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screwball comedies, the sort of things Hollywood has done best and honored least. Recent revivals of his lesser-known films in New York have made it possible to reappraise the career of America's foremost director of what has been called "bread and butter" cinema. . . .

The Road to Glory, released in 1926, was his first directorial assignment and is unrelated except by its title to the film Hawks directed in 1936. Of the other seven films Hawks directed in the silent era, it is doubtful that any have been shown since their initial release. These include *Fig Leaves* (1926); *The Cradle Snatchers* and *Paid to Love* (1927); *A Girl in Every Port*, *Fazil*, and *The Air Circus* (1928); and *Trent's Last Case* (1929). . . . It might be noted that *A Girl in Every Port* appears to be well-known and highly regarded in France, possibly as part of the retroactive fall-out from *Scarface*, possibly also because of the presence in the cast of Louise Brooks—after Garbo, the most beautiful actress of the Twenties. Here Miss Brooks plays a circus high diver who becomes involved with a cynical seaman played by Victor McLaglen. *The Air Circus*, listed by *The New York Times* as one of the ten best films of 1928, was a part-talkie, and *A Girl in Every Port*, *Fazil*, and *Trent's Last Case* had musical scores and synchronized sound effects.

The Dawn Patrol (1930), Hawks's first all-talking film, was released at a time when the screen was saturated with imitations of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Journey's End*. Consequently, the critics, though favorably disposed towards the film, tended to dismiss it in the hope that the genre would eventually peter out. Nevertheless, *Dawn Patrol* was well-liked by the public and is still fondly remembered despite a glamorized 1938 remake starring Errol Flynn, David Niven, and Basil Rathbone and directed by Edmund Goulding.¹ Hawks focusses here on the problem of moral responsibility in the crucible of action, a theme which will be amplified in later Hawks films.

The initial premise of *Dawn Patrol* places Neil Hamilton in a command position on the front lines where British planes of inferior quality, undermanned and outnumbered, are sent out each day with

¹ Additional confusion was caused by the fact that the Hawks *Dawn Patrol* was retitled *Flight Commander* when the Goulding version appeared. Even today, some circulating prints of the Hawks film bear the misleading title, and the error has been perpetuated by at least one film magazine.—Ed.

the foreknowledge that few will return. Richard Barthelmess, second in command, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr., his closest friend, are relieved of much of the moral tension by their direct participation in the action. It is interesting to note that Hamilton and Barthelmess are further estranged by a previous off-screen argument over a woman. This conception of the female serving in an essentially masculine world as a source of friction, competition, and moral catharsis will be developed in later films where the uniquely Hawkian woman actually materializes on the screen.

When Hamilton is promoted to a higher chain of command, Barthelmess is forced to assume the responsibility for sending men out to die, and finally ruptures his friendship with Fairbanks by sending the latter's younger brother on a fatal mission. To atone for his guilt, Barthelmess gets Fairbanks drunk and replaces him on a suicide flight. Fairbanks, as next in command, steps into the position of responsibility; the routine is resumed; the killing continues; the unnatural order remains triumphant.

Hawks's treatment of the material is distinguished by his customary virtues: bare, clean, uncluttered technique, a stark story line entirely within the range of terse dialogue which states the situation and then withdraws when the moral conflict becomes implicit in its action, and, most important, a pervasive atmosphere of hopelessness captured with economy and incisiveness.

The Criminal Code (1931) is a film which needs to be revived for a detailed judgment. Walter Huston portrays a cynical district attorney who boasts that he can successfully argue both sides of a case. When his political ambitions are stymied, he is appointed warden of a prison where many of the inmates owe their status to his skill as a district attorney. Phillips Holmes, convicted for a justifiable crime, becomes involved with the warden's daughter, Constance Cummings. When a squealer is murdered, Holmes refuses to identify the murderer, invoking the "criminal code." The film is notable for an extended scene of gallows humor with Huston being shaved by a convict who wields a straight razor as he chats about his conviction for slitting someone's throat.

Scarface (1932) is Hawks's greatest film, the bloodiest and most brutal of the gangster films which embellished the American cinema of the early Thirties. Hawks and Ben Hecht patterned its Capone-ish characters after the Borgias. Paul Muni plays Tony, a killer with

ments of time a decade or so apart. He has never used a flashback, and even in the thirties he seldom resorted to the degenerative montage of time lapses. His tracking, cutting, and framing have never attracted much attention in themselves, and this is not as much of a virtue as it may seem. Critics who argue that technique should never call attention to itself are usually critics who do not wish to call attention to technique. If Hawks does not choose to use technique as reflective commentary on action, it is because his personality expresses a pragmatic intelligence rather than a philosophical wisdom.

Nevertheless, Hawks has an uncanny technical flair for establishing the mood of a film at the outset and sustaining this mood to the end. The atmosphere established in the opening shots of *Barbary Coast*, *The Road to Glory*, and *Only Angels Have Wings* casts a spell which is uniquely Hawksian. The opening, wordless sequences in *Rio Bravo* present all the moral issues of the film. The low-angle shot of Wayne looking down at Martin with sorrowful disdain tells the audience all it has to know about the two men, and Hawks even tilts his camera to isolate the relationship from its background and to intensify the reciprocal feelings of shame and disappointment. However, Hawks never tilts his camera again in the film, and the intensity of the opening tapers off into comic understatement. This is typical of the director's tendency to veer away from dramatization and verbalization of feelings which are implicit in the action. Hawks consciously shoots most of his scenes at the eye level of a standing onlooker. Consequently even his spectacles are endowed with a human intimacy which the director will not disturb with pretentious crane shots. Hawks will work within a frame as much as possible, cutting only when a long take or an elaborate track might distract his audience from the issues in the foreground of the action. This is good, clean, direct, functional cinema, perhaps the most distinctively American cinema of all. It is certainly not the last word on the art of film-making, but its qualities are more unusual than most critics have imagined. . . .

