

D.W. Griffith as the ‘Father of American Film’

D.W. Griffith is often described as the “father of American film.” Born as a “Southern gentleman” in Kentucky, his early career was as an actor and making hundreds of short films (usually “two-reelers” of less than 15 minutes) for the Biograph Company. He made ‘Birth of a Nation’ in 1915, and the sprawling epic ‘Intolerance’ in 1916. After making ‘Broken Blossoms’ (1922), he left Hollywood, leaving American movies to their fate!

He was responsible more than any other filmmaker for the development of the standard feature film and the techniques filmmakers use to make one. His remarkable achievement by about 1915 was to have invented an “**inherent cinematic style**”, “a completely original style of moving images” specifically appropriate to moving pictures (in contrast to the short one-reelers and the statically filmed play-like movies in vogue around 1910).

Perhaps his most contribution can be summed up as “**classical editing**.” He realized that the main objective of a filmmaker was to “manipulate” his audience, to increase the dramatic impact of the scenes



David Wark Griffith

on the audience, to get them more emotionally involved – excited, happy, sad, empathetic with the characters. His “**chain of cinematic discourse**” included using (often short) camera shots other than long shots – long shots, medium shots, two-shots, close-ups, etc. shot from different spatial and psychological perspectives (mise-en-scène) – and linking them together by editing to make up a single movie scene. “**Time and space are conquered.**” You no longer have to rely exclusively on the long shot from **the 25th row**, but you can mix them in different scales and from different perspectives and points of view to heighten audience response. He was also one of the first to use parallel editing to increase suspense; he especially focused on **close-ups** as an eloquent and elegant way to allow the audience to see into the souls of the characters.

He also insisted on a natural, restrained **acting style** necessary in front of the camera; he worked hard to slow down the actors. He realized that the old theatrical style acting just a few feet from the camera came across as artificial and ridiculous. Although he continued to teach some old techniques, such as “St. Vitus’s Dance” that was meant to portray girlish enthusiasm, he generally insisted on smaller gestures and a quiet sincerity of facial features.

His style tended to be **sentimental** – modern audiences would find that he spooned on the sentiment a bit thick; also **spectacular** – he liked hiring casts of thousands, and in a long movie following the fate of an individual or smaller group through a dramatic historical **epic** (the ‘Birth of a Nation’ treated the epic events of the Civil War and Reconstruction); also **didactic** – he often stressed the message or the lesson that he was teaching his audience, e.g., white supremacy in ‘Birth of a Nation’ (1915), then paradoxically the importance of tolerance in ‘Intolerance’ (1916), and the importance of forgiveness and sensible treatment of women in ‘Way Down East.’

Until 1912 he was the most successful maker of short films for Biograph. There he developed his characteristic filmmaking techniques of natural acting and elegant editing. A good example of one of these films was his 1910 work ‘What the Daisy Said’ (See below).

After about 1912 he focused exclusively on **feature films** – that were at least an hour long and that told a story that grabbed the audience.



‘**The Birth of a Nation**’ (1915) is probably the single most significant film in the history of American movies. It was based on a highly racist play “The Clansmen” first performed in 1905. The movie’s budget was enormous for the day. Exhibitors charged \$2 per ticket; and despite (because of?) the intense controversy raised by the film, it was the single highest grossing movie in the USA until the late 1930s. Its influence was enormous. Much of the film style of the Soviet school in the 1920s was based on Griffith (the famous Soviet filmmaker Sergei **Eisenstein** much admired Griffith and invented the term ‘montage’ to describe his highly original form of editing). The essence of the mainstream Hollywood style was also largely derived from Griffith.

There follows the instructor’s review of ‘Birth of a Nation’:

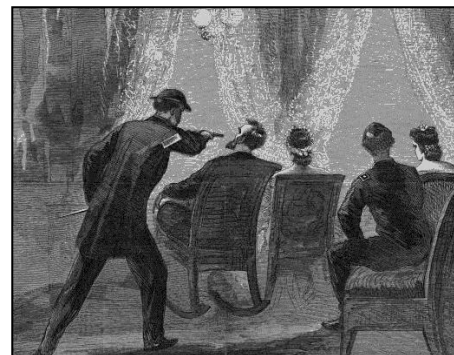
The Birth of a Nation 1915 D. W. Griffith Lillian Gish 3.0

Early 20th Century Lynching Extraordinary movie that affected the direction of the development of motion pictures. Incredibly racist in very explicit, in your face, and naïve way – the Civil War disrupted the natural affinity between northern and southern Aryans, and the white race from both sides had to join hands together again after the war to defeat the Black menace. Movie loaded with black menace, especially of sexual variety – black men spend most of their waking hours lusting after white women. Blacks also depicted as shiftless and ignorant, most notably in the legislature scene, where they vote in favor of miscegenation, drink on the floor, and take their shoes off and put their bare feet on their desks. Pointed citation of Woodrow Wilson’s ‘History’ and his reported fulsome praise of the movie. After defeat of blacks, explicit references to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, etc. at the end, hoping that we (whites) will never go to war again. Explicit glorification of Ku Klux Klan, who are a sort of revolutionary militia risen up and rightfully fighting for vigilante justice to protect southern civilization and womanhood against the racial menace. Very annoying to have to look at white actors in blackface playing the majority of the black characters. Greatest scenes of Part II (Reconstruction) fueled by fear raised by black lust for Elsie and Flora. Civil War scenes (Part I) very vivid and realistic, reminding one of Matthew Brady’s renowned photographs; also true epic grandeur. Mixes different types of scenes – historical tableaux (e.g., Appomattox Courthouse surrender); touching, sensitively edited domestic scenes, especially of the southern Cameron family (especially the return of the Little Colonel to the Cameron family home); great epic scenes, especially of Civil War battles; exciting chases where Griffith uses cross-cutting aggressively to create a sense of excitement and suspense (attempted rape of Flora, the endless ride of the KKK at the end of the movie).

The scene of **Ben returning home** is a classical example of Griffith’s subtle and sensitive editing; Griffith used close-ups, shots from the side of the door, slow pacing to affect emotions, etc. For most of the scene he lets the camera roll on both Ben

and Flora to record their subtle emotions; then he cuts for a side shot toward the door sill to show the mother’s arm (we do not see her) embrace her returned son from the other side.

Griffith shows great sensitivity in evoking the emotions the characters experience upon Ben’s arrival home after a long absence.



Harper’s Weekly Illustration of Lincoln’s Assassination

The sequence detailing the **assassination of Abraham Lincoln** is a tour de force using all the tricks of the trade to tell the story in an exciting way: mixing of long shots (establishing the initial excitement of the scene in the theater with the actors on stage) with medium shots (of Ben and Elsie sitting in the theater as spectators, of the President sitting in his box), and close-ups (e.g., Booth lurking behind Lincoln's box, and the gun that Booth holds in his hand) to tell the story. This is a textbook demonstration of how to enhance the dramatic impact of a scene through mixing shots taken from several different perspectives into a convincing whole. Having the viewer focus on the couple in the theater that we already have a sympathetic relationship and experiencing the tragedy through them and with them, etc.

