

slides they projected, the spoken word capable of imposing a very different meaning on the image from the one that the producer may have intended. Many exhibitors even added sound effects—horses' hooves, revolver shots, and so forth—and spoken dialogue delivered by actors standing behind the screen.

By the end of its first decade of existence, the cinema had established itself as an interesting novelty, one distraction among many in the increasingly frenetic pace of twentieth-century life. Yet the fledgeling medium was still very much dependent upon pre-existing media for its formal conventions and story-telling devices, upon somewhat outmoded individually-driven production methods, and upon pre-existing exhibition venues such as vaudeville and fairs. In its next decade, however, the cinema took major steps toward becoming the mass medium of the twentieth century, complete with its own formal conventions, industry structure, and exhibition venues.

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Transitional Cinema

ROBERTA PEARSON

Between 1907 and 1913 the organization of the film industry in the United States and Europe began to emulate contemporary industrial capitalist enterprises. Specialization increased as production, distribution, and exhibition became separate and distinct areas, although some producers, particularly in the United States, did attempt to establish oligopolistic control over the entire industry. The greater length of films, coupled with the unrelenting demand from exhibitors for a regular infusion of new product, required this standardization of production practices, as well as an increased division of labour and the codification of cinematic conventions. The establishment of permanent exhibition sites aided the rationalization of distribution and exhibition procedures as well as maximizing profits, which put the industry on a more stable footing. In most countries, early cinemas held fairly small audiences, and profits depended upon a rapid turnover, necessitating short programmes and frequent changes of fare. This situation encouraged producers to make short, standardized films to meet the constant demand. This demand was enhanced through the construction of a star system patterned after the theatrical model which guaranteed the steady loyalty of the newly emerging mass audience.

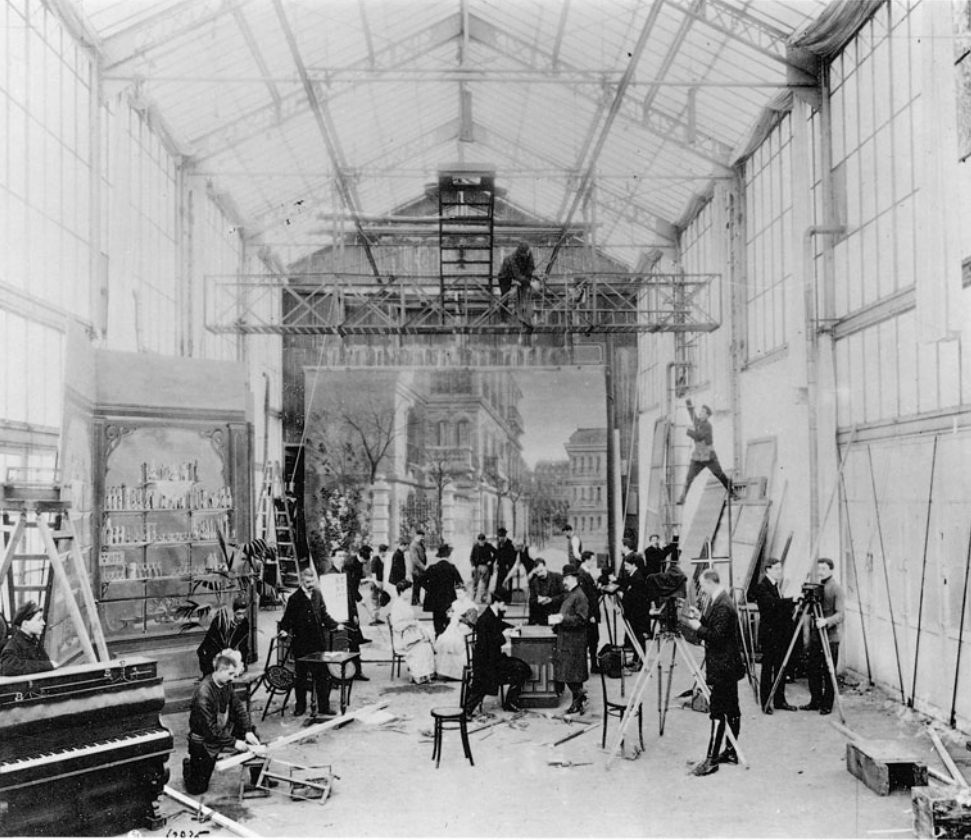
The films of this period, often referred to as the 'cinema of narrative integration', no longer relied upon viewers' extra-textual knowledge but rather employed cinematic conventions to create internally coherent narratives. The

average film reached a standard length of a 1000-foot reel and ran for about fifteen minutes, although the so-called 'feature film', running an hour or more, also made its first appearance during these years. In general, the emergence of the 'cinema of narrative integration' coincided with the cinema's move toward the cultural mainstream and its establishment as the first truly mass medium. Film companies responded to pressures from state and civic organizations with internal censorship schemes and other strategies that gained both films and film industry a degree of social respectability.

INDUSTRY

Before the First World War, European film industries dominated the international market, with France, Italy, and Denmark the strongest exporters. From 60 to 70 per cent of all the films imported into the United States and Europe were French. Pathé, the strongest of the French studios, had been forced into aggressive expansion by the relatively small domestic demand. It established offices in major cities around the world, supplemented them with travelling salesmen who sold films and equipment, and, as a result, dominated the market in countries that could support only one film company.

US producers faced strong competition from European product within their own country for, despite the proliferation of relatively successful motion picture manufacturers during the transitional years, a high percentage



Pathé Frères' glass-topped studio at Vincennes, in 1906

of films screened in the USA still originated in Europe. Pathé opened a US office in 1904, and by 1907 other foreign firms, British and Italian among them, were entering the US market on a regular basis. Many of these distributed their product through the Kleine Optical Company, the major importer of foreign films into the United States during these years and a company that played a prominent role in the transition to the longer feature film. In 1907 French firms, particularly Pathé, controlled the American market, sharing it with other European countries: of the 1,200 films released in the United States that year only about 400 were domestic. The American film industry took note of this, and the trade press, established in this year with *Moving Picture World*, often complained about the inferior quality of the imports, criticizing films that dealt with contemporary topics for their narrative incomprehensibility and, worse yet, un-American morals.

Paradoxically, an earlier move to rationalize film distribution had resulted in a maximization of profits, and as a result US manufacturers initially concentrated on the domestic market. However, during these years they began a campaign of international expansion that resulted in their being well placed to step into the number one position in 1914, when European film industries were reeling from the effects of the outbreak of war. In 1907 Vitagraph became the first of the major US firms to establish overseas distribution offices, and in 1909 other American producers established agencies in London, which remained the European centre for American distribution until 1916. As a result the British industry tended to concentrate

on distribution and exhibition rather than production, conceding American dominance in this area. American films constituted at least half of those shown in Britain with Italian and French imports making up a substantial portion of the rest. Germany, which also lacked a well-established industry of its own, was the second most profitable market for American films. In the pre-war years, however, American firms lacked the strength to compete with the powerful French and Italian industries in their own countries. American films were distributed outside Europe, but often not to the financial benefit of the production studios, who granted their British distributors the rights not only to the British Isles and some Continental countries but to British colonies as well.

During this period American film production took place mainly on the east coast, with an outpost or two in Chicago and some companies making occasional forays to the west coast and even to foreign locations. New York City was the headquarters of three of the most important American companies: Edison had a studio in the Bronx, Vitagraph in Brooklyn, and Biograph in the heart of the Manhattan show-business district on Fourteenth Street. Other companies—Solax and American Pathé among them—had studios across the Hudson in Fort Lee, New Jersey, which also served as a prime location for many of the New York based companies. *The Great Train Robbery* (Edison, 1903) was only one of the many 'Jersey' Westerns shot in the vicinity. So over-used were certain settings that a contemporary anecdote claimed that two companies once shot on either side of a Fort Lee fence, sharing the same gate. Chicago

served as headquarters for the Selig and Essanay studios and for George Kleine's distribution company. Many studios sent companies to California during the winter to take advantage of the superior locations and shooting conditions, and Selig established a permanent studio there as early as 1909. However, Los Angeles did not become the centre of the American industry until the First World War.

Around 1903, the rise of film exchanges led to a crucial change in distribution practices, which in turn created a radical change in modes of exhibition. The rise of permanent venues, the nickelodeons that began to appear in numbers in 1906, made the film industry a much more profitable business, encouraging others to join Edison, Biograph, and Vitagraph as producers. Until this time the companies had sold rather than rented their product to exhibitors. While this worked well for the travelling showmen who changed their audiences from show to show, it acted against the establishment of permanent exhibition sites. Dependent upon attracting repeat customers from the same neighbourhood, permanent sites needed frequent changes of programme, and so long as this involved having to purchase a large number of films it was prohibitively expensive. The film exchanges solved this problem by buying the films from the manufacturers and renting them to exhibitors, making permanent exhibition venues feasible and increasing the medium's popularity. Improvements in projectors also facilitated the rise of permanent venues, since exhibitors no longer had to rely on the production companies to supply operators.

