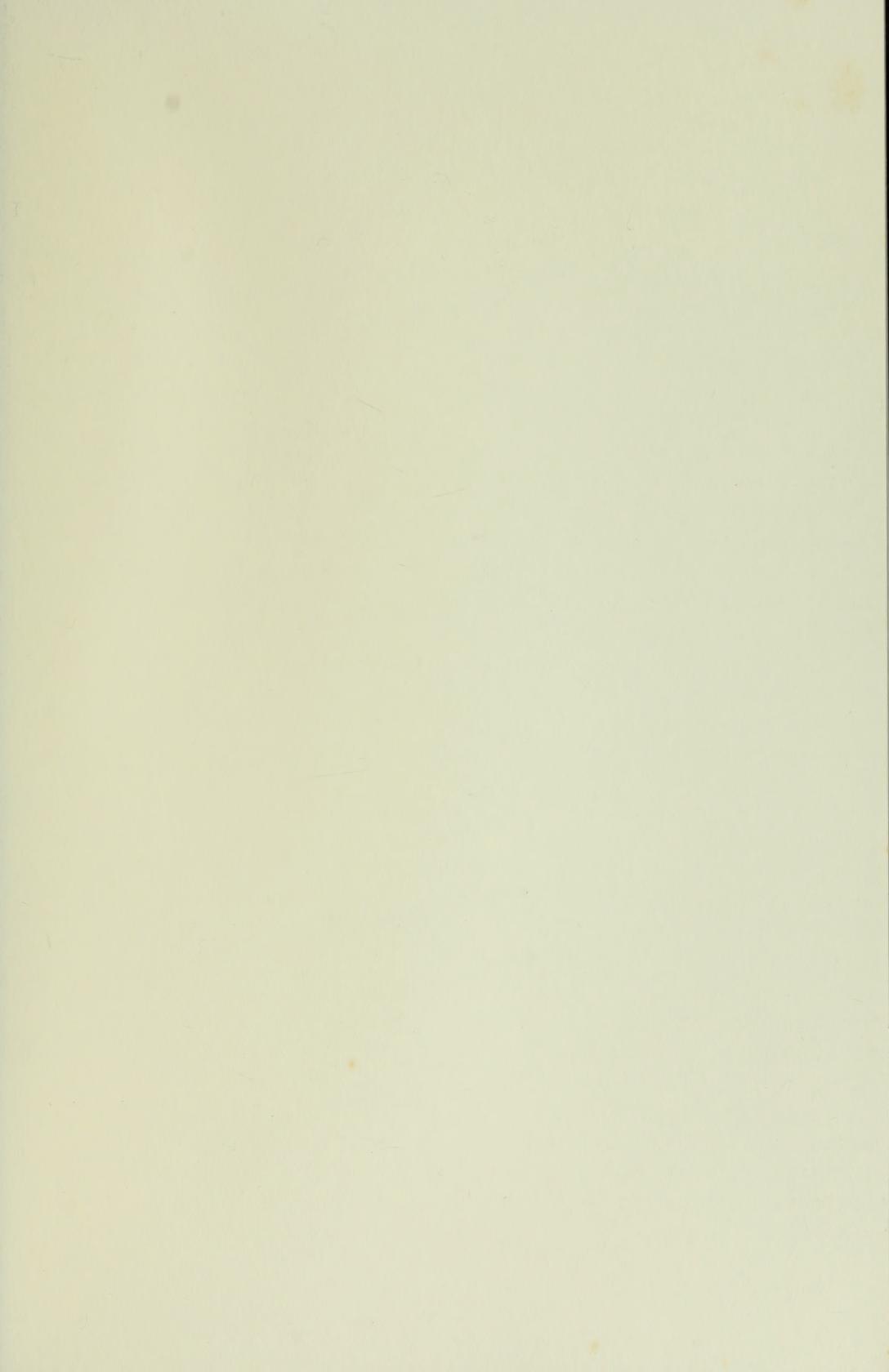
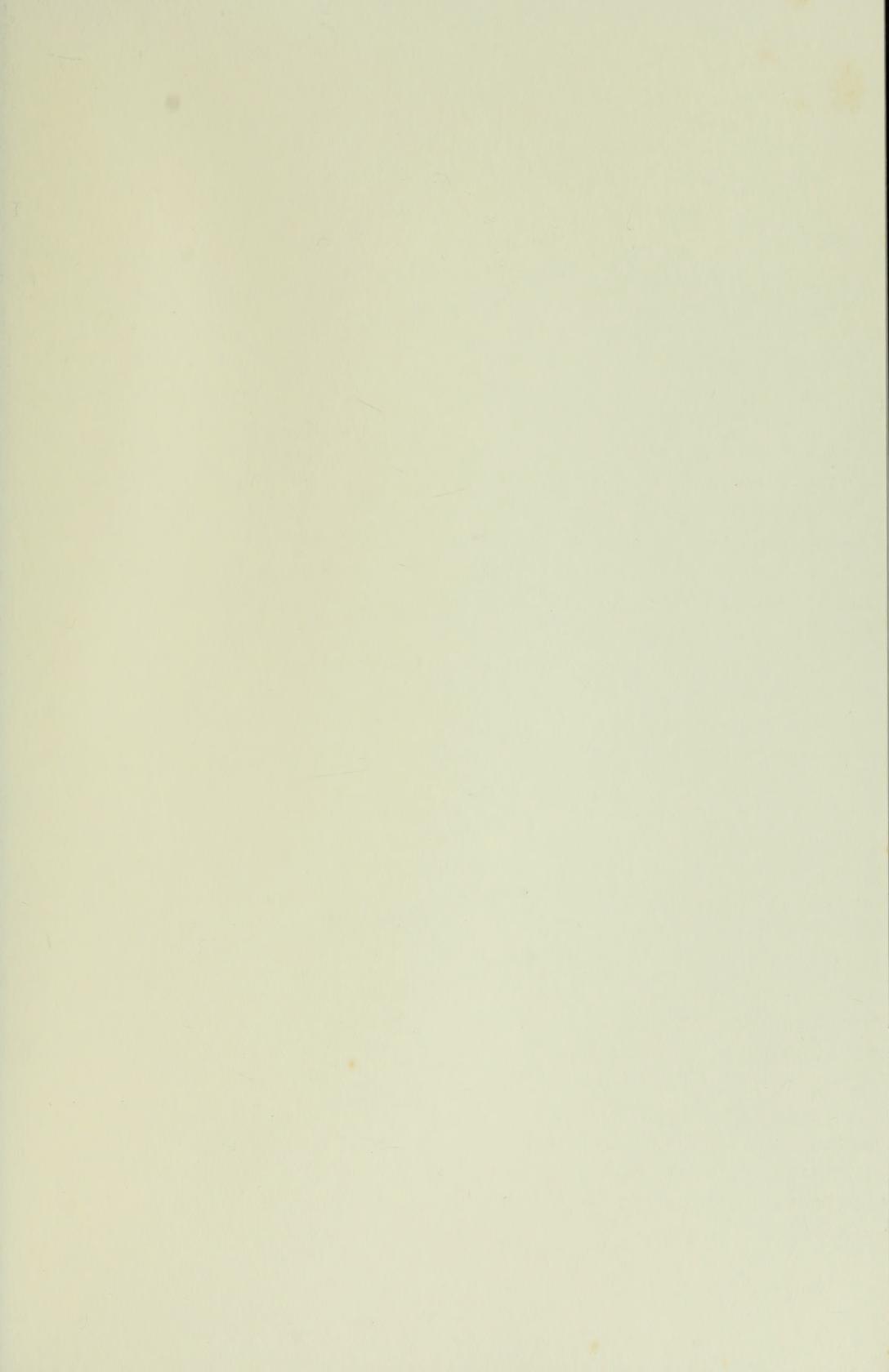


*film
biographies*



stan brakhage







**film
biographies**



**stan
brakhage**

turtle island : berkeley : 1977

Film Biographies copyright © 1977 by Stan Brakhage and the Netzahualcoyotl Historical Society.

LCCN 77-82308

ISBN 0-913666-17-3

THE FIRST BOOK was originally published as THE BRAKHAGE LECTURES by *Good Lion Press* (School of the Art Institute of Chicago: Chicago, 1972). Special thanks to Ian Robertson and Dean Roger Gilmore for all their help.

Thanks also to David Meltzer of *Tree* and Clayton Eshleman of *Caterpillar* for first publishing a few of these lectures in their respective magazines, to Edward and Jennifer Dorn for editorial assistance (THE FIRST BOOK), to Kay-Karol Mapp and Helen Lerchen, and Sally Dixon, and to Tom Luddy and Edith Kramer of the *Pacific Film Archives*, June Eos of *Anthology Film Archives* and Larry Kardish of the *Museum of Modern Art* for helping to gather the photographs reproduced in this book.

A special thanks to Lilly Latte for the use of Marianne Greenwood's photo of Fritz Lang, Seymour Stern for Brett Weston's photo of Sergei Eisenstein, and to Jay Leyda for A. Froloff's photo of Sergei Eisenstein, which serves as the frontispiece for this book. On the photo Brakhage writes: "this hieratically flaming image of Sergei Eisenstein is of him directing *Bezhin Meadows* (midst illnesses and conflicts with the Russian government which caused him to abandon the project)."

Stan Brakhage's FILM BIOGRAPHIES is published by Turtle Island for the Netzahualcoyotl Historical Society, a non-profit educational foundation engaged in the multi-cultural study of American Literature & Cultural History. Address all inquiries to NETZAHUALCOYOTL HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 2845 Buena Vista Way, Berkeley CA 94708.

C O N T E N T S

THE FIRST BOOK

- Introduction by Robert Creeley / 12
- George Melies / 15
- David Wark Griffith / 37
- Carl Theodore Dreyer / 61
- Sergei Eisenstein / 83

COMEDY TRAGI/COMEDY

- Introduction by Edward Dorn / 112
- Charlie Chaplin / 115
- Stan Laurel & Oliver Hardy, Etc. / 143
- Buster Keaton / 159
- Jean Vigo / 189

NARRATIVE AS RELIGION

- Introduction by Guy Davenport / 208
- Dr. Caligari / 213
- Fritz Lang / 227
- F.W. Murnau / 245
- Alexander Dovzhenko / 273

A Note on the Text / 293

the first book

TO JANE, AGAIN

the first book

INTRODUCTION

Vision, whether it be spoken of as 20/20 or as second sight, is primary to our lives. Being primates, we depend on its function more than we do upon that of any other of our senses. Men exceptionally gifted with its possibility, with *sights* surpassing those of usual insight, we honor as seers.

Film makers—those who make the *sun play*, in Griffith's words—have had a paradoxically awkward acceptance as artists among us. Very possibly it is an aspect of that threat which Brakhage speaks of at the beginning of his first lecture: “the search for an art . . . either in the making or the appreciation . . . is the most terrifying adventure imaginable . . .” In the situation of an art so newly discovered, all of its possibilities are vulnerable to an instant perversion insofar as there can be no manifest tradition to protect them. The value of “movies” in our own world has been dominated by their appeal to a mass audience and thus their ability to make money. After D.W. Griffith's investor's had forced him to edit *The Birth of a Nation*, crippling its truth, he himself financed the making of *Intolerance*, Hollywood's “greatest commercial failure . . .” In short, the world such men live in tends to reject them insofar as they insist upon the art of *making things visible*, which that world has learned to ignore.

Put simply, it might be said that we see things in two insistent places, outside and in. When there is a conjunction, when the *out there* becomes inexplicably *within* us, a true revelation occurs. We have lived to see images of our own kind stepping out of strange metallic containments onto the moon's surface, and yet no change in our sight seems to have happened. In contrast, Méliès' crude fabrications far previous to their literal possibility get us there, or rather bring that wonder to us, through the eye into the mind. Again simply, it may be that no reality of the physical world can take place in human experience without a specific imagination of that reality in the human itself.

Griffith's trust in "Accident," as Brakhage puts it, the fact that Méliès sees as "magic" what Pathé intends to be used for "document," the flickering transformations that turning the pages of a children's picture book must have meant to Eisenstein, the instant clarity with which Dreyer recognized *his* Joan of Arc, all of these circumstances describe men given to some unremitting use of themselves, possessed by it and possessive in their insistent demand for it, *artists* who, like Indians, eat the bear's heart not to fill their bellies merely but to take that power into themselves. There is an authority in all they do, an authenticity, in that they have only appetite to see what they know *can* be seen. What others see, or tell them they see, must of necessity wait. Their vision is primary. Their size, humanly, is to be measured by the magnitude of physical world they work to realize, to bring to eye's witness, in a dream peculiarly their own.

It takes a man of like possession and gift to honor them, someone whose own patience and commitment have brought him many times to these specific places of isolation and wonder, where the light enters the dark to see and to be seen. This book is his witness.

—Robert Creeley
Bolin, California



GEORGE MELIES

Now let me say it to you—simply as I can: the search for an art . . . either in the making or the appreciation . . . is the most terrifying adventure imaginable: it is a search *always* into unexplored regions; and it threatens the *soul* with terrible death at every turn; and it exhausts the mind utterly; and it leaves the body moving, moving endlessly through increasingly unfamiliar terrain: there is NO hope of return from the territory discovered by this adventuring; and there is NO hope of rescue from the impasse where such a search may leave one stranded.

It is not without cause that parents shudder when a child of theirs expresses the wish to become an Artist: they will, of course, do everything in their power to protect the child from such a fate!: they will even send him to institutes which will create phony arts and phony art appreciation to distract him . . . just as they will send the young explorer to the safe jungles of Disneyland—or those of the TV movie, etc.—to undermine any real adventuring: the society will, in fact, distort the whole meaning of the word “appreciation” . . . confusing it with “voyeurism” . . . to tame the energies of any active involvement: for real aesthetic appreciation runs exactly the same hazards as art-creation—leads as surely to what society calls “madness” as any creative making: (you may find this hard to believe, but

only because we have less example of real attendance to art in our culture than of creativity . . . thus an even phonier idea of “audience” than of “artist” . . . an ideology of many millions who imagine they appreciate—who are as silly in such imagination as would be a drunken group of mountain climbers scaling the papier-maché rock sets on the back-lot of a Hollywood studio.)

If you accept the full adventure of this course, you will surely lose your mortal soul!: you will be tortured by demons (physically pained by them, tickled to death by them, mentally-anguished to the point of suicidal thought): you will be stretched to the orders of angels more terrible than demonic force, set tasks by them beyond all comprehension or imaginable accomplishment: you will be changed so that your mother will never recognize you, so that your father will disown you, your friends betray you, your loved-one live in terror of you . . . :

. . . but then all these things will happen anyway—so what have you to lose? . . .

You have nothing to gain either: for this, like all real adventures, is purposeless—i.e.: . . . its impulse is beyond any purposeful definition—its achievements are cosmic . . . comic, if you like that term better . . . but anyway, of no *reasonable* order: (it is fashionable for art adventurers these days to say they are after knowledge or fun or escape even: but these terms are sheerly as symbolic a claim as the term ‘gold’ was for centuries of explorers): . . . “for the hell of it” will do as explanation as well as any other: for ‘hell’ comes first, just as in Dante’s adventure: and most do, alas, get stuck there beyond rescue—: hell comes first in all sequence . . . (imagine Dante entering first what he called heaven . . . : would it not, in that order, have been hellish?): and most have always got stuck early in whatever endeavor or non-endeavor: be advised then, that if you fall behind, no one will wait for you; but no one will wait for you if you move ahead either, nor where-nor-howsomever you wander: any true sense of company will occur as rarely as Maxwell’s Demon: the demons of art will make you *know* this, your desperate loneliness—they will make you know this and all truth by telling you lies: . . . (“He who seeks the truth must, as far as possible, doubt everything,” as Descartes put it): you will wan-

der in hallways of real objects looking as if they were mirrored.

If this all sounds like 19th century rhetoric—be advised that it IS of the orders of 19th century rhetoric . . . : I am introducing George Méliès, and thus the 19th century beginning of motion picture art.

Let me then present a fictional biography of Méliès—an historical novel so to speak—whereat I, as demonstrator, lie to you . . . tell a tale, as it's called . . . in order to get at the truth. My story of course is based on facts: however a fact about unexplored territory cannot be anything but misleading. I present, therefore, a fiction that is IN fact: if you follow, we begin advent—adventuring . . . touring the interior of a den of light, a cave of white darkness, shadow splotched with the dappled movements of illuminating black, a four-squared corridor widening from its entrance into this room—the gate of that projector—to an 'impossible' chamber (of the imagination) . . . the flat 'cube' of the screen . . . and branching out to become that complex of tunnels best referred to as The Labyrinth, each terminus of which, in the spirals of the spin-of-light behind every pair of eyes—every single eye-gate—in this room, in the gray hills and valleys of each brain present, holds a (thus) many-headed host of terrible monsters . . . The Hydra, considered as a singularity which we all (therefore) somehow share amidst a tangle of dangerous angel hair—that electrical thought-glass which cuts instinctual nerve to pieces (“doth make cowards of us all” inheriting Hamlet's problem) in this the most forbidding, and utterly foreign, land shape of all.

Young George then—already defeated by some-such creatures as we can begin to imagine on the barren planet of his foetal mind . . . completely overwhelmed, torn to pieces before what-we-would-call his 'birth'—begins as a child to invent a spirit-of-himself which will revenge him . . . a hero who will FREE the wickedly enchanted—or otherwise destroyed—pieces of his actual being, cause the monsters to dis-gorge the parts of his actuality; and young George, perhaps later then, begins to imagine a heroine who will restore him, a woman who will sew together or otherwise re-member his actual being: but he cannot quite imagine the woman as loving him, once

remembered, rather than the hero of his invention—cannot imagine her as anything other than heroine (to go with the hero) and/or Mother of him-George . . . cannot visualize her as other than spirit-force (unless she be Mother-again—wherein he be dismembered as once before). George finds his first hopeful solution to this dilemma at a magic show whereat impossible things happen and all contradictions therefore resolve in the hands of the able magician.

George himself decides to become just such a magician; but first he must make the hero of his invention a magician. As he is *imagining* the woman (rather than inventing her) she will always be victim of this magic—subject to the transformations of it: thus young George hopes to have power over her equal to her necessary ability to re-member and, as Mother then, to restore him. He must also manage some ultimate magic for his actual being which can defeat the magic he gives the hero-of-his-invention; and he begins, therefore, to create a demon-self (of himself-imagined-restored) who can tear his hero to pieces as he foetally once was; and he must of course in all this desperate plotting manage to conceal all knowledge of the demonic invention from the heroic invention until the proper time (when he is all-of-a-piece) to spring his monster-self from ambush upon his hero. He must, additionally, conceal his 'dark-side' as it's called from imaginings of the heroine, because it is necessary she love the hero up-to-a-point . . . (i.e.: until she has fulfilled her remembrance of actual him—a very tricky matter because demonic-George must end up as part-and-parcel with foetal-George re-membered: otherwise George will simply have invented another monster to turn on him once his rescuing hero has been defeated: and the woman in his imaginings *must* thus be very stupid and therefore easily tricked in the midst of her greatest magic—or else . . . as George thinks better . . . she must be too purely good, too utterly filled with 'sweetness and light' to even recognize the bitter black monstrosity of the dark-side of her own sewing; and, even later then—at hero's death—she must be too naive to recognize the evil parcel as being of the parts of actual George-restored.)

Hyenas laugh rather than growl—humans, too . . .: and George soon discovers humor (that term almost synonymous,

sound-wise, with human...and meaning, in exact English sound-synonym, to trick madness—i.e.: “to humour him”)... humor as powerful magic of duplicity... humor, that traditional field of endeavor whereby one elicits bared teeth in the form of a smile which appears opposite of that vicious threat it thus conceals—reveals deadly fangs even, the broader it spreads to say, say, ‘friend’...breaks into the “foe’s” bark of “friendly” laughter as it reaches the height of duplicity: and young George decides to master this powerful magic to most perfectly conceal his dreadful intentions, so that he can perform all his other tricks in the contradictory milieu of elicited snarls, growls, barks, and general roaring laughter of his utterly ‘fooled’ audience.

There is an historical reason George must master the trick of humor before all other magics: he was born in France, amid 19th-century scepticism: audiences were no longer incredulous about magic: the day of the serious shaman was long past (for that present at least): and even the progressive magic of Science (i.e.,—that craftsmanship of technical witchery...mechanical alchemy... which awed a previous generation) was becoming suspect as a closed, and completely explicable, system: the late 19th century magician either laughed with the audience, conditioning thus its laughter, or was laughed off the stage: audiences were no longer subject to the traditional ‘enchantment’... were no longer seriously ‘charmed.’

George discovered that essential madness of the 19th century that needed to be “humoured” when he was in his ‘teens— at a time when his own incredulity was breaking under the weight of accumulated knowledge: and, by this time, he was managing to conceal his heroic and demonic inventions from any knowledge his parts had of each other, and to exclude both from any imaginings of woman; and it was, too, at this ‘teen-time’ he began surely studying that master stage magician of all time: the great Robert-Houdin (*not* to be confused with his American imitator half-a-century later)—Houdin, the man who embodied the fullest traditional development of this centuries-old, specifically European, form of shamanism-as-entertainment...the man who does now represent the culmination of

that form of magic—whose name is synonymous with it.

George began to study this tradition because he felt the need to *prove* the magic he'd endowed his hero with in public—and ultimately to stage the triumph of his hero over primal monsters before an audience... thus to exteriorize the battle which his foetal-self had lost on interior grounds. What he did not at first realize was that only monsters of his own making would ever appear under his staged direction: like the shaman with his "rain dance," George hoped his mock battles would precipitate the "real" one, and that it would follow the orders of his repeated invention—that his mechanical manipulations, his tricks, would transform into the orders of phenomenal magic when the actual combat began... and all in the secure surrounds of attendant company/audience.

All the stories of his childhood, all myths, and most so-called "fantasy" books since, had informed him that he was not alone in having the dreadful experience of foetal dismemberment: these tales constituted a history of the various partial successes and the ultimate failure—so far—in human confrontation, with the seemingly endless host of monsters on that alien plain (as it was usually pictured in paintings) with that distant mountain range, marking horizon, wherefrom three shadows moving toward him had presaged the primal destructive assault... and that craggy valley (a specialty of Medieval 'oils') where his captive being was tortured... and that cave where he was torn to pieces—: all these images he shared, in their various forms, with many other men who had created heroes to return there for their deliverance... or had made maps, like vast battle plans, of the foreign territory—portraits like "wanted" posters of the demons to be slain—"rain dances" of language and oil paint in terrified sympathetic magic hopefully predicting the success of the hero.

And George, raised in the Christian tradition, could not help but also think that if *once* one man's hero could take upon himself these demons of 'The World,' that then they would cease to exist in their various but clearly-related forms for all men—could not help but think of each member of the audience as also a symbol of the disembodied fragments of this horrible drama, which—could it ever be made to surface—

would be recognized by each, each lending his hero to the necessary battle.

George did not consciously think all this out as he began his career as a stage magician because his further aim (of attaining some whole being again) necessitated the concealment of one part of his invented nature from another.

Because both inventions had to be concealed from the woman of his imaginings, sex was *only* conceivable to him (as most young men of his time) as an absolute private act, clouded in the utmost secrecy, fortified from any interference with his plans by every means of possession possible...simplified by money ('buyable,' in other words), guarded by jealousies of romantic love (most effective when engendered in the woman) and finally insured (as it *were*) by the absolute sanctification of marriage.

But these protective measures of sexual approach operative in the society around him, and the vulgar humor so desperately clouding all public reference to the private act, failed to give George any sense of integral security. His early relationships with actual girls naturally shattered his imaginings: the societal blows dealt to his complex image of woman destroyed most of his careful make-up of her, leaving only a series of bell-shaped curves reverberating in a blur of echoing multiplicity—many women of doll-like features and proportions all looking and moving alike...the chorus line. This Bell Woman, as we'll call her, could be publicly sexual because she was only a series of residual ghosts of some destroyed original; and as such she seemed a perfect partner for the dismembered man. Her enticing movements were safely synchronized to patterns of well-known music, all individuation limited to the bell dance, and the whole reverberation of her enmeshed in the trappings of the stage. Attention to her could contract mid-dance to focus thrillingly upon the centered image of the lead dancer, or star, because this individuation was only a pale reminder of any integral original and was always backed by the chorus-line scheduled, in the dance, to shatter into echoes of her. Often the right and left of this line of blurs divided into antithetical movements, just as a bell's visual vibrations might vary to either side of some struck center: legs could kick in clear approximate of

sex dance on the stage because there was no cut to fuck in all this ghostly mass: the imagined necessary power of the Bell Woman was 'number' rather than any frighteningly indivisible magic; her make-up had to be doll-like—a *reductio ad absurdum* of individual feature—; and her milieu was, natch, gaity . . . a humoresque to mask the horror of this recreation or re-enactment of the destruction of woman.

But George, a very precise man, wasn't satisfied with this blur of a woman: he cross-bred her show-biz dress with the costume of a ballerina—opting for some reminder, in this complex, of Tchaikovskian tragedy . . . the sad swan woman, mystery-woman, tragic heroine—albeit alive and kicking. Finally, he singled her out (usually in ballet tights and that blur of hips such fluff of swan's dress engenders) for a most particular transformation of his own devising: he imagined her multiplicity in the sense that she could be turned into anything—as a variety of being rather than a number of images of being . . . a transformation in quality rather than quantity—himself, The Magician, controlling the various charms of this *femme fatale*. He limited her in his imagination to the tradition of stage magic: she was always thus, the "helper" of The Magician: and otherwise, he drew upon the whole mythic history of woman, from oracle of Delphi to mermaid, from goddess to witch. In her divine aspects he had the courage to give her power over men—to loose demons against them . . . to turn men into beasts, etc.: but she was always putty in the hands of The Magician—or almost always—and could be made to jump through hoops like circus dogs, vanish in a puff of smoke at The Magician's slightest annoyance: she could be made-up out of anything . . . a dress-maker's dummy . . . the hoop she'd jump through . . . thin air itself. But whatever George's control over her, she was a magnificent imagining—greater than if she were just George's creation—inasmuch as she had a divine aspect which George adored and was certainly, in all her aspects, essentially "an original:" and, as such, we will call her "George's Love."

The 19th century magic showman had to be a mechanical genius, and George Méliès was no exception to this rule: the hero of his invention—that spirit-of-him created to wreak vengeance upon the demons who had destroyed his actual self be-

fore birth—that hero then, came to take on aspects of The Golem . . . a kind of stone impassivity and a manner of implacable servitude—the aloof presence and politesse of the stage magician, moving with rhythmic grace and machine precision through his acts and bowing to the audience he has just amazed . . . the audience he leads into the maze of awesome improbability—or taking upon himself the laughter of that audience he has just amused . . . the audience whose madness he had ‘humoured’ by making his hero-self appear as buffoon before them. George struggled many years preparing for the dreadful eventuality of his revenge and possible salvation: and all this time the hero took the gadgets and machines of magician’s trade as extensions and, finally, appendages of self . . . as knights must once have taken their swords, lances, horses. George built his own sets, gaining maximum control of the synthetic *mise en scène* which would one day (through sympathetic magic) precipitate the land shapes of original terror (the plain, the valley, the cave); and he designed all costume to wrap each moving creature in recognizable form (the oldest shamanism in the book); and he choreographed all movements to make (for the “rain dance”) a puppet-master’s perfect manipulability of the entire stage . . .

And he failed . . .

He achieved a worldly fame which was of no use to his desperate purpose, and wealth which couldn’t bribe demons, and he won The Bell Woman in her endlessly repeating variations of being (no vibration of which offered the least hope of heroine splendor or resolution for his dismembered self).

He failed as miserably as ever a man could . . . inasmuch as he had never even approached the ‘darkling plain’ of his dismemberment again—had made a charade instead to stand for it—a distraction repeated nightly with mocking success before an endlessly howling and applauding audience of horrible heads and hands floating in a black pit beyond the illuminated space of his actual shame.

Were it not for the machine, George would probably have played-out this hopeless game for the rest of his life: but the signs of the times were kind to George and directed him beyond his own advertence, led him (in midst of his inner despair)

down the most natural path of his daily existence—to the doorway of friendship with a man (symbolically?) named Pathé. It would have been difficult for George (as famous 19th century Parisian magician) *NOT* to have known the French inventor Pathé: and (as we know now how difficult it would have been for George to be *anything but* a 19th century magician) we can begin to say he had a *destiny* . . . that these two men were destined to meet . . . that the signs of the times—The Fates—perhaps advertised them to each other in such a milieu of practicality as to insure their friendship: (how happily extricable are these Fates once one understands the simple daily warps and woofs of all their weaving). Anyway, George was one day invited to the home of his friend Pathé to view a new invention.

The inventor dimmed all light and then cast a single beam of illumination across the room to etch the black and white image of a beach and ocean against the wall. George was not surprised; he had seen ‘transparencies’ before. Such ‘shadow images’ were, in fact, centuries old: and photographs had been available since George’s birth. But then, suddenly, the waves of the ocean began to move in toward the beach—to splash upon them . . . a brilliant rash of white light along a line of gray texture: had Venus herself emerged from this sea, been born in that room then, George couldn’t have been more excited than he was by this moving picture; for he must have immediately known this machine as a means for the Venus-birth of his own being, known it as a means of infinite transformation, known it as his Love.

His first move, in keeping with his character, was to attempt to buy it: but Pathé would have none of that—said this invention was for scientific research . . . not, no! not ever to be used for entertainment. George’s next action, in keep with his whole story of indomitable will, was to go home and invent it himself. Mercurially (after god of both thieves and artists) he both stole and created the Venus machine: like Prometheus he brought this god-force to ‘the people’—its firing light (on-off illumination of individual still images in sequences giving the illusion of movement) lit up his magician’s stage and dazzled his audiences.

But George, who knew these images were *not* moving pictures—knew them as ‘stills’ he’d photographed in a sequence of move-mirages—was no more dazed by this machine’s performance than by any of the other tricks of his creation . . . and thus he, alone of all those in attendance, first sensed something very strange occurring at each projectioning—something no one else in the entire world was to recognize consciously for twenty-some years: an eerie feeling . . . a rising of hair on the back of his neck . . . an indefinable fright to his whole nervous system—though not anything he could put his mechanic’s finger upon—nothing logically explicable—caused him increasing apprehension each time the flickering beam of light cut across his workshop room or flared over the sea of hands and faces in the darkened auditorium: it was as if some being he *hadn’t* photographed was attempting to “steal the show,” to usurp the screen and “upstage” all the pictured theatricality of his devising . . . by some ephemeral yet “real” act unchoreographed—or simply by the power of “presence” (that indefinable quality some actors have which makes it impossible to cast them as anything but “star.”)

George often faced the projector from his position on the stage, saw the beam of widening illumination as a hallway he might almost climb, diminishing in size until he’d perhaps vanished into the tunnel of the lens: he knew from experience that any step into the light would tear his shadow off his back and hurl it against screen behind; and so at first he avoided bodily intruding upon the apparitions of this machine. But his thoughts entered the flickering corridor and dissolved in hypnotized ‘light-mares’ as they encountered some alien quality moving there, creeping steadily down the temporal ladders of off-on illumining, gathering fearfully in the dark pockets of all pictured forms. It began to seem to him as if some forbidden veil were being ripped open in each shift of light . . . slowly, steadily, rent by black’s every insistence. The screen behind him smoked and darkened in formal patches as if the focused ray were turning it to carbon; and yet the screen seemed to repair itself continually, for these carboniferous patches shifted feverishly across the flat surface: were they smoke-hold of some hellfire,

then, that burns eternally without ever consuming? No!, rather—George sensed—this fire of motion pictures erupts out of Time's dimension . . . and burns through an infinite number of screens, or veils—films, then—beyond human comprehension.

Thus George became the first man to recognize motion pictures as medium of both super-nature and under-world—and instrument for unveiling the natural through reflection . . . and also the gateway for an alien world underneath the surface of our natural visual ability—an underworld that erupts into “ours” through every machine which makes visible to us what we cannot naturally sense. The so-called supernatural IS—as any magician knows—innately tangible to the naked eye . . . its recognition-as-nature requiring only a shift of thought—a sleight of hand: but the underworld HAD to be in-vented, as it were . . . i.e.: its very real existence had to be passed-thru invention for “us” to begin to be both aware *of* it and prey *to* its summation.

In these recognitions George inherited the full destiny he'd been born-to before his physical birth. The instant he found his medium . . . a medium that could summon-up the unborn . . . the only medium which can exteriorize moving imagination—in that instant George's life was all *before* him: he became the artist he had always been—the first such in modern history to turn ‘a medium’ into ‘an art:’ he had his demons lured from under and trapped into a realm of super sense: all the monster creatures which the mechanical thought of his unborn self had loosed upon him were loosed again through the terrible machine of motion pictures: and the long awaited battle could begin.

Knowing the black areas of the ignited screen to be the most actually haunted, George created many of his ghostly photo-apparitions in white—overexposing the image even, and blurring his spectral forms by shaking the camera . . . creating a counter-balancing demonology—an army of super-impositions upon all shadow. Black costume demons of his design tended, in his photo-play, to be easily defeated . . . exploded, usually, in a puff of brilliant white smoke.

The hero of these movie dramas was usually himself-as-photographed, garbed in enough black—the tux of the show-

man—to permit his photo-form to move magically through the darkling planes of any composition . . . carrying, as if it were a standard, his recognizable features for a head as hero's helmet—and yet sometimes disguised by the beard of an old man's role he'd created for his hero self—and almost always in that aged form disguised as a 'fool,' 'buffoon,' or one utterly prey to, at least, costume-demons in a play of foolishness . . . as if George were offering devils or baiting *The Devil* with his elder self (some trap, perhaps, borrowed from Goethe's *Faust* with its humanly happy ending.) Certainly George borrowed the trappings of all western man's converse with demons in a fight of fire with fire—white fire with black fire.

But because any actual monstrousness seemed to George to inhabit every area of graphic form—every shade of line that made image recognizable—his war spread naturally against every being and object photographed . . . the only safety of his hero-self being his ability to transform one thing into another—especially into some mass of white . . . the only heroic weapon, then, the magic wand: and George's ultimate means of helping his heroic self was his ability to transform the whole structure of the battlefield at any instant the 'going' got too rough. It was this latter necessity which led him to make the first splice in motion picture history—the attaching of one piece of celluloid sequence of "stills" to another.

The very nature of the war, however, began to change in the middle of George's career as film-maker. If every graphic of recognizable form was 'haven' for demons, then photo-still objects became enemy's fort. Every unmoving *thing* was, after all, a deteriorating thing. And if it had lines and shading upon it (nestling dark forces), it quickly became haunted: even the image of the sun—main source of light—required only the lines of a 'face' upon it to make it at enmity with anything more purely white. The moon, almost synonym for movie screen, haunted George particularly because its representation demanded a 'face' . . . thus led George to some cosmic suspicion of every light in the sky: were not all stars—as the first astro-watchers had seen them—simply high-lights vaguely indicating the shapes of enormous black creatures? Because George felt all photo-still objects as demon fortresses, he was moved as film-

maker to keep everything as animated as possible (like a man stuffing old houses with as much life as he could to edge out ghosts)—certainly to keep all people-shapes in continual movement in opposition to any ‘set’ of their surroundings. . . “on his side,” so to speak. He was also determined to give inanimate objects their ‘faces’ . . . like warning signs of what they harbored . . . and then often to animate those faces. He was inspired like the Greeks before him to “fill in” the spaces between stars—with as much white as possible.

All Renaissance shading, giving the illusion of depth, also provided ‘cover’ for his enemies: thus George was obsessed to attack the whole of western painterly trappings—Renaissance perspective itself: he therefore began to conceive his movie scenes as a series of movable ‘flats,’ offering a minimal ‘vanishing point’ and maximal relationship to the screen against which they would be projected. This desperate measure, against the grain of western visual development, gave George a new battleground (the likes of which had not been seen since the aesthetics of Florence had won over those of Siena). The nature of the battle became *anamorphic* (rather than *mythic*): the moving against the immovable: the quick against the dead. Just as he *knew* the moon must have a face (more dreadful to imagine in “the dark of the moon” than when clearly etched on white) so, too, he knew all white must have its black lines of form (though *not* necessarily spacial shadings . . . which he minimized by front lighting); and thereby he created his costume-demons as double-agents . . . spies on his side . . . demonstrating, so to speak, the defeat of all such monstrousness. George finally came to play The Devil himself again and again: and his witches came to take the very revenge that he himself desired. With masterful complexity George proceeded to play-out the war with spies and counter-spies of triumphant vision. His films became anagrams of incredible duplicity as he abrogated more and more powers of transformation to himself and his self’s hero magician . . . or witch . . . or demon . . . or devil, even.

But George could not honestly bring any aspect of his dismembered being to identify with either inanimate object or depth-of-space. The ‘sets’ were always ‘given over’ to the demons . . . his only control of them being the warning sign of their

visage—thus visibility—and “change of scene.” Inevitably, therefore, George came up against cosmic disaster . . . his defeat by material itself and the space of its residence—demon strata!

George, at the time of life a man just begins to feel himself as ‘ageing,’ would have surrendered were it not for the emergence of a new hero-image in his dreams—the only hero who might possibly pass through the veils of materiality and traverse all cosmological stuffing . . . the last (for George) heroic trick in the bag: The Machine: yes! . . . the hero-as-machine—old Golem again—young Venus maybe too, who’d once before given him a new lease on struggle: The Machine-as-photographed . . . The Machine-as-pictured through the means of machinery—something like a ‘hall of mirrors’ reflecting mirrors, *ad infinitum*, to confound all material sense and punch a hole in the whole of universal space.

Was it not the perfect servant or “helper” of The Magician? Was it not that absolute contradiction to confound demonology?—inasmuch as The Machine *was* material, yet animate beyond any human capability . . . was there any limit to the space a machine might traverse?—the master of it, himself, utterly inside its armor. Was it not a thing made up of many inanimate parts which were put together and came to ‘life’ then as they were fueled to interact perfectly with each other in a miraculous entirety of moving being? The Machine was—yes!—kin-creator to George—his bloodless (therefore humanly invulnerable) brother . . . and woman, too (for be it automobile or boat or aeroplane or rocket, even, some ‘unwritten law’ had always made it be lovingly called a “her”): she, any machine, was—yes!—the triumph of all his imagining and actual invention . . . the wildest Galatea of all Pygmalion time—“let ‘er rip” through Time itself, if possible, and all black space, shaking shadows off herself in each shift of gear, turn of wheel, whirl of The Magician’s motivation as she/he tore through the film’s cast fast as frames could touch her/his movement across the screen.

The Machine of his dreams became star of his dramas, defying all actor-scoffers—knocking ‘em down when they got in the way . . . knocking down walls, houses, and all such blocks or blockheads of material . . . putting out the eye of the moon . . .

jostling stars, even—and all the while protecting The Magician (and his friends), carrying him as gently as a baby in a cradle. . . as a baby in the womb. . . as man entombed. . .

Yes—alas—The Machine failed George too, finally. . . it was for all its animation a recognizable shape; and as such it fell into every trap of illumination—fell, as a train, once, into the sun's mouth. . . damned those within it to the same set-to of all inanimate scenery. As a recognizable object The Machine could never be more than subject matter: thus George's photo-plays still whirled shamanistically their dance flashing blacks and whites against impenetrable screen.

George desperately tried color toward the last—dyeing the celluloid—having images of objects (often The Machine) tinted tones that might vibrate them into another dimension of thought. . . brushed-in hues over the black and white shape on every single frame to shift the dark/light trap of photo-genesis. But he only managed to paint himself into a beautiful corner: (color is a quality of light—a qualification then. . . a diminishment as surely as shadow).

The battle was over—without there having actually been a fight—and George was left with reels of projectionable maps of a campaign only imagined. . . a record of sympathetic magic that had failed the maker's inner tension—had failed to alter for him what had already been. He had directed and acted a series of pretensions; and he had been (as all artists before him) simply used by forces beyond his imagined “2nd coming”—his ‘coming again’—his comprehension.

No artist has ever been permitted to comprehend the work he creates: only those who do creatively attend it are permitted to second-guess its actual being. . . make game of it. . . hunt down the beasts of it in lairs of their own angelic orders. Only those who exert as much creative energy apprehending the work of art as it took to make it, can break the traps of form that whirl an almost impenetrable cocoon of habit-sense around revelation. But the audiences of George's day were having NONE of *THAT* you may be sure. . . certainly NOT any Gordian knots to be unraveled on their ‘evening's out’—no!, not ever. . . never, then, any reminder, please, of what each

man, woman, and child had forfeited pre-birth . . . not, for god's sake, any labyrinthine amidst our pleasure—: let us, rather, be spirit *only*, escaping in a gas of distractive words, music and images meaning no thing whatsoever: let the gods and demons *have* of us what they will, what they have *had*, so long as our play is surely fun and free and we reasonably assured of soul's immortality.

An industry of imitators began making films like George's, but films which carried no weight of obsession, no haunt, no art. These 'escape movies' freed audiences from the strange discomforts and the apprehensions which George's elicited in even the most dense sensibility. George could not compete with his imitators and thus lost all commercial stance for his cosmic act.

Toward the last he tried to make a "come-back," as it's called, and he made a series of movie dramas which premised his primal scene of dismemberment *as if* it had been at the hands of audience on the darkling plain of the auditorium . . . as if the hands and heads of the clapping and laughing wealthy members of society—black with evening dress—had torn him/George to pieces . . . as indeed they had. His commercial failure—at their hands—had taught George lessons more immediate to his daily living than those he had learned in the womb. But these social dramas of the last years of his creating posed no war—as had the fantasies of all previous making . . . George was by then too defeated in all his being to manage even imaginary battle. He used the motion picture machine finally, almost as if to write a letter to 'the worldly'—pleading the cause of 'the poor' . . . asking shelter and food, *at least* for the abandoned baby or starving child he now felt himself to be. Sometimes he asked in these literaries his films had become to be invited again to the bacchanal—the birthday party of all beast scene . . . the celebration of demon's day amidst the rich (those who epitomized, for George, the humans that lived most successfully with dismemberment). In other films he sometimes fancied powers of goodness that would take pity upon his orphaned self and all such outcasts of a Victorian society obviously given-over to an evil that existed on, now, moral grounds—rather than fields of cosmic disorder. He envisioned all church, for instance, as just

another theatre where audience gathered to escape...rather than attend the messages of angels. He had no hero anymore, nor invention either. All that was left to his imagination was that old 'mothering' heroine: Christian Charity. His every plot now was dedicated to arousing this spirit-of-pity in each spectator or at least to haunt every eye with this goodly ghost. His scenes now were only supports of an aesthetic propaganda—for yes, these plays, though Charity advertisements, were still sufficiently "of an art" to establish a realm of consideration beyond George's wishes...were more than the moral pleadings he imagined them to be: they did, as a matter of incredible fact, anticipate the aesthetic milieu of the next great film artist, D. W. Griffith, and prophetically announce the subject which would most interfere with the light of this new art for the next twenty-five years. D.W. Griffith was to go to war in this matter and marshal pictured "fact" as his army against social indifference: but George Méliès was reduced to begging *for* sympathy...rather than *in* sympathetic magic...and had only sentiment on his side.

George's visual pleas went altogether over the heads of his audience, raining tears down out of their eyes instead of diamonds for either him or 'the poor:' he therefore failed himself once again...failed (as all artists do) to achieve anything reasonable to himself—for the muse-force in a man only uses "reason"...feeds on it from inside out, destroying it while assuming its logical shape...feeds on the maker, turning him inside out—destroys every idea he has of himself, finally even of himself-as-artist. George was luckier than many (having that 'luck' of the very hard-worker): he exhausted most of his aesthetic possibilities in his late middle age.

Magician that he was, he managed to vanish from popular sight, effected completely his disappearance from 'The World' as it's called, and attained, at least, a private life. All his failures in the realm of heroics proved useful at last in that kingdom-of-acceptance any 'daily living' is: George had identified sufficiently with every imaginable creature and condition of circumstance to manage a livelier/happier personal existence than most men even day-dream. Certainly no nightmares could ever take him by terrible surprise again. He continued to see the

shifting faces in the fire's dark of his hearth and all those leering from his living-room walls, floors, furnishings—the visages of all wood-work . . . the shapes in the irregularities of plaster, *et-cetera*: but these had become 'familiar,' so to speak, and must often have seemed even friendly—charged as they were with the nostalgia of acknowledged enmity grown old . . . : certainly they were no longer terrifying to him as they were when he was a child.

He married the proprietress of a candy store and became, thus, shopkeeper at center of children's world. He had children of his own; and he certainly did everything he could to protect them and all his candy customers too, from any fate at all like his: but still he couldn't entirely resist playing The Magician at times for them—performing small parlor tricks for their amazement . . . tiny transformations reduced to the stage of his aged hands, alive with loving movement in a flutter of tricks—a 'now-you-see-it/now-you-don't' amusement before the admiring eyes of a child: and he would then, more often than not, show how it was done . . . so that there should be no sensibility trap left in the wake of his game with them.

When he was a very old man—and his children fully grown and, happily, none of them artists . . . or even magicians . . . he was re-discovered, recognized, in his candy shop by a government official. His films, having a life of their own quite separate from his, had become established film classics in the meantime. Something in each of these films drew people to look at them again and again: after all the laughs had spent their force, and the films had entertained to their fullest extent, there still remained an attraction to them beyond popularity—some felt-quality of power unleashed in each . . . as if they were—as *in fact they are*—one of the greatest untapped natural resources in the world . . . if only one could penetrate their surface and release the real energy of them. George, of course, had no such notion of them: they had failed him much as children will fail a father—had failed to even make him a living, let alone to restore him to some whole being . . . ; and he was more-than-a-little surprised at the attention they belatedly brought him like some old soldier decorated twenty/thirty years after his defeat

on the field of battle.

George was awarded for *god* knows what reason, the French Legion of Honor medallion...

... He died a very short time after.



DAVID WARK GRIFFITH

They named him David: and he was to grow up to *become* a giant and slay himself.

He was an American and a Southerner—a bean-pole-of-a-boy with a wild, timid, swagger to his walking . . . a hesitancy in all conversation. He cut his eye-teeth on the Southern moon: he could stare straight into the face of the sun: he spit to put out stars. He was born 'ten-feet-tall' in his feeling; and he grew and grew and grew.

His 'people' had been wronged not long before his birth; and he knew, youngly, he was The One born to set the matter right. He felt a destiny river run between his toes, a destiny wind tug the hairs of his head; and he grew shy with others, his kin-folk even, who could not bring themselves to see how tall he'd grown, how far apart from head to toe his destiny had drifted all his thinking from their sense of things. They'd still pretend he was their size—his mother wishing normalcy for her boy—and that his too-much thinking was a fault . . . his father blaming shyness on his thought. They were defeated in their daily living . . . as they had been by the war . . . and could not bring themselves to see that he was not!

David's father had been 'the spirit of war' itself: Colonel "Roaring" Jake Wark Griffith, the kind of man who though

wounded, fought on and on and on—the Martian wind of his nick-name, the very growing spirit of his song . . . the air-of-war puffing young David into existence. But wounds were all his people saw—their eyes enslaved by defeat—: and David ‘bid-ed’ his time with them, pretending to be knee-high to himself, and shyly moved among all those who’d toe-the-line of imprisoned spirit.

His father’s tales were taller than he’d yet grown in his own estimation—and all illustrated with fleshy wounds and scars and blazing eyes and battle lines of facial feature: his father, War, became to David, Story . . . a wind-spirit of language telling . . . and Drama—the expression of aged face, more terrible in the silent shifts of flesh than in the husky voice or remembrances: wind moaned in the eyes of talk and told of the dead who died in vain: and the masks of sadness and horror, seen close, were the very ghosts themselves come forth on War-father’s face to beg to be laid-to-rest at last—though some came to ask revenge . . . these the most horrible of all.

David had a sister, Mattie, who in fact ‘mothered’ him: she it was who told him the secrets of The Fates—his destiny as it had been before—and The Muse . . . the goddess of all human life as it is to be. If War-father shaped the soul of David, then Mattie spirited his mind. She finally entered his head, when it had grown large enough to contain her entirety, and remained there unchanged—his guiding spirit—all his life: for David, like all giants, was inherently stupid and, without Mattie, he could never have fulfilled his destiny to right all wrongness. Wrong IS clever! Right is always simple-minded and therefore often loses its stance to tricks. But Mattie would ‘see to’ that; for she was American Hope incarnate: a woman of culture—refined on this continent to an innocence untouched by even her own sophistication . . . found in the South as an unknowing creature who yet knows all—a vessel of civilization who moves with the grace of her whole culture, yet is utterly unmotivated by what she carries . . . mind of Southern memory untouched by mattering—a dream woman, innocent as a baby mammaling . . . as ephemeral as sound, these symbol wenches, spiced with the Frenchness of New Orleans—these Southern Belles! Mattie

was perfect—as all Southern women—for minding men... a tireless mother—ringing, unchanging, influencing—utterly plastic (in the hands of men) and completely intact (in the minds of men), no matter the touch, baby goddess, all loveliness and gloss! Mattie could remain an absolute slippery solid of love through any War-father's or Sun's inferno.

And she did...

Young giant, David, knew The Bible and knew thus his destiny explicit—and knew his father, Jacob's, too... knew the fate of all those who wrestled with angels—knew better than to wrestle even 'angel' Mattie in his mind. His strength was brute and his fate culturally sealed: he was to kill himself at high-noon of his living, as death's example to all the others—the enemy as well as his kin defeated... to teach the victors Mercy... to teach the vanquished how to die... to teach both how to live in peace—God's rest to all ghosts... (yes, hunks of Christ broke off in his Psyche).

Young dumb giant David did then shyly hide his size among his defeated people's littleness, and assume the shapes of their cultural stance from his mother sister Mattie, and share his father's war-likeness, sure as "Wark," in the spirit of language story, and grow till he towered like a Goyaesque god above all past's battlefield and human misery... or as if this were the genie of his eye's light and he a tweed-suited, straw-hatted, bespectacled, cane-carrying Aladdin, inclined to rub his closed lids at every wonder and make his wishes amidst a shower of closed-eye sparks and cameo-ed visions. This teen-age dreamer with his Mattie intact and tucked into the folds of his brain, this young man, then, half Paul Bunyan and half John Appleseed, set off for the Big City to seek the fortune of his death... (following, thus, that American small-town instinct of the self-dissatisfied—thus U.S.-destined—, as repetitive, generation to generation, as salmon's spawn).

Big 'sin' City then, where small-town Americans go to hide-and-see and heroes to die, became young David's home. He hid at first and sought employ as part of his play—gathering 'warps' for the Story of himself among the American hucksters... (much like the 'carpet-baggers' who had come in the guise of traveling salesmen to strip what wealth of his South the

war had left—to cheat his ‘people’ in the variable name of Freedom—the game of ‘free enterprise’ their prison): oh!, David would learn, for surety, the capitolian system and take it unto himself . . . would demonstrate its death-dealing inside-out at his own undoing: he harbored a wolf in all his sheepishness who wished to devour the wicked world—*this* the Drama that tugged his lean cheek-bones, mellowed his eyes, and stopped all comedy on his face at a mesh of squint wrinkles and an ironed smile.

Nervous as he was with such pre-tensions, and having always played a-part from all the ‘others,’ what more natural for him than to become an actor—that salesman of the imagined soul . . . geist-huckster in chameleon-bag of his own skin. But he was no ordinary actor—nor extraordinary, either—hadn’t studied the craft to accomplish the stagey artifice of his day . . . no: he became an ‘extra’—a character in search of his own authorship—in a series of dramatic “novelities”: “toys” as ‘the movies’ were thought-to-be at this time . . . a short story told with “still” picture-cards which a nickel would set whirling in simulation of motion in the nickelodeon. What David did would hardly have been called “acting” then: for already the movie-makers had discovered “life-likeness” to be more convincing in these pictures than Dramatics as it was projected from The Stage. David, who had much childhood-practised pretense at “life-likeness,” prospered at this play of empiric deception—all the while searching for the bits of part that would eventually give him his place . . . not just as a name in lights, as actors want to prove their existence, finiteness—but rather his search was for a place in the sun, high-noon . . . infinitude.

The Eagle’s Nest brought him closest to this (right) of his wish and convinced him he could go no higher as actor. For some time he had been playing in movies made for darkened auditoriums, rather than brief boxed flips of nickelodeon—veritable ‘epics’ in comparison to the toy vignettes . . . long flicks, these, wherein an actor could develop the character he was playing—play it out to some more psychological fulfillment. In *The Eagle’s Nest* David played ‘The Father’ of a baby snatched by a giant eagle—played ‘the rescuer’ of his childhood self from that rapacious bird-symbol Northern America had taken

(as Rome and Napoleon before) to stand for its warring flights-of-fancy: The Eagle, vicious bird-of-prey, tearing into the innocent, harmless creatures of the earth and carrying them off to its nest: and young David climbing this giant height to fight with bare hands this Eagle beast and kill it . . . and rescue the/ 'his' child. It was no 'bit-part': he was 'the lead' —the leader—in this drummed-in, since his childhood, whole role of his being. He could go no further as an actor: he knew he must now assume power over actors and captain authorship itself for his necessary Drama.

(One cannot help but pause and wonder what the history of The United States would have been had 'our' forefathers chosen The Turkey-cock, as Ben Franklin suggested, for national standard. Certainly The Eagle was specifically North-eastern ideal—the idol of those who looked-to-the-mountains, thought of preying on the land as the bird itself did . . . the fur-trappers with their talons of steel . . . the carpet-baggers with their claws of thieves-law . . . the whole survival-of-the-fittest clan who twisted freedom in jaws of their own devising. Certainly The Southern and South-western farmer *shot* such-like birds and thought of them with no more respect than he would a rat or any-creature-else who might threat his chicks and, yes, turkey-cocks and other domestic animals. But The Southern, as well as Northern, farmer lived in the schizophrenia of painter Hick's *Peacable Kingdom*: all God's creatures living-together/feeding-on-each other . . . impossible Christian contradiction . . . a farm the very jaw of Man itself, crunching familiars—each farmer eating himself alive in spasms of bitter domestic guilt—each feeding his child the flesh of trusting creatures unequally in his care. The Northeastern ideal was at least more straight, saved the nation from eating its domestic heart out, except in Thanksgiving.)

(It is amazing, the power of unconscious persuasion any bird as symbol can have over men—particularly as the roots of human admiration for winged creatures is almost always twisted beyond recognition . . .: Mattie, in David's mind, would have it that bird-song was Joy. Surely giant David, in animal dumbness, must have known all song was threat, the bird's defense of his territory: the entwine of these twin knowledges

made birds prime forces of aesthetic depth in maturely-tortured David's work, as did all such clashes of 'culture' and IN-sensitivity in his nature. Latter-day 'Matties' would have The Dove—a creature who, given the chance, will torture its own kind slowly to death—be a symbol of Peace: David Griffith, in his greatest film, hitched such like winged horses to a tiny cart bearing gifts of a warrior king to his virgin beloved.)

But—to get back to a younger, lesser David—he began, then, mid film career to direct movies, to 'lord' it over his play and wag his own tales in the light: as the cameras whirled, recording actor gestures, David, like a puppet-master pulled the strings of their every movement, telling them each action to take, making up the drama as it rolled along being photographed, often without any rehearsal. It was child's play all-right—"Now, pretend you're very happy"—"Now, look angry!" . . . :for whatever the story the movie was supposed to be telling, the motion pictures spoke to all audience with bits and snatches of gesture and all other action most effectively made-up while actually filming—an actor's response to director's instruction quicker than either could think . . . quick as life itself. Somehow early in his career, this David/Goliath saw Accident as the prime death-dealer/life-giver in every drama: he often deliberately confused his actors in order to pitch their dramatic stances into a play of Fate—a chancy operation for sure, with even the best of pantomimists (as in the tradition of *Commedia Dell'Arte*) . . . but with untrained amateurs it was a calculated risk that stripped the last vestiges of stagey make-believe from before the movie spotlight and laid these photo-plays as barely real as cross-section slides under microscope. The actors and actresses often became as if suddenly spot-lighted in the attempted escape from prison of each his-or-her-self and/or the act/theft of another's soul: their (photo-screened) faces often went blank for an instant (in response to an unrecorded director's command) and therefore took on (as illuminated) looks of real looking, actual searching for expression, action, as if each were possessed of an inner god-consciousness (as they had been by David's voice) which drove them inside out. David thus fathered Western traditional fatality into the movies: it only remained for him to expand this "realistic" drama

to giant proportions and to move it beyond studio lighting and into the sun . . . and one thing other: to accomodate the whole-of-it to/fore- 'Mattie' culture!

Others had been working this 'uppity' side of the street for centuries and mining mind's-eye/dream-stuff above all mattering, too: the whole aesthetic West had chosen again and again to trust the eyes above all knowing (as Louis Zukofsky proves conclusively in his great book *Bottom on Shakespeare*)—the sound synonym of "eye" itself a prime affirmative . . . "the ayes *have it!*", etc. The arts of West's 19th century, especially literature and music, distorted their natural means as if in effort to give birth to motion pictures—novels, shifting away from writ's ends in *de-script*, attempted to 'give the picture,' moving as language does (as Sergei Eisenstein was to prove in his book *Film Form*, many 19th century novels can now be used as effective filmscripts without changing a single word(. . . so-called "program music" attempted, through tone textures corresponding to kin-visual feelings, to elicit scene, a seeing from all hearing, and thus to put this most abstract art at the service of aura-outing to the expense of all traditional audio—the line of all painterly development thickened, all out-line blurred in a frenzy to investigate the properties of light, the possibilities of movement: motion pictures HAD to be invented . . . because the innate *need* for such a thing was tearing all arts to pieces in unsuccessful simulation.

Now whereas most European film-makers inherited a Latin name for this new absolutely necessary art ("Cinematographer," for instance derivative of the term "writer of movement"), American David learned it called "moving pictures"/"movies," "Flickers"/"flics," and was himself to coin the term "Sun-play," and even copyright it, to 'cover' his dramatic manifestations through this medium: his emphasis was always more directed to motion and illumination of "the real"—as the name of his own company, "Biograph Co." would indicate . . . "photo," then, was means to a graphic end—a graph of "reality": and this became a *style* with him shaped absolutely by what was most "real" to the medium itself: the very track of light.

It can be said that every artist creates by intruding his personal experiences into the purity of medium—and that he achieves an art out of this intrusion to the extent he respects the medium . . . is true to its means . . . more than his self's expression therethru. If this be true, then David Wark Griffith became an artist quite by Accident—the same quality of accident he honored in all his motion picture making. His giant simple-mindedness depended absolutely upon uncomplicated notions—such as “right” and “wrong”—and, like all people simplistically motivated, his god was “Truth”: but “Truth,” like all 20th century gods, had become tricked-out as concept by too much wrongdoing in its name . . . : and thus the ‘fact’ of light's track along the strip of film, and its lens-shaped life-likeness, came to fascinate him above all consideration of his personal morality: the celluloid strip was after all a record of light's movement (that was how film existed in ‘fact’): these movements were more ‘life-like’ when Accident prompted them or when David created ‘the unexpected’ to destroy his actors preparedness (‘the unexpected’ being all he knew of Fate as factual): it only remained for him/David to frame it . . . i.e., to satisfy the Mattie in his mind and thus fulfill his destiny *culturally*—“in good taste” etc. . . . (for this was a ‘right’ too—as in “the right way” etc.): thus he became a Grammarian: arranger of accidental happenstance ‘any-which-way’ expressions into as-if-absolute forms and orders of pre-determined consideration. It was an old trick which in language usage had for centuries made the dumbest people seem the wisest, buried all new barbarian thought in clichés of punctuation, or negated new-thought-magic altogether because of its bad spell. Grammar-in-fact was the twined consideration where-with David sought to set the stage to set the matter right.

Another man who looked just like him—Woodrow Wilson—brought American grammarian logic into government at this same time . . . sought to traditionalize living history: and he was, too, to exemplify the death of all traditional goodness in the face of contemporary governmental evil. David rose to commercial prominence during the same period this Princeton scholar became President of The U.S.: they were twins of identical destiny—these two men . . . Woodrow of its finite manifes-

tation, and David of its infinite—Woodrow to die literally, as martyred example, and David to die symbolically, exemplifying the martyrdom of his giant animality to the murderous innocence of his Kentucky-farmer-self.

At the crossroads of his life, giant 'Goliath' Griffith had written the *Crossroads of Life* and starred his David-self in the leading role as suitor of a clergyman's daughter. In the story he wrote, the girl is finally forced to choose between 'the life of an actress' and her father's forgiveness—between suitor David and her dad...: she chooses daddy: two months later, mid-1908, our living hero signs his Griffith-name to a contract specifying he'll direct films for The Biograph Co. Very few any longer call him "David"—"D W" and/or simply "Griffith" is his name... his giant self begins to move through economic power as an actual force in the world. David now 'bides' his time as never before, hardly making an appearance either on or off the screen.

Mattie it is who begins to emerge—first, perhaps as "the clergyman's daughter"...always, anyway, some woman as vessel of virginity about to be broken—some girl-with-Achilles-heel... a heroine... carrying charm unknown to her, about to be stolen by an institutionalized, unseeing man... by heroic insensitivity. This the prime subjective matter of his time... the very story those as-if-movie-scripted 19th century novels most often told—the unworthiness of the brute male, kneeling and bound foetally before his Belle, the Victorian clapper-maid, wide-eyed with ignorance of her own inestimable worth... though she knew enough to defend the impeccableness of her carriage when his wolf-man-self, always haired-over face, would villain-forth in the full of the moon. Dumb "Goliath" Griffith wrote it all down for himself like an idiot making notes in lieu of remembrance: and he directed it out for eye's light to the fullest conclusions of illumining, trying every variation of 19th century themes which monkeying mind could imagine. He composed his pictures in absolute 'parrot' of French "salon" painting and British/American "genre" art, picking up every stitch of linear form for camera focus, which painting had begun to abandon in giving birth to film. His frame-line cropped all actresses to painterly busts: and full-lengths of all actor-stan-

ces were as traditionally composed as if arranged for Parisian waxmuseum. He was like a big boy belatedly having his childhood—covertly playing with flower dolls and leaden soldiers, destroying both in moments of self-disgust, yet persisting in a game which, albeit tardy, must be played-out (chips of Dionysus dropping off his giant shoulders).

