

## ATTITUDE AND INTERLUDE

OR, CONTEMPORARY CINEMA ARCHITECTURE IN THE LIGHT  
OF BUNYAN'S *Pilgrim's Progress*.

We have lately, said he, adopting his best impersonal style, been interesting ourselves in the evolution of an attitude. There is nothing unusual in this. We are always interested in the evolution of something or other. Until it has evolved.

That is the drawback of an attitude. The moment it becomes a philosophy it ceases to matter, as we may take it no sensible person is interested in anything except making money these days.

A chastening thought, explaining as it does the terrible struggle between Art and Commerce now raging at Elstree.

Besides, an attitude, as St. Paul the Apostle remarked so wittily, is just another excuse for theology. There is really no excuse for attitudinising in self-defence these days; a cold compress on the nape of the neck will prove more efficacious. And so much less worrying mentally. Or again, as Queen Lizzy remarked to the Adjectival Mary, what's in an attitude?

Have you ever, said he, adopting the direct attack style so much favoured by newspaper magnates, felt the total in-

## CLOSE UP

adequacy of words as a means of expression? Have you ever realised how we live in a word-bound world of literary limbo? You have? Right, Sir, yours is an attitude.

Incidentally, if such is the unhappy case, and your suppressed desires gasp for fresh mediums of expression, we may make any or all of three deductions.

Either you are such a thick-headed, illiterate, ill-kempt idiot that you do not understand your own language, or you are a genuine artist, in which case may the Lord have mercy on your soul and overdraft, or you are just another of those muddle-headed half-wits who think round the unfamiliar sides of a rectangle, like a taxi-driver airing his knowledge of London by taking the backstreets and the short cuts with one eye on the meter and the other on the longest way round the short side of a circle. No doubt you have noticed the high percentage of squinting taxi-drivers.

Is that clear, brief, concise, pithy? Get me, Steve?

Cinema is the modern attitude. That means, it is so much less disconcerting than a complete theory. It supplies no answer; it merely gives an excuse. It is the unfinished fragment of the modern development, the work in progress of the experimentalist, the dimpled dumpling of the dubious dabbler in dazzling developments.

Cinema's attitude is the world attitude. Sad, but true.

We have recently been intellectually stimulated by the Three Greatest Talking Pictures on record. (The first World's Greatest for nearly a week). These films are regarded as the answer to the critics' prayer, the ultimate eye-piece of artistic endeavour, the culminating jewel in the fair

diadem of creative inspiration, and the latest excuse for the British papers to show how worthless is their standard of patriotic criticism.

The three jolly little jack tars in question are *Two Worlds*, *The Yellow Mask*, and *Murder*.

Now let us understand the situation clearly. *Two Worlds* was described in solid print by the *Daily Mail*, that bulwark of the intelligentsia, as the greatest of talking pictures. *The Yellow Mask* was variously described as anything from good entertainment to a terrific box-office smash. *Murder* was laid down by the *Sunday Express*, that house organ of the Exclusive Cult of James Douglas the Deep Thinker, as the latest picture by one of the greatest film geniuses living.

Now it happened that these three films, shown in the order mentioned, improved in that same order. So let us consider 'em that way.

And now, Gentlemen—confound it! The same slip again—what would we, the discerning patrons, the light of intellectual fire, the eternal worshippers of the plastic muse, have to say about them?

That is printable, I mean.

Well, perhaps we would let *Two Worlds* down lightly by saying that as a work of art it was very good popular entertainment. As a contribution to living! Well, ever read a 1916 Bradshaw?

The worst of cinema, it is the attitude of the thoughtless interlude.

We might say of *The Yellow Mask* that it was the mixture as before, only more so. And we might say of *Murder* that it is the best of British films to date.

## CLOSE UP

In considering *Two Worlds* there is one point one must clear up. I take it we do not mind a film being bad when it never pretends to be anything else. We forgive the Brothers Warner. They do not attempt to make artistic masterpieces. They have their attitude; we have ours. But we do condemn a film which tries to be artistic and misses the mark.

*Two Worlds*, briefly, might be regarded as being neither of this world nor the next. Spiritualism, another of those Post-War attitudes which is in danger of becoming a philosophy, sometimes postulates seven spiritual planes outside the earth, each one deeper in sympathy than the one beneath. Meet the Eighth Plane. Mr. Dupont.