By 1908 the new medium was flourishing as never before, with the nickelodeons—so called because of their initial admission price of 5 cents—springing up on every street corner, and their urban patrons consumed by the 'nickel madness'. But the film industry itself was in disarray. Neighbouring nickelodeons competed to rent the same films, or actually rented the same films and competed for the same audience, while unscrupulous exchanges were likely to supply exhibitors with films that had been in release so long that rain-like scratches obscured the images. The exchanges and exhibitors now threatened to wrest economic control of the industry from the producers. In addition civil authorities and private reform groups, alarmed by the rapid growth of the new medium and its perceived associations with workers and immigrants, began calling for film censorship and regulation of the nickelodeons.

In late 1908, led by the Edison and Biograph companies, the producers attempted to stabilize the industry and protect their own interests by forming the Motion Picture Patents Company, or, as it was popularly known, the Trust. The Trust incorporated the most important American producers and foreign firms distributing in the United States, and was intended to exert oligopolistic control over the

industry. Along with Edison and Biograph, members included Vitagraph, the largest of American producers, Selig, Essanay, Méliès, Pathé and Kleine, the Connecticut-based Kalem, and the Philadelphia-based Lubin. The MPPC derived its powers from pooling patents on film stock, cameras, and projectors, most of these owned by the Edison and Biograph companies. These two had been engaged in lengthy legal disputes since Biograph was founded, but their resolution now enabled them to claim the lion's share of the Trust's profits despite the fact that they were at the time the two least prolific of the American production studios.

The members of the MPPC agreed to a standard price per foot for their films and regularized the release of new films, each studio issuing from one to three reels a week on a pre-established schedule. The MPPC did not attempt to exert its mastery through outright ownership of distribution facilities and exhibition venues, but rather relied upon exchanges' and exhibitors' needs for MPPC films and equipment that could only be obtained by purchasing a licence. The licensed film exchanges had to lease films rather than buy them outright, promising to return them after a certain period. Only licensed exhibitors, supposedly vetted by the MPPC to ensure certain safety and sanitation standards and required to pay weekly royalty on their patented projectors, could rent Trust films from these exchanges. The Trust's arrangements had an immediate impact on the market, freezing out much foreign competition so that by the end of 1909 imports constituted less than half of released films, a percentage which continued to decline. The prejudice against foreign films manifested in the Trust's exclusionary tactics may have encouraged European studios to produce 'classic' subjects, literary adaptations and historical epics for example, which were more acceptable to the American market. Pathé, whose 1908 position as a primary supplier of product to American exchanges made it a prominent member of the MPPC, pioneered this approach through the importation of European high culture in the form of the *film d'art*.

In 1910 the MPPC began business practices that pre-saged those of the Hollywood studios, establishing a separate distribution arm, the General Film Company. This instituted standing orders (an early form of block booking) and zoning requirements that prevented unnecessary competition by prescribing which exhibitors within a certain geographical area could show a film. Higher rental rates for newly released films, versus lower ones for those that had been in circulation, encouraged the differentiation of first-run venues from those showing the older and less expensive product, another hallmark of the coming studio system.

The Motion Picture Patents Company survived as a legal entity until 1915, when it was declared illegal under the

Asta Nielsen

(1881–1972)

After *Joyless Street* (1925), Asta Nielsen was called the greatest tragedienne since Sarah Bernhardt. However, her fame was established fifteen years earlier with her first screen appearance in *The Abyss* (*Afgrunden*, 1910), a film of sexual bondage and passion featuring the erotic ‘gaucho’ dance in which Nielsen, a respectable girl led astray, ties up her lover with a whip on stage as she twists her body around his provocatively. *The Abyss* was an explosive success and Nielsen became, overnight, the first international star of the cinema, celebrated from Moscow to Rio de Janeiro. Her performance brought people to the cinema who had never before taken it seriously as an art form. Her personal appearances drew crowds around the world.

Born in Denmark to a working-class family, Nielsen began acting in the theatre. There she met Urban Gad, who produced and directed *The Abyss* and became her husband. The couple moved to Berlin, where Nielsen



became one of the greatest stars of the German cinema, making nearly seventy-five films in two decades.

Between 1910 and 1915, Nielsen and Gad collaborated on over thirty films, establishing the signature style of her first period. In these early films, Nielsen’s sensuality is matched by her intelligence, resourcefulness, and a boyish physical agility. Her expressive face and body seem immediate and modern, especially when compared with the exaggerated gestures that were common in early cinema. Her powerful, slim figure and large, dark eyes, set off by dramatic, suggestive costumes, allowed her to cross class and even gender lines convincingly. She became, in turn, a society lady, a circus performer, a scrubwoman, an artist’s model, a suffragette, a gypsy, a newspaper reporter, a child (*Engelein*, 1913), a male bandit (*Zapatas Bande*, 1914), and Hamlet (1920). She excelled at embodying individualized, unconventional women whose stories conveyed their entanglement within, and their resistance to, an invisible web of confining class and sex roles. She surpassed all others in her uniquely cinematic, understated manner of expressing inner conflict. Nielsen’s celebrated naturalness was the result of careful study: in her autobiography, she described how she learnt to improve her acting by watching herself magnified on the screen.

Nielsen was a key influence on the shift away from naturalism that characterized German cinema after the First World War. Her techniques for conveying psychological conflict became stylized gestures emphasizing a sense of claustrophobia and limitations. Nielsen’s spontaneity slowed, her contagious smile rarely in evidence except as a bitter-sweet reminder of her past. Close-ups now emphasized the mask-like quality of her face. Her enactments of older women doomed and self-condemning in their passionate attachment to shallow, younger men (*Joyless Street*; *Dirnentragödie*, 1927) only take on their proper resonance when contrasted to Nielsen’s earlier embodiment of young women struggling against social constraints.

JANET BERGSTROM

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

(All films directed by Urban Gad unless otherwise indicated) *Afgrunden* (*The Abyss*) (1910); *Der fremde Vogel* (1911); *Die arme Jenny* (1912); *Das Mädchen ohne Vaterland* (1912); *Die Sünden der Väter* (1913); *Die Suffragette* (1913); *Der Filmprimadonna* (1913); *Engelein* (1914); *Zapatas Bande* (1914); *Vordertreppe und Hintertreppe* (1915); *Weisse Rosen* (1917); *Rausch* (dir. Ernst Lubitsch, 1919; no surviving print); *Hamlet* (dir. Svend Gade, 1921); *Vanina* (dir. Arthur von Gerlach, 1922); *Erdegeist* (dir. Leopold Jessner, 1923); *Die freudlose Gasse* (*Joyless Street*) (dir. G. W. Pabst, 1925); *Dirnentragödie* (dir. Bruno Rahn, 1927)

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Asta Nielsen

provisions of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, but even as early as 1912, several years before its *de jure* decline, the Trust had *de facto* ceased to exert any significant control over the industry. Indeed, its members at this point represented the old guard of the American film industry and many would cease to exist soon after the court's unfavourable ruling. Their place was taken by the companies of the nascent Hollywood moguls, many of whom had initially strengthened their position in the industry through their resistance to the Trust's attempt to impose oligopolistic control.

The MPPC's short-sighted plan to drive non-affiliated distributors and exhibitors out of the business ironically sowed the seeds of its own destruction, for it gave rise to a vigorous group of so-called 'independent' producers who supplied product to the many unlicensed exchanges and nickelodeons. In late 1909, Carl Laemmle, who had entered the business as a distributor, founded the Independent Moving Picture Company, known as IMP, to produce films for his customers, since he could not purchase films from the MPPC. By the end of the year IMP released two reels a week of its own as well as two Italian reels from the Itala and Ambrosio companies, an output that rivalled the most powerful of the Trust companies. Not only did Laemmle spearhead the opposition, but IMP eventually expanded to become Universal, one of the major studios of the Hollywood silent period. By this time several other independent producers had gone into business, some of the more significant being the Centaur Film Manufacturing Company, the Nestor Company, and New York Motion Picture Company, which first employed Thomas Ince. In 1910 Edwin Thanhouser founded the Thanhouser Company, using the stock company from his theatre and specializing in literary and theatrical adaptations. Also in 1910, the same year the MPPC established the General Film Company, the independents formed their own combination to resist the Trust. Their distribution arm, the Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company, mimicked the Trust's practices, regulating release dates and the price per foot, and also instituting standing orders from exchanges to the studios and from the exhibitors to the exchanges.

With this move, the independents ceased to be independent in anything but name, and by 1911 two rival oligopolies controlled the United States film industry. It is wrong to assume, as have some historians, that the Trust met its demise because of its conservative business practices and resistance to new ideas such as the feature film and the star system. It was an MPPC company, Vitagraph, which made many of the first American multi-reel films. Similarly, while Carl Laemmle of IMP has been credited with forcing other producers to emulate the theatrical star system through his promotion of Florence Lawrence in 1910, MPPC companies had previously pub-

licized their use of theatrical stars and showed no reluctance to tout their own home-grown products.