One such game—of undestructive resolve—was Fate's writ direct: *Three Sisters*, old as fairy-telling, with every 19th century mellow-rot twist...sister Mattie/Cinderella played by Mary Pickford, "America's sweetheart" who loves a blind man and manages with money to *cure* his insensitivity. But she, 'the ugly sister'—therefore 'death' itself—fears he'll not love her when he can actually see. He does, of course...what choice had he under the circumstances?...and the 19th century 'happy-ending' in—yes—Death, which all life IS when seen as "happily ever aftering," rolled on through D W's increasing exhaustion of these themes.

And where was David?—he now the genie bottled-up in movie-lamp blackness...the victim of imitating enemy tactics—David now carpet-bagged, himself, and all but sold on the world wide Griffith market.

The 'blind' world fell for Pickford sweetness as sure as the heart of America had; and in fact the whole Southern Belle harem D W primed for the lights and manipulated in memory of his beloved Mattie. The giddy Gish sisters came along, wide-eyed and cupid-bow lipped in serene innocence—mellow Mae Marsh of sisterly mothering remembrance—or Miriam Cooper...dark lady in the 'apple-pie' light of his eye...and many many others the world came to call "The Griffith Girls."

Somewhere along this line of moonlighting, these format ladies began to get out of alignment, each coming into her own ritual world-wise as a "star" and/or that image which would best spark masturbation in the frustrated males of the attendant audience, and thus kindle envy in their female companions, wives, etc. Mad King Griffith found his harem invaded; and he hatched a series of penny-dreadful dramas exemplifying the terrible fate of all such villainy in the light of love's pure movie beam. His wish was to make each viewer feel these bits of feminine light, these "stars" then, as kin, as sister, as mother. This

was, to him, a harem of virgins: (veils of 'immaculate conception' blanketed his dance of Salome thought: for his was the head of John Baptist already served on the platter to Mattie's stance . . . as it *was to be* the head of Goliath severed in David's Luck: for he knew—as we all do—that young David could only win over the giant by way of Luck, by Accident, then, by God!, by all-the-Fates eventuality . . . ; and, therefore, he worried not-at-all, these mid-career years, that Evil had tricked him out as King of its 19th century 'camp': he played the part to-the-hilt—was the world's first Hollywooden god . . . therefore founded that American Holy Wood wherein, as of old, Adonis—as he was to become—must die).

While still 'sowing wild oats,' before he'd settled down to harem, DW found the perfect eunuch to dress his 'dolls' with proper light, the only real apparel of their existence on movie screen: he came to recognize the genius of Billy Bitzer—cameraman of Accident extraordinaire . . . old 'chancy' Billy, Fate's darling—in the sense that angels always look-out-for the drunk, the fool, the child . . . : Billy Bitzer, with the luck of the Irish, became Griffith's main cameraman—because he had the inevitable knack of making meaningful mistakes.

A 'mis-take' in film parlance is a photographic 'take' that must be 'taken' again—when, say, the lens' cleaning tissue is left hanging down over the lens . . . unless of course angels arrange it there so that it filters the light—just so!—to veil the features of, say, a woman's face and thereby gives the world new vision of beauty . . . an odalisque as if nude, so blurred are her clothes in disintegration of form, that one can imagine her flesh more surely than if she were photographed naked . . . a woman soft as the halo of light itself, her features blurred to such indistinct feather-bedding she'll fit each individual man's masturbatory wishing—each woman's imagining herself in such light—: oh, yes! . . . Billy Bitzer was—with angel's Luck—the perfect tailor of The Emperor's new photo clothes.

Billy'd forget to open his lens wide enough: and there—lo and behold!—was a cameo-ed portrait of the "star," ready made for the movie lockets of each man's mind. Bitzer's Luck was that he always 'goofed' *within* the limits of Griffith's usability. He'd over-or-under-expose a shot: and there!—as Grif-

fith saw it—would be a mood . . . a mode of expressing emotion. But Billy was never so ‘chancy’ as to make blank leader, black or white—his ‘angels’ saw to that . . . each ‘slip’ of his was but a slur of conventional image—a sling of slightly biased light.

(I want it to be clear that it was never much more than the Billy Bitzer in great Griffith’s mind, a figure of his imagination, who could claim creative credit in the making of these meaningful mis-takes: DW Griffith worked camera magic equally well through such cameramen as Karl Brown, photographer of panoramic desert shots of *Intolerance*, for instance, and Hendrik Sartov, primarily responsible for the delicate photographic beauty of *Broken Blossoms*, and Sartov and Paul Allen who together photographed *Orphans of the Storm*, to name a few: Billy Bitzer was himself a fortuitous ‘accident,’ happening along as, and when, he did into Griffith’s hallucinatory usage.)

While Mattie could be said to begin to be mined as a merge of inner distinct “Griffith Girl” features, Billy could be said to be understood by “DW” as the “David”-geist that brought such forth into the light of projection: bit by Bitzer Bit, the spirit of giant slayer was loosed on the world.

He/David-hero waxed fat, also, on the sloth all giants suffer-forth in their bigness—such laziness as, for example, causes exact repetition in art . . . that, for instance, an aesthetic immensity tends to thrash back-and-forth without variance over its self-destructive termination: (think of the end of almost any 19th century symphony!)

(Take The Russians—those who, most in their music, sought to hatch visual counterpart to all audioing—starting with Glinka, who inherited, at the very beginning of this Russian first-classical music movement, the whole West’s symphony orchestra, as if it were a single instrument . . . unlike most cultural beginners who start song with single human voice . . . an aesthetic immensity from Russian scratch—and Glinka sorely tempted as all after him to repeat a good thing when he heard it, again and again . . . all those many notes to write down for just an instant of orchestral song—the temptation to double this time of music as simply as making the two-strokes and double-spots of a ‘repeat-bar’: thus the aesthetic of theme-and-repetition—as in Domenico Scarletti—as distinct from the more nor-

mal Baroque theme-and-variations . . . as in Bach . . .)

And great "DW" took his "p's" and "q's" from mid-European 'program music' development—Wagnerian leitmotiv as an idea that was applicable to the editing of motion pictures—(oh, he would charm King Saul and us all with his harping) . . . relying primarily on the whole German and Slavic 'tone poem' movement—as indeed he used this very music itself to accompany the images and engender appropriate 'mood' . . . though he also intercut these 'long-hair' modes with bursts of contrasting folk song—(much like his unknown contemporary, the composer Charles Ives). Just so-much as a "p" and a "q" are alike yet therefore very clearly different, so-too movie-shot "repetitions" are likenesses, occurrences in the same mode or scenic mold which cause a difference-of-feeling more dynamic than contrasting images . . . the "repeat" shot affecting all spectators almost as if it were a mirror-image of its previous self—further "repetitions" giving image multiple dimension as if all scene were reflected in mirrors reflecting mirrors (thus "DW" discovered for film, as Gertrude Stein did—at the same time—*à propos* language . . . that repetition is impossible; and 'as-if repeating' is a strengthening of all psychological reflectiveness).

(Therethru this accident, this by-product of laziness, a new aesthetic was loosed through music, language, and motion picture art in the 20th century—i.e., . . . a force which would automatically cut-down any huge and complex world of art to, for the simplest emotional—let us say: "Davidian":—understanding).

It can be seen again and again that great Griffith had a personal *subject* that mattered enough to him to warrant endless as-if-repetition in great laziness; and it can be seen that this had very little to do with the 'Accident' of his *objective* destiny—almost nothing therefore to do with here-to-fore/Mattie-culture . . . nor with Davidian law in his nature. The seed of all his subject matter can be found in an early work called *A Corner In Wheat*: it is a work of guilty conscience rather than a work-of-art—might have been writ by the very villainous 'rich man' it postulates as "lead" . . . or by his selfish daughter. It was, in fact, written by rich Griffith himself and was marketed by him for

all it was worth; and it was one, among those many 19th 'penny dreadful' century laments, of "the plight of the poor" victimized by "the industrial revolution." With his penchant for 'fact,' D W drew on actual incident and as usual 'milked it' to Death—beyond all *but personal* Truth in the matter . . . i.e., he postulated 'the rich man's,' *his own*, death at film's end—his 'black' self buried under wheat's white/movie flour in forced morality beyond any actual occurrence.

The "plight" shots repeat, thus disintegrating "the poor"—seen 'before and after' *A Corner In Wheat* etc. . . . the poor farmer's sowing-of-seed a moving copy of American "genre" art. The shots of 'the rich' tend *not* to repeat—the "industrialist" seen in all his operations as "revolutionist" . . . until of course his 'fall' (when revolution becomes turn of the same old wheel of Death). But (until then) all depiction of wealth is visually progressive—seen as an increasing complexity of visual development . . . photographed in imitation of 19th century French's 'salon' art.

All the subjective elements of Griffith's later greatest works are to be found in this brief Biograph—but very little of his art . . . very little Bitzer 'Accident' at all in this work . . . thus practically nothing of David, except as he was to be pitied as *of* "the poor"—and except in-as-much as it was clear he/"the poor" would endure beyond all "industrial" Death. Mattie/'culture-lady' is definitely slandered in a visual slur of white-womanly featurings and gestures buyable as Hell itself—seen in the film's black and white morality as black's 'dupe' . . . a superficiality sustained by wealth: and so she was, too, to be seen again and again in Griffith's *Intolerance*—just as black was, from all his Southern upbringing, to be always seen as inherently 'bad,' be-it 'tux' or color-of-skin, be it mustache of villain or negroid threat in *The Birth of a Nation*.

Comparison of *A Corner In Wheat* with any of great Griffith's later work, will show us more clearly than is usually visible that subject matter has really nothing whatever to do with the make of an art. *Because* David, Wark, 'Mattie,' Griffith, in all the multiple complexity of his nature, was essentially an Artist-by-Accident, he was naturally among the very greatest the world has ever hatched: he did never know enough of him-

self to too-much interfere with The Muse's use of him—nor Fate's accidental splendor, either . . . nor to save any part of him selfishly from the whole of his fathering-forth—as every man must for better or worse—his Destiny in-deed, in deadly earnest, in Death at last.

Let us gather, then/now, ladies and gentlemen, to watch this, the likes of which The World has never seen before—that a man should kill his giant-self with his child's littleness . . . and do it before his 'lady' /sister to them both—in the full of the sun—in the full of pride of each of them . . . Oh!—ladies/gentlemen . . . it could only happen here—in America . . . now—in this 20th of our western centuries.

See great Griffith in your mind's eye 60 feet tall in his camera tower, hovering over platoons of actors, costumed for a mock of Civil War battle and spread across miles of a meadowland where such battle once actually happened—those closest to Griffith appearing as toy soldiers from his height . . . those furthest from him looking like bacteria on a microscopic slide: and see him, then, ladies and gents, smile the smile of Woodrow Wilson and pick up, yes!, a field telephone (such as was right then being used at the 'fronts' of World War I) and with the smallest, softest voice imaginable, precipitate puffs of flowering white and charges of masses and dots across all the landscape beneath him: and look at him raise his hand there/then—like Michelangelo's God touching Adam—and bring Billy Bitzer to camera action . . . all accomplished with the American-ease whereby one might sing:

Will you bake a cherry pie?

Billy boy, Billy boy . . .

Will you bake a cherry pie?

Charming Billy.

See the benign eye of Great Griffith—teacherly spectacles of him framing his Spectacular . . . all this landscape exploding just off the top of his neatly parted hair: 'hats off' to him, folks!: :this 'man of peace' has just dreamed up one hell of a war: See!—no one gets hurt . . . those men fall down in this boyish game, only to get up and fall down again (a Buddhist dream): the effects are realistic enough in gruesome fact to satisfy De Sade himself—black movie blood almost drips off the

screen...prop bodies are flung like an angry child's dolls through aerials of flickering light and black photo smoke-quakes (the marathon dream of *The Romans* showing again)—later to be tinted yellows and reds, to look as if the projector itself was belching fire and raining down blood on the audience (the dream of *The Apocalypse*, then)... and yet, in benign Griffith's mind, "The War To End All War" (the A #1 American dream of toyhood fights made game.) This bloody, battle mocking hunt for peace was also Wilson's governmental sport—his 'soldiers' too were never meant to have "died in vain"... i.e.: in the quick of Death's earnest vanity... anymore than all West's Crusaders were meant to die—never to rise again. What giant Griffith newly created for this warrior sport was an art of it (despite himself) which could/would repeat its deaths and resurrections through film's exactitudes, in-ad-absurdum—breaking down the huge complexity of War as subject to its deadly simple objectives... ups-and-downs, *ad nauseum*.

You can almost see Mattie flitting about the towering platform of him, there, arranging Billy Bitzer's compositions as carefully fine as if setting table places for Alice's mad tea party, poking puffs of smoke into balanced visual cushions, stoking fires for neatest hearth, tucking them into compositional corners, sweeping shadow armies, even, before the broom of traditional logic—hanging both pots and panoramas together in magnificent Kitchen comfort... fluffing facial features, even, to starch of heroic picture stance—unfurling actors, in their gestures, as if they were flags in battle paintings.

But see now folks, how Billy Bitzer begins to run, his camera amok under all these womanly cultural pressures—as if to counteract all this 'class' he cuts loose vulgar photo capers like farts in church... jiggles the box, twirls the lens, dances with the light itself on the very edge of the tables of photograph probability—as if to show the 'high-falutin' a-thing-or-two, he pushes his luck to new extremes!

Oh, Praise our Griffith, in Davidian greatness, that he lets Billy, looses him, loves him for it: these blessed mis-takes: these blasphemous Accidents: these drunken measures which further newness into the medium.

And Bless ol' "D W" too, that he hosts both forces in his nature—thus must fuss to please Mattie amidst Billy's poltergeisting... must mother these Bitzer inventions himself, and train them to do the tricks-of-the-trade and wed them thus to meaning—must make a motion picture grammar as refined, through repetition, as Mattie herself and all her culture.

And give him a round of applause that he managed this tea-party-teeth-and-toe-nail-teaching in good fun—as a hell-raising-heaven-to-earth fellow... a jolly-sad man if ever there was one (how would you like to host such a gathering, as was in him, for all eternity?)

A moment of silence then that, amidst all this partying, he also managed an art to come out of him—and that he hugely, even, brooded beautifully upon it... his own death.

He could not anyway stop it: everything he *thought* he was doing led contrariwise to what he *knew* he was.

His investors slowed him down a bit, crippled *The Birth of A Nation* for him, as 19th century investors had *his* birth in hatch of War and clutch of carpet-bag. They cut the heart of Truth—fact bent—out of all sense of conflict... made senseless War as usual—i.e., a war that cannot be *sensed*. For instance, they edited-out—or worse yet forced him to it—the shots of Northern slavers raiding African villages, a New England cleric blessing the sale of a half-naked slave girl, the rape of a white girl by a negro and the whole sequence of his terrifying trial, castration, tortured death by The Ku Klux Klan, as well as fact-finder Griffith's photo-documenting Lincoln's letter to Stanton stating *his* dis-believe in racial equality and depicting of "Lincoln's solution" to American racism: the plan to deport all negroes "Back to Africa"... etc.: many scenes of black as evil... etc.: the seeing of The Klansmen as a moving accumulation of photographic light, as a force of white, as triumphant good.

But "D W" paid for the next party himself: and it was the biggest personal blast in the history of film: *Intolerance*. What with Mattie's perseverance, Davidian-Billy's mechanics, and Griffithian grammar, The Muse herself couldn't help but grace the occasion with her presence. (I won't say she stayed for the whole party: but has she ever in the history of film?)

Of *Intolerance* it may be said it is the *only* virtually uncen-

sored motion picture ever yet permitted to be seen by a large American audience: it was, as can then be easily imagined, U.S.'s *one* great Elizabethan movie moment—Griffith therefore American-Shakespeare as its maker . . . : but *because* it was a penultimate united statement, it failed utterly as commerce in these divided states of America . . . was the greatest commercial failure from Hollywood's entire history—was rejected by John Q. . . . i.e., U.S. money . . . Public more completely than any film since: no expensive film has ever again been permitted such rejection since its economic failure: (it is, almost magically, as if it *Intolerance* embodied its theme so completely that it demonstrated it therethru its own audience rejection and, thus, commercial crucifixion—taking thereby American main sin upon itself in every theatre in the land.)

Griffith financed it himself and fought valiantly with every simplistic moral disparity of his own nature in its making—that *nothing* would be seen or could be distorted in unseeing mind, as this-side or that-side of any given question of the nature of good and evil, as thereby any excusable Cause of war . . . other than such Accident as human nature itself through intolerable circumstance of social living. He had this one chance in his life, to stop the distortions of censorship which had ruined *The Birth of A Nation*, and to kill the temporizing platitudes of his own American power—his economic giant-hood . . . and he took it to the hilt—emasculating in this work every vestigial excuse of his successful U.S.-ence, his powerful life.

He encouraged Billy—that wizard of oddities—to pull every trick from the bag of his mechanical genius . . . to create images hard as irony, sling them like stones to roll down the ramp of projector light with American machine-gun rapidity and perfection of Yankee aim.

He turned every trick for-Mattie loose upon three historical facts: the fall of Babylon, the crucifixion of Christ, and the St. Bartholomew Day massacre:—dramatized these with a traditional exactitude his sister would *have* to recognize beyond all conservative glamour . . . and intercut each with each other and his own guilt-ridden nightmarish story of American injustice—revealing the blindness of U.S. Law as all Law before it . . . back

to, as Mattie would have it, that Romanized Greek statue-woman symbol of Justice, holding up her scales of supposed right-and-wrong—her statue eyes blind-folded-over with the lie of impartiality (this classical bitch certainly no Statue of Liberty, to him, but rather her opposite number... a death-dealing woman who would legalize her sight against any such as might hold up a candle in traditional darkness—hold up a motion picture torch against all of public blindness): and yet he gave his Mattie THE happiest place, amidst these warring inter-cuts at his giant nature, of his most loving Hope... cast her, played by beloved Lillian Gish, as he most often likened to remember her: the one of the 3 fatal sisters who rocks the baby/David in the cradle where Time itself is born to human conscience: and he added to this hopeful image a Whitman quote which takes on an irony in the context beyond any sentimentality intended:

...out of the cradle, endlessly rocking...

the very mothering movements inducing baby to sleep to become those frets of martial drums, sword thrusts, and man- quakes of devastation in adult human natural disaster—(for how is a war to be honestly considered as other than an ‘act of nature?’)

And great Griffith reduced all complexity of culture that might hide excuse for war as being Cause to the repetitional simplicity of natural law— ‘the powerful’ preying endlessly on ‘the weak,’ feeding naturally on its victim as sure as wily beast on innocent flesh in any jungle... except that as hyena may fatten on even lion’s flesh when Death has made ‘the king of the forest’ victim of his own mortality... as even great Babylon may fall to its victimization-of-self/betrayal-from-within—so, too, may the weak win over the giant by Luck, by that accident all love, all life, is where each creature’s own inner under-dog/Death has its day at last.

David could, and did then, win this series of rounds of Baroquely edited images wherein all themes-and-repetitions counter-punted each other into a work of visual music classicism as never before, and very seldom after, in the history of film.

The *art* of the work *Intolerance* is most magnificently visible as an abstraction of light almost kin to purely musical

sounds—its stories as secondary to its aesthetical nature as words in Bach's *B minor Mass*, say, or Mozartian opera, or even Wagner . . . even Griffith's dry-as-dust fact-founding—his "authentic" costumes and historical re-creations—pass, in the light of this film, as an American aesthetic (very much as in, say *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound . . . Griffith's contemporary after all . . . whose quotes of historic documents become poetry in the contextual rhythms of the workings of the total work). One might best *see* this mastery of image by projecting *Intolerance* out-of-focus—it the first film made which would survive such treatment and hold itself up, in displays of meaningful black-white counter-shapes and developmental rhythms as the art of *integrally* is . . . as "Art" then visible to those who otherwise—busy tracking story and/or documentation—might never see it as such (just as conservative academicians might best have first heard *The Cantos* as poetry were it in a language foreign to them.)

But it has, yet, to be seen—this film—; for it *is* so much of its Time and Place . . . as all great art . . . : and that temporal geography—20th century U.S.—so "out of joint" and divided still against itself. Even those Americans who most *want* to look at it find themselves as-if looking straight into the sun: they naturally shade their eyes therefrom it, look at it askance, are embarrassed by what they take to be Griffith's "corniness"—all the colloquialisms and attitudes of American ease which fret the conscience of even the most 'open' viewer . . . in a familial terror as if the household idiot were rattling skeletons in the broom closet during Thanksgiving Dinner—all its timely Truths of national self-evidence as if causing most audiences (40-some years after its creation) to greet any projection of it with a show of hysterical laughter now and again and again and again and/or that solemnity of cautious respect wherewith one sits down on an antique or indulges a so-called "primitive" custom.

U.S. citizens are not Elizabethans: and Hollywood products are certainly not Globe theatricals, Florentine re-birth, Noh drama, nor even old national Abbey. But dogged art will, as sure as hell, have its American day when Time and Place have become as one: David Wark Griffith's *Intolerance* is a glimmering pre-sentiment of this inevitability (was it 100, 150,

years too soon—going once?...going twice?—gone! to the highest bidder, so far.)

See him, there, great David Wark Griffith, as unselfconsciously Artist as any Renaissance craftsman—(as such as Michelangelo sloshing paint on Christian ceiling and muttering curses at his Pope... the man most like Mike himself in all Rome we know... his alter ego Julius II—or chopping out his own marble David 17 feet tall and more terrible than any Goliath ever imagined)—oh, see him, Griffith, as all before him ever aftering...(for in the Arts there is no competition—thus all who achieve the make of such are equal to all others in consideration)... take heart, Viewer!—and have after his images, for all you're worth!—have at the very soul of him.

See him grown taller yet, on walls and towers of plaster Babylon, stretched out across American open roads of mechanical land-escape, stepping across Time even, in this that he called "The Sun Play of The Ages"—crossed-over into Death then, the dimension of eternity—stretched thin beyond all audience comprehension of the film—fallen, therefore, into the limbo where citizens exile every vestige of immortal sensibility...broke...broken. For in the United States, to be without as much money as you *had* is to be as an Egyptian mummy unwrapped—i.e., lacking all means for soul's passage even into hell.

He made a few more films...some of his best *in fact*... trying to get back to where he had been, *and then some* (the #2 American dream) Humpty-Dumptying—but was never let "live-down" his presumption...his "Intolerance"...his "come-uppance" in the confessional all box-office is in the religion of show-business. He even had a fair amount of money... just not as much as he *had* had... and all his dreams intact—spent the rest of his days doing and undoing, like the hooves of a pole-axed bull that won't give up...(married twice and twice divorced)...managing grace in almost every vestige of his fall—David more fully alive finally in the hermitage of his last years... (at the old Knickerbocker Hotel)... than ever before: —he was greatly respected, naturally... (all those who fed on him were terrified of his ghost)... and he was laid-to-rest, in fact,

30 years after his intolerable fall while playing (like Phaeton) with the sun at the height of its climb for him and the killer child within: —he, in his 70s now/then, had just announced his engagement to a much younger girl . . . (shades of Mattie moving still in the shifts of life?) . . . and was writing a film script tentatively called *Christ and Napoleon* . . . (yes, David and Goliath again) . . . which he wanted to film in Asia with a cast of many thousands—when he died.



CARL THEODORE DREYER

Did you ever know a "Carl?": did you know him as 'a boy?': was he pale?—either of skin or hair...were his eyebrows blond?...or were they simply thin?—against white skin...were his lips, perhaps, tight and his eyes of a narrowed reflectiveness?: did you know anyone, ever, at all, like Carl Theodore Dreyer?: did you every play with a child that quietly wild; and can you really remember him?

Can you imagine him—this Carl you might once have known—born a Dane?... a Danish 'laddie,' then?oh, No!... "laddie" is a term that will not, really attach itself to a Denmark boy: it rides too trippingly upon the tongue—bespeaks a childishness of pastorality and animal fun—(Denmark too sophisticated for such simple stuff...too much part of Continental Europe)—"laddie" like a run upon hills and vales more green than white...(rather than the flat studious playland Danes inhabit)... ah, No!—one must search another term to go with Dane, child or man. Though there *are* Danish children—(and though both Swedes and Norwegians go to Denmark most to play...to be a child, again, on winter's holiday)—can a *Dane* be "child?"...or must he, young Carl, be definitively "boy"—a Danish *boy*, when young?... must he be considered that kind of cultural prelude to the specificity of Man?: in the

late 19th century Denmark of our imagination . . . (of the latitude of "laddie," but far too level and levelheaded for that) . . . yes!—I think he *must* be so-considered: boy Dane, then—Carl!

Is there any area of our consideration which will *not* be (as St. Paul would have the language of it, lacking fact) "through a glass darkly?": can we play with him, Carl then, in anything akin to his natural habitat? I think not!—think on the mists of Denmark . . . think onto "Hamlet" (there being *nothing* other in the English language to prepare us for this game with him): but let us play anyway (like Swedes on holiday)—move our minds through mists and ice and urgency of quickened summer crops and thick religiosity and sin-as-fun . . . stolid fogs and fierce bright want: let us try a game of hop-scotch in this severe climate of most foreign (almost Russian) field of playful thought—for the mind of Carl will naturally skip and jump, as if to fool and warm itself, in just exactly the way the eye will shift when confronted by a landscape almost completely flat and white with snow or wheat . . . in zig-zags, as skier . . . with cross-country skier . . . with leaps as silently sudden as avalanching snow—off roof or tree.

But let me warn—before the game . . . we have not dealt with the prime fact yet of Carl's make-up—that he was an artist . . . a late 19th century Danish boy who was to grow up to be an artist: the game, then, is a deadly one—sure, as Life itself, to end in Death! Can we play with that?—if not, then best to quit . . . before the downhill race begins . . . before the "Theodore" of his name intrudes upon *his* living—and, then, yours.

Carl Theodore Dreyer—blond Teutonic boy (gray mist's light) with fairest skin (rubbed red from fire within) and thinnest features (taut with stance) and sharpest eyes (ice) imaginable . . . ah *eyes!*—what shall we think of eyes like that?

(Let me present you now and again with pieces of a puzzle written by Carl's fellow countryman, Hans Christian Andersen, who'd died just a few years before Carl was, in 1889, born: to begin then, this "First Story" of *The Snow Queen*, which must surely have been read to young Carl again and again: imagine him listening this first time, in the year of our myth of him, to the true history of his own damnation—the account of the stitch of the net that trapped him before his birth . . . the key to the

lock of his childhood Fate and all that was to follow naturally after):

("Now we are about to begin and you must attend! And when we get to the end of the story, you will know more than you do now about a very wicked hobgoblin. He was one of the worst kind; in fact he was a real demon.

("One day this demon was in a high state of delight because he had invented a mirror with this peculiarity: that every good and pretty thing reflected in it shrank away to almost nothing. On the other hand, every bad and good-for-nothing thing stood out and looked its worst. The most beautiful landscapes reflected in it looked like boiled spinach, and the best people became hideous, or else they were upside down and had no bodies. Their faces were distorted beyond recognition, and if they had even one freckle it appeared to spread all over the nose and mouth. The demon thought this immensely amusing. If a good thought passed through anyone's mind, it turned to a grin in the mirror, and this caused a real delight to the demon.

("All the pupils in the demon's school—for he kept a school—reported that a miracle had taken place: now for the first time, they said, it was possible to see what the world and mankind were really like. They ran about everywhere with the mirror, till at last there was not a country or a person which had not been seen in this distorting mirror.

("They even wanted to fly up to heaven with it to mock the angels. But the higher they flew the more it grinned, so much so that they could hardly hold it. And at last it slipped out of their hands and fell to the earth, shattered into hundreds of millions and billions of bits. Even then it did more harm than ever. Some of these bits were not as big as a grain of sand, and these flew about all over the world, getting into people's eyes. Once in, they stuck there and distorted everything they looked at, or made them see everything that was amiss. Each tiniest grain of glass kept the same power as that possessed by the whole mirror. Some people even got a bit of the glass into their hearts, and that was terrible for the heart became like a lump of ice. Some of the fragments were so big that they were used for windowpanes, but it was not advisable to look at one's friends through these panes. Other bits were made into spectacles, and

it was a bad business when people meaning to be just put on these spectacles.

(“The bad demon laughed till he split his sides! It tickled him to see the mischief he had done. But some of these fragments were still left floating about the world, and you shall hear what happened to them.”)

Young Carl (variation of “Karl,” Scandinavian for “Charles,” being Germanic name meaning “man of the common people”) listening to Hans—feeling the call of the language in his bones, knowing the beat of the rhythms of it in his heart . . . sensing, in owl-like childishness, himself as a part of all this and yet apart—feeling his elf-self as a possible demon—young Carl . . . Theodore (from the Greek, meaning “gift of God”) emerging in him—self as such . . . stuff as heroes are made of—: had he been named Theodore Carl Dreyer, he might have become a Hero, killed in some war or other . . . : as it was, he became an artist—“Man of the common people” *first* . . . “gift of God” as an afterthought of his parents which he took *upon* himself: in some high school Greek lesson later, he certainly determined the full spell of his name for announcement ever after: Carl *Theodore* Dreyer: full measure of his meaning.

For he was a pre-destined Man, as any male Dane—and a particular Man, as none before him nor any after . . . and a meticulous Man, beyond every belief of his upbringing—beyond any article of faith that might have given object to his sub-zeroing-in on himself . . . oh, yes!, he was to be “The” Dreyer—as well as any given “Carl” . . . search-out the demon-of-himself—as well as any given “Carl” . . . search-out the demon-of-himself—as well as the “Kay” (of the Hans Christian story of the little Kay and Gerda, boy and girl of the Andersen puzzle)/(as well as Kafka searched out *his* “K” through “Trial” and “Castilian” nightmare) . . . and search-out “The Snow Queen” herself in the iciest habitat of his imagination of witchiest woman—as well as, finally, Gerda girl herself/himself’s femalian being at the end of his life, when he made *Gertrude*—a show-biz drama by fellow Scandinavian (novelist and playwright Soderberg)—into the greatest play-of-light ever to focus upon the fret of woman’s love, upon the keys and stops of orgiastic damnation.

(For those of you who *think* you do not know the story—listen a bit again to Hans...):

(“Kay and Gerda were looking at a picture book of birds and animals one day—it had just struck five by the church clock—when Kay said, ‘Oh! Something struck my heart and I have something in my eye.’

(“The little girl put her arms around his neck. He blinked his eye, but there was nothing to be seen.

(“‘I believe it is gone,’ he said, but it was not gone. It was one of those very grains of glass from the mirror, the magic mirror. You remember that horrid mirror in which all good and great things reflected in it became small and mean, while the bad things were magnified and every flaw became very apparent.

(“Poor Kay! A grain of it had gone straight to his heart and would soon turn it to a lump of ice. He did not feel it any more but it was still there.

(“‘Why do you cry?’ he asked. ‘It makes you look ugly. There’s nothing the matter with me. How horrid!’ he suddenly cried. ‘There’s a worm in that rose, and that one is quite crooked. After all, they are nasty roses and so are the boxes they are growing in!’ He kicked the box and broke off two of the roses.

(“‘What are you doing, Kay?’ cried the little girl. When he saw her alarm, he broke off another rose, and then ran in by his own window and left dear little Gerda alone.”)

Carl Theodore Dreyer became, first, a journalist—and he raked his share of muck with Denmark’s best of them... flinging verbal mud with abandon any young man can assume who has come to himself as ‘the news’ in the safe repetitions of daily papers—wonderful, to him, how ‘The Cause’ occludes to journalism’s language... inasmuch as its style of writ pretends an impartiality—a lack of all personal sense of “be,” as in *before* ‘the cause,’ *because*, etc. (all journalism, thus, is ‘ghost-writ’... as if no human had ever touched the words of any such as is known as ‘the report’—*shots*, therefore, in the dark of letters utterly immoral in every stance that makes them fit for newspaper print)... oh, yes!, young Carl’s greatest delight—this shift of columns of blackest thought!

To fellow newsmen, he was of course simply “Carl”—or perhaps “young Dreyer” . . . one cannot have a “Theodore,” after *all*, in a newspaper office . . . think of the jokes such plume-of-name would engender there: and Carl was not to remain content with journalistic thought—not more than a couple years . . . by 1912 he was writing scenarios and editing films—(for he did certainly intend to ‘grow-up’) . . . (and all journalists must remain adolescent-at-heart!)

See the instant in which *he* saw the moving image as impartial fact . . . as immoral a ‘black-on-white’ as any imagined newspaper truth: (for if you suppose—as he did then—the camera to be a reporter of life, then its record of any event on columns of celluloid becomes journalism’s ultimate dream: :the report of a machine). To write, therefore, what the machine *will* report, and to edit, after, its strips of so-called “reality” . . . very much as any news editor arranges his paper . . . and to see it run its fact-of-life as if for the first time in darkened auditorium—as if it/act had just happened . . . as *in* fact it had—oh! . . . this was to fly in the face of heaven—and/or to come close to being God.

But cinema as medium offered Carl more ‘growth-up’ than any making-of-news *or* mimic-of-heaven—for film is a Jacob’s-ladder that moves through Time as well as Space . . . (think of the difference between the verbs “record” and “report”) . . . : a motion picture is, as it were, a *record*—vibrates beyond any verb . . . beyond any such as might be called a *report*: for any ‘movie,’ once shown, can be shown again in the light of itself’s as-if fact—an eventuality as if it were, as it ran again and again, eternity’s drum . . . unreeling itself in a spin of hypnotic dream—a *beseeming*, then, as real as the *inner* life of any man: and this was, as entertainment, a “grin” wide enough to take the whole world in . . . until it shattered for him in his “30th year to heaven”—when he wrote and then also *directed* his first film: *The President*: and became the master of facial mime: :he who makes the faces of others his own . . . who makes them him/he them—i.e.: when he became “the mirror” itself, in his innermost being.

(As Hans had said):

(“When his grandmother told them stories he always had a

but—. And if he could manage it, he liked to get behind her chair, put on her spectacles, and imitate her. He did it very well and people laughed at him. He was soon able to imitate everyone in the street. He could make fun of all their peculiarities and failings. ‘He will turn out a clever fellow,’ said people . . . He played quite different games now; he seemed to have grown older.”)

Now—understand this, please . . . : a journalist discovering the term “to be” and attaching it to his sense of “cause”—a journalist discovering eternity . . . : this was Carl Theodore Dreyer directing his first actor’s features to fit those of his innermost self: this was the beginning of morality for him in his search for Truth—as opposed to any news sense of Fact . . . his making a ‘cause’ *his*—as opposed to serving any “The Cause.”

(Every journalist must serve first ‘The Cause’ of Fact when he pretends to write “objectively,” as it’s called—when he pretends, therefore, his act were guided by the hand of an impartial god . . . tends to a poker-face-type, hiding every trick in the newspaper game.)

Dreyer came, via journeyman film, to the end of all such ‘sameness’ as would comfort Man—as Bibles and newspapers do—and found himself torn apart . . . as you will, too, if you see—as he saw—that map of hell and heavenly grace all “flesh is heir to” in any visage . . . that “marriage of Heaven and Hell” possible in any humanly moving face.

But what do we mean—what did he—when we call a movie actor or actress “a star?” . . . a face of light!—most surely that!—but *what?*/what’s ‘star-like’ in that? . . . if not to make a crystalline fire of feature? . . . if not to turn all flesh of it to a burn of ice?—to freeze the animal shifts of all such feature into some perfection-of-thought—to turn the reflected world itself into mask’s hat.

(As Hans would have Kay have it):

(“In the evening when little Kay was at home and half undressed, he crept up onto the chair by the window and peeped out of the little hole. A few snowflakes were falling, and one of these, the biggest, remained on the edge of the window box. It grew bigger and bigger, till it became the figure of a woman dressed in the finest white gauze, which, appeared to be made

of millions of starry flakes. She was delicately lovely, but all ice—glittering, dazzling ice. Still she was alive. Her eyes shone like two bright stars, but there was no rest or peace in them. She nodded to the window and waved her hand. The little boy was frightened jumped down off the chair. . . .”)

Is it any wonder that Dreyer—young Fact, foundry that he'd been—should turn . . . in Truth . . . to the films of Griffith for inspiration: he patterned his next film—*Leaves From The Book of Satan*—after Griffith's *Intolerance* . . . : but it was a mistake to think he could emulate this American. It was only as writer that Dreyer felt inspired by Griffith's ideals—to get at Truth, to 'dog' and 'worry' it through quotes of Fact . . . Historical Fact, as it happened in Griffith's imagination—an altogether different matter than 'God's' Truth as a newspaperman might see it.

Think of him, Carl Theodore, reading Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan*—his eyes, those 'blues' of sight that graced his face with immediate advertisement of all his inner sorrow—those eyes of his then, shifting across this text that might have been writ by "The Snow Queen" herself in irony and pity of The Devil's plight: . . . the fight to win the unpredictable soul of man—: "Poor Devil" . . . the pity any woman might have for a fallen angel or man, half-masked in the prose-of-her by an iron smile of Christian train-of-thought, Christianity's sure-of-itself charity for 'the heathen,' 'the weak'—"poor Devil" said, therefore, very much as a mother might fondly damn her son . . . before teaching him—as she'd been trained-to-do—the 'error of his ways,' the price he'd pay for all such fault . . . as any pride in him she'd love—and as that "pride goeth before a fall." Think of Dreyer then reading this woman's text and imagining himself as her Devil's-child-pitied-thinking of 'Daddy' Griffith/Historical Fact in motion pic. . . . imagining himself, Carl Theodore Dreyer, mending "error of his ways" with moral-movie-tract of *Intolerance*—thinking of himself as Denmark's Griffith. See him, therefore, writing scenario of Marie's book in the darkest hours of his Danish night—feverish with all thought of bringing mother and father together again in him . . . The Devil himself gone moral in heaven's hellish marriage—as he wrote the script 'first person,' Devil speaking, and titled it:

Leaves From The Book of Satan.

It failed in motion—emotionally failed from scratch... naturally—inasmuch as he/Dreyer was *not* The Devil, nor in any way demonic... and he discovered that, surely first time in his living, by making this film: (the world of movie-goes hasn't discovered that yet of him... still thinks of Dreyer as 'satanic'): failed, then (with them)—inasmuch as he was not simply Carl, nor "The Snow Queen" either... though he'd be struggling to think of himself as such till the end of his life—inasmuch as he was also not, in any sense, David Wark Griffith.

Carl Theodore Dreyer took four Marie stories, made them his own in Devil's tongue, but could in *no*-wise bring himself to cut them up, intercut them, or in any way reduce their verbal sense to visual fact—as Griffith had done... (for Griffith took Fact to be Myth—as in History it *is*): Dreyer's film ends-up as an as-if 'interview' of old Satan himself, who as usual lies in his eye-teeth... (and, as is the value of all 'interview,' the film only tells what The Devil is *not*—not, for instance, Carl Theodore Dreyer—certainly not!)

In all Carl's work of these early years there is a moral fable which prompts his prose—each piece of journal writ twists itself around a stance which even haunts his later films... it is, to-wit: :that 'the old' suppress 'the young' — 'the dead' 'the living' — 'institutions' 'Man' — 'duty' 'love' —etc.: it is of no importance whatsoever in consideration of the artist Carl Theodore Dreyer... nor, thus, of any importance, either, in consideration of the man he was! It, as all stance, hardened his heart—yes!—and 'steeled' his eyes; but it did not touch the soul of him... nor any knowing of the world in him as he grew up. It was "prosaic" in the fullest sense of the word—the 'hang-up' of a writer who read... as he did... too many newspapers, novels, and current plays—too much of news, novelties and currencies adrift in his Psyche to enable him to budge the mental needle off any crack in the record. The Poet of him found release in language of vision—paid *no* attention to the thoughts of The Writer... except to dance upon whatever stage he'd thought to provide... to play upon whatever frets and stops his fussed consciousness could manage... and finally to transform all such plotting, as The Writer might be-thing, into a being of pure

vision—a visual poetics beyond comprehension.

The first-such work where the eyes had-it—above all negation . . . beyond all ‘literachuring’ in him—was “Jeanne D’Arc”:
: *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.

He was almost 40 years old; and he’d made enough films, successfully moving, to be famous throughout Europe: Carl Theodore Dreyer—top Dane . . . movie man—was brought to Paris to film the life of St. Joan in nationalistic commemoration of the 500th anniversary of her death by fire. Was ever any choice more happily ironic than this?—that Denmark’s somber newspaper film-maker should be chosen, above all others, to ‘cover’ the trial and martyrdom of History’s iciest queen at stake . . . Joan the *one* woman in all West’s tradition to claim and win her *own* place in the heaven of everyone’s imagining . . . oh yes!—she’s without a doubt queen of the highest throne the world has yet granted Woman.

Can you see him, Carl, searching the features of hundreds of actresses—roaming the streets of Paris—attending salons—ranging all ‘twenties’ France in his desperate search for her, the Joan of his wildest imagination . . . searching for living woman whose features could ‘star’ as this witch he’d perfectly make her?

Much has *been made* of his final choice: a dance-hall girl at the peak of her sexy fame in Parisian fashion: : Marie—yes, a Marie again!—Marie Falconetti: (one would have to say today “Brigitte Bardot” to approximate the effect of Marie’s name of that time). Most, naturally, thought that choice the maddest caprice—a publicity stunt, perhaps . . . : but it was not any such as that at all—(nor any such ‘satanism’ as movie-goers still like to imagine of him/Dreyer): it happened thus:

Poor Carl/“poor Devil” (in the sense he felt himself so cursed or magically unworthy for the holy task “D’Arc,” that he could not find an actress in all France who would ‘do’ for “Joan”) had announced he would not, could not, make the film; and he was ‘packed’ for a return to Denmark (in all humility—such as Parisian sophistication itself can engender in a country-man . . . such as he, Carl, must have been made-to feel each ‘salon’ he’d entered—each French film studio too—in his search . . . poor ‘country’ Carl) when—lo and behold! . . . in a magazine he was

idly thumbing through—he saw the fashionable face of Falconetti and immediately said (like any king who's found his maid . . . or the foot glass slipper fits upon . . . or perfect feature): she's the one/that's It!—I'll have her and none other. As I said, much has 'been made' as gossip of his choice: (none til now have thought to look at the likeness between Marie's features and Dreyer's own): Carl found himself, thus, in a fashion magazine; and as Theodore, chose himself to play with himself in the deadliest game of all: the hermaphrodite's game . . . played as always, to tortured end—Death itself by fire, for sure!

It was arranged that he and she would meet. When he said what he wanted, she thought him 'mad'—she laughed at him . . . she teased him some in the current fashion, in front of the others: but Carl, who'd after all now found himself, was not to be 'put-off' by The Salon: he asked to see her alone: they went into a tiny room: he promised her sex—natch . . . as she had that reputation of "nymph" which passes these days as "maniac"—he promised her that and God-knows what-all else besides; he promised her the moon—the sky . . . all heaven—as any lover; he proposed immortality even: even he could not remember what-all he promised her: and twenty minutes after the door shut them apart from the others, she accepted his proposal and agreed to play "Jeanne D'Arc" for him ever after: several days after film shooting began, the men he'd hired for her every pleasure were dismissed by her . . . she'd become by then that much Saint . . . : when all the photography was done, she/Marie retired to a mad-house and spent most of the rest of her life faithful to him, being Joan.

He was faithful to her, too, in every way he was able: he took her text, Joan's—the transcript of her trial—and loosed his visual Poet from all writ's task . . . cast poet Antonin Artaud as "her," Joan's, only friend among all other actors of her martyrdom; he directed the trial in her, Joan's defense with a will never seen in film before—exhibiting every shift of her face, each agony of transformation of her with a passion only possible to the truest lover . . . dotting on each feature and slightest change of expression; he lovingly set her face in the purest filmic light—composed such frames as film's are truly made-of . . . compositions which lead all eye to the expectancy of movement (rather than

to the whole of some static image, as in painting(—yes!, he unbalanced whole hierarchies of compositional law . . . in order to guide all eyes to every facial detail of her, Marie's, transformation, Joan's; he loved her "to death" like they say—and gave her/him immortality.

He would, and very nearly did, have it perfect for her . . . each half-inch of light . . . each 35mm frame cut to perfection—ah yes!, The Editor in him even did his dance at the last.

(As Hans would have it of him):

("Now look through the glass, Gerda!" he said. Every snowflake was magnified and looked like a lovely flower or a sharply-pointed star.

("Do you see how cleverly they are made?" said Kay. "Much more interesting than looking at real flowers and there is not a flaw in them. They are perfect. If only they would not melt!")

And The Poet of him, up against all that "writer's cramp" of "reality," would drive her crazy—to insanity wherein "the real" is once again what-you-make-it . . . just as it became for Artaud when The Poet within him drove him to a madhouse several years later—(as was the case with many poets up against all such sickness of those Times as took "the news" as "the real": "the new" as 'the new': "real" as 'real': etc.)

See him, Carl, threatening to actually cut off all Marie's lovely hair—her crying for "real" then, in threat of shears—him, Carl, castrating himself/her, Joan: watch him, Theodore, actually setting the fire under her, Joan . . . Marie's terror for "real" . . . flames burning her again and again in film's endless ritual beyond Time's measure: watch, therefore—with incredible care—this most contemporary man, this Dreyer . . . the terrible clockwork of him vaulting heavenward with burning poet wings—this moth whirl of thought about the moving picture light: it is your inevitable flight of The Times as well as his/hers: Marie's/Jean's—whose fates were inextricably beyond him . . . he but the boy/Carl who struck the match—the gift of God: she but the queen bee of all 19th century societal hive—she but the victim of her own illusion . . . not his . . . not Joan's—dead these 500 years thank God! . . . as she did: she/Marie, as Joan or any other she would play—in hopes of soul?—

as powerless as a flake of snow.

("Look! The white bees are swarming," said the old grandmother.

("Have they a queen bee too?" asked the little boy, for he knew that there was a queen among the real bees.

("Yes, indeed they have," said the grandmother. "She flies where the swarm is thickest. She is the biggest of them all and she never remains on the ground. She always flies up again to the sky. Many a winter's night she flies through the streets and peeps in at the windows, and then the ice freezes on the panes into wonderful patterns like flowers."

("Oh yes, we have seen that," said both children, and then they knew it was true.

("Can the Snow Queen come in here?" asked the little girl.

("Just let her come," said the boy, "and I will put her on the stove, where she will melt.")

Carl Theodore Dreyer wishing that when it was over it was over and done!—that when it was undone it was-to-be clearly undone . . . as in Romanticism—that when it was finished it was polished to show every grain-of-Truth underneath the surface . . . as is so in all Baroque—that when it was there it was there-to-stay in absolute schism from Reality . . . as in Classicism—in ultimate Eternity, then, now/then . . . as is 'a classic's' way: poor Dreyer then when 'stuck with' film: :a medium ephemeral as its name: :a veil of light (aflame in his *Jeanne D'Arc*). In his next vilm (*Vampyr*) he 'went for' something more Baroque: :smoke—seeking something more solid than Joan . . . the white-*white-WHITE* of his adoration of her which had driven him mad: oh, she/Marie got the realistic brunt of it all right!: but he too suffered 'no end' of madness . . . as is the case in all such worship of woman—he too never again entirely sane after Joan . . . on-and-off in asylum again and again, the rest of his life: but he had a hope so to speak—"a prayer," like they say . . . a chance to succeed himself where all others had failed—to 'turn back the clock' of all such romantic thought as would hatch a saint or a movie star . . . to *undo* all adoration of witch as was in him—of woman herself.

(He felt this way about it, as Hans once put it, to be sure!):

("Are you still cold?" she asked and kissed him on the fore-

head. Ugh! it was colder than ice. It went to his very heart, which was already more than half ice. He felt as if he were dying, but only for a moment, and then it seemed to have done him good. He no longer felt the cold . . .

(“‘Now I mustn’t kiss you any more,’ she said, ‘or I should kiss you to death!’

(“Kay looked at her and she was so pretty! A cleverer, more beautiful face could hardly be imagined. She did not seem to be made of ice now, as she was when she waved her hand to him from outside the window. In his eyes she was quite perfect, and he was not a bit afraid of her. He told her that he could do mental arithmetic as far as fractions, and that he knew the number of square miles and the number of inhabitants of the country. She always smiled at him, and he then thought that he surely did not know enough; and he looked up into the wide expanse of heaven, into which they rose higher and higher as she flew with him on a dark cloud, while the storm surged around them, the wind ringing in their ears like well-known old songs.”)

Thus next, then, he turned to legends of horrors grown old out of middle-European folklore and given romantic focus in Sheridan le Fanu’s book: *In a Glass Darkly*: yes!—in St Paul’s literary metaphor we begin to see, as he saw, all thought of Vampire (creature who’ll reflect in no *visual* mirror) take shape through story . . . take shape in the night of Dreyer’s mind as photographic smoke—as that part of the film’s emulsion *unexposed* to light—that part the laboratory *cannot* develop into anything *but* a solid shape . . . a ‘cut-out’ lacking all details of life-likeness . . . all recognizable feature—that part of all photography that gets hypo’ed at the Lab to an absolute . . . ‘fixed,’ therefore ‘eternity’ as a ‘blank’ . . . moving shades of something interfering with all light—shades of black: even this, in the making of the film, he would contradict—there being no absolute dark anywhere throughout *Vampyr* . . . only tendencies toward any such—shades of photo-smoke, mists, blacks-of-dress, shadows, underexposures of all object . . . every subjective detail as-if ‘about-to-be’ crowded-out by encroaching dark . . . each recognizable object subject to the continual *threat* of black—*all* image, then/therefore, obscure as folklore itself and/or

any literary description of, say, "evil"...i.e.: what can only exist in the mind of man...what cannot be seen: he'd photograph invisibility then—and he did!

His every move in the make of this film was contradiction—contrary to The Writer in himself, 'the reporter' / 'recorder' even: he'd *not* get at Fact (as a journalist might) or at Truth either, but rather (as Film-maker) get at Untruth's absolute power over both mind and material body: this film would be... as it is!... a journalist's Black Mass (opposite, thus, to all other 'spook movies' in the history of film, inasmuch as they seek with every dramatic 'trick in the bag' to engender Belief in the news-reality of some monster or other—some super-nature, as only the 'realism' of moving pictures can seem-to-be—whereas Dreyer's *Vampyr* is a parody of "Belief" itself... thus pure blasphemy against camera-as-God from beginning to end).

Its other title: *The Strange Adventures of David Gray*, gives us true sense, at start, of the mock-of-hero intended—as much as to say: "the adventures of Mr. Buir" or "Blah"... "David Non-entity" then—common man as colorless creature... or simply creature-of-film's dulled emulsion: he even spelled "vampire": :“v*a*m*p*y*r”—to set his symbol-of-evil apart from all other.

Almost all 'actors' in the film were 'amateurs'—only the old master-vampire and his feminine-victim (turned vampire then, too) were 'professionals' in any dramatic sense. David Gray, his common-man-hero; was Baron de Gunzburg, exiled Russian aristocrat (*uncommon* enough to end-up, years later, senior editor of *Vogue*): Carl found him, his blasphemy's hero, at a Count's masquerade ball in 1929 Paris—picked him that night for the part. For 'the wickedest woman' of the story's plot, he picked a "sweet old lady" as everyone knew her—for his 'heroine'... a "bitch," by everyone's account. Do you begin to see how it went?

For cameraman of this fantasy, he chose France's best 'realist'—such: Rudolf Maté: who'd worked with him on 'Joan'—"cinematographaer *par excellence*," as it's called... then stuck his lenses in an endless fog—directed every shot to look as crude as 'home movies' would: he insisted each object, from chateau to grave, be real... even the vampire book in the

film, authentic . . . , then slanted every sight to give the sense each prop was phony as Hell—lighted every scene to make them look as-if composed-of studio ‘flats.’ All evening shots were photographed at dawn: *:etcetera:* *:vice-versa* triumphant!

The sound-track, added later to make this his first ‘talky’ movie, contradicted itself too: human speech, unnecessary to its ‘silent’ movie plot, often degenerated into animal grunts—emotional sound-effects . . . as when the master-vampire (supposed by horror-movie audiences to be immortal) *dies*, smothered by grain (a trick stolen from Griffith’s *A Corner In Wheat*) muttering: “I don’t want to die!” in such a way that the language degenerates into a series of desperate ‘barks’ as the white wheat covers him up: “Arg - rarh - rargh - a rah!” Whereas the background of human converse on the track is continually pierced by animal cries—cock crows, barking dogs, parrot shrieks, etc. . . . these done by professional imitators—human beings imitating such sounds in the recording studio (and sounding as such to any listening ear).

Oh!—the film was clearly made *not* to ‘scare’ . . . but *rather* to reward all attention to it (as never before or after in the history of the horror film) with ‘awareness’ of the whole bag of superstition’s tricks—each act an obvious ‘fake,’ carrying the antidote to any ‘belief’ in it in its ‘pun’ upon itself . . . as when the ‘heroine,’ already vampire-bit, wakes up to smile at her sister and then broadens her smile to include her fangs (the film’s most frightening shot, and its most ‘acted’ one, thus a pun upon love’s want—*not*, in any sense, superstition’s fright) . . . or, for instance, when the hero is encoffined and the camera takes his place for spectator’s first-person ride to the grave, all ‘identification’ with David Gray (such as would have made the scene ‘scary’ for identifying audiences) is deliberately ‘tossed-away’ by Dreyer—lost in an intellectual play with David’s ‘double’ (*super-imposition*) stepping aside to watch you/ (camera)/him in a tomb (obviously) of the imagination.

The game of this film is rich with a wit like this:

I met a man upon the stair . . .

A little man who wasn’t there.

He wasn’t there again today.

I wish to Hell he'd go away.

Thus *Vampyr* is one of the greatest comedies ever filmically made—its humor as sweet as a nursery rhyme . . . and as terrifying, too—a smile with fangs (but certainly no ‘horror film’ as commerce would have it: everyone scared half-to-death in ritual belief—thus caught in endless repetition . . . stuck for endless tickets at theatre door, church door, newspaper’s more-and-more terror) oh!, No!—*Vampyr* is an end-in-itself . . . if you can but see it as such—if you can but see it as he made it beautifully be!

He did essentially the same thing, a decade later, for *Day of Wrath* and *Ordet*—exposing Christianity’s witch-tricks in the former and the magic spell of Christian see-er in the latter . . . both based on dramatic plays of a conventional Scandinavian nature, yet as Baroque as *Vampyr* in their filmic make-up—as ‘nursery rhyming’ in their visual horror. All three can, I think, best be seen as-if made by Hans Christian Andersen as a 20th century filmmaker (that perilous charm of Hans would certainly have come to this if he had been born fifty years later . . . this Christian who yearned to be an opera star, ‘settled-for’ novelist’s fame, and got stuck finally as literary baby-sitter—which he *was* best-at), as Carl “gift of God” Dreyer yearning to be top moralist, settling for ‘entertainer,’ got stuck with Art—poor contemporary bastard!

He’d show Art then what a ‘wooden-nickel’ It is in his *Day of Wrath*—each scene of it shot in blatant imitation of Dutch ‘religious’ and ‘genre’ painting . . . from Rembrandt to the worst of them—he chased his 17th century Danish witches through a veritable museum of black & white Holland art . . . a *mise en scène* that said “art-art-ART” at every camera turn—and burned this “Dies Irae” witch at a protestant stake . . . whereat she found no hope of heavenly saving grace, nor any later sainthood either: that these scenes of religious ‘quackery’ occur in the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt’s and Vermeer’s domain—and are thus composed of painterly sacredness . . . these scenes wherein even an *untortured* witch’s confession, at end, is a ‘fake’—does make its Black Mass a blaspheme against aesthetics . . . as he meant it—does expose the whole paintpot as the trap, of sensibility, it is as sure as church: (you have but to look

at the 'stills' of this film, and remember that Carl's an *original* man), to realize the terrible parody going-on herein: (yet none have so-seen this film's nursery pun upon Art it is because eyes of this Time are so-trapped in it/Art-as-church).

Ordet, meaning "The Word," came several years after: and the camera of Carl Theodore Dreyer took an opposite stance: all scene was sparse, as he would have it ('home movies' again as in *Vampyr*—but with a vengeance, a stillness)... language having its "day of wrath" and blessings (the parody that this portrait of a seer and his surroundings, should, could only, occur in a world of words almost totally devoid of visual Visions(—the religious sense Kierkegaardian...the director's eye a slightly shifting guiding-sight which leads all thought to: "The Word": "belief": which finally pulls-off the oldest trick-in-the-trade of speech: raises 'the dead.'

Oh God, old Dreyer, half-mad, 'pulling your leg,' plucking-the-sleeve, finally leading all sensibility by the camera hand—streetwalker Carl...poor beggar—sweet child: Carl Theodore Dreyer growing old—trapped beyond his own wrathful thought by perfection's wish...by the need of money to fulfill it—by Art, thus: tough 'old bird' in his mind...making the most childish fables, Grim gruesome, come visually true, to even a happy ending—in *Ordet*—as Hans Christian Andersen would have had it:

("He went about dragging some sharp flat pieces of ice which he placed in all sorts of patterns, trying to make something out of them...)

("Kay's patterns were most ingenious, because they were the 'Ice Puzzles of Reason.' In his eyes they were excellent and of the greatest importance: this was because of the grain of glass still in his eye. He made many patterns forming words, but he never could find the right way to place them for one particular word, a word he was most anxious to make. It was 'Eternity.' The Snow Queen had said to him that if he could find out this word he should be his own master, and she would give him the whole world and a new pair of skates. But he could not discover it.")

He hardly knew himself anymore what he was after... anymore than as a child quite lost in play—so given-over to the

game, the art, as to scare himself yet laugh: (but audiences never saw the *humor* anymore than adults see the irony of serious children).

Dreyer finally came to want to 'do' "The Life of Christ"—came to The U.S. and asked President Truman, at a Washington cocktail party, for a million dollars (or was it someone other, among the hundreds he insisted must help him? . . . was it more than a million he'd asked-for?)—because The United States was World's foremost Christian nation (or was it because The U.S. was The Kingdom of The Jews in his imagination? . . . or just because it was the richest country on earth?)—and then he'd said he wanted to film it in Jerusalem (was that Arab? . . . or Israelian?)—and he wanted, yes, to film it in eternal Jerusalem . . . and he ended his U.S. trip in a mad-house—went back to Denmark without a penny.

Years passed: and most forgot Carl Theodore Dreyer: for awhile, it was rumored, he was a bar-tender: but *he* didn't believe it: and then came *Gertrude*, 'out of the blue' of his legend: and he achieved with it/her/"Gertrude" the classic his whole life was made-for—achieved "classicism" at last in film, of *all* mediums . . . (in the sense Donald Sutherland defines "classicism," thus: "Classicism is based on presence. It does not consider that it has come or that it will go away; it merely proposes to be there where it is. It is; or, like God, so it affirms"): to make a work-of-art that can be defined as such, can simply *be*, then, were surely more than one might expect of Hans Christian Andersen in any form of him: yet Hans it was who predicted exactly how it might happen to "Kay"—foretold for Carl then, the way in which it finally did in his thus predestined living:

("Kay sat quite alone in all those many miles of empty ice halls. He looked at his bits of ice and thought and thought, till something gave way within him. He sat so stiff and immovable that one might have thought he was frozen to death.

("Then it was that little Gerda walked into the palace, through the great gates in a biting wind. She said her evening prayer, and the wind dropped as if lulled to sleep, and she walked on into the big empty hall. She saw Kay and knew him at once. She flung her arms round his neck, held him fast, and

cried 'Kay, little Kay, have I found you at last?'

("But he sat still, rigid and cold.

("Then little Gerda shed hot tears. They fell upon his breast and penetrated to his heart. Here they thawed the lump of ice and melted the little bit of the mirror which was in it. He looked at her, and she sang.")

He thought, when he began *Gertrude*, he was taking on all *Culture* in this film for paradoxical play (as he had *Art* in 'Day's Wrath' and all-such folk-*Belief* via language as "In the beginning was The Word" as in *Ordet*)—specifically intended the whole Culture trap of turn-of-the-century Stockholm to be sprung, herein this adaptation of a play written then to a perfect visibility... (he wished, for instance, to make it in color and have as consultant Adolf Hallman who'd published a book called *The Stockholm Society* in 1910); and he was, from scratch, after that sense of Culture as *conscious* habit (as Ezra Pound defines Culture as what's left after you've forgot what you set out to learn): but "Gertrude" herself (or was it the ghost of Maria von Platen, after whom the play's 'heroine' was patterned?) entered the heart of his thought; and she 'stole the show' from him, through him, as surely as if she were living woman; and she stopped all parody in him—all morality even... made him *love* her beyond any critical measure—made *Gertrude*, the film of her, the greatest declaration of love of woman in the history of the medium.

(It is, perhaps, almost impossible for most to know how an artist may love a woman of his imagination as physically as if he were in touch with her flesh—she having 'a life of her own' acting upon him, as surely as if she were moving in a world outside his mind... this being the exact state of all creative activity in him—The Muse herself, The Queen of this domain... not him, Man, certainly not!—except as he loves Her: yet each human being shares this same Myth with every infatuation... most simply unable to admit it—too terrible this fact that "one's true love" *cannot* be other than one's own thought always desperately adjusting to flesh, always caught in the cultural trap of one's own habitual loneliness: The Artist sometimes breaks-out of such habit as all "flesh is heir to" by letting the woman of his imagination—his Muse—have a life of her own *in* him... and

ever after, then . . . for all Eternity.):

("He kept tight hold of Gerda, who laughed and cried for joy. Their happiness was so heavenly that even the bits of ice danced for joy around them. And when they settled down, there they lay in just the very position the Snow Queen had told Kay he must find out, if he was to become his own master and have the whole world and a new pair of skates.

