finally, the old King becomes so interested that he and the Queen join in the revelry, and soon the whole throng are whirling around in the flames and all busy playing.

The last scene shows the heavens and a figure representing the sun playing, and he passes it on to the moon, who in turn passes it to the earth who takes it up with a will and is busy tossing the spool while the rest of the planets look on amused. Lenth, 328 feet.

THE SHEPHERDESS.—In this pretty drama we see a beautiful country girl tending a large flock of sheep. A young man appears on the scene, and is soon making love to her, and she in her innocent manner accepts his attentions, and promises to see him the following day at the same place. That night when she drives her sheep home she confides her secret to her mother, who advises her to use discretion. The next morning she is seen at the appointed place tending her sheep, when the young man comes along, and, after some persuasion, induces her to elope with him. She bids her flock a tearful adieu, and we see the two lovers as they hastily depart in a handsome automobile. The young man, who is very rich, but in poor health, takes the girl to his home and presents her to his mother, who refuses to accept her as her daughter-in-law. Finally, after much persuasion, she gives her consent, and the couple are married.

That night the parents of the runaway shepherdess wait in vain for their daughter's return, and finally go to the pasture themselves and drive the sheep home. They suspect that the girl has gone off with her wealthy admirer, but decide to make the best of the situation.

The next picture shows the young couple some years later as they are taking a stroll together, and we are struck with the change in the girl, who has now the appearance of a richly gowned society woman. The young man's health, however, has grown steadily worse, and she is compelled to hasten him back to their home, where he is put to bed, and after a lingering illness we see the poor fellow pass away. Immediately his mother turns on the young widow, and orders her out of the house, and we see the girl in her rich attire making her way back to her flock.

She meets her parents on the road as they are driving the sheep home, and, after telling her story to the old folks, who are grieved at the turn of affairs, she takes charge of the herd, glad to be back to her simple country life after her terrible grief and disappointment. Length, 754 feet.

UNUSUAL COOKING.—This beautifully colored picture shows some remarkable ingenuity in the line of trick photography.

In the first picture we see a chef come into the kitchen and throw a lot of rags on the floor; he then casts a spell over them, and immediately they take the form of human beings, and dance a wild saraband around the place. After performing many unique tricks they disappear into space, and are replaced by a group of knives and forks, pans, kettles and spoons. These are all supplied with arms and legs, and dance around the chef as he lies on the floor. Soon one of the knives and forks, drawing near to his prostrate body, proceed to cut him into many small pieces, which are then placed in a pan to be made into a delicious stew.

Finally we see a lot of cooks come in, each bearing a different kitchen utensil. After executing some wonderful dances they pose in a pretty tableau. Length, 196 feet.

POLICEMAN'S VISION.—Two policemen fall asleep in the station house and [illegible] has a wonderful dream of how [illegible] with all sorts of adventures while trying to run down a clever burglar. In the first picture we see a woman enter a jewelry store [illegible] some valuable jewelry. [illegible] the clerk puts the money in a [illegible] for a moment. Just then a fellow [illegible] himself to the diamonds [illegible] the money out of the till without opening it. When the clerk re-

(FIG. 4)

"Stories of the Films," *Moving Picture World* (19 September 1908); 222.

(Page 2 of 2)

30 THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD.

Song Slide Review.

The Best Thing In Life.

By Chas. K. Harris.

1. *Title.*
2. *In a well-known club.* Shows interior of club room, with a group of five gentlemen, in the attitude of listening, one of them recounting a story.
3. *One young fellow* of the same group asking a question with upraised arm, to emphasize its importance.
4. *Some passed through adventures.* A saloon interior, with its usual sordid surroundings; a drunken quarrel over a girl, resulting in the shooting of one. (A picture true to life.)
5. *There are many here have sweethearts.* Quite a contrast from the last picture. A woodland scene, peaceful and calm, with sluggish brook running through; two figures, a lad helping a lass over the stepping stones of the brook.
6. *Come now, won't you tell us, General?* This question is being asked of a Civil War veteran, who is persuaded to take the floor, and in the recounting of doughty deeds exclaims:
7. *The best thing in life is glory*, fighting for home and its flag; winding up with the admonition,
8. *So never let it drag*--a picture showing lady with flag trailing on the greensward, with background of trees.
9. *Now listen and hear crowds cheering.* Regiments of Uncle Sam's soldiers returning from the war, marching through the streets, with the crowd of onlookers cheering them on their way.
10. *'Tis then that your heart's blood's beating*, brings us back again to the club room, where the General's story has roused the enthusiasm of his fellows, and they stand, waving their handkerchiefs in their excitement.
11. *The dear General, he had spoken*, and they are shown applauding the sentiments he had expressed so well.
12. *They in fancy all could see him*, as he held the flag in his left hand, standing at guard, defending it even at the risk of his life, with a background of the setting sun in a blood-red glow.
13. *Then spoke a young financier*, brings us once more back to the club room, showing a millionaire extolling gold by saying.
14. *The best thing in life is gold, boys*, holding aloft before the eyes of his companions evidences of wealth, with the assertion that it aids those in poverty
15. *And gives you pleasures, too.* Showing a night scene at the great exhibition at St. Louis, with the buildings lit up with myriads of electric lights, boasting,
16. *You live like a king in his palace.* A fine interior view, with every luxury shown in its surroundings; beautiful lady seated in cosy chair, husband standing, both in earnest conversation, as though no troubles at all.
17. *The world's at your feet.* Same interior, with man looking out on the world [illegible]
18. *Then* [illegible]
19. *A crash upon the table* was caused by the eldest of the group, a gray-haired old gentleman, seemingly well-preserved in spite of his years, making assertion, most emphatic, that
20. *'Tis the love of wife or sweetheart.* Shows rustic garden seat, on which are a young couple; man has arm around neck of girl, who is smiling in response to his words, which sound pleasing to her ears; her left arm encircles a dog on her lap; the background of evergreens adds to the effect.
21. *The best thing in life is love, boys.* Brings a nursery interior to our view, wherein is depicted mother and child.
22. *A mother's love ne'er was equaled.* Gives a bedroom scene, with child saying prayers, kneeling in her cot, with mother listening.
23. *Your sweetheart, your home or your baby.* Takes us to a family at tea.
24. *So take all your gold and your glory.* Introduces us to a garden scene, where December and May are making love, with the god Cupid shooting arrow, showing that both old and young must succumb to his arts.
25. *Chorus.*

This set is well arranged and staged, the models are appropriate to the scenes, the photographing and coloring all that can be desired, and reflects highly upon the artist, A. L. Simpson.

When You Know You're Not Forgotten by the Girl You Can't Forget.

Words by Ed. Gardinier. Music by J. Fred. Helf.

1. Title slide. Fine moonlight effect, with a couple walking, strolling leisurely through the trees.
2. Same couple sitting on flower bank, sunlight and happiness abounding.
3. Same couple in boat on lake, in midst of overhanging trees and shrubbery.
4. Beautiful interior; gaslight effect on two figures.
5. Lady pensively watching, surrounded by circlet of flowers.
6. Effect scene. Lady on porch of house in her day dreams seeing her lover far away in India, riding on elephant.
7. Couple holding heart-shaped wreath of evergreens, in the center of which they are pictured in loving attitude.
8. In the foreground a rosebush in full bloom, backed by a fence, behind which are five maidens, rivaling the roses in front.
9. Lady seated in the open Gothic window of church, listening to her companion, who is outside.
10. Effect slide, showing couple holding hands over a heart, in which they are mirrored in each other's arms.
11. Snow scene, couple [illegible] in midst of trees.
12. [illegible]
13. Effect [illegible]

(FIG. 5)

"Song Slide Review," *Moving Picture World* (16 March 1907); 30.