Before 1908, several factors had militated against the development of a cinematic star system. Initially, most moving picture actors were transient, working on the stage as well, and did not remain with any particular company long enough to warrant promotion as a star. This situation changed in 1908 as studios began to establish regular stock companies. Also, until around 1909, film action was usually staged too far away from the camera for audiences to recognize actors' features, a precondition for fan loyalty. At the outset of the nickelodeon period audience loyalty was to the studio trademark rather than the actors, and so most companies, both Trust and independent, resisted a star system until about 1910, fearing it would shift the economic balance of power (as indeed it did to some extent). For this reason, the Biograph Company, which had some of the most popular actors under contract, would not reveal its players' names until 1913. Other members of the MPPC, however, did experiment, as early as 1909, with publicizing their use of theatrical stars; the Edison Company advertising Miss Cecil Spooner in its adaptation of Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*, and Vitagraph inserting a title into its *Oliver Twist* stating that Miss Elita Proctor appeared as 'Nancy Sikes'. By the next year, the mechanics of star publicity were set in motion, as Kalem made lobby cards of its stock company for display in nickelodeons. Other companies followed suit, distributing photographs to fans as well as exhibitors and sending their stars out on personal appearances. The biggest American stars of this period were Florence Lawrence of IMP (formerly of Biograph), Florence Turner and Maurice Costello of Vitagraph, and, of course, Mary Pickford of Biograph. Other countries also gave prominence to leading actors and, more commonly, actresses in this period. The Danish actress Asta Nielsen was a leading light of both the German and Danish cinema, while in Italy divas such as Francesca Bertini and Lyda Borelli starred in films which they also produced.

Like the American industry, the French industry came into its own in 1907-8. Film was no longer considered a poor cousin of photography but rather a major entertainment which threatened the popularity of more traditional forms, such as the theatre. The increased importance of the medium was shown by the remarkable increase in the number of Parisian cinemas, from only ten in 1906 to eighty-seven by the end of 1908, as well as the appearance in that year of the first regular newspaper column devoted to the moving pictures. Pathé remained the most important of the studios, its only serious domestic competition coming from the Gaumont Company, founded by Léon Gaumont in 1895. Although less significant than Pathé in terms of output and international presence, from 1905 to 1915 Gaumont had the largest

studio in the world. The company also had the distinction of employing the first woman director, Alice Guy Blache, who later founded the Solax Company with her husband Herbert Blache. Gaumont's most important director was Louis Feuillade, who specialized in the detective serial, the most popular of which was *Fantômas*, produced between 1913 and 1914, and based on a series of popular novels about a master criminal and his detective nemesis. The box-office success of Feuillade's serials enabled Gaumont to overtake Pathé as the country's most powerful studio, but it achieved this position on the eve of the World War which caused the end of French domination of international markets.

The Italian film industry had a relatively late start, dominated as it was by Lumières in the early years. The Cines Company, founded by the Italian aristocrats Marchese Ernesto Pacelli and Barone Alberto Fassini, built the country's first studio in 1905 and became one of the most important producers of the silent period. Cines set the pace for the industry as a whole by producing the first Italian costume film, *La presa di Roma* (*The Capture of Rome*, 1905), starring the famous theatrical actor Carlo Rosaspina. During its initial years, Cines concentrated mostly on comedies, contemporary melodramas, and actualities, in 1906 producing sixty fiction films and thirty actualities. 1907 saw the real take-off of the Italian industry, with both production and exhibition flourishing. Cines had built its studio in Rome, another important company, Ambrosio, operated from Turin, and several other producers built studios in Milan. In this year there were 500 cinemas in the country with total box-office receipts of 18 million lire.

By 1908, then, the Italian industry was able to compete on the international market with France and the United States, the Italian studios strengthening their position through the production of historical spectaculars. Ambrosio's first version of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (*The Last Days of Pompeii*) began a rage for the costume drama, many of which dealt with Roman history or adapted Italian literary masterpieces: *Giulio Cesare* (1909), *Bruto* (1909), and *Il Conte Ugolino* (1908, from Dante's *Inferno*). The relatively low costs of building the massive sets and hiring the large casts of extras necessary for these spectacle-intensive films enabled the Italians to differentiate their product from that of their foreign rivals and break into the international market without massive expenditure. This strategy succeeded so well that Pathé, concerned about Italian rivalry, established a subsidiary, Film d'Arte Italiano, to produce costume films of its own. It took advantage of location shooting amidst the splendours of Italian Renaissance architecture to produce films like the 1909 *Othello*.

FILM PRODUCTION

In all the major producing countries, film production during this period was marked by an increasing spe-

cialization and division of labour that brought the film industry into line with other capitalist enterprises. In the early period film-making was a collaborative enterprise, but the emergence of the director coincided with the appearance of other specialists, such as script-writers, property men, and wardrobe mistresses, who worked under his direction. Soon, the bigger American studios employed several directors, giving each his own cast and crew and requiring him to turn out one reel a week. This led to the creation of yet another job category, the producer, who oversaw the whole process, co-ordinating between the individual units. In 1906 Vitagraph, the largest of the American studios, had three separate production units headed by the company's founders, James Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith, and their employee James Bernard French. These men operated the cameras and had an assistant responsible for the staging of the action. Vitagraph reorganized its production practices in 1907, putting a director in charge of each unit and making Blackton the central producer. At Biograph, D. W. Griffith was the sole director from June 1908 until December 1909. By the time Griffith left in autumn 1913, six directors were shooting Biograph films under his supervision, while he also continued to direct his own unit.

With the exception of certain films designed to lend the new medium cultural respectability, the American film industry during this period emphasized speed and quantity. The studio front offices for the most part disdained 'artistry', since all films, whether 'artistic' or not, sold for the same standard price per foot. In 1908 the average film was shot in a single day at a cost of \$200–\$500, and averaged one reel, or 1,000 feet, in length. The introduction of artificial lighting in the form of mercury vapour lights in 1903 facilitated interior shooting but the studios still tended to film outdoors as much as possible. Interiors were filmed in what were initially fairly small studios (the Biograph studios were simply a converted New York City brownstone house) on theatrical sets with painted backdrops.

Looking in more detail at the best documented of all the American studios, the Biograph Company, permits us to follow the production of individual films through each step of the process. In 1908 the Biograph Company hired one of their actors, David W. Griffith, as a director, intending that he should simply rehearse the actors. But, as Griffith's cameraman Billy Bitzer reported in his memoirs, the new director soon became responsible for much more.

Before his [Griffith's] arrival, I, as cameraman, was responsible for everything except the immediate hiring and handling of the actor. Soon it was his say whether the lights were bright enough or if the make-up was right. . . . A cameraman had enough to do watching the rapidity of the action and keeping the hand-cranked camera going at a steady pace to prevent the film from buckling.

Until Griffith's institution as director, the Biograph Company had depended upon transient actors, but the new director developed his own stock company, integral to the period's ensemble style of film-making and, incidentally, presaging the Hollywood studios' practice of keeping actors under exclusive contract. While Griffith had the primary responsibility for hiring and casting, by the time he arrived at the studio Biograph had a story department that had been producing scripts, perhaps since 1902. By the nickelodeon period, it was standard practice for staff writers to prepare a script, often without consulting the director, although in the case of Biograph Griffith seems to have worked closely with the story department.

In most studios, although Biograph again may have been an exception, the principal actors received scripts before the shooting occurred in order to prepare themselves for rehearsals, which became increasingly important as stories grew more intricate. Rehearsal time seems to have varied from one studio to another, although by 1911 a trade press writer indicated that on average each scene was rehearsed from five to ten times. When Griffith arrived at Biograph, the front office emphasized the rapid production of films, and discouraged lengthy rehearsals, the directors simply ensuring that the actors remained within camera range. By mid-1909, however, Griffith was already willing to devote half a day or more to rehearsal, and by 1912 he averaged a week's rehearsal for each one-reeler.

At Biograph, little remained to be done by the time of the actual shooting. The cameraman's assistant put down the 'lines', using nails and cord to surround the area that would be in the frame, and there would be a quick, final rehearsal for positioning. When the camera began to crank, the actors were expected to do exactly what had been agreed upon in rehearsals. Griffith did, however, coach from the sidelines, telling actors to tone it down or give more. The tight schedule, with films taking only from one to three days to shoot, prohibited retakes, requiring actors and technicians to get everything right first time. In the days before sound and elaborate special effects, the post-production process was fairly simple; the out-of-order shots were assembled according to the pre-existing script, and intertitles added. Numerous positive prints were then run off by the laboratory and the film was ready for sale to the exchanges.

THE BEGINNING OF NARRATIVE

There was a 'crisis' in transitional cinema around 1907, signalled by complaints in the trade press about lack of narrative clarity, as well as by exhibitors' increased use of lectures in an attempt to make films understandable to their audiences. Films were poised between an emphasis upon visual pleasure, 'the cinema of attractions', and

story-telling, 'the cinema of narrative integration', but conventions for constructing internally coherent narratives had not yet been established. In the transitional years, between 1907-8 and 1917, the formal elements of film-making all became subsidiary to the narrative, as lighting, composition, editing were all increasingly designed to help the audience follow a story. Integral to these stories were psychologically credible characters, created through performance style, editing, and dialogue intertitles, whose motivations and actions seemed realistic and helped to link together a film's disparate shots and scenes. These 'well-rounded', believable characters, resembling those of the then fashionable realist literature and drama, contrast sharply with the earlier period's one-dimensional stock characters drawn from the melodrama and vaudeville comedy skits.

The increased use of editing and the decreased distance between camera and actors most obviously distinguish the films of the transitional period from their predecessors. The tableau or proscenium arch shot, showing the actors' entire bodies as well as the space above and below them, characterized the early cinema. However, towards the beginning of the transitional period the Vitagraph Company began using the so-called '9-foot line', staging the action about 9 feet from the camera, a scale that showed the actors from the ankles up. At around the same time in France, Pathé and companies under its influence, Film d'Art and SCAGL, also adopted the 9-foot line. By 1911 the camera had moved yet closer, producing the three-quarter shot that became the predominant scale of the transitional cinema and indeed of the entire silent period. In addition to moving the camera closer to the actors, film-makers also moved the actors closer to the camera. In chase films the actors had exited the shots in close proximity to the camera, but during the transitional period the practice became standardized, deliberately employed to enhance dramatic effects, as in a shot from *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (Griffith, 1912) in which a gangster slinks along a wall until he is seen in medium close-up.

