

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

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The Cinema and its Drama

By Gordon Craig

WHAT about it? It can be all summed up in a few notes.

1. It is nothing new; it is merely one more milestone as we go downhill . . . as we are led downhill by the nose.

The Drama in the Cinema is held to be made "of the people, by the people, and for the people." It is really made by the new school of the same old tyrants, to enslave *the mind* of the people.

It appeals to the vulgarity of most . . . the idleness of many . . . the economy of all . . . the fear of the ignorant . . . the laziness of half the world . . . the curiosity of the other half . . . the "wisdom" (*i.e.*, the pocket) of the few. Therefore it protects the few . . . and is against the many. Still it pretends to be for the people!!

It is up to date: it has all the same after-effects as every other mind-anæsthetic has in its up-to-dateness.

The mind enslaved, the mind drugged, is the best mind to glide downhill in comfort . . . to go willingly down.

Whether we shall go uphill again . . . or rather *when* we shall go uphill is all guesswork. Individuals harness themselves to a people and drag them uphill.

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2. The Cinema is the most important ally of what we call "Bolshevism" that exists to-day . . . the loyal Yellow Press coming in a poor second.

It glorifies the lowest in the terms of the highest.

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3. All that it touches it smears.

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4. It is, we hear, a good commercial investment.

It is, we had better know, a fatal investment in every other way.

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5. It is not original . . .

Exactly as in 1541, when the most energetic and at the same time most vulgar organisers of the time conceived the idea in Paris of acting the "Old Testament" because

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

they held that the people did not get enough Realism in the performance of the High Mass, so to-day do the very descendants of these energetic and vulgar impresarios find themselves and their "Realistic" theatre ousted by more energetic and more vulgar organisers holding the same opinion as their predecessors held in 1541.

As we may guess, there was money in it in those days—as we know, there is money in it in these days.

And all to enslave the Minds of the Peoples.

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6. The Cinema rules the People as in ancient days a degenerate Church ruled them.

The Cinema is the brat of yellow journalism.

It is quite possible to see where the Cinema steals ahead of both Theatre and Church in its adaptability to the *lowest* needs of man—the tired man—the man weary after a day's work (or even during the day's work if he likes).

The Church offered us, in its Cathedrals, Monuments to sit in.

The Stage, too, offered us Monuments for our ease in its early theatres.

Were they comfortable? I cannot say. I gather they were very comfortable. But of our comfort the Cinema, too, is not unmindful. In place of a Monument to enter we are given a real place of public convenience.

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7. The truth is that the old tyrannical Church was *difficile*—the Theatre became as *difficile*.

The Church expected a great deal too much from the congregation; it asked for Imagination in the listeners . . . it called for reverence in the onlookers . . . it demanded belief without showing the actual Redeemer in the flesh, without retelling the story of His personal sufferings and victory—without acting it—nothing was realised.

The Cinema asks for no exercise of the imagination—calls for no reverence other than what may gush over or dribble out in sentimentality . . . demands not belief at all except the "believe your own eyes and our limericks."

The Theatre, too, was *difficile*—although far easier than the Church. There were its faults.

It ordered the folk to come at such and such an hour and no other. It became expensive, it became snobbish. You had to dress to go there. It became a cult when it rose from being a gaudy show, roaring or squeaking butchers, cordwainers, drapers, and other tradesmen being the actors, producers, and profiteers—folk who could seldom read a word or utter a syllable in correct English or French. It became, in short, too good. It became an "Art." It strove to "elevate the masses." And all the time it pandered to their idea of what elevation might be and wasn't. It tricked.

It might have gone on till Kingdom Come, but luckily for us all the Cinema arrived in the nick of time.

The Cinema was not *difficile* . . . anything more facile is inconceivable. It was not *difficile* when it first opened its doors, though it promises rapidly to become so.

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THE ENGLISH REVIEW

In those days it offered these advantages, these facilities :

Cheapness. 3d. or 6d. instead of 2s. 6d. and £1 1s.

Evening dress was banned.

Comfort; any seat a pleasure to sit on.

Ventilation, ever improving.

The Hour was every hour. At 10 or 11 in the morning until 12 at night you could go in. You might say at 8 o'clock, "No, I'll not go and see a show"; and at 10 you might change your mind and see the same show . . . exactly the same.

Never disappointing, then, was the *Cinema*.

Position. No matter what your seat you saw as well as your neighbour . . . who might be duke or journalist . . . cowboy or postman.

Variety. It showed you all things . . . those in China and Africa as well as those in Rome, New York, or Mexico. Comic, Tragic, Melodramatic, Farcical.

It did "Impossible" things . . . cheaply for you.

Threepennyworth of the Impossible was no mean argument.

Beauty. You could see all the prettiest girls, gowns—nightgowns—caps—hats—shoes—furnitures—the richest mansions—ceremonies—societies—Kings and Queens even—Cardinals—famous actors.

And all this was guaranteed *dead* and *powerless* to *paralyse* with its personal magnetism the occupant of the (then) 3d. seat.

Filmed, the Individual became fangless. Teeth drawn, claws clipped, distant . . . behind the cage as it were; and we in our 3d. seats bosses of the whole pack of 'em. There's *Power* for you . . . what? Yea, verily "what ho!"

On the distant screen we saw "the movies"—Life's last squirm. This squirm sums up the charm of the facile Cinema.

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8. In time there will be found a much lower stratum of our sentimentality and rubbish to which it will be possible to appeal . . . but already it is doing its best and appeals to the very lowest that can be found in us.

Hence its success.

While we go willingly down the hill (and who would go uphill, for who cares for the least fatigue?)—the Cinema can always be relied on to help us down.

It can never go with us *all* the way, for in time it will put on airs . . . it is putting them on already. Yes, Mary . . . yes, Charlie . . . * It is not yet *difficile*—oh, no—but you two and those who follow in your footsteps will see to this—provided they can realise how great they are—and what a simple natural appeal they make (and you made) to the simple and natural "people."

* Two such nice ordinary people are Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin—but the men who pull their strings spoil Mary and Charlie for one more percentage—able, nice beings their manipulators give them away to us—thus are we and they bamboozled to pay for more whisky for these Cinema Kings.

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

Then alas! the Cinema will become really *difficile* and its day will be over.

But let us not fear . . . there will be always other inventions of men timed to go off pat when we press the button . . . the shareholders doing the rest.

And these will meet us, lower us, without so much effort, without so many jerks . . . man can see to it and man will. All must make for more and more perfect ease with each new century—until the bottom is reached, and then . . . then alas! there will, I'm afraid, be no hope for it—we will have to ascend or become dust.

Take it or leave it.