The chase sequence leading up to the **death of Flora** is a good example of building tension through **parallel editing** (at one point of three different actions – Flora running, Gus [played by a white actor in black face] pursuing her, and Flora's brother Ben looking for them both), and the anxiety about protecting the purity of Southern womanhood when confronted with interracial marriage. Did she fall off the cliff by mistake or did she jump in a panic? An early textbook early example of how to build tension and anxiety.

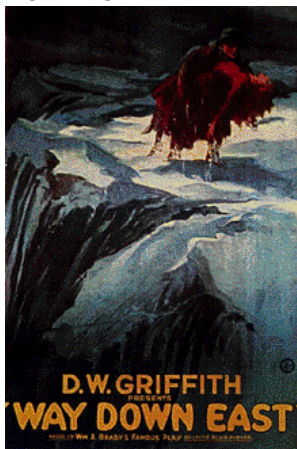


Lillian Gish

The **final ride of the Ku Klux Klan** to rescue the good people in the log cabin from the depredations of the Black soldiers and the Carpetbaggers shows the rampant racism of the film, and the creation of tension and excitement through an extended passage of **parallel editing**. Griffith plays on the excitement of the galloping hordes of Klansmen coming to the rescue of the besieged cabin. At one point he takes pictures of the onward galloping horsemen from the back of a moving truck (a tracking shot); at another he shows the men in the cabin poised to kill their women and children to keep them from falling into the hands of the attacking soldiers. The arrival of the Klansmen sends the soldiers running.

There follows a review of Griffith's film 'Way Down East':

Way Down East 1920 D.W. Griffith Lillian Gish as the adorable Anna, Richard Barthelmess as David, Lowell Sherman as Sanderson the heartless seducer. Opening title: "Since the beginning of time man has been polygamous – even the saints of Biblical history – but today a better ideal



Publicity Poster

is growing – the ideal of one man for one woman. Today Woman brought up from childhood to expect ONE CONSTANT MATE possibly suffers more than at any point in the history of mankind, because not yet has the man-animal reached this high standard – except perhaps in theory." Rather epic ("pastoral") story of young woman seduced and abandoned, but she finds a new life, and although accused, is rescued by a virtuous young man from physical and moral perdition. Very melodramatic and moralistic with clear religious message and clear distinction between good and evil characters. Gish absolutely radiant as poor, innocent and passive young woman with low self-esteem; she is virtuous and pure, and is led astray by a staged false marriage; she does however have reserves of courage and boldness (e.g., in scene where she reveals guilt of Sanderson); film depends on her sterling performance. Film pretty marginal as a modern women's statement, since it is keeping women in a traditional marriage and family, but just insisting that the men be faithful too. Griffith criticizes false religious piety; Mother Bartlett is gentle forgiving female religion, while Father is stern, unbending

Puritan figure; many prissy hypocritical and intolerant women (with hair pulled back tightly) who gossip

and condemn Anna for having a baby out of wedlock. In the end, Father has to accept the error of his intolerance. The film ends with the famous cliffhanger rescue on the ice floes (presented very realistically and frighteningly with no special effects), and then a triple marriage that is celebrated gaily.

The scene viewed in class (of Gish learning that she is not married after all to Sanderson after she discovers that she is pregnant) shows **Lillian Gish's** fabulous acting prowess and Griffith's skill in evoking an emotional performance from his star. Griffith uses lots of **close-ups** of Gish's angelic face and lets the camera roll to record her subtle interpretations of her dramatic situation: she goes from radiant in love and expecting her 'husband's' return, to surprise and confusion when he announces they are not really married, to disbelief when she shows him her ring and says we *must* be married, to hurt when he rejects her, and finally to despair when he rushes from the apartment. Although not the most popular star in Hollywood at that time (L.B. Mayer said she was box office poison), she was known as the most consummate actress, and she had the most prestige among her peers.

Film Clips Designed to Supplement Study of Mary Pickford's Life and Career

What the Daisy Said (1910) is a one-reel film (about 12 minutes) made by D.W. Griffith for Biograph. The story is slight. Two farm sisters (Martha, played by Mary Pickford, and Millie, played by the charming Gertrude Robinson) are feeling romantic and looking for suitors. Mary consults a gypsy who gives her a fortune that promotes his intentions to seduce her. Mary is shocked when she finds the same gypsy courting her sister next to a waterfall. The men folk chase the two-timing gypsy out of town, and the girls – flirtatious as ever – decide to make do with two local boys. The film is interesting for taking a look at Mary Pickford before she became a star – she is pert, pretty and vivacious playing an adolescent role (in her later roles in the 'teens she plays children's roles). The whole film is shot in just a few setups on one rural location. The title cards do not record dialogues but summarize scenes for the viewer – e.g., 'Martha discovers the gypsy's perfidy', 'A cowardly attack', 'The old man unhurt but the gypsy man is warned to leave the neighborhood'.

The Little Princess 1917 3.5 Mary Pickford; scenario by Francis Marion, her closest friend and collaborator at the time. Totally adorable, sentimental classic tale about girl from India (British) sent off to boarding school in London and then orphaned. Good production although we tire of the 20 minute version of 'Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves' set in the middle to illustrate Sarah's story telling prowess. Already fairly sophisticated editing including close-ups to take advantage of MP's adorable face and curls (e.g., when father and daughter take leave of one another), animation to show imagination (the dolls are playing) of MP, etc. Film includes a lot of printed cards that convey dialogue and tell us the moral of the scene much like a Greek chorus. Much ado about friendship between rich girl and poor servant (Zazu Pitts), who is also pretty adorable. The film is sweet-hearted with its insistence that (British) class divisions should not make any difference between the two girls; they become the closest of friends.

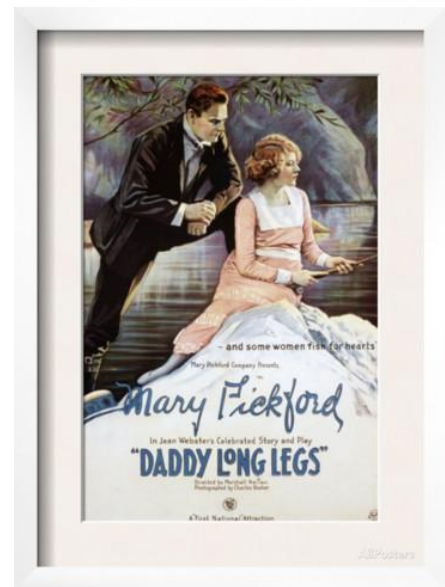


Mary Pickford in public

Pickford is outstanding in her relationship to camera. She is gay, sprightly, and the joyous center of attention; compassionate, understanding, generous; strong-willed, persevering and brave when things turn against her; excellent imagination and story-telling abilities; sensitive to the feelings of others. She is quite small, and in part because of this, is convincing as an approximately 12-year-old despite her 25 years. Some implicit critique of society – headmistress treats her with respect so long as she thinks family is rich, but turns into evil stepmother and banishes her to the scullery and the attic as soon as she learns that the family is broke. Obvious relation to Cinderella with

Sarah slaving and mistreated in the house until she is finally rescued by the kindly man next door (who provides secret Christmas dinner!) and his Indian servant. Coincidence plays a major role in the film, as it is not likely that the best friend of Sarah's father would move next door to the oppressed Sarah. Movie is sentimental and moralistic with advice about kindness, character, fairness between classes, and confidence in your own self (We are *all* princesses!). Great star vehicle written by Frances Marion for her friend Mary Pickford.