The decreased distance between action and camera not only enabled identification of the actors and the development of the star system, but also contributed to the increased emphasis upon individualized characters and facial expression. Editing was also developed for this end; both to emphasize moments of psychological intensity and to externalize characters' thoughts and emotions. The three-quarter scale already permitted audiences to see the actors' faces more clearly than before, but film-makers often cut even closer at climactic points. This was designed to encourage fuller viewer involvement in the characters' emotions, and not, as in early films like *The Great Train Robbery*, simply for shock value. For

David Wark Griffith

(1875–1948)

Born in Kentucky on 23 January 1875, the son of Civil War veteran Colonel 'Roaring Jake' Griffith, David Wark Griffith left his native state at the age of 20 and spent the next thirteen years in rather unsuccessful pursuit of a theatrical career, for the most part touring with second-rate stock companies. In 1907, after the failure of the Washington, DC, production of his play *A Fool and a Girl*, Griffith entered the by then flourishing film industry, writing brief scenarios and acting for both the Edison and Biograph companies. In the spring of 1908 the Biograph front office, facing a shortage of directors, offered Griffith the position and launched him, at the age of 33, on the career which most suited him.

Between 1908 and 1913 Griffith personally directed over 400 Biograph films, the first, *The Adventures of Dollie*, released in 1908 and the last, the four-reel biblical epic *Judith of Bethulia*, released in 1914, several months after Griffith and Biograph had parted company. The contrast between the earliest and latest Biograph films is truly astonishing, particularly with regard to the aspects of cinema upon which Griffith seems to have concentrated most attention, editing and performance. In terms of editing, Griffith is perhaps most closely associated with the elaborate deployment of cross-cutting in his famous last-minute rescue scenes, but his films also exerted a major influence upon the codification of other editing devices such as cutting closer to the actors at moments of psychological intensity. With regard to acting, the Biograph films were recognized even at the time as most closely approaching a new, more intimate, more 'cinematic' performance style. Several decades after they were made, the Biograph films continue to fascinate not only because of their increasing formal sophistication, but also because of their explorations of the most pressing social issues of their time: changing gender roles; increasing urbanization; racism; and so forth.

Increasingly chafing under the conservative policies of Biograph's front office, particularly the resistance to the feature film, Griffith left Biograph in late 1913 to form his own production company. First experimenting with several multi-reelers, in July 1914 Griffith began shooting the film that would have assured him his place in film history had he directed nothing else. Released in January 1915, the twelve-reel *The Birth of a Nation*, the longest American feature film to date, hastened the American film industry's transition to the feature film, as well as showing cinema's potential for great social impact. *The Birth* also had a profound impact upon its director, for in many ways Griffith spent the rest of his career trying to surpass, defend, or atone for this film.

His next feature, *Intolerance*, released in 1916, was a direct response to the criticism and censorship of *The Birth of a Nation*, as well as an attempt to exceed the film's spectacular dimensions. *Intolerance* rather unsuccessfully

weaves together four different stories all purporting to deal with intolerance across the ages. The two most prominent sections are 'The Mother and the Law', in which Mae Marsh plays a young woman attempting to deal with the vicissitudes of modern urban existence, and 'The Fall of Babylon', dealing with the Persian invasion of Mesopotamia in the sixth century and featuring massive, elaborate sets and battle scenes with hundreds of extras. In an editing *tour de force*, the film's famous ending weaves together last-minute rescue sequences in all four stories. The third of the important Griffith features, *Broken Blossoms*, is by contrast a relatively small-scale effort focused on three protagonists, an abused teenager, played by Lillian Gish in one of her most impressive performances, her brutal stepfather, Donald Crisp, and the gentle and sympathetic Chinese who befriends her, this role, as enacted by Richard Barthelmess, clearly intended to prove that Mr Griffith was no racist after all.

After the release of *Broken Blossoms* in 1919, Griffith's career began a downward trajectory, both artistically and financially, which he never managed to reverse.

D. W. Griffith on set, with cameraman Billy Bitzer and Dorothy Gish



Plagued to the end of his life by the financial difficulties attendant upon an unsuccessful attempt to establish himself as an independent producer-director outside Hollywood, perhaps more importantly Griffith never seemed able to adjust to the changing sensibilities of post-war America, his Victorian sentimentalities rendering him out of sync with the increasingly sophisticated audiences of the Jazz Age. Indeed, the two most important Griffith features of the 1920s, *Way Down East* (1920) and *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), were cinematic adaptations of hoary old theatrical melodramas. While these films have their moments, particularly in the performances of their star Lillian Gish, they none the less look determinedly back to cinema's origins in the nineteenth century rather than demonstrate its potential as the major medium of the twentieth century. Making a series of increasingly less impressive features throughout the rest of the decade, Griffith did survive in the industry long enough to direct two sound films, *Abraham Lincoln* (1930) and *The Struggle* (1931). The latter, a critical and financial failure, doomed Griffith to a marginal existence in a Hollywood where you are only as good as your last picture. He died in 1948, serving occasionally as script-doctor or consultant, but never directing another film.

ROBERTA PEARSON

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

Shorts

The Song of the Shirt (1908); A Corner in Wheat (1909); A Drunkard's Reformation (1909); The Lonely Villa (1909); In Old Kentucky (1910); The Lonedale Operator (1911); Musketeers of Pig Alley (1912); The Painted Lady (1912); The New York Hat (1912); The Mothering Heart (1913); The Battle of Elderbush Gulch (1914)

Features

Judith of Bethulia (1914); The Birth of a Nation (1915); Intolerance (1916); Broken Blossoms (1919); Way Down East (1920); Orphans of the Storm (1921); Abraham Lincoln (1930)

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example, in *The Lonedale Operator* (Griffith, Biograph, 1911) burglars menace a telegraph operator (Blanche Sweet) and attempt to break into her office. As Sweet desperately telegraphs for help, the film cuts from a three-quarter to a medium shot, allowing a closer view of her fearful expression.

Editing was also used more directly to convey characters' subjectivities. In the earlier period, film-makers had adopted the theatrical 'vision scene', using double exposure to put the character and a literal embodiment of externalized thoughts in the same frame. *Life of an American Fireman* (Edison, 1902), for example, uses this device to show a fireman thinking of an imperilled family, who appear in a balloon slightly above him and to his right. This convention continued in the transitional period, as in *The Life Drama of Napoleon Bonaparte and the Empress Josephine of France* (Vitagraph, 1909), in which the divorced and distraught Empress reaches out to a superimposed vision of her erstwhile husband. But the film's companion reel, *Napoleon, the Man of Destiny*, approaches the conventional flashback structure of the Hollywood cinema, in which a 'present-day' shot of the character authorizes the film's presentation of the 'past'. Napoleon returns to Malmaison shortly before his exile to Elba and, as he 'thinks' of his past, the film cuts from him to reenactments of battles and other events in his life.

The transitional period also saw the emergence of the editing pattern that is most closely associated with character subjectivity: the point-of-view shot, in which a film cuts from a character to what the character sees and then back to the character. This pattern did not become fully conventionalized until the Hollywood period, but film-makers during the transitional period experimented with various means of 'showing' what characters saw. In an early example, *Francesca da Rimini* (Vitagraph, 1907), there is a cut from a tableau-scale shot of a character looking at a locket to an insert close-up of the locket. In *The Lonedale Operator*, *Enoch Arden* (1911), and other films, Griffith cuts between characters looking through a window to what they see, although the eyeline match seems 'imperfect' by today's standards.

This last kind of editing, of course, not only externalized characters' thoughts but helped establish the spatial and temporal relations crucial to narrative coherence, both in the same scene (roughly, actions occurring at the same place and time) and between scenes taking place at the same time in different locations. In the earlier period film-makers occasionally broke down the space of a shot, selecting details for closer examination, as in *Grandma's Reading Glasses*. While not as prevalent as it was later to become, this analytical editing was sometimes used in the transitional period to highlight narratively important details rather than, as in the earlier period, simply to provide visual pleasure. In *The Lonedale Operator*, for

example, when the burglars eventually break into the telegraph operator's office, she holds them at bay with what appears to be a revolver but a cut-in reveals to be a wrench. While analytical editing was comparatively rare, conventions for linking the different spaces of one scene together, to orientate the viewer spatially, became established practice. In fact, part of the suspense in *The Lonedale Operator* depends upon the viewer having a clear idea of the film's spatial relations. When the telegraph operator first arrives at work, she walks from the railway office's porch into an outer room and then into an inner room. Following the principle of directional continuity, the actress exits each shot at screen right and re-enters at screen left. When the burglars break through the outermost door, the viewer knows exactly how much further they must go to reach the terrified woman. Here, character movement links the shots, but various other conventions, many relating to the relative position of the camera in successive set-ups, also arose for establishing spatial relations.