("Gerda kissed his cheeks and they grew rosy. She kissed his eyes and they shone like hers. She kissed his hands and his feet and he became well and strong. The Snow Queen might come home whenever she liked; his order of release was written there in shining letters of ice.")

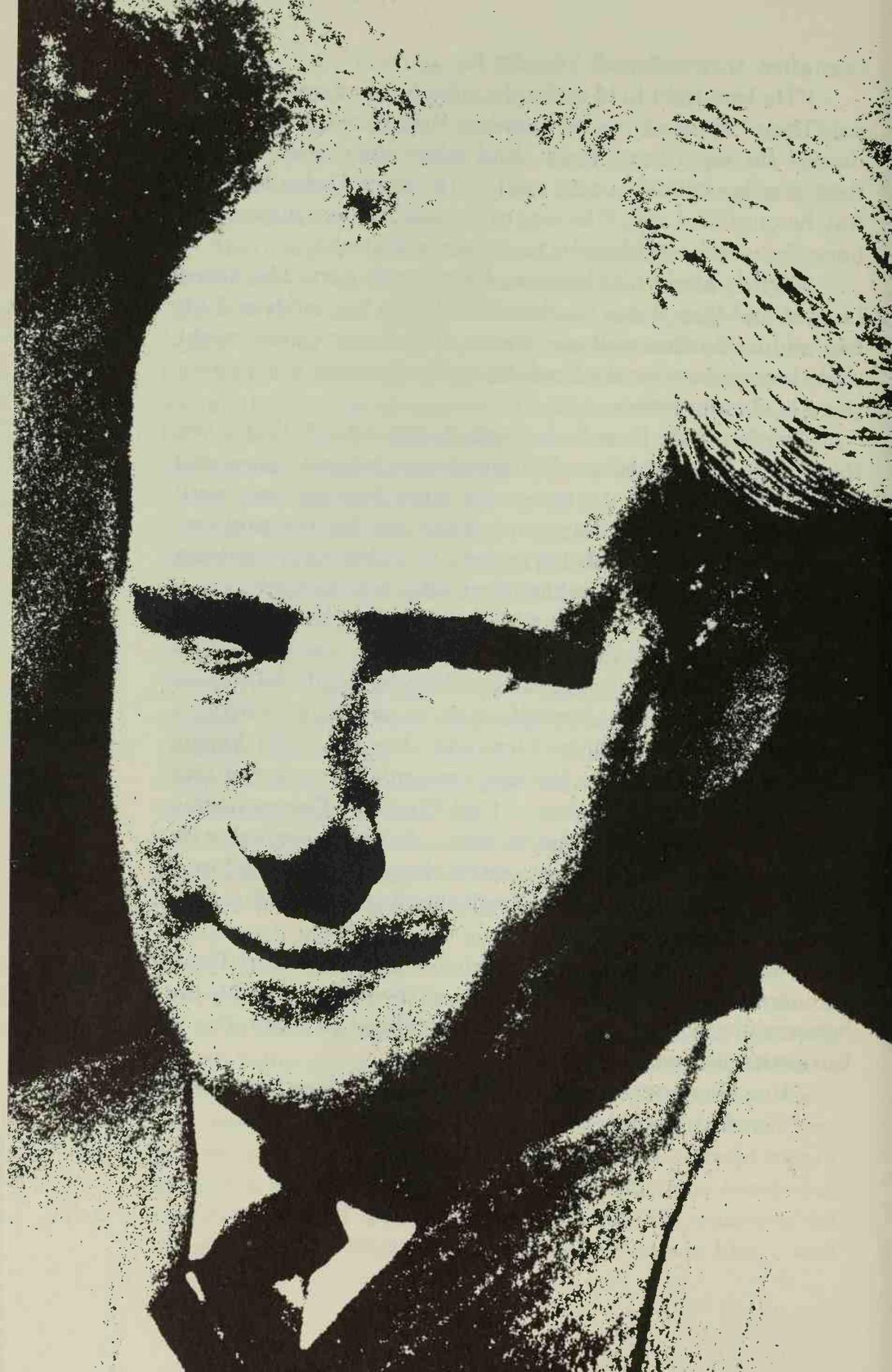
The Baron de Gunzburg recalled, about Carl, that when the camera was turned on, his face always began to glow and then turned red and yet more and more burning red, until mechanical end of shot: can you imagine any but the most loving woman in the world being mistress to such a man?; and can you then begin to know what "Gertrude" was to him?

How lovingly he wrote a new ending for the Soderberg play—which he'd *wanted* to film since 1920 . . . I mean he'd always had it in him, this love of her which he finally fully came to realize in this film—himself, then an old man, writing a scene imagining her, dear "Gertrude" *his* age . . . life having passed her by—herself, in the scene returning a packet of love letters to her lover, him then . . . Carl Theodore Dreyer having waited so long for her—she in him . . . having searched with such terror and final mockery among the saints and witches of his frozen imagination before finally finding her—before falling in love, then.

The film *Gertrude* was completed in 1964: and Carl Theodore Dreyer died several years after: at the very last of his life he was still wishing to do "the Christ film" and an adaptation of Euripedes' *Medea*.

"In modern or classic form?" asked an interviewer in 1966.

"Classic," he said.



SERGEI EISENSTEIN

Some men are caught before their birth by some monstrousness which tears them to pieces of horrible imagination ever after.

Some men are trapped at birth by national or geographic circumstances which re-enact, thus replace, every terror imaginable.

Some men are stopped in all previous tracks by a quirk of event which picks up every foetal and cultural trick-in-the-bag of their pre-birth trauma—an occurrence which acts as a snag in the fabric of their thought . . . an image even, in their experience—usually very early in their life—which creates a symbol of their birth-neurosis and supersedes any either natural or national symbolism . . . and it can be something as simple as a story, say—and it can be something as simplistic as a picture or picture book.

I believe it was a picture book which replaced the foetal haunt of Sergei Eisenstein and also damned all societal influences in him from then on.

He was to become a film-maker from some instant—when he turned the page of one picture over to reveal another . . . from some instant on—when one image replaced another in the flip of a book-image over . . . from some instant on to another—when a miracle of shifting picture book imagery sent an electri-

cal 'chill' down his child spine. It was a quality of thrilling exposure which must have managed an almost chemical shift in him: something imbalanced in his minutest physiological make-up was 'braced,' forever after, by this instant of tingling spine: I can guess this was what happened because his greatness was of that quality only possible in a man working out of "second nature" as it is called; and I can guess that this instant was inspired by a picture book because of the aesthetic process he created in all his work, both filmic and verbal, from then on.

But my 'guess' is conditioned by some similar pre-birth ghostliness, social disordering, and eventual snag-of-thought in myself, some chain-of-events perhaps utterly different from those I imagine as similar for Sergei; yet my 'guess'—right down to "picture book"—can be verified more than it normally could . . . *à propos* any other person . . . because he was an artist: and an art leaves a record of just exactly this—and very little else—just exactly this process of traumatization before, during, and very shortly after being born . . . and leaves it as naturally as a tree leaves patterns of veins in its leaves—as, naturally, a sea-shell records its growth and attendant hardship in the carves and colors of etched and dyed calcium deposit.

But I don't mean to suggest that a man's creative life can be anything as simply achieved as that of a leaf or sea creature: a man also grows of course, in patterns of veins, and carves his face and flares his emotions in display of colors which eventually 'set' as, say, "red-neck," "pasty-face," etc.; but he takes no more note of this, moment to moment, than of leaves and shells—nor does he take any eventual account of his surface fabric of wrinkles . . . the face he's made for himself, his skin textures or self-created-color . . . as expression-of-self: most men pay more attention to the color each was born with rather than any "subtle" change he's made for himself: the physiology of each man, thus, exists as a dream to him: and it is his mentality which seems to each and every one the prime creative realm: each meets leaf's surface and shell-shape with weave-of-thought he thinks he's made-up for himself.

This is false!

This fault in Man is exposed as such, and best, in Art!
An art is made as naturally/creatively as a face, a leaf—

each form of art as necessary-a-container as a shell...each thing made by a maker as preordained-a-mark as the thrusting tubes of chlorophyll—and as individual-a-thrust as each leaf's necessary measure.

Tree-leaves and leaves-of-books achieve their marks similarly.

Each sea-shell and each shell-of-ear contains the outside musical possibilities inherent from birth—the former, the sea creature, a chamber of, say, calcium carbonate which receives a world of vibrations...vibrations being The World that the bit-of-meat/creature expands and recoils within: whereas Man's ear is meat-pushed-out—the latter a flesh sound-catcher...the bone within this flesh, the drum of expansion and contraction of Man's hearing—in space rather than shape—which exists *as* sound, rather than World lived within, and which, therewith its vibrations, electrifies the brain.

Think of a man with a hollow sea-shell cupped around his ear. Think of him hearing what he calls “the music of the spheres.” It is his *flesh* ear—thus his face, his hair, his coloring all over—which he equates with a *dead* sea-shell or dried-out leaf: but the thoughts prompted by his ear-bones prompting brain do seem to him the thing comparable to creatively living Nature in *any*, as he would say, “manifestation.”

He would not honor the shape of his ear as anything creatively his: and this disownment of physiology...this shunning of his living surface...creates the net where Darkness *has* him/Man in a catch-of-thought that's often locked before his birth.

Yet, grounded as each man is by pre-ordained-thought, this shunning of his surface-life prompts the need in each and every man, to create a field of surfaces beyond himself. When these are made through the human process called “Art,” these surfaces come into being as naturally as any living surface: and they can, by any man, be recognized as such—for they are either fashioned as shields or, if Art, as illuminations...either as the heraldic banner of The Light or the guiding Light itself, against all of The Dark in him—as such as his skin...and as such as if *of* him, whomever made it: and these surfaces, separate from Man—yet *of* him—move naturally against thought...as naturally as vegetation thrusts against gravity: and The

Darkness—whatever that is (and we'll come to it again later)—finds itself defeated a little on its own undergrounds by a fielding of all surface tension . . . and defeated a lot by this field-in-time which historically we call "Aesthetics."

Aesthetics is a collection of dead sea shells.

It is a leaf press-dried between the leaves of a book.

It is a marker on the grave of thought.

But it can also be seen, childishly, as a picture book.

Let's work back—to this moment of young Sergei looking in a picture book . . . let's work back to this instant—from something of his he'd made as a grown man: in his first film . . . *Strike* . . . he superimposed the furry faces of animals over human features. These actors are 'villains' in *Strike*—strike-breakers in fact—and are introduced by sub-titles as nick-named: "Monkey," "Fox," etc. Such suggested totemism was not particularly original-in-itself nor very spectacular in this film: but the technical steps which arrive-at this effect in Sergei's first motion picture achieve an aesthetic particular to him: first, the villains are referred-to by their animal nick-names: secondly, a pet-shop is introduced so that the faces of the animals and the men may be viewed separately in a natural context: then, third, the faces of men and animals are superimposed. The whole sequence has the effect of (1) 'title,' and (2) comparison-of-image through filmic 'cuts' which are very like turns-of-pages, and finally (3) the combination of man/animal faces as they might occur in-the-mind remembering both simultaneously. There is very little attempt to make the animal face-shape conform to the human. It is an *idée fixe* being expressed.

Something alien as an animal had ravaged personal being in the womb: at his birth, the mouth of The World had opened to swallow him: the teeth and claws of air, then, had raked his body warmth: he was born out of a broken bag of streaming water.

Later, flipping a book leaf would turn a human into an animal before his eyes, or vice-versa, and back again: this image transformation—subject to the will of the young viewer—would absorb the terrified energies of the earlier occurrence . . . give the childish viewer some seeming grip again, as he'd thought he'd had in the womb, on his destiny being born . . . and

replace it with a process he would fulfill ever after.

And the water?—the out-pouring from the broken bag-of-water at birth? . . . : the first fast cutting to be found in the work of Sergei Eisenstein is the sequence of streams-of-water from fire hoses, shattering against a mass of people, drowning individuals in its streaks of diagonal whites. Most 'deaths' in the early films of Sergei are by water—the very 'threat of death' signaled dignified moving or rapidly-cut white diagonals . . . the instant of 'death' signified by a ragged white splash—this latter image evolving, in later work, to smoke and/or dust-puffs, white funeral dress, etc: but Death is always, in his work, diagonally heralded and whitely, explosively, fulfilled.

Have you ever watched a child with a picture book?—seen his sudden excitement expressed in rapid turns of the white lines pages become when flipped? . . . watched this whirl of papers-become-emotion erupt into a fountain of blurring movement? a splash of book-leaves caught in the shuffle of backward and forward motion?

Sergei met his first living death in a turn of the page: an animal image replaced one of a human—a picture of a child perhaps: Sergei thrashed wildly, then, with pages becoming like wings-in-flight to escape . . . and he seemed to die, all the same—all the same as before in the womb.

In *The Battleship Potemkin*, his second film, the first fast cutting occurs when a frustrated sailor reads words written around a plate he is drying, then smashes the circle of that plate, in diagonal arm movements, to its broken fragments: but previous to this act, this same sailor is seen in a roomful of swaying diagonal ropes holding hammocks—himself in one, as in a womb . . . himself hurt then, by a bestial officer—himself crying himself to sleep again. When the leader of the mutiny, the Hero is killed, he falls first into a loom of ropes, then slips from this accidental 'hammock-womb' to the death-splash ending of him.

The whole threat-of-death drama on *The Battleship Potemkin* develops beneath diagonal ship's cannons, reaches climax when a white tarpaulin is thrown over a group of disobedient sailors—like a limp page over a picture—: and they are ordered shot . . . : the resultant mutiny acts itself out as a series

of variations on this original theme—diagonal stair patterns and running sailor legs culminate in bursts of gun-powder white or ocean splash or both...diagonal candlesticks are crushed and piano keys smashed, in even the priest's cabin, delicately echoing this primal scene in an almost Mozartian variation—a miniature, as it were, culminating in pistol explosions.

It all, this enacted rebellion, has the authenticity of 'the real'—moved the world of viewers to believe in the immediacy of its happening—*because* it was informed in him/Sergei by events more remote than dream...events that took place before his birth, before thought, before whatever he thought he knew and could remember...events that later took shape in the life-and-death thrashing of a book caught between his pre-destined hands, his eyes, his mind's eye—his mouth-of-an-eye pre-ordained to swallow The World.

Let us come back to the term "The Dark" as it applies to The Soul of Man, and define it: The Dark, then, is any force which pre-ordains a man. That definition—which will serve us very well in this essay—permits "The Light" to be "Destiny"... as distinct opposite of ordination—opposite, therefore, of both personal order and the order of, say, a nation.

These terms: "The Light" and "The Dark": are traditionally interchangeable in Orthodox Christian Russia with: "God" and "The Devil." The motion picture medium is the first instrumentation which can express this interchangeability directly: and Sergei Eisenstein was the first Russian man to take advantage of that possibility. For *The Battleship Potemkin* he created a devil priest made up of black lines of evil expression on white-of-face, white hair and beard first seen as if streaming hell-fire's smoke—the beastliness of The Priest, his Jehovan hair... the manliness of him, his features struggling to achieve bestial expression—each image a contradiction... a complex of interwoven Destiny and pre-ordination—the apparition of The Priest, a portrait of the very war of Dark and Light which makes his Devil/God image possible on motion picture screen.

Sergei himself acts the part of The Priest of *Potemkin*—covers his face with a make-up beard, thick eye-brows, wig,

etc., and plays this character apart from all others: for it is a black priest he creates, yet bearded white... the only ambiguous—therefore ‘three-dimensional’—role in the film: oh, The Priest is clearly ‘villain’ as dictated by Communist policy; but he is a jolly ‘villain,’ a humoresque symbol of God’s ‘good,’ humanly moving—as given a depth-of-characterization by Eisenstein’s very features... his rapidly moving, thus ‘flashing’ eyes, expressively ‘pug’ nose, ironic/pressed lips, always as if about to laugh-at-self... and the whole charming personality of young Sergei poking winks and smirks and happy self-mockery through the pasted-on hair, the animal-mask, as it were, and/or God’s mask, too, over human face—an effect very like some fierce Sun visage breaking through white clouds in a child’s illustration.

(Sergei later claimed the part of The Priest in *Potemkin* was played by a local gardener: but he admitted donning The Priest’s robes and a fake wig to ‘stand in’ for The Priest’s fall down a flight of steps in the film: even if he only did this ‘stunt’ shot, that image ‘stands’ then for the single image of Eisenstein in all his films—that ‘fall,’ therefore identification-enough for the purposes of this essay... “The idea of performing the stunt was too tempting,” he said—Sergei’s features and the gardener’s, under hair, similar enough to tempt fate itself into portrait.)

The Priest in the film, is Devil—and even actively hinders the movie’s ‘good’ white sailor mutiny; but he is primarily a passive villain, clutching his crucifix and hiding behind his Bible... that “Book of books” as it’s called... like a mischievous child caught at play with his toys and fairytale stories, in midst of some adult quarrel utterly beyond him; and, like most children in such circumstance, he is on-the-side of the adults who would have things continue as-they-were—on-the-side of Authority; and he is made peevish enough, by this interruption of his play, this danger to the security of his, say, play-sword/crucifix and his book, to strike-out against the invasion of his ‘nursery’ by these disruptive young-adults/the-sailors of the Potemkin ‘family.’

The Priest is also Beast, as Sergei plays him, because of his beard. The beard is almost always villain, in itself, in the films

of Eisenstein—"the sign of the beast" . . . Sergei's childhood animal enemy—superimposed and growing then on his face. His clear heroes are clean-shaven, or no more than mustached, in his earlier films. The propaganda of The State made Sergei equate 'enemy,' thus 'beard,' with authoritarianism of the old regime: and the heavily-bearded characters Sergei films in, for instance, *The Old and The New* (also called *The General Line*) are always those favoring 'the old' and resisting 'the new.' Even in his last film, *Ivan The Terrible: Part 2*, Sergei takes particular delight in the sequence which depicts Ivan cutting-off the beards of his enemies and ordering that all Russians be beardless: but there is a kind-of-beard which Sergei, in later films, comes to accept—a close-cropped, well-trimmed beard . . . Lenin's beard. Perhaps his coming-to visual terms with *this* particularity of beard begins in this third film, *Ten Days That Shook The World* (or *October*, as it was originally called): in this film, the hero has-to-be Lenin: but, significantly enough, when Sergei first pictures Lenin, he has him disguised in a wrap-of-bandages concealing, yes!, his beard.

The features of later bearded heroes, Alexander Nevsky and Ivan, would be black: and the actors who played these roles would struggle dramatically to express their whitely human facial emotions in opposition to this stance-of-black, this animal hair, upon them. Both the Christ-like trim of the beard of Alex and the more devilish cut of Ivan's hair operate visually in contrast to each's feature and create the prime visible complexity-of-character in what becomes, in "Ivan," a black-and-white, almost musical 'study' of the struggle of good and evil on the facial surface of singular man.

The beard which Sergei finally found acceptable for his latter-day complicated protagonists—this beard of Lenin—is the one European West has most come to accept as that of The Devil . . . The Devil's beard being for mid-European Christianity the carefully barbered, thus thoughtfully intentioned, one—the cosmetic beard which did not grow, thus, naturally. But Russian Orthodox Christianity was older, closer to the struggle against paganism and all it might represent of Nature, the natural: thus it came to be that only priests above pagan suspicion, and later members of the ruling class, could safely let

their hair grow as it naturally did: all others tended to arouse suspicion with unclipped hair. In post-Revolutionary Russia, when The Priests came to be viewed as 'bad,' their traditional beards immediately became their prime visual target-of-criticism—were attacked, as if they were Medusa's coils, by those who hated priests.

As it happened, Sergei did not particularly hate The Priests; but he did hate beards. Neither Orthodoxy nor Communist propaganda moved him, as Artist, to sufficient passion for him to make immortal images of *any* of either Christianity nor Politburo's symbols: but, by luck, his complex personal struggle with hair-as-animality could mesh with Communist cosmetic dictates in this war of styles; and his fascination with The Devil's beard, as possible complexity-of-God, could take its cues from Lenin's taste: it was the same Artist's luck that Medieval painter sensualists had in "The Garden of Eden" which permitted them to depict the nude human body, or that masochist Gruenwald had in having Christ's crucifixion for acceptable subject of gruesome torture, or that Goya had, in excuse of patriotism, for loving depicting slaughter.

The only actor's part that Sergei ever played in his films was this one of black priest. In terms of his whole life's individual stance, this role in moving images constitutes a definitive self-portrait, as deeply biographical as any of young Rembrandt—though it is a portrait more like one of Durer's images-of self . . . that is, it is a very symbolic self-portrait—tells its story of conflicting personae, as well as person, via symbolic object as much as facial feature: thus, what may first appear as ambiguity of character, can come to be appreciated as incredible complexity of same . . . God and The Devil fighting this most particular battle for the soul of Sergei—Sergei in disguise—The Devil in disguise, of Priest—Priest in disguise behind the animality of historical God—God in disguise under a make-up beard. The Priest's acted death occurs also in this quality of 'ambiguity'—which we can appreciate as personal, self-portrait, 'honesty' . . . the simple truth that, as Sergei did not die, this priest-self-symbol of him only closes his eyes, one at a time, in obvious sham-of-death—a sham that is so playful as to enact itself as a 'knowing' wink at last image of The Priest: the audi-

ence must assume he was thrown overboard with the rest of the authorities: this is never shown.

It is therefore of the nature of a pre-ordained death—having nothing whatever to do with Destiny and/or The Light which all living things are destined to follow: The Devil, or ‘Prince of Darkness’ has it, thus . . . this assumption of the death of The Potemkin Priest: but his clutch of crucifix and book, his childish behavior and final wink, were destined from the first—as it was that Sergei should someday play something of some-such thing as this priest can be seen to be . . . destined that Sergei could make an image of his face, struggling through beard, which would haunt The World—there was such energy, therefrom the turn-of-page, as could move mountains forever after: the trap-of-energy was pre-ordained, pre-birth: the trap was sprung between two pictures in a children’s book . . . his Destiny arranged, as it always is, at energy’s release, when Sergei exercised his finger’s *will* to move a paper edge from right to left and back again and then—then made energy his . . . as it was always meant to be—be growth up into The Light of the sun . . . as any creature’s habit of pre-ordained form becomes energy’s fashion—seeking infinite possibilities.

We can now dispense with such terms as “Devil” and “God”—for Sergei had very little use or need for them . . . though he was socially stuck, as every Western man, with these historical terms at start: He turned, in his college studies, to The East to escape this traditionally pre-ordained trap of his imagination: the picture book was the key to this choice also in his living—thus . . . all East does make its terms from scratch, of images rather than words—its complexities of thought from image-combinations, superimpositions, in the hieroglyphics of its written language.

Let’s go back to the book—the picture book . . . for he was that young then, that the words within it were only images, too, to him: and let us see him as ‘child of his Times’ then—already trapped at birth by genetics . . . trapped since birth by codes of behavior in everyone around him, begun in each womb; and let us see him seeing himself—as if colored paper were a mirror . . . mirror the only other flat-image feed-back

he'd ever had: let us see him flat on the page then—with, perhaps, a red and black button coat . . . against a white landscape, flat with little knolls upon it—*made* curved or three-dimensional, by the slightest push of his fingers against the surface of the paper—and dark tree trunks . . . thrusting straight down to the ground, page bottom—tree trunks made to waver and coil diagonally by a sleight-of-hand push against picture-orders of the page: sudden thrust of, say, knuckles, and the image has become . . . what?—fox in his lair?—wolf tearing at the hide of a deer?—a lion mane in African scene? . . . no!—something more like a dog or cat upon its hind legs standing upright where, in the other picture, the child had been—some Russian puss-in-boots, then? . . . no—some more ferocious creature glaring out of an indoor scene—some mythological monster, whatever its whiskered feature! Sergei, later, could not remember any better than I can herein imagine the picture; but he certainly flipped back and forth between images and then desperately rummaged among the word-filled pages in search for the grace of white; and as he man-handled these pre-ordained pages, the lines of print curved and seemed to crawl—letter orders displacing previous letters in a 'movie' of slightly-shifting shapes on white—as if masses of black 'worker' ants were invading a sugar bowl in his hands.

The transformation was complete—Sergei's energy released . . . his possibilities within this particular *form* become infinite: he had his Destiny from then on.

The Form of transformation became Style in him—*his* style . . .

And Style in a man is Soul—his soul manifest to others only through his style . . . his living style . . . and the frozen etch of the style of everything he makes . . .

And Soul is simply the source of destined energy—released in the style of the original moment of transformation . . . a form that *can* become "form of Art" for fullest possible release of energy significant to others.

Nothing else mattered one damn to Sergei from then on: he used all societal damns, inhibitions of human will, to trigger some semblance of the original release—to trigger "some semblance" rather than simply "release" because the original re-

lease of his energy *had* occurred *because* of semblances . . . : thus he became a visual Artist: and the medium of motion pictures was to him, naturally, as if made for him.

Long before he ever knew of the existence of movies he was being prepared for them. Within days or weeks of the original transformation, his destiny was surely working itself through events of his daily life—making eventuality of it . . . thus:

Shoe laces went one over the other—and then one under . . . and then through each other, folded together—and pulled apart to gather or come asunder, any-which-way other than was an order:

The books had letters as well as pictures: and he was making the letters be in his mind as creatures—along a line, as mar-tialed people . . . one over the other—twisting together . . . to gather—together:

Before he could talk he came to hate the face of the moon . . . to love the sun . . . to hate the sun—to want to turn it off and on . . . to turn the picture page of the sun upon—what? . . . shoe laces . . . letters . . . whatever . . . what forever was crisis in mea-sures, the formal style, of his deliverance therefrom.

Thus he became the first film artist to believe-in totem worship—to create a dance of animal identification around the fire of movie screen: and to release this fearful energy, he created fast-cutting, the rapid replacement of one static image with another . . . a flip-book aesthetics that came, even when ‘slow-ed,’ to be called “Film Montage”—a term almost synonymous with his name.

By means of rapid, even ‘jump,’ cutting—and by inter-cutting for association-of-image—he made animal totem polar-ities of human agony which have haunted The World ever since . . . the stone lion in *Potemkin* . . . the dead horse as the failing spirit of ‘the people’ in *Ten Days That Shook The World*—this image, also derived of sculptured statue in previous shots, fallen limp as flesh . . . its white mane replacing the black hair of a dead woman . . . its body dangling from a draw-bridge rising, in a series of almost symphonically visualized criss-cross lines, to a singular diagonal—from which the body of the horse drops, finally, to watery death.

None of the things one writes about can possibly account

for the haunting power of this series of shots: it is an energy beyond memory which informs it: it is the formal integrity of a man haunted by a turn-of-the-page which energizes it.

The 'Odessa Steps sequence' from *Potemkin* is a masterpiece of steps become pages of a book spilling martial letters, their diagonals, out of itself—spelling Death to all irregular laces of masses as have, in its previous sequence, straggled down to the docks . . . the rope-like lines of people, who move among white rectangular buildings throughout the films of Eisenstein: as these coils of humans are 'undone' by militant lines of soldiers—all of a type—they begin to be revealed, by Sergei, as individuals facing Death . . . their white faces to be shattered by black streams of their blood: they move *en masse*: as veins on a hand: they are scattered by militant precision in a flurry of diagonals: they die, each one, as a monster—some mythological monster . . . created of blood broken loose from all destined form.

Only, finally, in *Ivan The Terrible* does this ant-mass of humanity achieve a triumphant means to its ends, as Sergei envisioned them; and then, in this last film of his—his testament—the line-of-people forms its as-if-hieroglyph across an expanse of snow . . . the people come to plead with Ivan to be their king again. In this perhaps most haunting scene of all Eisenstein, Ivan finally raises his head so that the coil of people beyond his window seems to trickle off the end of his pointed beard. It took Sergei a lifetime of shuffling motion picture diagonals and fussing with animal hair, to achieve this immortality moving black-on-white stencil of himself's/Ivan's physical and cosmic alignment with a glyph of the people—whose hierarchy included veins, ropes, shoe-laces, lettered enigmas, *etcetera* . . . a hieroglyph begun before he was born.

Government dictate would not permit Sergei to show, in his second film, that the mutinous sailors of *The Battleship Potemkin* were forced to scuttle their ship, seek Sanctuary in foreign lands, to save themselves from being shot—any more than Stalin's dictatorship would permit him to show *Ivan The Terrible: Part 2* or make the "Part 3" he'd intended . . . wherein Ivan, in a monastery, was to confront God: but these censorship could not for an instant stop him from making the com-

plete art of the picture-book trauma again and again, using whatever means of plot the censors forced upon him—whatever the locale of the photography or actors permitted him . . . could not stop him from developing this primal scene, film to film, for fullest exposition of his most personal vision . . . could not stop this growth of Art in him until they stopped him from filming at all and eventually killed him—‘broke’ his heart, called “heart attack,” a few months after *Ivan The Terrible: Part 2*, and all hope of filming “Part 3,” was taken away from him.

His fourth film, *The Old and The New*, and his fifth, *Alexander Nevsky*, were both closely watched and actively supervised by government censors during production: the former was ‘assigned’ to Eisenstein—was expected to be a propaganda film extolling the virtues of ‘the collective farm’ . . . was governmentally intended, primarily, for peasant farmers—was therefore an assignment expected to discipline Sergei himself, from . . . as a Communist bureaucrat might have put it . . . “all such artiness and high-falutin’ fastcuts and stuff-and-nonsense” as he, Sergei, had created in his previous films—: *The Old and The New* had to be very simple and stupidly straight forward: I’m sure that those who assigned it to him, then known by them as ‘the big city’ / ‘world famous’ filmmaker, thought of the assignment as a means to bring him “down to earth,” as they might have put it: it was mid-1920s, the beginning of the era of ‘cutting down” any such individualism as had surfaced in Russia immediately after The Revolution—an era that was to end in a ‘purge’ more terrible than war or hunger had effected . . . a bureaucratic purge which would cut many men down to six feet under the earth in unmarked graves of Siberia, for the slightest—often imagined—offense against bureaucracy . . . bureaucracy moving—as it always does—to create its safety in Fascism.

Despite supervision by these dangerous office-workers lording it over him, Sergei managed to attack ‘the bureaucratic’ directly in *The Old and The New*: he has a scene where the peasant protagonists, begging for a tractor to save the community harvest, are given the usual evasive treatment of ‘the bureau’ by superior-acting ‘white-collar’ workers too busy to see them, etc.—until one of the farmers pounds his fist on a desk and demands the tractor in the name of “Lenin” . . . a name

which, in this film, produces a tractor immediately—as magically as Aladdin's lamp.

The implications were clear: the man, Eisenstein, had gone-to-war against the officer worker—a war he was certain to lose, in Russia as anywhere else . . . a war no individual can win in his lifetime—outnumbered as any individual is, however populous his cause, by this white-collar corps, this largest collective with narrowest objective in the history of the world.

The Artist, Sergei within him, could and did easily win again and again: when they sent him 'to the farm' to humiliate him, he absorbed the world of the farmer into the light of his most personal vision—immediately shifted his dramatic necessities to the accommodations of folk-tale . . . "Lenin" the magic word to work miracles . . . a mechanical cream-separator or tractor the talisman to defeat all evil—and he even used broad peasant humor, the form of 'the dirty joke,' to develop his/Sergei's totemism further . . . dressing the cow for the mating with community's new bull as a bride, complete with veil and crown of flowers, etc. . . . intercutting bull's head, and cow's, with the laughing and weathered faces of farmers, wives, boys, girls, and happy children playing 'marriage': the whole-of-the-film could not be Art—it was too 'sat-on' by censorial office-workers . . . too loaded with the paper notions of propaganda; but Sergei did manage sequences as magical as anything else in his work—thus endangered himself . . . not from these sequences—which 'passed' the censors as 'showy' but otherwise 'harmless' tricks-of-his—but from some sense of growing power this growth of art-in-him gave the man/Eisenstein at the difficult Russian Time, when Communism shifted itself into the gears of total dictatorship.

Sergei failed to conform to 'The Party Line' as his imaginary farmers had done; and he might actually have been killed in the Politburo 'purges' of the 1930s, had he not left Russia for a world tour which was, also, to end in a series of failures-to-conform—failures to find any kind-of-an Artist's home . . . to complete any film and/or escape the confines of censorship. He did, surely, take this trip in hopes his international reputation would succeed for him better elsewhere than in Russia: it

didn't: and his worldly self thus prevented The Artist in him from completing a single sequentially moving image for almost ten years.

He began a film called *Romance Sentimentale*, which was commissioned by a famous opera singer of old Russia, and was to be a portrait of her and of—as he envisioned it—that condition of nostalgic living she was having. It begins with a thrashing to tree-trunk diagonals, blackly moving lines against the white 'page' of the sky, all intercut with the rush of sea-surf and its 'explosions' of white, in thematic answer to cut trees falling down: but when it came to images of the woman in her living room, sitting at her piano, singing songs *in memoriam* of old Russia, he could not bring himself to complete the film—left it his companion photographer, Edward Tissé, and script-writer, Grigori Alexandrov, to fulfill the demands of the commission . . . to give it a happy, show-biz ending in singing and singing—this first sound film he'd ever attempted thus ending as musical comedy.

He failed in Mexico, naturally, too—script after script rejected . . . month after month wasted—without a chance to even begin filming.

He failed in Mexico, after months of filming what was to be called *Que Viva Mexico* under commission by Upton Sinclair—one of the so-called "cocktail communists" of American 'thirties' . . . these men, living in hellish contradiction of being wealthy proletarians,—rich 'poor folk' . . . or somesuch—thus hack Idealists . . . these men, then, proving more destructive to any possible art or, even, human understanding than the worse materialist business man the dishonest commerce had ever created—Sinclair finally taking all Sergei's Mexican footage away from him and selling it piecemeal to "Castle Films," etc., for travelogue movies.

Everywhere Eisenstein went he was 'the toast of the town,' was praised, was 'wined-and-dined,' was promised almost anything by any and everyone in fashion—his ego pumped and puffed-up beyond any previous recognition: but the artist-in-him was permitted nothing in midst of this fame . . . thrashed hopelessly amidst his worldly 'favor,' midst broken promises, fits-and-starts at film-making—managing only frag-

ments of aesthetic haunts...such as Mexicans in hammocks streaked by rippling diagonal shadows...heads of native martyrs stomped-to-death under horse hooves in 'splashes' of dust...totemism through animal and monster masks among candied skulls and other symbols of Death-worship in Spanish festival...etc.—fragments, finally edited into fragmentary completion by Marie Seaton and others, years later.

Finally Sergei Eisenstein returned to Russia. Kenneth Rexroth tells the story of a conversation with Eisenstein, shortly before his departure from America, wherein he/Sergei admits he's being forced back to The Soviet Union—reportedly says 'they' "have something *on* him"/his "homosexuality"...that 'they' had threatened to "expose" him: "Let them," said Rexroth: "Oh, no!" he replied: "It would kill my mother."

He failed at his first attempted film again in Russia: *Bezhin Meadow*: and had it taken away from him. He seemed trapped at every move he made, each movie he attempted to make, each script of his which censors refused to accept: he was too famous to squeak-through any cracks of Politburo inattention. Finally, in 1938, on the eve of Russian war with Germany, he was permitted to complete his fifth film: *Alexander Nevsky*:—thought-of, propagandistically, as an historical "review" so to speak of the defeat of German Knights by Russian heroics... a kind-of musical-comedy warning to Hitler—and an operatic 'pep-talk' to the Russian people. Sergei was, naturally, supervised more closely than ever while making this film—a censor continually 'at his sleeve' during all photography...looking 'over his shoulder' each editing instant: again, no total work-of-art was possible: but he did manage some sequences-of-images sufficiently in his personal tradition to accomplish immortally haunting pictures—that which is all, of him or any man, which can honestly be called "Art"...sufficient to the desperate needs of the/his person to haunt all other persons—remind them of their, however other, ghosts in the matter of becoming individual living creatures.

In *Alexander Nevsky*, children are thrown into the fire, disappear into a puff of smoke: Teutonic Knights are masked as beasts and totemed with the horses they nightmarishly ride

upon; and they are—as absolutely horizontal lines of black on snow and ice white, finally ‘defeated’ by being linearly broken up . . . in the greatest thrash of heroic diagonals yet achieved by Sergei . . . and destroyed, horse/man, men-limbs/hooves, masks and all, a piece at a time, through black cracks in rapidly-cut ice-breaks, to watery death—The Artist Sergei at desperately happy work again!

His theoretical writings at this time defended every aesthetic stance he took in absolute confirmation of his bookish haunt: each use by him of letters was a word-by-word thrash of language against itself, ‘fighting fire with fire’—every sentence as if made to sentence language to obliteration by image . . . to make every verb an actually moving hierarch—every noun a glyph of thing. For instance, he graphed his aesthetic statements as if he were writing film-scripts; and he was quick, whenever possible, to make linguistic assumptions which compacted all flow-of-language into blocks-of-sense, as if sentences and individual words were no more finally useful than as signposts.

He even graphed Sergei Prokofiev’s music score to stand for the line of Knights in the image it accompanies—assuming the viewer would ‘read’ the line of soldiers, left to right . . . making Prokofiev’s eighth note marks occur exactly—assuming average speed of reading—where Teutonic flags occur in the line of, thus, ‘type.’ Eisenstein’s entire interest in sound was, in theoretical fact, the effect it might have upon directing attention to the desired ‘reading’ of image . . . that a musical beat, for instance, co-inciding with a particular movement, could fix attention on one or another area of composition specifically—just as dialogue could replace sub-titles, thus literature, altogether. These two Sergei’s, working closely together, appropriated the signatures of music and forced them to illustrate images very much as images had traditionally illustrated text.

Working along lines of operatic thought and ballet aesthetics, Eisenstein and Prokofiev attempted sound-and-image combinations akin to Song and Dance at Classical best. They worked closer-than-ever together on Eisenstein’s next film: *Ivan The Terrible*, making all music essentially accompaniment-of-image in Tchaikovskian tradition—as purely illustrative as all

words, in *Ivan*, finally are . . . all dialogue utterly dramatic in the Eastern Theatrical tradition—as *unliterary* as a Western man could make it.

Although Eisenstein was an actively passionate Reader—exhaustively studying whatever literature or even newspaper that came his way, his whole lifelong—he was subconsciously, and therefore *most* naturally, against The World of Letters as such, as he'd inherited it . . . thus was aesthetically up-against the cultural fact that “movies” in Russia are called “Kine,” a word derived from The Greek meaning “writer of movement”: he did everything in his power to alter that sense of it—Pudovkin's sense of it . . . Vsevolod Pudovkin his life-long friendly-enemy . . . Pudovkin the film-maker he forever argued with . . . the Pudovkin he beat at Chess once, to win the ‘right’—the ‘stakes’ of that game—to cast him in the role of “The Anarchist,” the emotionalist in rags and chains, in *Ivan The Terrible*.

Parts 1 and *2* of this last work of Sergei continue the most perfectly realized *unfinished* film in the history of Motion Pictures. The success of *Alexander Nevsky*, in the eyes of Stalin, permitted Sergei the greatest freedom he or any film-maker in Russia had ever had in the act of making: censorship was to come later at Stalin's displeasure with, particularly, the ending of *Part 2*—which suggests the corruption that complete power . . . whether Ivan's or Eisenstein's or Stalin's . . . effects in the individual man—Ivan seen, at the end of this second part, in a dictatorial control of Russia accomplished through a series of brutal murders.

I do not think Sergei imagined for an instant that Stalin would take *Ivan* ‘personally’: for Sergei was completely absorbed in himself confronting a beast in a children's picture book; and—like all artists—he was utterly naive . . . when at-work . . . as to the effect *his* beast might have upon the beastliness of others—though he had been warned of the danger he was running along paths of *Ivan*: his script-writer, Alexandrov, finally said he would have nothing to do with the project: and his cameraman, Tissé, abandoned him in midst of making *Part 2*.

It had been assumed . . . and he must have assumed it, too . . . that these life-long companions were essential to his work:

but their refusal to complete *Ivan* with him destroyed this myth—the myth of ‘collaborative Art’ . . . that an art can, or ever does, come from more than one man: for *Ivan The Terrible* is clearly, with and without Tissé, all of-a-piece and absolutely Sergei’s greatest film.

Each movement within its every composition is perfectly realized Ballet. Each composition is as structured Architecture, each stroke of light as controlled as if it were created in oil paint or fashioned as the reflective surface of mosaic. Everytime anyone or thing moves in *Ivan*, he, she or it shifts to a new compositional stance in relation to everything else in the frame, including the minutiae of distant landscape and/or the carve of architecture, the curves of its arches seen-from-within, and the compositions of murals on the wall surrounding The King in his palaces, churches, etc., and the conspirators against him, hemming him/them in, as if these nets of paint on the walls behind each court action were traps—or Death itself—for any living creature . . . either Ivan or his enemies . . . moving in a foreground of enclosing illustration—as if every human action were a desperate dance-of-Life between two positions of ‘full-stop’ in a painted composition . . . the whole film moving inexorably under the influence of its fatal backgrounds—as if each human gesture were a shift of mosaic or a fragment of shape seeking freedom from some frozen ordination in a picture-book—seeking each his Destiny through dramatic moment and emotional speech—each contradicting at every word and turn the “tapestry” of background hemming him in.

But *Ivan The Terrible* is essentially a work of Resignation—Sergei becoming like the ‘Ivan’ he imagines . . . resigned, increasingly to the ‘pre-ordained’—at the same time he celebrates Destiny-as-movement . . . each sign-of-life in this film the most beautifully choreographed triumph of Sergei’s will imaginable—Ivan’s every gesture memorable for all Time. Motion herein is almost always emotional: yet his human actors are as thoughtfully moved, from stance to yet more static stance, as if they were psychological ‘weights’ of point-counter-point in a game of intellect. The two prime worldly traditions informing middle-aged Sergei for this work were The Chinese Opera and

Chess: but his Artist inspiration was as always picture and page—though he'd learned to turn his images slowly . . . thoughtfully . . . in his still desperate mind, and to feel each move with the care of an experienced man—stepping, now, slowly along his difficult way.

Fast-cutting, Sergei's main rhythmic means, is at a minimum in this last work: and *Vision* in *Ivan* is a slow evolution rather than, as earlier, a mutant leap-of-imagination.

Youthfully, it, all Art, had been for him rapidly-cut lines on white—

curves of lines making shape . . .

shapes 'filled-in' with shades of gray and black and white . . .

White turning over and over—faster and faster—24 frames—per-second—as he turned the sun . . . in his imagination . . . on and off—these the means of young Sergei's eye chewing away at *The World*.

The means of *Ivan's* make-up are essentially a reverse of all earlier procedure: this last work seeks Black and the monumentality of solid shape—most sequences constructed slowly *out* of some activity of introductory White:

many sequences begin outdoors in snow scenes—

black dots of moving humanity upon them . . .

and move to interior darknesses—

white spots of candle-light within them . . .

In one 'telling' sequence of the film, a huge book, *The Bible*, is laid over the face of Ivan seeming near Death: but like *The Priest* of *Potemkin*, he is only faking death to fool the conspirators of his court: the actor playing Ivan then opens his eye and visually echoes, with his look, the exact expression of Sergei, playing Priest two decades earlier: elder Eisenstein thus had his "Ivan" accept what young Sergei, as Priest, could not.

Ivan moves through the light of this film along a line of rejections-of-Death—his mother's . . . which makes him child-King—his beloved's . . . which frees him from personal life to assume full powers of Kingship—to acceptance-of-Death . . . through Murder—himself as Death: *Part 3* would surely have found him/Sergei, and Ivan, coming to terms with his own death at last.

The 'turning point' in Sergei's life, which makes such eventual acceptance possible to him, and his Art of *Ivan*, occurred when he made his third film: *Ten Days That Shook The World*. This film, made late-1920s, was after all the last work Sergei was permitted to create, very much as he wanted, *and complete*.

It is true that the government censored him here too, somewhat—cut his sequences of Trotsky from it, of course . . . altered historical fact, thus, to suit the purposes of current propagan-da; but they left him *essentially* free—free enough to develop his style as never before . . . and as, ever after, only in the two-thirds of *Ivan The Terrible* he was allowed before the ultimate censorship, his death, interrupted all work.

Ivan's Part 2 was banned, rather than altered—smuggled, later, out of Kremlin vaults through East Germany . . . finally released 'officially'—after Stalin's death—exactly as Sergei had made it: thus, this total ban on the work ironically saved it from the censors' cuts and preserved it as the only film of Eisenstein we've inherited unaltered by The Politburo: but *Ten Days That Shook The World* is a 'close second' in this respect, and exists as his least-supervised finished film.

It may seem odd that as politically 'touchy' -a-subject as The October Revolution should have emerged least censored of all Sergei's films: but it must be remembered that Eisenstein was a dedicated Communist Revolutionary—a student fighter during the final up-rising . . . completely inspired by the events he depicts in his film of that historical moment when Kerensky's government was overthrown. For once in his life, the artist-in-him and the revolutionary man were in accord with each other and both in accordance with official policy: thus *Ten Days That Shook The World* occurs as completed Art because of one of those rare miracles of co-incidence of creative person and politics in agreement—that same miracle which produced The Renaissance, Elizabethan Theatre, Irish Abbey, etc. . . . a co-incidence which is rare as heaven-on-earth—is yet the only means whereby the art of living men may enter 'the public domain.'

Sergei gave *Ten Days That Shook The World* immortality thus:

any picture-book picture, within it, can combine with any other, or others, to make a replacement for *sound*—as when the ‘still’ image of a soldier and the ‘still’ of his machine-gun are rapidly intercut to produce the effect of the sound of firing . . .

and visual sound-effects, thus, become replacements for *words*—as when a harp, being strummed, is superimposed over a speaker’s face . . . the speaker about-to-be interrupted by stomping feet:

therefore images make sentences, thus:

movements, within the frame, replace verbs:

therefore:

pictures of objects replace nouns:

and:

each act of editing, itself, becomes utterly prepositional.

‘Still’ images, cut together, create contexts—complexes of thought . . . ideas—for instance:

the objects of the imperial office which Kerensky inherits, beginning with dolls and primitive masks, proceeding to tiny statues of Napoleon, and culminating in symbols of king’s crown, chess-pieces, etc., spell-out a statement of historical philosophy . . . :

whereas:

moving images, edited in juxtaposition, cast spells of mood—make one long visual verb . . . a choreograph—thus: the peacock-statue on the imperial office door becomes a creature of the assumption-of-power in its spread-of-tail . . . the act of boasting which Pride engenders; and it becomes symbol of Pride and power-noun again only when ‘still’—prideful.

All visual-verbs move as if to become conceptual nouns . . . as Sergei cuts them—thus: in the sequence of the Russian dance which unites The Communists and The Cossacks, faster and faster cutting gradually obliterates the movements of dancing and makes of them The Dance . . . obliterates the gestures of humans uniting and spells, of their swiftly-cut and thus superimposed figures, a singular sense—Unification.

Perhaps Sergei thought he was making a grammar for Film: he had, he said, worn-out a print of DW Griffith’s *Intolerance*, looking at it hundreds of times before making *Ten Days That Shook The World*: but what he actually achieved was

some complete opposite of written grammatical intention as we experience it in writing. Griffith, the film's main grammarian, would have found Sergei hopelessly barbaric: and he was!—as barbaric as a child...: and he did create his orders-of-image very like those first humans who tried to substitute a picture for a grunt, a track of lines as an approximate of some spoken meaning, a map of signs to stand (*not* at first for places, things, or persons) but for the sounds of, say, some chief's intentions—the map of the 'list' of the things he'd want from his wars and travels... his thoughts about the history of himself as collector of possessions—his map for afterlife, a signature of desires accomplished. These 'inventories' were the earliest records in the history of Man—records of sounds... wishful groans—grunts of satisfaction... and finally then, the picturization of Humanity howling: "I want... I want"—and the image lists which signify: "Mine!"... King's—as Artist's—immortality only possible through these symbols which seem to stand-for all that can't actually be kept.

The Revolution was over—just another turn-of-the-wheel—and moving toward eventual Stalinism... already in 1928... when Sergei Eisenstein celebrated it—making it triumph as only it could in his images... triumph over its own historical Death—its own October... triumph as it had for the period of "Ten Days" that Sergei saw in such a way they would shake The World a little longer than revolution.

He saw them, these "Ten Days," in the most primitive terms known to Man—the metaphors of Dream; and he created this dream of revolution according to the most primitive processes of imagination... the dream process which makes of anything the many-somethings which are finally no-one-thing—or, at least, nothing finally intelligible to the waking man and/or all his systems of thought and orders of communication. The Dream Process is personal: it begins in the womb before other human being, even twin, is so-much as dreamt-of; and it grows only in accordance with the closed-system of 'the sleeper,' even when he is 'daydreaming'; and it feeds on events of the waking world as if they were all only the results of imagination.

Sergei wrote many texts attempting to create communication-systems of the image-orders in his films, most especially of

those in *Ten Days That Shook The World*: and in this contextual writing he *is* grammarian. He *had* thought he was creating a communal language when making each film; and he was, as surely as a cause can be said to have an effect, doing such as he thought . . . but only *because* the world of viewers, and readers, too, insisted upon some-such thing out of him: the truth is: *Ten Days That Shook The World* can only be fully appreciated as a dream—a most particular dream, dreamed by some unintelligible other human being in a womb of his own imagination.

He had the Greek Dramatic ideal—or was it the idea of the Politburo?—to avoid any images of violence depicting The Revolution . . . a dreamy Revolution to be sure—all Death a suggestion . . . a nightmare's threat—utterly abstract. All the explosive violence at the end of the film is essentially directed against property. The wounded soldier, seen gesturing his comrades on as he is dying, is too picturesque to be taken as seriously hurt. The end of this dream-impulse, as far as we are permitted to experience it, occurs when 20 years later, *Ivan* celebrates brutal Murder—Ivan's 'feast of celebration' being the only scene of color afforded Eisenstein . . . blood-reds of dancers amidst the gold of his splendor—the colors as garish as, and of the symbolic orders of, remembered Dream: and Ivan says as his last words in the film, that he/Russia will go on and, as necessary, go on killing . . . as he and his guests eat the food of slaughter—some of it served in dishes shaped like animals . . . drinking wine as if it were the very blood of the victim—as totemic-a-scene as ever to-be-found in any jungle.

For twenty years Sergei moved through images that were—in his early films—like those a dreamer remembers on waking . . . images censored by personal conscious thought—ordered by grammatical attempt—and thus abstract: toward the last of his life he came—in *Ivan*—upon the 'dream-stuff' itself . . . the primordial urgencies previous to intellect . . . the primitive King any child is in the womb and for many years after being born—the very raging monster historical 'Ivan' was born-to-be, 'at-large' as adult human: and Sergei used all his thoughtfulness—in making the film *Ivan*—as a tool—outside the work—as a camera . . . etc.—to simply present him . . . a

walking nightmare of being human—being then, Sergei, too, as he had before memory been... a killer beast—defending himself—against any and all... in his imagination... that might keep him from whatever he might want—might want to be!

It was a heart attack which killed Sergei Eisenstein in 1948. I like to think it was his own—and not some part of ‘the doctor plots’ of those post-war Stalin purges... : I like to think he made it, this last struggle with the beast within—his psychology hemming-in *Dream*, as it had from the beginning—himself... exactly as he would have finally wanted it—all thought caught-up in the beat, and at one with the struggling measures of his physical being.

comedy

tragi/comedy

comedy

tragi/comedy

INTRODUCTION

The first time I heard the word “Brakhage” was in 1959, high in the mountains of New Mexico. Shortly thereafter I had a taste of his outlandishly accurate writing in a little magazine of the time called *Blue Grass*. It was going to be a few years before I actually saw the films. By the time I did have a chance to see the films at the Vancouver Arts Festival in 1963 I had some notions about him and the art of his family. Word formations flying through the mountain chains of the West. How Jane Brakhage could get an audience of 75 beavers together in the aspen groves just about any afternoon for a flute concert. There is a certain critical attention mountain dwellers must pay to the phenomena of their location, and I always paid close attention to news of the Brakhages.

Brakhage is a definitional writer. He starts with more or less common knowledge (or common controversy) and shows us where the language (both verbal & visual) leads into the interior. Through the draws to the hidden vale. Or up over the passes to the whole outside. The journey has to be made, but *The Way* derives from nature. This is not a “psychological” determination. It is both more serious and grander than that. The definitions track through the forest of puns, a vigorous prose on antrogenetic legs. Invested sometimes with the truly

bewildering meanings of its subject.

The truly deep comic is animal. When the soundtrack comes on the impression rises suddenly lighter even than air to the head. Of Jean Vigo's *Jean Taris, Champion of Swimming*, Brakhage writes: "Conquering water in every conceivable way, concluding with his camera-created Jesus-act of walking on it." That suggests something beyond and "above" something funny. Walking and chewing gum simultaneously is simply too entirely physical, though sprung from the same primeval gestural medium.

The Chaplin lecture is the greatest illumination of that difficult subject I've ever read. Was he just another insidious influence bubbling up from the lower classes or the heaviest prescription for a comedian yet writ? Brakhage avoids both those limitations. He is an artist—"The United States was his bridge, he danced upon it almost half a century, a marionette dangling from a string of vicious gags, with a cane in one hand and a woman's arm in the other—tight rope walking across a Niagara Fall of dollars." Charlie Chaplin left for the West at Kansas City, pretty near where everybody else entrained.

—Edward Dorn
San Francisco, 1977



CHARLIE CHAPLIN

Let's call him "Charles," for a start—God knows what he might have originally been called . . . forth from—some Olympian joke, like that which set the Greeks to spinning: give a twist to the top and watch it weave a blur, as it contains itself: put a curl on the end of a boy's name (the "y" on "Sammy," "Larry," etc.) and watch him become a bully . . . or is it the other way round?—does that squeal at the end of "Charl," that "ie," come to BEcause?; the diminutive thru namesake caused BY an angry genii in some William baby all of us have known as bull Billy, Willie, etc., from kindergarten on?

Let us call him "Charles" awhile and try to tame the beast he, as Charlie, was—or, at least, to beard him in his den of lies: for this is the brute who first put diminutive upon the moving image of world . . . and made it, amidst squeals of laughter, stick!

My attempt, in this lecture, will be to rid us all of that: and I will surely fail: Charles will call upon his references, break bonds of present meaning, and drag us all back to the jungle, again and again, until we tire of the trip: Dionysus must have his parade till kingdom come.

Still and all, if we say, "Charles, climb upon this altar, pose with alabaster classicism for us, that we may worship—",

he will surely grant this cagey stance, for ego's sake, as he occasionally did for journalists throughout his otherwise career . . . he, one of the few men, in our Time, who only showed himself as a statue—in the white of flashbulbs . . . he the only king whose courtroom in our times, was the Hall of Justice—monumental flirt that he is and always was.

Born to lead a parade of light into darkness—to diminish each person he touched, like a laughter Midas whose very appearance reduced every human to a giggling fit . . . only in Court did Charles permit civilized response from his onlookers . . . only then a nobility other than religious whoop, but no!—there was a third Charles . . . the man among his friends, or acquaintances, like they say—this too, like Charles/Dionysus, was composed of calculated Act; with friends, and even lovers, as one might say, he was The Human . . . whom he never knew of himself—save in flash-bulb instants when brought to Trial—The Human Being understood as a ghost-of-self . . . interest, as in Human Interest—as sure an Act, for him, as that of Major-Domo for the diminishment of Man.

No one knows, nor ever shall, what a god IS; but those who embody god-force on Earth, who never know either, DO calculate each step they take—have eyes in the backs of their heads to count the number following, act OUT each gesture which takes others IN . . . and are, each Christ/himself never anything BUT “out”—of whatever “it” they have engendered . . . do not feel particularly humorous or dolorous, as the case may be—are emphatically not diminished when diminishing nor crucified when they lay their cross upon an humanity.

Charles *had* to be born an Englishman, and to settle finally in Switzerland. The United States was his bridge; he danced upon it almost half-a-century—a marionette dangling from a string of vicious gags . . . with a cane in one hand and a woman's arm in the other—tightrope-walking across a Niagara Fall of dollars. English he was, at scratch—the first great *anti*-pilgrim over since Raleigh's folly . . . perhaps the last great disillusioned immigrant this continent can safely suffer—England's final swap, let's say, for a Henry James from us.

Switzerland seems 'perfect' for his final destination—land where thieves run with their money . . . collection of city-states,

fiefs within cities, and allegic persons in-fighting block to block, such an altogether feudal sense throughout that The Swiss, natch', haven't energy left to war with outside nations . . . yes!, this was the natural destiny of Charles' come-uppance in the World.

He was, after all, a Twentieth Century Diana-geist—two-bit Dionysus . . . the *very* man to answer Ezra Pound's:

"What god, man, or hero

Shall I place a tin wreath upon!"— he was Diana's final gigelo, then, her chips all down . . . the Paulette Goddard, as we know her—etcetera; and he did answer the description, better than any other, of the demands of The Age, as Pound spelled them out in his beautifully bitter "E.P. Ode Pour L'Élection De Son Sepulcre":

"The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;"

"The 'age demanded' chiefly a mould in plaster,
Made with no loss of time,
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the 'sculpture' of rhyme."

"Christ follows Dionysus,
Phallic and ambrosial
Made way for macerations;
Caliban casts out Ariel."

"All men, in law, are equals.
Free of Pisistratus,
We choose a knave or an eunuch
To rule over us."—

these quoted stanzas are not intended as a 'digest' of the poem, which must be carefully studied in its entirety to comprehend my meaning herein; but the quotes will serve to indicate Charlie's particular qualifications for Pound's 'tin wreath' at last.

Please understand this delicate matter; it is not laughter

per se I'm against; it IS the saying of "laughter," rather than what was meant, I hate; it is the joke as distraction I'm against. Natural jollity is body's happy tremble, the outbreak of it into sound throat's share of this with the airiness of The World and all around, an infectious wind of loving feeling. Therefore, I abhor all that which contrives this joy to mask its opposite, as surely as I abhor, for example—sex educational movies . . . etc.

The contrivances of Art are, in my opinion, entirely designed to leave each attendant person *free*, unto himself (are thus called "keys," often enough, in formal search); there can be, therefore, no Art which seeks, for instance, to force a person to laugh; most that passes, there-to-fore, as 'comedy' is, in fact, some opposite of that: most that easily passes as laughter is 'humor' in the sense one says "humour the mad."

Comedy, if to be considered an art at all, must be for the sane—all laughter therefrom, occurring as naturally as it does in joy . . . i.e., that a work has so presented an entire 'world' in such acceptance that one laughs in sheer pleasure of it and is tickled by the natural contradictions implicit in it *and* that acceptance of it. Comedy, as an Art, creates occasions for laughter; thus it is opposite to any humouring.

Jokesters abort all this for immediate relief—thus deepen the trap . . . bait the breath with forced laugh—sell Death, like any 'pusher.'

Let's make a compact with The Devil himself and see how it goes, once the 'eyes and ears of the World' are above what everybody knows.

Charles!

Be a bust of yourself an instant.

Take off that mustache, please.

Fake eyebrows too, remove.

Unblacken your 'pitch.'

Doff your hat.

What's left?

Imagine the face of Charles thus, carved upon Mt. Rushmore alongside Jefferson—to the left, please, in space—and laugh a different kind of laugh. How'll we get at him, other, without falling victim to his clowning?

Let's get at him, *his* image, another way—for he has cer-

tainly got at ours . . . let us call him Spencer—as was his middle name . . . (if we can believe any of the advertisement on him) . . . and was born in 1889, in London slum, of French-Jewish (father) and Spanish-Irish (mother) mix . . . (if you can imagine that)—among vaudevillians ‘on the skids’ . . . a setting even Charles Dickens couldn’t have managed as ‘novel’—of drunken father and insane mother . . . the former to die of alcoholism and the latter committed to asylum before Spencer hit his “teens”—NO! . . . Spencer, obviously, would never have ‘made it’ unless, like Dickens’ Oliver, his wealthy inlaws, (of the imagination in his case) bailed him out; but, of course, his imagination *did*. These dreams of wealth, such as only a “Spencer” could create for himself, cast Dickensian glow over all of Charlie’s childhood as it did over the whole brood of Victorian poverty upon itself. Yet one can be sure that Spencer Chaplin died, age five, when his father thrust him suddenly upon the stage to sing the song “Jack Jones.” Tossed pennies cascaded, at end. He, dying in his skin, sang again and again. More pennies each time rained round in *undreamed* wealth—*dreamed* poverty’s death . . . His father finally had to pull him from the stage. It was, then “Jack Jones” who killed young Spencer Chaplin in 1895. His drunken father set him up for the kill, unwittingly. His actor father could not, then or ever, save him. Charlie was born, as surely as basketed Moses, then!—little poor boy up from hell . . . innocent betrayer of his origins—Boss Man to come.

I take this trouble—to lament this unknown child’s death—because Spencer was a natural artist . . . the only kind of artist there ever is, born-to-it-artist, then . . . i.e. ‘one of the kindred’ . . . having *nothing* to do with ‘kind’—and because Spencer’s ghost did, albeit only spiritually, manage a work-of-art or two or three or more . . . (as we’ll search out—of Charlie’s religious rubbish—in Time) . . . many years after his childhood murder. His body was sold to the Devil for pennies. His soul soon fell to Dionysus. His ghost, having nothing to do with either, of these doubles, was artist of such destroyed greatness it, even so, managed to create, despite. We’ll come to that and salvage it, if we can, with the expertise Dickens exerts to raise Oliver from the mellow-dramatic muck.

