

The Museum of Modern Art

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Please reply to: The Film Library, 485 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Trustee Committee: John Hay Whitney, Chairman, A. Conger Goodyear, Edward M. M. Warburg

Director, John E. Abbott Curator, Iris Barry Telephone: PLaza 3-1981

January 31, 1936

TO MOTION PICTURE EDITORS
TO CITY EDITORS

Dear Sirs:

The PRESS VIEW of the second program, The Rise of the American Film, given by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library will be held at the DALTON SCHOOL AUDITORIUM, 108 East 89th Street, New York City, TUESDAY February 4 at 8:30 P.M.

The four motion pictures which comprise the program are:

The New York Hat (1912) directed by D. W. Griffith, with Mary Pickford and Lionel Barrymore

The Fugitive (1916) directed by Thomas H. Ince, with Wm. S. Hart

The Clever Dummy (1917) a Mack Sennett comedy with Ben Turpin

A Fool There Was (1914) directed by Frank Powell, with Theda Bara

Program notes will explain the significance of these films and they will be accompanied by music appropriate to the day in which each was produced. Stills from each of the films may be obtained now at the Museum or at the Dalton School Tuesday evening.

Particular interest attaches to the showing of A Fool There Was, the first picture in which Theda Bara was featured. In it she plays a role designated simply but sufficiently as THE VAMPIRE. Through her acting in this role the word "vamp" was admitted to the dictionary eight years later. In striking contrast to the completely bad woman Miss Bara portrays, the program presents Bill Hart in a Thomas H. Ince Western in which Hart is the good-bad man that he played through scores of such photoplays. These two pictures, in their chief characters, illustrate two of the most popular motion picture conceptions of their period.

You are invited to attend or to send a representative. Please use this letter as an admission card.

For further information please call the undersigned at Circle 7-7470.

Sincerely yours,

Sarah Newmeyer
Sarah Newmeyer
Publicity Director

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR RELEASE Saturday afternoon or
Sunday morning, February 1 or 2, 1936

The Museum of Modern Art Film Library announces the New York showing of its second program of motion pictures on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, February 4 and 5, at the Museum, 11 West 53 Street. As the activities of the Film Library are non-commercial, the program may be shown only to members of the Museum and to students and members of colleges, museums and study groups throughout the country to which each program of the Film Series is circulated immediately after its New York presentation.

This second program, under the general title of The Rise of the American Film, is composed of four motion pictures: The New York Hat (1912) directed by D. W. Griffith, with Mary Pickford and Lionel Barrymore; The Fugitive (1916) directed by Thomas H. Ince, with Wm. S. Hart; The Clever Dummy (1917) a Mack Sennett comedy with Ben Turpin; and A Fool There Was (1914) directed by Frank Powell, with Theda Bara.

The New York Hat, both entertaining and genuinely touching, is remarkable for its forecast of talents that were to become of the utmost importance in the development of motion pictures. The screen play was written by a schoolgirl, Anita Loos, who afterward became famous as a witty caption and scenario writer and who gave to the world that masterpiece of feminine psychology, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. Griffith's direction of the movie projects its human values with the cine-dramatic economy that was one of his great contributions to the screen. And the acting of Mary Pickford, at that time a young girl with long curls known only as "Little Mary," shows unmistakably the qualities that brought her to stardom by public acclaim and enabled her to retain longer than any other woman in motion pictures a rating as First Lady of the Films. The New York Hat is a simple little story of a shabbily dressed, motherless young girl who is befriended by the village pastor, handsome young Lionel Barrymore, and of the resultant cruel gossip. The simplicity, restraint and utter sincerity of Mary Pickford's acting is as perfect cinema art today as it was twenty-four years ago when the picture was made.

The Clever Dummy is a splendid example of the type of motion

picture that reached a high point of development earlier than any other form of screen play. Slapstick comedy is one of the purest and most original types of motion picture and Mack Sennett was supreme master of American slapstick. He began as an actor with the old Biograph Company, playing comedy rôles not only with enthusiasm but with a growing perception of the underlying principles of the comic art.

In her program notes for The Rise of the American Film Iris Barry, Curator of the Film Library, writes of Sennett: "When he became director for Keystone in 1912, he carried slapstick to its final form with its elaborate chases, its brilliant timing and characteristic pace, its rich low humor and its corps of inspired grotesques-- Sennett himself, Fatty Arbuckle, Mack Swain and, above all, Mabel Normand and her one-time partner, Charles Chaplin.