Daddy Long-Legs 1919 Marshall Neilan (Artcraft; wr. Frances Marion) 4.0 Mary Pickford, who is 27, plays a 12-year-old girl in an orphanage – she successfully looks her age. Charming, poignant, and amusing meditation on what it is to be an orphan. Mary is smart, gay, lively, bold, impertinent, maternal (she comforts the smaller children), free (moves rapidly through the house wherever she wants), resourceful (cuts the arm off the doll so she can give it to the sick orphan), doesn't mind if she gets in trouble; when older she is sensible and kind. Soulful close-ups of Mary, and the adorable, beautiful children of the orphanage. Extensive titles that tell the audience the (often drippily sentimental) moral, help with the progress of the narrative – sometimes the visuals seem to be just illustrations of the story told in print —, and introduce the characters; they are humorous, sometimes a little poetic; but they also report a fair amount of dialogue. Initial picture of life in boarding school: the headmistress (shades of Miss Minchin) tyrannizes over the children, although the star children make fun of their superiors: she burns Mary's finger on the stove and then kicks her when she is on the ground. Children have to eat prunes, but they dream about good food. The older children take care of the little ones; a large section on Mary acting as a most adoring mother to the small children. Slapstick gag – accidentally drunk children swing on trapeze and knock headmistress' assistant into a well; an apparently drunk dog walking unsteadily on his hind legs, and then the two children walk equally unsteady into the school building and tell the other children in the pantry to eat all the jam they want. Story contrasts Mary who was found in an ashcan with the spoiled rich girl who comes to visit the school – the orphans are good, the rich kid is bad. Mary then grows up (about 18-19 and her hair is now rolled in a bun) and goes to college with the support of a rich man (only a wall shadow of his long legs are shown, hence the title of the film). She is very affectionate, and writes him charming notes about her experiences in the company of the rich girls. A bit of fantasy as the cupid organization – composed of toddlers – decides it is time for her to fall in love, but they pierce two suitor hearts by mistake, and she is pursued by them both, the one apparently a businessman, the other a callow student, but both “have ancestors”. Mary looks very small standing between them – which will she choose? A nice quiet edited sequence when she reflects on love, her novel, and her future. She decides to become a novelist in order to pay back her benefactor, but her first attempt is rejected; when she writes from experience about life in the orphanage, she is accepted. Some pathos when she graduates with honors, but she is sad because she is alone – no family and Daddy Long Legs does not come. When she is presented to the rich bitch girl, Mary very fetching in her rather unsuccessful attempt to smile and be polite. When she receives her marriage proposal, the icy stare of her enemy freezes her and she imagines herself in the orphan garb; again social snobbery paralyzes a good and gifted person – she refuses her blue-blood suitor because she is ashamed to tell him about the orphanage. A marvelous ending: Mary goes to DLL's house; completely adorable close-ups of her face as she speaks to him (he has been sick but is recovering) and then discovers ... Daddy Long-Legs is the fellow she has turned down for marriage! She then is angry (“You brute!”), but (with the camera still shooting the back of DDL's chair) he grabs her arm, pulls her into his lap; at first we see her two feet



kicking in protest, then they are still, and then pumping happily (he is kissing her) – “The End”.
Marvelous collaboration of writer, director, and star.

The Mark of Zorro 1920 Fred Niblo 3.5 Douglas Fairbanks Sr., Noah Berry Sr., Marguerite De La Motte. The original swashbuckler. Set in late colonial California with the whole province subjected to the tyranny of the corrupt governor, Captain Ramon, who also nearly rapes Lolita twice, the comical Sergeant Gonzalez (Noah Berry Sr.), and their men. Zorro is the alter ego of the



effeminate Don Diego, who has a house with lots of secret passageways so he can change his identity when he needs to ride off and rescue the oppressed. Diego walks around slumped, he is always tired, he takes snuff, he plays with wall shadows made with his hands, he performs magic tricks, he doesn't believe in violence, and he makes love weakly, indecisively and limply to his beloved Lolita. When trouble arises, he turns into the hyper-masculine Zorro with the black mask, the black cape, and his handy sword. A very good swordsman, he has no trouble besting his opponents; he leaps around acrobatically and athletically, running circles around the Governor's men, laughing and mocking their feeble attempts to defeat him, and often smoking a cigar or eating a meal between bouts of fighting; interesting that no pistols are fired, not one person loses his life, and at the end the soldiers cheer Zorro and join him, while Gonzalez and Ramon are instructed to leave the country.

Douglas Fairbanks as d'Artagnan Zorro is also a manly lover. While Diego limps around Lolita, Zorro (same person!) pursues her aggressively with manly poetry, hand kissing, and finally a full kiss in final frame after a great deal of spirited play with a windblown handkerchief. The oppressed include all the Indians (most of whom seem painted white actors), the Franciscan friar, the “unprotesting soldier of Christ” who is whipped by the tyrants and then rescued by the good guys, and eventually all the noble families, who turn against the government. Movie rather justifies rebellion against injustice and oppression – motto repeated several times is “justice for all!” Nobles (“caballeros”) and commoners (“peons”) join together behind Zorro to oppose repression, much in the tradition of the American Revolution.

The film is interesting for getting acquainted with Fairbanks screen person and for understanding the man that Mary Pickford married. The film represents an effort by Hollywood producers to appeal more directly to a male audience through the **adventure-romance** genre featuring the good-humored, light-hearted, jaunty, athletic, acrobatic Fairbanks. Fairbanks was subsequently imitated by many action-adventure actors, including Errol Flynn and Jackie Chan.