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Editorial.

Boyertown, Pa.

Wherever we went Tuesday this week, we were met with the question that was on everybody's lips: "What do you think of Boyertown?" "Isn't it awful?" "How are you going to treat the subject?" "Our industry has got another black eye," and similar remarks.

Boyertown has certainly added another calamity to history, and thanks to the Associated Press every paper in the country had its headliners, and for a time a little panic may prevail. We are deeply grieved at the loss of life, and sympathize with those who are bereft, and also with the sufferers. Looking at the calamity with a judicial eye, and sifting out from the mass of printed details, in which we find so many conflicting statements, then getting down to bare facts, we find there was an amateur theatrical company staging a production called "The Scottish Reformation." Now, what does this play need a moving picture machine for? And if a machine was in use, where was it placed? It certainly could not be used on the stage, where the trouble commenced.

We learn that Boyertown is a country village, without electricity or gas, using kerosene as an illuminant. A St. John's Lutheran Church had engaged the Opera House for an entertainment. Sixty boys and girls were on the stage, capable of holding forty comfortably. Kerosene lamps were being used for footlights, and an acetylene generator was supplying a spot light. Another source says the generator was supplying a moving picture machine with an amateur operator in full charge of spot light and machine. The rubber tube became disconnected with the generator, putting out the lights and causing the children to stampede toward the front of the stage, treading on the board holding the kerosene lamps [illegible] ing the fearful holocaust. Another says an acetylene generator caused the whole trouble; it got out of order and the operator in adjusting things set fire to the moving picture machine. Two lessons may be learned from this: First, the absolute necessity of employing an expert operator, and secondly, the prohibition of acetylene gas in a moving picture machine. Acetylene is not and never will be suitable for this purpose, because it is not portable, needs constant attention, thus distracting the operator, is an element of uncertainty in its present method of use, and cannot be made portable by compression owing to its great explosive qualities when compressed in cylinders. Experiments along this line were made at the Birmingham Oxygen Company's works, England, in 1901, which we watched with great interest. In the final results it proved to be unusable as a compressed article, being almost as explosive as if oxygen and hydrogen were mixed and a light applied.

Later reports may give an entirely different version of the accident. We strongly object to every little accident at an entertainment being headlined with the moving picture machine, on the basis of "Give a dog a bad name and hang him." All such scares can be eliminated when the trade employs only first-class men, and local authorities refuse permission for anyone to operate a moving picture machine except he be an expert.

Since the above was penned we received the following information:

"The origin of this holocaust was a mere trifle. The stereopticon used in the entertainment got out of order and several little girls on the stage rushed to the curtain to peep out to see what was the matter. One of them kicked over a lighted kerosene lamp, which exploded. Then there was a general stampede. The one narrow exit was choked. Men, women and children trampled one another in their mad confusion. Many persons tumbled over seats, to perish where they lay.

So that, after all, the poor moving picture machine had nothing to do with the affair, and we consider great censure is due the Associated Press for spreading such a canard and to the whole press of the country for publishing it so prominently. We trust that in the future there will never occur a fire in connection with a nickelodeon or moving picture exhibition, and that all operators will redouble their exertions to restore the confidence of the public in their safety.

Our Visits.

We saw advertised outside a nickelodeon, "Fire at the Parker Building," and went inside to see—one of the biggest frauds ever put on canvas by a projecting machine. The fire (that is, the original one) occurred at night. We saw a bright sunshine, a holiday crowd at windows and on the sidewalk, watching the gala run of the fire brigade, waving papers and shielding their eyes from the sun, the dense masses of smoke stained red to represent the fire. The audience expressed disapproval at being taken in, and so do we.

Another film, beautifully photographed, "The Mountaineer," but—it is a travesty on the marksmanship of Uncle Sam's regimental scouts. A sentry looks at a girl and lets her steal his rifle; then, without a murmur, at the command of the girl, throws up his hands and releases her sweetheart, who binds and gags him, makes him take his place and locks him in. Then with the girl he flees. By-and-by the relief discovers the sentry locked in the jail and the prisoner flown. Releasing the sentry, who tells of the escape, they call for axe and some [illegible]

(FIG. 6)

First signs of film criticism

"Our Visits," *Moving Picture World* (18 January 1908); 35.

(Page 1 of 2)

seven or eight crack shots (?) follow the fleeing lovers, and after sending some thirty or forty volleys, fail to hit either the man or girl, who at last are captured in a shed. Alas!

The last film this visit was "Afraid of Microbes." A half-witted, imbecile-looking old man is seen reading a newspaper article, which is thrown on the screen. Then the reverse is shown—an ad. for a microbe specific—which he immediately goes and purchases. It proves to be an atomizer, and the old imbecile proceeds on his way, squirting the dirty stuff into the faces of those he meets, gradually drawing a crowd after him, who, following him an awful long way, at last capture and kick and beat out of him what little sense and life the poor beggar had. Deary, deary, me!

Come, Mr. Manufacturer, you must do better than this. The public won't stand for it. And we don't blame them.

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casing on the side, bend it over and lay it down flat with the end touching the center of the plug, and there's your bridge. Screw the plug back into place, and if the plugs were of too low amperage, fix the other the same way so you won't be bothered again. Of course, the inspector would not approve of this method of procedure any more than he would approve of bridging with a piece of copper wire, but there are times when we can't stop to ask his permission. Besides, your carbons act as a safety valve as well as a fuse will, and give you the danger signal by their sputtering, flaming and traveling around the arc when you are getting too much juice, and warning you to cut in more resistance on your rheostat.

The Popular Nickelodeon.

Despite Efforts of Business Men to End Existence of the Five Cent Theater, It Still Lives and Prospers Because of Popularity.

By Frederick J. Haskin

(FIG. 7)

"Our Visits," *Moving Picture World* (18 January 1908); 36.

(Page 2 of 2)

Comments on Film Subjects.

Yielding to the requests of many of our readers to take up the criticism of some of the film subjects, we invited two capable newspaper men to make the rounds of the theaters with us last week. They were asked to be guided in their expression of opinion by the remarks overheard among the audience and to particularly note how the film was received or applauded. While we have modified the remarks of our critics in some instances, some statements may not agree with the opinions of the manufacturers. In defence of the critiques we say that they must be taken as an expression of public opinion, and as it is or should be the aim of the film manufacturer to please the public, we will try to hold up the mirror of public opinion as the surest and safest guide to the success and future stability of this business.

In this connection we might add that the exhibitor is largely responsible for the increase or decrease of the public demand for picture shows. If they want to kill the business they could not do better than follow the example of a theater on Third avenue, not 100 yards from Fourteenth street, which showed to a packed house last week a copy of Pathe's "A Hold-up in Calabria." This magnificent film, one of Pathe's best, was highly popular some six months ago. As we saw it last week it was hardly recognizable; a dazzling rainstorm of scratches, flashes of light where the emulsion had peeled off, jumps where the film had been mended and patched, aggravated by the unsteady throw of an obsolete machine, made a sorry spectacle, well calculated to drive away patronage.

Richard III.—About September 28, the Vitagraph Company released one thousand feet of filmed Shakespeare, which I saw at Keith's on Tuesday night. It is high praise when I say that this film is equal to the other three Shakespeare films which have been put out by this company. The acting of the principal characters in Richard III. is all that can be desired, the only blemish in this respect being in the battle scene, where the smiles on the faces of the actors are ill-timed. The staging and scenery is well handled and the film took well with the audience.

