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complex and with more at stake than ever before.

The strongest weapon in the arsenal of reaction is that ideological fabric that has been so carefully woven about the minds of the people to keep them from seeing the truth. As institutions decay and increasingly fail to meet the human needs on which life depends, this ideological fabric rots through and tears begin to appear in it. When this happens, the parties of established institutions move swiftly to silence those who point out the rottenness of the fabric, and to employ camouflage artists to paint beautiful lies that will serve to cover up those points through which the truth can be glimpsed.

Here the interdependence of the artist and the forces of progress is again manifest. His fate is bound up with the fate of the people—his freedom is an integral part of their wider freedom. What has happened to artists in Germany, Spain, in France and England, and is increasingly happening to American artists as we move from latent to overt crisis, makes this clear beyond dispute. And if I may venture a personal opinion, there is no salvation for the artist as a creative worker except through the onward march of all men.

In the curious attributes of philosophers and writers through all history has been their disposition to erect within the covers of a book the skeleton of an ideal society which they call Utopia. It is significant that in more than one of these never-never lands the artist has ceased to exist—whatever function he performed in earlier societies, having been obviated by the attainment of the perfect life.

Artists, are, of course, unready to accept any such prognosis and I think we will agree in our turn that we can do without those who think in terms of Utopia. A step at a time is enough for us, and in any steps whose direction and whose implications we can see before us from the stage in history on which we stand there is a vital role for the artist to play.

The artist is by his nature dedicated to life and to the common humanity he senses in the men about him. Again and again through all history the artist has turned from the formal requirements of tradition and the dominant ideology of his time to search out and make permanent the universal qualities of the common man. This, as much as any metaphysical universality in esthetic qualities is what makes the art of diverse places and widely separated epochs of time intelligible and meaningful today. It presages the brotherhood of man and the artist feels it in his bones and in his basic urge for permanency in the materials with which he works and timelessness in the image he creates.

The highest good which results from the interplay between creative talent embodied in the individual artist and the environment is in his affirmation of what is vital and basically good in the life about him. This implies understanding as well as feeling and it is both understanding and feeling that the artist contributes to his fellow men. By his selection

of material, by his emphasis and recreation of it in terms that disclose its significance the artist adds stature and dignity and richness and strength to the lives of his fellows. With these, no matter how dark the night, the forces of progress cannot fail.

LYND WARD.

Mr. Ward's article is his address given before the general session of the recent Writers and Artists Congress.

Tripe and Taylor

Also "She Knew . . ." and a Peter Lorre film.

IN THE feeblar detective stories and the sillier newspapers, much has been made of a gadget called the lie detector. Its true name is the association test, and its function is to find out, by means of your verbal associations and the way you express them, just what your reaction to a subject is. Thus, if they yell "Red!" at you and you immediately sing out, "White and blue!" you are a one-hundred-percent etcetera, while if you shrink, shudder, and after five minutes of hesitation sheepishly mutter, "Flannel underwear," you are one of those you-know-whats. Well, this reviewer saw two films the other day, and for twenty-four hours has been giving herself an association test to find out what she thinks about them. And the result is a blank; a blind, dreamless, happy blank.

After painful brain-searching, one impression does come to light; *Billy the Kid* has some beautiful desert photography. If you like travelogues and picture postcards of the Grand Canyon, this is the film for you. Its technicolor is perhaps the best handling of outdoor scenes we have seen yet, and is also kind to the horses and Mr. Robert Taylor. There are great towers of rock with blue mists swirling about their bases. There is also, somewhere, a story with a lot of shooting in it. This plot, while never quite standing still, progresses at such a leisurely pace that the villains seem to die in slow motion, and when Mr. Taylor stiffens in the last agony there is no very perceptible change in him. It would be unfair, however, to say that *Billy the Kid* is actively bad. It is not even that. It just isn't there.

Brian Donlevy and Ian Hunter perform capably, and Taylor, with his pretty face artistically dirtied up, is at least better than he has ever been before. Yet none of them manages to be more than a fairly pleasant person standing around in a doorway waiting to get shot. All the familiar devices of the Western are employed: the bold bad men, the stalwart cowpunchers, the cows of different colors, the posse galloping across the desert, the two-gun hero, the simpering heroine, the singing Mexican. It is perhaps the complete familiarity of these elements that makes them so curiously unexciting. Any three-year-old child who has seen one installment of *The Lone Ranger* could tell you exactly what is going to happen to Mr. Taylor.

Billy the Kid, mind you, is never painful. It will probably not provoke anyone to get up and stride out of the theater, angrily demanding his money back. It may even provide a suitably tempered thrill for the kiddies. It has about thirty seconds of real power, provided by Olive Blakeney as the widow of a murdered cowpuncher. And there is always the desert.

"SHE KNEW ALL THE ANSWERS" is even more conspicuous by its absence. She may have known the answers, but the script writers didn't. And this reviewer is similarly at a loss. What is there to say about a film that will never quite put you to sleep and never quite wake you up? It is a shot of mild anaesthetic—but emphatically not laughing gas. The plot, of course, has nothing to do with human life, and neither have the characters; this unreality, however, is so much the rule in Hollywood comedies that it hardly needs mentioning. We have all heard before about the chorus girl who proves to the hard-boiled millionaire that you can be beautiful without being dumb; though after watching Joan Bennett's performance, I am inclined to doubt it.

Well, the chorus girl wins over the millionaire and throws over her previous lover, who is rather relieved—sensible man. Before this dubious reward of corresponding virtue, there are stock shots of night clubs, Coney Island, and legs. Franchot Tone makes heroic efforts to be funny, even to popping his eyes at you and writing with his nose. John Hubbard, the female impersonator of *Turnabout*, contributes a less successful male impersonation. What comedy the film does offer comes almost entirely from minor characters such as William Tracy's bumptious office boy, Eve Arden's "invalid sister," and an enchanting drunk who staggers across the scene for a brief ten seconds. At only one point is *She Knew All the Answers* downright offensive, however. This is in the presentation of an office spinster of the old school, who lifts eyebrows constantly, simpers over her imaginary beauty, and faints at the mention of passion. If this lady ever really existed, she has gone to an unwept grave long ago. Cannot Hollywood give us a rest from the comic old maid?

I haven't had a chance to talk about it, but I should like to mention an old film of a very different sort, *The Face Behind the Mask*. In its entirety it is an admirably written and brilliant melodrama, and its first half is very much more than that. In presenting the miseries of unemployment, the film attains an incisive grimness rarely equalled, and Peter Lorre's portrayal of an eager, friendly little immigrant is a heartbreakingly beautiful job. The waste of such actors as Lorre is one of Hollywood's greatest crimes; out on the West Coast, anyone who can act is automatically a villain. Even in this unusual film, Lorre is soon forced to hide behind a mask and turn into a menace. But what he does with the brief chance he gets makes *The Face Behind the Mask* worth catching up with at the little neighborhood theaters.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

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