The Lonedale Operator also provides an example of an editing pattern primarily associated with the name of its director, D. W. Griffith. He became famous for the cross-cutting, parallel action, or parallel editing through which he constructed his spine-tingling last-minute rescues. Several pre-Griffith films, however, show that, while the Biograph director may have conventionalized parallel editing, he did not invent it. Two 1907 Vitagraph films, *The Mill Girl* and *The Hundred-to-One-Shot*, cross-cut between different locations, the latter even featuring a somewhat attenuated last-minute rescue. Several Pathé films from 1907-8 also contain fairly brief parallel editing sequences, the plot and editing of one, *A Narrow Escape* (1908), prefiguring Griffith's *The Lonely Villa* (1909). But from his earliest films, Griffith experimented with cutting between pursued, pursuer, and potential rescuer, and he and other American directors soon developed parallel editing beyond the fairly elementary form seen in French films. The climax of *The Lonedale Operator*, for example, cuts from the menaced heroine, to the menacing burglars breaking down doors, to the hero in the cab of a speeding locomotive, to an exterior tracking shot of the onrushing train.

When Griffith first began directing at Biograph in 1908 his films averaged about seventeen shots, increasing five-fold to an average of eighty-eight by 1913. The later Griffith Biographs probably feature more shots per film than those produced by other American studios, such as Vitagraph, during the same years, but American film-makers as a general rule tended to rely more heavily on editing than did their European counterparts, who were concerned more with the *mise-en-scène* and the possibilities of staging in depth. American films tended to stage the action on a shallow plane, with actors entering and exiting from the

sides. Particularly toward the beginning of the transitional period, they even used painted flats, making no attempt to disguise their theatricality. By contrast, European films, particularly the French and Italian, began to create a sense of deep space not possible in the theatre. Lowering the camera to waist level from its previous eye level facilitated shooting in depth; the reduction of the empty space above the actors' heads produced both a larger, closer view of the characters and much more contrast between characters closer to and further from the camera, permitting the staging of action in the foreground, midground, and background. Convincing three-dimensional sets for interior scenes, often with doors that gave glimpses of an even deeper space behind the set, added to the illusion of depth. The use of doorways and contrasting light and shadows often enhanced the feeling of deep space in exterior shots, as seen in *Romeo and Juliet* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1909). In one shot, Romeo returns to Verona and walks through the dark shadow under an arch into the well-lit deep space behind. The next shot, Juliet's funeral procession, is a graphic match cut to the shadowy arched doorway of a vast church out of which pours a huge cast. The film holds the shot long enough for the many gorgeously costumed extras to wind past the camera, the lengthy procession drawing the eye back to the church door.

The American cinema's emphasis on editing rather than *mise-en-scène* was coupled with the development of a new 'cinematic' performance style that contributed to the creation of credible, individualized characters. Film acting began increasingly to resemble that of the 'realist' drama and to reject the codified conventions of an older performance style, associated primarily with the melodrama. The earlier or 'histrionic' style was predicated upon the assumption that acting bore no relation to 'real' or everyday life. Actors expressed themselves through a pre-established lexicon of gestures and poses, all corresponding to pre-specified emotions or states of mind. Movements were broad, distinct, and forcefully performed. By contrast, the newer or 'verisimilar' style assumed that actors should mimic everyday behaviour. Actors abandoned the standard and conventionalized poses of the 'histrionic' style and externalized characters' thoughts and emotions through facial expression, small individuated movements, and the use of props. Two Griffith Biographs made three years apart, *A Drunkard's Reformation* (1909) and *Brutality* (1912), illustrate the differences between the histrionic and verisimilar styles. In both films a wife despairs over her husband's affection for the bottle. In the earlier film, the wife (Florence Lawrence) collapses into her chair and rests her head on her arms, extended straight out in front of her on the table. Then she sinks to her knees and prays, her arms fully extended upward at about 45 degrees. In the later film the wife (Mae Marsh)

TRANSITIONAL CINEMA

sits down at the dining-room table, bows her head, and begins to collect the dirty dishes. She looks up, compresses her lips, pauses, then begins to gather the dishes again. Once more she pauses, raises her hand to her mouth, glances down to her side, and slumps a little in her chair. Slumping a little more, she begins to cry.

The changing use of intertitles during the transitional period also related directly to the construction of credible, individualized characters. Initially, intertitles had been expository, often preceding a scene and providing fairly lengthy descriptions of the upcoming action. Gradually, shorter expository titles dispersed throughout the scene replaced these lengthy titles. More importantly, dialogue titles began to appear from 1910. Film-makers experimented with the placement of these titles, first inserting them before the shot in which the words were uttered, but by about 1913 cutting in the title just as the character spoke. This had the effect of forging a stronger connection between words and actor, serving further to individuate the characters.

If the formal elements of American film developed in this period, its subject-matter also underwent some changes. The studios continued to produce actualities, travelogues, and other non-fiction films, but the story film's popularity continued to increase until it constituted the major portion of the studios' output. In 1907 comedies comprised 70 per cent of fiction films, perhaps because the comic chase provided such an easy means for linking shots together. But the development of other means of establishing spatio-temporal continuity facilitated the proliferation of different genres.

Exhibitors made a conscious effort to attract a wide audience by programming a mix of subjects; comedies, Westerns, melodramas, actualities, and so forth. The studios planned their output to meet this demand for diversity. For example, in 1911 Vitagraph released a military film, a drama, a Western, a comedy, and a special feature, often a costume film, each week. Nickelodeon audiences apparently loved Westerns (as did European viewers), to such an extent that trade press writers began to complain of the plethora of Westerns and predict the genre's imminent decline. Civil War films also proved popular, particularly during the war's fiftieth anniversary, which fell in this period. By 1911 comedies no longer constituted the majority of fiction films, but still maintained a significant presence. Responding to a prejudice against 'vulgar' slapstick, studios began to turn out the first situation comedies, featuring a continuing cast of characters in domestic settings; Biograph's Mr and Mrs Jones series, Vitagraph's John Bunny series, and Pathé's Max Linder series. In 1912 Mack Sennett revived the slapstick comedy when he devoted his Keystone Studios to the genre. Not numerous, but none the less significant, were the 'quality' films: literary adaptations, biblical epics, and

historical costume dramas. Contemporary dramas (and melodramas), featuring a wide variety of characters and settings, formed an important component of studio output, not only in terms of sheer numbers but in terms of their deployment of the formal elements discussed above.

These contemporary dramas display a more consistent construction of internally coherent narratives and credible individualized characters through editing, acting, and intertitles than do any of the other genres. In these films, producers often emulated the narrative forms and characters of respectable contemporary entertainments, such as the 'realist' drama (the proverbial 'well-made' play) and 'realist' literature, rather than, as in the earlier period, drawing upon vaudeville and magic lanterns. This emulation resulted partially from the film industry's desire to attract a broader audience while placating the cinema's critics, thus entering the mainstream of American middle-class culture as a respectable mass medium. Integral to this strategy were the quality films, which brought 'high' culture to nickelodeon audiences just at the moment when the proliferation of permanent exhibition venues and the 'nickel madness' caused cultural

Warner's first cinema, 'The Cascade', in New Castle, Pennsylvania, 1903



Cecil B. DeMille

(1881–1959)

Cecil B. DeMille was born in Ashfield, Massachusetts, the son of a playwright and a former actress. He tried his hand at both his parents' professions, without much success, until two tyro producers, Jesse L. Lasky and Sam Goldfish (later Goldwyn), invited him to direct a film. This was *The Squaw Man* (1914), the first American feature-length movie and one of the first films to be made in the small rural township of Hollywood. A thunderously old-fashioned melodrama, it was a huge hit. By the end of 1914 DeMille, with five more pictures under his belt and hailed as one of the foremost young directors, was supervising four separate units shooting on the Lasky lot, later to become Paramount Studios.

DeMille's prodigious energy was matched, at this stage of his career, by an enthusiasm for innovation. Though relying for his plots mainly on well-worn stage dramas by the likes of Belasco or Booth Tarkington, he actively experimented with lighting, cutting, and framing to extend narrative technique. *The Cheat* (1915), much admired in France (notably by Marcel L'Herbier and Abel Gance), featured probably the first use of psychological editing: cutting not between two simultaneous events but to show the drift of a character's thoughts. 'So sensitive was DeMille's handling', observes Kevin Brownlow, 'that a potentially foolish melodrama became a serious, bizarre and disturbing fable.'

The Whispering Chorus (1918) was even more avant-garde, its sombre, obsessive story and shadowy lighting anticipating elements of film noir. But it was poorly received, as was DeMille's first attempt at a grand historical spectacular, the Joan of Arc epic *Joan the Woman* (1917). Aiming to recapture box-office popularity, DeMille changed course—for the worse, some would say. 'As he lowered his sights to meet the lowest common denominator,' Brownlow maintains, 'so the standard of his films plummeted.' With *Old Wives for New* (1918) he embarked on a series of 'modern' sex comedies in which alluring scenes of glamour and fast living—including, wherever possible, a coyly titillating bath episode—were offset by a last-reel reaffirmation of traditional morality. Box-office receipts soared, but DeMille's critical reputation took a dive from which it never recovered.