Samson and Delilah.—A reel film released by Pathe about September 1. Is a fine production, following in a general way the Bible story. The film is rich in dramatic effects, handsomely colored and, on the whole, well acted. I think that it would not lose by cutting out the last scene, which is biblically incorrect, offensive to good taste, and spoils the climax.

As You Like It.—Kalem Company's rendering of this charming comedy is not what I had hoped to see. It comes so near to being a success that it is a pity it had not received the finishing touches. In filming this story the minor characters should have been eliminated and the unity of design better adhered to. The story of Rosalind and Orlando should have been brought out more strongly. Shakespeare himself here departed somewhat from the unity of design and crowded the play with characters not needed in the working out of the plot, but this should have been avoided in filming the play, as Shakespeare intended "As You Like It" more as a "Masque," so popular in his day and long after. Of all things the "Masque" is least adaptable for moving pictures. The love scene in the forest between Rosalind and Orlando is acted in a lame manner. I have seen people hold hands in that fashion on the last Coney Island boat of a Saturday night, but in a Shakespeare play—never.

Ingomar.—This drama, so popular with Americans, has been done into moving pictures in an able manner. The adapter has realized the importance of the two supreme moments in the drama, the conquest of Ingomar by Parthenia, and later the conquest of Parthenia by Ingomar, and the [illegible] have succeeded in weaving all into [illegible]

[illegible]

absurd in some instances and the whole film has evidence of having been made in too much of a hurry. Why the Vitagraph Company, with their fine staff of artists, fine equipment and reputation for excellent productions, should dig up this mouldy story from the past ages and present it in such second-rate fashion, is more than I can understand.

The Wayward Daughter.—An interesting story, well told and well acted by the Esanay Company. The authors have avoided the beaten tracks of melodrama and have produced some new, wholesome effects. The pictures are natural and in no way overacted. On the same reel with this was **The Bully**, an amusing and clean story for the children. If the average struck in this reel could be maintained it would be a welcome improvement.

Old Sleuth.—A whool reel story by the Kalem Company, is a very good rendering of a time-worn tale. The action in the so-called climaxes is rather too long sustained, but on the whole it is a film that will prove very useful to exhibitors.

Her Newsboy Friend.—A warmed-up "mellerdrammer" of the most ancient and venerable type, with the usual "Take back your gold" appeal to the gallery. There must be some films of this type, no doubt, but, let us hope, not too many.

The Custom Officer's Revenge.—This was a full reel film released by Pathe about September 20, and well up to the Pathe standard, being cleverly acted and staged. The titles of some of the Pathe films seem to be translated with the aid of a crowbar and a pocket dictionary. In this film one of the sub-headings is "A Night Watch's Sad Ending," giving an entirely wrong translation and being confusing to the audience.

A Great Wrong Righted.—The idea in this film is not new; in fact, it was old when Shakespeare worked it out in "All's Well that Ends Well." Nevertheless, it is a subject that will have a good run at the electric theaters. It appeals especially to the fair sex, who are regular patrons of the moving picture shows. All the ancient dramatic traditions are lived up to. The villain wears a high hat and smokes a cigarette; the heroine wears the usual impossible society gown; but with a large class of theatergoers these blemishes are rather virtues. Lack of attention to details and some bad acting is against the success of this film. The garden party, with the engagement of Laura to Arthur, is lacking in action and expression. The meeting of Mary with her father is unintelligible. The spectators know of Mary, but so far her father has not been presented, and consequently they have not the least idea of his identity. The drowning scene is dramatic, but too slow and lacking in realism. Mary should not so evidently have landed in shallow water, and when the man jumps to save her he should not have jumped so far away. The finale is not natural. In a regular marriage ceremony a man cannot be deceived, as the bride has to answer to her full name, and a veil is never so thick that the features of the bride cannot be recognized. As the audience in this case can see the features of Mary through the veil, I cannot understand how it could be expected that Arthur could be deceived. It is disappointing to see a film that is so expensively staged as this one is, marred by inattention to details.

DESTROYING THE LANTERN SLIDE BUSINESS.

Some music publishers have strucck a mortal blow to the lantern slide business by circulating an advertisement offering a lot of old slides for sale at prices below the cost of production. They do not explain that the slides are old, and for songs that failed to go and that they are second-hand, with slides from other sets faked in to take the place of slides that are broken and that there is hardly a set that does not contain cracked slides. Their advertisement makes it appear that the slides are new, and for songs that are present day hits. The effect of this kind of advertising makes slide purchasers believe that when they buy slides from regular dealers they are being overcharged and that slides can be sold brand new from the studio at a big profit for about half what they now pay for them. The result is [illegible]

(FIG. 8)

First film criticism department in *Moving Picture World*

(3 October 1908); 253.

Comments on the Week's Films.

A WESTERN HERO (Pathe).

If our conjecture is correct, this is the first, or one of the first, Wild West moving picture photographs made by Messrs. Pathe. They have gone right into the current game as it is being played by so many moving picture makers: that is they have chosen a Western subject for camera treatment. To begin with, the picture is beautifully colored, indeed, so far as we may judge, the different colors are so natural and lifelike that even the long threatened photography in natural colors could hardly displace the Pathe method, as it is at present practiced by this eminent firm. The full story of the film, which was given in last week's issue, shows some extremely good acting cast around a series of adventures in which the duplicity and cunning of American aboriginals forms the main theme. Of course, the Indians are defeated in their duplicity and everybody is made happy at the end of the picture. There appears, from inquiries that we have made, to be a very great demand amongst American audiences for Indian subjects, probably, therefore, on that account, this Pathe subject will be popular. It is a radical departure from the usual Pathe picture, and will, no doubt, be well appreciated out West, where fine comedy and tense drama of the European kind is hardly understood or appreciated yet awhile.

THE OYSTERMAN'S GOLD (Lubin).

Mr. Lubin has produced a film which ends in a way totally unanticipated, we venture to think, by 99 per cent. of the audience who witness it. It starts off in a manner somewhat prosaic, although decidedly interesting. It shows in a series of scenes the process of oyster catching. We see the men at work on the boat, and the landing of the molluscs. Incidentally there is a view of an oyster dredging fleet, and finally we reach that point where the catch of oysters is sold to an oyster merchant on the shore. We had just persuaded ourselves that Mr. Lubin had contented himself with the making of an industrial picture of an informative character when the drama started. And a very fine drama it is. The oysterman having disposed of his catch, pockets his gold, but wharf rats are on the watch and they track him home with the view of robbing him. So home he goes, along a very beautiful rocky shore, lashed by the ocean which has given the Lubin operators the opportunity of making some extremely good photographs of seashore scenery. Indeed, in this respect alone, the picture is well worth looking at. Well, the two wharf rats kill their man and one of them is also killed, leaving the sole survivor in possession of his ill-gotten gold. Now comes the tragic part of this very interesting story. The culprit seeks to hide his gold, when the apparition of the murdered oysterman appears to him. So he goes from scene to scene. So long as the cursed gold is on him, so long as he endeavors to hide it, so often does the vision of the murdered oysterman haunt him. This part of the picture is very effectively managed—the printing in of the supplementary image being neatly done. Finally, of course, the owner of the stolen gold commits suicide. The acting in the piece is fairly good, and, as we have said at the outset, it is a curious contrast in utilitarianism and weird tragedy. The audience appeared to receive it with great favor. There is a bad technical defect running throughout the film that should have been remedied by physical treatment, or else that portion of the negative made over again.

THE WAY OF MAN (Biograph).