A young Buddy Rogers

My Best Girl 1927 Sam Wood 3.5 Mary Pickford, Buddy Rogers (whom she will marry after her divorce from Doug Fairbanks). Wonderful print – clear, textured – with great new symphonic score mixed in with a little Chopin. Wonderful romantic comedy with viewer's

attention engaged from beginning to end. Largely because of Mary Pickford's adorable personality – cute, engaging, sincere, innocent yet determined and with honest indignation, etc. Rogers a little too innocent and devoted, but also engaging. The two are very convincing together – even in traffic and in the rain, they seem wrapped up in one another and oblivious of their environment. Pickford performs perhaps her first real love scene with Rogers in a stockroom packing crate. Cinderella story as the two (he rich and she a shop girl) overcome

all obstacles finally to make it to the ship that will take them to Hawaii on their honeymoon. Rich are snobby and aloof, but the men at least are human – father of BR relents and regrets trying to bribe MP (\$10,000) not to marry his son. A lot of quirky, well-defined characters, and nice small gags and quirks (mother attends funerals for kicks and always needs smelling salts, the snobby butlers, etc.). Generally, women are snobbier and more unforgiving than the men. Terrific outside photography, particularly of lovers walking through busy urban streets (LA or SF?) in the pouring rain. Good source for studying Pickford’s late silent career – she is more adult, but she retains and exploits well her innocent, juvenile image; even though she is 35, she succeeds in looking 20. This is probably Pickford’s last good film.

The Little Princess 1939 Walter Lang 3.0 Shirley Temple, Arthur Treacher, Mary Nash, Ian Hunter. Pretty good rendition of Mary Pickford’s movie, manipulated to suit Shirley Temple (her last successful childhood movie). Shot in early Technicolor! Several changes brought in: syrupy romance between supportive female teacher and her sweet, faithful, devoted boyfriend diverts our attention from the main story line; Mrs. Minchin has vaudeville experienced brother, who supports Sarah (against his sister) and dances with her when appropriate thus turning the film into part musical; role of the servant girl friend Becky is much reduced. Father is reported dead fighting against the Boers in South Africa (it’s 1899), but 20c Fox provides happy ending by having him turn up wounded in a London military hospital; he is amnesiac, but snaps back when he finally sees his beloved Sarah in a touching recognition scene in the hospital. Nash very good as Mrs. Minchin, who is cruel beyond necessity and credibility, but audience loves despising her and rooting for adorable Shirley/Sarah. Lots of suspense at end – Sarah escaping from police and Minchin as she runs through London streets; will father recognize her and respond? Well portrayed Queen Victoria appears endearingly at end and plays small role in helping Sarah to find her father. Effective sentimental touches all the way through.



Shirley Temple

Temple is very gifted as performer – song, energetic dance, big smile, always boisterously upbeat, perhaps annoyingly so; her acting skills are a bit more ‘adorable’ than skilled and credible (take a look at her final scene with her father). Film is more an entertaining show featuring a child actor than the more searching comedy dramas of Mary Pickford (she was of course an adult playing children when she made her movies). 1940s audiences who were familiar with Temple movies transferred many of their characteristics to Pickford films without having seen the latter, thus contributing to the collective forgetting of Pickford as an artist. Film is patriotically pro-British in Hollywood’s Anglophile mood as war with Germany looms on the horizon in 1939. Pretty good strictly G rated show!

Adolph Zukor and Paramount Studios: the Rise of the Studio System, 1910-25

Today’s focus is on the **movie moguls**, the “balding little men in dark double-breasted suits” (Sklar, 141) who pose stiffly before the cameras when giving some celebrity a tour of the studio, and their great achievement – the construction of the **studio system**. Perhaps the most successful among them was **Adolph Zukor**. “Zukor was never the first to do anything, but he was invariably the most thorough, resourceful, and successful.” (Sklar, 146)

Before the creation of the studio system, the system of film production, distribution and exhibition in the USA in **about 1910 was decentralized**, perhaps disorganized and chaotic. The three different functions were fulfilled by companies independent of one another. They had to negotiate with one another constantly and to sign multiple contracts. Exhibitors and distributors complained that they didn’t get enough good films to satisfy their customers; producers complained that not enough of the money taken

in by the theaters was making its way back to them. The uncertainties in the system gave rise to a kaleidoscope of business maneuvers and changes and eventually a pressure toward the creation of an integrated (“**studio**”) system.



The Paramount Gate in Hollywood

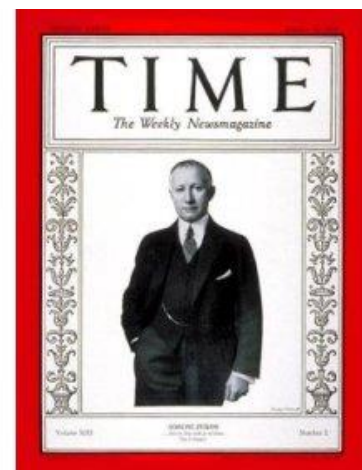
would please middle-class audiences; he was also the proponent of the star principle in marketing his films – most of the early stars of the 1910s worked for Zukor at one point..

He was however distressed that not enough of the profits from movies was making its way back to the producers – the theaters, which collected the money from the patrons, and the distributors were getting the lion’s share of the receipts with little left over for the production companies. Zukor, who was later known as the “**Napoleon of film**,” was uncomfortable working in a system where he was playing second fiddle to anyone.

Meanwhile, another entrepreneur, **W. W. Hodkinson**, organized **Paramount Pictures** as a nationwide distribution company in 1914 (it also financed film production, although it was not involved directly in production), and soon took over the task of distributing all of Zukor’s production: he signed a contract to distribute 52 films per year for Zukor. Hodkinson also generally gets the credit for designing the Paramount logo with the pointed mountain surrounded by a ring of stars. Zukor, however, did not like being a “subcontractor” to anyone; by clever and often ruthless maneuvering and with the help of **New York financing**, he took control of Paramount, adopted its name for his new company, and soon had a production/distribution company. With Paramount, Zukor dominated the film business in the late 1910s with only minor competition from the First National company.

The ultimate problem was control over the exhibitors, since virtually all revenues originate in the movie theaters, and the producers judged that an insufficient cut of the money was making back to the top. At first, Zukor resorted to manipulative business practices to ensure placement of his production – **block-booking** that required exhibitors to take all the product of a producer and not just select parts of it (“if you theater owners want Pickford and Chaplin movies, you will have to take all the movies we produce in a given year, even the duds”; it was of course very difficult for theater owners to turn this deal down); and **exclusive booking** that forced exhibitors to show movies only from the contracting producer (“if you want Pickford and Chaplin films, you will have to exhibit only Paramount films – no competitors!”). Exhibitors didn’t much

Adolph Zukor built the first full-scale studio organization. Although Mary Pickford was close to him, speaking of this “dear little man”, he was known as a driven, ruthless entrepreneur, quite the opposite of the popular Laemmle. After his start in nickelodeons, in the early teens he moved into production with the organization in 1912 of his **Famous Players** production company, in which he vowed to provide American audiences with longer, more elaborately produced films based on theater productions; this was merged with the Lasky Feature Play Company in 1916 to form the **Lasky-Famous Players Corporation**. He was in the forefront of the movement in the industry toward longer feature films that



Adolph Zukor on the cover of ‘Time’, 1929

like these practices, but if they wanted the star vehicles (Pickford, Chaplin), there wasn't much they could do, since Zukor controlled most of them.