But first, let’s back to Charles, again, as marionette on

Charlie string.

The Devil has that now, right?

Are there too many characters in this writing to follow?

That's the trouble with a Dickens novel—any novel, for that matter...the trouble of keeping any writ right *new*—as the term 'novel' insists upon.

The 'poem' "Charlie" is, at best, 'verse'—a vaudeville ditty...patterned after limerick—too cowardly to manage decent smut.

The 'poem' "Charles" is 'ballad' of the moral-story sort.

The Devil's 'poem' we all know by heart.

Spencer's is the only 'poem' we'll call Art—i.e. the only Poem, in fact; Spencer's 'poem' only exists as a haunt... (it hasn't yet been 'read' by any but the poets who attend to haunts/houses where Muses move from rhymes to rooms to off-and-ons that pass, to most, as mysteries.)

Chaplin, like Popes, commissions poems to advertise proclivities of Gods.

A 'poem' *cannot* be commissioned, except thru luck of coincidence (as in a Renaissance). Thus Chaplin seldom gets what he wants from Spencer—thus 'fakes' his haunt, like any medium caught in the table-tapping racket...yet, out of luck, does get, a time or two, more than he'd bargained for—a whole Art.

It is so much easier to follow Charlie's jingle—from penny-dreadful beginnings to himself as millionaire... is it not?—that, of course, The World of Man has easily done that...sung his praises as vaudevillian clown to Hollywood fame—'loved him,' like they say, for the very things he'd taken from them. His dumb rhymes of slapstick repetition will, like a Chinese water-torture, far outweigh the considerations of this lecture to all but the thoughtful. Most will, rather, laugh their heads off: Charlie, 'the pusher,' will always win with 'the hooked'...—and who is not?...even murdered Spencer was dependent on Charlie's drugs in the end. Only Charles was not—sane old stuffy Charles. This lecture is written, then, for Charles, wherever he is!

Charles would have kept his Charlie-self in England—where he might have ended up at The Old Vic...or gone on with Slapstick—careers of solid money paid for the same old

act.

It was Charlie who sniffed out his Dionysiact as U.S.-bent.

Every European traveler or settler on this American continent—from Cabeza de Vaca to The Puritans—marked it off as irrationally religious settlement . . . Dionysus domain then . . . “The land of the free”—or ‘the mad’ as it sometimes seems . . . with guaranteed Right to “the pursuit of happiness”—its inclinations all religious thus: heaven on earth!

Charles would have had none of it but once dragged here on an acting tour he—like any thrifty immigrant . . . like all of Europe’s “tired,” “poor,” etc.—opted for “Security” . . . ‘streets of gold’ in the stingy imagination—felled by the ‘ton of bricks’ which is the more actual condition of The Nation.

Both aspects of Chaplin’s character were warped by U.S. stage tricks from youngest scratch—steeped in Americaneze . . . viz.—the influence of U.S. Minstrel shows on English theatre.

The Minstrel shows created the first racial false face—the white as the black . . . the literal black joke—to diminish the very human excuse for North/South Civil strife; its bird of ill humorous omen in England shaped itself up as a modern or Victorian Slapstick before coming back home to roost by way of Vaudeville. Vaudeville’s influence on ‘the movies’ finally gave us “Charlie” as the ultimate trap of all this guilt.

But Charlie had half-a-century of help out of which he’d hatch the white man’s actual burden in fact, and half-a-century after his ‘lead’ of image diminishment the motion picture cartoons have managed to combine his anthropic jerky stance with the morphism of Walt Disney into what can only be a Dionysian ‘dance of death’—the “Tom and Jerry” cartoon hero being ‘man as mouse’ . . . Jerry’s endlessly ‘fixed’ win over black Tom Cat—the trap of all sensibility which permits far more than racial fake . . . permits each hypocrite to diminish himself via what he identifies with in order to stingily imagine this or that—to buy the products advertised at the expense of himself literally and thru T.V. insult. “The joke’s on *you*” they endlessly say. The joke began, to wit . . . at wit’s end on an English stage.

So far so goodly bad for the childhood American influences shaping Charlie.

Another desperate U.S.—‘pop’ offshoot affected him in

his very first stage appearance. He was cast as 'a waif' /thus himself in the drama of the "Horatio Alger" school of American myth. Minstrels masked The White Man as a comic Black and threaded their songs and jokes around this painful stance to the expense of Black People: whereas Horatio Alger masked 'the rich' with poverty and stretched his story thru a maze of improbabilities at the expense of the gullible 'white collar class.' Both Minstrels and Alger had their English equivalent--Minstrels in English pantomime theatre... Alger in Charles Dickens. But European pantomime was exaggeration--American Minstrel its opposite... evasion: and whereas Dickens sought to *expose* social evil, his American imitator Horatio Alger attempted to *conceal* it. Chaplin was shaped by turn-of-the-century anglicized American 'junk' from his first touch with The Theatre because the British were then feeding evasion--come to be known as 'escape' --to their 'working classes' as fast as they could follow in competitive footsteps at the time.

The play Charlie first appeared in was a British adaptation of "From Rags to Riches"—called "Giddy Osten" at the London Hippodrome. Charlie was 10 at the time. In his 'teens he toured all England in productions of whatever his business brother Sidney could arrange for him—crossed paths with Stan Laurel once... gave up the part of "Jimmy The Fearless" to him—lacking self-confidence at the time. Charlie picked up his mustache in "The Football Match," his penchant for pantomime on tour in The Channel Islands when he found his audience unable to understand English; and he decided for Comedy as his metier and his cane as comic prop, first time, in "Casey's Court Circus"; but he didn't get it all together under his derby hat until, half a decade later, he appeared in Mack Sennett's "Kid Auto Races at Venice."

His first film for Sennett was appropriately-enough called "Making A Living." Sennett, called "the father of American film comedy," was Canadian by birth—had learned motion picture technique in conjunction with D.W. Griffith at the Biograph Company from 1908 to 1912. His natural inclination was to feed French farce into the developing U.S./British comic movie mix and he rose to 'top' directorial place at the Keystone Studios by 1913 when Charlie was hired off a Philadelphia thea-

tre stage. Charlie finished his tour, left the stage forever in Kansas City and headed West to Glendale, California.

Think of his track across *The Nation* as more than a trip—imagine it as part of the whole “Westward Ho!” then, and now still going. His step off stage in Kansas was a perfect mid-country transformation—this terrain still in midst its “Dodge City” days...it’s “Go West, young man, go West” putsch—which drive, whether baited with Sutter’s gold or Hollywood, ended its affront at the impasse of The Pacific Ocean...doubled back then for every American pilgrim upon mysticism—the religious cults and Babylonian ‘star’ worship indigenous to L.A. California. (San Franciscans, after all, had the option of ‘The North’ as prospect to deflect their frustration at being stopped in trek). Imagine Charlie amidst all this—his Englishness very much the same stuff which first inhabited these shores...his trip a swift recapitulation of three hundred years of ‘pushy’ U.S.ence—imagine him thus to get at his myth...not for religious worship—but rather its opposite in Art. Thus we must take up the thread of Spencer again—must see his child ghost haunting Charles’ business sense and Charlie’s comic relief...giving aesthetic shape to Dionysian mist—hatching a play-within-a-play as surely as Hamlet’s father’s ghost.

Sennett was ‘hard’ on newcomer Charlie—gave him the roughest ‘dressing-down’ ever publically witnessed at The Keystone Studios...relegated him to a ‘walk-on’ part in a short ‘filler’ film—was to Sennett to be “a nuisance” in “a funny costume” interfering with the photography of a children’s auto race at Venice Park...good, Sennett thought, for “a few laughs”—cast thus as Sennett’s experience had been of him: for Charlie had made nothing much but a nuisance of himself at the Keystone Studios—inasmuch as he couldn’t understand or adapt to movie techniques...couldn’t bring himself to pretend to look at something or anyone not visible to him on the ‘set’ nor imagine that filmic editing would supply the thing he’d been supposed to be seeing and/or the missing person—got stuck with the continuities of stage techniques which Sennett couldn’t easily cut as shot-to-shot Keystone montage.

Imagine, then, naked Charlie in the prop room—bereft of Charles who’d got him there for “Making A Living”...stuck

with the ghost of Spencer—as all men bereft get stuck with the naked raging child they've murdered or allowed to be killed. It was surely Spencer's ghost who picked, from all previous 'spots' of stage desperation those 'props' which would best give him/Spencer some substance—some geistly 'life on Earth' . . . like ectoplasmic stuff mediums operate with—that 'frame' wherein the mist of mysticism takes shape. . . haunted Charlie circling magically (widdershins?) among the properties of the costume room as blindly sure as any necromancer calling forth 'the spirits' into shape—as visibly guided by murdered Spencer to defeat Dionysus via the oldest artist trick in the aesthetic bag of history. . . that tricking-out of invisible gods into sensible shape—that trick every Renaissance Artist played upon The Popes to eventually destroy the Church. . . gods apparently as subject to flattery as kings and middle-class businessmen desiring portraits—trapped thus into im-mortality on Earth.

Spencer it was, then, who picked up a bamboo cane as godly wand and got the swap of undersize derby hat, with uptilted brim for horns of The God, and picked a toothbrush mustache to 'stand for' the black nose of goat—actually cut down from a handlebar mustache of Mack Swain's. . . (shades of The White Goddess contributing?)—and a pair of Fatty Arbuckle's huge pants to approximate the fulsome rump of upper goat's let and size 14 shoes worn wrongly on the feet to create the splayed hoof stance of The Goat, as this mythic creature is traditionally pictured when up-standing. But then it was of course a London child's concept of a faun complete with tight vest and shuffling walk such as an eccentric 'old goat' reduced to the role of tramp or a cramped 'fairy' in disguise might assume in an English public park.

It was the 'play within the play' which surely birthed the proper pantomime for Charlie's 'walk-on.' A prop camera was set in front of the picture taking one at the Venice race track: Charlie's instructions were to pretend to interfere with the motion-picture taking of the children's race by walking onto the track in front of the prop camera again and again, bumping cameraman and eluding Keystone cops set to pretend to stop him. In fact he upstaged the whole child's racing world with his improvised pranks, and thus The God got his bargain's worth

of fun out of this film and launched his Charlie-self religiously upon the World for most of a decade following.

I'll not trace that, for its history properly belongs to the priests of American movie comedy who have huffed and puffed it up enough to stick us all with the immaculate assumption that this constitutes the greatness of Charlie Chaplin. Let him/ them have it—and Charles too, who grew rich upon it . . . commissioning its every turn for profit—proper god worship on U.S. earth.

I can read the whole deepest drift of these 'in-between' years in the sub-title to the closing scene of "Easy Street," which I take to be the best whole work Charlie'd managed as Diongeist. "Love Backed by Force, Forgiveness Sweet, Bring Hope and Peace, to Easy Street." The rest of 'the best' is straight slapstick, baggy pantomimic stuff such as "One A.M." 's pun on drunkenness, "The Floorwalker" 's man against Deus Ex Machinae and "The Pawnshop" 's spoof of material wealth.

Each person is entitled, as in any church, to his personal choice of 'the best'—the rite most close to 'the heart' of any him and her . . . this the limit of any religion's allowance of 'free will'—thus you're "free" to make up your own list of Charlie's best . . . the democratic vote of all THE religion's members, therefore, constituting THE church's righteousness. But take note of this/ that the ritual itself is as in any church a predetermined trap—demanding the 'hee-haw' of exact response . . . without which there would be no church—no Charlie's cache of laughs.

Humans need no training in order to find relief in the discomfort of another; there is some innate, and utterly irrational belief in each that the misery of any other human being will relieve The Self of that same miserableness. The Scapegoat was invented—by desperate Arabs who each year drove one of their "billys" into the desert, hopefully heaped with the village demons, to die of thirst . . . Jews emulating this evolved Christ, of course—and this invention became then again realized at its most primitive source in U.S. competitive system . . . when 'dog eats dog' the misfortune of one dog surely IS to the benefit of every other—most certainly benefitting dogged killer . . . thus the public triumph of every son-of-a-bitch this Nation's hatched—"Scapegoat" ritual herein having then actual stature again.

This syndrome operates obviously best among nomads; the lack of any city-state or American civilization gave this ancient belief new lease on life, but what gave it the terrible leash of laughter implicit from/in/of Capitalism? What gave it the particularities most common to U.S. Comedy?—the pie in the face?—the kick in the butt?—the slip upon banana peel/etce-tera? . . . the blacking of the face—or Ku Klux Klan-like whiting of some—which pie accomplishes in movies, release racial guilt! . . . the kick (rather than slapping of sticks against the butt as gave “Slapstick” its name) symbolizes something for Americans more sexual, say, than the adult ‘spank’ in historical Slapstick!—something more competitively personal!—more visually akin to the twists of meaning in an American “Fuck You”! . . . the banana or other slippery substance, always shown thrown-down by someone, being simply this deathly “fuck” as gauntlet prepared in Time by Chance—Time is ally in American enmity because the Enemy is never immediate to emotion—chance is collaborator because any Victim of circumstances, other than The Self, will do as Enemy in the furthering of one’s own competitive aims. All this is Indeterminately thus—is us . . . is U.S.’s inner sense—natural to each. The laugh itself, however, must be of trained response as surely as “Amen” and can only operate in U.S. movie comedy as relief from guilt. Charlie’s whole *modus operendi* is to play these pranks upon ‘the rich,’ ‘the cop,’ and ‘the tough’ and upon himself in his every attempt at human dignity-himself as Charles . . . representative of The Establishment—himself as Civilized Man.

His attempts at Satire fail as Art inasmuch as his satyr nature operates politically. This Americanized nomad has always had an ‘axe to grind’ against any attempted city-state. Anyway, Satire is usually the last of the Arts to be achieved by any new civilization. Comedy is usually the first Art new culture accomplishes: but first, as Art, it must wean itself from all religiosity as would, in ritual attendance, end it for some political use, god-prop stuff, etc.

The priests of American movie comedy have had at it long enough. I’ll opt for Art, and to do that we must take up the thread of Charlie’s life at a point of threat—when he, as man, not priest, was hurt . . . when Charles did lose his business realm

to a state of being—in 1920 when the first of Charlie's women took divorceful shape in his life.

The American people had surely expected Charlie to marry Edna Purviance—actress most convincingly coupled with him for comic effect in many films...the only woman who 'could handle him'—as it was said by gossip columnists of this mother-loving public—in his off-screen temperamental moments...the only woman to remain in fact his constant friend and advisor for many years—his best 'straight' woman in comic fiction. But Charlie chose instead 16-year-old blond and blue-eyed Mildred Harris...child-star since she was 6—treated by Charlie "fatherly" and "as though I had been a mere child," to quote her on the matter. She had been protegee of D.W. Griffith, among others for whom she acted 'the child' in film after film of her staged growing up: and Griffith is reported as playing cupid to this match, advising each to marry the other; what better public myth could either hope to achieve in Hollywoodian grandeur of Dickensian and Pollyanna romantics—just two make-believe kids off the actual streets playing American 'house'...one of them old enough to play 'the father'—Mildred, however, soon-to-be too pregnant to play 'daughter' any further...Chaplin, all the while, at the make-believe 'front,' finishing "Shoulder Arms" and less and less at home with his child bride.

In the film just previous to his marriage—his first work completely controlled by himself...and named by him, then, "A Dog's Life"—he envisioned marriage thus, (an ending subtitle): "When dreams come true"...himself and Edna Purviance in a rustic cottage smiling down upon a basket by the fire, an end shot of the dog heroine of the film and her litter of puppies.

In a Los Angeles hospital an actual crippled son was born to him and Mildred. The boy died several days later and was buried under the Apollonian inscription his mother gave him: "The Little Mouse."

Charlie began making the film "The Kid" with Jackie Coogan almost immediately and thus to begin to struggle with his Abraham and Isaac-self from scratch—two kids on the street...both boys, tho' one of them old enough to play 'father'—both

Isaacs, however, in peril of the sacrifice old Abraham/Society threatens to make of them. Only God-The-Artist can relieve this child's, and this man-child's death by a tacked-on happy ending to the Hollywood dilemma. Charlie could *play* the man-child in this film and reject all his Abrahamming; but he could not yet bring himself to trust the child in him to direct the filmic course of events; thus he cut to improbably escapes and a tacky end—much as Greek dramatists created Deus Ex Machinaes to solve the impossibilities of their religious works . . . the same as desert Jews created a voice for God to halt the natural slaughter of son by father—God-the-cop shoots Charlie down in a dream . . . he wakes up to be reunited, via that same cop, with “The Kid” at end—Charlie bucked off a cow, in “Sunny-side,” dreams himself as Pan . . . then dreams later in that film he's killing himself!—he's rescued from drowning (while dreaming himself Pan) by his ‘boss’ . . . he's rescued (from his dreamt suicide) by God-the-boss, again later in the film.

God is always the Authority which orders his death and then saves him, in and out of Dream. He cannot ever completely save, or Author, himself—except in those instances of his dance utterly prompted by The Child . . . whenever Spencer can manage to slip in amidst Charlie's elaborate and useless plots—Charlie's adult plodding, etc.

Ken Jacobs suggests that the best central metaphor for Chaplin might be that famous tightrope scene in “The Circus”: ‘our hero’ is ‘faking it’ as ‘a tightrope walker’; and he wrongly believes that he's being supported by two thin ropes attached to a balance pole clutched by his outstretched hands. Monkeys crawl all over him. That image as metaphor could well stand for the historical condition of Western Man, centering on crucifixion. It stands very well for Chaplin certainly—‘strings attached’ which do *not* support the Art of him . . . and the monkeys?—ah, well, Pan's stance in all of this! . . . that itch which every ounce of his Artist-self is up against—the Dance of Life itself which prompts each necessary balance.

The repeating theme of this lecture is—did Spencer manage an Art amidst all of Charlie's Chaplinesques? . . . is there one whole work ghost-written thus?—that is . . . to put it simply—will any film last aesthetically? One can deduce an Art (just as

mathematicians did planets they could not see) because these pictures tend to haunt—are haunted by irregularities in the narrative continuity of motion picture light . . . rhythms beyond measure—images which cannot be anything but felt . . . so little do they fit all pre-conceived notions—are therefore un-*for*-gettable (just as mathematic irregularities create a memorable heaven) . . . and yet no one whole film will seem to ‘stand up’ to minimal aesthetic considerations—i.e., that it create a ‘world’ unto itself . . . most of each film dependent upon the ‘eye of the beholder’ and his laugh; viewers tend to sit thru long passages sterile as medical waiting rooms for the catharsis of Chaplin’s momentary dance, then they are as usually cheated of any real health as in a doctor’s office. But now and again there is an image, a sequence of ‘treatments’ of a theme, a series of timeless variations so profound as to do more than relieve pain and/or the laughter itch. Every now-and-again, in every film, one is in the presence of Transformation—where one may return again and again as to eternal spring . . . as it is outside Time—being composed of perfect timing . . . as its images are indivisible—being constructed masterfully as an entire fragment of a World (like a ‘shooting star,’ one might say). These instances I call Spencer’s Art, and I have part-and-parcelled Chaplin thus because I know that only a ‘divided’ man could achieve such scenes and yet not ‘go’ for a whole work thereof them.

How did Charlie avoid being haunted by his art to the exclusion of all else?, and, that being so, how did Spencer then manage an art at all amid Charlie’s avoidance? I imagine that the Charles-of-him, the 20th century westernized viewer stood somewhere between and blocking all recognition of more than would “turn-a-buck/tickle-a-rib,” et set!—‘set to,’ like they say . . . : Charles was the personality dividing this ‘split’—his ‘wall street’ persona permitting Spencer to exist as “The Child” within . . . as any ‘broker’ waxes sentimental about what he has been—his adultimate self permitting the ‘social conscience’ act of Charlie’s communal make-up . . . as is fashionable among the liberal rich—the ‘cocktail communists’ of those Hollywood times.

For all of Charlie’s ferocious ripping away, in gag after filmic gag, at Spencer’s/the Child’s ‘hood,’ Charles-the-broker

kept his 'right hand' from all knowledge of 'the left' by the calculated blindness which creates every ghost—ghost of an art . . . artifact—but *cannot* create an Art. For that, one must accept the haunt as real and opt, in oneself, totally for the world of The Child . . . which is always, in every instant, a whole world—as holes are, as in holy. In moments, this happens in Chaplin's work—in the stances, usually, of Dance . . . and/or Dream—Surrealism thru the Ballets Russes freeing movie-makers of these times as surely as Freud freed prose; but the Dance! . . . the Dance is The Thing!—Charlie's dance in *or* out of Dream.

Gloria Bartek said to me once the Ballet artifact was this, that its regular audience expected The Art of it only every 'once and again'—only occasionally that instant when The Body truly 'leapt' . . . even 'the best' solely achieving this one or several times in an evening of Dance—an instance of fleeting aesthetics amidst their worship of this wished 'god gift.' The experience of Ballet, or any performing art, is very like that/then of Voodoo/church; the Dance goes on, as religious discipline; attendance is regularity itself; the Gods/the children occasionally 'drop in' to 'service.'

Someone young friend of my high school days once said: "Ballet was an art before it was invented and hasn't been since!"

All of Charlie's inventions 'wear thin' within a very few viewings; only fleet-footed moments, mercurial to the mind, remain. Each scene of him, his very skin, chameleon, all hidden-seek amidst his sense-of-self, seance; only occasionally can one get under-the-skein of all this desperate scheming. (Sergei Eisenstein, who was friend awhile to him, did once manage some inner-sights of his life—played games with the very hide of him, perhaps—in the ambience of Chaplin's sex-life—((pornographic movies made with Doug Fairbanks, Jr., perhaps Charlie's Art?)) . . . Sergei, anyway, learning that he/Chap. lacked a sense of humor—just as humorous children do . . . that he hated children—as Sergei put it, in "Notes . . .", "But who *normally* does not like children? Why, the children themselves" . . . that he was, in lovable fact, a child—*un*-lovable as every overgrown kid or childish man. I love him, his Little Tramp stance, unlike Eisenstein, but love him rather likened unto any/

everyone else's child—The Child, of Origin Nation, Nature with all her Mists . . . called 'gods': the ONE God complex—and all the antropomorphic dignity implied—is perhaps what defeats both 'the little Chap' and myself in this search among his laughter fetishes and down the pathos he chose later in his life. He once wrote: "Even funnier than the man who has been made ridiculous, however, is the man who, having had something funny happen to him, refuses to admit that anything out of the way has happened, and attempts to maintain his dignity." Dignity was then, perhaps, what kept him from 'giving in' to obsession—for obsessed he certainly was . . . the same themes recurring again and again, but without aesthetic gain, in his films; the 'dance hall' sequences or the 'ideal cottage' dreams haunt audiences endlessly whether from "A Dog's Life" or "Modern Times." There always tend to be the same elements—the dance-hall girl, the dog (or other totem animal, dead or alive, real or imagined), the 'enemy' (be it cops or robbers, etc.) and Chaplin, winning by 'luck' . . . and/or . . . the cottage (log cabin or suburban) and the cow (dog, chicken, donkey, etc.) These are the ingredients which spring inexplicably from his childhood. Or, we have Chaplin in the "Lime-light," whether it be in boxing ring, roller-rink, on tightrope or on stage. He wins, despite considerable skill, by luck! It is his 'winning' which destroys the Art, brings whatever sequence 'down to earth' of dignified plot; but as he begins, then again, to lose control of whatever narrative he's 'set to,' he approaches the presence of another aesthetic haunt.

He once checked into a hotel under the name of Spencer. It was when running from divorce suit of Mildred Harris, himself dirty and disheveled as a slum child, passing thru Salt Lake City carrying the negative of "The Kid" in his bags, fighting his way back East across the nation, finally 'making it' to the Ritz Carlton, New York City. That was in the Fall of 1920. He managed to keep Mildred from 'attaching' "The Kid"; and their divorce became final in November of that year. A few more 'shorts' are completed in the next couple of years (to fulfill contracts): and then, from 1923 on, Chaplin made only feature length films.

Rather than laugh him to death (as all his many 'friends')

or attempt to ignore him (as his enemies), let us from now on help 'the littlest fellow' -of-him create a masterpiece. We must therefore 'hone in' on his obsessions; and we may have to flay the very hide off Charlie (in the spirit of Michaelangelo painting his own flayed visage on Sistine wall.)

First off, we must establish the cycles of Chaplin to 'get at' that spiral from/of him which is eternal—and not just the bi-cycles of his 'show-off-ness' . . . "Look, Ma! no hands!"—but, rather, the 'trike' beyond his big-wheel-ness . . . beyond perspective—his 'triplicates' in Time, now/then . . . rather than simply his 3-in-one characterization—his musings . . . beyond the amusement he harped upon—his absolute! I'll not attempt a fugue of his life, he was too "Trappist" for that: a round and a-round and around will do.

Between 1914 and 1943 Chaplin was married and divorced thrice. He was filmically coupled, in these years, with three increasingly complex female types—the first, played by Mabel Normand, is essentially created by Mack Sennett . . . the "Mabel" series of Keystone comedies—culminating in "Tillie's Punctured Romance," Chaplin's first feature. Mabel is always a 'pickup' in these 'flicks' until Chaplin writes and directs himself married to her in "His Trysting Place"—its comic gags beginning with Charlie's carelessness with 'the baby.' Then Sennett directs the ". . . Punctured Romance," playing Mabel off against rich "Tillie" . . . both rejecting Charlie at end. This feature is 'dogged' a month later by Chaplin's writ and direction of himself as married to a buxom reminder of Tillie in "Getting Acquainted"—and marrying Mabel, in that film, to Mack Swain, his usual Keystone "buddy"- 'partner'. Charlie thus opts for money and Mom and vicarious sex with Swain and then finally primitive bachelorhood in "His Prehistoric Past," last Keystone film. He plays himself off against every major comic rival of the Sennett 'lot' (Mack Swain, Chester Conklin, Fatty Arbuckle, etc.) He impersonates a woman twice in this series, once as a "Tillie"- 'like' wife ("A Busy Day") and again as something more "Mabeline" ("The Masquerader"); he plays at being 'an artist' once ("The Face On The Bar-Room Floor"), and there is no Art, to speak of, in any of it. Half a decade later he was to run with Kono, his faithful chauffeur, across the conti-

ment to escape Mildred Harris, life's 'opposite number' to Tilly/Mabel, etc.

In that meantime, he had made a series of films centering around Edna Purviance—the second woman of his cycling. He played her best himself, wearing her clothes and twin-sistering her movements . . . his last female impersonation on the screen ("A Woman"). He 'married' himself to her again and again in these films, tho' always at end of the film—she his 'friendly neighborhood,' 'happily-ever-aftering,' 'mother' (remaining, in fact, one of Chaplin's closest friends for life . . . given retirement salary by him—supported, then). This series of films (1915 to 1923) was given visual stature by photographer Rollie Totheroh (who continued as Chaplin's 'cinema eye' from then on). They thicken in plot, complex all character act, and become, each, some more singular joke, rather than a series of such. Most contain some ghost of an art; all 'swing' on Dance . . . a baggy pants mime—and Objects (objectification) which haunt.

Charlie often 'solos' in these, is once almost totally alone ("One A.M."), without recourse to rivals; and he also comes (through "A Dog's Life") to brotherly terms with children ("The Kid" in him) last time in his filmic life . . . then 'chickens out'—treating them as fowl (in "Easy Street," as he once confided to Eisenstein, "I did this because I despise them. I don't like children"). Within a year of his last film starring Edna ("A Woman of Paris" released in 1923) Chaplin married Lillita (McMurry, that is), child star who had played a coy angel in the heavenly dream sequence of "The Kid"), known by her screen-pseudonym Lita Grey . . . lady Edna's 'opposite numen' in every 'flapper' respect—another minus in Charlie's life, tho' not absolutely thus: two boys were born, between 1924 and '27 (the year of the divorce) . . . the first named Charles Spencer, Jr.—double alter-egoing . . . the second Sydney (Earle)—after Chaplin's elder brother ("a man") . . . the one who'd most cared for him—his pseudo-Father, then.

During these Grey years Chaplin made what I take to be his greatest film ("The Gold Rush"), and he completed the film most probably containing his archetype stance (the tight rope crucifix of "The Circus"). He had begun to imagine a new kind

of feature-length heroine who would culminate in cultured Paulette Goddard (the “gamin” of “Modern Times” and persecuted Jewess of “The Great Dictator”). Born Pauline Levy, she was 20 years old when she met Chaplin in 1931; they lived together almost a decade. He referred, finally, to her as “my wife” a month before their 1940 divorce; there were no children. You can see the vivacity of her makeup in Georgia Hale (star of “The Gold Rush”), the vacuity of her child-act via Merina Kennedy (circus rider in “The Circus”) and the vacillating balance between the two in Virginia Cherrill (first blind then ‘cured’ child-girl of “City Lights”). Pauline, then ‘ette,’ then Mrs. Chap. emerges consonant with the decline of his art to ‘round’ the third circle of our considerations.

Perhaps it was The Mother of Pauline who was missing; both previous marriages included Mom-the-‘in-law’ as entangled as child-bride with ‘father’ Chaplin. Perhaps it was Mom Charlie was previously always after, rather than daughter: Paulette, as he/Pygmalion cast her was a female Charlie—played “mother” to ‘her sisters’ *only* (as he had ‘father’ to brotherly “Kid”) . . . and played-out that ‘role’ as sisterly Jewess to Charlie’s schizoid “Dictator” (much as he had brother-buddied to “A Dog”)—she short circuiting, thus, Chaplin’s only means for raising hell/ghost/geist-art of Spencer forever; the rest of his movie life was autobiography.

(Mark Twain once told his friend Dean Howells he’d write down his memoirs if he could manage complete honesty in them; a year later Twain declared autobiography and honesty as absolutely incompatible and had given up!)

Paulette was ‘waif,’ blew *all* his fuses, then—creating some outer-‘tegmina’ for him . . . co-‘incident’ to his inner/art event—was, say ‘happenstance’ . . . more attractive than him to him—his Spencerinna!

Let’s backtrack and take Chaplin’s real and fictional mother to aesthetic task. She must speak for herself—and she did! . . . when Chaplin (in 1921) managed her release from English ‘asylum,’ and shipped her all the way over to Santa Monica ‘home,’ took her, so to speak, “under his skin,” and showed her, then, himself as “Charlie” on the screen.

She said: “Why do you want to make yourself look hide-

ous, you who are so beautiful?"

She always referred to him as either "Spencer" or "The King," was alternately afraid that his work might not be honest and/or that 'they' were working her poor boy too hard, and depressed Chaplin terribly every time he saw her. He could not, then, he finally learned, play the part of Mother to her or himself ever again.

Georgia Hale plays 'mother' in "The Gold Rush"—for that is surely what this vivacious character primarily is... a typical flapper mom of 'the roaring 20's'—(her 'spitting image' was cast as protagonist in Broughton's "Mother's Day" thirty-some years later): this 'mom' is opposite of any English 'mum' (the sweet Mabel one): she sings and dances her way to stardom (Paulette has 'a crack at her' in "Modern Times" dance-hall sequence but chooses Charlie instead). This 'mother' will never choose 'the child,' or any other man either, above her careering, party-going, Parisian 'seance' of herself's 'holy ghost' (tho' Charlie does have "A Woman of Paris" choose orphanage work to atone her sins in forced end to that film). This is a ghost mother to mother only ghostly murdered child. Georgia Hale plays her 'to the hilt' in the 'heartbreak' scenes of 'the-little-Chap.' of "Gold Rush."

The film opens with a yin-yang symbol, the serpentine line of it composed of hundreds of climbing men encircled by iris effect; the titles have already told us that these men are 'game'—to be destroyed as they beget... gametes then—seeking gold-en cache; but it crotch of gold they are more nearly after. Charlie emerges from this shuffle, as naked here in his city clothes as every babe in his skin and as 'out of place' in this enormous alien space, as obviously cold, as every creature suddenly thrust from womb. He teeters innocently on cliff's edge from the first, just as every newborn (I've seen) toys with death for half-a-dozen days after birth. A bear follows him, becomes his totem—all unknown to him until personified, later in the film, by Big Jim McKay, (Mack Swain, again)... his bearish 'friend' who alternately protects and then threatens his life throughout the plot—Big Jim then God, guardian angel, finally 'father' in all this... but also his first playmate friend—protector against the bully Black Larson.

And so it goes, weaving in and out of the playroom—the cabin surrounded by storm . . . which finally teeters on the cliff's edge itself—almost taking 'adolescent' Charlie to his death near end of this parable of childhood. It is a middle-Europe fair-tale in its totemism—Charlie 'chicken' until he kills a bear . . . "the donkey" of him eating the 'party favor' of 'mother' / his 'girl'—himself tied to 'the dog' on the dance-floor as 'the dogs' are tied to him, his sled, as young man near end. It is post-Freudian in its sexual puns—his hat as practice 'fit' for fuck to come . . . tips it to 'the boys' in coy masturbation and only takes it off when making himself at home to the accompaniment of 'the ladies,' etc., and then finally in the company of his love—his cane, as direct penis, usually letting him down . . . it alternates, as a pun, with guns throughout this film.

He has three Fathers in "The Gold Rush"—his totem-god-friend, the ultimate benefactor—then the Jack Cameron of the film, his rival for 'mother's' affections—and finally the old man who is never there, the one who leaves him in charge of the cabin: but 'mother' is singular . . . she is the one whose picture he keeps under his pillow. She teases him, little realizing the true nature of his passion. She abandons him on New Year's Eve. She only finally loves him, and then only protectively loves him, when 'the chips are down' for her and he is 'up.' Gold is the symbol of manhood in this "Rush"! God finally gives some of it to Charlie when he escapes 'the playhouse' 'mother' then 'cashes in.' It is the *fiction* of Chaplin's life, writ with his dancing body across strips of celluloid 'tooled' to some larger-than-life semblance on the screen. As another Charles (Charles Olson) once said:

"In short the recognition (inquiry picture story) that, to get the density—WOT'APPENED?—not so easy. Two alternatives: make your own story—fiction, or history: when you are up against it, to equal *what went on*. One can know what one oneself makes, but to know what happened, even to oneself?

"Which, then, is WHY history as the other kind of 'story,' that one does also want to know what did happen—I mean now. Or just five minutes ago. Or right now *as it is happening*. It is a stance.

"In other words there are TWO stances. Always are. It isn't

a question of fiction versus knowing. 'Lies' are necessary in both—that is the HIMagination. At no point outside a fiction can one be sure." ("The Special View of History")

"The Gold Rush" succeeds most as Art because the locale was most 'made-up'—Chaplin never having been to Alaska, or anywhere *like* it, until he began photography in the winterous mountains of Nevada...this then his only feature-length 'dream' sequence...his only dreamt 'reality'—Chaplin surrounding him with "HIMagination."

"The Circus" (to follow), as "Limelight" (later), is an exactly opposite/autobiographical matter; he plays his stagey self—as he had in "Kid Auto Races at Venice"... as he did as a woman in "The Masquerader"—as he burlesqued in "Carmen."

Charlie's roles tend to run in 'threes,' like his marriages, to this time of his life: three female impersonations—three clown parts—three 'fathers,' etc.: then there's usually a 4th attempt at a part he'd created for himself apart from the others, some act as ultimate characterization, as we might characterize his final marriage.

The Art of these cycles emerges each time an 'objectification' occurs: his femme-imp finale, "The Woman (of Paris)" was his first film not starring himself, in which thus Edna Purviance then plays him-as-femme (as opposite from Paulette being twin-to-him, if you see what I mean)... his re-in-actual clown, "A Night at The Show," a filming of the very act which got him hired by Sennett, wherein he plays (in the film) *two* rowdy members of the audience (two alter-egos alien to him-as-actor)... and Dad "The Pilgrim," where he plays at playing that sexless Father, the country minister, (a role which, via sermon, permits him to act out the slaying of Goliath by David in the greatest pantomime of his entire career).

Three times he created encounter with The Artist, so postulated by him as to be Artiste, a flatly Frenchified prop, Le Peinteur, etcetera—first in "The Face On The Bar-Room Floor":, a burlesque on D'Arcy's poem and the *only* film in which Charlie plays the part himself—then, round 2, as Lloyd Bacon played him in "The Vagabond" as the man who takes Charlie's woman away from him by painting her picture, establishing thus her true identity (this, therethru its visual puns

on identification, one of the *key* films of Chaplin pathos, Agon-work per every pathetic excellence to come from him, a veritable 'pitch-blend' of the later "City Lights" last shot's radiance, naked Spencer seen, herein "The Vagabond," more biographically than in any previous film)—then again (as before on "Bar-Room Floor" "Artist" is cast as negligent lover and actual 'Father' of "The Kid," the abandoned bastard salvaged by foster-brother Charlie—and, finally, he is 'Jean Millet' of "A Woman of Paris," the neglected childish lover who kills himself (thus giving Charlie, via Edna-playing-him, a chance to love and then 'mother' "The Artist" at his death, to subject himself to the objections of Spencer's ghost.)

"City Lights" is almost perfectly balanced between sub-and-objectivity: for this reason (the feeling of this reasoning) some take it to be the epitome of Chaplin's art.

I do not—tho' I'd not deny that the ultimate 'haunt' his features have achieved is in the last sequence of this film; the final shot constitutes, for me, the last we are ever to clearly see of Spencer from him . . . for "Modern Times" obscures the image of 'the child' as plotted insane, or drugged, or blindfolded, etc.—and from then on we have only adulterated Spencer.

In the months preceeding the beginning of "City Lights" Chaplin toyed with the idea of playing Napoleon and then Christ, a theme D.W. Griffith was to be scripting at this death: Chaplin wanted to play a virile, thus unorthodox Christ, not dissimilar from the one Dreyer dreamed of but never filmed, the last 30 years of his life; but 'Charlie,' mass-man-norm/the-city-tramp 'won out' again and "City Lights" was begun instead.

At "City Lights" end, Chaplin began his second trip around the world saying "...like all ego-centrics I turn to myself. I want to live in my youth again." He met Paulette Goddard upon that trip, made her him-as-"Vagabond"—a female "Tramp" . . . Twin-anna to this phoney Pan—gave up the ghost. From then on 'brotherhood' ruled his thought to the margins known news-wise as 'parlor-pink' ! Tho' Marx-bent, he certainly never was a communist. It was one of the few 'charges' he denied in all seriousness—another was his denial of himself as father . . . in mid-forties court suits trumped-up against him—

his appearances for 'the news' and 'in court' were less and less Spencerian... more, rather, "The King" he was—if not 'the god' become. He was certainly more and more "up for" American 'crucifixion' mid-40s and he dignified his martyrdom with a grace equal, tho' opposite, to his comic stance.

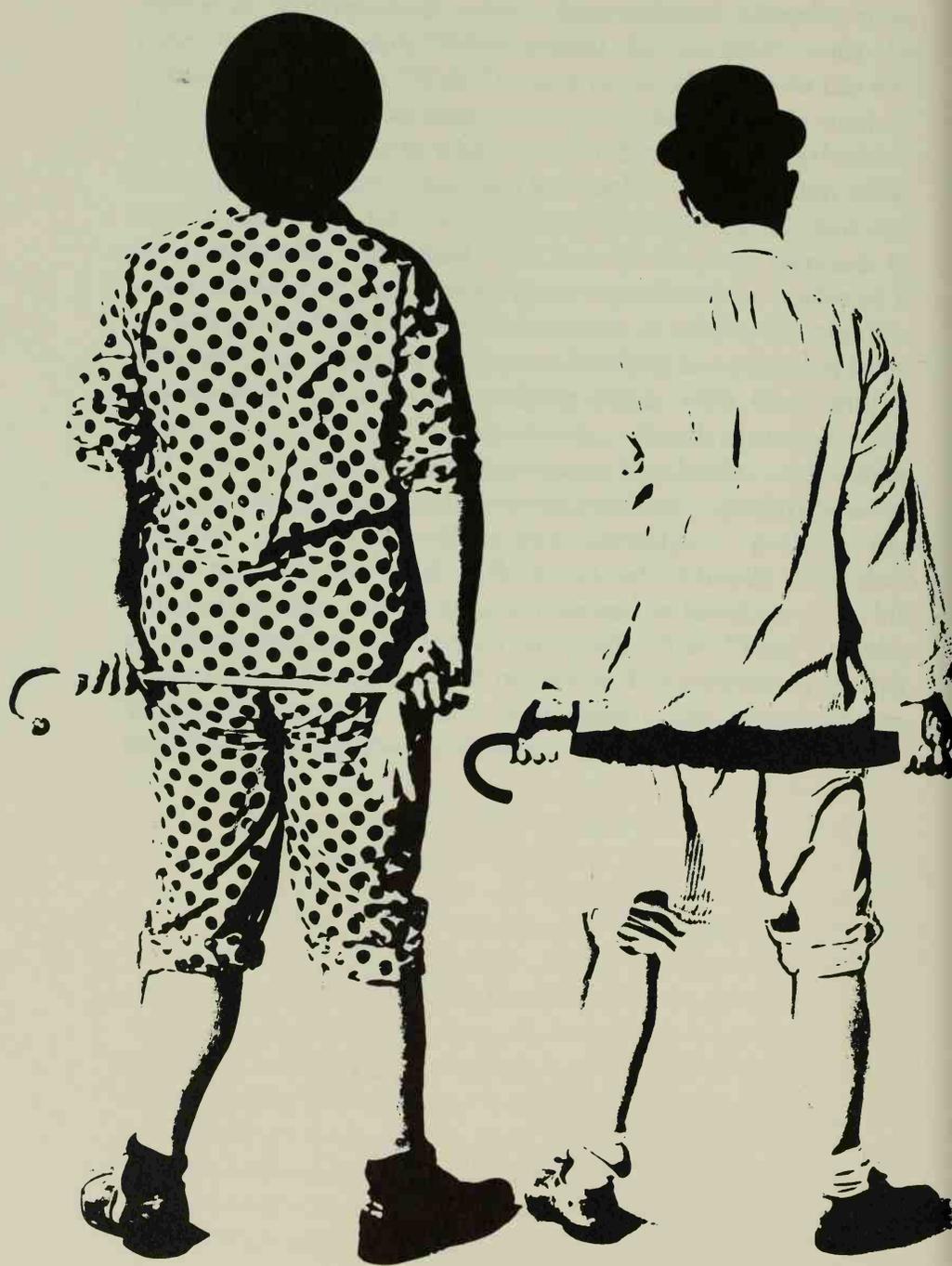
(Consider the word "pan"—whattall it covers... from that facial pun on wide pot, thru the technical photo term of it/ 'to pan,' to source of that in 'panorama,' and The God himself at ancient last—then wonder what it most currently means, as in his latter life, 'to pan' as synonym for "criticize": Chaplin is certainly not the-great-god Pan... rather only a modern 'fake' of him—"a panic," like they say.)

And as for him?—Charlie?—Charles Spencer?—Chaplin? After satisfying his 'Napoleonic' urge by playing Hitler (AND somewhat his Christ-complex by doubling as persecuted Jew) in "The Great Dictator"... this a film where Spencer emerges only once, to play with a toy balloon—marred by the geographical marks meaning "world"... after this, then (frantic schiz-catharsis), Chaplin married his 4th and final woman Oona O'Neill (18 year old daughter of playwright Eugene). After "Monsieur Verdoux"—his-storical of a literal 'lady-killer'... wherein the Charles-of-him may be said to have written his dreamt-memoirs (the idea of "Verdoux" as film, was suggested by Orson Welles to him)—Chaplin, Oona, and children began the third round-the-world; they've never returned to U.S.; and Chaplin has ever since refused all commerce... Charles, too, perhaps 'dead' in this transact—Charlie, perhaps, killed off by "A King In New York"... Chaplin/him-solely left as bust of self—enwrapped by the Game he'd only once thought to attempt (as Stan Laurel tells it, when Chaplin first saw U.S. shores he rushed to the rail and yelled: "America, I am coming to conquer you. Every man, woman and child shall have my name on their lips—Charles Spencer Chaplin!") He is now, like every statue, finally the property of children. I imagine the many he's fathered with Oona crawling over his statuesqueries against a backdrop of Alps.

Sartre says that "Genius is not a gift but the way out that one invents in desperate cases"; in that sense, Chaplin's 'end' must seem to be accounted a success; he's escaped. He's even

received the French Legion of Honor, like the old George Melies after years of his inactivity. He's "set," like they say.

After writing the above it happened I listened to a phonorecord of wolves—wolf cries... (remembered Chaplin once answering Eisenstein's "What animal do you like?" with the unhesitating answer "Wolf!")—and came (thereby) to the following conclusion: the song of creature—be it wolf or man... (and further listening to whales and birds confirms this thesis)—is *singular*... (deserves that pun in "single"—is surest sign of (at least) mammalian Life, which is always (after birth), and can only (solely) be, individual. The lone wolf's song increases in mournful beauty each repeat (never repetitious) he makes of it... and so (soulfully) the underwater cry of whale, the nightingale, etc.; but when the pack joins howling in—choral in tonic lamentation... whales also seeking triads with their sliding scales—then 'the song' breaks down... chords sounding more and more accordian—and degenerates into barks... or whines—easily identifiable social communications... declarations of territory and stature—King-and-courtships... 'pecking orders,' etc.—of the pack... flock—et set! Chaplin was that social artist, then, whose song was bound to break down... his art dependent on the terrain of laugh—him "King" of the pack; I grant him that; and otherwise I've excerpted, in this writing, his singularity now and again... the lonely underworld of him—his dream of womb. Song!



STAN LAUREL & OLIVER HARDY, ETC.

Who can imagine the gathering of either dark or light forces?—who envision their decisiveness? . . . I do not mean some anthropomorphic vision—light forces as white bearded god . . . or angel wings, halos and the like—dark as negroid . . . night or spider pot cat black etcetera—no! We peek thru keyholes of our own devising and are gripped with Cause. The movies toy with Magic's symbol; but they do not, thus far, move mountains of more than men imagine.

And who can imagine the gathering of, let's say, white forces?—these forces as focused for effect . . . effect without cause—being? We would have to read light's "to be" as "beam" and sex it 'him,' to sing hymns to, and name it something—making 'molehill' of our moving mountainous illumination . . . if we can be said to have even ill-omen of these considerations—let's name it "Tobey."

Tobey, then, a gathering of the flow of light did beam upon The Earth in our 1891 to create an elf in bonny Scotland. He planted his elf in the carefully chosen 'plot' of the family of a show biz. entrepreneur named Arthur Jefferson—"A.J." to friends and relations . . . "Aj" then his magic name in our fairy-telling—commonly called 'The Guv'nor' . . . Guv'nor—Aj, then, as we'll make tall of him for fathering.

Tobey was pleased; and he watered his 'plant' with the normal doings of The World; and he called him after the language of light—an unimaginable calling to us... thus must I invent a name for our story's sake—say, "Stanley" as he was to be known... a crude translation of illumine-linguistics, but—a name in keeping with our simplistic understanding of Tobey and his ways as we're inventing them.

This elf of Tobey was seen by Guv'nor Aj as a normal baby—a son to him... the youngest of three—(you see what a very traditional fantasy Tobey was hatching!); and Aj named him more-and-less after himself—Arthur Stanley Jefferson... the older brothers named Gordon and Everett—Gordon, Everett and Stanley then; and there was a daughter, too... Beatrice Olga—(and you can readily understand the full story intended, that of The King, his three sons and the later missing princess, with a dash of Russian-ness, etc., without my having to spell it more-than-less out for you.)

The very next year, in our '92, Tobey's 'dark side'—for what else shall I call it?... we have such a dualistic sense in us that we cannot see 'shadow'—cannot think 'shade' as anything but opposite to 'light'... can't see 'shade'—but think it?... perhaps we can—as a side?; and therefore Tobey, as I make him out, did create an aside to his elfin plot in Scotland and therefore make a troll to be born in Harlem, Georgia, U.S.A.

The troll's earth father was named Oliver Hardy. He named his son after himself and died a very few years later. It was Oliver Jr.'s Scottish mother, Emily Norvell, who had taken dark Tobey's fancy. She was a rather perfect 'bitch'—strongly independent and tough in the teeth of the world... she ran hotels rather than, say, re-marry—and a doting woman full of child-spoiling compassion... who taught her son to sing and gave him everything in the 'bargain' that would set him off uncocked, half-crazy, and coddled clear thru his 'teens—she being woman to his 'little man'... adding "Norvell" as his middle numen—to split "Oliver" from "Hardy"... calling him "Norvell" throughout his childhood—'nicking' him thus with her maiden name.

Young Oliver "Norvell" Hardy was, like elfin Stanley, the youngest of a largish family, "a genuinely beautiful baby who

loved everybody," as his sister remembers him, a fat but handsome boy soprano of unbelievable sweetness who always played "The Villain" in all childhood games. He called his mother "Miss Emmy," as if she were indeed his "sweet"; and we'll let her go at that; for Tobbey's lighter side had provided a goodly woman, yet literal "dark lady," to raise Oliver in his crucial "baby" years—a "colored mammy"...as black substitute mothers were called in those days—whom he called "Mama"; and she it was who gave him a real place on earth, his warmth and all the joys of life which concerned him very much more than any career. (Tobey was and is, you see, the very soul of irony; and you cannot 'read' him with more exactitude than you can trace the subtle differences between the terms "troll," "gnome" and "goblin" throughout the text of his playfulness—wherein we'll only try to distinguish just how much of a 'mountainous one' this troll was . . . how gnomish was his nature—and how many goblins sat within him.)

Norvell loved to watch people in Miss Emmy's hotel lobby, most particularly Chatauquans and other travelling theatre people—they were his 'hobby' . . . in the fact that everything he, all his life, loved became hobby-to-him—something to make game-of, rather than game. He played thus intensively with Life-substitute; and he learned early to sing the living to sleep, to make living, and/or to make them laugh—he the local jokester . . . rather than fat butt of another's joke—in desperate swap with Death; for the killing-urge was surely strong within him. Each time they/the-other called him "fatty" he would quickly quit the gamble, whatever he'd been playing. He ran away from home at eight to join Coburn's Minstrals as a soprano soloist—returned home and then again and again when running to Atlanta theatres to see the shows and dream of being in/of them . . . ended singing to illustrated slides at 50c a day—returned home and then ran off from military school where Emmy had desperately placed him . . . because, he said, they didn't feed him—joined another minstrel show as 'end man' . . . weighing-in at 250 pounds—having the last laugh at inner expense. At eighteen he opened the first movie theatre in Milledgeville, Georgia, and soon decided he could 'make it' as a movie comic, and then three years later went to work for Lubin Motion Pictures in Jackson,

Florida, at \$5.00 a day as a 'heavy'—a comic villain... black eye-browed and mascaraed with vertical lines—a good-bad'un if ever there was one.

But Miss Emmy came hard on the heels of his games and hobbies. He carried her nick-name until he changed it for the retrogressive one of "Babe"; and he rode the nightmare of her all his life, cradled in escapist baby fat. Put a mustache on his infant picture and you have an exact image of his grown self; more so his aged self, mustacheless and bald, was 'spit image' of this youth—no growth 'split' visible at any pictured instant of his development... the most remarkably UNchanged human form I've ever seen—'dark' thus a natural epitaph for him... not a 'goblin' as of caves of thought, but—a troll, he was, as befitting his giant stature... and as my childhood reading first found trolls under bridges exacting 'toll'—as every pun of that word, such as that "to fish"... and all rhymes, "droll," "roll," etc.—will help us come to terms with the complexities of his nature.

A homosexual barber changed his 'nick' to "Babe." As he later told it: "He had a thick foreign accent and he was also a boy who liked boys. Well, he took a great fancy to me and every time after he'd finish shaving me, he'd rub powder into my face and pat my cheeks and say, 'Nice-a bab-ee. Nice-a-babee.' The gang always used to kid me about it and after a while they started to call me 'Baby' and then it was cut down to 'Babe'—and I've been Babe Hardy ever since." That was in 1913; and he was 21 years old, and making his first movies for Lubin, when the 'than-veil' of 'Norvell' went out of his life—in exchange for a comic name more appropriate to Mother Thalia, Muse of Comedy; and Babe Hardy it was from then on... to be—familiarly, as surely as Oliver Hardy was Tobey's 'world wide' familiarity... as had been foretold—a fortune-teller in Decatur, Georgia, once prophesying to Miss Emmy that her son's name would be known everywhere on earth.

(Thus, you can see for yourself that Georgia 'Babe' is a traditional U.S. fantasy—a success story... a mish-mash—an Italianate Samson and Delilah, etc.... wherein muses and mechinaes mix—and IMmoral... fit for goodly trolling, name-changing, going-a-longing, and so forth—as fraught with ambi-

guities and dextrousness as any of the stories from the land of Oz.)

Let's go back to our Scottish Fantasy awhile and pick up young Stanley in his teens.

We find him in Glasgow, where Guv'nor Aj had moved to rule the famous Metropole Theatre there with ironic hand. Among his showmanistic tricks were smoking balloons with ad banners, and a live lion in a traveling cage mauling pieces of meat dressed like a man—all stunts to entice the Scot populus to part with its money... 'P.R.' stuff of 'the old school'—kings and governors always using the macabre (wars, disasters and the like) to attract their subjects for tax. Aj was generally 'loved,' as rulers are—and similarly by his sons... i.e. with fearful admiration—especially by Stanley.

Young elfin man was already, at ten, as The World was later to know him—thin and solemnly shy with desperate winsomeness... a 'bean-pole' with protruding ears and Aj red hair—a tiny creature being enchanted into human size—stuck under 'the glass' of Victorian up-bringing. He loved his Dad; and he did his best; and that was that. But school, by his 'teens,' was too terribly much most un-naturally 'against the grain' of him; and he 'hookied' to the woods again and again; and Aj finally took him out of school and set him to the task of ticket taking.

Perhaps it was fake trees and woodsy scenery which drew him first from glass booth to the stage inside his father's kingdom. It was not certainly princely ambition; for actors were among the lowest servants of theatrical castle of those days; but there was clearly more Life for an elf upon 'the planks'—or at least lively simulation of Life... its natural ghost—than anywhere else in the 'good ship' Victoria, sinking as she was.

Anyway, one day he tried on Daddy Aj's pants, giving him 'bags' enough for the 'faun rump' of the standard jokester of the time and tried out before an audience as a stand-up comic on his own—stolen pants they were at that—transformations absolute... absolutions ultimate—a fairy-tale plot, you see, from scratch!

His first role was that of 'Golliwog' in a comic "Sleeping Beauty," his second as 'a tramp' in "Alone in the World," and third as a "Mumming Bird," whatever that was; but one can

hear the echo of elfin call running thru the very sounds of it all; and we can imagine Tobey guiding the destiny of him within it. Unfortunately, there was very little elf-like in the acts themselves. One wonders if the gathering forces of light are cognizant of more than names as sounds. Nouns, however, suffer in the translation to the real, as angels suffer on heads of pins. But then again, 'subject matter' is hardly the business of light—and certainly not 'profound thought' . . . anymore than suffering is of consequence to angels; thus we must move cautiously in our track of Stanley's fate among the 'golliwogs' and mellow-dramas of the time—move with the spirit of a sunbeam, which can fall upon almost any surfaced thing.

Stanley fell here and there as Tobey might have had it—rather than have had *at* it . . . as Stanley's elfin ears heard it—whatever *it* ' was.

Did "The Mumming Birds" sound musical to his ears?—did it to Chaplin's? . . . does it to yours?—or was that pure chance which brought young Charlie Chap. and Stanley together in this cast of the old Karno troupe. In any event, or eventuality, "The Mumming Birds" became one of the most famous acts, or accidents, in vaudeville's history—later to be called "A night in an English Music Hall" . . . suffering translate—and finally, with Chaplin's movie version of it as "A Night in the Show" . . . its final sufferance—a variety comedy which took audience as the ultimate butt of all its slapping sticks. Stanley understudied Charlie playing 'Drunk' and became, thus, his familiar in fact.

Oh, Tobey!—how did you do it? . . . how manage such luck on an English stage?—how effect . . . or is it affect?—such a transformation from elf, to Daddy's bagged pants faun, to 'golliwog,' to 'tramp,' to understudy 'drunk' of the greatest "Tramp-to-be" that this century has known?

Stan finally understudied every Bird in the Karno 'review'—though he never 'flew' himself within this Mumming 'world' . . . nor discovered his own 'ground' herein—it was his 'school.' He toured the U.S. in 1910—rooming with Chaplin . . . his closest companion in the Karno troupe—both derbied "dandies" with elaborate canes and spats 'to boot,' hankies 'up their sleeves' . . . double-breasted English 'birds' of unlikely

U.S.- 'feather' —flat 'broke' most of the time . . . Stan running off on his own, again and again—back-and-side tracking to England and continental Europe in 'acts' of his own . . . pairing himself with taller and heavier men to whom he could feed his gags in straight 'watch the birdie' tradition—he the imitation Chaplin often . . . the 'taker' who passed his mis-takes on—the "take" and 'double-take' . . . those silent 'asides' to audience—registering surprise and indignation . . . thus stealing audience response of all *but* laughs—he the creator of 'haws,' gag-man . . . the 'straight' of any team—the grown-up thief of bag-pants . . . coming back onto Chaplin himself for new cues in 1912—until Charlie left the Karno troupe, Hollywood-bent . . . went out of Stan's life, from that time on, with emphasis—the subsequent life-long avoidance surely that of heroish 'master' shunning 'lien-to' disciple . . . they meeting again only twice in the next half-century for one of those led-by-nostalgia talks—both 'meets' of that overt friendliness which can never 'match' competitive passion . . . Stan the very mirror of Charlie's innocent start—the heartlessness of 'straight,' 'take,' 'double-take,' and 'miss' . . . entropy of every comic who plays to an/any other—most two-man comic acts, in this century, premised upon some homosexual aversion . . . some return to babyhood in escape from male friendliness—an act beyond any child-likeness lonely Chaplin might engender . . . or maybe it was just that Stan was a mustachless Chaplin—young 'open-face' . . . prime innocence—was enough to drive terrified Charlie away . . . thus Stan was an *earlier* hero to him . . . in Charlie's/his stories—who, along the same lines of adventuring, had been turned to stone.

But there was, then in 19-teens, more to follow—a further Stan-transformation . . . as Stanley hoofed his own panic way in U.S. Vaudeville circuits—a furthering enchantment which saved him from becoming statuesque Chaplin at scratch. As he tells it: "Just about this time, I started thinking of a new name for myself. When I first started in show business, I used my full name, Stanley Jefferson. This I broke down to Stan Jefferson. Then one day, quite by accident, I happened to notice that my name had thirteen letters in it. I figured the superstition department might be the cause so I decided to make a change. Funny

—I don't know why I picked Laurel. Honestly can't remember. Just sounded good, I guess. However, my hunch was right! Things started to get better right away, and after I got known in pictures, I had my name legalized."

Oh!—he was a sleeping beauty . . . for surety—all 'sub' his attention to Tobey's 'dance mastering' of Stan's ultimate Laurel 'make-up.' Stan was, as Laurel, previous to self—as all elfs are . . . lacking sibilant—selfless as 'babes in the woods' . . . worse yet!—as make-believe 'trees' and cut-out 'stones' . . . (nothing, was he, so form-in-able as Nature's sibling rival—but worse! . . . as entity without a shape—there being a baby there where there happens to be a man . . . a happen-sub-stance, then—needing t'other or a brother to 'shadow' all his life.)

In the meanwhile, Hardy was as Hardy does—always that presence of his in platitude . . . there being no "did" to his "doing"—a veritable hymn to Self . . . full-fleshed and bleeding gratitude—always 'villain' when up against any rather average man . . . Hardy playing "the heavy," as it was called, in every normal comedy or cowboy movie he made for his living—movies no 'calling' for him anymore than soprano soloing had been . . . Mother Emmy having 'seen-to' every ambition *he* might have had—all grist for the mill he'd hoe . . . or some-such—painful puns his major enjoyment . . . especially when he could force them on an unwilling and openly groaning victim—to create an aborted laugh.

He funned his way thru/and around the country—he the 'poor man's' "Fatty Arbuckle" . . . when in comedies—but mostly playing mellow-drama to some thin actor's heroics. Hardy was once starred in "The Wizard of Oz"; but I've never been able to discover which 'part' he played; surely it must have been "The Cowardly Lion." Anyhow THE Hardy began to be 'recognized'—tho' still personally known 'Babe' to his friends . . . if he can be said to have really had personal friends—this gobbling gnomish creature that he then pre-tended to be. He surely acted 'friends,' just as he played at 'villain' and 'made game' of himself, but what he really loved was golf. His whole grace was just such selfishness as made of all of his life a simple pass-time. He was determined, thereby, to avoid any remembrance of times past. He was 'loveable' as anything truly solid

is—i.e., as objects are mistakenly said to be... that is as loveable as anything which cannot be said to love back—he a veritably moving but unmoved cupid... as if detached from carved niche—amidst the ‘hiss’ of fountains or the ‘laughter’ of falling waters in some public park.

Both Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy drifted to and away-from, worked in-and-around, and finally settled on Hollywood—both working now-and-again for the same picture companies... both doing movie stints with comic Larry Semon, for instance—yet never once managing to meet each other in nearly a decade of such shilly-shallying. Imagine two figures avoiding each other unbeknownst to either—an elf and a troll in a dance which permits both to miss each other at every turn... amidst mirages galore on a desert island—or in a deserted aisle... for Hollywood was truly no grove more than its holly-name was either local-or-American Holy—both name and place a mirage of language as well as locale... fit set for fancy—an undeserted desert, say... of petrified wood gone to seed—hatching heat waves and historical illusions... a mass, thus, of enough ecto-and-ego-plasm to stuff all ghosts ever begotten—a gathering place for forces otherwise beyond imagination.