This is the nearest approach to a problem play which the Biograph dramatic staff have yet taken up. Here is the problem: Given a man in love with a beautiful girl, and the girl loses her beauty through an accident, is that man bound in honor to marry her and remain true to her through life. The Biograph people don't put the problem so tersely as we do, but that is what it means all the same. Life itself is nothing but a series of problems from day to day which we have to solve for ourselves. Well, let us see how the Biograph people work out this very interesting problem. A young fellow in love with a pretty girl goes away to make his fortune. [illegible]

things are not as he left them. The girl has a pretty cousin staying with her, while she herself has been the victim of a lamp accident, which has marred her beauty. For a time she conceals the scar from her lover, and he, poor fellow, wants to be loyal to her, but it is obvious that the unscarred beauty of the cousin is influencing his heart. The man in him asserts itself to the detriment of the lover. Few of us, we imagine, could be loyal to a disfigured idol. In a very tender scene, the disfigured girl, realizing the state of affairs, places the hand of her cousin in that of the man's and goes away presumably to commit suicide. She is followed by the household, who discover her clothes at the top of a steep river bank. But she does not commit suicide, and the lover marries the cousin, and the disfigured girl becomes happy amidst different surroundings. So the pretty little piece ends in a common sense if unromantic way. Of course, there are other ways of treating this problem. One is obvious. The pretty cousin could have been made disloyal and the disfigured girl loyal, and the man's heart given to loyalty rather than to mere superficial beauty. But we were not the authors of this book, the story of which seemed to please the audience. As usual the photography of the subject was excellent, although the lighting was somewhat harsher than is usual with Biograph subjects—too much illumination seeming to come from the roof, and then the particular positive we saw was not so free of light splashes as we are accustomed to see in Biograph films. The famous Biograph heroine suffered patiently under her temporary disfigurement, and the leading man gave us a nice piece of acting as the puzzled lover. Altogether a very excellent Biograph comedy subject which fortunately did not end in tragedy.

NO APPETITE FOR DINNER (Gaumont).

Mr. Kleine is passing from success to success in his Gaumont releases. The theme of this typical bit of French comedy is a very slender one, nevertheless an attractive one. It is characteristic of French comedy on the talking stage that it is slender and graceful in outline rather than cumbrous and massive. The themes as a rule require delicate treatment. They are worked out in a thoroughly French manner; that is, by the pure gesture of acting. For French people act intuitively; that is, without an effort. In this picture a young couple inadvertently invite a soldier to dinner. They ask him to come, out of politeness, because they do not mean him to come, nor does he mean to go, but remembering the appointment he goes, after the couple have dined. So they prepare a second meal. He is hungry and they are not. Thus the picture offers an opportunity for the display of some delightful by-play. Frankly, we fear the story is rather beyond the comprehension of an average American moving picture audience, but it is a very excellent one all the same. All ends happily by mutual confession. In parts of the picture we were immensely pleased with some beautiful photographic effects obtained by using the camera in an ordinary room, taking the view through an open doorway of an adjoining apartment. This gives an opportunity for the production of very fine effects of light and shade; in fact, imparts depth and distance to the picture. Admirers of fine French comedy will find this film very much to their taste. Gaumont subjects, we are pleased to notice in recent months, have departed from the tragic and the morbid. They all end happily. We think Mr. Kleine is to be congratulated upon having command of a line of subjects which, as we have before remarked, keeps him abreast of his competitors in the American moving picture market.

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNDER THE BRITISH FLAG (Vitagraph).

The career of "The Father of His Country" will always be popular reading with patriotic Americans [illegible]

(FIG. 9)

Comments renamed.

Moving Picture World (3 July 1909); 12.

COMMENTS ON THE FILMS

"The Dancing Girl of Butte" (Biograph).—A drama of considerable power which tells an interesting love story, though perhaps one may be permitted to say that it is not so strong as most of the Biograph productions. It tells of the love of a newspaper artist for a dancing girl, and exhibits a strongly dramatic picture when he discovers the truth regarding her occupation; but she convinces him of her purity and sincerity and they are married. Visible evidence is afforded afterward that in this instance, at least, the marriage was happy. While it is not a great film, it is well acted and the photography is clear and the situations are satisfactorily worked out. The film ends happily, which is an important point in pleasing the public.

"The Tattooed Arm" (Lubin).—A story of how the tattooing of the initials of a boy and girl on the arm of each resulted in recognition after years of separation, renewing the childish pledges of love and a happy wedding to close the picture. Some thrills are included, too. An abduction, a shipwreck, life among savages and similar occurrences serve to hold the interest unbroken from beginning to end. The interpretation in the hands of Lubin's capable company is sufficiently graphic to be thoroughly satisfactory. The picture, as a whole, is one of the most interesting Lubin has offered recently and should please wherever it is shown. Plenty of action of this character is what the public likes, and in this instance the players perform their parts with an energy which adds materially to the attractions of he picture.

"The Highlanders' Defiance" (Selig).—While it is difficult to repress a feeling of pride that men should be as brave as those who play the principal parts in this drama, one cannot restrain the further feeling of sorrow for those at home, waiting silently and hopefully for the loved ones who gave up their lives to defend a position from an attack by the Boers. War is glorious, when one reads about the dashing bravery and the wondrous gallantry of the soldiers who do the fighting, but it takes on quite a different appearance when one sees the men fall in battle. Perhaps along with its other beneficent offices the motion picture will help the peace society advocates in their crusade against war. The graphic representation of deaths in battle, followed almost instantly by the equally graphic reproduction of the broken-hearted mourners at home will emphasize, more than mere words can do, the horrors of war, with its waste of life and money. War pictures may be thrilling, but they may convey a deeper meaning, and exert a more powerful and beneficial influence than their makers suspected.

"Alderman Krautz's Picnic" (Selig).—If you want clean, pure fun, with the boy's love for getting some unfortunate into scrapes made prominent, here it is. The philanthropic alderman has his picnic. The boys enjoy it, and who shall say the alderman did not, even though he took a bath, got tangled in the wreckage of "London Bridge" and was finally set upon and despitefully used by a colony of lively hornets? But the genial alderman was game, and the spirit of the Selig players accurately portrays his experiences with the bunch of kids at his enjoyable picnic.

"The Winning Punch" (Imp).—Here is a picture that will set the blood coursing through one's veins these cold days and cause one to feel like giving vent to a genuine "rah, rah, rah" when the young collegian finally sends his opponent to earth with a well directed upper cut, after a slashing ring contest that appeals with irresistible force to the man, or woman, who has just a touch of sporting blood. Anyhow the young fellow gets the girl he wanted, and she is proud to think that he was able to beat out his opponent in such a vigorous fight. There is plenty of action in this picture, action which speaks for itself, requiring no explanation of its purpose or its direction. Consequently the film is attractive and is generally vigorously applauded. It is an improvement over some of the earlier films sent out by this house. Not that the highest possible standard has yet been achieved, or even approached, but the improvement is none the less welcome and proves that the company has profited by its previous mistakes and augurs well for its future.

"The Engineer's Romance" (Edison).—A thrilling railroad melodrama, illustrated with all the vim and finished dramatic work which characterizes the work of the Edison players. A girl station agent in a lonely station is beset by theives. She wires to a distance for help. Her sweetheart jumps on his locomotive and goes to her assistance. The last part of the film, showing alternately the progress of the locomotive and the steady retreat of the girl as the robbers force door after door is thrilling, and causes one to become almost breathless as the swift-flying locomotive with its assistance seems to crawl. The story is strong and the pictorial work is clear and quite up to the requirements of the subject and the story. No question need trouble the manager of a motion picture theater if he will watch the crowd when a story of this sort is on the screen. Action is what they like, and a thrilling rescue of this character causes a wonderfully impressive exhibition of interest. Such a film will never fail of pleasing the average audience.

