

remain generally under the restraint of humanitarian laws and conventions.

I call the moving picture world false because it does not seem to me to represent either life as it is or the inspiration and the poet's dream. I hate it, and therefore suspect that I fear it. Looking inward I try to find the danger. It is possible that prophetic Hollywood is an expression of life as people in general want it to be. There are signs that the life of the screen is appearing in real life. This may be purely imitation. Perhaps I fear that the screen shows something real, maybe the life of the future as the robots of the future will live it. God forbid.

These are wild and whirling words, my lord, but you asked me for them, and now my conscience is clear.

GRANT HYDE CODE.

## THE LATEST BRITISH MASTERPIECE

A Swedish film called *Matrimony* followed *The Ring* at the Astoria in London. This no doubt allowed a lot of jollity about international nuptials in the trade, for *The Ring*, as will be seen, is British. It ran for or fortnight and received, besides hilarious publicity, unusual attention (seeing that it was a film) in the journals described as "leading". Now the run was pre-arranged (and was actually shorter than was

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desired because the Capitol refused to pay £ 2000 for having it for three weeks) but the criticisms caused a number of people not ordinarily interested in films to visit this one. I know this. For there is a sincere wish on the part of the public to have a British cinema, and this word "masterpiece", which has been so enthusiastically given to *The Ring*, is an instance of the wish being father to the quite honest hope, also, of the press. We WANT good British films. If being British means anything, it means something that can best be expressed on the screen by British films. Certain characteristics foreigners (excuse the word) cannot hope to interpret, even though they may realise them. There is the British outlook and, whatever it thinks of it, the public prefers it to be British-made than American-mimicked. It believed that *The Things That Have Made us—well, What We Are* might to a certain extent give the films something they have hitherto lacked. Restraint, for instance, reason, taste possibly and tradition. It believed we should not do better what Hollywood does, but what it fails to do. So, a larger and more trusting public than usual saw *The Ring*.

And what did it see? A story in which a Girl forsook her husband and her lover according as each won or lost. This was what we had, to tell the world. Here was the British outlook, the fresh viewpoint. But *The Ring* was a "masterpiece", so it could not rely on its story. The direction must be very good. Let us watch it.

What has Mr Hitchcock done? Well, he has opened with shots of roundabouts and swings. Swings with the camera

swinging too, roundabouts from below. Clever angles—the audience say “as good as *Vaudeville*.” That is what he wanted. But why “as good”? Why not, please, different? Never mind. We don’t want originality for its own sake. Next comes a boxing booth. How popular boxing is. *Knock-out Reilly, Battling Butler, The Patent Leather Kid, Rough House Rosie*. These things go in cycles. We don’t want originality (for its own sake)—and we don’t get it, even for art’s. Art, old boy is long, and films are business, and must be quick.

What else has Mr. Hitchcock done? He has chosen for his evenly matched boxers one expert and one novice. This whim (was it really necessity?) resulted in dainty paragraphs extolling his cleverness; for the novice fought, under guidance, in slow motion, which was then speeded up. Who’d have thought it? Who’d have thought the camera could alter his footwork or make his body look anything but flabby and untrained, so that we never felt he was a match for Carl Brisson? We are a sporting race and this is how we stage a big fight. It is not good enough. The cinema is cutting its own throat if it first accustoms us to Tunney-Dempsey fights and then gives us bad fakes. The old device, so popular in bull-fights, was better,—doubles in the distance, with occasional separate close-ups. Yet, why not drop mock representation and, greatly daring, try expressionism? That’s what you did with the early fair-scenes, though I don’t believe you knew it.

Then, for the girl, the director had Lilian Hall Davis, an

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actress of hard efficiency and no charm. She cannot help failing to appeal to you, to me, and it's to her credit that she is efficient. It saves hundreds of pounds. She knows her job, and thus allows time to be spent on stage importations who must learn theirs ; and time is the bugbear of British productions. You *must* finish to time, whatever else you do or do not do. Miss Davis enables films to be made quickly and cheaply even if she has not the personality which will fill the cinemas when they are shown. So for box-office appeal Carl Brisson is brought in, and he needs time. Here we go round the mulberry bush ! This is the way we make films. What can come of such a way ? Why, *The Ring*.