The Modernity of Howard Hawks

by HENRI LANGLOIS

It seems that *A Girl in Every Port* was the revelation of the Hawks season at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

For New York audiences of 1962, Louise Brooks suddenly acquired that "Face of the Century" aura she had had, many years ago, for spectators at the Cinéma des Ursulines.

Because for Paris *A Girl in Every Port* is not a recent event, but one which occurred in the 1928 season.

It was the Paris of the Montparnassians and Picasso, of the surrealists and the Seventh Art, of Diaghilev, of the "Soirées de Paris," of the "Six," of Gertrude Stein, of Brancusi's masterpieces.

That is why Blaise Cendrars confided a few years ago that he thought *A Girl in Every Port* definitely marked the first appearance of contemporary cinema.

To the Paris of 1928, which was rejecting expressionism, *A Girl in Every Port* was a film conceived in the present, achieving an identity of its own by repudiating the past.

To look at the film is to see yourself, to see the future which leads through *Scarface* to the cinema of our time.

The modern man—that's Hawks, completely.

When you look back over his *oeuvre* today what is striking is the degree to which the cinema of Hawks was ahead of its time.

To be more precise—since there is generally a time lag between the main currents of contemporary art and the cinematic art—what

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is striking is the degree to which Hawks's art is up-to-date, and even in the vanguard of artistic movements.

The art he created is that of an America which has now been exposed and which did exist, but whose evolution was then still in progress.

Thus, five years before the appearance of the first modern construction in the streets of New York, on 53rd Street¹—fifteen years before the appearance of the first modern skyscrapers which have transformed Manhattan—Hawks, like Gropius, conceived his films as one might conceive a typewriter, a motor, or a bridge.

That is why, today, when America has discovered Hawks, his old films like *The Crowd Roars* have such an impact when shown on television.

In these forgotten Warners films, the people of New York and America, much to their surprise, recognize themselves: the depiction of the American scene now seems very accurate.

It is this which has caused people to write that Hawks is the most American of film-makers.

He is certainly American, not more so than Griffith or Vidor, but his work is rooted in contemporary America in its spirit as well as in its surface appearance. It is now clear that Hawks's is the only *oeuvre* the American public can totally identify itself with, in terms of both simple admiration and criticism:

"... It has no relation to my work. ... I didn't care to do it but was forced to under contract. ... It was made right after Murnau's *Sunrise*, which introduced German camera trick-work to Hollywood. ... They liked it; I didn't. ... I've always been rather mechanically minded so I tried a whole lot of mechanical things, and then gave them up completely—most of the time my camera stays on eye level now. ... I just use the simplest camera in the world."²

So many excuses for three or four shots made as a concession to Fox in *Paid to Love*, which anticipates Lubitsch.

¹ Langlois is punning with the word "construction"; it refers both to buildings and to modern "constructivist" sculpture—the Museum of Modern Art is located on 53rd Street.—*Translator's Note*.

² From Bogdanovich's interview with Hawks in his *The Cinema of Howard Hawks*.—Ed.

It must have meant a lot to him.

Thus, at the time when Paris was rejecting expressionism, at the very moment when Babelsberg was conquering the United States and Hollywood, Hawks too rejected it and for the same reasons, because it was in conflict with the demands of the new age.

Curiously, *A Girl in Every Port*, so novel for people at the time, seems much less so today than *Fig Leaves*, in which Hawks's art operates in complete freedom.

But *Fig Leaves* was at that time too new a film for contemporary audiences not to be blinded by it.

With the coming of the sound film, the problem arose of cinematic construction in terms of speech, of the editing of dialogue in terms of movement.

A new dramaturgy was about to be born: it had to be discovered, explored, established.

Hawks applied himself directly to the task, without trying to evade the difficulties.

He immediately arrived at the heart of the problem: dramatic film construction in terms of the roles played by dialogue and sound.

From *Dawn Patrol* to *Ceiling Zero*, Hawks was totally preoccupied with this construction. As a result, he became the Le Corbusier of the sound film, in the way he handles lines and volume.

His works, then, are stripped bare almost to the point of abstraction—but it is as if they are made of concrete.

The essential. The truth of the dialogue, the truth of the situations, the truth of the subjects, of the milieux, of the characters: a dramaturgy derived from an agglomeration of facts, words, noises, movements, situations, as a motor is assembled. There is nothing superfluous: no stopping, no meandering, no fleshing out. What is most impressive is Hawks's progressive mastery, culminating in *Ceiling Zero*, a totally accomplished film, and one which is diametrically opposed to filmed theater, except for those who no longer see its originality and its extraordinary achievement because they have learned too much from it and thus find it too familiar.

The dialogue: what one says, what one is, what one does. Hawks puts great emphasis on dialogue and intonation: on the meaning of the dialogue, the construction of the dialogue, the delivery of the dialogue.