This increasingly didactic pose—preaching virtue, while giving audiences a good long look at the wickedness of vice—found its logical outcome in DeMille's first biblical epic, the \$1m *The Ten Commandments* (1923). Despite misgivings at Paramount, now run by the unsympathetic Adolph Zukor, the film was a huge success. Two years later DeMille quit Paramount and set up his own company, Cinema Corporation of America, to make an equally ambitious life of Christ, *King of Kings* (1927). This was an even bigger hit, but CCA's other films flopped and the company folded. After a brief, unhappy stay at

MGM DeMille swallowed his dislike of Zukor and re-joined Paramount, at a fraction of his former salary.

To consolidate his position, DeMille shrewdly merged his two most successful formulas to date, the religious epic and the sex comedy, in *The Sign of the Cross* (1932): opulent debauchery on a lavish scale (with Claudette Colbert's Poppaea in the lushest bath scene yet) and a devout message to tie it all up. Critics sneered, but the public flocked. When they stayed away from his next two films, both smaller-scale, modern dramas, DeMille drew the moral: grandiose and historical was what paid off. From

Cecil B. DeMille on set, c.1928



then on, in Charles Higham's view (1973), he abandoned 'the artistic aspirations which had driven him as a young man. He would simply set out to be a supremely successful film-maker.'

Cleopatra (1934) dispensed with religion, but made up for it with plenty of sex and some powerfully staged battle scenes. With *The Plainsman* (1937) DeMille inaugurated a cycle of early Americana, leavening his evangelical message with the theme of Manifest Destiny. The brassbound morality and galumphing narrative drive of films like *Union Pacific* (1942) or *Unconquered* (1947) were calculated, Sumiko Higashi suggests, 'to reaffirm audience belief in the nation's future, especially its destiny as a great commercial power'.

The one-time innovator had now become defiantly old-fashioned. His last biblical epics, *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and the remake of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) are lit and staged as a series of pictorial tableaux with the director himself, where needed, providing the voice of God. DeMille had always been known as an autocratic director; in his later films the hierarchical principle informs the whole film-making process, casting the audience in a subservient, childlike role. Yet audiences did not stay away. For all his limitations, DeMille retained to the end the simple, compulsive appeal of the born storyteller.

PHILIP KEMP

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

The Squaw Man (1914); The Virginian (1914); Joan the Woman (1917); The Whispering Chorus (1918); Old Wives for New (1918); The Affairs of Anatol (1921); The Ten Commandments (1923); King of Kings (1927); The Sign of the Cross (1932); Cleopatra (1934); The Plainsman (1937); Union Pacific (1939); Unconquered (1947); Samson and Delilah (1949); The Greatest Show on Earth (1952); The Ten Commandments (1956).

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arbiters to fear the potential deleterious effects of the new medium.

Although the peak period of quality film production coincided roughly with the first years of the nickelodeon (1908–9), film-makers had already produced 'high-culture' subjects such as *Parsifal* (Edison, 1904) and *L'Épopée napoléonienne* (Pathé, 1903–4). In 1908 the French *films d'art* provided a model that would be followed by both European and American film producers as they sought to attain cultural legitimacy. The Société Film d'Art was founded by the financial firm Frères Lafitte for the specific purpose of luring the middle classes to the cinema with prestige productions; adaptations of stage plays or original material written for the screen by established authors (often members of the Académie Française), starring well-known theatrical actors (often members of the Comédie-Française). The first and most famous of the *films d'art*, *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (*The Assassination of the Duke of Guise*), derived from a script written by Académie member Henri Lavedan. Although based on a historical incident from the reign of Henry II, the original script constructed an internally coherent narrative intended to be understood without previous extra-textual knowledge. Reviewed in the *New York Daily Tribune* upon its Paris première, the film made a major impact in the United States. Further articles on the *film d'art* movement appeared in the mainstream press, while the film trade press asserted that the *films d'art* should serve to inspire American producers to new heights. The exceptional coverage accorded *film d'art* may have served as an incentive for American film-makers to emulate this strategy at a time when the industry badly needed to assert its cultural bona fides.

The Motion Picture Patents Company encouraged the production of quality films, and one of its members, Vitagraph, was particularly active in the production of literary, historical, and biblical topics. Included in its list of output between 1908 and 1913 were: *A Comedy of Errors*, *The Reprieve: An Episode in the Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1908); *Judgment of Solomon*, *Oliver Twist*, *Richelieu; or, The Conspiracy*, *The Life of Moses* (five reels) (1909); *Twelfth Night*, *The Martyrdom of Thomas à Becket* (1910); *A Tale of Two Cities* (three reels), *Vanity Fair* (1911); *Cardinal Wolsey* (1912); and *The Pickwick Papers* (1913). Biograph, on the other hand, concentrated its efforts on bringing formal practices in line with those of the middle-class stage and novel, and its relatively few quality films tended to be literary adaptations, such as *After Many Years* (1908) (based on Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1908). The Edison Company, while not as prolific as Vitagraph, did turn out its share of quality films, including *Nero and the Burning of Rome* (1909) and *Les Misérables* (two reels, 1910), while Thanhouser led the independents in their bid for respectability with titles such as *Jane Eyre* (1910) and *Romeo and Juliet* (two reels, 1911).

EXHIBITION AND AUDIENCES

During the early years of film production, the dominance of the non-fiction film, and its exhibition in 'respectable' venues—vaudeville and opera-houses, churches and lecture halls—kept the new medium from posing a threat to the cultural status quo. But the advent of the story film and the associated rise of the nickelodeons changed this situation, and resulted in a sustained assault against the film industry by state officials and private reform groups. The industry's critics asserted that the dark, dirty, and unsafe nickelodeons showed unsuitable fare, were often located in tenement districts, and were patronized by the most unstable elements of American society who were all too vulnerable to the physical and moral hazards posed by the picture shows. There were demands that state authorities censor films and regulate exhibition sites. The industry responded with several strategies designed to placate its critics: the emulation of respectable literature and drama; the production of literary, historical, and biblical films; self-censorship and co-operation with government officials in making exhibition sites safe and sanitary.

Permanent exhibition sites were established in the United States as early as 1905, and by 1907 there were an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 nickelodeons; by 1909, 8,000, and by 1910, 10,000. By the start of 1909, cinema attendance was estimated at 45 million per week. New York rivalled Chicago for the greatest concentration of nickelodeons, estimates ranging from 500 to 800. New York City's converted store-front venues, with their inadequate seating,

Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree playing the title role in the first US version of *Macbeth* (John Emerson, 1916). This was one in a series of quality dramas, often adaptations of Shakespeare, that Beerbohm-Tree starred in following the success of the 1910 British film *Henry VIII*



insufficient ventilation, dim lighting, and poorly marked, often obstructed exits, posed serious hazards for their patrons, as confirmed by numerous police and fire department memos from the period. Regular newspaper reports of fires, panics, and collapsing balconies undoubtedly contributed to popular perceptions of the nickelodeons as deathtraps. Catastrophic accidents aside, the physical conditions were linked to ill effects which threatened the community in more insidious ways. In 1908 a civic reform group reported: 'Often the sanitary conditions of the show-rooms are bad; bad air, floors uncleaned, no provision of spittoons, and the people crowded closely together, all make contagion likely.'

There is no accurate information on the make-up of cinema audiences at this time, but impressionistic reports seem to agree that, in urban areas at least, they were predominantly working class, many were immigrants, and sometimes a majority were women and children. While the film industry asserted that it provided an inexpensive distraction to those who had neither the time nor the money for other entertainments, reformers feared that 'immoral' films—dealing with crimes, adultery, suicide, and other unacceptable topics—would unduly influence these most susceptible of viewers and, worse yet, that the promiscuous mingling of races, ethnicities, genders, and ages would give rise to sexual transgressions.

State officials and private reform groups devised a variety of strategies for containing the threat posed by the rapidly growing new medium. The regulation of film content seemed a fairly simple solution and in many localities reformers called for official municipal censorship. As early as 1907, Chicago established a board of police censors that reviewed all films shown within its jurisdiction and often demanded the excision of 'offensive' material. San Francisco's censors enforced a code so strict that it barred 'all films where one person was seen to strike another'. Some states, Pennsylvania being the first in 1911, instituted state censorship boards.

State and local authorities also devised various ways of regulating the exhibition sites. Laws prohibiting certain activities on the Christian Sabbath were invoked to shut the nickelodeons on Sundays, often the wage-earners' sole day off and hence the best day at the box-office. Authorities also struck at box-office profits through state and local statutes forbidding the admission of unaccompanied children, depriving exhibitors of a major source of income. Zoning laws were used to prohibit the operation of nickelodeons within close proximity to schools or churches. In counter-attacking, the industry attempted to form alliances with influential state officials, educators, and clergymen by offering evidence (or at least making assertions) that the new medium provided information and clean, amusing entertainment for those otherwise bereft of either education or diversion. The more powerful



Vitagraph's *The Life of Moses* (1909), one of the first 'feature' films.

members of the industry, such as the Motion Picture Patents Company, often encouraged the incorporation of health and safety requirements into local ordinances dictating the construction of new exhibition venues and the upgrading of old ones. The New York City ordinance of 1913, specifying in detail such matters as the number of seats, aisle width, and air flow, represented the culmination of efforts to make exhibition venues more salubrious, that is, bearing a stronger resemblance to legitimate theatrical houses. In fact, in that year and in that city, the first 'movie palaces' appeared. These large and well-appointed theatres contrasted strongly with the nickelodeons. With seats for up to 2,000 patrons, architecture mimicking Egyptian temples or Chinese pagodas, large orchestras, and uniformed ushers, these theatres provided environments nearly as fantastic as those projected on to their screens.