Imagine therein, these UNidentical twins in shimmies of American ‘20’s’ agitation—imagine them dancing around the toe of Krishna’s holy foot about to lift and end the world... as in a Hollywood movie—among the L.A. waves that were really death dunes... the stone forests long ago turned to dust—the cement building blocks constructed of this petrified stuff... the heat/light shivers of their ghostliness—enough!

There was a man named Roach who hired them both and, as usual, broke every spell in the book—to “make a buck”... or so he would have said—Hal, thus “King,” Roach his name... shades of Daddy Aj.—a ‘down-to-business’-man.

Amazing how the gathering forces of dark-and-lightness catalyst thru commerce—the world-of-business too abstract-in-itself to countenance nonsense... hard-practicality most often acting upon all Dream very much as the noise which awakes each sleeper—every dream-remembered collecting its various images around the very intrusion which stops sleep.

Laurel and Hardy were forced to meet—in the wake of

King Roach's desperate war with Mack Sennett—"King of Comedy" as Mack was then called... Laurel and Hardy to become the only economic answer to Sennett's hero Chaplin—King to come!

Hal Roach was the very man to fuse the heavens, clock shooting starts and race 'em, cast Gilgamesh and Enki-du as Mutt and Jeff, etcetera, if it'd 'tickle his pocket.' He looked a lot like Hardy, actually—was born four days before the Georgia 'Babe'... loved golf more than anything else—and was, in all heavy-set respects, a gagging man. He hired the greatest joke-writers, comedian directors and comics of the time and hurled them like cannon balls against Charlie Chaplin. It was his happiest continual obsession.

The 'war' itself was as metaphorical as this piece of writing—i.e. implicit in the language from scratch... as Guy Davenport traced it thru his dictionaries for me—the following:

"Charles, carl, peasant, chuck, chucklehead + chaplin, priest.
"Whereas Stone Laurel (stanli3, "rocklike") (stone + tree) and Olivetree

Sanli3 (tree + stone) are Aurignacian elemental sprites, interchangeable sad

and happy, the seesaw of comedy in its deepest spirit—

Gilgamesh, first known western hero, is, as his name means, the Happysad—

Treestone, the Tristram of Finnegans Wake

Pound's 'tree and stone alive together'"

By the late '20's, Stan Laurel had stopped acting of himself—become gag-writer and director for Roach... the impulse to create arising within this elf as surely as wish of his to stop being acted-ON—thus rejecting Aj. as strongly as he could... as he once had 'done' with his dad by choice of Acte—as he now did by manipulating actors with witticisms of his own.

Oliver Hardy was one of those actors Laurel used to ghost his wit—one of those who acted-out what Laurel wrote... how else was elf to out-wit troll?—"I'll give you my life if you'll do what I tell you to do." As Chance would have it—or was this accident?... the heart of Tobey's matter—Hardy burned himself while cooking a leg of lamb; and Laurel was forced to sub-

stitute for him, playing “timid butler” in a film called “Get ‘Em Young.” Laurel was a success—per inner accident...or was this luck?—got stuck with what he didn’t want to be but was... was asked to write himself into the very next film in mind—him-to-be ‘butler’ again...servant to the roll of ‘the artist’ he’d created in a script—caught up in his own writing and forced to act it out. He objected—hated the idea of himself thus ‘typed’... a “supporting actor” as it was called—and a ‘character’ at that. He was ‘bought-off’ by Roach. All his objections would be countered by money from then on—his hatred of being elfin... ‘effeminate,’ as it was known—his being made to cry in almost every film... shown-up as the ‘cry-baby’ he really was—his hatred, later of Hardy... and love also—being subject to the laughter of The World.

Hardy played the enemy of ‘the artist’ in this film—both men thus cast opposite each other... each as polar support of the leading ‘part’ of “Artist” as Laurel had written it—a ‘penny-dreadful’ bedroom farce named “Slipping Wives.” Hardy too had his hatred—himself as fat... each pound of flesh—the price he was paid ‘for keeps’... his fame finally dependent on his weight—killed him at last. Then too one might call the fire which burned him ‘sacrificial’—his aversion to killing animals having haunted him all his life... a “Peaceable Kingdom” contradiction raging within him—a slip-of-the-hand to sacrifice himself in place of the holy lamb?... a ‘Freudslip’-wish to eat himself?—precipitated all the ritual of Laurel and Hardy to kingdom come..

Their lives were never to be separated or unsupported again—as they swung around the central metaphor the written “art” of Laurel or Hardy’s ‘rite’ had been to them... as surely as if the terms were invoked ceremoniously—they initiates who had innocently ‘asked for it.’ They never knew what ‘hit’ them—other than the money ‘laid-on’ for this use of their lives... the lavish attention paid them for ever more—the popularity which hemmed each into ‘the world’ of ‘the other’ in a thirty-years’ sacrificial dance that paid-off... played-out—stopped only at Hardy’s death.

I won’t trace all that. My interest is Art. It ‘fell-out’ as such—like a ‘found object’... a ‘ready-made’ that didn’t even

need a Duchamp—an art unknown to either of them . . . they trapped the rest of their lives in the tracks of three years of accidental creative work; but these few years—from 1927 to end-'29 . . . the final period of the Hollywood silent film—created Laurel and Hardy for all Time.

The World watched in astonishment—not knowing what was to be seen . . . Tobey's meanings—the very same ritual that has always been . . . beyond Time: The Antiquity Twins having at 'it' again—and/or 'the dance' around The World Tree . . . as ever before—the birth of religion.

Both Laurel and Hardy, like Chaplin, were worshipped everywhere they went—whether they appeared in the flesh . . . to represent the gathering forces of their ritual bent—or were re-presented themselves film-wise . . . the ghostly track of them unreeling a-frame-at-a-time—shades of themselves shading deities.

Among the alters to gods, in a Chinese prayer room, their images have been seen. Single frames of them have been three-and-four stories high in the public market places. One of their films was the very first shown on Vatican television.

I'll not trace prayerful thought either—the birth of religion from appreciative decay . . . the wish to worship that which once was an art—but rather take Tobey's gift as it happened to 'fall-out' . . . of the very real "skies" so to speak—with the exactitude of unreeling stars . . . "stars" the first movie that men watched in the dark of the night—when audiences were astronomers. It is elemental stuff I'm talking about—not how the watchers worshipped later . . . became astrologists after the fact of their sight—Tobey NOT to be made god-like . . . nor Laurel & Hardy made more-of than their names engender in this writing—more than you'd imagine a pun to be worth deifying.

One defines aesthetics very much as astro-watchers draw imaginary lines from star to star to create a figure thereof. One needs stable star configurations—or else a good story to explain all disruption . . . thus is Narrative born—to hang either Signs or Art upon. Narrative was ever a sign of weakening vision—in shift of heaven; and signs forever advertise religions . . . god stuffing: Art always thrives otherwise than these proclivities of Man—making use of everything.

If one looks at the movies of Laurel and Hardy, as one might study the skies in some very beginning, a very few total shapes, or works of art, appear! These that I count as Art are (1) "Early to Bed"—which sustains eye-sense of the story of "the master" and his "servant"... 'the rich' and 'the poor'—their plots as known on earth... (2) "Two Tars"—the return of "the warriors"... 'the revolution'—as it occurs in the histories of men... (3) "Liberty—the pean to "the private life"... or "dream"—night's mare... Freud's etcetera—told, as it usually is these days, as a homosexual pun... and (4) "Big Business"—the subject of 'war' itself. There may be more. I have not seen them all. I would make a case for "The Music Box" as close to an art; but it—which attempts an existential statement on "the condition of Man"... 'Sisyphus'-stuff—fails to achieve a total balance of all the materials in it... it is best appreciated as a surreal pun on cultural progress—inasmuch as Laurel and Hardy... moving a piano up an impossible flight of stairs—never exactly repeat any error in all their non-evolution.

The question to ask—of comedy's 'heaven'... when watching the screen as if it were night's whole sky—what's left between the spaces... of every move—within the pauses between each and every comic mockery... before and after Thus—beyond all laugh? Laughter is the dance of the audience. It is accompanied by Vision. That vision can be attended, as Art, like music—beyond all accompaniment... as 'the dances' of Schubert, Mozart, etc.—for what it is in itself. One can attend and dance at one and the same time. Why not? Gertrude Stein once said that a genius was one who could listen and talk simultaneously. Let us dance, then—Look!... where you're going—etcetera.

Everytime the plot thickens, in a Laurel and Hardy movie, so does the vision—thicken with explanation... Narration—that which sickened the stars... surely sickening us—leaving all at wit's end. It is some well-rounded Circumstance which causes Art to blossom from/of them—a created 'perfect' Situation which 'backs' their dance... as sky—'black' which 'shapes' the movement of points of light—some Simplicity, one might say... simple as black & white—The Scene, as it was called.

Many directors 'called it'—made-a-scene for them... di-

rected their being this way or that—"Early to Bed"... Emmett Flynn—"Two Tars" and the later "... Music Box"... James Parrott, a pseudonym for comic-turned-director Charlie Chase (—or was it Charlie Chase's brother?... as was rumored—and who was Charlie Chase?... if not a pseudonym chasing after Chaplin)—"Liberty"... Leo McCarey (—a man so 'mythed' by Hollywood that it's hard to believe he ever existed... let alone directed—his method that of being a haunt to actors... ephemeral as Fate—he Tobey's best geist in all of this... the main carrying force of influence upon almost every film of theirs this three-year period—he 'baiting' them... they 'eating it up' from him—'dropping in' on 'the set' to 'liven it up' with wild Irish humor... the spirit which centered their scenes)—and then "Big Business," their masterpiece... James Horne—and so on thru a list of names that didn't essentially alter one Laurel and Hardy whim.

They were lucky to have Jimmy Finlayson—an arch-type comic Scot... to make 'em 'feel at home' —in making up these sceneries... along with George Stevens—that Irish proximity... to telescope their acts and 'back 'em' proper—he the photographer of every film worthy of visual consideration; but they could have 'done without' any of them... anyone else but each other—Stan elfin and Oliver trolly. What they *did* need was the easily going-along atmosphere of movie-making of The Times—almost akin to home-movie-making... making it up out of some inner longing—the Surrealism of limitless possibilities.

Xmas trees in Los Angeles—that was a start!... a joke perhaps—along with a house that was due to be wrecked... a destructable prop—coupled with the magnificent 'take' and 'double take' of Jim Finn... Laurel's hated father-substitute—along with the endless shop talk... joke swap among each other—and 'the war' of "Big Business" was on!... moving rhythm-wise like a piece of Bach—to an inevitability beyond all joke.

The improvisational character of each comic situation—dreamed up 'on the spot'... worked-out as it went rather than by script: Sound ended that. The coinciding national depression ended any further humoring Hal Roach might have given them. Their dance of endless comic possibilities was stopped—

forced to repeat...made mince-meat for competitive sport—
Laurel & Hardy to-be-eaten by the M.G.M. Lion and 20th
Century Fox.

Oliver Hardy's heart went out of his work mid-'30's, in the
year of our 'anything-goes' and/or Tobey's unhappy ending.
His heart stopped, after prolonged illness, in 1957.

Stan Laurel went on, suffering stroke after stroke, until his
death within the decade following.



BUSTER KEATON

Here we have him. Now we don't. This 'bastard' will escape all use. He's 'an original' —an unto-himself... 'An' —capital "M" Man... you might uniquely say—therefore... as an Artist —unquestionably so... young/old so-and-so—mercurial... singular—uni-versatility itself!

He is without doubt; but there's more to it than that! Let's not praise him yet—he who had always to earn it... again and —so forth!

We're warming up—the language to become athletic... which is to say—'straight'... 'set 'em' —up and up. No need to invent. He'll escape whatever trap—except the one... as in Achilles game—sprang every trap... but THE one that 'downed' him—each a "made thing" by himself... except that one he won—that woman... as we have it from him—so to speak:

"There is no sex, no passion, for the comic actor. When a woman kissed me I became a father to her. I wanted to protect her for the rest of her life": she did... he died; it was a simple story—but that was later... many years—after his beginnings.

First his parents met—went together like... Scotch and Irish—Myra Edith Cutler and Joseph Hollie Keaton... THE FAMOUS KEATONS to be—she... the daughter of a medicine show owner—he... a traveling actor—was 'in.' They left her fa-

ther's—she 'that way' . . . as they say—he 'this and that' . . . a flightiness—they . . . the two of them—one comic act par excellence of every marital joke that could be made upon themselves. On stage and off—she . . . a jolly falling woman—she . . . "Look Out!—she's coming down!" . . . fell from the stage, then from horse and buggy—she and baby still inside her . . . felled by a theatre tent in a storm—a "London Bridge" before his birth . . .

"Rock-a-bye Baby

In the tree top.

When the wind blows

The cradle will rock.

When the bough breaks

The cradle will fall;

And down will come Baby

Cradle and all."

—born in Piqua, Kansas, October 4th, 1895 . . . in The Mohawk Medicine Company Hotel—babe Joseph Frank Keaton.

Little Joe followed his folks every-which-way immediately—they off to California . . . road-showing with Harry Houdini—him at being a six-months baby . . . falling down the boarding house stairs—landing gracefully at The Magician's feet . . . being named by Houdini right there and—"Buster" from then on.

Buster Keaton, before the age of one, sleeping peacefully in a theatrical trunk, felt the lid come down. His parents, after their performance, saved him from that one.

Buster K., crawling around, snatched from the suffocating smoke of—once the actual flames of . . . fire flickering 'movie-like' light of—hotels burning down.

Buster, very much 'on his own'—'grabbing floor' . . . inching along—pulled him-, 8 months old, self onto the lighted platform . . . upstaging Father's pitch-for-laughs—broke up Dad's performance . . . bringing down 'the house,' 'busting up' the audience, leaving 'em 'rolling in the aisles'—like as if he were Sam's son, Zeus, or some-such.

Young Keaton 'done to' all along in the same 'do it yourself' fashion—as one July Kansas day he remembered . . . he barely two and a half at the time: his inquisitive fingers got caught in the cogs of a machine—a clothes wringer . . . a dry-your-hands the hard way joke; then, his head bashed by some

heavy stone he'd thrown to knock fruit down from high heaven—a peach tree... a comedian's Newtonian Eden if ever there was one; and finally—all in the same day, mind!... as if B.K. were dealt three up-side-down fortune-teller 'jokers'—stacked decking him for every myth to come... a cyclone struck, sucked Buster out and up the street a block-and-a-half, and sat him down unharmed—a 'full house' of god's laughter and roaring applause.

His father also threw him around—'a good bit'... within their theatrical showmanship—"The Two Keatons" became... Buster toddling along—"The Three"... he dressed in exact miniature of his dad—she the 'mom'... Father Joe the 'helli-on' quarreling with his son—his dwarf of self... Young Bust. "The Human Mop" to be thrown in play and around—away and... Hell!—well... all in fun—once deliberately hurled at some misbehaving New Haven college boys in the front row. Buster took it 'straight'—later wrote:

"From the beginning I was surrounded by interesting people who loved fun and knew how to create it... You might say I was brought up on the stage... Well, I was born with a show... See by the time I'm 21 years old I'm a vet... I cannot remember Pop teaching me anything... We found it much more fun to surprise one another by pulling any crazy, wild stunt that came into our heads... I could take crazy falls without hurting myself simply because I had learnt the trick so early in life... The old man would kick me a hell of a wallop... I don't know what the thunder they (the audience) figured... The greater a comic's indifference, the more astonished he seems by the public's laughter... When I began to have this reputation for impassivity, we went thru my films to see if it was really true that I never smiled; I wasn't even aware of it myself... I concentrated on what I was doing."—he... 'the mop'—flopping about under old Joe's foot... 'scape' of old 'goat'—came out 'on top'—top billing... age seven—signs reading: "Buster, assisted by Joe and Myra Keaton."

(I may as well state that the quotes in the above paragraph are all out of mixed-up context—a 'cut-up' to get at the truth... Burrough's fashion—to get at isolated 'slips' of it Freudwise... reading between the lines—circumventing Keaton's noncha-

lance...in interviews of 'the good old days'—cinema mag. stuffing...autobiograph—dead-pan stuff...his insistence on remembering childhood as fondly—as was the sad style of his whole mistreated generation.)

It is insane to look for him other than as 'half-mad'—half-pint of his father's...this stagey family's Huck Finn kid—kid-ding everyone but himself...little monk—monkeying every turn his dad would make...he being mischief of The Acte—acting ag'ed wildly incorrigible Youth...thought by many of the audience, then, to be a midget—midget man, then, surely as is the craziness of every child...staged Fright—frightened half out of his wits...half into them—him audience's/Father's altogether acceptable murdering of The Child at last...laugh!—laughter's absolution of an Era that particularly doted-on and hated its dottering children. Listen!; and you'll hear his plight in the rustle of the too-many undergarments stiffening kids of those Times—the 'turn of the century's' little adulterations...the adulation of "Little Women"/"Men"; and/or just read the record straight as 'the poor' always have it—the child labor news of "The Times"...working children deaths—child prostitution statistics...later little Shirley's movie Temple—all of a world of 19th century hatred of infancy. Whatever else it did, to-and-from kids, it certainly made-for geniuses of a particular Romantic aura—half-Roman-mad...half Germanically super-sane—the kind of Artist who 'moon-ed'...with impeccable precision: may-fly wise-men—died young...one way or another—every one. Keaton was true to this 'run' of upbringing—being exceptional...without exception—see-sawing thus all his life.

Watch!

Clock his every movement.

Baby-sit with him in his own "Playhouse"—now you see it...now you don't—you see?: his 'playhouse' reveals itself to be...a real playhouse—you saw: "Let's play house"... "The Playhouse"—begins as a dream of himself entering a theatre where-in everyone (the audience within the film, musicians of the orchestra, and all on stage) is him...his dead-pan face on each—and then...as must surely be the earliest infant dream—him asleep in a room broken into, he awakened and evicted by...

The Landlord? . . . God-The-Father, stage manager—his room breaking open after him, broken up . . . tissue-thin walls coming up in the . . . what the?—revealing “Back Stage” . . . (the name of an earlier film where he’d used this same Pirandellian gag)—Buster, ‘stage-hand’ . . . lowest of the . . . etcetera—him falling in love with twin sisters . . . them in mirrors, then, a multitude of women . . . mirroring him as in his dream again and—he ‘stage frightened’ half out of his . . . ending not knowing one woman from her other . . . as babies search to discover the end of self and the beginning of Mother—he then substituting for a monkey on the stage . . . shades of young manhood, its myths and initiations . . . perfected by zoological study to a “z”—his face “animated,” like they say . . . (him grimacing on film as never after or) . . . before only when aping his father—he, from then on, monkey on Dad’s back . . . reinacting his acted growing up and up—(and, later lin “The Playhouse” adolescence . . . after farcical military service—at last axing-off his daddy’s burning bushy beard . . . masque of emasculation of The, etcetera)—his ghostly theatre finally flooded with water . . . wet dream!—leading, quite naturally, to escape in marriage . . . (as at end of almost every happily-ever-aftering film he made)—The End: . . . to be continued—in the cyclone sequence of “Steamboat Bill Jr.”)

Even the shortest gags of this “Playhouse” film are routines of his youth—swung on puns of sex . . . thus: (and I present the following remembrances absolutely ‘straight’ (—from the monkey’s mouth:

“ . . . Then I found that knothole in the floor at Columbus. Stopped and looked at it with that alley broom in my hand and walked away. Walked back and looked at it again, jabbed at it with the broom handle and missed. Gave up and walked away again. Just then Joe started his recitation and needed a noise obligato. So I walk over and really go to work on it. Jab and miss, jab and miss. Get into every crazy position—even on my head—to aim better but still miss. Sounded like the Light Brigade; no one could hear a word Joe was saying. He picked up the gag, stopping and starting over, doing the slow burn.

“Then he begins to really wonder, ‘What the hell is that over there?’ walks over and I point at the hole as serious as if God only knows what’s down in there. I keep missing. So I get

sore, take off my coat, roll up my sleeves, spit on my palms, take the broom in both hands, sight down the handle, take aim—Joe bending over watching me—shake my head, line it up again, take a fresh aim. More of a production, for Chris-sake, than Palmer lining up a thirty-foot putt. Finally I let fly. Hit the hole at last; then the broom goes in up to the bristles, and I go smack on my face with my feet up in the air. A beautiful fall. After all that build-up the audience is absolutely killing itself. All over a hole in the floor.”

Never underestimate Keatonian ‘bits’ as passing fancies to be forgotten. Each piece of “Playhouse” ‘business’ is informed by childhood wants, or lacks. Each is a back-bite desperately meant. Every facet of his action reflects the ghostly statement of the total film. This is the essence of his Art. He was *un*-conscious-a-perfectionist of his jokes as he was a consciously perfect acrobat. He never mixed mind and ‘what’s-the-matter’ up—talked down all thought of ‘Art’ . . . “artistic” his worst epitaph for an act—all of which is to say: he was a natural . . . never gave a second thought to what was ‘for granted’ him—obsession. His life was always all before him; and he had only to act it out.

Old Joe was an opposite sort—anything might happen . . . and usually ‘*did*—them in’ . . . Buster and Mother with him—hit the small and smaller towns . . . ‘no-where-ville.’ Big Daddy Joe bragging it up—their act . . . him increasingly ‘out—of it’ . . . him drunk—not giving an argumentative damn-blast!—him chasing a theatre impresario out of his office . . . ending all of them ‘on the streets’—‘skids . . . rows’ of saloons—the Irish usual of those Times . . . Joe ‘living up’ to caricature.

Buster, the son of this bungling happy-go man, was ever more and more somber in his mien—his metier to be contrariness to Dad . . . sobriety itself—off-stage . . . ‘on’ he was his imitative tiny twin—schiz. life for Buster down the fatherly line; but he kept doggedly . . . winning—‘poker face’ ever more and more becoming.

It was the usual father-son game, only played half-on/half-off the stage. Imagine being caged with Daddy Wild-Beast night after night in arena where ‘anything goes’—any hurtful half-truth the occasion for mirth . . . and that—laughter . . . the whole

raison d'être. No wonder Buster learned to keep one foot on the grave side of his nature. It surely was 'murder' otherwise for him. But, then, he never knew anything other than this pater-familial sport clear thru his teens.

At 22 Buster and his long suffering mother walked out on drunken Joe at last. How many thousands of 'rounds' had Buster sustained—steadily winning all the while . . . never cracking the slightest revealing grin—the against-the-grain Triumph of The Century! . . . viewed by hundreds of thousands of clapping and bellowing 'fans'—from beginning to . . . what?—but beginning again; for this was the legend of Buster's . . . his story—that would force him to the particularities of his art . . . his long sufferance against insurmountable oddities over which he would triumph—he 'The Kansas Kid' . . . arch-type of American "sonny"—beating the Father Figure to 'the draw,' the lot-of-money, the many women and/or Mother won . . . against whatever the 'cut of cards' when/wherever and any which, et set-the stars by it, you bet your—and so *forth* goes the Plainsman/commoner-hero . . . dogged Buster-upper of familiarities—an Americanized Orion. What else would he wait to and for all those wrestling years, but to win—by Artemis . . . or whatever would suffice—Mom. Having won, he was stuck with The Theme, of him, to repeat and repeat again, with/in variations ever less and less finite; and for *that*, he needed a less *definite* Father as immediately as he had lost the last.

Fatty Arbuckle was as if made for this—a roly-poly 'poesy' Don of Broadway fame . . . a Damon Runyonesquerie of New York's 'gay nineties' hang-over—check-vested and watch-be-fobbed happy fat man . . . a devious 'simp.'—of indecently innocent appearance—by day stage and movie light—masking his under-worldliness by night . . . his eye's inner darkling shifts of . . . his female impersonation's coy fear of . . . his broad grimaces and overly-acted desperation of . . . his jolly Coney Island mechanical laughing man self.

Buster—job hunting first time 'on his own' . . . Father-hunting on his un-'owned-up' /obsessed inner sense-of-self—had signed for a tour with Schubert's "Passing Show of 1917" . . . the money "a lot," a veritable 'Pot-of-,' for The Times, at \$250.00 a week—when he met fat Roscoe . . . jolly rascal—Ar-

buckle walking down the street with an old vaudevillian friend. Fatty and Buster—ham and . . . Buster surely egging Arbuckle on—must each have immediately known each other—smack-dab . . . as quick as—mid Broadway . . . as sure as—they ‘hit it off.’ Arbuckle hired Keaton—he ‘on the spot’ . . . casual, for all that—as he’d been ‘poker’ trained in round after round since babe ‘up in arms’; and he accepted a second-rate film ‘part’ with ‘Fats’ at \$40.00 a week . . . without a second’s thought—threw-over his stage job as easily as that!

The Theme begins again—variation: movies. Even movie-buff interviewers are astonished at this chance encounter and the casual counter-point of young Keaton’s acceptance of his—what would you call it? . . . other than predestination—viz:

“You gave up a contract for \$250.00 dollars a week merely for the pleasure of making films?”

‘Old’ Buster ‘Non-Chalance’ answered as easily as:

“Money never interested me very much and besides, I wanted to see what it was like . . .”

As easily as that—Buster having proven he could make ‘the money’ . . . wondering next about himself as Daddy—wanted . . . lacked—“What . . . was . . . like.” Would Fatty fit the part of ‘baby’ in their together-act?

In 1917, Arbuckle was making \$5,000.00 a week—a sure-fire star . . . in movies since 1909—discovery of Mack Sennett. His first motion picture for Comique Films—at this fabulous salary—was the very one he’d asked young Keaton to ‘try-out’ in: “The Butcher Boy.” The \$40.00-a-week Buster nearly ‘stole the show’ right-off—the two of them almost equal *co*-stars from then on . . . and until—Fatty Arbuckle ‘the wild man’ of Hollywood—Keaton his ‘straight’ . . . to the end of Arbuckle’s career in 1921 when “Butcher” was hurled at Fatty from every newspaper headline in The Land. Roscoe, movie’s lovable “Fatty” Arbuckle was accused of killing young starlet Virginia Rappe—raping her to death with a champagne bottle and chunks of ice . . . end of an otherwise typical Arbuckle party—orgy of finally fulfilled desire . . . as his last words to guests before entering the ultimately fatal bedroom; “I’ve waited five years for this!” Most of those five years, from 1917 to ’21, marked the rise to fame, under Fatty’s familiarity, of young Buster Keaton—Arbuckle’s

opposite in every way... but with full... respect— 'on screen' and... off and on—the two of them friends 'to the bitter... ending' in—Keaton's beginning again.

The relationship is a maze—amazing to contemplate... a labyrinthine simplicity—if ever there was one. You can see it all in "Coney Island"—now you/Buster, with your girl... Buster climbing poles... hitting the 'thing' which rings the bell at the top of the pole... shooting-the-chutes (Buster 'standing in'—dressed as The Girl and sitting in chute car... with Fatty—Arbuckle's usual invention... them sweetly holding hands—as they go down and... taking her 'fall' with Fats—into the water)... splashing about—now you, Fatty... don't, Fatty, this... Fatty that—fatty stealing Buster's girl... his grotesqueries... his leers... sneering smiles—him/Fats becoming then girl/himself... his curls of disguise... his shyness (directing the camera to raise up, for in-group joke, as he's undressing on screen)... his laughed-at lying... his whole sad 'pun' on "Sinning." Arbuckle was obviously The Child of the two. Buster's girl runs away with—but to 'mother' Fatty awhile... play 'girls' with him—turns to Buster at the end.

I think it—the relativity of them... 'Fats' / 'Bust"—was a swap: Buster wanted a baby to 'father' in the act... but a fatherly babe at that—'Fatty' having 'the money'... the Fame... the whole desperate guise of "know-how"—'20's pathetic-Sin::; and Fatty probably wanted something so simple as 'a son' he could fuck—something he never in the world ever really and... couldn't possibly have... never thought... didn't.

Listen to Keaton being 'fatherly' superior:

"When I started in movies, Fatty Arbuckle warned me: 'Never forget that the mental age of the audience is never more than 12 years old.' Several months later I went to him and said: 'Roscoe, you'd better get that idea out of your head because anyone who goes on making films for 12-year-olds will soon be out of business. The public is always smarter than you—it has to be if it's going to enjoy what you're doing.'"

Arbuckle was finally, after third trial, acquitted. Hear Daddy Buster quipping at the time that he should change his name to "Will B. Good"—a suggestion pathetic Fatty took to heart... after years of being unable to obtain any kind of work

—he became William Goodrich . . . Keaton's name-son then in partial fact—until his death in 1933.

(You may think these interpretations are all too very 'far fetched'; but listen a bit to Buster's insistences on his "love" for Roscoe—keeping in mind the sense of Love as defined in Keaton's films; and attend his continual crediting Fatty with teaching him everything he knew about film—remembering, all the while, the incredible Keatonian mastery of the medium in comparison with Arbuckle's slap of one shot after another . . . "Arbuckle taught me how to edit"—indeed!; and finally consider Buster's most recent praise of Fatty was that Roscoe was "that rarity, a truly jolly fat man" . . . "He had no meanness, malice or jealousy in him": what can such extravagant 'white-wash' stand-for?—in the light of the horrifying eventualities of Fatty's life—except an obsession beyond all reasonableness . . . such as a father might have for his wayward son—indulgences beyond belief.

(I quote old reminiscing Buster often in this essay because I take exception to his whole verbal stance and think it more important to understand the particularities of his 'kidding' himself than to 'go along' for 'old time's sake' or some-such 'worshipfulness' as those interviewers who are in-to-it just for the 'laughs.')

(the entire narrative structure of Keaton's films is postulated upon just such lying Ideals and pretended Simplicities as his conversation exhibits. The greatness of his films, beyond the 'kicks' and jokes of them, is exactly dependent upon the extent to which they 'x' all Ideals and reveal them as hypocrisies. Most have "swallowed" 'whole hog' the simple Keaton surface or else rejected it as 'corniness.' I'm after the hell-of-a-jungle of his complex nature underneath. Thus I dig not *at* but, rather, *into* him—turn him in his gravure image . . . poking seriousness as well as fun—with all and every respect for that which made his accomplished work *work* and go on working . . . what made him 'tic'—for all Time.)

The 'father figure' that was to take up Keaton's attention next—and last . . . as an obsession the remainder of his living—was The Machine . . . the same as captivated Méliès mid his magic stage career . . . and the same as, to some extent, every maker

of films—old *Deus Ex Machinae*.

Arbuckle put it that *The Machine* was Mom to Keaton: 'He lived in the camera.' But this is the wrong idea, surely, considering his mastery of every mechanical device on screen and off—that the machine is always clearly a partner in every Buster caper... though often letting him down... throwing him around... etc.—very like his relationship with his father, rather. He had always a mutually dependent 'war' with car, boat, train, whatever.

(George Méliès envisioned *The Mechanical* as 'mothering' him—viz. his placement of himself/his-hero within machines... his 'fix' on the inner workings of them—visibility of hidden moving parts; but Keaton's technicality was always external... his always a 'fixing up'—athletic or mental flexibility as co-opted and competitive with mechanization... with/against and/or push-pull back and so forth. It is interesting to compare old George and eternally youthful Buster: both started in—to the inner workings of their arts... their 'magic touch'—with "Houdinis"... Méliès with the European traditional Magician... Keaton with the flashier U.S. imitator Harry—who 'stole' his "Houdini" as naturally as Americans 'steal' Grecian false-fronts to advertise Antiquity on their banks, etc.

(Méliès mastered the tradition of stage magic and then was 'avant-guarded' by the advent of *The Machine*. Keaton tried everything *first* and *only* then mastered mechanics—became, in function... rather than, say, 'historical fact'—a machine traditionalist. As he says, of his daring young childhood on 'the flying trapeze':

("The kid growing up in the wings imitates all he sees;"—This sheer Americaneze!... "if a tight-rope walker comes one week, he'll try walking a taut cord when nobody's looking; if a juggler comes, he'll try juggling; he'll try tumbling, he'll try everything... I even imitated Harry Houdini"—but young 'make it or Bust-' er stopped imitating once he truly came to an understanding with the motion picture camera... the ultimate duplicator of its/his whole sense of everything—movement's imitation.

(Méliès immediately had begun, from his very invention of this 'trick'—the photo moving graph... the 'dupe' of Life—to

stretch its potential for imaginaries and flights . . . literal 'skips' of its recording orderliness—to escape the 'built in' trap of auto-mation.

(Buster, however, never took camera-etcetera as anything but a movement duplicating device—recording apparatus . . . thus appendage to his act—even when fantasizing with it, Méliès-wise . . . all Buster's Surreal scenes clearly revealed-as and labeled "dreams"—his normal pride always in his own acrobatics . . . their visibility . . . viz:

("No, there's no camera trick there . . . I got some beautiful spills, some real beauties . . . I was running along the top of a freight train . . . I was the cop who falls off the motorcycle . . . A couple of times I swung out underneath there and dropped upside down when I caught her . . . I had to go to the doctor right there and then . . . and me with that deep sea diving suit . . . I could only stay down there about thirty minutes because the cold water goes through into your kidneys . . . But it's a one-take scene and we got it that way . . . You don't do those things twice"—his art all dependency on film as a reality-stunt.

(Méliès might have taken the dictionary Latin term "camera"—"room . . . chamber"—literally. Keaton—like D.W. Griffith . . . his creative mentor—took it 'straight' . . . in 'two-bit' U.S. sense of "the real"—according it . . . and to it—only what it exactly did.)

He certainly did it—with it . . . motion pictures—what he wanted . . . *everything!*—realistically pose-able. Buster 'cranked 'em out' with Arbuckle—learning more and . . . less and less leaning-on—weaning himself finally of . . . whatever Fatty had—to offer . . . finally—Keatonian comedy . . . becoming—Buster's Art at last . . . first in 1919—reworking early Arbuckle movies to suit his mechanical genius self . . . "One Week," "Convict 13," "The Scarecrow," "Neighbors," "The Haunted House"—"Hard Luck," "The High Sign." If "Neighbors" can be taken as 'a verb,' then the whole chronological list of earliest films reads like a 'blurb' of their integral theme. Call "The Playhouse" the title over all of them—this 'story of his life' . . . of the hard hard times of his growing uppity climb to individual Fame; but by mid-1921, Buster *was!*—and essentially tired of playing with even the ghost of Fatty's games.

His titles take on his absolute quality—as his movies from then on . . . as well as *Life*—of proper knows: “The Goat”; “The Boat”; “The Paleface”; “Cops” . . . all of them fronted by “The”—as sure as World itself . . . except for three: “Cops”—a normal ‘conversation stopper’ . . . symbol of Daddy Authority: “My Wife’s Relations”—my, oh, how that “My” has defeated most men in this century . . . that attempt to possessively pronoun one’s spouse!; and “Day Dreams”—his attempt to wish himself other than what he so actively was . . . to wish rather than be Cause—to play his drunken Father’s ‘Walter Mitty’ game as something other than a sleeping dog’s lie—Buster’s first feature—“The Saphead” . . . 1920.

Old Joe came slightly back into Buster’s life at this time—appeared in his third feature-length movie . . . ‘A bit part’—performing his favorite stunt . . . aiming a ‘high kick’ to knock the top hat off of someone in the film: “Our Hospitality”—typicality of old Dad . . . then playing in “Sherlock Junior” the misunderstanding ‘Father’ of the girl Buster wants to marry—as iron cast as movie’s flickering light could . . . as Buster ‘getting back’ might . . . in act—make Portrait of old Joe the Primordial Pappy fending off Son’s love of the whole harem/woman/Mom; but it was all “in fun,” like they say . . . like “how do you do?—it” . . . like—any Artist’s answer; “Like, Hell!”

Buster’s second feature-length movie was a ‘spoof’ of the greatest epic film that had been made up to that film historical time: D.W. Griffith’s “Intolerance.” I can’t bring myself to call Buster Keaton’s “Three Ages” a satire. It is more like a college student’s fond charade of his favorite teacher’s personality quirks—jokes at Griffith’s expense just so much excuse to imitate D.W.’s essential techniques . . . his grammar of film—Buster having his ‘school’ at last. Besides, what more could Buster ask for—beginning . . . second attempt at longevity—than a format which would permit him to piece together three ‘shorts’ for full-fledged necessary length. Never underestimate the god-damned practicality of him. Keaton was an economic whiz-bang!—slow as molasses to take a risk . . . quick as a wink for profit—as he put it:

“Unlike those others (five-act dramas) we used no definite manuscript of any kind; we thought up a thin plot which suf-

ficed to enable us to start building scenery; then we set ourselves to thinking of 'gags' (comic ideas and actions) to fit the situations and the settings. When we felt that we had 'shot' enough for five or six films, we stopped and assembled what we had; by successive cutting we arrived at the desired film, containing all that was best of the lot."

For his 'features,' however, he wrote complete scripts—often as fussily detailed as Thoreau's account of nails, etc. . . . in "Walden"'s build-up—of miserly determination not to miss a penny-saving 'trick.' Economics was Keaton's main 'con'—of himself . . . i.e., he never permitted his miserliness to realize he was doing otherwise—in the making of his films . . . than as was the American fashion—following a profit motive down the . . . on the—line. Keaton followed it thoughtfully thru—read Marx, for instance . . . which is more than Chaplin probably ever—Buster more secretly bookish than any other comparable comedian. Actually he was risking life and—broke his neck once . . . only learned of it years later—working out a series of impossible childhood contradictions . . . all hidden from him behind such normal U.S.-masks as: Athletics . . . "take your mind off," "sex," etc.—'working it out' . . . with what thought to the inner that is to be out-worked?—'making a buck' . . . money the real American 'kicker,' alright—'getting a laugh' . . . *that* the U.S. Comedian's "A#1" 'put-off' of any inquiry—Buster's final word-poker Trump:

"I never realized that I was doing anything but trying to make people laugh when I threw my custard pies and took my pratfalls."

But Buster never threw custard pies in his own films; and his falls were Grace itself!, tho' they often brought him to 'death's edge' in his "daring-do"!

Every risk of life reveals the intelligence far out on some neurotic limb—the Soul in Limbo . . . the very nerves chewing away at brain matter—attempting to escape a trap . . . most usually with Humans—body spasming to spring some contradiction . . . talk being always too cheap for any child to more than 'stake his heart' upon—physiologically retching from some early 'Yes/No' on. Buster's contrarities involved his whole physical bodying-forth extraordinarily—I mean the very air he

fell through in his kiddy act... that also which whirled him once via cyclone—and... from then on—midst Daddy's playfully real wrath. Where most others ordinarily thrash among imaginativities—tear away at The Language Walls which shaped them... hallucinate—Buster was... raised—Hell!... to act it out—so that every muscle of his body might be best described as a cluster of obsession... potentiality for blindest genius Vision—each act of his “a dream” like they say and often then said of his acrobatics. He kept himself thus effectively preoccupied—with the technique of creating ‘dreams’ of movement. He never analyzed what they meant. They worked themselves—out thru his leaps... the wild contracts of very flesh... varying twists of his trunk in air... flail of his limbs suddenly ‘out on’ the whole ‘family tree,’ the up-bringing, of *him!*... the torques of his leapt body's risk—his nervous system reaching for... as was all he ever consciously ‘allowed’ — ‘stunts’ — Prat!... the collision of flesh against solid— ‘buck's’ —laughs!

He had nothing to do but to DO it:

“I never shied away from the most crazy, impossible gag, the kind that was later used by cartoon makers.”

But that, like most Keaton statements, is amiss—leading you to think... he never thought—of this:

“Because I find it easy to scratch my left ear with my toe you may think me incapable of having opinions on poetry or music. But after all, learning how to scratch your ear with a toe requires strong muscular discipline, and every discipline implies another, cerebral discipline.”

The Truth of his spirit is all between his contrarities—part/parcel with his... systole and diastole—whole being. He knew very well what he was doing; but it would have been an affectation to have called it an “Art.” He was an American—remember... and a Kansan—at that! The *last* thing any U.S. citizen would write in a hotel register under the heading: occupation; would be Artist. It is part of the American Dream to *be* one: Artist: secretly. Buster was an ultimate accomplisher of that—managed Public Art... yet hidden behind a ‘passel’ of jokes—a Dance of Death, in fact... as graceful as currently despised Ballet—yet acceptable to all, within the context of his humorous timing, as A Laughter Sport. He also managed ex-

pression and public acceptance of the most psycho-dramatically neurotic 'closet-traumas' yet created. He not only beat his father but the whole Dada movement at his/its own game. His themes—their integrities are so terrible that no one has yet dared to psychoanalyze his works. I think they are essentially beyond Psychoanalysis. Only an anthropologist, used to the most bestial rituals in the dreamyist history of Man, could effectively deal with Keatonian Drama.

I'll stick with this bio-graph—trace his two main streamings of sub-thought . . . his Father-fight and his coming to terms with Wife—the socio-logic that made him an artist before he knew and kept him at it unknowingly.

First his dad, as we've looked at, into, thru to Keaton's 'run-off' of/with Mom—then Fatty Arbuckle as being good, finally a fatherly son to him . . . and now, as then, The Machine—his more-than 'twin' . . . more-so mortal god to him—a Promethean. It was some forbidden transportation Keaton was all ways after from/of machines—that they be toys . . . take him back—to where he should have could have had a childhood.

Note the train at end of "The Blacksmith"—falls off a bridge . . . camera pulling back—to reveal it/a-toy-train set in the god-like/childlike hands of giant Buster . . . who, until that instant, audience had thought to be *on* the train—running away with his woman . . . note the whole real locomotive he destroys in "The General"—running again away with his woman . . . every little boy's normal god damn dream . . . note "The Boat" as one whole huge yet bath-tub-like toy—for his imaginary family . . . sinking twice in the same short film—"Damfino" its punnic name . . . note his managing to keep a large luxury liner "The Navigator" afloat . . . and how he luxuriously/playfully does it—It running away with girl and him . . . him the one to be sunk again and—again gadgetry his 'saving grace' in this film . . . this movie the very "stuff that dreams are made of"—"play's The Thing" increasingly in these later motion pictures . . . note his use of the paddle-wheel riverboat in "Steamboat Bill, Jr."—it named "Stonewall Jackson" (another General then) . . . as one huge utterly useless gadget—it yet the only thing withstanding the cyclone in the film . . . enabling him—to save himself, 'his girl,' 'his father,' 'girl's father,' etc-

tera . . . in this very late 'feature' of—his greatest work.

Read this progress of playful evolution—this toying with Life . . . his films that become increasingly gadgets/in-themselves—i.e., less and less useful . . . more and morally abstract—as if each motion picture were an appointment to be forever kept . . . all we've noted, then, being his 'eternity notebook'—each 'meet' with Machine some 'sport' with larger and more emphatically playful Gods.

The chronological trace of his whole careering shows Buster growing smaller and—finally tiny . . . insect-like—in relation to Deus Ex Machinaes. They use him as much as he Them. He has become a wildly flexible cog in Their destination. His is an involution sizewise back thru the whole of childhood to himself as Cosmic Hero: Tom Thumb.

At first he creates his machines; and they are *his*; but they most often then turn against him. Mid-career, he engineers 'em masterfully as a child most often rigs each tinker-prop to suit his megalomaniac dreams. At last he envisioned himself as the tiniest and least practically able creature on earth who yet wins every heroic battle by pure 'necessity—the mother of invention'; and the giant toys of these final films benevolently aid him in his plights of fancy . . . verily much as if 'bye-and-bye'—Luck! . . . the means of The Gods—Their love . . . of lucky him—very much as the unknown Muse visits only *some* men in the hours of their loneliest trauma . . . much as all women are such visitants—each to the desperate man she loves.

Keaton's vision of mechanization grows from the struggling double-entendre view of his "Boat" "Damfino" thru 'the engineer's' presumption of himself as a priest of "The General" mechanical religion, to a transcendental view of The Machine as Muse. Samuel Beckett finally postulated the Existential ending of Buster's career in a script written for him mid-1950's (filmed mid-60s)—a film called just that . . . "Film"—Keaton cast as The Existential Hero living amidst The 20th Century debris of machinery. Buster acted it out; but he never 'bought it'—he simply a salaried 'prop' in this 'roll'em' . . . "camera, action" and all the 'false starts' of—making-a-movie the very Subject of this excellent film . . . directed by Alan Schneider—Keaton naturally-enough despising every filmic instant 'on the job' . . . Schneider

having sensitivity-enough to *use* Keaton's hatred—"Against Himself" . . . the best possible sub-title of this film—"old Buster" 'last acts' THE portrait of Buster Keaton poker-facing Death.

But let's flip thru the notebook again—from earlier . . . note Buster's first 'shot' at Death in his short "Hard Luck" . . . he attempting suicide in that film by lying on a railroad track—putting himself at the mercy of . . . train simply by-passing him on another set of rails—the capricious indifference of . . . Keaton's using this fearful gag as a name and finally THE device which helps him 'win' in "The General"—the militant 'train' of . . . Father's—Thought guiding Keaton by "Hard" 'luck' . . . he trying in this early movie suicide again and . . . given 'too much rope' —failing to hang himself . . . finding 'his poison' at last—'takes to' alcohol . . . from a bottle skulled and cross-boned—leaps into an empty swimming pool . . . ends in a hole—an ultimate 'tomb' for him . . . his main 'life saving' movie symbol most usually Water—Buster emerges from this 'grave' . . . "one year later," as the titles indicate—coupled with a Chinese wife and oriental Keaton children.

This film—from its title . . . "Hard Luck"—to its oriented end of Wife and Death . . . is exact metaphore—his whole sense of living. He called it his "favorite short"; but it cannot be found . . . that, too, metaphorical in itself—"Hard Luck" . . . his choice—a lost work.

"Spite Marriage"—its title speaking eloquently—his 'swan song' on the theme of Women.

There are two 'shorts' Keaton sought to suppress—"The High Sign" . . . note its sub-title:

"Our hero came from *nowhere*. He wasn't going *anywhere* and got kicked out of *somewhere*":

and—"My Wife's Relations" . . .

It is time for us to take up the story of his wife—Natalie Talmadge . . . sister of movie actresses Norma and Constance—she/Natalie then 'the sister who didn't make it' . . . in The Movies—she only to be parodied in Buster's films . . . as 'the sweetheart,' 'the girl next door,' 'the fiancée,' etc.—Keatonian love-affairs always . . . fairy-tale-wise—ending with Marriage.

The Keatons' real sad "happy ever after" began in 1921. Within a year their relations were strained to mutual disgust—

her wanting mansions of Twenties Hollywood grandeur from then on . . . him less and less 'at home to anyone'—her an overwhelming Matriarch to 'mother over' him . . . his sense of a female Father—homily of American 'momism' . . . him again the lowest in the family order—hen-pecked husband. Five years later relations were beyond discussion. Within a decade he was an almost hopeless alcoholic, ill with encroaching neurasthenia. In 1937 he spent a year in a psychiatric clinic—went on drinking after . . . deeper and—into 'the hole.'

There was to be a 'reprieve' for him—dead broke/drunk . . . at the end of even *his* long rope—he was saved, mid-fifties, from himself by a man somewhat the spit-image of him . . . a very much younger symbolic 'twin'—a dark-horse 'brother' to Buster Keaton: Raymond Rohauer, the man who then led him through many ups and 'downers' of years of legal negotiations to restore his films . . . his sense of self—stopt 'drink' . . . that 30 year's gap in his life—to work in films again . . . not as once—of course . . . coarsely rather but anyway—enough! . . . acting jobs advertising soaps and such on television—to "make a living" as its called . . . to re-marry, happily—to come to Beckett's "Film" in the end . . . (though "The Scribe" was his last 'actual film'.)

So much for the restlessness of his life! The clear death-knell of his first marriage is told "between the lines" of Romantic Love cliches which he exposes in film after filmic story.

Take "Cops"—one of his best short works . . . beginning with a quote from old godfather Harry Houdini: "Love laughs at locksmiths"—to which . . . to wit—Buster gives an ironic twist . . . having himself-the-hero as if behind bars at the beginning of the film—a 'twist' of the camera revealing it as only the ironic gate of his rich girl friend . . . her iron attitude—which 'imprisons' him. The last shot of "Cops" shows Buster 'turning himself in'—becoming willing victim of The Police . . . he jailing himself—more literally than at "Cops" beginning . . . tho' he's defeated the whole police 'force' acrobatically this/that and anywhich everyway throughout outwitted Them—ALL . . . because his girl continues to snub his love—"The end" titles of this film appearing on a grave-stone topped by Buster's hat.

In most other films, 'the girl's' acceptance of 'our hero'

leads to an implied 'worse' —Fate...less—than heroic death would have been. The 'Modern' ending of "Three Ages" shows him, wife, and French poodle taking a walk.

"Sherlock Jr." ends with him mimicking some sophisticated 'smooth' movie (film within his film) in order to properly propose and/or propose properly to his 'girl' —he suddenly dismayed... last shot of "Sherlock"—an image of dismal marriage scene.

In "The General" he's made a Col. and inherits 'the girl' as ever at usual end. He places her on the cross-bar connecting locomotive wheels in such a way that he can kiss her and yet salute troops of soldiers happening by—the most mechanical kiss in movie history... slam at soldiery as well—both aspects of The Chivalric 'done in' by one Keatonian repetition; but perhaps the most direct aspect of this irony is the placement of it...between two "wheels of Fate," so to speak—they both upon that same cross-bar which Buster had, earlier in "The General" ridden-on into the actual rail-road tunnel dark... metaphor of his oblivion in the film—perhaps the most dangerous stunt he ever attempted:

"But when it came to this shot I asked the engineer whether we could do it. He said, 'There's only one danger. A fraction too much steam with the old-fashioned engines and the wheel spins. And if it spins it will kill you right then and there.'"

The cross-bar then—their 'love-seat'... this his tempt of Life—Death's throne.

He came back at it again and again and—against the Romantic Dream... this his creative maturation—the absolute persistence with... maniacal wit with—which/whatever acrobatic ingenuity... ingenuously—he THREW his whole bodying-forth and soul-fullness against the Wall of 19th Century Love's Romantic props.

This self-destruct—whim of him... he being nothing—remember!... if not A Romantic/himself—is coupled in every film with another similarly Ideal Theme 'taken to task'... as if the very subject matters were up for Marriage—these secondary themes usually derived from the settings... the term 'scenario' having more than usual meaning—call it "scene's aria" in his films... 'songs' of homes, home-towns, hotels, rooms, theatres,

shops, countrysides, rivers, seas, and dreams—his tributary themes ‘the love of-,’ ‘warring over-,’ ‘working with-,’ ‘conquering’ and ‘being conquered by-’ or just ‘drifting thru’ all of these . . . as activities—sometimes rather more aesthetically called: Hearth Worship; War Heroism; Proletarian Heroics; just plain Heroics or Comedy/itself; Tragedy; Morality Play and/or modernly Surrealism, etc.

(Thus, like Laurel and Hardy, Keaton’s greatness as an artist depends very much upon the scope of his set—the depth of set-to his scenery can present him with . . . all the universal haunts each scene affords—his acrobatic leaps . . . or even the slightest shift of his face—as well as the penetration power of every machine he runs to and from and drives thru these views. Unlike Laurel and Hardy comedy, Keaton’s art depends equally on his personal background—the inner landscape of his past . . . memorabilia—he desperate to come to terms with it . . . that which only exists as a childish whim within him—his success, where Chaplin failed, and which Laurel and Hardy both absolutely evaded, precisely this: that Buster Keaton’s child-likeness was alive *within* him . . . he never having then to be less than the man he was—thus ‘the mysterious stranger’ all his long life . . . i.e. “The Man who knows where he’s from,” as Ed Dorn puts it—“NOWHERE . . . going ANY” . . . as Buster puts it himself—adding bitterly, “kicked out.” A simple Credo like that—if fully felt . . . “in the bones,” so to speak—can make all the difference in the making of an art . . . whether intended as such as with Charlie Chaplin—or as in Keaton’s unconscious accomplishment of it.

(Chaplin once said: “I’m an extraordinary being; I need no extraordinary angles”

(The main maxim in the Buster Keaton studio was that the picture would be a success if the boss got dunked.)

Now Hear THIS!, then—the angularities of Keaton’s “making it” . . . his bias for History—his story, too:

“We took pains to get good-looking scenery whenever we possibly could, no matter what we were shooting . . . In “The General” I took that page of history and I stuck to it in all detail. I staged it exactly the way it happened . . . Well, the moment you give me a locomotive and things like that to play

with, as a rule I find some way of getting laughs out of it . . . I was running that engine myself all through the picture: I could handle that thing so well I was stopping it on a dime . . . Oh God, that girl . . . had more fun with that picture than any film she'd made in her life. I guess it's because so many leading ladies in those days looked as though they had just walked out of a beauty parlour . . . We said to thunder with that, we'll dirty ours up a bit and let them have some rough treatment.”:

—(he more like Carl Theodore Dreyer than he ever knew . . . his/each's attitude toward heroine/women—Keaton's most likeness to D.W. Griffith more than he would have ever cared to admit . . . each 'up against' old War Father—all three of these men akin, then, to Erich Von Stroheim who affected to *become* that Prussianism of God Damn Dad which Stroheim equally despised. These four men, and somewhat Sergei Eisenstein too, the major makers of 'historically accurate' movies within the personal history of motion picture film—ALL of them searching, re-searching, desperate for Film as The Time Machine . . . films as crystal ballrooms—spheres of 19th Century parental passions . . . theirs to play with—inner crystal . . . clearing thought—each within his outrageously thought-full head . . . “minding Parents,” as it's called—“taking care of” The Dead . . . ghost sitting for all eternity—and there-to-fore, when asked why “The General” looks more real than “Gone With The Wind,” Buster said:

(“Well, they went to a novel for their story. We went to history.”:

(. . . that, of course, not at all—the really . . . *real*—Reason being rather the accomplished meaning of his through-the-key-hole-stranger than Life . . . necessity to do—as he did!)

See/Hear the extent of his risk—the precise technicality of it . . . his account of the making of one stunt for “Steamboat Bill, Jr.”—in midst of cyclone of his own:

“First I had them build the framework of this building and make sure that the hinges were all firm and solid. It was a building with a very tall V-shaped roof, so that we could make this window up in the roof exceptionally high. An average second storey window would be about 12 feet, but we're up about 18 feet. Then you lay this framework down on the

ground, and build the window around me. We built the window so that I had a clearance of two inches on each shoulder, and the top missed my head by two inches and the bottom my heels by two inches. We mark that ground out and drive big nails where my heels are going to be. Then you put that house back up in position while they finish building it. They put the front on, painted it, and made the jagged edge where it tore away from the main building; and then we went in and fixed the interiors so that you're looking at a house that the front has blown off. Then we put up our wind machines with the big Liberty motors. . . . Now we had to make sure that we were getting our foreground and background wind effect, but that no current ever hit the front of that building when it started to fall, because if the wind warps her she's not going to fall where we want her, and I'm standing right out in front."

Now, then, I want to tell you a story (this is no longer 'an essay'); for I once met Buster Keaton and then talked with him a few times, each talk with him as in a fog, voices muted, bodies rigid. I cannot remember any quotes to speak-of. I was very shy each occasion, made 'small talk,' praising some film of his or otherwise expressing my admiration—which always embarrassed him—and generally inventing conversation to 'fill the gaps' of his silence. He was never rude, simply preoccupied—shy too, I imagine.

He told me several stories; but they are as 'dim' to me as if they were my own attempts to think of something to say to him. I rarely looked up into his face. When I did, it was always the same, his mouth barely moving when he spoke, his lips incredibly aged and 'frozen.' I was always as overwhelmed by his presences as at that first encounter. Here's how it happened:

I was living in Los Angeles; and I went often to The Coronet Theatre to see old cinema classics, etc. One night a friend and I took 'pot luck' on whatever The Coronet might be showing. We were disappointed, on arrival at The Theatre, to discover 'the show' for that night was a 'twenties' comedy by an unknown, to us, comedian named Buster Keaton.

We went 'in for it' anyway but sat in the back so that we could easily leave. The title "Steamboat Bill, Jr." flashed on the screen; and the first long camera 'pan' across an old river town

had my friend and me fidgeting.

But soon some jokes came along to humor us. The gags of 'The Father's' disgust at the sight of his 'Son,' played by Buster, called forth more than usual laughs from me. I'd just been recently to see my father and had 'had it,' the same kind of reception.

My friend was 'taken by' the "Romeo and Juliet"-like development of the plot, he being involved with 'influences of Shakespeare on our times' or some-such.

We were 'guffawing' along with the rest of the audience and began, then, to notice a man, sitting in front of us, who never once laughed. We even made 'raised eyebrow' expressions at each other about it, 'shrugs of shoulder' and the like.

Then came the cyclone scene in the film. A whole town blows up and down around the hero, buildings falling and narrowly missing him, etc.; and 'the house came down' within The Theatre, too, everyone laughing more than I'd ever heard before, myself and friend laughing uncontrollably. When we had time to notice, between absolute fits of giggling, we saw the man's shoulders in front of us rigid as ever, not so much as a tremor of laugh moving him. We became as amazed by this mysterious stranger as we were by "Steamboat Bill, Jr.". Toward the very end of the film, the man in front got up and turned to leave; and it was, of course, Buster Keaton.

That was my strangest meeting of all with him, and the most revealing.

Later I got to know Raymond Rohauer, owner of The Coronet; and I eventually went to work for him, taking tickets, sweeping the place, and even delivering my first public lectures there, all for a room backstage and meals with Raymond. Thus I came to have several of these brief conversations with Keaton and to learn some of his story at that time (1956-57).

Rohauer and he had gained permission from Natalie to take the negatives of all his films from her old attic. James and Pamela Mason were living in the house then; and they were amazed to find that there had been enough nitrate film above their heads to blow up several city blocks.

Nitrate, as it gets older, tends to become so explosive that a spark of static electricity will ignite it. Just pulling the tape off

the film container can blow everything to kingdom come, including all future for the film. I risked my life once opening several cans of Keaton 'shorts.'

There was at first no money to transfer Buster's 'originals' to 'safety film'; but then Paramount decided to do "The Buster Keaton Story" starring Donald O'Conner. They needed to see all Buster's early comedies; and Rohauer finally managed to transfer these dangerous nitrates into 'safety masters' and useable prints. He also arranged for Paramount to take Keaton 'on' as a "consultant" for this Hollywood version of his life story.

One incident that comes to mind: Keaton was trying to teach O'Conner some simple acrobatics; and finally, aged as he was, Buster was 'moved' to demonstrate. In a brusque, 'off-hand'—but actually exasperated—manner Buster turned a backward somersault while seemingly holding a tea-cup upright in his hand. Actually, he had slipped it onto a table, mid-leap, and then picked it up again at the instant of landing on his feet; but the 'flip' of his whole body was so quick and dynamic that no one noticed his way of doing it.

O'Conner was never able to master or even mimic Keaton's tricks to any real extent; and "The Buster Keaton Story" was naturally an abysmal failure, 'box-office-' and every other-'wise'; but this movie—amazingly enough—provided the means for preserving Keaton's great films and permitted Buster himself to make his T.V. 'comeback,' etc.

Only Charlie Chaplin, of all Keaton's previous Hollywood friends, had given him a chance to be himself again in films. Charlie had cast him as a vaudeville clown in "Limelight"; but that 'work' was 'hooted' off U.S. movie screens by anti-communist committees, in the early 50's, driving Chaplin from this country.

Buster Keaton's bitterness was never Social, like Chaplin's; Keaton's stemmed from personal unhappiness, he being the most ultimately Romantic walking Tragedy I've ever seen. It makes me feel sad, in the noble heroic fashion of Michaelangelo, just to think of him, remember his shoulders—yes!, it was mostly his shoulders I remember. They were bowed without in any way being hunched. Yet the tortured feeling of them said,

with his every movement, that they should have been hunched. His shoulders were as if perpetually shrugged; but I never saw him move them with that meaning.

Raymond Rohauer told me later that when Buster Keaton left his first wife he gave her everything: the house, cars, luxuries, all the money in the bank, all investments, his personal belongings and, of course, the films. He just walked off without a cent and went on a long drunk, losing all incentive to even try to break into 'sound movies' and fight for his career, etc., in the changing movie-making, corporate studio take-overs of that time.

Buster of course would never admit to that story. I shyly tried to pull that out of him; but he always simply blamed M.G.M. for his whole down-fall.

In fact it was his wife's brother-in-law who forced him into the M.G.M. syndrome (1928) against his wishes. He was as lost, and continually abused, there as Laurel and Hardy... and in the same fashion.

Buster, true to the style of Romantic long-sufferance, would never say one word against Natalie, nor her brother-in-law, sisters or whatsoever had anything to do with her.

I learned from him (simply from the example of the haunting memory of his 'bearing'); more than from any other, I learned of the necessity for genius to maintain its forms at all costs.

This story of mine, and all the incidentals to it, doesn't begin to 'capture' Buster Keaton as I remember him; (tho' the energy of that memory has spirited every inch of this essay.)

The films don't "capture" him either. They are as a fossil is to the whole creature that once was trapped in sea-mud in such a way as to leave its archeological mark on The World; (all of which is to say, he failed to accomplish his own ends and made his films as innocently, finally, as clams make shells.)

He was 'a natural': (that's how I best remember him, going about his own business with a determination almost god-like.) His was a supreme indifference: (*that* the key to the aesthetic greatness.)

The day he was dying, January 31, 1966, his friends simply couldn't get him to lie down. His mind was fogged, his body

shot thru with cancer—though he didn't know it—and he forgot the names of everyone in the room. He died the next morning . . . and was buried without the name "Buster" on his tombstone. He had been playing poker at the time of his seizure.



JEAN VIGO

There was a boy called “Nono.”

Jean Vigo was his name.

“Nono” was the hero of a children’s story.

That story was written by a man named Jean Grave.

Jean Vigo, then, was encouraged to author himself as children’s hero in the tradition of The Jean of Grave, gravity, gravure image earlier than he could remember.

In the meantime he was “Nono”—this and “Nono”—that throughout his childhood.

