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## *CLOSE UP*

probably it may have been. Anyhow it is an interesting film, if only on account of its subject. But we must congratulate Warner for a rendering that could not have been more gracious or more graceful. It would be illogical to object that religion should not be made an excuse for money making as long as there are collection plates in churches, or again, when entertainment tax is charged to hordes of pleasure-seekers visiting the premises of a murder.

A Cecil M. de Mille Film.

## BED AND SOFA

Here is an example of the newest Russian non-propagandistic film, a simple story almost crudely told, yet astounding in its sheer uncompromise. *Bed And Sofa* is a story of modern Russia and of poor people, and the cost of production must have been negligible. Nearly the whole action takes place in a tenement room. The usual technique is almost ignored, and havoc is made of time sequence by reckless cuts, by unrelated continuity, by every fault that the amateur can make. And yet here was a film that gripped and had genius. Its very uneven-ness gave it an odd power ; almost, one might say, created a new technique. It should be played without music, and its staccato movement would be in accord. Music made blur, or attempted to bridge over, which was a mistake.

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Played in silence the almost cubistic pattern of short, vivid moments would have been really powerful.

Briefly the story is of a man and his wife, and the housing problem of modern Russia. The two live, as has been indicated, in a tenement room. The husband seems a cheery, animalistic young man, stretching and smiling beneath the bedclothes. His wife is young too, but less cheery. Indeed you observe instantly a curious sulkiness in her ; that kind of introspective brooding that can permeate a whole house. She prepares breakfast desultorily and with an air that suggests repudiation of her surrounding circumstance. The slightly bedraggled, ever so slightly slatternly appearance she presents in some way gives stress to her beauty. You notice she is beautiful, then that beauty is marred in her by something unbalanced or unadjusted ; by some dissatisfaction that is deeper and more dangerous than circumstances seem to call for. The feeling is that through ennui she would be deliberately capable of anything, but at the same time not through strength but weakness of character.

Later the husband brings back his friend. He has nowhere to stay, and the husband offers him the sofa in the corner of the room as a bed. On the morning following the new young man is up early and preparing breakfast. There is elaboration and courtesy in his attitude which tells its tale to the wife. She watches him, half sulky, half amused. She has acquired over-night a hard, wariness of expression, something furtive and covert and false. So when the husband goes away to work a few days, it is inevitable, that under the pres-

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sure of the atmosphere created by her sensual and destructive indolence, and by the feeling of being cooped up in such cramped space with this young man, (toward whom it is clearly indicated she entertains feelings only of morbid curiosity) the obvious should happen. The young man moves over from the sofa to the bed. There is no nonsense about it. There is no atmosphere of a love affair, or of illicit beauty. It is deliberate, cynical, and part of the room with its shabby curtain over the door and its untidy table and general litter.

The husband comes back and finds out. He becomes angry more through his wife's attitude than because of what he has discovered. She pretends shame, but there is something taunting and triumphant behind it. The husband stamps out in a rage. A little reflection convinces him he does not live in a world of mock heroics ; he is comfortable at home, so he goes back. He is a little aghast when his wife and the young man retire for the night. It is now *his* turn to sleep on the sofa.

The young man and the husband remain good friends. They play chess together. Now it seems inevitable that the young man should order the wife to make tea. How different this from his waiting on her a few days back. She, very reasonably, refuses. The situation is full of dissatisfactions, pent up feelings. The two men play their games together. She sits at the window. The room gets on her nerves. Her furtiveness and treachery become more pronounced. While sitting at the window a motor car with strong headlights dashing past startles her. She starts forward in her chair, then sinks back to her despondent mood.

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There is another subtle moment when she is seen again, only in daylight, at the window, a long, shallow window, with rain pouring down. Her husband, finally exasperated, is again going off. He leaves. You do not see the door because a curtain is hung across the passage. But you see the curtain billow up, and sink back as the door slams. Then the wife suddenly runs out after him. She leaves the door open, you can tell this because again the curtain blows up, and papers lift, then blow off the table. Her feet are seen running past the window. They come back together, both dripping with rain.

We have discovered at last what it is, why her brooding has become more intense. She has gone to an hospital to stop motherhood. We would remind *Close Up* readers again, that birth control is completely legalised in Russia. Films, showing in detail the dangers of irregular abortion are freely shown, and all information supplied.

While waiting her turn, clearly very frightened, she sees from the window first a baby in a pram, then a child with a doll. These two symbols came like a hit between the eyes. Until this moment everything had been stark, exact and undeniable. Suddenly we were back with the old technique, the old sentimentality. Suddenly the psychology was going to bits. Until this moment her type had been remorselessly painted in, so that you felt now that the sight of a baby at such a time would repel her; would shake her certainly. Here was no type of motherhood. She was far too self-centered, too occupied with her own needs to feel anything but phys-

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ical fear of the ordeal before her in the operating room. She creeps out. Presently her tears fall on a small plaster ornament. She goes off in a train. At the end of the film the husband and his friend stand in front of the mirror with the ornament and her note, scratching their heads.

The amazing quality of this film was that it presented life as it (let us admit it) so often is, and not as most of us try to pretend it should be. Here were human relationships blurred and adjusted, as human lives always are, to suit surrounding circumstances. People are usually wise enough not to carry their principles to the point where they cease to become principles and become instead stupidity or destructiveness. That is what this film says. It says there is no morality except the special morality adaptable to different circumstances, and it goes even further, pointing out that any morality except the morality adjusted to governing conditions of one's particular life is so much hearsay, not even considered as remotely in existence. Some people might hold up their hands at this film. They might say "But this is impossible." Their indignation would reveal the fact that they realised how exactly true, common, and, to be frank, natural, the lives of these people were.

It is a pity that we are not likely to see the film as widely as it should be seen, (it has had a great success throughout Germany) if only on account of the fact that it is the most recent and most complete example of the modern Russian method in cinematography. It is an historic film, and probably better in many ways than *The Mother*. You cannot

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compare it with *Potemkin*, which belongs in the propagandistic class. But our advice to everyone who can is to see it at all costs. It is one of the most momentous contributions to film progress yet achieved.

The principal parts are played by Ludmila Semenowa, as Vera, the wife ; Woldemar Fogel as the husband, and Nicolei Bataloff as the friend.

### HEIMWEH (Homesickness)

A *Terra* Film by Max Glass, with Mady Christians and Wilhelm Dieterle.

A certain distinction holds the attention in this film where attention is strained by too much unrelated incident. The story is of Russian exiles, and has some excellent acting. It opens with a surge of wild faces, an effect both startling and dramatic. Revolution.

Near by a great palace is silent. The General rings and nobody comes. He goes to the top of the stairs angrily. Nobody answers his calls. Presently Lydia (Mady Christians) comes from her room. She goes down the huge staircase to find out what is the matter. She finds one servant remaining only (Wilhelm Dieterle) who tells her they are abandoned. These opening scenes with the atmosphere of suspense and the deserted palace and vague uneasiness or impending calamity were well achieved. Later they flee... to Paris. (Is