When **First National**, a movie theater company trying to counteract Zukor's growing power, moved into distribution about 1920, Zukor realized the threat to his dominance, and he decided to acquire his own **theater chain**. With the help of money from **New York investment bankers** (Kuhn, Loeb & Company), he bought two picture palaces in New York – the Rivoli and the Rialto; he went on to **acquire a theater chain** of about 600 first and second run theaters by about 1921, using ruthless techniques that earned his agents the nicknames of “the wrecking crew” and “the dynamite gang” among independent theater owners across the United States (the company's theater holdings eventually reached almost 2000 screens by the end of the 1920s). Paramount could now advertise its own stars and produce its films with the assurance that they would be screened in major theaters across the country.



Paramount Theater in Oakland California

Now with large-scale production, distribution and exhibition wings, **Paramount Pictures** was the first of the great studios; it was the most complete (large theater chain), the largest, and the one of the most long-lived. Because of its debt and its dependence on outside financing, however, it was to be prone to financial problems especially when the movie business hit hard times in the Depression in the 1930s. Paramount was forced into receivership in 1933. Zukor was ousted as CEO in 1935, but he remained as Chairman of the Board of Paramount until his death in 1976 at the age of 103. His autobiography published in 1953 was entitled “The Public is Never Wrong”.

Note that the age of auto-financing, in which film companies by and large depended on their own savings for investment, was over. The creation of large film companies with huge chains of theaters required more money for expensive real estate than the entrepreneurs could raise on their own. Beginning about 1920, the fate of all the major Hollywood studios was intertwined with **financial institutions**, particularly eastern banks. By the end of the 1920s the film industry was estimated by some to be the fourth largest industry in the nation – a far cry from the “mom and pop” operations of only 20 years before.

What is the Studio System?

The **studio system** that Zukor pioneered in the early 1920s is characterized by:

1) **Vertical integration** of the three parts of the movie industry – **production** (the studio/production unit/movie factory itself that makes the movies), **distribution** – the methods used to distribute multiple copies of the film to exhibitors/movie theaters throughout the country, and **exhibition** -- the theater chains that show the films to the public and take in the receipts;

2) All the members of the production team – producers, directors, actors, editors, cinematographers, cameramen, art directors, technicians, etc. – are under **long-term exclusive contracts**; they are “owned” by the studio – they have to work when management tells them to; they have to work only for their studio (“exclusive”) unless the studio for some reason loans them out (for compensation); if they don't follow



The Paramount Logo

instructions – if for example an actor rejects a movie that he thinks is below his stature – the studio has the right to suspend them, probably without pay. Actors usually had to sign a “**morals clause**”, whereby their contract would be suspended if their bad personal behavior (drug use, wild sexual behavior, scrapes with the law, etc.) became notorious in public opinion.

This system of making movies dominated American cinema until around 1960.

Universal and MGM

The other famous studios were not far behind. After the usual early experience with nickelodeons, “**Uncle Carl**” **Laemmle** founded the Universal Film Company in 1912, fought heroically against the Edison Film Trust, purchased 250 Hollywood acres to open Universal Studios in 1915, and by the early 1920s had added distribution and exhibition to his **Universal Studios**. Laemmle was always the most popular of the studio chiefs. Universal became especially well known after the coming of sound, mainly because of their series of horror movie shockers in the 1930s – ‘Dracula’, ‘Frankenstein’, ‘The Wolf Man’, etc.

MGM, the most famous and one of the most successful of the studios, originated with the exhibition and distribution chain of **Marcus Loew**, a New York distributor and exhibitor who had been in business for a time with Zukor. In the late teens, he began to acquire studios with the help of money from the Duponts (the wealthy chemical firm). At various times in the early 1920s he moved into the movie production business with the purchase of Metro Studios, Goldwyn Studios, and Mayer Studios (thus acquiring that “pompous ass,” Louis B. Mayer) to form **Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer** in 1924. The studio was intended to provide high quality film product for the Loew’s Theater chain concentrated around New York in the northeastern United States.



The MGM Logo

Like many studios beginning in the 1920s, MGM’s corporate office (Loew’s) was in New York; studio chief Louis B. Mayer on the West Coast took care of production, and New York under the direction of **Nicholas Schenck** (he succeeded Lowe when he died in 1927) controlled the finances and saw to distribution and exhibition in its theater chains; New York also checked the bottom line to keep stockholders happy. Between 1924 and 1937 Mayer depended a lot on the “Boy Wonder,” **Irving Thalberg**, for direction of production at MGM. Under him MGM established its reputation as the wealthiest and most profitable studio: its films were glamorous and sophisticated, it had “more

stars than there are in heaven”, and it produced the most polished and elaborately mounted entertainments in Hollywood at the rate of about one feature film per week. The MGM studios were in Culver City, California; the former Goldwyn mascot of Leo the Lion now became the mascot of MGM, and the corporate motto listed under the roaring lion was “Ars gratia artis” (“Art for Art’s Sake”).

Thus, about 1920 was a major turning point in the history of the American film industry. From now on, 1) most film production took place in the **studio system** on the west coast in Los Angeles. And 2) the age of auto-financing, in which film companies by and large depended on their own savings for investment, was over. The fate of the studios was intertwined with **financial institutions**, particularly **New York bank interests**. The parent companies of the studios, where the financing was arranged and production goals set, operated on the **East Coast** out of New York, whereas the actual production of the movies took place on the **West Coast**. The movie industry was now an integral part of American “big business”.

American physical comedy in the Silent Era (1910s and 1920s)

Since dialogue is usually not necessary, physical comedy is well adapted to silent movies. It is probably the **greatest achievement of the American silent screen**.

“Low” (physical) comedy (involving exaggerated physical violence such as running full speed into a wall or being hit over the head with a frying pan, also known as **slapstick**) is an old tradition in American culture; it was picked up in the early history of the movies, and soon became an important genre in American movie culture. The early comedies before about 1920 were mostly one or two reels (up to 20 minutes); the tendency in **the 1920s** was to expand them into more or less full length feature films. The earlier movies emphasized physical, “low” humor (pratfalls, pies in the face, knocking people on the head, etc.). Before 1920 the comedies were directed to the immigrant, working class audience, and they shared their irreverent, **“subversive”** attitude toward authority figures like policemen, waiters in restaurants, and powerful, wealthy people in fancy clothes. After 1920 the comedies became much more “middle class” – comic protagonists were moving up the social ladder, seeking success in business and marriage with respectable girls, and generally respectful of mainstream middle class values.



‘Fatty’ Arbuckle & Mabel Normand

A good early example is **‘The Bangville Police’ 1911**, in which Mabel Normand, spooked by noise in her farm home, calls the “police” to rescue her. The police are bumbling, to say the least – stumbling over one another, waving their clubs wildly, mistakenly firing their pistols into the air, riding in a car whose exhaust explosions leaves craters behind it, but Mabel and her family are happy and safe at the end. Nevertheless, this community would probably be safer without their inept police force.