"Ashes" (Edison).—Probably every man who reaches middle age sometimes looks into the dying embers of a fire and reads what may seem to him the story of his life. The bachelor who sees in the smoke of his cigar the face of his first and only sweetheart, and then sees the scenes of his love story pass before him, wreathed in this smoke is probably typical of very many who have had a romance, but have lived long enough to see it vanish down the vista of the years. The story passes. The scenes resolve once more into the bachelor's den and he gazes regretfully into the ashes, apparently mourning because this romance passed. The memories of middle life will make this picture impressive, and all men will see in it some allusion, perhaps, to their own experience and that will make the picture all the stronger. It is recommended as a desirable addition to any program.

"The Minister's Daughter" (Kalem).—An interesting melodrama dealing with the love affairs of the daughter of a minister who is lured to the city by a villain and begins a course of dissipation which makes her an invalid. Then she is deserted and finds her way back to the parsonage, where she is welcomed home. The story hasn't much in it that is new, but the way it is told makes it attractive and the excellent work of the actors in interpreting it keeps the audience interested from the opening scene to the last. Dramatically it is one of the best that has recently come from the Kalem people. Photographically it is an advance upon other similar films, and the finished acting is an important feature in the film's many excellencies. The steady improvement in the Kalem films is an important factor in the increasing popularity of the firm's pictures, and the company deserves credit for its work.

"An English Boxing Bout" (Pathe).—A sporting picture which will appeal to those who are interested in vigorous athletics. The photography is remarkably clear for this character of picture and the audience is sure to be interested in watching it as it runs.

"Her Terrible Ordeal" (Biograph).—A love story; the interest in which is heightened by the fact that the girl is locked in a safe; an absent-minded business man who leaves important papers behind and must, perforce, return to his office to get them, and a general mixup which keeps up the interest throughout the film. The girl is finally rescued and the picture ends happily, with the young people united and probably all pleased, rather than otherwise, that the aforesaid business man was absent-minded. Maybe the central thought of this picture may be taken to be the inference that sometimes those things which seem all wrong in reality are blessings in disguise. Or, to make the application of this idea specific, if the business man in the picture had not been absent-minded the girl would have died in the safe. Not all in an audience will reason out or appreciate these subtleties, but when they do interest in the picture is increased proportionately.

"A Tale of the Backwoods" (Selig).—A melodrama which combines the Selig qualities in a marked degree and affords opportunity for some interesting character delineation. Two distinct types are shown, and the conception of the parts is accurate. The actors interpret the peculiarities of these two types so closely that one becomes involved in a mental consideration of their relative values as personalities in a community. There are a number of dramatic incidents which rouse one to a more than ordinary pitch of excitement. A delicate girl, for example, is carried away by a deformed and insane man, thrown into an old building and the place set on fire. Then suddenly he changes and the endangered girl is rescued, while the one who induced him to commit the deed is thrown in instead. But everybody is rescued, the lovers marry and the erring ones are properly forgiven. But the thrills in the film are numerous and keep one constantly on the alert. The technical quality of the film is quite as good as its pictorial features, and one feels constrained to say that it promises to be popular.

(FIG. 10)

Comments renamed again; signs of interpretation.

Moving Picture World (January 6 1910); 91.

(Page 1 of 3)

"Over the Wire" (Lubin).—A comedy which is based upon a marriage direction left in a will, which was carried out over the wire after numerous amusing complications. Like all the Lubin films it is funny and after seeing it once one wants to see it again.

"Miss Moneybags Wishes to Wed" (Pathe).—A comedy representing the desire of a wealthy girl, who had nothing else to make her attractive, to secure a husband. The numerous complications afford opportunity for a good deal of fun before the story is told.

"Women in India" (Pathe).—An educational subject, produced with all the beauty and high technical quality which accompany the Pathe productions. The picture depicts with care and detail the life of women in India, producing it so graphically that everyone who sees it will obtain a clearer understanding of the conditions existing there. Such films are not alone interesting. They are highly instructive and in them the motion picture performs its most important function, the graphic and easily comprehended dissemination of accurate information.

"Shooting in the Haunted Woods" (Gaumont).—A magic film introducing some novel features. Two hunters stray into some woods seeking rabbits, and are confronted with ghosts and all sorts of strange things happen to them. Even the chicken they were to carve for dinner flies away, a most unkind thing for an eatable fowl to do. The surprising adventures of these hunters afford much amusement for the audience, who are kept constantly wondering what will occur next. The evidence of preparation and care in making up this film adds to its interest.

"Towser's New Job" (Gaumont).—A trained dog performs most of the manual labor at a hotel, moving baggage, waiting upon the table and collecting tips from the departing guests, an important portion of the business of such a hostelry. The evidence of training given by the dog adds charm to the picture, particularly for those who are interested in dogs.

"Bear Hunt in the Rockies" (Edison).—Something new in film animal pictures. Heretofore hunt pictures have been made with animals either in captivity or trained so as not to be dangerous. But in this instance the operator joined an actual hunt, and the audience goes with the party from the time they start until the bear is killed and taken to camp. It is reproduced on the screen with amazing fidelity and offers numerous thrills before the rifle shot brings the huge beast to the ground. The way the young woman, fishing, retreats to camp when the bear swims the stream is a touch of comedy that gives a touch of life that increases the interest. The scenery of the Colorado Rockies is faithfully reproduced. To those who have been fortunate enough to clamber over these magnificent mountains and thread their narrow defiles, this picture will appeal with irresistible power. And those who have not been there can rest assured that the reproduction is truthful and is almost as good as seeing the originals, without the attendant discomforts. Of course discomforts will not deter the enthusiast from climbing a mountain, but they do exert some influence on others; and this picture is a good substitute. The technical work is uncommonly good, considering the difficulties under which much of it was performed. It is a picture which should secure for the company the congratulations of all who appreciate the labor involved in obtaining it.

"The Call Boy's Vengeance" (Vitagraph).—A lively comedy representing the results of a theater call boy tampering with the instruments in the orchestra. The combinations and complications which follow are as funny as it is possible to make them.

"The Old Maid's Valentine" (Vitagraph).—A farce based upon an old maid's strange valentine. There is a good plot and the play is full of fun from beginning to end. Where the writer saw the picture the audience never ceased laughing until the picture ended.

"A Redman's Devotion" (Bison).—A Western story, told with dash and enthusiasm and affording opportunity for some good work representative of Western life. Some good riding is shown and there are a few thrills like capturing a girl and her rescue and an opportunity to show the better side of an Indian's character, a matter which is of considerable importance. The picture is full of action and depicts the life graphically.

"The Winning Punch" (Imp).—On the occasion when we saw this film at the old Fourteenth Street Theater the audience received it with an enthusiasm that would have gladdened the heart of the producer if he had been present. The story is cleverly handled and contains all the thrills that captivate a moving picture audience. There is a love story with a heroine and a hero, who is the champion boxer of his college. In a spirited bout this chap wins a prize-fight against a professional boxer and gets the prize money. Also incidentally winning the consent of the girl's father to their union.

"His Only Child" (Essanay).—A graphic illustration of what occurs when a man becomes so engrossed in business he forgets his family, or, perhaps it is better to say, overlooks the fact that they need affection or attention. Not all children are so well favored as the one here depicted in having a sympathetic nurse to look out for them. And even this picture, which seemed a bit forbidding at the beginning, ended happily with the father realizing that children need something more than stocks and bonds to make them grow up into well-balanced men and women. This picture possesses an unusual interest in its suggestion of what may occur, and what probably does occur, under certain conditions.