It was not only in the United States that film houses faced criticism and opposition in this period. Permanent exhibition sites appeared in Germany in 1910, a few years later than in the United States, but the rapid growth and increasing popularity of the new medium attracted the attention of state officials and private reform groups concerned about film's possible malign influence upon susceptible audiences and the nation's culture. The Berlin Police Commission instituted an official pre-censorship plan in 1906, a year earlier than their Chicago counter-

parts. As in the United States, children were perceived as particularly vulnerable and in need of protection. Teachers and clergymen produced several studies testifying to cinema's deleterious effect upon the young while teachers' associations and other groups for popular and continuing education denigrated the use of the cinema for amusement and urged increased production of scientific films for teaching purposes. In 1907 reformers joined together in the cinema reform movement (*Kino-reformbewegung*) and touted the new medium's potential both for child and adult education. Supported in their efforts by the trade press, who saw co-operation as a way to avoid more official censorship, the cinema reformers were successful in persuading the German industry to produce educational films, or *Kulturfilme*, that dealt with natural sciences, geography, folklore, agriculture, industry, technology and crafts, medicine and hygiene, sports, history, religion, and military affairs.

In 1912, literary intellectuals became interested in the by then predominant fiction film, urging adherence to aesthetic standards to elevate the story film to art rather than 'mere' amusement. The industry responded with the *Autorenfilm*, or author film, the German version of the *film d'art*. The first *Autorenfilm*, *Der Andere* (*The Other One*), was adapted from a play by Paul Lindau about a case of split personality and starred the country's most famous actor, Albert Bassermann. The prestigious theatre director Max

Reinhardt followed with filmed versions of two popular plays, *Eine venezianische Nacht* ('A Venetian night', 1913) and *Insel der Seligen* ('Island of the blessed', 1913).

Britain had no real equivalent to the American nickelodeon period, although debates about cinema's cultural and social status paralleled those taking place across the Atlantic. By 1911, when film rental and permanent exhibition sites became standard, most cinemas mimicked the up-market accoutrements of the legitimate theatre. Before this, films were exhibited in a variety of locations—the music halls and fairgrounds that had constituted the primary venues of the early period as well as the so-called 'penny gaffs'. Although never as numerous and often more transient than the nickelodeons, these store-front shows were equivalent to their American counterparts in being unsanitary and unsafe. The first theatre devoted entirely to film exhibition seems to have been established in 1907, and, between the following year and the advent of the World War, films were increasingly exhibited in 'picture palaces', the equivalent of the American 'movie palaces', replete with uniformed ushers and red plush seating for up to 1,000 or even 2,000 customers. While prices remained low enough to permit former patrons to continue to attend, all these amenities served to distance the cinema from its previous associations with the music halls and the working class, to attract, as the trade press fervently hoped, a 'better' class of customer.

Like their transatlantic counterparts, British film-makers also pursued respectability through more positive tactics. In 1910 producer Will Barker paid the eminent theatrical actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree £1,000 for appearing in a film version of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. Rather than selling the film outright to distributors, as was still the dominant practice, Barker gave one distributor exclusive rights to rent, but not to sell, the film, claiming that its high production costs and high cultural status required special treatment. Barker produced other films of a similar nature, establishing the 'exclusive' or 'quality' picture, the adjectives referring to both the films and their distribution. Hepworth and other producers followed Barker's lead, adapting contemporary plays and literary classics that would appeal to the customers now patronizing the up-market theatres. In 1911 the Urban Company issued a catalogue of films suitable for use in schools. In the same year, the trade paper *Bioscope* urged the industry to persuade government authorities to recognize the educational value of film, even arranging a film screening for members of the London County Council.

French *films d'art* provided the model for film producers in other countries, in their quest for cultural respectability. French film-makers also emulated the narrative strategies of more respectable entertainments, imitating the stories in popular illustrated family magazines such

as *Lectures pour tous*. Upon taking the position as chief producer-director at Gaumont in 1907, Louis Feuillade wrote an advertisement for the studio's new serial, *Scènes de la vie telle qu'elle est* (*Scenes from Real Life*), claiming that the films would elevate the position of the French cinema by affiliating it with other respectable arts. 'They represent, for the first time, an attempt to project a realism on to the screen, just as was done some years ago in literature, theatre, and art.'

EPILOGUE: TRANSITION TO FEATURE FILMS

By about 1913 the American film industry's strategies for attaining respectability—emulating respectable entertainments, internal censorship, and improved exhibition venues—had begun to pay off. Conditions were very different from what they had been in 1908 when the medium had been the centre of a cultural crisis. Now a mass audience sat comfortably ensconced in elaborate movie palaces, watching the first true mass medium. And the films they watched were beginning to change as well, telling longer stories through a different deployment of formal elements than had been the case in 1908 or even 1912. A few years later, by 1917, the situation had changed yet again. The majority of important and powerful studios were located in Hollywood, by now the centre not only of American film-making but of world film-making, largely as a result of the First World War disruption of the European industries. Hollywood production and distribution practices now set the norm for the rest of the world. The films themselves had grown from one reel to an average length of sixty to ninety minutes, as film-makers mastered the demands of constructing lengthier narratives and codified into standard practices the formal conventions experimented with during the transitional years.

The industry called these lengthier films 'features', adopting the vaudeville term referring to a programme's main attraction. They were descended from the multiple reel films produced by the members of the Motion Picture Patents Company and the independents during the transitional period, as well as from foreign imports. Although film historians have characterized the MPPC's business practices as somewhat retrograde, the honour of producing the first American multi-reeler goes to Trust member Vitagraph. In 1909 and 1910 Vitagraph released the biblical blockbuster *The Life of Moses*; a five-reel film depicting the story of the Hebrew leader from his adoption by the Pharaoh's daughter to his death on Mount Sinai. Vitagraph continued to produce multi-reelers, and the other studios adopted the policy. Biograph, for example, released the two-reel Civil War story *His Trust and His Trust Fulfilled*, in 1911. Clearly, then, elements within the American film industry had begun to chafe at the 1,000-foot or fifteen-minute limit, finding it increasingly impossible to tell a story within these constraints.

Existing distribution and exhibition practices, however, militated against conversion to the multi-reel film. The limited seating of most nickelodeons dictated short programmes featuring a variety of subjects in order to ensure rapid audience turnover and a profit. The studios, therefore, treated each reel of the multi-reelers separately, releasing them to the exchanges according to the agreed schedule, sometimes weeks apart, and the nickelodeons, except in rare instances, showed only one reel in any specific programme, charging the same admission price as they did for all their other films. For this reason, the impetus for the transition to the feature film came from the European, and specifically Italian, films imported into the country. Multi-reel foreign imports were distributed outside the control of the Trust and the independents, with rental prices keyed to both negative costs and box-office receipts. Instead of playing the nickelodeons, these features were 'roadshowed' as a theatrical attraction, shown in legitimate theatres and opera-houses.

Films from other countries, such as *Queen Elizabeth* (Louis Mercanton, 1912), played a part in establishing feature films as the norm, but it was the spectacular Italian costume films whose profits and popularity persuaded the American industry to compete with longer films of its own. In 1911 three Italian productions, the five-reel *Dante's Inferno* (Milano Films, 1909), the two-reel *Fall of Troy* (1910, Giovanni Pastrone), and the four-reel *The Crusaders or Jerusalem Delivered* (1911), treated American audiences to a pictorial splendour seldom seen in domestic productions—elaborate sets and huge casts enhanced through the use of deep space. Released in the United States in the spring of 1913, the nine-reel *Quo vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni, Cines, 1913), running for more than two hours and exhibited exclusively in legitimate theatres, really sparked the craze for the spectacular feature film. Adapted from the best-selling novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the film boasted 5,000 extras, a chariot race, and real lions, as well as clever lighting and detailed set design. The 1914 *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, Italia) capped the trend. The twelve-reel depiction of the Second Punic War contained such visually stunning scenes as the burning of the Roman fleet and Hannibal's crossing of the Alps. Pastrone enhanced the film's spectacle through extended tracking shots (unusual at this time) that created a sense of depth through movement rather than through set design.

Quo vadis? inspired a host of imitators, not least D. W. Griffith's own multi-reel biblical spectacular, *Judith of Bethulia* (1913), which was made against the wishes of a Biograph front office still committed to the one-reel film. But Griffith's own historical costume drama epic, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), excelled all previous features in length and spectacle, while dealing with a truly American subject, the Civil War and Reconstruction. It was this film

that began to establish the feature as the norm rather than the exception. Prior to the film's January 1915 release, Griffith's publicity department had hyped its expense, huge cast, and historical accuracy, creating great public anticipation for the famous director's most ambitious project. Griffith exercised as much care with the film's exhibition. Premiered in the largest movie palaces in Los Angeles and New York, *The Birth of a Nation* was the first American film to be released with its own score, played by a forty-piece orchestra. The admission price of \$2, the same as that charged for Broadway plays, ensured that the film would be taken seriously, and it was widely advertised and reviewed in the general press rather than the film trade press. All these factors showed that film had come of age as a legitimate mass medium. Of course, the film attracted attention for other reasons as well, its reprehensible racism eliciting outrage from the African-American community and their supporters, and offering an early insight into the social impact that this new mass medium could have.