"Sennett's genius has always been underestimated, despite his influence on Chaplin and on René Clair. Slapstick today is decadent and people remember it, erroneously, as a lot of meaningless pie-throwing and rushing about. It was, instead, an ordered madness, a high form of cinematic art improvised with an instinctive grasp of visual rhythm and of tempo. Akin to carnival and to the circus, especially to the parade of the circus clowns, slapstick under Sennett was great not merely on technical grounds but because it was inspired by a profound, wry knowledge of human nature and a most delicate observation of life."

In The Fugitive (1916) and A Fool There Was (1914) the program presents in striking contrast two of the most popular motion picture conceptions of the period: the good-bad man, played continually and with only minor variations through scores of "Westerns" by poker-faced Bill Hart; and the thoroughly bad woman portrayed with heavily sinister overtones by Theda Bara. No matter how many people Bill Hart killed in the course of his desperate screen deeds, audiences were always solidly convinced that he was one of nature's noblemen-- a true diamond in the rough. On the other hand, the rôles that Theda Bara played seemed to satisfy some primitive audience instinct to hate with abandon a completely wicked woman. On the screen there was never a spark of goodness in her makeup. She didn't love even little children! She was a sorceress in satin--a silken snake-in-the-grass. Yet the public took both the good-bad man and the all-bad woman to

its inconsistent heart.

The Fugitive was directed by Thomas H. Ince. Like Griffith and Sennett, Ince went from the stage to the screen as an actor with the old Biograph Company. In 1911 he established himself near Santa Monica, where a circus in winter quarters rented him genuine cowboys and Indians. His films were marked by a combination of romance and brutality, which somehow made a perfect screen vehicle for the tight-lipped Bill Bart. Although Ince produced other types of motion pictures--Typhoon with Sessue Hayakawa and the anti-war film Civilization among them--he is most famous for having brought the primitive "Western" to a high point of artistic perfection. Today--as during his lifetime--Ince is highly admired in Europe, perhaps even more than in this country where "Westerns" are native. In 1919 Jean Cocteau referred to one of the Ince "Westerns" as a masterpiece and recalled a scene of it as "lingering in one's memory as the equal of anything in the greatest literature."

Theda Bara was a quiet, circumspect young woman, an extra on the Fox lot, when she was pressed into service to play the femme fatale in A Fool There Was. The role had been designed for a well-known stage actress of the period, who was unavailable. Possibly because of her large dark eyes, her willowy figure and her somewhat sombre expression, Theda Bara was cast in the role. Simultaneously a publicity campaign was begun to make Miss Bara appear in her private personality as sinister a creature as the vampire she played in the film. Fantastic stories were told about her supernatural powers, all in league, of course, with the prince of darkness. Photographs of her posed with skulls, skeletons, snakes, incense burners and other symbols of terror and evil were broadcast through the land. Her birthplace was changed from Cincinnati to Arabia and her name from Theodosia Goodman to Theda Bara, a rearrangement of the words "death" and "Arab." She was apparently the first film player to be built up by a strenuous publicity campaign, and she was an overwhelming success in A Fool There Was. Part of this was due, no doubt, to the fables which the public so eagerly devoured, but the perfect conjunction of her style of acting, her startling screen makeup, her slithering satin costumes, and the type of part she was first called upon to play must have been equally responsible for her sensational success. She was condemned

to the eternal role of vampire in forty films produced within five years, and she left her mark on the English language when, in 1922, the word "vamp" was admitted to the dictionary.

The program, The Rise of the American Film, which includes the four motion pictures mentioned above, is the second of five programs in The Museum of Modern Art Film Library Series No. 1: A Short Survey of the Film in America, 1895-1932. The third program in Series No. 1 will be D. W. Griffith and will consist of his motion picture Intolerance in thirteen reels. It will be shown at the Museum March 3 and 4. Additional programs of Series No. 1 will be released by The Museum of Modern Art Film Library in April and May. Immediately after showing at the Museum, each program will be started on an itinerary which will include museums, colleges and study groups throughout the country.

PHOTOGRAPHS ON REQUEST

By application to The Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 485 Madison Avenue, New York City, one or more of the following stills will be sent you for reproduction only:

1. Scene from The New York Hat
2. Scene from The Clever Dummy
3. Scene from The Fugitive
4. Individual shot of Theda Bara from A Fool There Was