He was the son of a very famous man—a ‘king’ among the anarchists of his time. . . his father one Miguel Almercyda Vigo, famous anarchist, pacifist, newspaperman—Vigo a name to be reckoned ‘anti-warrior’ . . . other than the usual ‘war-father’ son’s inherit—Almercyda Vigo . . . Almercyda an anagram of “y a (de) la merde”—his father’s name literairily meaning “There is shit.”

“Nono’s” father had a real name too—like Jean . . . a likeness of sound to Jean’s—Eugène Bonaventure de Vigo.

Jean son of Eugène then—son of the good venturer-forth from the shit of Vigo . . . No No Vigo—to be exact—was a cross-fertilization of these terms before he reached his ’teens.

“No” and then “No” again was the double-negative daily

catalyst for all of this contradiction in his life.

“Nono’s” godfather was, naturally, a “Jean”—Jean Jaurès . . . a ‘king of kings’ among the anarchists—Jean godson of god-sent Jean.

“Nono’s” grandfather was a government official in the French Pyrenees where the whole story begins—governing officialdom . . . French rulership over the stubborn Basques in this lonely mountainous region—grandfather Basque inheriting a government ‘post’ in this dominion . . . Frenchified fiefdom of even God’s mountain—grandfather somehow a ‘fake’ aristocrat in all of this . . . *not* bearded god-like defender of his shepherdly people—rather sickly ‘post’ man who died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty.

“Nono” had no traditional fairy-tale patriarch to hang his imaginings of family glory upon.

“Nono’s” great grandparents raised his father—were hated for their trouble . . . were epitomy of govern-mentality which Almercyda labeled “shit” and so forth—until “Nono’s” grandmother married Gabriel Aubès and took her son in again.

Gabriel certainly ‘blew the horn’ on this whole cursèd de Vigo bureaucracy. Even the terms “mother” and “father” were swept under-the-rug of Gabriel’s easy familiarity. Almercyda had called him “uncle” and his mother “aunt.” Gabriel was an extraordinarily good man; and he was a photographer.

Almercyda was most emphatically *not* a ‘good man,’ tho’ he was to be a great one, a martyr finally; the term “good” would have stuck in his stubborn young throat. He left the Pyrenees in his late ‘teens and traveled to Paris—where else? . . . the very heart of his proud Basque grand-parental power—and circled immediately among those most idealistically determined to overthrow the government. It was the exact turn-of-the-century time—1900 . . . the immediate end of ‘gay nineties’: and Anarchy was a movement more purely free of political usage than that it ever was to be again—young “Good Luck” Vigo . . . then than it ever was to be again—young ‘Good Luck’ Vigo . . . ically sure of himself, perhaps, than anyone was ever again permitted to be . . . this century—the 20th . . . ‘century of politics’ . . . about to polarize all Romantic thought—that surely governmental grandeur, and all parental authority, were about

to be swept from the face of Earth's natural anarchy.

Young Eugene took a job as a photographer's assistant. Within a year he was imprisoned two months in a boy's reformatory for the theft of 20 francs. It was then that he changed his name to Almercyda.

In 1901 "Nono's" father-to-be was again arrested for placing photographic magnesium in a public urinal. He served a year in almost solitary confinement.

In 1903 he ran off with the wife of a friend of his—the woman named Emily Clèro . . . Emily to become "Nono's" mother—set up desperate housekeeping in a small and dirty attic . . . shades of the "LaBohème" which "Nono" was to be born into—a world of assignations, manifestoes, etc., and awful hunger shared with dozens of half-starved cats.

Almercyda loved cats more, perhaps, than anything else on *solid* earth. Causes dominated all his *abstract* thought.

In 1904 Almercyda attended an international anti-militarist congress in Holland; and in 1905 he was organizing his own congress in Paris when "Nono," fairy-tale hero, was born.

Fog—not mists, clouds, honest rain and the like . . . nor some mysterious gloom or shadowy other—plain fog, it stinking of plaster and something like fried potatoes, old socks . . . not anything particularly dramatic such as sewage, dead fish, or industrial waste—just fog in all its unrighteous pervasion of city living: this is the image which, the smells that, the touch of which grips young Nono's clothing so that his flesh remembered feeling as if continually scaling, being the shirts he wore, his trousers knee-high, his worn-out undergarments slipping away down his legs, his stockings looped around his ankles, his toes continually searching the bunched-up mass of cloth in his too-large shoes . . . or some-such—his being a childhood of hand-me-downs from other families.

He was always the kid 'in the corner'—of the room where adult's 'high talk' went on and on 'over his head' . . . 'in one ear and out the other'—the drone of purposeful busy-ness hemming him out . . . each incomprehensible stream of grown-up conversation eroding his mind more surely than those few words spoken at him—he the kid up against the gray wall there barely visible . . . his eyes reflecting doubly sharp the candle most dis-

tantly from him—he lying down finally on his cot under tattered blankets . . . his visage still facing the whole room's narrow width—him pretending to sleep and dream his own dreams.

The talk almost always went on into the night and the desperate morning. Angry voices often awakened him. These busy adults—his father, his mother, their friends . . . the enemies these friends often actually turned-out to be—all these whom he loved . . . if they loved *him!*—were saving The World!

The words were often guns which smashed the glasses on the table, killed distant people, put out the light, and filled the room with fog. Their words were anything which could be hurled through the smoke of their breath in the cold of winter—snow-balls, bottles, bombs . . . their word against the words of others—beyond the flaking plaster . . . down the street—some elsewhere in Nono's imagination.

These people he loved were saving everything that would be good for him if only they—his parents . . . the many 'uncles' and their women, sometimes other children— if *only* they could win.

The other children sat with him in the corners of all the rooms—sometimes in bars along the benches at the side . . . smoke of many people erupting thru the flues of elaborate lamps—he and the other children smoke-watchers . . . wall shadows—shy conspiritors also.

Nono was always a hesitant whisperer at first—the fingers of another boy often closed to him . . . sticking touch that made for fear—the smell of alien sweat . . . stench of different cooking always—eyes of other scenes beyond Nono's walls . . . feelings of terribleness Nono could not imagine—strengths he couldn't match . . . or touch—each coming to him with fists in pockets . . . as was shy custom—mouths shut. They'd clasp hands, as was expected, and then sit. They were to be quiet, to be friends.

Nono would make a shape with his fingers. Some child or other would repeat the signal—Nono repeating then too . . . each beginning to giggle—that also a signal . . . a secret sign—each of them 'in on it' then . . . the revolution—whatever.

Their parents almost never noticed—they noticing themselves all the more . . . then—their being children . . . Nono's father sometimes looking over—seeing.

Later they told Nono he took his very first baby steps in jail—reaching out to his imprisoned father . . . he remembering—his father proudly telling of it . . . him falling for—toward . . . as he remembered—his father's reaching . . . his arms, his legs—his father's.

Nono was never sure; but the story was always—his father's 'pride' . . . his to 'live up to'—the very first unforgettable thing . . . they told him—to remember.

Gabriel Aubès enters our story again—quietly steadily exposing silvered plates, fixing the light that had fallen upon them, in his photo shop in Montpellier . . . a magical 'uncle'—dabbler among the earliest chemicals, 'fogged' glass, and magnesium flashes of 'still' photography.

Nono was sent from his parent's city attic—slat roofed and biasing smallness . . . their world of jungle struggle among live cats and deathly Causes—to Gabriel's home . . . Some comparative Eden of French gardening and provincial easement—each time Almercyda was imprisoned:

1908—two year's hard labor . . . Almercyda sentenced for praising a mutiny of soldiers and for insulting Clemenceau—3-year-old Nono walking 'on his own,' running, playing . . . him among the stalking weeds and crops of Montpellier—play-prisoner . . . moving within the stories of his missing father—

1910 railway strike . . . Nono five and climbing trees, the knee of Gabriel, and small mountains of his imagination—Almercyda imprisoned again midst railroad union agitators . . . his father somehow a champion to trains?—hero of locomotive . . . ghostly as distant whistle in the night, trails of smoke—Slash of policeman's sabre across the scalp of Almercyda . . . mid 1911—and on and on . . . amidst Nono's games—Gabriel's pursuit of photo light in the dark of his shop . . . Nono's search among the black newsprint for his name—VIGO . . . ARRESTED—hisc. come-uppance with every conceivable . . . always circumstantial—evidences of his father.

Nono dreamed him up—himself . . . his father—hero of Montpellierian fairy-tales . . . Gabrielian fancies—Parisian horrors . . . spooking the child imagination—the occasional fact of this sick man half dead from prison fathering him.

Then, sudden as Death always IS to the unsuspecting child,

Nono's godfather Jean Jaurès was shot down—the 'voice' of "*L'Humanite*" silenced... World War I beginning the very next morning—godson Nono nine at the time. A single shot—God's death... and a world at war?—yes, children always get The Story straight... personally, i.e.—to the heart of the matter. That is why they suffer terribly from each contradiction—thus want the story told exactly the same... as at first love—every varying time, viz: "once upon"; and "ever after."

Why, then, did Jean Grave, author of Nono's name itself, suddenly become an-other? Kindly, peace-loving, old Jean Grave was now, then, enemy to his father?—he who had written the story of Nono-the-hero?... he, Jean—Grave writing from then on in favor of The very War that had killed Nono's godfather. "*Temps Nouveaux*" was the name of the anarchist newspaper—'new times' supplanting the 'once upon' of Jean Grave's earlier writing... Nono's very coming into being—a 'War of Jean's' mingling in all of Nono's thinking.

And what of his father?

Almeryda began to publish his own newspaper which called itself 'pacifist' but praised a faction of that very government which had so often imprisoned him and all his friends. The newspaper was named "*Le Bonnet Rouge*."

Humanity—

New Times—

The Red Bonnet—

How these terms must have intermingled in Nono's thought.

Jean...

Jean...

NoNo!

Old Socialist friends refused to speak to his father.

Closest anarchist friends attacked the name of Vigo in their newspaper.

Almeryda began to have money to spend upon pleasure—proof-positive he was no longer a Jean-Grave-father... Nono no hero then either—suddenly 'There is shit' took on new meaning among the past acquaintances who spat his name back at him and his listening son. His enemies spoke of his cars, his lavish living, the many mistresses he was seen to escort. He

bought a villa; and Nono and his mother were sent to live there—St. Cloud... the very final fairy-tale “happily ever”—dreadful ending to all of Nono’s heroic dreams: a lonely ‘castle’ wherein he moved among impossible contrarities of all earlier feeling... a castle in the clouds... saint’s dominion—all that his parents had once despised now surrounding him.

He rarely saw his parents there.

He was dressed as properly as any French middle-class child—cloth cuffed... little manly frills of worshipful bourgeoisie-ness... straight laced.

He dressed as properly as any French middle-class child—cloth cuffed... little manly frills of worshipful bourgeoisie-ness... straight laced.

He was sent, by servants, to daily school—drilled in the grammar of conservative language... that which makes flat and mechanical the speech of all Gallic children—the curse of Richelieu’s Académie Française falling upon him as catastrophically as its dictionary of the French language had been shoved down the throats of a whole nation some two centuries earlier... crimping that happy waggery-of-tongue which prompts all language into poetry—only Nono’s *eyes* surviving schooled Frenchification.

Almercyda, when he did appear at his St. Cloud villa, was clearly sick—yet strangely so... medicined into an illness the boy could barely understand—drugged with morphine often.

Then, as inevitably as it had always been before, Almercyda was arrested—in St. Cloud... on the 6th of August—1917. Eight days later he was found strangled in his cell.

The first autopsy stated he had been dying of peritonitis (as if his own rotting innard, self-poison, had destroyed him.)

The first official statement said haemorrhage had killed him (as if 20 years of rage had finally burst the very veins of him.)

The police statement, a week later, said he committed suicide.

Those who’ve studied the material on Almercyda’s death have little doubt that he was murdered.

Nono was 12 at the time—was sent back to Gabriel... shades of Montpellier—was forced to assume a false name to

enter school . . . Jean “Salles”—which means both “room” and, then, “dirty” in French pun on “Sale” . . . “Filthy,” “Nasty,” “Indecent,” etc.—his emulation of Almercyda . . . Filthy Jean his new name, then, until he was seventeen—(“Jean,” note, first assumed by him as part of a rhetorical pseudonym.)

He began referring to dead Almercyda as “my poor little father” and to write to those who defended his father’s memory agaisnt the many charges of treason.

Almercyda had indeed betrayed every extremest faction of his youth and, as anarchist, had been traitor already to the whole concept of nationality. The one term he never betrayed was “pacifist”; and this fidelity beyond politics cost him all peace-of-mind, his health, his politico friends, and finally his life. His brave “Red Bonnet” published statements from The Left *and* The Right, so long as they centered all argument upon some possible end to The War. He forced himself to ‘sit on the fence’ between political extremes—to balance his passions in the service of Peace . . . absorbing the painful insults of all polarized friends who, naturally, regarded him as ‘compromiser’ — Almercyda, perhaps, coming to some sense of his “shit” as *more* than slang . . . fertilizer, a ‘compost’ of himself, for restoring what the earth has given—a sense of self his Basque ancestors would have recognized as enduring.

In any event—since World War’s beginning . . . humanity’s threatened death—Almercyda resisted all political passion . . . swallowed all anarchist pride—choking in terror of his possible betrayal of “There is shit” . . . dealt even with the government—was torn apart . . . within himself half-mad—with terrible inspiration. As such he set the final supreme example for his confused artist son—Almercyda the only antidote Jean was ever to have against the clutch of French culture . . . just as anti-political Diderot and his Encyclopedia might be called the antidote to Richelieu’s clutch on the tongue of The Nation—Almercyda simply, finally, recognizing something so simple as that ALL the ‘Sides’ of a question DO shun Advent equally . . . the very fact that French is ‘the language of diplomacy’ being its Damnation of all Poetics except the precise and half-mad poems of contradiction—Jean Vigo’s legacy surely Almercyda’s exactitude and crazy middle-class courage at last.

In place of Almereyda's 'Peace,' Jean had The Muse as his inspiration—that non-partisan lady of the artist's imagination . . . she who fucks with every man's extreme—the epitome of passionate indifference . . . "Oh, Lady!" as the poets painfully invoke her, etc.—she the wide-eyed Balancer-of-scales beyond every simple-minded justice and all human law.

But it took Jean awhile to get to know her—his 'mother of invention' . . . lover-to-be—post adolescence.

One could almost make a recipe for Raising Artists out of the events of Jean's childhood—the location of self in an imaginary name . . . Jean Grave's hero—the continual contradiction of self . . . "Nono," 'good Jean,' 'bad Jean'—the confusion of "worlds" within which Jean could never take more than an imaginary step . . . an artist's childhood conditioning very exactly metaphored by Buster Keaton in the film-within-a-film of "Sherlock, Jr."—each boyish attempt to 'take direction' interrupted by something very like a filmic 'cut' or 'cross-cut,' 'fade' and 'dissolve.'

(In case you think I lay too much emphasis upon names, let me quote Gertrude Stein's clear sense in the matter:

"I have found it to be a fact, that little as one can think it, which is the same as saying they do not believe it, it is nevertheless true that the names that are given, the given name or the Christian name does or do denote character and career."

(She proceeds to prove this statement, in "The Making of Americans," by her magnificent style of linguistic 'repetition,' until the reader comes to the astonishing realization that—of course! . . . anyone's name is the most often personally repeated word one ever hears—one's name is the very heart of hearing *all* of the language of one's living.)

Jean Vigo took his own whole name intact, finally, when he went to Paris—at the same age as had his father . . . 17—to attend the lycèe at Chartres. He lived with his mother Emily and began to haunt those same circles of anarchist friends his father had youngly known—not, mind, the anarchists of Jean's age . . . not turn-of-the-*new*-wheel's 'revolution'—*history's* anarchists were Jean's fascination, all those who might clear Almereyda's name, make his father clear to him.

Mother Emily was naturally horrified at this morbid pre-

occupation. They quarreled; and he left her—angered . . . both of them—over The Father.

One could almost make a recipe of Jean's Father-obsession—baked haunt of old Dad . . . in artist temperament—the making of a comic, rather than tragic, aesthetic. It is almost always Mama-ghost who prompts Tragedy, or at least melodrama, in her men. The Father Figure is abstract enough in its Geist to lead a son to wit—wit's end, finally . . . a laugh that tears the heart out—ritual sacrifice implicit in every paternal obsession . . . wit which twists the snarl to smile's mask of aggression—“comedy,” after all, meaning “reveling” . . . as we usually have it, these days, ‘to revel-in’ . . . “to rebel”—to sing at, always, the expense of another. But when ‘the other’ is one's own most likeness, then one *can* say “the joke's on me!” Taken seriously enough, an artist of comedy is in-the-making.

There can be no doubt of Jean's seriousness. He was “très sérieux,” as the French say—“pale, sickly, and taciturn” . . . as was written about him—a serious young man.

In 1925 he joined the Sorbonne, studying all the mental ‘ologies’ and ‘ics’ until he became too ill to continue.

It was in the year 1927 when tuberculosis struck at him—as it had struck down and killed his grandfather . . . Early death surely, then, a seeming familial inheritance to him—Jean Vigo, 22 . . . about to be re-born as absolutely as if he were—from then on—some totally new man . . . the artist-of-him a ghostly replacement for Father-haunt—all creation breaking loose from his pass near Death.

His father's friends sent him to a sanatorium in Switzerland. The woman he met was Polish—Elizabeth Lozinska . . . daughter of a wealthy factory-owner; and—of course—he loved her and married her and lived with her the rest of his life . . . Lydou her name—to him—from then on.

The rest of the story is on film.

“A Portrait of Nice”—this a ‘home-movie’ of the holiday resort town he and Lydou then moved-to . . . photo-/(almost seismo-) graphing Jean's own inner struggle with Almereyda—the camera shifting through these scenes of the French Riviera . . . as if in the hands of some religious initiates caught by earthquake—Jean's ‘Hell’ . . . the focus of this document of what

might be called "Krakatoa-town," "Pompeii," or any 'last resort' unthinking celebrants might inhabit—Jean's style (or soul) of the conscious naivete a tourist might attain shooting Vesuvius as if it were a fireworks display.

I call it "home-movies" because I understand something of the particular 'home' it springs forth from—call Jean a conscious "tourist" because I see him and Lydou in a 'Hell' they no-wise made for themselves... visitants there but to briefly 'beg a boon' of 'the dead'—their home there a stage... set-to 'the tune' of Almereyda's cat-filled attics—juxtaposed against the bourgeoisie antics of all Nice, also all Montpellier of Jean's bucolic childhood, St. Cloud, etc.

He and Lydou had moved into a house called "The Two Brothers"; for Jean was first to search for his father as part of "the brotherhood." "The Two Brothers," decorated and furnished by an old anarchist who had survived Devil's Island, was shared with a persecuted political cartoonist named Gyula Zilzer and a Russian emigrant couple, Boris Kaufman and wife.

Kaufman's story would have been particularly appealing to Jean who had, at age 24 reborn and newly married, *all* the problems of being the son of a famous man; for Kaufman was the *brother* (note!) of Russia's greatest film-maker Dziga Vertov. Vertov had been driven to Russian martyrdom—hounded by the communist politbureau for his unorthodox films... banned and despised by Red bureaucracy—as surely as Almereyda had been killed by French equivalents. Jean and Boris shared a bond—both to be 'true-to' the dual 'Brotherhood'... *yet escape* the fetters of martyred inlaws—which was to hold them creatively together... as director and cameraman—until Jean's death. The "split" in their personalities—Boris' 'fix' on scenes of Nice rock-steady as if he himself were a tripod... Jean's selection-of-scene and cutting creating the whole sense of Nice erupting—a schizophrenic perspective on everything they put their 4 entangled eyes to depict...(that word "depict" never having more meaning than when applied to the warp and woof of Jean's and Boris' work together)—accomplishing the visual 'marriage' of 'fantasy' and 'realism' as never before.

(Think on the particularly French aesthetic struggle be-

tween Moreau and Manet, Nerval and Zola, etcetera!)

Lydou's father had given Jean a 16 mm. camera. Some of the film was photographed with this machine sometimes hidden beneath a coat, almost always hand-held. You can mark the differences between Jean and Boris by watching the variance-of-style of those camera shots 'in hand,' some Jean's, some Boris'. Most of this Nicean portrait, however, is Boris' regular 35 mm. stuff—a kind of composed Kaufman box . . . within which Jean catches fancies of his thought—a kind of circus effect . . . centered on real wild beasts—showmanship which Jean was to call "point of view document."

The money spent on the film was Lydou's; and one has the sense, often, of Jean bringing clusters of images, like exotic bouquets, to his love.

Most have seen how Jean Vigo was influenced by Rene Clair and Charlie Chaplin. This is to take him at his easiest stance. But the first film-maker Vigo ever quoted was Jean (another 'Jean,' note!) Epstein:

" . . . photography in depth reveals the angel that exists in man, like the butterfly in the chrysalis."

This was the 'banner' of Jean Vigo age 20, about to be re-born, like all artists, mid-wived by another man's aesthetics.

(It is timely, within these lectures, for me to remind you that the word "aesthetics" springs directly from the Greek meaning: "to perceive"—*you see?*: politics is, of course, a game played 'close to the chest' . . . "now you see it, now you don't"—so to speak!)

The next film-maker Jean Vigo is remembered to have singled-out for special praise is Luis Bunuel; but this is the early Bunuel of "Andalusian Dog" and, especially, "Land Without Bread." It was Bunuel the 'black humorist' who inspired Jean to *loose* the bucolic 'fancies' of his childhood Montpellier like swarms of hornets upon all social 'realisms' which "There is shit" had brought to light.

(It must be kept in clearest mind that *both* 'fantasy' and 'realism' are styles—each a way of signifying . . . neither one more-or-less counterfeit than the other—both equally reflective of the unspeakable World within which artists strive to and toward Life.)

Vigo's third main filmic influence is almost never mentioned. It is the most mysterious, and the most natural, of all: Erich Von Stroheim—clearest seen in this first film . . . "A Portrait of Nice" being haunted by a 'Jacob and the angel' struggle within beginning Jean—Erich Von Stroheim 'the angel,' then of "God The Father"/Almercyda whom young Vigo simply *had to know* . . . above all else—whatever the cost.

It was surely Boris who prompted this drift of Stroheim influence into the work. Vigo and Kaufman acted catalyst to each other—each forcing the other to face . . . create/mask—what the other would otherwise deliberately forget.

Jean prompts Boris to camera fancy-work reminiscent of his brother's Boris had gone so far as several countries removed and a change-of-name to escape Dziga's *geist*; and he was never, after Vigo's influence, to reflect his brother's genius again in his camerawork—"On The Waterfront" . . . however pretty its image are—owes nothing to Dziga Vertov.

Boris, naturally enough, raises the ghost of the hated 'father figure'—Erich Von Stroheim's whole life's dedication . . . that theme of acknowledged guilt—embodiment of Father in hatred-of-self.

Jean Vigo ended his speech in praise of Luis Bunuel with the following description of "A Portrait of Nice":

"These are the last twitchings of a society that neglects its own responsibilities to the point of giving you nausea and making you an accomplice in a revolutionary solution."

Clearly he does not *choose* "revolution"—"Making you an accomplice," he says . . . indicating Dad's whole dedication—*for-in-as-much* as Jean's childhood 'society that neglects' was that of his parents. Jean may have *thought* he was indicting the lazy 'rich' of Nice; but the foolish 'poor' who entertain them are as bitterly seen throughout. It was the fantasy which *both* rich/poor create that most haunts all memory of this film—the fantastic "angel in man" . . . the "depth" of this film—the "butterfly" then of French 'decadence' rising up from "realism's" "chrysalis."

(I cannot help but pause to quote Robert Creeley's great poem "After Lorca" which achieves a similar balance of vision Vigo manages:

“The church is a business, and the rich
are the business men.

When they pull on the bells, the
poor come piling in and when a poor man dies,
he has a wooden
cross, and they rush through the ceremony.

But when a rich man dies, they
drag out the Sacrament
and a golden Cross, and go *doucement, doucement*
to the cemetery.
And the poor love it
and think it's crazy.)”

Jean accomplished this delicate envisionment of Nicean society despite his conscious self; for he surely thought himself to be attacking the same clichés as dear old Dad.

He must have thought of Von Stroheim's style as fuel wherewith he might fire an anarchist salvo against 'the rich.' Like Stroheim, however, he acted as if he, or Boris, *were* The Father; and, deeper than thought, these images destroyed that 'act'—stripping Dad... as did Stroheim himself (up against an opposite class of Father)—of all attitudinal bias.

Jean must also have thought he was attacking Nice itself; but Boris knew better—wrote later:

“He seemed to both love and hate the town...”: this is precisely what makes “A Portrait of Nice” such a perfectly balanced, unusually 'classical' work of art—working out of Love/Hate become one in the soul of the director.

Jean Vigo also said, in that same introductory speech for the 1930 premiere of this film:

“...I affirm, the camera is King—or at least President of the Republic.”

Strange tribute from the son of a martyred anarchist?—strange tribute to 'brother' Boris?... brother of the man who made “A Man With A Camera”—strange tribute to the machine which automatically rights all dark of despair with so many flashes of light per second, interrupts then the light with almost equal necessary dark, to bring every semblance of Life (light's choice in the hands of the maker) to life. The camera is

King to those most desperate for yin-yang; for it is The West's first meditational machine; and it is, as is most appropriate for 'Westward Ho' -ing man designed utterly for contemplation of movement above all else. It eats politics for breakfast, history for lunch, and dines on—who knows? . . . the day being young—Vigo one of its morning children.

There isn't much more to say about his life and work. Once we've got a track on his beginnings—fixed the fatherly source of strength in/of him . . . learned the historical aesthetics that shaped his young manhood—the rest of all his sublime restlessness is the story of how he simply did it . . . just that!—these other three films which he knew exactly how to make . . . what he was desperately after—a 'master' of himself.

It's a simple story from here on. He's Jean—remember . . . finally—Jean . . . Jean-the-father when a daughter—Luce (of "light")—is born to him and Lydou in 1931.

His next film, made in '32, is "Jean Taris, Champion of Swimming," a 'short' surreal portrait of this swim-champ conquering water in every conceivable way, concluding with his camera-created Jesus-act of walking on it.

By 1933 Jean has found himself an actor—Jean Dasté by name, naturally enough . . . (an actor who appears such a 'spitting image' of Vigo himself that I cannot imagine why no one has ordinarily noticed this striking resemblance in critique's of his films)—Doppelganger logic the only approach to Jean-as-Jean's last two works.

"Zero for Conduct" was completed within the year 1933; and Jean plays Jean as a "Jean" in the film—a kindly Chaplin-esque school-teacher . . . the only adult 'hero' of "zero"—Jean Vigo's coming to terms with himself as a childish adult. The setting is the French boarding school of St. Cloud wherein young Vigo had suffered some of the indignities which prompt this film. Most of the episodes were drawn from his later school experiences at Millau and Chartres.

The names of all the other adults in the film are clear-enough: "Sourpuss," "Vice Principal," "Principal," "Mother Hariot," "Maths Master," etc. The boy's names are those of actual school-chums Vigo remembered.

"Jean" is the only *created* name in the film; and the film

speaks eloquently for itself. One might only add the autobiographical note—to off-set those who have superficially read this film as “Red” . . . a call to revolution etcetera ad nauseum—the Chaplinesqueries of ‘good-fellow’ teacher-“Jean” do *not* lead him to join the revolution of the boys in the film: this character’s whole stance is rather to humor . . . to wit: he makes laughter of every situation as surely as Midas makes gold—to counteract . . . whatever seriousness is afoot—to dance upon every gravity equally.

The ‘friends’ of “Zero for Conduct” don’t seem to realize this happy stance anymore than the French censors who immediately banned the film. It is true that some of the scenes were ‘conned’ from Almercyda’s prison experiences—that when the persecuted boy “Tabard” yells “Monsieur le professeur, je vois dis merde!”, he is echoing a famous newspaper challenge of Almercyda . . . one of Daddy’s loudest “shit”-statements; but these reflections of Father are quite distinct from the comedy of “Jean” in the film—“Jean,” any-which-way seen as only humoring such revolutionary occurrences as he does at the end of the film with his stylized wave-of-hand: “goodybye!”

Many activities of both the officials and the boys are cross-cut so that actions cancel each other—diagonal movements of authority (“Come with me to my office”) ‘crossed-out’ by opposite diagonal movements (the boys marching off on promenade); the architectural opposition of many scenes . . . compositions ‘x’ing out previous compositions—convinces me that Jean Vigo more often than not set the camera himself.

The sound track also creates contrasts tooting against each other—drum rolls and animal cries . . . qualities of voices in textural juxtaposition; and both adults and boys do tend to repeat (such as “my boy, my boy” or “give me your paste, give me your paste, give me your paste”) until their statements have none but funny animal feeling—tone repetition (more than repeated words) draining all serious meaning from everyone but the almost *silent* “Jean.”

“L’Atlante,” the brave mythic name of a dirty Seine river barge, titled his final film—Poor Jean, with all his dreams of many films . . . stuck with a bedroom comedy script of the most commercial sort—yet Jean-The-Rich, whose sensibilities could

expand even this flimsy river-boat film to the seas of his endless imagination.

Jean Dasté again plays Jean as Jean—this time a newly married man and river boat captain . . . the woman Juliette—Romeo-“Jean” and Juliette, then; and Vigo’s inspiration is to create a *domestic* Shakespearian comedy. The barge is ‘the world.’ Its name takes history back to Greece (one of Shakespeare’s favorite tricks). The interior sets are created by an old anarchist friend of Almereyda. The only other characters upon this romantic ship are “Père (Father, then) Jules,” his dozens of cats, and a speechless idiot boy.

You can easily figure it out for yourself—old Jules, the ignorant man of the world (Shakespearean archtype) playing ‘father’ to all, pseudo-‘priest’ as well . . . tempter and temperer of this film—‘the boy’ Vigo’s memory of himself as always awkward child. “A Peddler” comes into the film to remind us of ‘sporting’ “Jean”—echoing “Zero for Conduct’s” hero . . . passing ‘fancies’ to lure Juliette out of this world—all Paris itself that peddle-shop whose chimeras and lefts and rights and wrongs do nearly separate the lovers for ever. Both Jean’s dream and the realism of old “Jules” re-unite the lovers finally at end of film.

Vigo has got his obsessions at last located in Time—you see? . . . perceptual—this fathered-boy-him . . . idiotic Nono—this peddling lover . . . “Jean” the ‘sport’—these many sides of “Jean” the young husband *in love* . . . Jean as Lydou must have loved *him*—swimming for his very life through the only dream that could make of him a man.

Jean the film-maker accomplished what poet Charles Olson was later to declare as the only really meaningful thing a man can do with his life in this 20th century: “to create himself.” Charles managed it as “Maximus of Gloucester”; but this desperate young Frenchman Vigo fought his way thru finally to plain “Jean,” a kind of holy filmic ghost of humorous Love.

Jean Vigo fell desperately ill at completion of the film. The commercial distributors re-edited it, superimposed faces of music-hall ‘artists’ upon it, tacked on a popular song of the day “Le Chaland qui Passe” and changed its brave mythic Atalanta title to fit their momentary concerns: “The Passing Barge” or, in pun on ‘Chaland,’ “The Customer Going By.”

Vigo died of pneumonia November 5th, 1934. The mutilated "L'Atalante" had its world premiere in Paris the very same autumnal rainy day its maker was buried.

narrative
as religion

Wife died of pneumonia November 5th, 1934. The next
day "L'Atalante" had its world premiere in Paris. The very
same abundant rainy day its maker was buried.

narrative as religion

INTRODUCTION

The first time I introduced Stan Brakhage to an audience, fourteen years ago, I had the one-year-old Bearthm, his son, in my arms and, as I discovered when I reached for my notes, a green salad in my jacket pocket, placed there secretly, leaf by leaf, during dinner, by one or another young Brakhage, presumably for later consumption.

What any of the Brakhages will do next is beyond prediction; the seven of them live in invention, in exploration, in perception. Stan goes at any subject by as many approaches as the terrain allows. He is the best proof I know of Vivante's image of the mind as a shoreless and bottomless sea. When my phone rings, and Stan's voice says, "Which is it to be, Guy, Massaccio or Duccio di Buoninsegna?" I settle back to listen to two hours of brilliant conversation.

Brakhage's lectures cannot be introduced except with the invitation to follow his mind with a diligent faith: he is going to climb this mountain by wrapping it with his footprints; he will come down again when he is halfway up, climb another mountain by way of digression, and then go back up the first one. He

shows us that to be interested in anything we must be interested in everything. This kind of mind is not an American tradition. We are raised to respect conviction rather than analysis, persuasion rather than interpretation. Brakhage uses up the average man's portion of speculative thought every day.

In these lectures he is first of all an artist commenting on art, a rarer act than we might suppose, for many artists can practise their art with very little comprehension of what their fellows are doing, certainly with a very narrow view. Eakins gave Whistler grudging praise but said he was a coward to paint the way he did; Picasso seemed a monster to Mary Cassatt. Brakhage has traced the history of his art as probably no artist has ever done before. He has seen a million films, many of them hundreds of times.

If there is a theory to be found in these lectures, it is that all boundaries with which we shape knowledge are not there. The more we explore any event, the more we see that the island is simply a rise in the ocean floor, and that the cells in the back of the eye derive from a complex marriage of sunlight and a daisy digested by a cow.

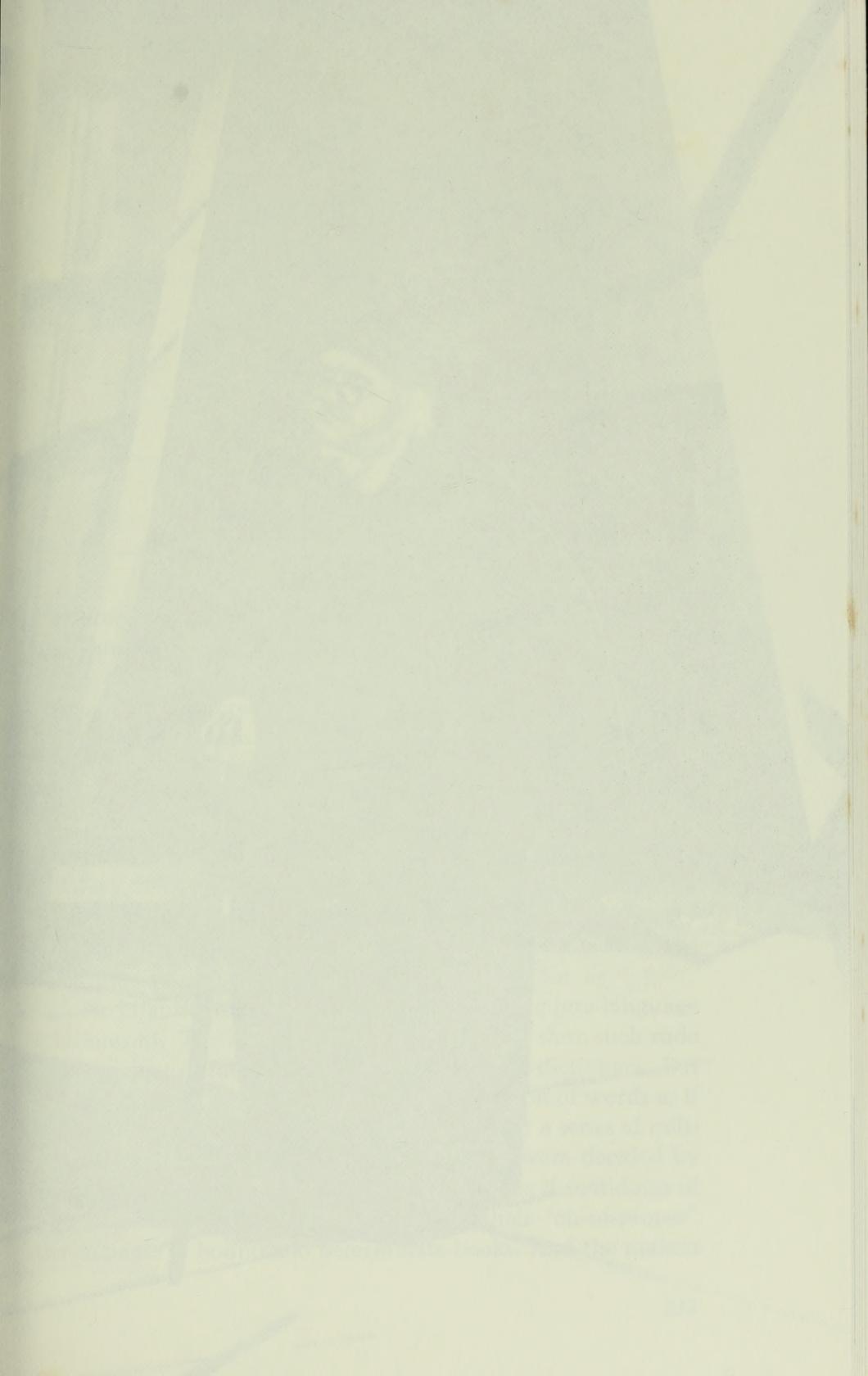
Biography for Brakhage is a drama of forces, and these lectures integrate biography and critical interpretation with an imaginativeness and energy unusual in American writing. There is a tenacity of intelligence here that keeps outdaring its own risks. The themes are origin and destiny: where a thing began and what happened to it because of that beginning.

Film itself is an art so young that its origins were immediately obscured in adolescent forwardness. So the first achievement was to recall attention, perhaps to discover the reasons for attention at all. Most of us, facing the history of film, are like Elizabethans who have seen "The Spanish Tragedy," "If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody," and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and are not certain who wrote which, or what the real significance of any of them might be, except that they were pleasant and exciting to watch.

Brakhage the historian and analyst of film is, despite the unlikelyhood of such a conjunction, as great a figure as Brakhage the master of film-making. How these two energies can flow side by side is something we can understand later. At the

moment we can only congratulate ourselves that we are lucky enough to be contemporary with them.

—Guy Davenport





DR. CALIGARI

This creature slouching into recognition—this ghost of languaging Rome . . . birthed in honor/horror of Caligula—benefitted from every fright of Latin Memory . . . scattering sounds into the tongues of conquered nations—“Cali,” as we have it straight out of the Old English Dictionary . . . “caligulism” meaning behavior invoking one of the most beastly of Roman Emperors—“Cali” fortified in the rub and tumble of European fear via “Caliph” . . . the term for Mohammed’s successors—yet “Calig” (with “g”) most centered in “caliginousness” . . . Latin reference to “dark,” “misty,” as “dimness of sight”—carrier of mists of alien/Arabian or other-worldly associations in the eyes of every beholder moved to ‘caw’ the “ca” and wail the “li” and choke upon the “g” stuck in his or her constricted throat.

No linguist would ‘pass’ the above assaying into language relationships. The makers of the O.E.D. would shun such rude usage of the carefully tended plot of their great dictionary. But linguists tend to ‘tidy-up’ the historical evolution of words as if their ‘rolls’ on tongues had been determined at a series of military board meetings—as if ‘wars’ of sounds were decided by authorities . . . ‘behind lines’ of their usage—as if soundings of language were an unhappy side effect to their ‘oh-so-proper’ ties to pages of bound and determinate books. And the makers

of dictionaries trace 'roots' of language as if each word were to be found in the petrified forests of libraries. No!—words take to the air off launching pads made of desperate meat wagging variously as every human moved to speech—propelled by throats vomiting carbon dioxide shapes for each launch... smokes of sound fed by the most inner fires imaginable—individual cell fire *informing* every utterance. The choice among words learned, as each human moves to speech—the constriction of the throat...as flame thrower—the shaping of the tongue...taste monger—the particularities of the parting of the lips...opening the hatch of that tube whereby we 'worm' our way thru life—these choices of 'stance' for 'breaking into speech' are determined *cellularly*. *Think* of the slurs of all learned language and the warps of taught word which are necessary to each geographical location. The cells dictate the word to be slung so as to approximate the necessary *sound*. It is the vibration of these sounds which cause the cells to tremble.

"Cali"iiiiiiiiii—said with enough abandon...forced beyond the 'soft pedals' and 'stops' of intellect—"Cali"iiiiiiiiii will send chills up the spine...that spine which contains the aged cells of the body that do *not* 'die out' every seven years—and on up the raised neck hairs to the top of the head. The central nervous system is carrier of these meannesses of sounds beyond all mumbly mouthing. It bathes in the vibrations of words directly and prompts each back-bark.

If the meaning of a sound be: "California, a state": the "Cali" of it will seem to attract every obscure and mysterious religiosity The Nation has to offer. Backbones of caliginous nature will tend to congregate there in astonishing numbers. The sound will draw them; and they will shape the sound to sharpen their means and various meanings. They will say that Beauty attracts them; and many "Cali" words do spring from the Greek "kalos"/"beauty." A twenty-some century rot of meaning—honey laden—effects shift from "o" to an "i" that sounds as an "e"...vowel Hell become—try "calisthenics," "caligraphy" in Greek comparisons...Shakespeare's "Caliban" intervening...down from Greece's "beautiful strength" and "beautiful writing" to current militaristic meanings and usages of engineering—"Beauty" itself, akin once to the Latin "Bonus"

meaning "Good" does *now* more usually mean "pretty": and "pretty" comes via Old English "trick."

Is there any "trickier" word than "Beauty"?—any concept more prey to interpretation? . . . it almost a prayer in itself—for example: to Kali worshippers, the Hindu goddess Kali Ma (the Black Mother) is surely beautiful. She is the goddess of destruction and death. "Her idol is black, with four arms, and red palms to the hands. Her eyes are red, and her face and breasts are besmeared with blood. Her hair is matted, and she has projecting fang-like teeth, between which protrudes a tongue dripping with blood. She wears a necklace of skulls, her earrings are dead bodies, and she is girded with serpents. She stands on the body of Shiva . . ." as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition, describes her. Kali Ma mythed wife of mythic Shiva—he finding her eternally beautiful as opposite to himself . . . their domestic quarrels the pivot of one of the world's oldest religions—sure thus sets our stage to/for caligulous thought: what spouse hatched Dr. Caligari as opposite numen?

The "g"-string tightens up the throat—fortified by "a" . . . "ga" aaaaaa—and rages into an "r" . . . "gar!", which affords the same relief as its "aw go-on-with-you" meaning—"gar" the last gasp of gentle dis-belief. Add an "i"iiii to that and you have a scream again. The over-all emotive sound of this word "Caligari"iiiiii is then perfect structural model for every successful ghost story (formula for terror)—"Cali" the engendered fear . . . ending on howl (via woman(of first threat ("i"/'e'eee: first appearance of ghost)—"gar" that part of the story where intellect seeks to disprove the events of the first part . . . the dis-belief of 'the hero' (a 'normal man': gar!) or 'his friend' (usually skeptic: "er, ah!)"—"i"iiiiiii at end the *deja vu* of echoing scream (which fixes each reader or see-er as gradual believer in ghosts . . . as surely as his heart beats faster, his breathing shallows, his hairs rise, hands clam, pupils dilate)—initiation of the 'religion' every ghost story seeks to be.

The structure (outlined above) as contained in sounding "Caligari" is, therefore, 'High Mass' of the particular 'cult' called "Gothic story"—it a part of that generalized 'religion' known ordinarily as "narrative"; for nothing can so totally

affect the physiology of audience as the ghost or horror story.

The heart may quicken in love story's service, the penis may rise and vagina moisten subject to pornography, the eyes tear at sorrow's tale; but the narrative of super-nature shakes the entire body and is the very foundation of every religion on earth! Every narrative is in the service of this 'binding together' which "religion" is—from Latin's "religare"/"to bind back" . . . as in "gimme that old time," etc.—"religare"/Caligari . . . the arrangement of the story—any story—which suspends belief in one's own senses . . . binding the attention to an invisible 'string' of words/sounds, acted actions, images . . . 'ropes' of air or shadow-play which hypnotise—spell-bind—have you 'on the edge of the chair,' "unable to put it down," as they say.

Who hatched this sound—"Caligari"—into contemporary meaning? . . . what priests loosed this string of syllables into prayer . . . which chief priest commissioned its images of desperate craft or—could it have been—Art? Was there an aesthetic to all this non-sense—this back-act—staged up front? . . . this that was to entertain most fearfully . . . certainly never meant to amuse; or was this 'black mass' of thought—taking shape as 'religion'—simply benefactor of a German art renaissance? . . . like Catholic's Byzantium, Goth, Italianate etcetera.

These chick/egg questions I'll leave to you.

Here are the facts and biographs in the matter:

The great French author Stendahl meets an Officer Caligari at LaScala opera in Milan, remembers him, jots his name into a letter published later in a book quickly out of print—"Unknown Letters of Stendahl"—

(One of those volumes whose copies shift among the dust of used book stores . . . lair of hidden treasure to all literati desperately searching for the 'unavailable,' obscurely 'theirs.')

One Hans Janowitz, a Czech, a 'student of Prague,' an infantry officer—returned from the front a fanatic pacifist—author who'd decided to devote his life to the denunciation of authority . . . one Hans—with small boy's notion of 'doing good'—discovers Stendahl's book in 1919 Berlin . . . the term "Officer Caligari" taking on immediate meaning to him—

(Hans' eyes having caught . . . thumbing through the book—snagged at "Caligari" as a name most fit to signify a mon-

strous figure of his imagination.)

Prague, Janowitz' birthplace, had haunted German arts since 1913 when Hanns Heinz Ewers wrote the movie script "The Student of Prague." Paul Wegener directed its photography to the most medieval sections of the old town itself and, two years later, directed "The Golem" in its ancient Jewish ghetto. Prague was to European aesthetics then what the region of Transylvania was to become to the next generation, what Salem village had been to the 'new world' imagination: primal spook scene.

("Everything depends on the image, on a certain vagueness of outline where the fantastic world of the past meets the world of today": as Paul Wegener had envisioned it—)

Hans Janowitz identifying with Hanns Ewers—who'd cribbed his script "The Student of Prague" from medieval Faust legend, Robert Louis Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson," E.T.A. Hoffman's "Das Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht," Chamisso's "Peter Schlemihl," etc.—

(Hans identifying himself with the movie's 'student' who... Faust-like—signs a pact with a 'devil' and loses his mirror reflection... as Schlemihl thus lost his shadow—which leads from-then-on a 'shady' life of its own fulfilling all the evil that the hero had sought to eschew... Hyde and Jekyll—until the student hero shoots his glassy doppelganger, thereby killing himself... overall tone and reflection supplied by Poe and Hoffmann.)

Hans Janowitz idolizing Paul Wegener—whose craft and commercial success consisted in capturing shadowy likenesses and casting them back as reflections of Everyman's dream—

(Young Man making idol of himself... Hans the 'chosen one' —to carry-on the tradition of his spooky "home-town")

Young Hans Janowitz in 1913 Hamburg, strolling along the Holstenwall and searching for a pretty girl he'd seen at the town fair—hears a woman's laughter... calling him onward into the darkened park—sees a young man enter the shrubbery before him... Hans The Voyeur of the sounds of their love-making—sees the young man finally leaving and then *feels* the presence of another... shadowy figure hidden like himself—

glimpses this 'other' . . . who "looked like an average bourgeois,"—as young poet Hans forever remembers him . . . rushing into the shrubbery also before Hans has any chance to move—

(Hans divided by the surest passion which splits human psyche . . . sex-block—leading to self-love . . . which always creates its 'other'—as Narcissus/his image . . . to love to death—

The next day's Hamburg newspaper headline: "Horrible sex crime on the Holstenwall! Young Gertrude . . . murdered." Hans still following the thought of 'the girl' . . . attending the funeral—sees his "average bourgeois" in the congregation . . . recognizing and being recognized by him—telling no one . . . 'till years later—

('till the creature of Hans' imagination—called "Caligari"—does bring them together again . . . him and his unseen self-love encoffined—in "The Cabinet"—held spellbound by the will of a murderer . . . a bourgeois minister of Death—the "Doctor"—in the normal tradition of Romantic literature . . . Heloise and Abelard, Tristan-Iseult, Romeo/Juliet, twisted into 20th century's homosexual setting of the Death-Love/self-love story straight at last—within "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari"—till Death do us bring together finally . . . all other/wiser Lovers vowing "till Death do us part.")

Adolescent Hans Janowitz going to war—infantry officer ordering other men to their death . . .

(Poetry 'giving way' to authority—poets becoming authors of prose . . . as Poe, Hoffman, La Faneu, etc., set the stage to scare the wits of countless congregations.)

Hans Janowitz, the homosexual, falling in love with Carl Mayer, Austria born in 1894 Graz, oldest son of a gambling father who loses his fortune at Monte Carlo and kills himself . . . leaving Carl—age sixteen—to care for his three younger brothers . . . Carl-the-mother, then, touring Austria selling barometers, singing for his supper, acting in provincial theatricals, sketching portraits—into his desperate adolescence—'till 'drafted' for the 'great' Austrian 'drive' to restore The Hapsburg Empire . . . World War One finally 'breaking' Carl—stepchild of the arts throughout his 'teens—leaving him under the care of a hated military officer psychiatrist.

Carl Mayer in post-war Berlin meets Hans. Both swap their

stories, moods and affections—their affectations...

(modes of personal myth—Janowitz the doppelganger... seeking reality's 'other' in a film of his own making—Mayer the victim of psychiatric 'war'... battling authority of father/Dr.-etc. for his very sanity—Janowitz dreaming of making a film *with* Mayer his 'loved one'... the projection of *both* of them—Mayer thinking to try writing... the one art his childhood had not exhausted—Janowitz naming himself as "the father who planted the seed, and Mayer the mother who conceived and ripened it.")

Hans and Carl attend a street fair together. Carl urges his friend into a sideshow titled "Man or Machine." They see before them a man of incredible strength. He bends iron. He lifts weights. He strains against every normal human limitation—muttering all the while... vague threats and broken syllables of be—seeming prophecy—all as if in a stupor... moving mechanically as 'the hypnotised' are bound to do—sleeping thru his every act. Hans and Carl have found their 'somnambulist': "Cesare"—un-crowned King... Everyman—to their thinking. His 'master' / "Doctor"?—in their minds—is Mayer's psychiatrist... as it is also Hans himself—in their relationship—who, had, after all, been 'an officer' in 'The War'... 'the girl' / "Jane"?—of their story—Hans' 'unseen murdered woman' or, perhaps, the dead mother of Carl... the hero "Francis" and his friend "ALAN"?—themselves!

They create a 'good' Doctor also in this story—"Jane's" father—so that there is a 'double' for every major character... except for the heroine herself. They create a village called "Holstenwall" in honor of the 'touchstone' experience of Hans. They imagine a 'fair' there with merry-go-rounds, sideshows, exhibits... Carl Mayer writes it all down to filmic specifications and is delighted when Hans brings home the book with the perfect 'fit' of a name in it: "Caligari," yes!—"Dr. Caligari"... The sound caught him; tho' he'd perhaps only thought to honor Stendahl—'anti-war' author... as he might have thought him—of "The Red and the Black."

(What Hans and Carl thought to show-forth—Cesare/common-man as sleeper turned killer by evil 'officialdom'... Caligari the bourgeois kaiser hypnotising 'the masses' to com-

mit his wickedness—was *not* what these two scriptwriters were able to effect. Instead they demonstrated themselves—along a line of terrible paranoia . . . the desperate quirks of years of experiential frustration—their collective neurosis. They'd thought to 'right' a social 'wrong' with this film; but they created a script to prompt religious illustration—pictures for the walls of lover's tombs . . . Narcissus' 'last stand'—shattering 'the church' of Romance: *thus* they were tricked into Art.)

Their script is read by commercial producer Erich Pommer—a young business-man . . . one with 'new' ideas—a man much 'given' to 'novelties' . . . later to 'produce' Fritz Lang's "Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler," "Nibelungen," "Metropolis" and Von Sternberg's "Blue Angel"—Pommer who founded Decla, one of the earliest post-war German movie-manufacturing 'empires' . . .

("founder" perhaps a better term than "producer" for him—Pommer the mechanical bumbler . . . every gambling business-man IS—whose lack of actual work often masks his being . . . not quite there—Pommer leaving no trace of his Erich self . . . child's self—nothing upon the film . . . for identification—'producer' Robert Meinert, years later, claiming the same 'supervision' of this "Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" which Pommer affects . . . the effect of neither man altogether clearly more than, finally, "Caligari's" guilt at the end of the film—)

Pommer says "Yes" to the script, and brags then later among show-biz cronies about his 'handling' of Hans and Carl: "They were talking 'art' to me . . . They wanted to experiment; and I wanted to keep the costs down . . ."

(Meinert or any equally able business-man could've/*would've* automatically made this same decision—the one which *most* . . . in classical accountant fashion—shaped the visual pieces of the film to its greatest mastery . . . that it be the starkest blacks and whites cheap studio lighting can effect . . . that it be set archtypally by return of camera again and cyclically again to its very few scenes . . . that it be claustrophobically 'close' upon every limited event—)

Hans and Carl want Alfred Kubin to create the sets—Kubin, the famous Czech Romantic 'decadent' painter . . . another "student of Prague"—creator of images of witch sabbaths and

such canvasses as "The Way to Hell," "Black Flowers," etc. . . . forerunners of Surrealism—that 'movement' *back* . . . stepping into Romance via Dreams—he in the Impressionist tradition of Ensor, Mucha and Redon . . .

(wandering thru ghetto streets of Prague—"possessed by an obscure force" . . . entering a tea-shop—"waitresses . . . wax dolls . . . moved by . . . mechanism . . . customers . . . phantoms . . . at the far end of the shop . . . its barrel-organ . . . a trap . . . a bloody lair wreathed in gloom . . ." as Kubin describes one of his afternoon strolls in "Die Andere Seite"—)

Pommer says "No" to Kubin—chooses studio designer Herman Warm instead—Warm the same age and commercial inclinations as Pommer . . . a trustworthy interior decorator—Herman lending himself so well to other's budgets *and* aesthetic wishes he gets all the 'top jobs' . . . 'knocking off' some of the best scenery 'movies' commissioned—marks out studio "flats" . . . later for Pabst . . . "The Loves of Jeanne Ney"—for Carl Theodore Dreyer . . . "La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc" and "Vampyr"—without once leaving a trace of any interfering Self— . . . style of whomever coming thru him/ 'sieve to water'—good old Herm . . .

("The cinema image must become an engraving"; and it was *because* the cinema absolutely could *not* become thus that Herman Warm's attempted 'failure' succeeds as Expressionistic art—each graveur set-to destroyed by every movement in the act . . . the slightest gesture breaking into Herman's scenery as if this film were a succession of shattering mirrors—)

Herman Warm brings in two painter friends of his to help him out: Walter Rohrig—later to work with F.W. Murnau . . . "The Last Laugh," "Tartuffe" and "Faust"—and Walter Reimann . . .

("Walter"—Germanic for "army of dominion" . . . Rohrig dominating even Murnau's "Faust"—his blackening visions abstract as thought itself . . . steering "Caligari"—as "Faust" later—into Concept . . . i.e. it *his* 'baby,' visually, above all others—)

Herman thinks Reimann to be the essential influence—writes: "We spent a whole day and part of the night reading through this very curious script. We realized that a subject like

this needed something out of the ordinary in the way of sets. Reimann, whose painting in those days had Expressionist tendencies, suggested doing the sets Expressionistically. We immediately set to work roughing up designs in that style...

(“Expressionis—tic-ly”... *this* commerce talking—“roughing up designs”... i.e. “knocking ‘em out” with ‘cookie cutter’ commercial mentality—making “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” function as if it were ‘the terrible machine’ it finally makes itself to be... ‘at one’ with its own automatic process of coming into being—)

Pommer wants famous Fritz Lang as ‘director.’ Young Lang, more known as ‘scriptwriter’ in this time of his living, begins immediately rewriting “The Cabinet” to fit his own soulful sense of worldly goings-on...

(that the original story be ‘framed’ by a beginning and ending which ‘sets-off’ Hans/Carl’s intentions as “crazy”... the Janowitz and Mayer plot seen by Fritz Lang as “tale told by an idiot... signifying nothing”—other than that their ‘communism’ and attendant sense of ‘social danger’ be Paranoia... best dealt-with as singular self’s delusion—to be pictured within the film as the insanity of the hero’s/Francis’ ‘mooning’ for ephemeral heroine/Jane... “What I have experienced with her is still stranger than what you have encountered. I will tell you.” —“iris-in” to Holstenwall... horrors later returning to Fritz Lang’s ‘happy ending’—whereat ‘the true’ Caligari, a kindly psychiatrist, announces he believes he can cure poor Francis, viz. ... now that “at last I recognize his mania”—)

Pommer says “Yes” to Lang’s vox populi re-write...

(this—a normal business-man’s decision—made a ‘cesarian’ of this film... its ‘left wings’ clipped... wrongs ‘righted,’ ‘middling well’ —Pommer/whomever ironically effecting that perfect balance to this “Caligari”—script which permits its ultimate art... that it be shaped most finally by the automatic system it was written to expose—Pommer being no human there to thwart ‘the process’ making this film of itself... that Cesare and Dr. Caligari have equal presence throughout—homage to Julius Caesare/‘classical man’ AND his modern counter-part kaiser/Caligari... all in the eyes of the film’s madmen—the singularly split personae of Hans and Carl.)

Fritz Lang quits—forced to complete his serial film “The Spiders” instead of directing the script he’d re-written to suit himself.

Pommer hires Robert Wiene in his stead—a *Dr. Robert Wiene*. . . (who adds authenticity’s final ‘touch’—Wiene’s father having suffered insanity. . . his father—a famous actor. . . ending his life in that ultimate ‘act’ insanity IS—)

Dr. Robert Wiene hires Werner Krauss, as Caligari, and chooses Conrad Veidt for the somnambulistic ‘roll’ of Cesare. . .

(directing his attentions from then on to ‘reining-in’ the broad theatrical gestures of all these stage-trained ‘stars’—flinging their arms as if to ‘the balcony’ . . . each slightest grimace just naturally made to impress those sitting in ‘the last row’—)

Krauss and Veidt both exponents of Max Reinhardt aesthetics. . . (the psyche of Max hovering over all of this film production—Reinhardtian fantasy in every shift of feature. . . the exaggerations of Hitler being born in these 1920’s Max Reinhardt theatricals—“insanity!” surely to Dr. Wiene the essential ‘realist’ . . . struggling with ‘the ghost’ of his father.)

The script is thus staged, shot, cut—film strips tinted. . .

(blue—flickering over all photographed whites. . . as if they were flashes of light off gun-metal—blues, greens. . . ‘sherwood’ greens making caves of every shadow, jungle greens dripping through the blackened paths of Expressionist sets—and earthen browns. . . sepias. . .)

The advertising department finally gets a completed film to distribute!

(The ‘ad’ hacks of Decla were surely the first in the world to recognize “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” as a religious experience. . . advertising it thus. . . in gothic type: “You Must Become Caligari!”)

Hans and Carl hate the film. They quarrel with each other about it—separate some time later. . .

(Hans Janowitz not to be ‘heard from’ much again—until he publishes his memoirs years hence.)

Carl Mayer ‘goes on’ to become the most famous script-writer in the history of film—especially known for his collaborations with F.W. Murnau. . . “The Last Laugh,” “Tartuffe, the

Hypocrit," and "Sunrise"—script-writing also Ruttmann's "Berlin, the symphony of a great city"...

(Mayer working throughout his life under the influence which "Caligari"—having a life of *its own*—exerts on every film...)

...till his death in war-time England, 1944.

(Other 'sets' of men, doubling their neuroses, collaborated on film to further the particularities Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer hatched from 'scratch' ...

Hans Richter and Victor/Viking Eggeling—good friends of no homosexual attachment—'charged' abstract 'object' with personality-split...Eggeling's death in 1921 causing a 'haunted' Richter to create a half-dozen films wherein 'the object' behaves as if it were "the sleeper" incarnate—animated film itself, then, 'the hypnotiser' which effects sokme 'dance of death' or other... comically in "Ghosts Before Breakfast"...with desperate frenzy in "Everything Whirls/Everything Revolves"—all Richter's actual object movements dominated absolutely by Eggeling's *masterpiece* "Symphonie Diagonale"; and Watson/Webber...Dr. James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber of Rochester, N.Y.—lovers made desperate by homosexual guilt—created the greatest films yet *directly* inspired by "The Cabinet"...it seen by them as the absolute trap of their circumstances—its images re-cast in 'mirrors' of their own most personal want...shaped to U.S.'s sex/intellect desperation in their version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"...formed of guilt itself in their Biblical personally prophetic Armageddon "Lot in Sodom"?—Melville Webber's death mid-1930's ending Watson's life-in-film as surely as the death of 'the somnambulist' ends 'the dream' career of Caligari.)

The shop was a place
I've never seen before.
That is an old place,
and I like it very much.

Was it not
what his mother
was the friend?

Have you ever seen
the shop of your father's
and the shop of your mother's
and the shop of your brother's
and the shop of your sister's
and the shop of your friend's
and the shop of your neighbor's
and the shop of your country's
and the shop of your world's
and the shop of your future's
and the shop of your past's
and the shop of your present's
and the shop of your life's
and the shop of your death's
and the shop of your eternity's
and the shop of your nothing's
and the shop of your everything's
and the shop of your all's
and the shop of your nothing's
and the shop of your everything's
and the shop of your all's

I don't know what
the shop of your father's
is like, the shop of your mother's
is like, the shop of your brother's
is like, the shop of your sister's
is like, the shop of your friend's
is like, the shop of your neighbor's
is like, the shop of your country's
is like, the shop of your world's
is like, the shop of your future's
is like, the shop of your past's
is like, the shop of your present's
is like, the shop of your life's
is like, the shop of your death's
is like, the shop of your eternity's
is like, the shop of your nothing's
is like, the shop of your everything's
is like, the shop of your all's
is like, the shop of your nothing's
is like, the shop of your everything's
is like, the shop of your all's

Mother's shop is a place
I've never seen before.
That is an old place,
and I like it very much.
Was it not
what his mother
was the friend?
Have you ever seen
the shop of your father's
and the shop of your mother's
and the shop of your brother's
and the shop of your sister's
and the shop of your friend's
and the shop of your neighbor's
and the shop of your country's
and the shop of your world's
and the shop of your future's
and the shop of your past's
and the shop of your present's
and the shop of your life's
and the shop of your death's
and the shop of your eternity's
and the shop of your nothing's
and the shop of your everything's
and the shop of your all's
and the shop of your nothing's
and the shop of your everything's
and the shop of your all's



FRITZ LANG

The shapes of his father surrounded him. His father's touch was upon every beam, floor-board, door-jamb, frame and arch. This is an old plain wrapper—he'd think—on father's floor. He/Fritz would have dropped it there.