The narrative structures, character construction, and editing patterns of the first multi-reel films, both American and Italian, strongly resembled those of the one-reel films of the time. This was particularly apparent in terms of narrative structure: one-reelers tended to follow a pattern of an elaborated single incident or plot device intensifying toward a climax near the end of the reel. The first multi-reel American films, intended to stand on their own, adopted this structure but, even after distribution channels became available, longer films often continued to appear more like several one-reelers strung together than the lengthy integrated narratives that we are accustomed to today. However, film-makers quickly realized that the feature film was not simply a longer version of the one-reel film, but a new narrative form, demanding new methods of organization, and they learned to construct appropriate narratives, characters, and editing patterns. As they had in 1908, producers again turned to the theatre and novels for inspiration, not only in terms of screen adaptations but in terms of emulating narrative structures. Feature films, therefore, began to include more characters, incidents, and themes, all relating to a main story. Instead of one climax or a series of equally intense climaxes, features began to be constructed around several minor climaxes and then a dénouement that resolved all the narrative themes. *The Birth of a Nation* provides an extreme example of this structure, its (in)famous last-minute rescue, as the Ku-Klux-Klan rides to secure Aryan supremacy, capping several reels of crisis (the death of 'Little Sister', the capture of Gus, and so forth) and resolving the fates of all the important characters.

However, the basic elements of the earlier films remained unchanged—credible individual characters still served to link together the disparate scenes and shots, the

Lillian Gish

(1893–1993)

Dorothy Gish

(1898–1968)

Lillian and Dorothy Gish were born in Ohio, daughters of an actress and her absentee drifter husband. Stage juveniles being in constant demand, both girls were acting professionally before they were 5. They were enticed into movies by their friend Mary Pickford, who was already working for D. W. Griffith, and they made their screen debut together in his *An Unseen Enemy* (1912).

Over the next two years the sisters played numerous roles for Griffith's company, both together and separately. At first Griffith had trouble telling them apart (tying coloured ribbons in their hair, he addressed them as 'red' and 'blue') but their very different characters, and screen personae, soon emerged. Dorothy was effervescent, gregarious, a natural comedienne. Lillian was serious, intense, with a toughness belied by her delicate looks. 'When Dorothy arrives the party begins,' Lillian once remarked, adding wryly, 'When I arrive it usually ends.'

Dorothy, Griffith noted, 'was more apt at getting the director's idea than Lillian, quicker to follow it, more easily satisfied with the result. Lillian conceived an ideal and patiently sought to realize it.' Since this dedicated approach appealed more to Griffith's own workaholic temperament, Lillian generally got the better parts, and was awarded the lead in his epoch-making Civil War epic *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). As Elsie Stoneman, daughter of a family split by the conflict, she transcended the hearts-and-flowers, virgin-in-jeopardy elements of the role with

a performance of sustained emotional truth. The film made her a major star, as Griffith acknowledged in casting her as the iconic cradle-rocking Mother linking the four stories of his next epic, *Intolerance* (1916).

There seems to have been no rivalry between the sisters. Lillian suggested Dorothy as a rowdy French peasant girl in their first major film together, the First World War drama *Hearts of the World* (1918), and was amused when Dorothy stole the picture. Even so, Dorothy continued to work for other directors, while Griffith reserved Lillian ('She is the best actress I know. She has the most brains') for his own films.

Lillian's supreme performance for Griffith was as the abused child of *Broken Blossoms* (1919), terrorized by a brutal father and finding tenderness with a lonely young Chinaman in nineteenth-century Limehouse. It was pure Victorian melodrama, dripping with sentiment, but transmuted by the subtlety of Gish's acting and the power—for all her ethereal looks—with which she could convey raw emotion. *Way Down East* (1920), no less melodramatic, made equally good use of her blend of physical frailty and inner tenacity.

Dorothy continued to specialize in comedies, including one directed by Lillian, *Remodelling her Husband* (1920). It did well, but Lillian found directing 'too complicated' and refused to try it again. Dorothy's range reached far beyond comedy, as shown by their finest film together, *Orphans of the Storm* (1921). They played sisters caught up in the French Revolution; Dorothy's performance as the blind sister, moving but not for a moment mawkish, is in no way overshadowed by Lillian's.

It was their last film for Griffith, who could no longer afford Lillian's salary. They parted from him amicably and moved to the Inspiration Company, where they made *Romola* (1924) together—from George Eliot's



novel—before Lillian signed a contract with MGM. Dorothy went to London for four films for Herbert Wilcox, of which the most successful was *Nell Gwynne* (1926).

Lillian was now one of the highest paid (\$400,000 p.a.) actresses in Hollywood, able to approve her own scripts and directors. She chose Victor Sjöström to direct her in two of her greatest roles: a passionate, wayward Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1926), and the gentle wife whipped into desperation by the elements in *The Wind* (1928), a performance of awesome physicality.

But fashions were changing. Garbo's star was in the ascendant, and Lillian was too identified with virginal virtues and the silent cinema. Irving Thalberg offered to fabricate a scandal for her; she coolly declined, and returned to the live stage. Dorothy did the same, her film career virtually over. Lillian, though, appeared in a dozen or so films after 1940, of which the finest was Laughton's Gothic fable *The Night of the Hunter* (1955). In it she portrays, as Simon Callow (1987) comments, 'the spirit of absolution and healing. . . with a kind of secular sanctity which cannot be forged'. Gish relished making the film: 'I have to go back as far as D. W. Griffith to find a set so imbued with purpose and harmony.' Coming from her, there could be no greater praise.

Lillian outlived her sister by a quarter-century, ageing gracefully and still acting in her mid-nineties. Well before her death, she saw herself securely reinstated as the supreme actress of the silent cinema. Dorothy, a fine actress if not a great one, still awaits fair reassessment.

PHILIP KEMP

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

Lillian

The Birth of a Nation (1915); *Intolerance* (1916); *Broken Blossoms* (1919); *True Heart Susie* (1919); *Way Down East* (1920); *La Bohème* (1926); *The Scarlet Letter* (1926); *The Wind* (1928); *Duel in the Sun* (1946); *The Night of the Hunter* (1955); *The Cobweb* (1955); *The Unforgiven* (1955); *A Wedding* (1978); *The Whales of August* (1987)

Dorothy

Remodelling her Husband (1920); *Nell Gwynne* (1926)

Lillian and Dorothy

Hearts of the World (1918); *Orphans of the Storm* (1921); *Romola* (1924)

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Opposite: Lillian and Dorothy Gish in D. W. Griffith's *Orphans of the Storm* (1921)

difference being that character motivation and plausibility became yet more important as films grew longer and the number of important characters increased. Films now had the space to flesh out their characters, endowing them with traits that would drive the narrative action. Often entire scenes served the sole purpose of acquainting the audience with the characters' personalities. *The Birth of a Nation* devotes its first fifteen minutes or so, before the outbreak of the Civil War occurs, to introducing its major characters, seeking to engender audience identification with the Southern slave-holding family, the Camerons. In scenes that establish the plantation owners' kindly and tolerant natures, we see the pater familias surrounded by puppies and kittens and his son Ben shaking hands with a slave who has just danced for Northern visitors.

Feature films also deployed their formal elements to further character development and motivation. Dialogue intertitles had first appeared around 1911, but their use increased so that by the mid-1910s dialogue titles outnumbered the expository titles that revealed the presence of a narrator; the responsibility for narration being accorded more and more to the characters. Although the standard camera scale remained the three-quarter shot that had become dominant during the transitional period, film-makers increasingly cut closer to characters at moments of psychological intensity. In *The Birth of a Nation*, closer views of terrified white women supposedly intensify audience identification with these potential victims of a fate worse than death. Point-of-view editing also became standardized in the feature films of this time. Although Griffith actually used this pattern fairly sparingly, in two key scenes in *The Birth* we get Ben's point of view of his beloved Elsie, the first time as he looks at a locket photograph of her and the second as he actually looks at her, an iris shot of Elsie mimicking the photograph's composition.

The transition to features served to codify many of the devices that film-makers had experimented with during the transitional period. This is particularly related to moves to create a unified spatio-temporal orientation. Analytical editing became more common as film-makers sought to highlight narratively important details. In the scene in *The Birth* where Father Cameron plays with the puppies and kittens, a cut-in to a close-up of the animals at his feet emphasizes the alignment of the Southern family with these appealing creatures. Most features included some parallel editing, *The Birth* of course being the *locus classicus* of the form, not only in the climactic last-minute rescue that cuts among several different locations, but throughout the film where alternation between Northern and Southern families and the home front and the battlefield reinforces the film's ideological message. Devices such as the eyeline match and the shot/reverse-shot became standard conventions for linking disparate

spaces together, and devices such as the dissolve, fade, and close-up became clear markers of any deviations from linear temporality such as flashbacks or dreams.

After a decade of profound upheaval, by 1917, the end of the 'transitional' period, the cinema was poised on the brink of a new maturity as *the* dominant medium of the twentieth century. Films, while continuing to reference other texts, had freed themselves from dependence upon other media, and could now tell cinematic stories using cinematic devices; devices which were becoming increasingly codified and conventional. A standardization of production practices, consonant with the operations of other capitalist enterprises, assured the continuing output of a reliable and familiar product, the so-called 'feature' film. The building of ever larger and more elaborate movie palaces heralded the medium's new-found social respectability. All was ready for the advent of Hollywood and the Hollywood cinema.

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