How is this story treated ? Well, it *is* treated visually, but then its merit ends. Mr Hitchcock's method is to depict one simple fact, that a sub-title could have got over, by a long sequence or a number of elaborate tricks. This is worse than a photographic rendering of a story, for it is pretentious. The way the boxer's name mounted to the top of the poster before our eyes, for the time and expense were out of proportion to the effect. The only way to have lent any interest to this novelette was, for once, to stress the sex. If a woman alternately desires and deserts two men, there must be some reason. Let us have it. If it is not solely sex-hunger, give us the other reasons. Sex has mental as well as physical reactions Give us some mind, some inner conflict, some, I beg you, psychology, if that is not too hard a word.

This is what we were given. Carl Brisson won a fight : his wife was not at home to welcome him, being out with his rival.

When she returned there was a scene. Miss Davis bit her lip and stamped her foot. Carl Brisson tore her dress off her shoulders and, after she had made an exit covering her shame with the rival's fortunately large photograph, he thrashed the rival in a night-club. Of course a note was on the mantel-piece when he got back. The Great Fight came on, against the rival. He was losing, but his wife came round. Little Wife. . .do you hear? Jack, Jack, you must hear...here in Your hour of Need. . .He won the fight.

Barbaric, isn't it? We ought to have got beyond this. If the director had been a little less busy demonstrating that the British studios are the best in the world, he might have given us a little characterisation. It would not have been so spectacular, but it would have avoided, as *Matrimony* did, much of the vulgarity inherent in the story; it would have shown a definite conception, and a lack of conceit. There is no lack of conceit in this film. Mr Hitchcock shows what he can do, and he often does it very prettily. But it is not a question of technique. Touches and angles à la Ufa are nothing without the inspiration of a Pick or Murnau. There is good enough technique in any Clara Bow comedy, while that of the Russian films, whose sincerity and force is so striking, is frequently dreadful. Mr. Hitchcock's touches and angles misled the public, which had noticed them in German films. And German films are good. Look for the trade mark. Yes, *look*—don't have someone else's thrust at you. And if you have followed me, you will have found Mr. Hitchcock's trade mark.

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The Swedish film ran for a week and received little notice. Perhaps the whisky ran out? Its story was as unpromising as *the Ring's*. A rich Englishwoman lost her money. She determined to marry her creditor, a Swede. On the journey she fell in a river and was saved by a man whom she married. He was, naturally, her creditor. But life was dull, and she pined for London. He let her go, but when he followed, disgusted with her "set", he broke with her. But Love Proved Stronger Than Hate. The usual stuff! Yes, but the direction! When Love Proved, etc., each set out to return to the other. They met at a half-way station. Instead of forgiving, embracing, shoulder-patting, their Pride Intervened. They sat apart, cutting each other. Nervous. You felt that at any moment he or she would go in opposite directions, not a word would be spoken. You felt the hopelessness. Then a waiter came in. He looked funny. She smiled; they both smiled—at him.

By the way each responded to that symbol, you saw how each became—both. The boredom of the wife came over too. She was Lil Dagover. She picked up *Vogue*, looked at photographs of restaurants, ball-rooms. The figures swayed before her eyes, swayed, began to dance (a trick justified) on the page. She burst into tears.

This director knew how the banality he was given could mean something, so that that banality, instead of being all he had, was a piece of glass between us and the minds he revealed. Better if the glass had not been there, but, thank heaven! there was a room beyond, and we saw through. Thank hea-

ven he didn't spend his energy on decorating the glass, frosting or staining it (with paper—to look like the real thing) so that never once did we see through.

ROBERT HERRING.

## B O O

*(Sirocco and the Screen.)*

“They boo him.” “Do they ?” “They are boo-ing him.”  
“Are they ?” “They will boo him.” “Will they ?”

So strophe. So antistrophe. Mr. Noel Coward looms impertinent, important. His subtlety has, like the proverbial Caesarian ambition, o'er leapt itself and so delicately has he portrayed character in his new play *Sirocco* that, character looks upon itself as in a glass, not at all darkly and proclaims this is us, nice husband, nice girl, these are ourselves, this is our home, god bless it, this is me and you and this is cousin Gladys (only it happens to be Lucy). Well says character (the critics) here we are gathered together from the four corners of the earth, at home with ourselves, sufficient unto ourselves (Auntie Johnson has come with us) held together by some common fear, some alliance against the unknown, the