"On the Bank of the River" (Gaumont).—A story of an ill-matched pair of sisters, which represents the practical one driving the dreamer from home. Later the banished dreamer returns as a popular musician with money to pay off the mortgage and save the home of the more practical sister in quite the old-time success novel style. The photographic quality of the picture redeems it from the merely commonplace. The story itself presents nothing especially new or interesting.

"A Seat in the Balcony" (Gaumont).—Purports to depict the experiences of a man who sees a play for the first time. The picture presents considerable rough-house, and offers nothing especially new. Pelting with peanuts and bags may be tolerated in foreign theaters, and disturbances such as the one here presented may be of sufficiently frequent occurrence to warrant motion picture reproduction, but in general such scenes are false and therefore lack one of the principal elements of interest, truth to actual life. The photographic quality of this film is quite up to the Gaumont standard.

"Richelieu" (Vitagraph).—A sumptuous and strongly dramatic production of an episode in the life of the famous Cardinal, dealing with a conspiracy in which the lives of important French government officials were threatened. Much time and money were expended upon the staging of this picture, and the costumes and settings are as nearly historically correct as it is possible to make them. A love story runs through the picture, adding materially to its interest, since jealousy, however repulsive an exhibition of it may be, supplies a reasonable motive for the movements of different actors which might not otherwise seem plain. Dramatically this picture will rank with the best productions of the Vitagraph's capable players. And what is perhaps more pleasing to a critical audience, the acting is well balanced and evenly sustained through the different scenes. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the acting is convincing, each actor giving what seems to be a good reason for his movements. Such elaborate pictures, presented with the beautiful stage settings and sumptuous costumes, add materially to the educational value of the motion picture, and what is of even more importance, they furnish an opportunity whereby those who cannot afford expensive theater tickets are enabled to see and enjoy dramatic masterpieces. The influence of such pictures is beneficial. They stimulate interest in important historic events and they graphically present the beauties of literary masterpieces. Under their influence public taste will improve and the artistic and literary impulses will be cultivated and become stronger. It is one important feature of the diffusion of artistic and literary education through the medium of the motion picture.

"The Red Girl's Romance" (Bison).—A slashing Western story, possessing all the imagined elements which make the West a land of romance and poetic misconceptions. Here are presented a love story, considerable gun play, with huge clouds of smoke; the capture of one party, the escape and capture of another, with different individuals tied to different trees in different ways, and the whole ends with some demonstrative love making between an Indian girl and her white admirer. There is plenty of action, interesting scenery, and withal a series of scenes which are alike thrilling and interesting. It is a good addition to a program.

"Forgiven" (Centaur).—A threadbare story in which a young man marries below his social position and is disowned by his father but clings to the girl. In spite of this love test we are shown the couple in their own home having a quarrel, and the young wife starts to foot it back to her dad. It is a long walk from Alpena, N. J., to Avenue C, Bayonne, and on the way she gets knocked down by her father-in-law's automobile, in which she is taken to his home; hubby is telegraphed for and forgiven, and everybody is happy.

(FIG. 11)

"Comments on the Films," *Moving Picture World* (January 6 1910); 92.

Neither the acting nor the photography lend strength to the plot.

"Mishaps of Bonehead, in Search of an Heiress" (Centaur).—This was the most applauded and most thoroughly enjoyable number on the program at the old Fourteenth Street Theater on Thursday. We overheard the manager say to the representative of the United Film Exchange: "Give us more of this kind of stuff and give us the same photographic quality." As comedy it is the best ever turned out by the Centaur Company and we advise them to stick to that line. Every independent exhibitor who shows "The Mishaps of Bonehead" will find it a house-warmer.

"Camille" (Pathe).—A veritable film d'art. A thrilling and intensely dramatic representation of what has been termed by competent critics to be Alexander Dumas' son's masterpiece—Camille. The story of the unfortunate Marguerite Gautier and her unhappy lover, Armand Duval, graphically represented and dramatically acted, as the finished actors of the Pathes company always do act. It is unnecessary to repeat the story. It would seem that one so popular in novel, drama and opera would be sufficiently well understood to preclude the necessity for repetition. Criticism of such a popular and well-known drama seems scarcely necessary, and that is especially true in this instance, because it seems almost impossible to suggest any improvement. The setting and staging are alike sumptuous and the figures move across the screen like actual persons. After seeing the picture one seems to become acquainted with them and they are individual entities which will live with one as long as memory lasts. In many respects this seems to rank among the leading films the Pathes have produced. Perhaps the play is not up to the standard of some of those produced in the past, but even though this may be true, the picture has most of the attributes of greatness and deserves to be included in the comparatively small number that are reckoned among the leaders in the motion picture world.

"Home of the Gypsies" (Urban).—A wonderfully impressive film, its superb photographic quality contributing to its beauty. It is a picture of ancient Moorish architecture in Spain. First is shown a panorama of the ancient city of Granada and following that come details of that masterpiece of architectural art, the Alhambra, the palace of the Moorish kings, with the Lion's Courtyard, Myrtle Courtyard, and the famous Lookout Balcony. This is one of those pictures which cannot be described, nor is it possible to offer any criticism. It is a record film, but such a marvelously satisfactory record that one wants to see it again. The masterly reproduction of such examples of art must be helpful and in no sense is it possible to escape the conviction that far too few such pictures are presented. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that unless the reproduction is perfect the picture is worse than useless. It must be a faithful record, else it conveys a false impression and does more harm than good. A picture that gives accurate representations of this character has an educational value not easily estimated, but the reproduction must equal the original, else it better not be attempted. The romance of Old Spain is closely connected with the Alhambra and any reproduction of this building necessarily brings to mind the romance and chivalry of its period. Naturally this serves, in some degree, to throw a sort of halo over the whole scene which adds much to its beauty and emphasizes its influence. A touch of picturesque life is given when the picture closes with a Gypsy wedding, followed by the rejoicings and the merry dances.

"True to His Oath" (Urban).—A touching story, illustrating the lasting strength of a father's influence. The young man would have been led astray but for the Bible and the appearance of the father's spirit. Influences of this sort do not always have the actual appearance of a ghost to increase their emphasis, but the spirit is present, and probably exerts quite as strong an influence as it would if it were visible. The lesson here is obvious.

"Electric Insoles" (Essanay).—A modification of the liquid electricity pictures which were numerous last year, combining with it a long chase after a human whirlwind whose electric insoles bear him into all sorts of difficulties and bring about many and disastrous collisions with people and objects. The picture is lively and develops a good many convulsing situations.

"The Old Maid and the Burglar" (Esanay).—Based upon the oft-repeated proposition that old maids are always looking for a man. In this instance she finds him, knocks him down and locks him in a room, but he jumps to the ground rather than run the risk of marriage. Of course the picture is funny. One cannot question that; but it is a species of coarse fun which cannot be commended as highly as it might otherwise. However, it excites the risibles of the average audience, and therefore performs its mission.

"An Episode of Napoleon's War with Spain" (Itala).—A bit which purports to represent a touch in the life of the great commander. Fortunately it does not depict him as an inhuman monster. On the contrary, he is shown pardoning a peasant and his wife sentenced to death for fighting for their home. The plea of a child saved them. Aside from the glitter of uniforms and the clash of contending armies, the picture possesses little interest.

THE TIDE OF FORTUNE

will swiftly and surely roll into 111 East Fourteenth street if the Independent Motion Pictures Company continue to publish films as good as the one which bears the above title. The story is clean and ennobling—the acting is good, and then some—the photography is equal in quality to the best work of much older firms. All this should be encouraging to the "Imp." With several other callous men of the world we were invited to see an advance copy of "The Tide of Fortune." Before the last scene ended our eyes were so dim that we could scarcely discern the figures on the screen, and when the lights went up we caught some of the party using handkerchiefs. Yes, indeed, "The Tide of Fortune" shows that the "Imp" is progressing in the right direction.