And now, warming into our stride and adopting the lightly satirical style—styles are so helpful to the scribbler—*Two Worlds* is just the cutest little thing of all time. Its story, probing the psychological profundities of the universe, sweeping the whole panorama of human emotion, delving into the very fundamentals of our being, tells how a handsome Austrian officer during the war falls in love with a Jewess whose father he has illtreated for military purposes. The old man, however, helps him out of a scrape by pretending he is his son, and the girl falls in love with him, and the wicked Russians seek after him in vain, and the boy's father comes back and hears he wants to marry the girl, and says he mustn't, and he says he will, and he threatens to have the father arrested if he does, and he gives in and doesn't, and the girl throws a faint throws a faint throws a faint, and the father does glycerine stuff, and the handsome boy goes off to war leaving the girl he left behind him behind him behind him.

Is that clear? I rather thought not.

Well, well, well. It is a terrible thing, studying the attitude of others. One's own is sufficient of a nuisance.

All this, mark ye, to the tune of much Jewish religious ritual, an undress scene, and some frightfully-plastic-most-iconoclastic camera angles. Meanwhile the world turns on in the lathe of time and the dark lands heave amain, and we find a joke in the Dupont smoke which will never come back again.

Photography? Picture postcard. Individually good, no sense of unification.

Direction? E. A. Dupont.

Perhaps British International will make money out of *Two Worlds*; one never knows. It seems strange. But then everything seems strange. It is a world of misapplied superlatives and hopelessly valueless values.

The attitude of the commercial cinema; the complete negativity, the lack of interest. Sterility and defeatism.

And so to *The Yellow Mask*. Why a mask, anyway? And why this film? It is curious; Lachman is the naughty boy of the studios, the man who might do a good job if left alone. Instead he does *The Yellow Mask*, which as a contribution to contemporary cinema means as much as a third class sleeper to the seclusion-loving dabbler in the arts.

It is unfair to criticise this film, just as it was unfair to expect anyone to make a good job of it. For the first time I understood why folks made such a fuss of that Johnson girl.

She flew from England.

By the way, have you cracked that one about the difference between Amy, Al, and yourself? The first are Flying and Singing Fools respectively.

*Yellow Mask* will make money. Let us hold it to the

## CLOSE UP

director's eternal credit that he has assessed its value pretty closely.

And thus to *Murder*. Hitchcock by now must be an admitted authority on the black arts, having graduated with *Blackmail*.

Hitchcock, of course, is an interesting phenomenon, said he, adopting the quietly introspective style. A rambler rose on an arctic slope. Or perhaps it would be better to say a walrus on Everest. He has his moments. He is the one man in this country who can think cinema. He may never achieve half of what he thinks. One cannot expect too much of the British industry. Indeed, one expects nothing of any attitude, even one's own.

But Hitchcock's moments justify themselves. Obviously *Murder* had its moments. It may not achieve real unity, but it comes nearer than any of its homemade competitors. And after *Two Worlds!*

There is a suggestion in *Murder* of a talk-film idea which personally has appealed to me from the start of the dialogue film. Too much, in my opinion, is made of the deliberate distortion of sound to make a counterpoint to the visual rhythm. For myself, I have always been interested in the direct linking of sound and picture by the employment of a literary translation in the dialogue of a similar rhythm as is used in the montage.

In this way a speeding of development with a very considerable increase in dramatic content can be obtained cinematically. While we are box-office bound we are justified in attempting compromise.

In the jury sequence in *Murder* Hitchcock has discovered

this same idea. The acceleration of cutting, coupled with the dialogue rhythm, speeding up, speeding up. Speech montage. So much more fundamental than that psychologically interesting " Knife " episode in *Blackmail*.

Much could be said about Hitchcock, his use of the detached camera. Documentation. His efforts to weld literary satire into cinematic development, the old fault for which Lubitsch has to answer. His idea-fertility, the use of dialogue as a thought-medium—a throwback to the Elizabethan stage, this.

Anyway, Hitchcock gives the screen ideas, in which it is so bankrupt. *Murder* has several ideas, flung off, used to serve a purpose and then forgotten.

Regarded as a motion picture *Murder* is a praiseworthy effort, quite the best thing this country has done. Looked at from the straightforward angle of the film-goer it gets dangerously near the highbrow, which means to say that the fact it has brains may militate against it.

Its literary link is too strongly noticeable. Too much footage is occupied with the novelists' preoccupation regarding the psychology of crime. There is much too much of the stuff that Clemence Dane is made of.

The evolution of an attitude. The surprise that someone's cinematic attitude may be worthwhile. The problem as to whether Hitchcock's attitude is compatible with the film-goers'.

We have lately, said he, adopting his best impersonal style, been interesting ourselves in the evolution of an attitude.

And in most cases much has been found wanting.

HUGH CASTLE.