‘Fatty’ Arbuckle, who was an extremely popular silent comedy star in the late 1910s and early 1920s, typifies many aspects of slapstick comedy before it became more serious with Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. Keaton played in several of Arbuckle’s films before he started to make his own in the 1920s.

American silent comedy reached its maturity with the works of comic authors like **Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd**; moving beyond the low comedy of Mack Sennett, they produced their masterpieces in the **1920s**. It is useful to view an excerpt from two of these comics with an eye to characterizing the genius of the genre and to distinguishing between their comic styles.

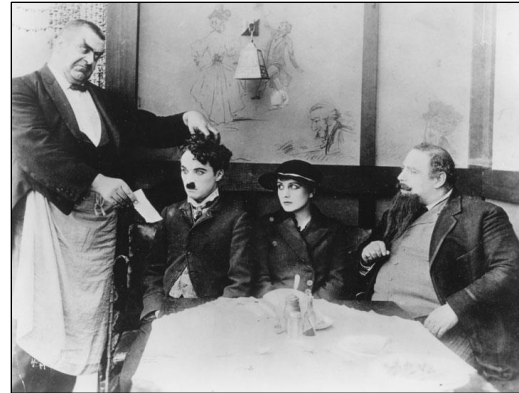
The Immigrant 1917 Directed by Charlie Chaplin
Charlie Chaplin, Edna Purviance as the mostly decorative and passive love interest (she had a romantic relationship with Chaplin at the time), Eric Campbell as the waiter. This is a relatively early short Chaplin film that is perhaps not a fair representation of his fame, since his masterpieces (e.g., ‘The



Charlie Chaplin in ‘The Immigrant’

Gold Rush' 1925 and 'City Lights' 1931) were full length movies produced beginning in the 1920s. Charming 20 minutes about down and out Tramp in realistic environment – with immigrants on an immigrant ship, he arrives in New York where he continues to pursue girl, and they decide suddenly at end to get married.

This is one of Chaplin movies in a strong social milieu. The **life of the poor** is very difficult – on the ship where they suffer from seasickness and discomfort, but especially in the restaurant, where the waiter does not give the Tramp the service and respect he would accord a “respectable” patron. The poor are frustrated when they try to enjoy the good things of life (eating in a restaurant). **Restaurant scene** is a long running routine with Chaplin very cute trying to make do with little money, impress his girlfriend with his pretense of having money, and outwit the fascist-like headwaiter. Lack of money is a big theme – on ship worried about it being stolen, and in the restaurant concerned about the embarrassment and physical danger if you are a little short on the bill (in a hilarious scene it is made clear that the restaurant staff will beat you up). Authority – here represented by the waiting staff in the restaurant instead of by the police – tends to treat the poor violently – **beat you up** if you are ten cents short! The movie is a bit “subversive,” since it (lightly) critiques the money orientation of American society.



The Tramp bullied by the waiter in the Restaurant Scene of 'The Immigrant'

Chaplin is socially awkward: he would like to be respectable, have good manners, but can't manage it: he **eats beans** either one-by-one with his fork or in large amounts with his knife! Chaplin is excellent with **little physical routines**: his bowler hat, cane and waddling walk; his manipulation of playing cards on board ship; his farcical handling of beans, coffee, knife and fork when eating with his girlfriend. The camera rarely moves; it is basically set in front of the scene to record the antics of the Tramp persona; few close-ups. The film has a **sentimental** tone: Charlot so good hearted, such a true, devoted lover, smiles with such eagerness that he tugs at our hearts. Artificial happy ending, where Chaplin suddenly drags his girl into the marriage license office with no preparation for the audience.



Buster Keaton in 'Sherlock Jr.'

Sherlock Jr. 1924 Directed by Buster Keaton Buster Keaton, Kathryn McGuire as his love interest, Joe Keaton. Amazingly **inventive and imaginative** movie, and also touching as we root for the underdog that he will get his girl. First 35% of movie is realist and slower (entertaining shtick on dollar bills in the movie trash!), as BK pursues his girl unsuccessfully and gets blamed for a theft.

While projecting a mystery movie, he falls asleep, begins to dream, and then **walks into movie**, where he is Sherlock Jr., the “world’s smartest detective,” called in to solve the theft of a pearl necklace (reminiscences of Woody Allen’s ‘Purple Rose of Cairo,’ where however the main character walks *out* of the movie and not into it).

The whole style of fantasy sequence is much more fantastic; whereas in first part of movie he is poor, not very competent, and making little progress toward winning the girl, after he steps into the film he is very smart (World’s Smartest Detective), very lucky (staying alive through all the gags) and achieves great things. Great **gag on editing** (bow to D.W. Griffith) at the beginning of the film sequence -- with his persistence on the screen,

and then falling/endangered as the editing of film changes from garden to street, to desert, mountainside, jungle with lions, seashore, etc. (clever on the issue of the film medium's manipulations of reality through editing!).

Then Keaton gives us about 10-15 minutes of **stellar gags and looks at suburban LA in 1924!** The exploding billiard ball, the billiard game where somehow he manages to miss the explosive ball! Walking through the safe to go outside and start the chase. The long chase: handle bars of the driverless motorcycle and his near misses (crossing the tracks just before the train barrels by! crossing the bridge whose gap is filled temporarily by passing moving vans, speeding through the big gap in a hay bailer (?), creating a sailboat out of a convertible top). Most inventive gags are his escape through window suddenly (almost magically) into the **costume of an old lady!** and his disappearance through the middle of his assistant Gillette when he is being pursued by the bad guys. Happy and ingeniously witty ending when he gets the girl and learns how to woo her by watching the movie out of the corner of his eye! (But he is not so sure he wants to have all those kids!)

“Sherlock Jr.’ is **directed with care** and logical succession of ideas – cf. the way he carefully prepares the sequence in which he breaks out of the crooks’ hideout (placing the costume’ and filming the breakout scene without an exterior wall). Keaton’s facial expression is minimalist – the **“Great Stoneface”** stares disconsolately at the camera for a second or so when he discovers that he is the only person on the motorcycle; or in the final sequence in which he imitates the ending of the movie he is projecting, his priceless **eye movements** show his cluelessness, his uncertainty, and even his disagreement with what is happening on screen. The *New York Times* said of him,



Harold Lloyd, the third great American film comic of the 1920s.

"In a film world that exaggerated everything, and in which every emotion was dramatized and elaborated, he remained impassive and solemn, his poker-faced inscrutability suppressing all emotion." He has astounding **acrobatic skill**, evidenced by the stunt where he rides a railroad crossing arm down to land in the back seat of a car. Point of second part of film appears to be a **reflection on the film medium**: you have complete control over “reality” because of editing; things usually turn out better in movies than in reality; you can learn from movies (Keaton learning how to court his girlfriend by watching the characters on screen). If you want to learn how to treat the ladies, go to the movies and watch the stars.

