

"to love that life may keep on living," etc. The pain of the author's search lends dignity to his confusion. But it is obvious that this confusion cannot lead to situations which are dynamic, meaningful or clearly outlined.

A similar mystic content, and a similar dramatic flabbiness, are to be found in a wide variety of current plays. It is generally true that the architecture of the modern play is off center. The preparation is excessive and the *event* is ignored or minimized. What Freytag called the "erregende moment" or "firing of the fuse" is unconscionably delayed (or altogether omitted).

Ibsen avoided preparation, beginning his plays at a crisis, illuminating the past in the course of the action. This method has now been carried to a further extreme: the crisis is diluted and the backward-looking or expository moments are emphasized—so that the play (in many cases) is *all* exposition and no crisis.

The playwright whose attitude toward life is negative and mystic will naturally express a dread of action, a lost desire for emotional stability. He achieves this by delaying or avoiding the moment of conflict. This may satisfy the playwright, but it does not satisfy dramatic construction. When the dramatist runs away from life, he runs away from his own play.

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON.

(The above is an excerpt from a forthcoming book on the technique of playwriting.)

Shooting China

MIKE PELL

HOLLYWOOD is in need of fresh backgrounds for its kissing parties, so cameramen have been sent to Alaska, Mexico, China and all ends of the earth. China seemed a very promising field, and several studios had units working out there during the past two years. *Oil for the Lamps of China* (Warner Bros.) and *The Painted Veil* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) were the first fruits of those ventures, and we shall soon be treated to some more pictures with the genuine Oriental background. One of the pictures shortly to be released will be *The Good Earth* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer). A tremendous ballyhoo will escort the showing of this film, for it has been one of M-G-M's ambitious ventures, on which they have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars. We will be shown in this film masses of real Chinese workers, real Chinese soldiers, real Chinese temples, cities, countryside. Yet will we be shown the real China?

Let us see. When this M-G-M unit arrived in Shanghai it contained, besides the usual technical workers, a "contractor." This was a certain prominent lady, who knew all the big shots among the Chinese diplomats and officials. Her job was to smooth the way, cut the red tape and ascertain whose

palms had to be greased and to what extent. Before any shooting could be done, the entire scenario script had to be okayed by Chiang Kai-shek's publicity department in Nanking. Although nobody could classify Pearl Buck's *Good Earth* as being in any way "Red," the script was mercilessly mutilated with oppressive restrictions imposed on the manner in which the scenes could be shot. There must be no showing of women with bound feet. There must be no filming of ragged Chinese or their grass and mud hovels. There must be no filming of the beggars, the starving, the sick and emaciated. There must be no filming of anything, any place without the permission and presence of Kuomintang agents. Even taken, no films were to leave the country without first being submitted to the scrutiny and approval of the Nanking censorship bureau.

Nor was this all. Chiang Kai-shek wanted to show off his pet accomplishment: the Nanking Military Academy, so M-G-M had to agree to shoot several thousand feet for him and present it as a gift. Then various generals wanted their pet troops filmed and this had to be done. The general who had fought the Japanese at Kupeikow, one of the few courageous generals Chiang Kai-shek has, wanted that whole battle immortalized. This was done too, except that instead of showing the Chinese troops defeated as in reality, the film ends with a glorious victory for Chiang Kai-shek. This film is now being shown amongst the Nationalist troops, to bolster them in their fight against the Chinese Red Army.

During the filming of these military scenes, Chiang Kai-shek's generals exhibited callous disregard for the lives of their soldiers and the property of the poor peasants. In order to make the scenes realistic, powder charges were deliberately exploded under the legs of running soldiers. One soldier's clothes were set afire and two others were seriously wounded. Peasants' fields were blown up and their crops trodden down, without apologies and often without indemnification. Once, during a parade rehearsal when some of the soldiers smiled in good humor, the Kuomintang general drew his Mauser, ordered his aides to do likewise and threatened to shoot down every soldier who dared to smile. There were also ludicrous moments. The various generals (and in Chiang Kai-shek's army every gangster chief, opium magnate or warlord's son is a general) were jealous of one another and would refuse to cooperate. Once, when the various units of the Nanking Military Academy were to be filmed, the general in charge of the tanks refused to join the parade because his pride had been hurt. Another time, during a cavalry charge, the cavalymen revolted because their general had

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dared to eat his lunch while letting them go hungry.

The worst cruelty was shown in the use of peasants in mob scenes. Impoverished peasants, learning of the chance to make the fabulous sum of one dollar (33 cents in U. S. money) for a day's work, walked twenty and more miles during the night, in order to be on location in time for work the next day. Most of these scenes were shot north of Peiping, because the peasants of this region were noted for their docility. Two or three thousand would be packed onto a train (exodus scene) and shunted back and forth. For hours on end they were not permitted to get off the train to attend to their natural needs or to get some food. One of the women, exhausted and feeble from the long night's trek and the subsequent waiting, died of privation. After about eight hours of dangerous riding and shunting on the trains, the mob was finally allowed to get down. Most of them hadn't even the necessary few coppers for a bowl of tea and they gazed hungrily as the M-G-M troupe and the Kuomintang officials feasted on chicken, oranges and cooled mineral water. When, after an hour or so, they were ordered to board the train again they showed surprising solidarity in absolutely refusing to budge.