Was it "Fritze" they called him?... "Fritzie," perhaps, what his mother's sweet voice would sometimes affect; and *that* was the 'good boy' syndrome of him. His father provided the delusional set—'naughtiness'... grandeur its effect.

Have you ever lived in the house of your father?—each architecture the result of his act? Imagine that. Fritz's father was an architect.

I do not know whether Anton Lang ever actually designed his home, the quarters which hemmed young Fritze growing up; but old Viennese Langs 'from way back' did surely structure all the environs of both father and son. Theirs was what European citizenry would term a "very old, well-to-do bourgeois family."

Mother Paula's family name—Schlesinger—would fall into a distinctly different 'case' of meaning... its 'spell' determined *at the time* by excruciating grammar of racial prejudice—Paula Schlesinger a Jew... the Viennese 'time' being 1880's through first World War *and...*

Young Fritz was born to Anton and Paula on December 5th, 1890. The records of that birth designating him as “half-Jew” were to haunt him all the German-speaking days of his existence. Those records were to cause him to “flee for his life,” like they say, at the height of his later film-making career. In effect, those records were to destroy him from then—1933—on . . . destroy the ‘last shot’ possibilities of ‘the artist’ within him as surely as if The Gestapo had imprisoned or killed him outright; but then the ‘haunt’ of those records had—thru the deadly fact of their existence . . . in the divided mind of Fritz Lang—*created* that ‘artist’ which the literal records eventually destroyed.

Young Fritz knew much of this even as a child. Many buildings which his father might have been given to create were commissioned of other architects who had married in the ‘acceptable’ Austro-Hungarian fashion. Anton Lang’s ‘limitation’ of marriage would surely surface as subject matter. Young Fritz would notice all nuance of hurt flit across the faces of each of his parents midst arguments—more terrible because of the silence their love for each other would impose upon any Semitic reference. There was, ‘from scratch,’ a *silent* half of Fritz’s ‘make-up’—came like an axe upon his baby-self . . . birthed a Judeo-Christian god from/of his familial ‘split.’

Imagine a sketch . . . quick thin strokes of elaborate detail: Viennese furniture scattered across a page—the thin curved lines of carved wood seats . . . curliques of antique cut—the irregular billows of comfortable sofas and over-stuffed chairs . . . plumps of soft charcoal smudging the drawing paper—hard architectural lines cross-hatched . . . vertically shaping the space of paper into a room—the Lang family living room.

A half-dozen ‘down strokes’ shape the standing figure of a man. Cross-hatches indicate the features of Anton Lang. These sharp delineations cluster around a perfect circle—his monocle.

Graceful lines of singular curvature create a woman’s body against the bent-billows of a stuffed chair. Soft smudges suggest the features of Frau Paula Lang, blending with her drafts of lovely hair.

Perspective lines and smudges of rug create a floor upon which sits a collection of angular delineations of boyish body,

topped by the disproportionately large oval of his head bent forward in some play. This featureless miniature mass will have to stand for young Fritz Lang.

The echoing rectangle of a window might frame some impressive domes and church tops—a hodge-podge of doodles to represent the international architecture of Vienna.

The boy is—let's say—seven years old... for it was the parliamentary elections of 1897 which passed a strongly anti-semitic platform: *thus* the shades of charcoal gloom which weight our picture—clouds of smudge which shape no object... a tension of line which delineates no act—the impending threat.

Such a picture might have been drawn by teenage Fritzie himself to please his mother... for he wanted to be an artist from early-on. Anton would have thought it useful play for-in-as-much as he was set that Fritz should be an architect.

The Mother will win—we all know that! She has the luck of the 'under-dog' in this struggle for her son... children always identifying more strongly with the weaker members of any family—those closer to them. But then children do tend to imitate 'the strongest' in their mimic of adulthood. Where this grown-up struggle-for-power is in nearly perfect balance, The Child shapes himself as from a mold of each—is "perfectly balanced child," as they say... no Artist ever arising from such. Will-to-create Art is hatched as Obsession—slips through 'the nets' of parental love... using the *imbalances* in parents as 'spring-board'—leaps to conclusions never dreamt.

Fritz's parents affected him with such equality that Art-as-such was *never* more than an idea-in-him while growing up... himself as draftsman, painter, worldly-bum dreaming of La Boheme.

But Judaism did surely 'mother' an aestheticism *in* him—a feeling akin to great 'unknowns'... dance-of-veils as 'daily' as if all great mysteries were vast 'dust-catchers' spread over the world—a paranoia that was to prompt him, now and again, to *fight* for his life. Anti-semitism was to 'spring' The Artist of Fritz Lang as very like unto the creation of the myth of The Golem; and Fritz was destined to a fate patterned almost exactly after Paul Wegener's 1920 motion picture based on that ancient Jewish theme. He was to play at being the bad/good

guy created to “save the people” but destined to be destroyed by his love of a woman and his lust for a little girl.

The Artist in Fritz Lang would, of course, have to *re*-create this intolerable theme. As the origin of it was Judaism *and* Christianity’s anti-semitism, Fritz was set to ‘father’ a whole new religious amalgam; and he did just that—he/Moses, by Golem! . . . creating a new shrine for worship out of his shame—as only an artist can! Narrative was naturally his metier—as Religion must always . . . must absolutely . . . *must* have a beginning, a middle, and an end. A *new* religion, then *is* a simple story. It grows to be a novel—what “the people” know as “new.” It completes itself as, say “Book of books” . . . all the stories of the tribe, old and new—anthology.

Lang began and ended with “tales told by an idiot.” Let’s see how he got to that:

He went to the Volksschule—Folk School . . . or People’s School—for a start.

Then in 1905—age 15—he started attending the Realschule . . . of 19th century thought—a science institute dedicated to ‘the new.’ His subject was Architecture.

From the age of 18 to 20 Fritz attended the College of Technical Sciences at the Academy of Graphic Arts in Vienna. Good Fritzle . . . model student—“a credit to his parents”, like they say.

Then he broke from home, bolted to Munich to enroll in a plain old School of Arts and Crafts, fled that for Paris and the ‘left-bank’ life, shipped off to the South Seas, skipping through Asia Minor, Indonesia, North Africa, China, Japan, Russia and then again continental Europe; Belgium, Holland, Italy, etc.—all in the space of three years.

1913 finds him re-visiting Munich—selling picture post cards in cafes . . . the circle of Bohemian fakery closing tightly upon him—and returning to Paris.

For a year he designs fashions, draws political cartoons for German newspapers, paints and sells tourist-trap watercolors of The Cathedral at Chartres and generally art-whores his way around the town. He plans to open a little shop of ‘what-nots’ collected from around the world.

The War saved him—he/Austrian arrested by French police . . . Lang ‘the spy’—escaping his captors in melodramatic

rapture... Lang 'the superman'—fleeing through familiar alien streets... 'wanted' Lang—to catch the last train to Vienna where he enlisted immediately in the Austrian Army... 'our hero' to be.

The War was actually a grisly joke to Fritz—as it was to so many others—; but its ironies were particular to young Lang's bearing... he fighting against the French who'd provided him with the only ideal 'mothering' home! "la vie Boheme" relatively free of anti-semitism—The French having settled something of their racial prejudice on the head of Dreyfus—; or, at least, he/Lang having been free of his familiar Jewishness in Parisian-town must have felt all Gaul his happiest grounds. He was perhaps "The Good Soldier Schweik"—providing his own black comic 'relief.'

He quipped, years later, that the Austrian Army was nearly as bad as the Italian. He shot and was shot at—Lang 'the murderer' Lang 'the victim'... wounded three times in combat—finishing the war in a Vienna hospital studying the art of the wide world of his travels and painting and writing stories. He was minus an eye—war's forfeit... something to 'top' Anton's monocle—and did surely not have ANY ideas of "Artist" left in his head... nothing wherewith he'd please either parent or attract the tourists—singular obsession his mien from then, for almost two decades, on!

Let's imagine what sketch Fritz would effect from this hospital bed—same theme, say, still singularly 'in his head'... Anton, Paula and himself-still-child—the three of them locked to this self-same drawing room.

Time has softened the vision.

Travel has given it a cheap opulence—exotic in detail.

Parisian so-called "Decadence" has influenced the vision: The Father, The Mother, The Child, are caught in a dream; the walls are smeared with anthropomorphic shadows... pre-figuring Surrealism.

Italianate "Futurism" has set it in a space for science-fiction—cubing all furniture.

The pictured window view of Vienna is reduced to walls—the pedestrian view of any city... sombre columnar walls—as "Decadent German" pre-Expressionism would have seen it.

The War has clouded the vision over . . . given it to gloom— as if it were an underwater scene.

The Boy in the picture could be seen to inhabit this space more surely . . . the man Fritz Lang in the hospital bed then could dream of the boy more nearly.

The theme of this lecture is that Fritz Lang based his every creative act upon infant-to-adolescent fantasies—that he sought to fashion a religion of them. Had he primarily ‘called upon’ Freudian “classical symbolism” or the “archtypes” Jung espoused, the task of this essay would be simple . . . several thousand years of Western Aesthetics would have formalized his conclusions in Art; he would, in fact, be very much more recognized as Artist than he is. As it was, his childhood choices of escape were extraordinarily contemporary—i.e., fashioned of the immediate so-called “garbage” the ‘lower classes’ dump into their daily living for relief from Purpose . . . his, no doubt, a reaction against the ‘airs’ of ‘refined’ imagination his parents would have preferred. He clearly chose some so-called “childish” escape-hatch through the servant’s quarters. Huns—rather than Grecian gods—abounded thru his dreams. His ‘dragon’ was between his legs . . . rather than via The Chinese—China itself an exactitude of intrigue to be found and explored as idiotically as Vienna. Two-dimensional Evil could be located explicitly in the criminal ghettos . . . master-minded from the elegant offices of The Viennese—as well as Chinese—Rich. His ‘aesthetic’ inheritance was what ‘sophisticates’ call “trash.” He grew-up into Art like Peter Brueghel, in that respect—his symbols the very most popular riddles of his childish time . . . obscure within the few years of his maturing—too “corny” for even the pun-slumming Sigmund Freud to have dredged-up in consideration—these the ‘dumb’ speech-songs of The Poor . . . poor in imagination as in everything else—this realm beneath the dignity of those who determine Arts the idling ‘classes’ affect to own and dote upon.

There is no way to approach the dreams of young Fritz except as one re-members the most intimate vulgarities of one’s own ‘cheap’—least ‘worthy’—escapisms . . . sexiest simplicities . . . crudest power madness . . . meanest worship—that which effects masturbation most easily.

For example:

Fritz naturally pursued a succubean woman in his convalescence—as he had once/often pursued her before on his father's 'grounds.' She would be his unmentionable femme... his desperate silence in the room of his parents—femme fatale—therefore that much *more* made-up of his mother than is as usual... his father's avoidance midst argument—*unusually* Christian then this Romantic adolescent ideal—black Madonna. She would also be Queen of The World—for how else would Jews end persecution other than through mastery of Earth?... denied 'heaven' as they Christianly were—she/Mother therefore Judean Queen—Fritz Lang thereby half-king. The monster-of-him was—as is normal—Father... this the intricate balance of his creative obsession.

Twenty-eight-year-old one-eyed bedridden Fritz did fashion these fancies into plays of adventure like those which had prompted his dreams—with no attempt at Art—'straight' 'pop' escape... copy-cattling the fictional 'pap' that had serialized his youth—writing ideas for movies and even whole scenarios—'thrillers' for photoplay... cranking-out War's left-over crisis-in-him as if it were a cartoon strip. This therapy cured him; and these stories of his were discovered by a visiting film director and bought outright for motion picture production in Berlin. Lang was released from the hospital in 1919 and immediately brought to this/THE German capital—that was then Europe's 'Hollywood'—to act in these scripts and help with their direction.

He naturally met the producer Erich Pommer and was furthered—one might almost say "fathered"—into new life as "escape artist"... as we might ironically—and sometimes worthily—call him from now on. The following list of script-titles is clear document of the 'drift' of his penny-dreadful thought at this time—his pursuit of The Forbidden-to-him Woman... etc.—viz.:

"The Marriage in the Club of Eccentrics"

"Hilda Warren and Death"

"The Lash"

"Plague in Florence"

"The Woman with the Orchids"

“The Tiger of Eschnapur”

... this is the story of an architect adventuring in the ‘pulpy’ jungles of a narrative originally ‘hacked out’ by Miss Thea von Harbou. Her novel was named “The Hindu Tomb.” With the help of Fritz, she adapted the first half of this into a film script and titled it “The Mission of Yogi.” The architect-hero is ordered by a demented prince to build a tomb to bury illicit lovers alive within. ‘Our hero’ refuses and is therefore condemned to share their fate. It is up to Fritz to save everybody from such a dastardly end in his scenario sequel “The Tiger of Eschnapur.” He brings in a second woman—fiancee of ‘the hero’—who sacrifices herself to the event and rescues ‘lover’ from otherwise certain death.

Thea gets the message, divorces her actor husband Rudolf Klein-Rogge and collaborates with Fritz Lang on his aimlessly ‘bogged down’ film script:

“The Wandering Image.”

It is soon completed and re-titled:

“The Madonna in the Snow.”

Fritz is sufficiently impressed by this collaborative shift of thought to marry Thea in 1920—this the year he’ll also see Wegener’s “The Golem”... remembering perhaps then the original version of this film—by Wegener also—released in Vienna the year of Fritz’s ‘beginning again’... year of The Great War, 1914—“The Golem” having surely been read or told to him—the dreadful *very* beginning of childhood... Fritz now/then—1920—in an aura of double *deja-vu*.

Up to this time Fritz Lang had scripted, occasionally acted-in, and assistant-directed films—with only one motion picture credited to his direction... it ironically titled:

“The Halfbreed”—1919.

The year of his marriage he was given to direct;

“The Master of Love”... and:

“The Spiders”

—he and Thea collaborating upon

this script and:

“Mistress of the World”... and:

“Four Around a Woman”

—starring Thea’s ‘ex’ ...

Klein-Rogge himself!—never after able to escape the manipulations of these two obsessional neurotics weaving their way through childhood ends.

“The Spiders”—subtitled “The Adventures of Kay Hoog in Worlds Known and Unknown”—is every little boy’s sweaty daydream of endless cliff-hangings endlessly escaped... as “Mistress of the World” and “Four Around a Woman” might be termed every little girl’s corollary dream—these very mellow-dramas the last gasp of adolescence in the script-writing Langs.

It was The Artist/Fritz that Thea never imagined in her wildest flights of fantasy. She was always at play. Fritz began again—1921—to fight for his... her—his/her life. Therethru this unique half-circumstance, we inherit the only works of day-dreaming *adolescent* Art that film-making has yet managed. Within the confines of this marriage Fritz had become ‘the jew’—usurpt thus ‘the role’ of his mother... loosing a ghost neither one of them would ever ‘live down’—Artist sprung! The more Fritz master-minded each script, the more screen credits he gave to Thea. She naturally-enough never forgave him for it.

Their struggle-with-each-other fought-out script by script, lasted a decade. Then Thea joined the Nazi Party and began to speak covertly against her husband. It is signal fact that The Langs had—1929—planned to hatch a crime-to-end-all-crimes film and thus had brooded upon the question: what is the worst criminal imaginable? They agreed with each other that the most criminal act was the writing of ‘poison pen’ letters and/or any deliberate hidden slander of another—character assassination, etcetera... the destruction of a human life by innuendo.

Fritz eventually decided Child Murderer worst criminal and created “M” instead of the film they’d been planning; but Thea did take the original idea ‘to heart’ and acted-it-out against Fritz with increasing ferocity—dropped hints, dark ‘suggestions’ and out-right lies about him in Nazi soirees, etc. ... (as a mutual friend of theirs—John Lefebre—has informed me)... Thea’s tales then—1930 to ’33—of unimaginable terror to Fritz Lang in-as-much as he knew that once... just once... the word “jew” might be woven into Thea’s conversation.

As it happened, she never did betray him ‘straight out.’ In

fact, Nazi Propagandist Goebbels asked Lang to join The Party finally. One long afternoon Fritz Lang sat listening to the Minister telling him of Hitler's admiration for his films... Fritz knowing somehow then—right then midst their interview—that he would have to flee by that very evening's train... last train to Vienna—Goebbels explaining what-all could be done between them to make these movies-of-his Third Reichian, etc. ... Lang checking his watch each unobtrusive moment—bank closing... on his mind... finally closed—Goebbels giving every benefit-of-doubt to Fritz's affability... Fritz Lang the desperate master of intrigue once again.

Years later he described his 'goodbyes' to Thea as: "the most decent separation you could ever imagine." Can you imagine it?... him fast-packing his suitcase and telling her—what?—not to worry?... auf Wiedersehn?... this is the end?

So much for Thea and all that she meant to him—this writ-of-execution he wrongly imagined of her... she only a papier femme-fatale after all. Their whole relationship was two-dimensional as hell, as script, as movie screen. He'd 'done with' both her and the art of the film as surely there—where World War Two began—as he had 'done himself in' as post-card painter and Bohemian at the beginning of World War One. He would go on to make many movies; but he'd never again have either the means or obsession to more than 'toy' with the life/death themes of Art.

What have we got of him then?... personal-enough to pry loose from the 'pulp' he was rooted-within?: a general 'drift' of six films which have influenced every ghost gangster horse-opera monster science 'flic' and all movie psycho-drama since!—a visual catechism of six:

"The Tired Death"

... released—1921—in Germany and then, as altered version for English audiences, re-released as:

"Destiny."

Then—a year later—

"Dr. Mabuse"

... this the title of two full-length films which were cut to a single 90-minutes and 'tailored' by

distributors to fit the public taste for gangster films—thus re-named:

“The Fatal Passions.”

From 1922 to 1924 Fritz and Thea researched, wrote and filmed two works based upon “The Nibelungen”—Lang choosing to adapt these scripts from the 13th century German “Lay of The Nibelungs” rather than follow in Wagner’s ‘footsteps’ . . . the composer having drawn upon the Scandinavian “Vol-sung Saga” and “Edda”—Lang opting for a more barbaric version of this theme . . . one thus architecturally starker—released 1924:

“Part 1—Siegfried’s Death” . . . and:

“Part 2—Kriemhild’s Revenge”

shown only separately abroad under a variety of titles to attract customers—for instance:

“Siegfried” . . . and

“The She-Devil”—etc.

The following year-and-a-half the Langs labored on:

“Metropolis”

—premiered 1927—cut to two-thirds its length for commercial release.

Two more films comprise *my* list of six:

“M”—1931—and:

“The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse”—1933.

In the intervening years—the late ’20s—Fritz had made “Spies” and “The Woman in the Moon”; but then he made an endless stream of films which need not concern us . . . anymore than they only temporarily concerned him.

The six ‘works’ under consideration shape a monument of exact proportions—that which I call “a visual catechism” . . . from “Catechesis . . . instruction by word-of-mouth, N. of action . . . orig. to resound, sound amis, ‘din one’s ears’ ”—substitute “eyes” for “ears” in the original Old English Dictionary meaning of catechism . . . thinking of Lang’s “instruction” as ‘eye to eye’ rather than the “word-of-mouth” to ‘mouthing’ disciple we usually mean by the term.

Fritz Lang had a prayer to impart. He made an altar of continually moving light for it. This light was so arranged and

re-arranged that the eyes of every beholder were trained to remember a general sense-of-scene from each of these six films.

“The Tired Death”: a wall and a series of verticals (candles) which would (as a single vertical) split that wall at end.

“Dr. Mabuse”: a mise-en-scene of ‘modernisms’ (night-club interiors, theatres, wealthy homes)—this jagged and billowing complexity a *facade* ‘warring’ throughout the film with *practical object* (hotel-room, police station, jail-cell, city-streets, and the apartments of the master-criminal) . . . the film an intricate psychological display of design—frivolous ‘femme’ opposite practicing good-and-evil ‘Man’—which centers on cubes of cluttered and uncluttered rooms.

“Nibelungen”: towers of caves, walls, and evenly spaced trees in shades of gray—black-robed and white-garbed humans enacting their passions amidst these verticals . . . all the gray-clad men and women being absorbed into their architectural surroundings—an endlessly streaming hallway containing finally only the memory of heroics.

“Metropolis”: tiers of the architecture of all Western Time—the up-reaching criss-crossed frivolous modern, the practicality of machine design, the peasantry hovels, the subterranean . . . each element threatening every other with all humans merely chesspieces upon the various squares of space the film screen variously delineates.

“M”: ‘zig-zags’ (of staircases, streets, high-wires) which catch-at human innuendos (the missing girl, the missing murderer, the girl’s balloon)—objects which become abstract in themselves (maps of streets, diagrams of building interiors, vague clues); and then (mid-way thru the film) a series of verticals which imprison . . . as the ‘hallway’ of “Nibelungen” . . . giving way to a subterranean room—lighted as an ovular hole in the space of previously barred dark.

“The Last Will (or Testament) of Dr. Mabuse”: wherein Mabuse (Caligari-like) effects destruction upon all the other architectures of the film from a single room!—the insane asylum his utterly practical ‘home’ in this film . . . Mabuse dying thus finally only haunting this (could it be padded?) cell and the world beyond it—(these suggestions only ‘guess-work’ on my part derived from accounts of the ‘plot’ . . . I’ve not seen this

film)—this (the filmic 'ghost' of all five major previous works of Lang?) that *must* have burrowed its visual catechism into something like an architected womb . . . call it: 'the cube that rules the complexity of the world'—a tomb.

Fritz Lang—as artist then—can be most clearly seen as *frame-maker*. The title "scenarist" takes-on an unusual *aesthetic* meaning in consideration of him. The stories are all borrowed; and the style of their narration is plagiarized also. One can learn from his *choice* of them what troubled him. One can trace his struggle-to-the-death with Thea the castrative wife; but there is very little aesthetic obsession shaping the plots they fashioned between them.

Far more significant of their marital fuss is the fact that Rudolph Klein-Rogge plays in FIVE of these six considered films: "the dervish" of "The Tired Death"; 'Dr. Mabuse' himself in both those films; 'King Etzel' in "Nibelungen"; and 'Rotwang' the mad scientist of "Metropolis" . . . his acts the primary sub-conscious 'father-role' throughout these workings of Fritz's imagination; but Fritz did never more than 'cast' him thus as from an old childhood 'mold.'

The Art of Fritz Lang is architected light. His narrative—thus religious—bent is devoted wholly to the continuities of surrounding and divisive shape . . . often as simple as 'egg and dart.' He said it himself once—telling how he'd "done with" all of it . . . in the 'silent days' of his film making—he'd write a list of scenes he wanted to film and *then* fashion a plot to shoot right through them.

"The Tired Death" borrows its narrative structure from D.W. Griffith's "Intolerance" and a 'host' of similarly motivated German films 'of the times'; but one can *see* the extent-to-which Lang dominates scenery when one realizes that the official designers of "The Tired Death"—Herman Warm and Walter Rohrig . . . of "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" fame—managed almost nothing of their absolutist style 'in the face' of Fritz's simple visual obsession.

The whole serial criminal concept of "Mabuse" comes out of Lang's earlier "Spiders," which was 'lifted' piece-meal from "Fantomas" and "Les Vampires" of the great French director Louis Feuillade.

"The Nibelungen" is 'heisted' not only from the 13th century saga, but its narrative style is stolen from 19th century plays by Friedrich Hebbel. Only its haunting transparencies of architecture reflect the obsessive familial 'seed' thus soulfulness of Lang.

Thea and Fritz were openly accused of stealing "Metropolis" by Frau Debeke, who claimed to have sent a script alike in every major plot detail to Erich Pommer and the Langs. They'd not have needed her script to plagiarize the themes of "Metropolis." Karel Capek's "R.U.R.," much in H.G. Wells novels, and the Russian film "Aelita" would have served for original source of the plodding story of their film.

"M" was, of course, drawn from newspaper accounts of the child-murderer of Dusseldorf; yet where else but from Fritz Lang's most desperate sense-of-self 'as such' could Fritz have drawn the careful 'net' of diagonals eventually imprisoning 'the murderer' and then diffusing into the egg-shaped lighting of the room—or womb—of his trial. The first-half of the film, actor Peter Lorre—playing 'child-murderer'—is only seen as shadow or in reflection... he then presented *first person singular* until Fritz Lang begins to fashion the compositional 'cage' which will contain him—Lang obviously 'curing' himself in the making of this film... somewhat as The Boston Strangler cured himself finally via child murder. "I'm always afraid of myself... of people... of ghosts," recites actor Lorre—on his right a perspective suggesting hallway, himself backed by a solid/white wall, verticals, 'framing him,' and the whole lighting composition of his figure unusually ovular... 'the judges' of "M" sitting in a nest of overlapping spots—or 'eggs'—of illumination.

"Metropolis" presents the greatest exposition of 'Langian' setting. The plot best—of all his work—affords this largess of architected light. It even ends on Church to permit a traditional 'worship' of ornamental sculpture (The Seven Deadly Sins and various gothic monsters of church roof) and the practicality of arch wall door stone-steps etcetera (this scene in homage of father Anton as surely as the sequence of The Tower of Babel—patterned after Breughel—can be attributed to the influence of his Jewish mother stirring dreams/obsessions...)

“hierarchitectitiptitoplofticals”—as James Joyce put it—in young Fritzie Lang.)

The ‘Key’ to the architectural continuities of “Metropolis” could be better followed if we had the film in its full length. Commercial distributors cut ‘the hero’s’ mother out of the film altogether. She had been named “Hel,” had run away from “Rotwang”—Klein-Rogge’s part—to marry “Joh” . . . Jehovan Federson (changed to “John” in all English sub-titles)—and bear on her deathbed young Freder/ ‘our hero’ . . . named thus “The Free”/ ‘son of The Free’ with pun also upon “Peace”/ ‘son of Peace,’ ‘Christ’ then to the scriptwriting Langs—“Maria”/ ‘our heroine’ being ‘The Virgin Mary’ then . . . “Mother of God” . . . thus “Joh’s” wife . . . thus “Rotwang’s” mistress—THUS the extreme distraction of “son”/“Freder” desperately trying to extract this substitute mother for himself. He must kill “Rotwang” of the church roof-top AND triumph-over ‘God The Father’/“Joh” without guilt. The commercial distributors cut most of the scenes between the girl “Maria” and “Rotwang”/ Klein-Rogge—old “red cheek” . . . as his name means in symbolic German . . . ‘he who gets slapped’—scenes deleted in which this ‘mad scientist’ begins to believe Maria is really his long dead mistress . . . *thus* does he pursue her . . . *thus* fashioning of her a mechanical ‘dolly’ of his own—this whole film, as ‘butchered’ by commerce, often narratively inexplicable . . . lacking ‘Hel’ . . . lacking Thea . . . lacking Paula. And yet these ‘cuts’ don’t affect the essential Art a jot! It/Lang’s Art is visually composed *framing* for a sketch of Fritz’s youth. The ‘war’ of ‘femme’ and ‘man’ is fought by shape alone in this film . . . each commercial ‘cut’ acting upon “Metropolis” as winds, rain, barbarians, etc., do upon classical edifice . . . the ruins of “Metropolis” architectural-enough to evoke the whole majesty of his neurosis step by movie step—the ‘vault’ of his thought encompassing mom/dad egg/dart Judeo/Christian quibbling since the world began.

Having solved Anton and Paula’s problems, Fritzie thrashed-about ‘a bit’ and then solved his own adolescences in “M.” He wrote “The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse”—as he says—“practically alone.” Then he returned penniless to Austria and filmed a comedy—Molnar’s “Liliom”—in which ‘the artist hero’ goes

to a comic 'heaven.'

His next . . . and final . . . stop was Hollywood.



F. W. MURNAU

“Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) the general name of a series of wars in Germany which began formally with the claim of Frederick the elector palatine to the throne of Bohemia and ended with the treaty of Westphalia. It was primarily a religious war and was waged with the bitterness characteristic of such wars...” (The Encyclopedia Britannica—11th edition)

Once upon this time there was a fellow from Westphalia known to his friends as ‘growly’—a ‘murren’-chap’... given to ‘grumbling’ — ‘Murrisch’ in his extremes... “sullen, surly”— ‘murmein’... the onomatopoetic root of his name in “mur-mur”—or “Murr,” as he was sometimes known ‘for short’... anthropomorphic nick-name given him in friendly honor ‘after’ “Murr” the tom-cat of German fables—“Na” added affectionately by those who called him in his childhood... “well! come now!—mach! now then! come, be quick”... etc.—“Murnau” the eventual evolution of his family name.

The Murnau family certainly began with him. A nobleman dubbed him “Plumpe” for services in the “30 years’ war”—“Fat Cat” then his nom-de-guerre... or something more-like “Tom The Blunt”... “Coarse Cat”... or “Plunderer Tom”—this “Plumpe”=term a designation, equivalent to ‘captain,’ created in these 30-year-fusses which were known as the war more

finally fought for 'plunder' than any religious or political matter . . . the survival of every warrior-band more dependent upon theft of food than on any pitch of battle—"Murnau The Food Gatherer" perhaps his 'rank's' ultimate meaning.

It is natural then that "Plumpe" become a petti-bourgeois 'title' handed-down from father to son among Murnau tradesmen for the 300 years of 'the rise of the middle classes'—from the protestant reformation to the 19th century triumph of 'industry' at last.

In the 1880's a wealthy German textile merchant did no doubt use this term "Plumpe" as 'plume' to help him woo the daughter of the mayor of a Swedish town. He won her—hand, heart, and good family name—and took her home with him to Bielefeld . . . "long plain field" or 'Plainfield'—as it means—a small farm community in the region of Westphalia.

This successful merchant—this 'king' . . . among the multitude of middling-class 'kings'—and his respectable wife . . . daughter of politics . . . gave birth to three sons—this a classical myth-match then!

The first-born—Robert . . . "bright in fame"—as the dictionary glosses the ruder meaning of his name . . . "from Old French *rober*, to steal"—was to grow-up and become a municipal officer . . . 'apple' of mother's eye.

The second son—born December 28th, 1888 . . . in the turning of the year—was named Friedrich . . . after Frederick the elector palatine? . . . Frederick The Great?—"peaceful ruler," as the dictionary puts it—and then 'crowned' Wilhelm several years later . . . Friedrich his 'Christian name' . . . Wilhelm something more barbaric given him at his christening—Friedrich-(hyphen)-Wilhelm Plumpe Murnau. He grew-up to become 'our hero' . . . perhaps the greatest story-teller Cinema has yet fostered—his variously divided-self the subject of this lecture.

The third and last boy to be born was given the utterly Gothic name Bernard—"bold as a bear"—; but he was to follow timidly 'in the footsteps' of Fred-The-Older until . . . outstripped by The Great F.W. Murnau-to-be . . . the world lost sight of him.

Three brothers growing-up among the animal husbandry

and season crops of surrounding farms . . . only one of them ever able to make-use of these forms ultimately—three brothers sheltered by ‘the good life’ of their bourgeois parents . . . only one of them, after, able to eschew these comforts of home hearth wealth/health happiness and all such as bait the goals of most men to some repetition of parental living—three sons, then . . . one of them dis-similar as the hidden ‘difference’ which destined his parent’s marriage . . . only one—Friedrich-Wilhelm—to reveal the terrible secrets of his family’s skeletal closet. When?—one wonders—did Friedrich open his Pandora-box and sight Death! . . . was it that he was privy to some parental argument his brothers were spared? . . . was it some coitus he interrupted when he’d come, perhaps mid night, longing for mama?—he perhaps arriving/crying for a glass of water or comfort from terror . . . at the doorway of his parents—his ears aware of the rhythmic screams within . . . burning shyness into him from then on—his hand turning the knob . . . release of all the evil in the world-to-him—his eyes . . . oh! his eyes! . . . struck by the dark animal hump of his father . . . shadow of all shadows . . . never even consciously memorable after—his eyes taking-in . . . ‘taken in’ . . . to primal scene—his seeing for ever after *a fact* beyond all talking or hope of explanation in his home. He was—anyhow—stuck with sight of *something* which thenceforth was solely in his eyes . . . *un*-utterable as Death—i.e. something which could only be approached . . . *never* lived-through; for he had been transformed then at some-such instant of his childhood as if his younger self were turned tomb-stone—he/ ‘changling’ then on for the rest of his desperate living: he had *become* ‘mama’ for an instant of identifying fear and/or want; and he had thereby learned a magic old and dreadful as irreducible fact . . . a simple story—yin/yang wu/woe-man . . . “*lubh*, to desire”—lief/leman . . . “leofman”—A.S. “leof, dear” or “bread”—wifman/wife . . . or as in the O.E.D.: “whoman . . . wooman . . . woman . . . oman,” etc.—these last the extents of Middle European language attempting to speak for the female creature on manly earth.

Friedrich-Wilhelm had ‘the story’ straight ‘on sight,’ but in such-wise terrible form it became a religious mystery to him—a hidden icon of the mind . . . something to be alluded-to in

awe—foresworn to secrecy as he necessarily was. His primal scene—whatever it was—did surely occur before speech.

Friedrich rummaged books, sure-enough, to get at it. He had an aunt—Aunt Anne—who provided an ‘out’ from his bucolic home. She lived in Kassel; and her large library was a ‘world’ millions-of-miles ‘off’ the down-to-earth home he’d come-from. Aunt Anne brought out all the artist-of-him he was to know when young. She listened to his dreams—he being a ‘heavy’ dreamer...nights forever fraught with tossings-and-turns in sleep (which even his brother Robert remembered of him)—day and night dreams continually working-away at his experience of himself.

From age eight on Friedrich directed theatre pieces for the audience of Anne. There was a cousin-of-his—living also in Kassel—who must have been Friedrich’s first dramatic ‘stand-in’...acting parts of Friedrich-Wilhelm Plumpe’s psyche in these theatrical beginnings of Director Murnau-to-be—his/Friedrich’s wish to direct an invented ‘him’/Hero moving within the confines of some certain room each stage *actually* is...this playmate-cousin surely sometimes Fred-The-Great—peacemaker...sometimes helmeted Will—warrior of old...sometimes Tomcat, meow-ing lover—mocking amorality—as children do...sometimes Woman in Aunt Anne’s clothes.

With a cousin for variously altering ego and a library bigger than any world previously known, Kassel became his ‘grounds for separation’ from both his parents and brothers...they surely no longer understanding him: he was affecting to read—and act out—Schopenhauer, Ibsen, Nietzsche, Dostoievsky, and Shakespeare... (as brother Robert reported specifically years later.)

Friedrich, naturally enough, went to school in Kassel; and then at 18 left even Anne’s home to begin his studies in The University at Heidelberg. It was here he was to meet the man who played perfect alter-ego to every theme he’d imagined of himself in his desperate attempt to escape these origins constricting him...the Westphalian peacefulness always absolutely foreign to his own ‘warring’ insides...the petti-bourgeois mentality of his home which—as veil—he’d torn to pieces when he was young beyond remembering.

Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele was certainly everything likely-opposite to all that young Murnau knew of himself. He was a year older—thus subject to idolization. His father was a rich city banker...the very name of him be-speaking “honor” of family “tree”—‘Hans’ an invocation of “God” himself; and “Degele” an exotic Frenchification Hans had attached to himself in exquisite affectation...meaning “thaw.” Hans had world-widely traveled, studied philosophy in Berlin, been proclaimed “Poet” by those students given to knowledge of such things, and then had come to Heidelberg to major in Literature. Hans was an ‘*only* son,’ completely adored and supported by his parents. Friedrich-Wilhelm naturally-enough fell in love with him.

(Brother Robert Murnau—chronicaller of many of the events in the life of ‘our hero’...in a book titled: “My Brother Friedrich Murnau”—writes of two women who had a strong influence on Friedrich in early childhood...both older women...both frustrating him terribly: were these—one wonders—surrogates for Mother Murnau and Aunt Anne? These women—who/how-some-ever they were—can be imagined only in some context as un-utterable as that which shaped Friedrich’s original toss-of-dreams...ladies unreal as Hell to him desiring them—himself the object of every amoral affection.)

Friedrich (naturally enough) fell in love with Hans—himself loved in return...they ‘being each other’—like they say—in each the other’s company. Thus they took vacations together in Hans’ home; and—once again—Friedrich became ‘as a son’ to another family...The Ehrenbaums treating him as one of their own.

It was during this time that Friedrich-Wilhelm Plumpe ‘dropped’ his own ancestral title as if it were baby-fat—became Friedrich Murnau...possibly ‘Fritz’ even—in homage of his worthily-title friend. He changed his studies...along this way...: Dramaturgy and German Literature to accomplish a PhD. in Philosophy—the abandoned subject of Hans—at the age of 24. He took vacations in Paris—became ‘worldly man’ after-the-heart of Hans. He wrote plays, directed and staged them successfully... ‘caught the eye’ of Max Reinhardt—no less!—and directed in the Reinhardt Theatre in Heidelberg,

vacationing in Zurich, Switzerland, to study further with the great Max... whose influence was to counter-balance his own idiosyncracies all his life—another doppelganger for him then... Max Reinhardt the homosexual “father” to his poetic ‘brotherhood’ with Hans: Murnau liking best to recite—of all Max’s writing—“Der Todspieler”/“The Death Actor.”

In his 25th year Friedrich inexplicably switches his “studies’ to Music. One can not help but see him as ‘thrashing’ insomniac... these—the hard realities of choice... these thoughts what-not to do, what do with himself?—halved in affection for Hans—dividing him.

The year is 1913. Thus both Hans and Friedrich are drafted into The German Army Air Force. Both are trained as pilots.

This was the era of the offspring of Pegasus—these World War I airplanes... made of wood cloth glue and a minimum of metallic parts—every boy’s dream of flying hobby-horse... light enough to bounce buck leap with every gust of funneling air—making knights, as ‘of old,’ of each warrior pilot aloft.

One can easily imagine Murnau’s christening-name coming into use again, as comrades would pay him mock-honor in homage to Kaiser Wilhelm... ‘nicking’ him “Kaiser”—or “Willie” even—in the jovial aristocratic manner which has become ‘legend’ of these fliers... ‘horsemen’ of an ‘apocalypse’ such as the world had never seen before.

Can’t you see him?—Wilhelm Murnau... hooded in black leather... goggles reflecting clouds where his eyes would otherwise be—Hans too... his fluttering scarf—Degele—a pennant in the largest bloody arena men had yet known.

Murnau was to write, later: “Nothing can be compared to flying”; and he was to speak of the physical feeling of it... kinesthesia—the physical feeling of flying through the air—incomparable... (something like the remembered sensation at ‘center’ of sexual dream—wet dream—, as is known to psychoanalysts studying such kins-of-feeling). Murnau was to say, at the height of his motion picture career, that even film-making could not compare with the experience of flying. Little else is known about this period of his life other than that praise-of-his for flight... and that he wished to continue—as a pilot—the rest of his living.

He serves with The Guard of Potsdam. Hans is stationed elsewhere. And they were never closer than now—drawn into the shared sensuality of aero-dynamics . . . both war's aristocrats—closed in that 'comraderie' which faced-Death elicits from men.

Then comes the letter enclosing a poem in which Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele seems to prophesy his own death:

“FOR FRIEDRICH

Hours pass slowly
You are awake, you are digging trenches
From time to time you whisper a song
You dream of homeland, of happiness and of
return
Patience becomes your duty, waiting—your action
Oh, gray nights, oh, gloomy and hopeless days
Shortly death will come
Severe as a dreadful bullet.

Dig more deeply your grave, soldier
Perhaps one day the peace will be born
With the chimes of the distant bells
Spreading from one tower to another
And everything will shine and gleam once again.
Then everybody will be joyous all over the German
soil
Therefore dig your grave, soldier, full of memory
and longing.

I see—the wreath of winter dismal smoke falls
silently
Upon you and your soaked garment.”

His plane has crashed and killed him within some short space of time. It is 1917—the war soon to be over . . . Murnau's flying career ended as well—this the year of terror that will prevent Friedrich from ever flying again . . . this/then some faulted trickery of Icarus—this nightmare to join all the others . . . tor-

menting his already troubled sleep.

He refuses to speak of The War...its aftermath—refuses to speak at all for months...as if it were he—as it was—who was killed...as he had been before as a child—refuses to answer the letters of his parents, his brothers, his cousin, kin, anyone.

It was at this time he 'dropped' all sur-name—became F.W. Murnau. He journeyed to Switzerland again to find another 'home' in Max Reinhardt's Schloss/"Castle" near Salzburg. It was a 'play castle' in almost every sense of the word—a 'time machine'...of 15th/16th century origin—centered on drama...theatrical center of all Europe, in fact—and a de rigueur teenage dream mansion of variously erotic 'free for all' any-/every-thing coming-and-going 'open house' of continuous orgies...the sexual 'goings-on' at Reinhardt's Schloss notorious throughout the world.

Murnau was 'well-loved'—soon rose from 'assistant' and 'actor' to be assigned directorship of plays staged in Max's Salzburg theatre. Max Reinhardt became thus/vicarious 'Aunt Anne' to him. Murnau's first play—in this new/old game—was "The Miracle"...a medieval pageant drama; and his ultimate (ironically symbolic) success was Shakespeare's "Henry IV"—F.W. directing and acting the part of (who else?) 'Henry.'

Attending Reinhardt's school, Murnau met most of the men who were to shape his film-making years to come...some kinsmen-in-art...some homosexual "cousins"—like they say—: Conrad Veidt (of "Caligari's" 'somnambulist' -to-be), Ernst Hoffmann (old E.T.A. Hoffmann—a 'split' personality to match F.W. Murnau's...Hoffman more shaping The World's sense of storied horror than any writer this side of Edgar Allan Poe—the following an example of Hoffmanesque which Murnau himself might almost have written:

"My whole being, turned into the capricious toy of a cruel fate, surrounded by strange phantoms, floated without rest upon a sea of events whose enormous waves broke over me, roaring. I can no longer find myself...I am what I seem, yet I seem not to be what I am. I cannot solve the problem myself: my 'self' is split in two."):

and then there was Alfred Abel (‘James Bondian’ hero of an early Murnau spy-comedy), and Werner Krauss (the actor who was to play “Caligari”—himself and, later, “Tartuffe” in Murnau’s version of this Moliere play) . . . and—as might be expected in such company—producer Erich Pommer . . . and—etcetera.

Murnau’s first move out ‘on his own’—repeating cycles of his being-again—was to form a motion picture company with Conrad Veidt . . . then generally known as ‘the most beautiful’ young actor on the German ‘scene’—Murnau seeking appropriate ‘double’ for himself again.

The Murnau-Veidt Filmcompany located its offices in Berlin. Young passionate Conrad and terse F.W. ‘hit the town’ for money. Within a year—1919—Murnau had managed to make his first film . . . its double-title suggesting exactly ‘where he was at’ :

“The Boy in Blue”—or:
“The Death Emerald”

. . . The Boy . . . The Death.

Within that same year—the year Conrad Veidt played ‘Somnambulist’ in “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” also—Murnau directed his second film . . . this time starring friend Conrad in an ambitious study of the nature of evil, called—appropriately enough—:

“Satan’s.”

Karl Freund—great cameraman of “The Golem”—was his photographer, Robert Wiene—director of “Caligari”—his scriptwriter . . . D.W. Griffith’s epic film “Intolerance” being the ‘model’ for this three-part work—Murnau’s ‘portrait’ of Satan variously ‘set’ in ancient Egypt, Spain of The Inquisition, and revolutionary Russia:

“Pharoah’s Story”
“Lucifer’s Story”
“Vladimir The Devil”

This same theme was—this same year—being directed by Carl Theodore Dreyer in Denmark . . . Dreyer’s film also divided into Griffith-like episodes—based on Marie Corelli’s novel—ended on ‘revolution’ . . . his “Leaves From The Book of Satan.”

(It is interesting to note that D.W. Griffith himself made a

film of this Corelli book in 1926... his/Griffith's titled: "The Sorrows of Satan.")

All of which is to say that such historical filmic-Devil-worship was very much 'in the air' post World War One—Murnau's 'fix' upon it natural-enough; however his choice of Griffith as 'master'... despite commercial difficulties of "Intolerance"—its complicated form—was the first clear sign of Murnau-as-artist being born. From this point on, F.W. Murnau was consciously working within an aesthetic tradition of film—though he continued to direct numerous 'fledgling' pot-boilers... only a few of which I'm mentioning here... only those few whose titles seem to indicate a drift of his unconscious thought.

Murnau's personality still 'split' with Veidt, it is to be expected he would make a film with a 'Jekyll and Hyde'-like theme. He did just exactly that in 1920—starring Conrad Veidt as a man with alternating egos:

"The Janus Head"

... Janus being the name of a two-faced Roman god. This film—like his "Satan's"—fore-runs F.W.'s later obsession with the Faust legend, inasmuch as its screen-play calls for the Devil to appear at end and demand... in payment for duplicity... the protagonist's head. The script-writer was none-other than Hans Janowitz—of Janowitz and Mayer... collaborative writers of "Caligari"—Hans no doubt 'working thru' his own 'double entendres' with this theme.

Film follows film, 1920 and '21.

The very next choice F.W. intuitively makes—along this 'double' track-of-thought—is to adapt a novel by Carl Mayer... Han's old 'Caligarian' lover—this film provocatively titled:

"The Discovery of a Mystery"

... hiring Mayer himself as screenwriter.

This is immediately followed by Murnau's last film featuring Conrad Veidt—appropriately titled:

"Beyond Desire"

... Murnau parting Company the next year—1922—and 'free lancing' his directorial way through the Berlin film-world.

Now we have him a 'loner' again... as when he was a

child. He is to remain 'on his own' the decade and-some-few-years left of his living. He is of such bitter resignation, from this time on, that there seems to be nothing further for him to lose. (We have, for instance, his letter to younger brother Bernard—who'd 'taken up' Painting and wanted to come and join him in the 'whirl' of Berlin art-world...Murnau replying: "Never...never...I don't want you to enter Art...it's disastrous!"—written 1919.) His closest friend in these coming years—actor Emil Jannings—made numerous entries in his diary apropos "the terrible sadness" of F.W. Murnau. There was to be no homosexual relationship between these two—Jannings an absolutely separable entity in Murnau's imagination... this permitting one of the greatest director/actor collaborations ever recorded on film... film after film. Murnau, having nothing to lose, was shaken to his childhood foundations. Having 'nothing to lose' is The Muse's most explicit invitation to 'the dance' which fashions Art. Murnau lost even himself at last.

The project which accomplished this was the making of the film:

"Nosferatu"

F.W. Murnau based his film upon the Bram Stoker novel "Dracula." Bram Stoker had been inspired by Roumanian folk-legends dating back to the 15th century. There had then lived in Transylvania a very reclusive aristocrat named Count Dracula. (His existence is attested-to by document as well as story.) He ruled the Ulaska County from 1455 to 1462; and then he retired to his small castle at the edge of a village. Only a cleaning-woman was permitted to visit this hermitage. Naturally the villagers talked often about him. The cleaning-woman also talked. She claimed he threw no shadow, that no mirror would reflect his image. The villagers called him a "bloodsucker"—as peasants often designate 'the rich.' It was said that he sucked blood from young girls, that he could turn into a wolf, a bat... that he was 'mad' as—etc.

Legend had it that: "he could produce a fog to hide himself... sees in the dark... can talk the language of animals, can disappear at will, govern rain and storm... lives only at night in order to return to his castle at first cock-crow to take shelter in his coffin... dirty animals following him always, while all

others were terrified”—(all in quotes translated from Roumanian legend).

One day the cleaning-woman heard a noise in the cellar. She discovered The Count lifting the lid of a box, became terrified, screamed and hurled a pitcher of milk she'd been carrying which drenched her employer. From that day on the villagers nick-named Count Dracula “Nosferatu,” which means—in Transylvanian—“splashed with milk.”

The film company Prana asks Murnau if he wants to film Bram Stoker's novel “Dracula.” It is a ‘coup’ for an independent director. Cameraman Fritz Arno Wagner—one of Germany's best—is assigned to him. The budget is ‘tight’ . . . thus he and Wagner must invent—at every turn of the camera—the least expensive mise-en-scene possible . . . they as similarly ‘strapped’ as the makers of “Caligari”: how to make a believable horror film economically?

Murnau roots his thought in the original legend; takes his ‘cues’ from his own psychological desperation; counter-balances this with outrageous ‘camp’ —as if to scoff-at and/or hide personal motivation thus—; and only ‘laces’ his film with the plot of Bram Stoker's novel.

For instance:

He travels to Transylvania—possibly even has Wagner photograph there . . . (tho' there's no direct proof of this: the film is advertised as “shot on location”—usually ‘taken to mean’ “photographed in and around Bremen”—; but one must remember that D.W. Griffith's penchant for documentary proof-bringing was a strong influence on Murnau at this time . . . influencing him to ‘document’ the original castle of Count Dracula?—or whatever Transylvanian ‘tourist’ ruin was currently assigned this name?)

Murnau's choice of title: “Nosferatu”: speaks authenticity for itself; but it also ‘smacks’ of ‘camp’ —sly F.W. ‘pulling the leg’ of the whole audience he intended to ‘spook’ with hidden “spilled milk” . . . the reference having also a homosexual significance—as pun on ‘come’—long an in-group joke among ‘camp's’ initiates . . . the sucking for milk . . . the swallowing of semen—this ‘joke’ then ‘crossing wires’ with mother's ‘tit’ and every subsequent ‘forbidden’ love in Murnau's psychology.

His choice to photograph 'on location' is perverse-in-itself. A fantasy such as this would surely be better subject to studio lighting and controlled effects, imaginatively artificial sets, etc. . . . or so it seemed to all good German horror-makers of 'the times' —all those following directly down "Caligari's" path. In fact, even so-called "realistic dramas" were then most normally composed of manufactured 'trash' in carefully constructed 'dumpish' studio sets.

F.W.'s choice was a departure to escape (I'm sure) all currently fashionable design-styles of German Expressionism; partly to make more *real* for himself this spiritual drama; part 'camp' trick—show-off-ness . . . increasing the challenge to him —; and altogether sheer normal clarity of genius. He recognized for himself the ghost-story's most effective literary device—that the be-seeming authenticity of all that surrounds a ghost lends substance/credibility to 'the ghost' itself . . . for example, Bram Stoker's use of the forms of diaries, journals, journalistic 'clips' and-the-like to tell his tale—Murnau's pictorial 'realism' making "Nosferatu" a 'tour de force' of style surpassing every previous horror film.

"The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" was an *obvious* 'tour' — forcing its terror upon every viewer; "Nosferatu" is disguised as 'tourist film' rather . . . a "fairytale," say, which moves among picturesques whose *after*-effects terrify beyond any easy remembering—its emotive residue an *uneasiness* which cannot be forgotten. And yet, broad coarse 'campish' humor contradicts this stylistic delicacy throughout the film—its 'madman' so maddeningly mad, its 'villain' so obviously villainous . . . these card-board characters 'pratfalling' constantly—that the viewer's laughter contributes to all disguise of evil in this film . . . as if humor were humoring insanity—the dis-ease of every spectator a 'plague' of laughter he eventually shares with the desperate film-maker. (Does it seem too far-fetched that the humor of "Nosferatu" is all-that-intentional?; then how do you explain Murnau's choice of a striped hyena as the first animal Nosferatu 'turns into'? Surely wolves were easier come-by in either Bremen or Transylvania; but Murnau's choice: hyena: clearly exemplifies his technique: to create a 'complex' of each occurrence—such as 'hyena' for 'wolf' . . . its visual appearance terri-

fyng—more-so than any canine imaginable . . . its occurrence 'on the spot'—European countryside—ludicrous! . . . its significance: metaphor for "laughter":—perverse opposite of comic relief.

F.W.'s 'in group' film company humor conditions much of this "Nosferatu" evolution. Did he choose to photograph in Bremen because the town's original name was Bram?—sly homage to Stoker? The novel specifies that Count Dracula travels to London . . . economically impossible, of course, for Murnau. The essential question—along *all* lines of enquiry—IS: did F.W. Murnau play the role of 'Nosferatu' himself? . . . as suggested by Ado Kirou in his "Le Suralisme au Cinema." A thorough search to locate the actor credited with this 'part' revealed that no such person ever existed. (My guess is that "Nosferatu" is acted by none other than F.W., as the facial physiology is similar-enough—under gross 'makeup'—to fit Murnau's features . . . this/then a disguised self-portrait in film; and psychologically he could, yes!, play that 'part' most happily as movie 'camp' joke on himself.) Anyway, 'in group' humor *did* invent the name of the non-existent actor credited with the role: Max Schreck! Schreck means "fright"; and Max means? . . . who else but Max Reinhardt?—this film . . . a thinly disguised veil—half-homage then to Max who'd most shaped F.W.'s whole dramatic life . . . Max 'the father' of all "spilled milk"—thus also this dedication a half back-slapping 'swipe' at Max's homosexual Schloss which metaphors Dracula's castle at each 'thickening' of the plot. (That there was then a currently popular music hall performer named Max Schreck—who certainly did *not* play "Nosferatu"—only underlines the joke . . . this concert performer perhaps a mocking-Max to Reinhardt's students?)

The dark heart of the matter is, of course, F.W.'s own most personal childhood terror. The film begins with petti-bourgeois avarice. This is how hero 'Jonathan Harker' gets suckered-into 'the deal' mad agent Renfield offers him. From the very beginning the wreck-of-a-house they intend to sell The Count is contrasted with the 19th century country-style home of Nina and Jonathan. The third architectural concentration of the film is 'Nosferatu's' Transylvanian castle—a Goyaesque

'giant' looming above barren hills . . . its tower menacing as an upraised 'arm'—structural symbol of medieval greed.

Most transitions of the film pivot on beds: Jonathan in nightshirt at the Transylvanian inn—reading about vampires . . . receiving his warnings—Jonathan *not* 'getting to bed' first night at Schloss . . . this scene a masterpiece of metaphor on the 'old story' of desirable Youth avoiding sex by sitting up all night—Jonathan, second night in castle, pulling bed-sheets over his head . . . dream of his sleep-walking wife saving him—Jonathan sick in bed . . . distant Nina's sickness also . . . Renfield's bedridden madness . . . the mysterious illness of the sailors in hammock—etc. The ultimate 'bed' of this film is, of course, the coffin . . . the 'hold' of the ship itself becoming one vast bed-of-death—its 'tarp' rolled back like a sheet before Nosferatu's appearance. And, of course, the final scene of the film is played upon Nina's bed.

The very instant Jonathan is reduced to fearful childhood—hiding under his sheets—Nina becomes the only one who can save him and/or 'the world' from the evil of Nosferatu . . . she then 'mothering him'—these themes overt departures from anything Bram Stoker wrote. Jonathan's bed-sheets do actually effect his escape, in-as-much as he tears them into rope-like lengths for escaping from confinement in the tower . . . a 'prison'—it might be noted—usually reserved for fairy-tale maidens-in-distress. There is much running down spiraling stairs, flights down hallways, and hesitations before shut doors and coffin-lids—beds with doors?—to sustain the sexual fantasies of this film. Jonathan writes Nina: "I have had some frightful dreams. But they were only dreams. You mustn't worry about me."; but the audience—and 'Nina' . . . with whom the audience increasingly identifies—knows better.

Meanwhile the 'tongue-in-cheek' documentary filmmaker Murnau goes out of his narrative way to present three examples of vampirism: 'Dr. Van Helsing' interrupts the story to show us a Venus Fly-trap closing around a fly and a microscopic polyp making its kill; and mad 'Renfield' points out a spider closing web around its 'catch.' The 'rat and plague' parallel is also used to prop belief; (and take especial note of the name of the plague-carrying ship: "Demeter"—"earth-mother")

...as The Greeks called her—this bed-hold of “Nosferatu” ‘mom’s’ boat then.)

When the ship’s captain is about to be vamped by The Count, the film cuts to somnambulist Nina walking exactly in that space of picture frame where the terrified captain had been looking. Parallels of Murnau’s editing draw Nina and Nosferatu closer together. She *thinks* she’s waiting for Jonathan on 19th century horseback, riding through wooded glades and mountain streams; but Murnau-the-editor says it is the more ancient form of vampirism which she anticipates. The waves of ‘Nosferatu’s ship’ move as the curtains of Nina’s room. “He’s coming”: she says: “I must go to meet him”; but whom? The intruding waves she runs to meet are cut to Demeter’s sails.

Jonathan arrives and properly kisses Nina... kisses her in front of their lovely house... kisses her in their Victorian bedroom; but it is Nosferatu carrying his coffin—approaching his home in a shot styled after Bocklin’s great painting “The Isle of The Dead”—which holds our/Nina’s attention. She promises not to read “The Book of The Vampires”—why?... because it is ‘dirty’?and then does so anyway. It tells her everything she needs to know...to fulfill Murnau’s ‘mothering’ destiny for her in this film—that she give herself freely to this aged monster...hold him in her bed till “cock has crowed”—to save her childish Jon. She dies for him then—giving ‘new life’...thus ‘birth’ to Jonathan—becoming full mother of him in her final act.

Thus Murnau comes to terms with the primal scene which once gave baby Friedrich birth; but there is more-to-it than that: Murnau also becomes ‘the father’ in this final scenery... as he had become seducer-of-himself—or Jean—in earlier sequences of the film. Note how Nosferatu—at his last—also climbs stairs and hesitates before doors...he often only a shadow—camera thus first-person in grammatical relationship to him. Nina is split by her bedroom mirror as she rises to invite him in. He is split similarly as he rises to his death. The cathartic transference is complete for maker Murnau—whether he played this ‘role’ or not. He’d managed to rid himself of *both* parents in a classical ritualistic fashioning of this film... and then to dissolve the complex symbol of himself—Nosferatu—in

a beam of light: Puff! . . . a little smoke to mark the spot on film forever—and that is that! . . . except for the last shot—Nosferatu's mediæval Schloss in ruins.

Having 'killed' his mother/father-self—'rolled into one' . . . *as vampire*—did not end the matter. Vampires are—like The Holy Trinity . . . by definition—immortal. Bram Stoker had included—primarily in his book—the classic form for 'dealing with' vampires: one must drive a stake thru the heart of the vampire to put him at rest. Murnau goes a long—and only allusive—way . . . out of the way—to avoid this.

The most normal 19th century metaphoric relationship was that between the sex organs and the heart. Romanticism is premised upon the interchangeability of these parts. In this tradition, the stake through the heart is clear metaphorical fuck. Murnau creates an allusion far removed from even this symbol of sex/death—his elusiveness the factor which most determines the narrative formality of his art . . . a story being—as of old—the surest way to 'beat around the bush,' the bed, the dead and/or any direct revelation what-so-ever: such avoidance is what narration shares with religion most explicitly . . . that both 'story' and religious ritual will move 'along a line' which defines the perimeters of an experience—by alluding *to it*—without ever once revealing the 'forbidden subject matter' . . . "the face of God," say . . . the genitals of The Father . . . the desireability of the wishfully Virgin Mother—and/or any other 'what's the matter' troubling the artist and zealous priest guarding these angsts as mysteries.

"Once upon a time . . . there lived . . . happily ever after"—F.W. Murnau . . . master story-teller—guarding himself and all else from *any* manifestation of the primal scene . . . stringing his illusions along a narrative line—'stringing himself along' way round-about—defining exactly where *not* to look/see . . . *be* 'as he was wont to be'—salvationist thus if ever there was one.

Now that you know something of the essentiality of his art—an exactitude of what it was not . . . how he arrived at that—the 'rest' of his films may 'speak' . . . each for itself—the remainder of his life devoted totally to that which has saved him: The Story as Art. In a way, there is no such thing as The Art of Story—no one ever having made an aesthetic 'case' for Narra-

tive Art . . . there being only The Art of Story-telling—the ‘tale’ of any given ‘work’ being but that structure of it which *limits* the ‘outside’ creative possibilities of the maker.

F.W. Murnau made two more films in 1922:

“The Burning Earth”

—a ‘lost work’; and:

“Phantom”

. . . these possibly re-visitations of childhood farm-land surroundings and, then, childhooded sense-of-self—old “Nosferatu’s” ghost surely haunting him. He made a couple more films in 1923—which critics generally think would be best forgotten . . . as “lapses into bad taste”—his critics as little realizing . . . as Murnau himself . . . that “taste” has nothing to do with the making of Art—the ‘success’ of an artist’s work nothing . . . either . . . more than the ‘to do’ other’s make of it—everything ‘aesthetic’ always in evolution . . . until the moment *when*—say, 1924 . . . for Murnau—‘the son’ of “Nosferatu” rises again . . . this time as a hotel doorman—middle-class uni-formed Ger-manic ‘father figure’ supreme . . . as the film presents him—reduced by narrative circumstances to the defeated ‘part’ . . . of Murnau’s psyche—as reluctantly obedient ‘son’ . . . exiled to ‘the underworld’—as it is pictured in the film—of the hotel toilet. The film’s title?:

“The Last Laugh”!

Erich Pommer was ‘producer,’ Carl Mayer ‘author,’ Emil Jannings “the doorman”—thus explicit ‘keeper’ of Murnau’s soul in the ‘role’ of this cinema-drama—, and Karl Freund the ‘photographer.’