Comparison. The comic styles and personae of the two comics are quite different. Chaplin’s Tramp has a distinctive dress (tight coat, oversized pants and shoes, a derby hat, a bamboo cane and his toothbrush mustache); he has very **distinctive quirks** and mannerisms (his waddling walk often skidding to the side, his active facial expressions, his swinging cane). He is a master at **mime**, and is very good with **small physical routines** like eating peas with a knife or dining on his boots. Keaton’s acting is more restrained with his famous poker face expressions (“**The Great Stoneface**”); just small, subtle changes in his facial expressions can be very expressive, as when he discovers in ‘Sherlock Jr.’ that he is riding alone on the handlebars of the motorcycle and he looks disconsolately at the camera. Chaplin is much more **sentimental**; he continuously pulls on the heartstrings/creates pathos with the Tramp’s cute and soulful looks at his love interest, his acts of kindness for the poor and out of luck. Keaton is more physical and dynamic, often too busy **grappling with machines** to play the sentimental card.

Chaplin tends to anchor his characters in working class life and society and to deliver implicit **criticism of American culture** (violence, greediness, the swaggering domination of the powerful, etc.), whereas Keaton is somehow bourgeois, and his stories are less likely to be even implicitly critical of American culture and society. Neither one is particularly violent. Keaton is more **acrobatic**, and is often wrestling with machines (film projectors in “Sherlock Jr.” 1925, train engines in “The General” 1927, steamboats in “Steamboat Bill, Jr.” 1928, etc.), those wonders of American **technology**.



Charlie Chaplin's famous dinner scene in “Gold Rush”

Chaplin's **direction** is pretty bare bones – the camera's function is to stand there and record the antics of the Tramp – while Keaton has a more careful, artful and inventive use of the camera and of editing. Compared to Chaplin's barebones approach, Keaton takes his camera outdoors and devises artful and **elaborate gag sequences** (often involving machines) that make a big impression. His disguise gag in ‘Sherlock Jr.’ (when he dons the costume of an older woman while jumping out of the window) is a good example of an elaborate gag carefully set up and photographed and edited so that the audience will fully appreciate it. Keaton was voted by *Entertainment Weekly* the seventh best director of all time.

Your instructor obviously prefers Keaton. Your preference will depend on your taste in comedy and movies.

Silent Dramatic Movies and Sex Stars in 1920s Hollywood

Hollywood in the 1920s made movies about **romantic passion** to appeal to the mostly female audience that flocked to the movies. Because the Puritan ideal was still strong in the USA, in these movies viewers were allowed to enjoy vicariously the dangers of infidelity and forbidden romance only for a time, and in the end the characters come to their senses and returned to the duties of the marriage bed. Also the most risqué of the characters in these movies are



Theda Bara was the most popular vamp (femme fatale) of American movies about 1920

Europeans, who have a more weary, worldly wise, and less puritanical idea of the relationships between the sexes; American audiences are thus able to enjoy “the voyeuristic glimpse of hidden pleasures and desires” (Sklar) while maintaining a certain geographical and cultural distance. In addition, the American studios employed large numbers of European stars and moviemakers: Greta Garbo (Sweden), Lora Hansson (Sweden), Ernst Lubitsch (Germany), Friedrich Murnau (Germany), Rudolph Valentino (Italy) come to mind.



Hollywood Director and Actor, Erich Von Stroheim

A further characteristic of these films is their **romantic, fantasy, unrealistic character**. In contrast to films before about 1912 and after the coming of talkies, melodramatic films of the 1920s rarely present socially and psychologically realistic dramas about social problems in the USA, such as poverty, the penal system, the rise of the mafia, the impact of war, or Prohibition. American viewers, the majority of whom were women, preferred romantic fantasies (e.g., ‘The Shiek’)

that often took place in faraway, exotic locations ('The Thief of Bagdad').

The earliest examples of these trends can be seen in the movies made by Cecil B. DeMille and **Erich Von Stroheim** around 1920. In the latter's films in particular a young American married woman vacationing in Europe is subjected to severe sexual temptation by a decadent aristocratic officer played by Stroheim; the woman comes to her senses in the nick of time to save her virtue, and the husband henceforth resolves to pay her more attention.

Stars were more important than ever to audiences in the 20s. Moviegoers flocked to the theaters to see the likes of Greta Garbo, Gloria Swanson, Rudolph Valentino, John Gilbert, and Clara Bow. Meanwhile, the studios devised personas (artificially constructed personalities and lifestyles based on stars' film roles and their private lives) for the consumption of the public.

1) The favorite female heartthrob of the 1920s was **Rudolph Valentino**, an Italian immigrant dancer, who had a brief career in this period as the matinee idol of American women. He was darkly handsome and lithely and solidly built. He "moved gracefully and gazed at his heroines with a mixture of passion and melancholy that sent chills down female spines..." He was "a vicarious fulfillment of dreams of illicit love and inhibited passions." (Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia*). He was not however popular with American males who saw him as too effeminate, a "**painted pansy**" and a "pink powder puff", a guy known for wearing jewelry given him by women. One woman said in an interview that Valentino was "triumphantly seductive. [He] puts the love-making of the average husband or sweetheart into the shadows as tame, flat, and unimpassioned."



Adolphe Menjou was a near star in silent and sound movies

Although men said they wanted to be like Fairbanks and not Valentino, they often copied his style – men with slicked back hair were often referred to as a "Vaselino"; journalists sometimes blamed him for an alleged effeminization of the American male. The bottom line was that men stayed home from his movies or walked out of them if their wives or girlfriends made them go.

When he died unexpectedly in 1926 at the age of 31, huge mobs of unruly female fans turned out at his funeral home in New York and for his funeral in Los Angeles; rumors circulated that he had been poisoned by a discarded mistress. A **Valentino cult** sprang up immediately; it is still active today. Note the change in image from the wholesome, all-male Fairbanks to the **sex symbol Valentino** who appealed exclusively to women.



Nita Naldi mesmerized by Rudy's hypnotic stare

Although certainly not his best film, "**The Sheik**" (1921) was his breakthrough movie.

The Sheik 1921 George Melford 3.0 Rudolph Valentino, Agnes Ayres, Adolphe Menjou! Interesting mainly for looking at screen persona of Valentino. After long introduction to the exotic pleasures of a North African city (Biskra), story begins as kidnap/rape, but the Sheik ends up falling in love with his victim, and once we learn that he is not Arab, but a European, the presumption is that they will live happily ever after!

Valentino is very **handsome** with classic regular features. He is strutting, swaggering with a sexy magnetic look mixing **passion and melancholy** and usually displaying his straight teeth for our

admiration. Some of the poses he strikes are ludicrous for modern audiences, but there can be no doubt that he was a stunningly beautiful man. He is sensitive, has remorse, prays to Allah, and falls in love, sacrificing himself for his beloved; he also looks pitiful as he lies unconscious on his sickbed.