At the end of the day was in soldiers beat the hungry men with the butts of their rifles, officers used the flats of their swords and the gang leaders pummeled the crowd with their fists.

The Kuomintang officials were always afraid to allow mob scenes to be shot within any large town or city. When, in Peiping, consent was finally procured, the following conditions were made: (a) The whole operation must be within the walls of the Forbidden City; (b) The mob was to be recruited by police agents; (c) Soldiers were to be mounted on the walls and emergency police at the gates; (d) For each twenty-five men, there was to be a leader, appointed by the police; (e) The M-G-M was to provide clean caps and other articles of clothing necessary to give the crowd a respectable appearance. (f) The whole operation was to be concluded as hastily as possible. Numerous other conditions were imposed, for the police were in constant fear whenever a mass of Chinese workers were allowed to assemble.

The only filming which was permitted without restriction was that of temples, pagodas, memorials, monuments and grave mounds. This is the "real" China which Chiang Kai-shek and his opium-eaten cohorts want the American public to see.

MIKE PELL.

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The Screen

AS life in capitalist America becomes increasingly cruel, horror films grow more lurid and revolting, more fantastic and pathological. *Mad Love* (M-G-M-Roxy) is an example.

Peter Lorre, in his first American film, portrays Prof. Gogol, a great surgeon madly in love with an actress of the Grand Guignol, Parisian horror theatre. But the actress, Yvonne Orlic, loves her husband, a pianist. Orlic loses his hands in a train wreck and Yvonne persuades Dr. Gogol to perform a miracle. Gogol grafts the hands of a freshly guillotined knife-thrower to the arms of Stephen Orlic: the new hands develop a mind of their own and Stephen automatically becomes an expert knife-thrower. In the meantime, Gogol's passion for Yvonne takes the place of his passion for seeing prisoners decapitated. He cooks up a scheme whereby he suggests to Stephen that he is a murderer and has just knifed his step-father. To make doubly sure that Stephen believes him (and to give the audience the necessary thrill) Gogol masquerades in a steel head brace and steel gloves and appears before Stephen in the role of the dead criminal whose hands Stephen now wears. Stephen is arrested and Gogol's insanity grows. In the final sequence, Gogol is in the act of strangling Yvonne "because he loves her so

much," when Stephen and the police rush in at the crucial moment; the husband throws a knife through a small grill, ending Gogol's career. This outline of the story is restrained, to say the least.

Peter Lorre, one of the most sensitive and capable of film actors, seems doomed to be cast as a rival to Karloff. Lorre came into prominence as the psychopathic child-murderer in Fritz Lang's German production, *M*, still the most effective horror film. *M* lacked all the artifices of *Mad Love*. Although both *M* and *Mad Love* belong to the same genre, there is as much difference between them as there is between a story by William Faulkner and a story by Erskine Caldwell. **PETER ELLIS.**

Other Current Films

Dante's Inferno (Fox-Rivoli): A gangster yarn combined with the theme of *The Power and the Glory*, the film contains a five-minute interlude when a sick man describes Inferno to the hero. Hollywood's version of Hell proves to be thousands of semi-nude, prostrate extras writhing in superimposed flames. The modern story deals with a racketeer living through a hell of his own making (he says) and everything is hunky-dory. This is the second spectacle of the season. *She was No. 1*, to be followed by Cecil DeMille's *Crusades* and climaxed by the Hearst-Warner-Rhinehardt, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. **P. E.**

Between Ourselves

JOHN L. SPIVAK took time off from a novel he is writing to attend to Congressman Dickstein.

Mike Pell is a seaman. He has been about everywhere and while in China recently worked for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer field expedition making *The Good Earth*, about which he writes in this issue.

Among the features in next week's issue will be:

"The Rise and Fall of Abraham Cahan," by Paul Novick, managing editor of *The Morning Freiheit*; an examination of the "patriarch" of *The Jewish Daily Forward* who for more than thirty years has been the head of that organ of Old Guard "Socialist Partyism."

"Walter Lippmann and Soviet Russia," by Corliss Lamont, author of *Russia Day by Day*. The steady evolution of an ex-Socialist, ex-liberal into a reactionary sophist and defender of the status quo.

A piece by Robert Forsythe (who is now on vacation). "Back in the days when Upton Sinclair was a novelist and not a politician, there was a large body of opinion which held that he wasn't even a novelist," Forsythe begins and goes on from there.

The International Bookshop, 1265 Raymond Boulevard, Newark, N. J., will follow the example recently set by the Brownsville Bookshop in distributing returned copies of *THE NEW MASSES*, in order to increase sales of the magazine in Newark. *THE NEW MASSES* can now be purchased at most of the newsstands in Newark, Irvington and Journal Square, Jersey City.

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(See editorial in this issue)