Freund-“friend” in German—who’d been steadily employed by Murnau . . . photographing each film he’d made *since* “Nosferatu”—is worth ‘looking into’ as F.W.’s ‘familiar’; he was a 360 lb. ‘cranky’ extremely self-opinionated ‘bourgeois’ worker of unsurpassed cinematic inventiveness . . . his forte the discovery of ‘how to do it’ /whatever a film director might order—he, then, the ready-maker of F.W.’s ‘wildest dreams.’

It was scriptwriter Mayer who called-for a mobile camera, Murnau who wouldn’t permit ‘dollies,’ ‘tracking shots’ and all-such mechanical camera-moving devices, and Karl Freund who therefore decided to strap the photographic equipment to

his chest—his invention the first thoroughly controlled ‘hand held’ camera technique... “The Last Laugh” thus ‘fathering’ body-motion into the Art of Film.

It is interesting to compare Freund’s ‘work’ for Fritz Lang—his photography of “Metropolis”—with what he accomplished Murnau-wise... (this the clearest ‘fix’ we have upon F.W.’s control of the camera itself—the visual limits of his art.)

Lang faces *his* ‘primal scene’ thus: the underworld of “Metropolis” explodes with rhythmically gushing spumes of water... white as milk... plumed as ‘come’; and the heroine beats the metallic ‘nipple’ of a giant breast-shaped gong—calling all the ‘children of the world’... including the hero—to gather around her.

Murnau’s prime sexual scenery of “The Last Laugh” takes place in a dream—the doorman demonstrating his masculine prowess by bouncing and balancing an enormous coffin-like box... “trunk,” like they say—this normal Freudian pun for “cunt”—in surreal ‘air’... bell-hops—like amazed pall-bearers... his audience—as he carries it through an infinite revolving door; (and what could better symbolize—for Murnau—*That* door... which hopefully need never lead anywhere... than the circularly turning one of this film?—what door more oppositely damnable than the endlessly swinging panels which flank “The Last Laugh’s” descent to the toilet?)

For Lang, Freund ‘shoots’ his ‘busty’ gong off-center so that often it will appear—on cinematic ‘cut’—exactly where some ‘gout’ of flooding white had been; and he photographs “Metropolis” with first-surface mirrors beaming tiny ‘models’ of the layered city onto the scene he’s photographing with actors... to avoid any over-lay of superimpositions.

For Murnau, friend/Freund does most oppositely—superimposing wherever F.W.’s ‘double entendres’ make possible... the revolving door ‘splitting’ the head of the sleeping doorman—his whole schiz-dream... each piece of glass—trans-parent or reflective surface any-everywhere throughout the hotel... utilized in the filming; and he divides the three layers of ‘Murnau’s hotel’ into visual platforms which can only be reached by roving camera-eye thru elevators, hallways, stairs and—as is the main theme of this film—doors.

The Moving camera in "Metropolis" is a force-field thrust at the protagonists.

In "The Last Laugh," Freund makes a tunnel of every camera move—in and around all investigative space 'the doorman' inhabits... this milieu of 'the hotel' to be explored as if one's life might depend on minutest detail.

And so it went—this filming of Murnau's sense of "Plumpe"-in-Eternity... from the beginning as Carl Mayer described it:

"A revolving door. Which turns perpetually in the light. And in front of it: A Doorman!
Tall. Stiff as a lackey.":

to its end with the 'broken' doorman facing death-the-nightwatchman—his only comforter—in a darkened hellish 'men's room'; (and here... where Murnau ended it—as if about to 'strike up' a last desperate homosexual relationship with Death—is where all projectionists should stop the film—the additional sequence showing the doorman inheriting 'a million'... forced upon Murnau—as a Brechtian technique to permit the film some commercially acceptable 'happy ending'—surely only to be credited to Erich Pommer. It was surely some Pommeranian commercialism which gave it "The Last Laugh" title: Murnau's name for this theme was explicit as the 'hell' he'd intended at end:

"The Last Man.")

F.W. Murnau lowers his schizophrenic 'sights' two further steps to-ward Hell... a film a year—1925 and '26—casting Emil Jannings first as a hypocritical 'con man' and then as The Devil himself... in

"Tartuffe"—and:
"Faust."

The same team—Mayer, Freund, Jannings, and Walter Rohrig... set designer of "Caligari"—collaborate with F.W. adapting this baroque drama to his personal needs. Moliere had derived the name of his villainous 'lead' from Old Italian "tartufo"—meaning "truffle"... the edible fungus which grows only underground—this parasite of tree-root considered 'a delicacy' by The French.

Murnau creates a modern-times 'framing device' for the

Moliere play; and he photographs this—an ill-concealed Father, Son and Wicked Step-Mother Fable—in style of dusty realism. Walter Rohrig is then instructed to build raised platforms for the stage-play scenes, Karl Freund told to photograph them softly—as if an echo of life—, and Jannings, Lil Dagover, Werner Krauss, etc., directed to play this ‘play within a play’ stiffly... as if—as photographed mostly from underneath—they were marionettes of some complicated Punch-and-Judy show. Thus F.W. ‘pulled the strings’ upon his parents again.

The most haunting scene of the entire film is a ‘camera pan’ along a candle-lit balcony and flight of stairs following the heroine’s maid as she goes to fetch her childish master to watch Tartuffe’s seduction scene. Jannings plays a bestial ‘dad’ alright; but not ‘to the hilt.’ The child-like husband—peeking through keyhole with horrible fascination—interrupts the scene just short of rape. Nothing less than obsession could ‘charge’ this otherwise silly plot with the intensity-of-terror Murnau elicits.

“Faust” comes next—most naturally—in F.W.’s train-of-thought; and he chooses to pattern his film very much after the Gothic version... taking-on the theme of ‘the good Dr.’ Faust who only signs a devilish pact to save the people of his village from plague, then gets persuaded into young manhood, then sexually ‘tricked out,’ and finally trapped by his own nostalgia for the village of his youth and—thus by way of childhood—Love... leading naturally-enough—in Murnau’s psychology—to murder... including murder of her whom he once loved and their child.

It is a theme ‘after his own heart,’ for sure!; and he does make of it the fullest film epic of his entire career. You’ll find it all—each theme of any personal meaning to him—most carefully delineated... along the lines of this story—so that every thing is *known*... without ever being seen—each desperate instant spelled out... in blacks and whites—this a masterpiece of violently burning abstractions bracketing the quaintest pan-to-mimicing of life ever created on film.

Murnau’s changes in the text—evolved with scriptwriter Hans Kyser—make this a “Faust” equal (in all my respects) to Marlow’s, Busoni’s, or perhaps even Goethe’s... in ‘theme’ at

least—an absolute in itself.)

Murnau brackets the standard legend with 'Book of Job' context; and he twists his youthful Faust into old age again—near film's end—as he joins Gretchen at burning stake.

F.W. had been haunted in young adolescence—(so brother Robert tells us)—by the fact that two Murnau ancestors were burned as witches at Recklinghausen in 1650, and that the daughter of one of them . . . "Trina" by name . . . was also accused and put to death—these indications of hereditary 'warlock-ness' in him finally shaping a 'magic' . . . in this Faustian scene . . . more powerful than any witchery of his childish imagination—*of* himself; for herein the making of this film he was master of it all. Identifying with Janning's, he Murnau-Mephisto could close the curtains over the sex-bed of Faust like a spider drawing its web; and he could—as he did—burn 'the holy' Murnau Trinity in filmic effigy . . . having it be 'all to The Good'—thus rid of guilt—for "Love," as it says.

He played 'the game' fairly—as if it were 'match of wits' with God . . . thus 'above' any cheating—; for The Devil . . . as Murnau conceives him . . . loses his wager with The Angel in the exact manner Evil usually loses: not content with 'the wreck' he's made of Faust's life and the total possession of his soul, old greedy Mephisto must spoil Faust's last romantic 'fling' by ruining his looks—making him aged again . . . a niggardly meanness—which causes The Devil's loss of all he'd won.

Identifying F.W. with Faust—rather than Janning's Devil—one can follow this film as a chornological autobiography of Murnau . . . from (1) its transference scene of youth for age, (2) its love-of-flying sequences, (3) its lust-love in The Princess of Parma's Schloss, to (4) its parody-of-love as acted-out by The Devil/Gretchen's-Aunt and hero/heroine—all leading Faust/Murnau to a subsequent boredom with the phenomenological 'world' . . . a Faust-logos which was to continue—prophetic—the rest of Murnau's life.

He was hired by Hollywood—via William Fox—to make 'a love story' . . . that old Hollywooden 'staple'—there where glamour promises everything imaginable . . . except *an art*; and men like Fox thought they could surely purchase *that*. F.W. Murnau gave them more than they'd bargained for: the great-

est love/hate guilt-ridden film ever studio-manufactured.

Don't let it too-much 'fool' you—this love-laden tale devised by Carl Mayer, witchily moon-lit and blackly photographed by Karl Freund, directed beyond 'all it was worth' by F.W. Murnau, and ironically titled:

"Sunrise": 1927

This film is perhaps F.W.'s most objective venture—he having so little 'at stake' along its plotted course... the story centering on a simple farmer and his sweet country-wife; but then one can 'read' these protagonists as in-continuation of Faust and Gretchen. Suppose Faust had avoided killing Gretchen's brother—avoiding thus the murder-by-neglect of mother and child—, had 'settled down' to the "daily life" of marriage and hard-working livelihood... and then?—supposing it had all 'turned sour' on him—*what* then?... well! it being Murnau's film—he'd have wished to murder her outright... naturally enough—run off with some 'vice' or other... etcetera—Vice versus Guilt the theme of this photo-drama.

It is all a mask—this film's sexual stance... working up and down the scales of emotional response—of justice—with clock-work precision... a 'camp' so cleverly concealed that it convinces itself—effecting the most perfect Art Murnau had yet created.

The 'word' had gone gossip-wise 'round Hollywood that F.W. Murnau would only hire homosexuals for his film... that he—like other European directors before him—wanted an 'all gay' ensemble for his cast. Sweet be-seeming Janet Gaynor—the heroine- 'star' of the film—had already been 'tabbed' as a 'dike' by community slander... aspersion thus over all of them. Whether this 'Elizabethan' theatrical intention was Murnau's or not, the effect would have been to produce a good deal of rebel homosexual hilarity during the whole filming of "Sunrise"—this then Murnau's most Max-manufactured film... tho' so contrived—as such—that it showed not one innuendo of its 'gay' origins... nor Murnau's 'personae' either... of itself thus—as a normal Hollywood product... (unless it be such broad farce as the scene where the Venus de Milo 'loses her head' in the photographer's studio... or the 'black pig on the dance floor' sequence—this same 'pig motif' as marking

crucial turning-point in his film "Tabu" also... with Totemism of Murnau?—possibly signaturing his films with an in-family joke.)

OK—so what? It is just that I would point out: a hidden 'campish' nature reveals itself in symbols... the same as any other—say "aesthetic" or "religious"—concealment... the more shy the revealer, the more original the symbolic logic—acting as mask; and symbols... when absolutely oblique—as in Murnau's "Sunrise," say—operate for maximum objectivity. This 'butterfly' -of-a-story is pinned to the wall—"the movie screen" ... as it's called—and sliced! As the subject is Guilt—an ugliness—elusive Murnau 'goes for' maximum Beauty in the filming ... 'mounting' this specimen beyond all American sentimental cow-eyed movie-fan expectations; but then both he and script-writer Mayer were getting to be 'older men'—more naturally guilt-ridden than they perhaps even knew of themselves: *thus* "Sunrise" became the metaphoric 'confessional' it unquestionably is... its emotive power cutting across all sophistication, intellect, and class distinctiveness Murnau had developed to hide himself—it 'straight' movie-stuff... taking shape—and/or symbol—as its Art.

He made two other Hollywood films:

"Four Devels"—1928—and:

Our Daily Bread"

... re-titled: "City Girl—never released. (Both these films were commercially suppressed; and thus they're not available for either viewing *or* comment.)

The great documentary film-maker Robert Flaherty and his brother David came to be known to Murnau in the late '20s! Flaherty was just back from two year's stay in the Samoan Islands where he made the film "Moana." He desperately wanted to return to 'the south seas,' push-on to Indonesia to photograph the Balinese.

I can see these two men sharing a bottle—a 'guffaw' from Flaherty splitting distance between them... his humor as infectious as was his whole fun-loving sense of life—breaking the thin-lipped smile of shy Murnau and the sad eyes of him... whose whole European decorum was an icy puzzle to most men—tho' certainly not to 'put off' Huckster Flaherty... known

for an 'Irish tongue' that could "charm a stone"—these men then... and David Flaherty also—he possibly catalyst to this strange mixture of opposites—dreaming drunkenly together of seas and ships and south sea islands.

Anyway. F.W. Murnau 'bought' the idea—*what* idea no one quite knew... some general 'Westward Ho' to the vast Pacific's onward eastward where-so-ever?—Flaherty clearly fishing for a 'backer' to float him to Bali... agreeing to collaborate on a movie with 'good old Fred'—Murnau more simply planning adventure.

Flaherty had charmed both wooden Indians and bitter businessmen all his life: 'Fred' Murnau was 'a cinch'; but there was more-to-it of Murnau than that: "I dreamt for years of making a film in the South Seas," he wrote; and he bought a yacht, named it "Bali," and set-off one fine day with David Flaherty and a crew of six.

Robert Flaherty—in another letter—wrote... *of* Murnau: "He is disgusted and worn out by his work in Hollywood; he is leaving the American film scene for good and all..."

The ship sails for "Tahiti, Samoa, and... Bali"—Robert joining them mid-June of 1929 in San Francisco. They never get further than Tahiti.' F.W. Murnau goes as far as the first exotic 'stop'—gets 'stuck on' the remote island of Bora-Bora... won't budge—from this/that... seeming answer to his dreams... holding him 'fixed' and already making-it-up/ 'the film' he'd most necessarily wanted from the beginning:

"Tabu"

— the simplest story ever to come out of him.

Flaherty felt 'put-upon' by a plot that didn't any-which-way reflect his passion. He stayed and photographed enough-of-it to set the style of imagery throughout; and then he left.

I think it was the strangeness of these island surroundings—perhaps the great separating space of The Sea itself—which permitted F.W. Murnau to make this film free of his usual elusiveness... permitting him to identify directly with the heterosexual lovers—their story/his own... he too now free to fuck as he pleases in this island culture—this film then 'straight' equation of man's universal plight:

The Son (Matahi) plus

The Mother...imagined as young—wife (Reri);
divided-by

The Father...imagined as old—Death (Hitu)

equals?... are there words that will state this sum?—this that passes as the term: “Family”?... “holy” or otherwise—“Tragedy”?... *that* a word stemming from the Greek “
” — meaning “the cry of the goat”; and such a sound... or the experience of seeing the film “Tabu”... will do—as well as anything written—to total the formula stated above. (If you must have *The Story* of it... the narrative religiosity of it—in words —, then Joseph Conrad did-it-up as explicitly as possible when he said that every novel could essentially be written on the back of a match-book:

“He was born. He suffered. He died.”

F.W. Murnau returned to Hollywood in 1930. He had less than a year to live. Others were, later, to suggest he was cursed by the islanders—that he himself had broken a tabu making the film... moving “a sacred stone in order to install his camera”—etc.; but the curse which he was under came from his childhood. From Bora-Bora he wrote his mother—first time in years... as if to get some final word back *at* her—some parting complaint: “I do not feel at home in any place, in any land...”

On March 11, 1931—in a sleek and powerful Packard limousine... F.W., his 14-year-old Spanish-Filipino ‘boy’: Garcia Stevenson—passing as his “valet”—, a hired chauffeur, two business friends, and Murnau’s pet German shepard dog: Pal... traveling Highway 101 to Santa Barbara—swerved off the road, to the left, tires screeching, sliding, on air... Murnau then flying first time in years—last time ever—crashed to the bottom of an embankment... F.W. Murnau dying... five o’clock in the afternoon—dead later that evening.

The ‘14-year-old’ had been driving. The chauffeur had been saying: “You’d better slow down”—saying later: “He couldn’t keep his foot off the throttle”; and Murnau... as Hollywood ‘rumour had it’ of him... had been ‘making out’ with this kid—“blowing him”... like they say—when the car ‘went over.’



ALEXANDER DOVZHENKO

Born 1894 in Ukrainian village of Sosnitsa—a small farm community near Chernigorov . . . meaning “Black Forest”—near the river Desna . . . meaning “Right” river; born to Peter and Darya Dovzhenko—a peasant and his wife . . . two of the poorest of this poor village; a baby boy—whom they named “Alexander.”

Born sunk in wood and earth . . . as if about-to-be buried—surrounded by the hardboards of his cradle and the mud-chinked log walls, earth floor and planked roof of his home . . . himself wrapped tight against the darkness and fierce cold beyond him—his normal light the occasional point of candle, the orange glow of embering fire, and the golden sun . . . his salvation from each night’s-breath, then—the sudden flickering increase of hearth’s fire . . . his covering warmth—, and the steadily moving window beams of morning-to-evening illumination: these rectangles of light were surely baby Alexi’s first visual consideration.

The Ukraine is known as flatland of only low rolling hills—these mostly the effect of rivers . . . rather than geological upheaval—the land split by The Dnieper, its tributaries . . . including Desna—, and all lesser waters flowing to The Black Sea . . . these rivers freezing solid through long Winter, breaking ice dramatically in Spring, some drying to mud-flats mid Summer

—life-lines of all commerce and travel to the people inhabiting “Little Russia” . . . as this area of Alexi’s upbringing is called—this ‘land’ . . . the plains and forests of it dependent—as the people—upons whims of water . . . the sparse rains of short spring summer autumn—its snows from, often, October through April, or even mid-May . . . the wind’s wail a continuous sound all these months—across endlessly open spaces of the imagination . . . then broken—dramatic as drum, ‘crack’ of fiery log, or ‘boom’ of explosion—river’s thaw in Spring: golden corn and ripening wheat fields, dark green forests, black-brown flows of water along irregularities of ground, and the huddled muddy colors of villages, a few farmhouses and an occasional steeple.

The ‘thud’ of The Desna melting—shifting load of winter . . . split wide by blaze of sun—felt in the very bones of Alexi . . . these racheting ‘cracks’ of sound—shaking his beloved window shutters . . . this river’s tremors—shifting foundations of his fragile house—the ground itself quivering in the noise of thaw . . . these rhythms to be his—from the toes and crawling fingers—gathered in the mind of Alexi to be recreated almost forty-years later in his great film “Ivan.”

Peter and Darya Dovzhenko—both illiterate . . . Peter the odd-jobber of Sosnitza—his only ‘treasure’ his cart for hauling the produce of the villagers, their meagre furnishings, their trash . . . himself suffering all his life because—as he told his son Alexi—“he had not been educated” . . . Darya—Alexi’s mother . . . the housewife, then—her task to ‘make ends meet’ to feed the family; but she . . . as Alexander Dovzhenko often later reminisced: “knew stories—many stories”; and then there was his grandfather—a bookish man . . . often also given to stories—this old patriarch the ‘haunt’ of film after film Alexander was later to make in memory’s honor of the most influential moments of his early childhood.

His grandfather was a state official—a position much respected in Russian village hierarchies . . . surely thus permitting him some extravagance of beard and haughty mien—his house floor-boarded, white-walled perhaps, and absolutely warm to Alexi’s every touch. It was from Grandfather he certainly learned the Russian meaning of his name—Tzar Alexius, it

was!, who fought for The Ukraine and won, in 1667, annexation of the part of "Little Russia" which The Dovzhenko family called their home . . . Alexius the *first* tzar to all their ancestors then; and young Dovzhenko would also have heard—from such a lover-of-books as Grandfather was—stories of the great 19th century Tzar . . . Alexander *The First*—most 'progressive' tzar of 'the times' . . . within Grandfather's memory—benefactor of literature and all the beloved arts.

Grandfather's death can be seen as a simple 'passing away' and also a continuing-being-there—in Alexi's tenacious mind . . . the old man having often told the boy he was going to die before he finally did—some quiet hypochondria perhaps making 'a legend' of this man whom Alexander would later 'immortalize' in his film "Zvenigora" and finally 'face' as actually dead in his filmed portrait of Death itself, "Earth."

And then, too, Grandfather 'lived on' in the surrogate likeness of Alexi's uncle—also a state official . . . a literate man too, but of somewhat practical 'bent'—who taught Alexi how to read old Grandfather's books for himself.

Alexander Dovzhenko—given full elementary education in Sosnitza . . . at the insistence of his father—sent then on to the college of Gluchov . . . city-of-dreams to Ukrainian peasant Peter: Gluchov the home-town of Taras Shevchenko . . . "the Ukrainian Shakespeare"—as he was known; Shevchenko the 19th century poet most responsible for the very distinct existence of "Little Russian literature" . . . himself born in a small village—as Alexander had been—in the condition of a serf . . . lowest order of Russian life—as Alexi had experienced himself throughout his youth—Shevchenko the 'singer of songs' of the 'the olde Ukraina' . . . him painting in oils and water colors, as well as words . . . as surely as Dovzhenko cartooned—drew—painted and wrote his thoughts with equal facility—his freedom to be gained only through Poetry and Art . . . as Shevchenko's had finally been purchased from a land-master by the intercession of the other poets and Russian aesthetes who admired his works—as must certainly have been the similar dream of young Dovzhenko seeking to escape his peasant birth—Shevchenko/Dovzhenko a rhyme to stir the youngest imagination; and then there must have been—in emulative dreams—Yuri Fedkovich

... also of peasant family—Ukrainian who made poems of soldierly living, 'songs of war,' forlorn camp-life and lonely heroics.

Oh!, to be such-a-hero as these—shapers of the people's religious imagination of themselves... these writers who found ancestry's voice for Little Russia—Taras Shevchenko and Yuri Fedkovich... names known even to the tongue of his father—these prophets of The National Ukraine... writers whose songs were still sung by the traveling peddlers in the days of Alexi's youth—a Ukrainian tradition as racially intense as that which was finally collected into The Bible of desert Jews.

Shevchenko was later to be resurrected in the time of Alexander's making his motion picture "Arsenal"—in the filming of the railway station sequence... Alexander directing his actors to portray the petti-bourgeois mentality by a ceremonial confrontation—in which old 'gray beards,' fat politicians and the-like light candles before a portrait of The Ukrainian Shakespeare... to act out an opposition to the 'new order' of The Arsenalists—this ceremony suddenly broken... as Alexander edited this sequence of shots—Shevchenko 'coming alive,' leaning through his 'gilded' frame and blowing out all of the candles. Fedkovich too did surely haunt him in the war-times of his later film-making—when he visited 'the fronts' of World War II... writing: "The Battle For Our Soviet Ukraine," etc.... arranging those images of war-light—the documentary shots given him—into lengths of rhythm in imitation of poetic line. These two peasant poets—Taras Shevchenko and Yuri Fedkovich... the master-singer of Ukrainian pastoral life and the songster of war—might be taken as alternating egos of Alexander Dovzhenko all his insecure life.

But Uncle Dovzhenko would have none of it—if he'd had his meticulous way... as he did to the extent Alex 'majored' his studies in Economy and Languages—in order to survive in what Uncle knew as 'the modern world'; and these subjects were for serious collegiate Alex "his best"... tho'—as he was later to write—he: "dreamed of painting all the time."

The rectangle—the white light-bouncing canvas... each flick of wrist diminishing its space; for all pigments create but a colorful darkness—"shades" of, say, "red green blue or white,"

as we speak of it...some shadowing of canvas or paper with shapes vaguely remembered—unmoving...cold as ash—: only some *dream* of painting finally interested him...as the dreaming mind might animate dreams of paint—or the *action* of painting...as distinct from finished Art—these ideas, then all that were to capture his lifelong imagination...painting itself ‘given up’—by him...being only ‘hobby’; but his continuous draftsmanship—doodling cartoons, quick sketches, swift pencil portraiture...this a ‘crutch’ never-to-be abandoned—the composite of upswept lines breaking paper into a semblance of sparks...as-if-flickering in each shift of eye—managing a restlessness of vision which 19th century Russian Painting never *could* have afforded him: the sketch was, at least, a metaphor of smudges indicating where ‘the fire’ had been; and he used it, for all its nervous-worth, until his death.

He was soon teaching Painting to pay for his Economic and Linguistic education. Then—age 20—he was drafted into the 1914 War...bound for Russian/German ‘front’—five months later to be dismissed from services...returning home—to Sosnitsa—in what could only have been some be-seeming ‘sickness unto death’ to him...seriously ill—stomach ulcerated...neurotic—disgraced—all self-sense of peasant ‘heroics’ destroyed by his selfish-seeming inability...‘bodying forth’—in the ‘face’ of war.

Sosnitsa, as even Gluchov, was too small-a-world to contain so great a failure as his must have seemed to himself; and therefore Alex set-off two months later—miraculously recovered—to study at the University of Kiev. He ‘earned his keep’ teaching Art...continuing his studies in the tradition of his uncle’s cautionary practicality—Survival his only recoupable gain from all this suffering; and Survival-it-was that got him out ‘nick of time’ /three-years-later when the Polish troops occupied this Ukrainian capital city.

Uncle’s tactics ‘paid off’ at last—midst the ‘modern world’s’ war-fares...anarchies of allegiances...revolutions...counter-revolutions—all visited chaos-of-which...starvation...plague...etcetera-unimaginable—damning The Russian People of this era; but Alexander was chosen...one of few to—yes!—SURVIVE...above all else—survival his because he

knew Languages...his natural 'knack' for the shiftiness-of-thought all Translation IS—The Ukraine Committee for Foreign Affairs making him an Officer...“paper hero”—as he must have felt this title... State Official—as his Grandfather before him, his uncle...some whole ironic consideration given him in—oh, yes!reward for his military failure... this image-of-himself to later prompt a movie-script he wrote for Charlie Chaplin, *and* a short story written 'first person' (“The Cross of St. George”) AND his own bitter laughter in the privacies of sad remembrance ever after.

He was sent to Warsaw, Poland—sent *away* from all specific allegiance to his Ukraine...uprooted thus from the only narrow “cause” he had—(his causality limited to some exactitude-of-Russian-earth...Little Russia, lost—as soul-and-soil indistinguishable to him...these the last ‘grounds’ of intelligible meaning to him); and then—as diplomatic translator—sent on again...the year 1919—on and on to Berlin...Alexander Dovzhenko—“attache” to ‘the world’ of the most ancient enemy The Ukrainian People had ever suffered.

When a man's body ‘betrays’ him—his very nerves ‘at enmity’...with all he'd thought to have been: Transformation!, then—the state-of-self within which one feels being-nothing...skin bag felt as flotsom...psyche in-side-out...thought a'float...bone become puppet—the root-nature of such-a-spell...a whiling-away of all one's life—being...just that—Being! All else is Mask! But men do only recognize The Mask—whatever Art they've made of themselves...fabricated from affinities—with human ‘other’ or many ‘others’...like or unlike—with earth air fire water...of whatever each feels composed—affinities being but mirrors...wherein the psyche prides itself—these ‘bindings back’ of individual self most normally known as Religion.

Once having—upon a time of Transformation—‘given up’ The Art of self-composure...a human—*being* any human—peasant Alexander Dovzhenko even—is enabled to create Art elsewhere than only of his own imagination. It is a ‘giving up’—you see: ‘*up*’...as all ceremonial sacrifice informs us—to God gods clouds skies stars infinity...beyond mirroring affirmation—sum total exhaustion with ‘likeness’; and that is how

he/Alexander did it: he gave himself . . . and then all other Little Russians—UP; and he made Art of him/them . . . as one might say “made fun” . . . “made light-of” . . . “made film”—as he then did.

Resigned his diplomatic position—the gay life of ambassadorial pomp . . . the ‘gay’ life—returning to The Ukraine in early 1920’s . . . to Kiev—taking job as chief illustrator and political cartoonist of daily newspaper “VISTI” . . . this visually-rooted word meaning “NEWS” in visually minded Russia—rejecting all governmental attempts to send him translating ‘abroad’ again.

Then:

“In July 1926 after many sleepless nights pondering on everything I did with my life I took my cane and suitcase and departed for Odessa never to return to my old home. I left all my canvases and possessions. Thus, I found myself on the banks of the Black Sea alone and a naked man of thirty-two. I had to begin my life anew—that was film.”

In Odessa, he went to work at The Ukrainian Film Studio—his jobs: art consultant, poster designer, editor of submitted manuscripts; but always . . . in mind . . . motion picture director—to be a director.

His best ‘next step’ up bureaucracy’s ladder is as Script-writer. In one short year he exhaustively imitates every modality of film style known to him—the-viewer—mad film-buff Dovzhenko . . . as he had been in Berlin—recreating now on paper . . . in provincial Odessa . . . ‘the gamut’ of types of photo-Play—these ‘penny dreadful’ thematics his only experience of Film: Heros, Criminals, Lovers, Spies . . . undergoing Heroics, Reformation, Bedroom Comedy Antics, and Patriotism or Death—his scripts: “The Heros” (rejected—as he had been . . . World War I), “Vasya The Reformer (directed by Faust! Lopatynsky), “Love’s Berry” or “The Strawberries of Love” (which he was—at last . . . within this first year of ambition—permitted to direct), and “The Diplomatic Pouch” (which he directed and only partly wrote): thus in the year 1927 Alexander Dovzhenko became God-The-Director . . . of the sun and every ghostly shadow cast by camera optics upon his film—(there is no other

way to truly speak of what this accomplishment surely meant to him.)

The most interesting of Alexander's imitative scenarios is the comedy of "Love" he wrote—inspired by Chaplin, as it was . . . Charlie Chaplin the only artist-of-film he'd really appreciated in all his Berlin viewing—Charlie's 'touch' upon him that of a similarly "native genius," like we say . . . the kinship of serious Alex for the 'clown of Clowns'—what . . . we can only term: the "religiosity" of both of them—being immediate as this . . . that—both men would think singularly of The Self . . . as of The People—both . . . thus—megalomaniacs supreme . . . enabled—each—to 'quote' whatever imagistic stance had been created as if it were the first/last sight of The World. (See: Chaplin 'quoting' himself as "the little fellow"/Everyman.) (See: Alexander Dovzhenko making quotient of each object in his films—in a multiplicity of divisive camera angles and varying distances from all photographic things . . . as if each scene were *subject* only—viz.: the 'flashback' sequence of "Love's Berry" wherein 20 shots averaging 5 or 6 frame's-length 'quote' the entire sequence of preceding events, making 'quorum' of the whole story of the film . . . an act akin, say, to making brief laws out of lengthy courtroom procedure—'Moses'-Dovzhenko creating a pictured moral . . . this instance of the film—simply to discomfort his wickedly comic 'hero.')

"The Diplomatic Pouch" served Alexander as perfectly mellow drama wherein he could—and did—exhaust the last influences of Hollywood . . . rejecting—at each plotted turn—the life of diplomacy he had lived . . . as diplomatic translator . . . as transformer of escapist cinema—as he wrote:

"Which is the more advantageous . . .

—to make a picture which the spectator looks at only passively . . . ?

—to make a picture which the spectator does not fully understand the first time he sees it?"

Like quests of all zealots, his answer is some sure rhetorical foregone quest-shunning conclusion which he proceeds to harp and harp upon—religiously . . . i.e. in the measure of tradition—again and . . . to quote only one example—again:

"If we can look many times at Raphael's or Rem-

brandt's pictures, if we can always read Byron or Goethe or hear Beethoven's music, or follow Shakespeare's lines repeatedly, why should it not be possible to also see a valuable, artistic film several times?"

Note that the sense of "art" is—as his sensitivity was—secondary in consideration... 'art for art's sake' never even occurring to him—all Dovzhenko aestheticism essentially second... as was his second nature... to none other than Nature—Worship his primary concern. Propaganda was his danger—that his zealotry bred films of worshipful advertisement only... as The Politbureau would have had it of him, anyway—God-The-Government hand-in-glove with Long-Suffering-Nature, etc.... Morality saved him—that he was an exceedingly moral-minded man... given to confuse Morale—the government 'pep-talk' he thought he was illustrating—with the vigorous peasant morality of his youth. Morals are of a structure closely co-incident with the formality of Art—each work-of-which, for instance, must... absolutely must!... be—first of all—true to itself... each element of aesthetic structure 'answerable' to every other... each Variation—in Music—responsible to The Theme... etc.... Ezra Pound goes so far—in "Guide to Kulchur"—as to say:

"You cannot get anything DONE on an amoral tradition. It will merely slide down. Arry (Aristotle) was interested in mind not morals... the Homeric vigour was gone..."

In Alexander Dovzhenko's case, *morals* were about *all* he had—as *artist*—to 'go on'... morality his only integrality—all that saved him from a career as purely propaganda film-maker.

Once having finished-with "The Diplomatic Pouch" he devoted his literate self to 'the tales of the tribe,' his visual perception to reverence—the 'grounds' of such-worship purely Ukraine—, and his self-as-editor to the devotional task of compounding 'tribal laws' of Soviet persuasion. Reverence, fortunately, dominated all—his *awe* the catalyst of Art from/of him... directing his choice of story... guiding his eye along paths of scenery—thus providing the total material which neither his nor Politbureau's self-righteousness could efface.

Let me put it, then, in the form of a code-key to his film:
“Zvenigora”—1928—

story code: The life of Grandfather Dovzhenko . . . (the narrative imagery thus drawn from Alex’s childhood, even though the script was entirely written by Johan Joganson—a liberal Jewish author . . . accused of “bourgeois nationalism” because of his historical writings on The Ukraine—close kin to the literal and literary background of Dovzhenko . . . closeness of friendship between them—permitting Alexander’s memory of his grandfather to ‘flesh out’ the trite scripted symbolism of Joganson).
visuality: Ukrainian fairy-tale, as Grandfather or Mother would have told it (images re-created from Alexander’s childhood imagination.).

law: Industrialization (as the government was out to sell it).
key; the gold-digging ‘grandfather’ of the film intercut with creatively montaged mechanization (viz: hot steel poured into a mold—miners pushing carts of ore—‘Grandfather’ appearing from a hole he’s dug carrying rustic and rusty sword—‘Grandfather’ sitting and staring at his ‘find’ . . . followed by a title which suggests ‘the law’/morality of the ineffectual ‘old’ giving-away to ‘new’ Soviet techniques—as ‘Grandfather’s’ movie title puts his masculinity in ancient emblematic perspective . . . : “AACH! IT WAS A LONG, LONG TIME AGO.”).

autobiographical ‘aside’: (as these occur in all Dovzhenko’s films—standing out from all else as some oddity of fantastic narrative-interruptus . . . the personae of Alexander-the-artist asserting his most private—usually guilt-ridden—self), in the sequence where ‘the bad grandson’ gives a diplomatic lecture, promising to end with his publically staged suicide.

(The Art of Alexander Dovzhenko always exists as ‘an aside’—either personal or . . . at his best . . . as in identification with the phenomenological World by way of child-like Fantasy—viz.: the fairy-tale told by ‘Grandfather’—viz.: the reactionary ‘priest’ disappearing in a cloud of steam from progressive Soviet engine . . . these the themes/dreams which root Dovzhenko in the real and morally structured grounds of his youth: the story of “Zvenigora” is just so much “narrative line”—like we say—wherewith he may hang his evil self . . . the ‘good and bad grandsons’ simply schiz-aspects of young Alex in Grand-

father's house... the struggle between 'old and new,' in the film, merely occasion for Grandfather and Uncle to grapple again in the mindfulness of Alex's adolescence—this whole film, then, a sub-conscious disciplinary metaphor: mind/matter morality).

The 'big city' aesthetes respond to "Zvenigora"—hail the 'provincial poet' -of-film Alexander Dovzhenko, much as England's art-crowd had once lauded Scot poet Bobbie Burns... shades of Shevchenko's acceptance as Ukraine Shakespeare in the 19th century art capitals of Russia now passed—as rustic mantle—onto the frail shoulders of this disillusioned Odessan film-maker... this dream too coming true—as most dreams do —when Alexander no longer felt anything but the most remote kinship to his original wish... his 'tack' now being "Moderism"... his allegiance to The Ukraine become some dim memory in him. But city-folks will have peasant heros in their hierarchies—thus Sergei Eisenstein's acceptance of Dovzhenko as "lyric," "bucolic," etc... as "Genuine Gogol!"—fixing him in all future imagination as 'The People's Poet' of cinema. Film-maker Pudovkin and poet Mayakovsky 'went along' with this image—a sub-conscious 'ploy' to keep Alexander in his intellectual 'place'?... his films 'framed,' thus, as homilies—totally over-looking The Diplomat Dovzhenko who had set himself the task of translating Soviet dicta into the absolute "Datta" of religious fact... , viz.:

"Arsenal"—1929—

story code: the rail road train as 'fiery dragon' to be tamed (this 'train' left over from the final sequences of "Zvenigora"—old Grandfather shouting: "The treasure will be ours! Hurry! Stop the fiery serpent that would crush our treasure underfoot!")

visuality: Uncle Dovzhenko's 'tales of modern times' (the adventure stories of Alex's adolescence).

law: the triumph of Man over Machine (as "Zvenigora's" had been the triumph of Machine over Nature).

key: the train wreck (culminating in hero Timosh's statement: will learn to run these things soon";—wry humor understating every instance of heroics in this film... as Timosh caricatures Dovzhenko's sense-of-selflessness—as Timosh the 'good grandson carried-over from "Zvenigora" as that absolute 'quote' which

indestructable heroes become).

autobiographical aside: “KILL ME!/YOU CANNOT KILL ME!! (as Timosh implies when he refuses to obey the orders of his officer . . . as he proves when he rides the brakeless train clear thru its wreck . . . as he says explicitly when placed before the “gaidamak” firing squad—surviving all their bullets . . . screaming: “SHOOT! THERE IS SOMETHING HERE YOU CAN NOT KILL”—and as is epitomised throughout the film by, for instance, the ‘German soldier’ attacking the camera-1st-person . . . then dropping his rifle and turning into a scarecrow—and the ‘dying Arsenalist’ stating contradictorily: “BURY ME AT HOME, BROTHERS, I HAVEN’T SEEN IT FOR NINE YEARS . . . his ‘death’ spurring his filmic ‘comrades’ into the fullest ‘liveliness’ of action and editing yet seen in the whole film’s progress—and, finally, the ‘old Bolshevik’ (grandfather?) quietly taking the revolver away fro his ‘capitalist captor’ . . . this ‘assassin’ simply unable to “do it looking in the worker’s eyes”—Dovzhenko, thus, expressing his unbearable guilt-unto-death AND, at the same time, managing to out-stare . . . with his camera lens . . . Death itself).

(The Art of “Arsenal” clusters its images around notions of dying—nodes such as the image of the fallen peasant woman . . . as-if killed by Czar Nicholas’ entry in his diary: “I shot a crow today. Splendid weather.”—or the exhausted street woman fondled by the soldier . . . her absolute immobility causing him to pass listlessly on—or the accordion collapsing on itself . . . silent representation of the sigh of a dying man—these images catalysts of death-wish abstracted beyond any means of actual dying.)

In 1930 Alexander Dovzhenko tries desperately to get out—out of Russia altogether . . . ‘outward bound’ beyond any simple measure of his consciousness—manages temporary ‘escape’ to Paris (for study of cinematic techniques) and from thence to Berlin wherefrom he anxiously writes to Sergei Eisenstein in the United States, thus:

“ . . . can you, together with our friends, or with Chaplin, or with anyone else, bring me to Hollywood . . . I desperately want to submit one of my scenarios to Chaplin. I have worked long and hard

on it. If it isn't suitable for him, he can at least pick out a few useful things for himself... However, if you find it boring I shall not submit it.

Since I cannot stay long in Berlin, I beg you to reply immediately and frankly by telegram... If the answer is no, believe me, I won't be offended..."

—no answer from Eisenstein ever having been acknowledged.

There is *sex*/death mixed integrally up in this angst of Dovzhenko—some coy giving-up, again, within him... viz. the following passage in that Berlin letter:

"Various Frenchmen were courting me passionately in Paris, but nothing came of it. Between you and me, I fled from them and now am glad. I think they're mean and roguish people."

—this brief paragraph, no doubt, having more to do with Eisenstein's rejection of his plea than any other aspect of his desperation. All his writing from this period sticks at Death—he surely also "stinking" of it, like they say... his whole self sacrificial—as surely... as with certitude of any religious fanatic—he courted The Ultimate... viz.:

"Earth"—1930—

story code: sex/death (every adolescent's masturbatory dream).
visuality: Poetical Nature—the giver and the taker-away... that aspect of Her as The Dark Mother with 'one foot'—i.e. her daughter—in Hell (images sprung from the 'little boyish' dreams of fucking Lillith among the tall grasses and black farm furrows of "the fields of The Lord").

law: the supremacy of The Co-op Farm (or Daddy's dominion over Nature—God-The-Farmer exacting his toll... of her—of him/Dovzhenko "at play"... with her/"Earth"—this then essentially Politbureau's law against normal Father-Son squabble).

key: Vasil's funeral—intercut with a pregnant woman in labor... with Vasil's nude sweetheart throwing herself against the walls of her room (a scene usually cut from all released prints of the film)—and with Vasil's killer dancing himself as-if to death in marionette-like paroxysms of guilt upon the distant horizon

line.

autobiographica aside: Grandfather's death—"DIE QUIETLY, SEMYON, AND WHEN YOU ARE DEAD, LET US KNOW, SOMEHOW, WHERE YOU ARE... IN THE SKY OR IN HELL...").

(The Art of the film centers upon the regenerative images which attend 'Grandfather's' dying—the "fruits of the Earth" . . . the children playing with apples rather than eating them—the leaves of the trees . . . their shadows dappling Grandfather and, later, dead Vasil—the white horse which symbolizes Death itself . . . its turn-of-head, and indifferent turn-of-it back again, the only indication given of the sound of the gun-shot which kills 'hero' Vasil—and all-such memorabilia from Dovzhenko's childhood as would have shocked child-mind midst Funeral.)

Alexander having thus-consistently asked for it, a kind-of 'death' was given him—all wishes being granted . . . in form absolutely distinct from any wishful imaginings—his 'Death' then coming to him as a woman . . . Yulia Solntseva—her name meaning "sunshine girl" . . . literally "daughter of the sun"—she his form whereby he was to kill all the creativity within him.

Yulia Solntseva was born in 1901 in The Ukraine—she being then six years younger than he . . . but of the very specific 'earth' of his childish obsession—she an actress especially given to film . . . of his 'field's' dedication, then—her major previous fame, her starring role as "Aelita" in the film of that name (made 1924) . . . a science-fiction 'classic,' of no Dovzhenkan interest, wherein she portrays "the queen of Mars"—her other filmic roles those of comedies of some popular lightheartedness utterly foreign to Dovzhenko's nature—she blonde, medium height, 'light of foot,' always perfectly coiffed, Russian musical-comedy symbol of sex . . . in contrast to his black-haired 'bean pole' height of slouched and nervous unkempt stance as Ukraine's peasant-poet—their 'match' most clearly an "attraction of opposite" *types*.

He cast her—this off-spring of Sol . . . or Martian queen—as "the daughter" of "earth" . . . *not*, mind!,. "the fiancée" of murdered Vasil—rather "the daughter" (Persephone?) *'aside'* from the central drama . . . a quick decision surely—his 'first

impression' thus to be the last one she was ever to play in film.

(if it can be considered that Sergei Eisenstein essentially married 'his mother,' when he took-to-wife editor Pera ("Pearl") Attasheva, then it follows that Alexander Dovzhenko's choice was for "the dragon lady"—Solntseva always to the fore . . . from then—in the foreground . . . on and forever usurping him—her script-proofing . . . his to film—she correcting his writings . . . his idea—hers to write 'him' ? . . . his life!—her "editing," as it's called . . . his film? . . . becoming him?—her finally filming his films, after his death . . . throwing away all footage he'd shot (because, as she said, she could not express herself fully while using the scenes he had made)—her re-filming whole sequences in his exact style, shot for shot . . . Ukrainian soldiers returning from battle carrying their dead in boats through smoking swamps of burning trees reflected as candles in the water—"Chronical of The Flaming Years": this last, posthumously re-filmed sequence of Alexander Dovzhenko can be seen (through Solntseva's recreation) as his final attempt—24 years later—to get 'back' to the beginning of:

"Ivan"—1832—

story code: The River of Death (of Destiny, of Desna).

visuality: The Desna itself (tho' The Dnieper is used in the filming).

law: Damnation (as this film expresses the old Industrial Revolutionary themes gone sour for Alexander).

key: the intercutting of The River and The Material which will Dam it (the damnation of the men who 'man' these machines and 'work' the materials of this construction).

autobiographical aside: The River itself—dispensable (as all Dovzhenko's 'asides') . . . indispensable only within the context of his yearning for death (as his film affirms—this selection of titles from "Ivan"): "I have brought you my son, Ivan. Take him into your team" . . . "What do you want?"—"Nothing," . . . "Here's my profile. Here's the nape of my neck. Take heed of my composure" . . . "In my time I too worked as much as I could for the advancement of the project" . . . "Everything is overpriced. They have destroyed individuality. This is dialectical nonsense. Dialectic is atrocious" . . . "Man no longer exists"—"What about me?" . . . "Ivan is adopted by the working class!"—"My son Ivan

died for a good cause.”

(Young Ezra Pound wrote to one Viola Baxter—letter dated October 24, 1907...published in “Paideuma #1”—the following passage appropriate to this study of Dovzhenko’s aesthetic dis-integration...last two dozen years of his living—appropriate to the entire consideration of “Narrative as Religion”:

‘Religion I have defined as “Another of those numerous failures resulting from an attempt to popularize art.” By which I mean that it is only now and then that religion rises to the dignity of art; or from another angle, that art includes only so much of religions as is factive, potent, exalting.’)

Alexander Dovzhenko wrote—1942—bitterly against his life...as all artists—one time or another—lamenting the limitation Life places upon Immortality and/or Death:

“I often think how my life has been wasted. What a great mistake I made when I went to work in the cinema! Sixteen years of penal servitude in this goddamn bourgeois trashcan where I am obligated to coexist and cooperate with miserable people who hate me and whom I profoundly despise...How much health and happiness have I lost with people whom I never want to see again! How much time and spiritual strength have I wasted!”

He fitfully struggles—World War II—to make cinematic ‘poems’ of propagandistic newsreel slaughter...to be—per terrible happenstance—the Fedkovich of Film. Still tortured by guilt—1945—he wrote:

“By nature I cannot be content. I am with the poor, the unhappy, the displaced. I have long observed this in myself. It must be due to my imagination and some ancient traumas...”

and—with megalomaniac zeal—

“I am ashamed, so ashamed, as if it were my fault they are poor, badly dressed, and displaced. As if I had tricked them, deceitfully promised them something, sucked their blood out, deprived them of their holidays and rest and gentle natures...”

and—quite personally—

“My own 80-year-old father died from hunger in Kiev, and I myself, severely wounded by my own people, am barely alive.”

He was to live 11 years longer—dreaming finally of other planets... scripting a Martian Odyssey—his last escape... last approach to Solntseva, the queen of Mars: “What are the Martians like? Do they resemble dwarfs or teen-agers, or are they like us? How are they different from us?”—“Do everything to keep the film from being a tragedy.”

Early on a November morning in 1956, a heart attack killed him.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

My first readings first past these lectures as a credit course at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago during the fall and early winter of 1970-71 (THE FIRST BOOK), the fall and early winter of 1971-72 (COMEDY TRAGICOMEDY), and the fall and early winter of 1972-73 (NARRATIVE AS RELIGION). Edward Douthett, who attended many of these lectures, regards them as "important statements about the biggest art of this century—and certainly the greatest thing that's been happening lately in Chicago."

The films shown as part of this lecture course were by accident, and in order of screening:

(1) Georges Méliès: *The Ballet Master's Dream*, *The Miraculous Kingdom of Patricard*, *The Witch's Revenge*, *The Inn Where No Man Dies*, *The Infernal Cardians*, *The Conquest of Egypt*, *Explosion's Thunderbolt*, *The Storm*, *The Stage Lovers*, *Extraordinary Illusions*, *The Enchanted Well*, *The Apparition*.

(2) Georges Méliès: *The Red Eye*, *The Colossal Crust*, *The All-Seeing*, *A Trip to the Moon*, *The Conquest of the Pole*, *Paris in Moon Cars* (hand-colored version), *George Méliès' Dream*, *Jean Cocteau*, *The Secret of a Star*.

(3) Georges Méliès: *An Unlucky Film* (hand-colored), an unknown *Dream* (hand-colored), *A Trip to the Moon* (no visible hand-colored version), *Tanaka's Dream of Toyland*, *A Christmas Miracle*, *Atomysawa* (School of Méliès), *Transformation*.

(4) David Wark Griffith: *The New York Hat*, *The Lillian Gish Opera*, *The Battle of Elderbush Gap*, *Birth of Babes*.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Stan Brakhage first gave these lectures as a credit course at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago during the fall and early winter of 1970-71 (THE FIRST BOOK), the fall and early winter of 1971-72 (COMEDY TRAGI/COMEDY), and the fall and early winter of 1972-73 (NARRATIVE AS RELIGION). Edward Dorn, who attended many of these lectures, recalls them as "important statements about the biggest art of this century—and certainly the greatest thing that's been happening lately in Chicago."

The films shown as part of this lecture-course were by meeting, and in order of screening:

(1) George Méliès: *The Ballet Master's Dream*, *The Magical Kingdom of Fairyland*, *The Witch's Revenge*, *The Inn Where No Man Rests*, *The Infernal Cauldron*, *The Damnation of Faust*, *Jupiter's Thunderbolt*, *The Mermaid*, *The Magic Lantern*, *Extraordinary Illusions*, *The Enchanted Well*, *The Apparition*.

(2) George Méliès: *The Bob Kick*, *The Delphic Oracle*, *The Art Lesson*, *A Trip to the Moon*, *The Conquest of the Pole*, *Paris to Monte Carlo* (handcolored version), *Baron Munchausen's Dream*; Jean Cocteau: *The Blood of a Poet*.

(3) George Méliès: *An Untitled Film* (handcolored), *An Astronomer's Dream* (handcolored), *A Trip to the Moon* (an earlier handcolored version), *Topsy's Dream of Toyland*, *A Christmas Miracle*; Anonymous (School of Méliès): *Transformation*.

(4) David Wark Griffith: *The New York Hat*, *The Lonedale Operator*, *The Battle of Elderbush Gap*, *Judith of Bethulia*.

(5) David Wark Griffith: *A Corner in Wheat*, *The Three Sisters*; Edwin Porter: *The Great Train Robbery* (colored version), *Rescued from An Eagle's Nest*.

(6) David Wark Griffith: *The Birth of a Nation*.

(7) David Wark Griffith: *Intolerance* (Part One).

(8) David Wark Griffith: *Intolerance* (Part Two).

(9) Carl Theodore Dreyer: *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.

(10) Carl Theodore Dreyer: *Day of Wrath*.

(11) Carl Theodore Dreyer: *Vampyr*.

(12) Carl Theodore Dreyer: *Gertrude*.

(13) Sergei Eisenstein: *The Battleship Potemkin*.

(14) Sergei Eisenstein: *Ten Days that Shook the World*.

(15) Sergei Eisenstein: *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1*.

(16) Sergei Eisenstein: *Ivan the Terrible, Part 2*.

The films shown the second year (the COMEDY TRAGI/COMEDY series) were:

(1) Charlie Chaplin: *A Woman*, *A Night at The Show*, *The Cure*; Lumiere: *Le Cinematographie Lumiere*.

(2) Charlie Chaplin: *Making a Living*, *Easy Street*; Sennett: *Liz-zies of the Field*; Méliès: *The Inn Where No Man Rests*, *The Witches Revenge*.

(3) Charlie Chaplin: *The Cure*, *One A.M.*, *A Night At the Show*, *The Floor Walker*, *Pawnshop*; Melies: *Baron Munchausen's Dream*, *The Bob Kick*, *The Oracle of Delphi*, *The Lesson*, *Jupiter's Thunderbolts*, *The Mermaid*, *The Magic Lantern*, *The Conquest of the Pole*, *Paris to Monte Carlo*.

(4) Charlie Chaplin: *The Gold Rush*, *Vagabond*.

(5) Charlie Chaplin: *City Lights*, *Modern Times*.

(6) Laurel & Hardy: *Two Tars*, *Early to Bed*, *Liberty*, *Big Business*.

(7) Laurel & Hardy: *Wrong Again*, *The Music Box*; Bunuel: *The Andalusian Dog*.

(8) Buster Keaton: *Neighbors*, *The Playhouse*, *Cops*, *Baloonatics*, *Coney Island*.

(9) Buster Keaton: *Our Hospitality*, *Sherlock Jr.*

(10) Buster Keaton: *The General*.

(11) Buster Keaton: *College*, *Steam Boat Bill Jr.*

(12) Schneider: *Film* (starring Buster Keaton).

(13) Jean Vigo: *A Propose de Nice*, *Taris*; Clair: *Entr'acte*; Leger: *Ballet Mechanique*.

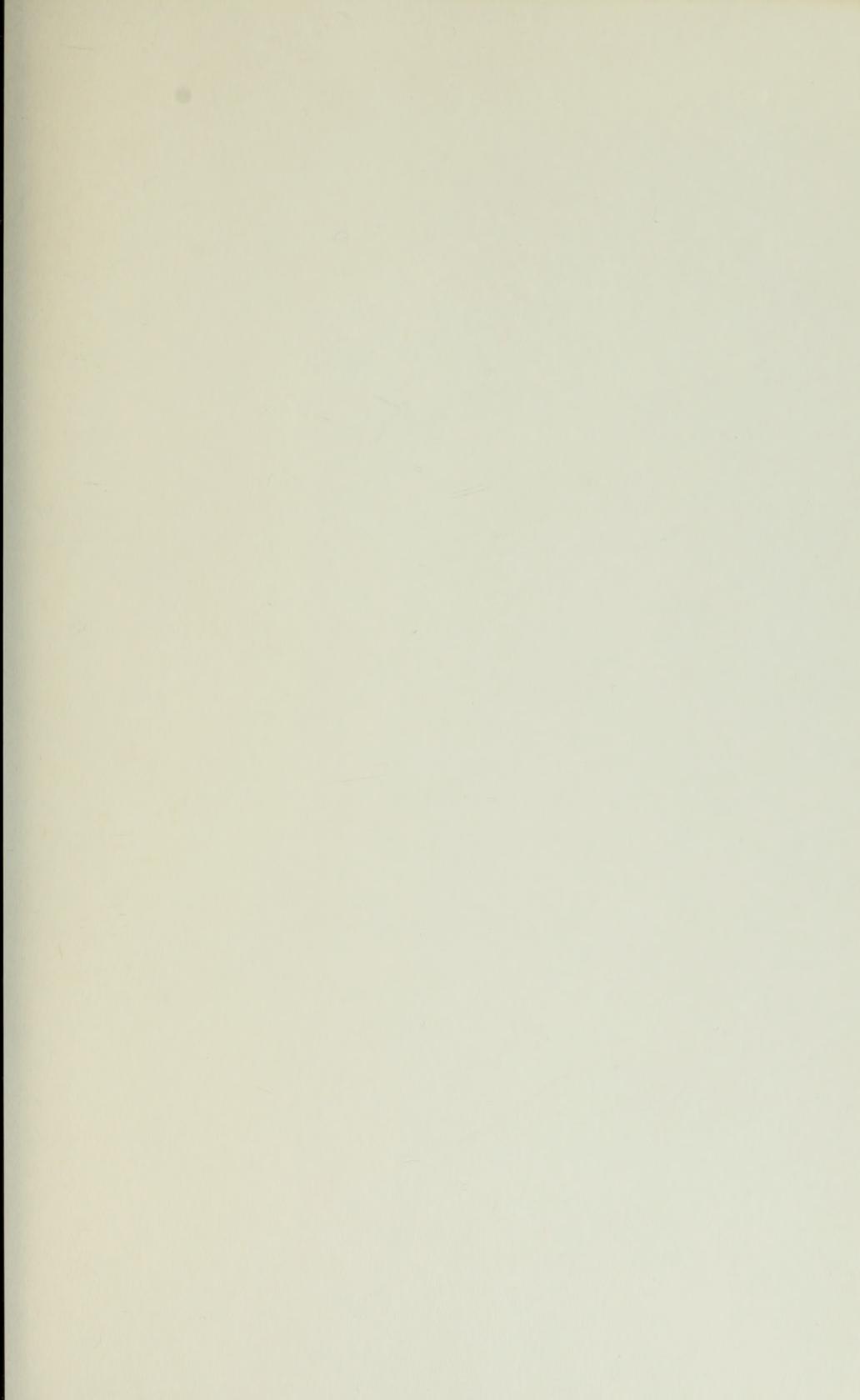
(14) Jean Vigo: *Zero for Conduct*.

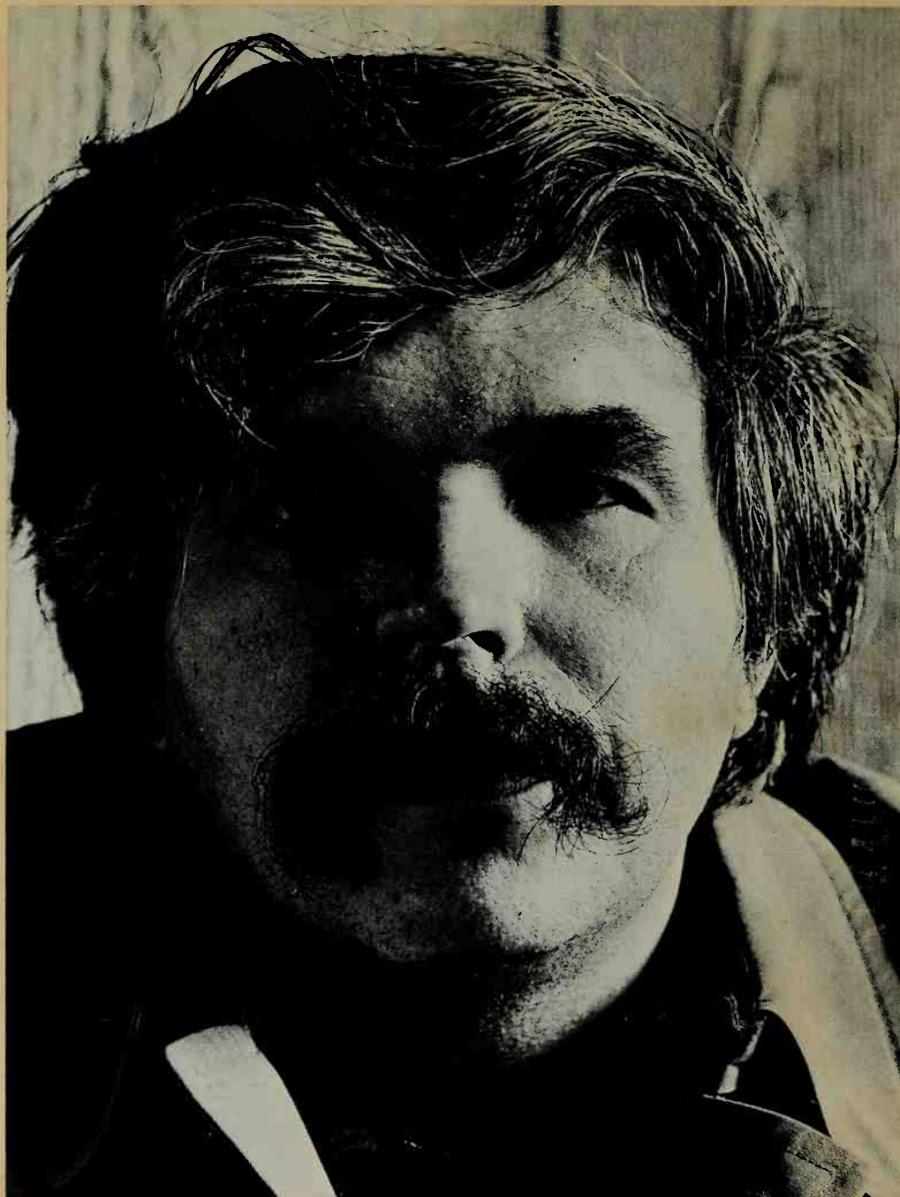
(15) Jean Vigo: *L'Atalante*.

The films shown the final year (the NARRATIVE AS RELIGION series) were:

- (1) Robert Wiene, etc.: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.
- (2) Viking Eggeling: *Symphonie Diagonale*; Hans Richter: *Rhythmus 21, Everything Revolves, Everything Whirls*; Watson & Weber: *The Fall of the House of Usher, Lot of Sodom*.
- (3) Max Reinhardt: *Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- (4) Fritz Lang: *Metropolis*.
- (5) Fritz Lang: *Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler, M*.
- (6) F.W. Murnau: *Nosferatu*.
- (7) F.W. Murnau: *The Last Laugh, Tartuffe The Hypocrite*.
- (8) F.W. Murnau: *Faust*.
- (9) F.W. Murnau: *Sunrise, Tabu*.
- (10) Alexander Dovzhenko: *Svenigora*.
- (11) Alexander Dovzhenko: *Arsenal, Earth*.
- (12) Jean Epstein: *The Fall of the House of Usher*.
- (13) Jean Epstein: *La Glace A Trois Faces*; Jean Cocteau: *The Blood of a Poet*.
- (14) Jean Cocteau: *Beauty and The Beast*.
- (15) Jean Cocteau: *Orpheus, Testament of Orpheus*.







Stan Brakhage is a definitional writer. He starts with more or less common knowledge (or common controversy) and shows us how the language leads back into the interior. . . . His Chaplin lecture, in particular, is the greatest illumination of that difficult subject I have ever read. . . .

—Edward Dorn

Brakhage the historian and analyst of film is, despite the unlikelihood of such a conjunction, as great a figure as Brakhage the master of filmmaking.

—Guy Davenport