The setting is exotic ('beautiful Biskra' and then the sands of the Sahara), with minarets, big ornate tents and luscious dancing girls. Print is fair with lots of tinted stock (alternating between brown/orange and grey blue), shots through doorways; major cross editing at end as rescuers gallop to save AA from a fate worse than death! AA starts off as liberated woman who declares marriage to be "prison," but ends up falling in love, defending her honor like a cat woman, and then, once assured that her man is white, living happily ever after with one man. Arabs are treated fairly in the film: there are good ones and bad one (Omar the Bandit); religious beliefs and prayers to Allah are handled with respect.

2) **Greta Garbo**, who was brought over from Sweden by Louis B. Mayer, was a much more long-lived movie star. Although at first MGM did not know how to market her, they soon learned to take advantage of her magnetic personality: they settled on the image of the "**mysterious stranger**," a mature and complex woman, the unattainable and ever-changing **slave to eternal love**; her private life was sheltered and also quite mysterious. "On and off the screen, she represented a remote figure of loveliness – **aloof, enigmatic**, craving to be alone." (Katz) MGM billed her as "The Swedish Sphinx". Unlike Valentino, Garbo appealed to both men and women. She successfully made the transition to sound movies despite her husky voice and rather deep Swedish accent ("I want to be alone." 'Grand Hotel' 1933), and then to comedy in 1939 with 'Ninotchka'. Garbo was bisexual, although she preferred women and had liaisons with several famous women of the epoch. She retired in 1941 never to make another movie; she spent the rest of her life shirking publicity and walking through the streets of New York wearing dark glasses.



Garbo in the heat of passion with lover John Gilbert

Ephraim Katz comments: "Of all the stars who have fired the imagination of film audiences, none has quite projected a magnetism and mystique equal to Garbo's. "The divine", "the Dream Princess of Eternity", "the Sarah Bernhardt of films" are only a few of the superlatives writers have used in describing her over the years. Mysterious, unattainable, and ever-changing, she appealed to both male and female audiences. She played heroines who were at once sensual and pure, superficial and profound, suffering and hopeful, work-weary and life-inspiring. On the screen as off, she represented a remote figure of loneliness – aloof, enigmatic, craving to be alone."



Lurid publicity poster for Garbo

'**Flesh and the Devil**' was her first big Hollywood hit in 1927. It was during the making of this film that Garbo began her love affair with co-star John Gilbert. Their relationship was so torrid during the filming of "Flesh and the Devil" that the film crew could not help but notice during the love scenes.

Flesh and the Devil Greta Garbo in her breakout role as sincere, heartfelt *femme fatale*, John Gilbert as her lover, Lars Hanson as Gilbert's childhood bosom buddy who marries Greta instead of Gilbert leading to enormous tension with his friend. Rather long silent romantic **melodrama** about extremely loyal and affectionate childhood friends – Gilbert and Larson – who have the misfortune of falling in love with the same woman.

Takes place in upper class circles sometime between 1900 and 1930 in Bavaria, thus fitting the 1920s romantic cliché of steamy stories situated in Europe to make them more acceptable to American audiences. All the romantic leads are dashing and handsome/beautiful; two of the three – Garbo and Hanson – are Swedes in this ultimate romantic drama of forbidden and tragic passion.

The black and white film is beautifully restored with only a few bad sections; the modern symphonic score (composed for TCM by a young composer) is memorable and effective in the tradition of great 30s and 40s Hollywood film scores. Film is directed in successful commercial fashion with imaginative decors (often with special effects), lingering romantic close-ups, somewhat soft focus shots of the principals, melodramatic scenes (e.g., of duels when the duelists disappear beyond the sides of the frame, smoke billows, and we don't know who was killed until later) and sentimentality throughout.

Most of the **scenes with Garbo** are memorable: her confident and bold looks at Gilbert from the carriage after her arrival at the train station, their tryst in the heavily shadowed garden, where their faces are lit by Gilbert's match (no, she doesn't really want a cigarette) and she takes most of the **initiative** in the passionate kiss. Garbo is young-looking and very beautiful in her wispy way – many close-ups of her looking at us with her smoldering eyes from beneath her wrap-around 20s hat. She is a **slave to love** – there is no way she can give up Gilbert even though her marriage to Larson and her sympathy for him give her every reason to do so; but then she also is racked by guilt at her betrayal of one of the men she loves.

Characterization of deep male friendship between **Gilbert and Larson** is sentimental and rather touching; it is the energy that drives the story to the end – both men suffer from guilt and unhappiness because they are betraying one another with Garbo. Film has a strong **moral foundation** – the pastor who warns Gilbert to give up Garbo, and then thunders at them from the Lutheran pulpit (quoting the Old Testament's condemnation of David) for their immorality. Film ends tragically with the two men meeting for a duel on the **Île de l'Amitié** (Island of Friendship), Garbo falling to her death through the melting ice while rushing to prevent them from fighting, and the men being reprieved by a mysterious impulse they felt simultaneously (apparently the voice of God as previously expressed through the pastor). (An alternative ending that has Garbo saved from drowning at the last minute by the men was never used.) Although film has genuine **tragic** feeling at the end, overall impact is a **romantic vehicle** for the two great MGM stars.



Garbo famously takes the kiss initiative in the garden scene of 'Flesh and the Devil'.

Garbo is still the subject of an active film cult. As one fan put it: "With her incomparable beauty and talent, she has a mesmerizing effect which I have never experienced before in an actor/actress. Whether silent or sound, good or bad script, she remains classically stunning."

Ephraim Katz wrote about her: "Of all the stars who have ever fired the imagination of film audiences, none has quite projected a magnetism and mystique equal to Garbo's. "The divine", "the Dream Princess of Eternity", the "Sarah Bernhardt of films" are only a few of the superlatives writers have used in describing her over the years. Mysterious, unattainable, and ever-changing, she appealed to both male and female audiences. She played heroines that were at once sensual and pure, superficial and profound, suffering and hopeful, world-weary and life-inspiring. On the screen as off, she represented a remote figure of loveliness – aloof, enigmatic, craving to be alone."



**Clara Bow:
20s Flapper Girl**

3) Clara Bow was another popular sex symbol of the 1920s, appealing to both men and women. Coming from a very deprived background, she enjoyed a brief meteoric period of stardom in the mid-1920s before her career crashed on sound movies and on nasty rumors about her personal life and habits. She was a “symbol of the **Flapper Age**, a vibrant, liberated young woman of personal magnetism whose bobbed hair, cupid bow lips, and sparkling eyes came to represent the era.” (Ephraim Katz) She was “the Royal Mounted Police of sex, who always gets her man at the end of every film.” Unlike Valentino and Garbo, she was born and bred in the USA.

She represented the concept of “It” popularized by Elinor Glyn in the 1920s. “**It**” was the “unself-conscious attraction of the modern young woman, that “something extra” that separated her from the ordinary crowd;” animal magnetism. Although it was not supposed to be the same thing as sex appeal, most people thought it was. Bow was a good example of a female star who went after her man aggressively and would not take “no” for an answer. She was called the “It” girl after her movie of that title made a big hit in 1927. “It” is one of the early examples of a **romantic comedy**, a genre that is still very much with us.