A year ago the stronghold of the independent was the European films. Now the demand is for American and the outlook for the importer is not so rosy. This is hardly to be wondered at, as some foreign stuff we have lately seen was positively nauseating, while even the independent American manufacturers are vieing with each other on quality—and some of them are really making good.

PANTOGRAPH CORPORATION.

The Pantograph Corporation, as stated in our last issue, would release on January 22, request us to state their release will not be until January 29. The picture to be released on that date will be one of interest and educational value, entitled, "A Tale of Colonial Days." This picture is an episode in the life of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, and has been carefully prepared, treated and tinted by a special process of their own, which gives exceptionally fine detail and makes the outlines exceedingly sharp. The personages are reproduced with scrupulous accuracy and the scenes have all been made on the actual grounds where the episode occurred. A full synopsis will be given in our issue of next week.

TEXAS NOW THE STAMPING GROUND FOR MOVING PICTURE ARTISTS.

San Antonio and its climate have attracted the manufacturers of moving picture films, and for the next three or four months a company of real actors will work eight hours each day in enacting those roles now displayed in every city where the picture now flourishes.

Wallace McCutcheon, a pioneer in this business and now manager of the producing department of the firm of Geo. Melies, of Paris, France, and Paul G. Melies, son of the head of the New York branch, reached the city recently. Within a week it is planned to have the studio ready and the making of silent dramas and comedies will be under way. The actors will reach here Wednesday from New York City.

"We are not," said Mr. McCutcheon at the St. Anthony Hotel, "asking any financial aid of San Antonians. San Antonio was selected by our firm because we learned it was the land of sunshine and would afford us a great deal of scope for our operations. We were informed of Fort Sam Houston, and one of our aims is to secure here a number of pictures of the soldiers. There is at Fort Sam Houston a splendid opportunity for a series of brilliant pictures that must necessarily appeal to the American who has a martial spirit and is interested in his country's arms. We are now having written the story of San Antonio by an author with whom Americans are familiar and who is familiar with the history of this city and its achievements. The staging of this picture must necessarily take in many of the points of interest and will, of course, include the Alamo. We appreciate that a great amount of work and many rehearsals will be required to fulfill our aim in this respect. Before we attempt to put this picture on a film, we shall wish to have it witnessed in San Antonio first by those who are interested in San Antonio and are familiar with the city. We want something historically correct and there will be ample ro-

(FIG. 12)

"A veritable film d'art"

"Comments on the Films," *Moving Picture World* (January 6 1910); 93.

(Page 3 of 3)

tified with the public mind with the blare and extravagance of circus and vaudeville exploitation. Advertising in the periodical press, and especially in the trade journal, has a great advantage over any other form of advertising. In the first place the trade journal or the periodical press affords a wider and prompter publicity and a more effective distribution of the advertising information than any other means that can possibly be employed. In these mediums the advertiser can bring his name and his wants to the attention of thousands of readers when they have the time and the disposition to give deliberate and undisturbed attention and consideration to what is presented to them in the columns of the journal.

Persistent advertising and in the right place is, let me say again, the most satisfactory method. "No advertiser has ever achieved fortune through a single announcement," says a writer who knows, in "Publicity," but thousands have through continuous announcements. Nature points an unheeded moral to the transient advertiser. The seas thunder against the white cliffs of Dover and "gradually" alter their conformation. The coral insect "gradually" rears a structure that defies wind and sea. The teachings of Nature are the teachings of "persistency." The transient advertiser is working "against" great natural laws as unerring in the field of human endeavor as in the operations of nature. The persistent advertiser is working with every advantage in his favor. It was Shakespeare who wrote, "Many strokes, though with a little axe, hew down and fell the hardest-timber'd oak," but long before, Lyly had written, "The soft droppes of rain pierce the hard marble and many strokes overthrow the tallest oaks." Mr. William Gamble, in his new book, "The Business Life," puts the matter concisely, too:—"Above all things, it is necessary to be persistent in advertising. A man who hears about you fifty-two times a year, will know you fifty-two times better than if he had heard of you but once and the more he knows of your goods, the more likely he is to trade with you."—*The Photographic Dealer.*

What Others Think of Us.

Mr. Saunders' experience in this business extends over a period of twenty-two years, during which time he has been professional photographer, slide maker and lantern operator in many parts of England and Scotland. Early in his career he was the operator for the Gilchrist lectures, in which capacity he has also been of great service to many prominent English university professors. He introduced the cinematograph in the lecture hall of the Birmingham University.

Since 1894 Mr. Saunders has contributed extensively to photo and lantern journals in England, and in 1902-03 occupied the chair of editor of the Optical Lantern Journal; he came to America three years ago.

In this country, being a high degree Mason, Prelate of his Commandery, and a Noble of Mecca Shrine, he has been occupied chiefly in making special sets of slides for that fraternity. As regards motion pictures, Mr. Saunders' experience in that direction extends so far that he has exposed, developed and exhibited films.—*From Views and Films Index.*

SAUNDERS.—Sir Alfred H. Saunders of Empire Commandery has accepted the position of editor of the *Views and Films Index*, a position for which he is qualified by an experience of twenty-two years as a photographer and slide maker. He was formerly editor of the *Optical Lantern Journal* of London, England.—*Masonic Standard* and *Wilson's Photographic Magazine.*

"THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD."—We have received the first number of a new weekly publication issued under the above title from the World Photographic Publishing Company, 361 Broadway, New York. It is a journal of the cinematograph and lantern slide trade, and is edited, we see, by Mr. Alfred H. Saunders, who will be remembered by readers in Birmingham as having for a period been responsible for the appearance of that fully titled publication "The Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger."—*British Journal of Photography.*

THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD AND VIEW PHOTOGRAPHER, a journal devoted to the interests of manufacturers and operators of moving pictures, etc., make its appearance under the able editorship of Mr. Alfred H. Saunders, late of *Views and Films.* The moving picture has firmly established itself as a popular form of entertainment and instruction.—*Wilson's Photographic Magazine.*

THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD AND VIEW PHOTOGRAPHER, a journal devoted to the interests of manufacturers and operators of moving pictures, etc., has made its appearance in America under the able editorship of Mr. Alfred H. Saunders, late of *Views and Films*, and the British *Magic Lantern Journal.*—*The Photographic Dealer.*

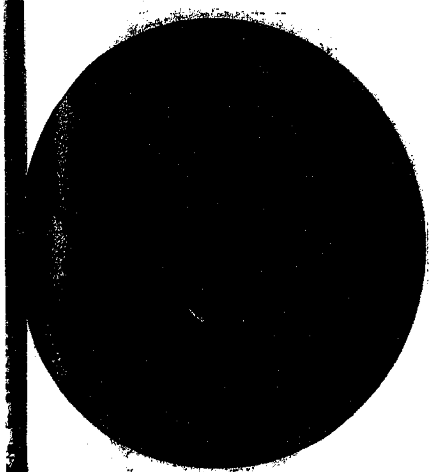
Eddie Hern, the operator of a moving picture machine at the Vaudele Theater, Muncie, Ind., had a narrow escape from injury at a small fire at the theater last week. The celluloid film became ignited and burned up, causing quite a scare in the theater, no one, however, being hurt. The shutter or safety attachment to the machine by some unknown reason got out of order and the film caught on the machine.

Young Hern, instead of leaving the room when the film ignited, attempted with unusual bravery to extinguish the flames. He was unsuccessful, but did not leave the room until he saw the film could not be saved. Although he was in the room with the blazing film he was uninjured when he came through a specially arranged trap door.

The loss was confined to the film alone, its value being in the neighborhood of $200.

(FIG. 13)

"What Others Think of Us," *Moving Picture World* (11 May 1907); 150.



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TO ADVERTISERS: The MOVING PICTURE WORLD goes ress Thursday morning of each week. No advertisements can be rted and no changes can be made in standing ads unless the y reaches us by 10 A. M., Thursday.

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Publishers' Note.

The publishers of THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD desire to reiterate the statement that this publication is *absolutely independent and free from the control of any house, firm, or member of any firm, connected with the manufacture of films, machines, or accessories, connected with this industry.* Its policy is broad and can be expressed in the words, "justice to all; malice towards none." No item of interest to the profession will be excluded from its pages; they are open to all who have any information to communicate. The publication covers a vast field and aims to get in personal touch with manufacturers and operators of animated photography, or projection machines. All who use song slides, lantern lectures, or produce the same,

Correspondence.—All letters for information must be accompanied with the writer's name and address, not necessarily for publication, and will be answered in columns devoted to that purpose.

A directory is being prepared tabulating the names of all connected with the above industries throughout America. Our readers' help is required to make it complete and reliable.

(FIG. 14)

"Absolutely independent and free from control"

"Publisher's Note," *Moving Picture World* (20 April 1907); 99.

(FIG. 15)

"ABSOLUTELY FAIR"

Variety's first issue.
(23 December 1905)

ADVERTISING RATES ON APPLICATION.

First Year. No. 1.

VARIETY in its initial issue desires to announce the policy governing the paper.

We want you to read it. It will be interesting if for no other reason than that it will be conducted on original lines for a theatrical newspaper.

The first, foremost and extraordinary feature of it will be FAIRNESS. Whatever there is to be printed of interest to the professional world WILL BE PRINTED WITHOUT REGARD TO WHOSE NAME IS MENTIONED OR THE ADVERTISING COLUMNS.

"ALL THE NEWS ALL THE TIME" and "ABSOLUTELY FAIR" are the watchwords.

The news part of the paper will be given over to such items as may be obtained, and nothing will be suppressed which is considered of interest. WE PROMISE YOU THIS AND SHALL NOT DEVIATE.

The reviews will be written conscientiously, and the truth only told. If it hurts it is at least said in fairness and impartiality.

We aim to make this an artists' paper; a medium; a complete directory; a paper to which anyone connected with or interested in the theatrical world may read with the thorough knowledge and belief that what is printed is not dictated by any motive other than the policy above outlined.

WE WANT YOU FOR A SUBSCRIBER. If you don't read VARIETY you are missing something.

Do you want to read a paper that's honest from the title page to its last line? That will keep its columns clean of "wash notices." That WILL NOT BE INFLUENCED BY ADVERTISING? That's VARIETY.

To insure you receiving VARIETY REGULARLY, send in your subscription now. You will find it coming to you regularly to any permanent address given, or "as per route."

The only positive way to get VARIETY is to subscribe for it NOW.

This paper is for variety and variety only in the broadest sense that term implies.

Is honesty the best policy? Variety will give the answer in its fifty-first number.

The recent reversal of a lower court decision by the Appellate Term of the

(FIG. 16)

Variety
(23 December 1905)

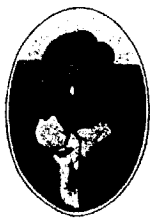
"Skigie"

(FIG. 17)

Variety
(January 6 1906)

"Skigie," the Youngest Critic in the World, Sees the Show at Proctor's. Doesn't Like Aurie Dagwell Because She Sang "My Old Kentucky Home."

("Skigie" is a boy, seven years old. Having been a constant attendant at vaudeville theatres since the age of three, he has a decided opinion. "Skigie's" views are not printed to be taken seriously, but rather to enable the artist to determine the impression he or his work leaves on the infantile mind. What "Skigie" says is taken down verbatim, without the change of a word or syllable.)



I liked the first act (The Zarbes; Proctor's One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street; Sunday afternoon, Dec. 17,) because they went around on those you know things (rings) and I liked that little actor (Charles Rossow) imitating Sousa, and the other one which came after (The Rossow Brothers) when they were boxing, and the little fat fellow got the worst of it, and I liked the pictures, but I didn't know what they were about (The Rolling Mill).

That colored girl (Artie Hall) is all right, but I knew she was blackened up because she wore gloves. That's all I liked. There were a whole a lot of things, but I didn't like the others. I forget how many acts there were. It was a short show and I couldn't get any ice cream soda after, and I'm sore.

I didn't like that girl that came out and sang (Aurie Dagwell). I hate that Old Kentucky River (Home) song, and it makes me sick and that's why I don't like her.

I liked the last act (Lavine and Leonard), the one they juggled in while the machine (auto) blew up, and it was a real machine too. I liked it better than the other one (Harry Tate "Motoring"), but that little fellow that says "Yes, Paw-Paw" made me laugh.

I bet I know where they (Lavine and Leonard) got that machine thing from. The Hippodrome where it used to blow up as Marceline left the stage and then Marceline would fall off.

That fellow that doubles all over (Toledo and Price) was all right, and then they had a sketch (Tom Nawn, "Pat and the Genii") which was long, but it was funny, and after it is all over the fellow they call Pat sits there as though he didn't know what to do and then he says, "Gee, I guess I've been asleep," and he hadn't been asleep at all.

A big fat man (Gus Williams) came out and told something and then he takes a wig off his head and put it in his coat pocket.

And I bet you five cents I get that ice cream soda the next time.

"Skigie" Goes to Syracuse. Sees the Show at the Grand Opera House. Says It Smells Bad. Wants to Come Home.

("Skigie" is a boy, seven years old. Having been a constant attendant at vaudeville theatres since the age of three, he has a decided opinion. "Skigie's" views are not printed to be taken seriously, but rather to enable the artist to determine the impression he or his work leaves on the infantile mind. What "Skigie" says is taken down verbatim, without the change of a word or syllable.)

Syracuse, Jan. 4.

Gee, this town is bum, and that theatre is bummer (Grand Opera House). I had to climb a lot of stairs before we got there, and when we got there it was only the box office, and we had to climb some more before we could sit down.

I didn't like the show. It stinks. The only thing I liked was those fellows up in the air (Four Flying Dunbars). They're the goods. Wish they would take me to throw, and the pictures were all right, and they don't have intermission here, so I was glad, because I saw the pictures so much sooner, but I wanted a drink while that rotten sketch was being played (Patrice, "A New Year's Dream"), and my mother wouldn't let me get it because she didn't want to miss any of the show.

Then a fellow made a lot of figures on a blackboard and then he smiled (Solomon II.). They said his name was Solomon, and I knew lot of Solomons here, but I never saw him before, and then a girl gets in a ball (Belle Stone) and rolls up to the top of something and then rolls down again and I bet it's easier coming down than going up, and then a man (John Gieger) with a violin says, "I will now make this machine say 'Mary had a little lamb,'" and it said it, but I couldn't understand what it said.

Six girls all dressed up funny (Peri Sisters) sang and danced and I didn't like either, and then a fellow came out and talked and talked (James J. Morton), and they made him come out a lot of times, but he made me sick and I don't know why he came back so often. Everybody but me was laughing.

But I liked the pictures the best because they stole a safe, and the police chased the robbers in a boat, and then the safe and the whole crowd spilled over in the river and got wet.

I want to go back home.