

## Modern Matinees: Iris Barry's History of Film

Nov 1- 29

The founding of the MoMA Film Library (now the Department of Film) on June 25, 1935 was a catalyst for the study of the motion picture as art in the United States. The function of the Film Library according to Iris Barry, its first curator, was to "trace, catalog, assemble, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of films." These are methodologies the Department of Film adheres to more than 80 years after its establishment.

Using Barry's 1935 publication *Film Notes* as a guide post, *Modern Matinees: Iris Barry's History of Film* endeavors to reconstruct a range of those earliest programs originally organized in six thematic series and three monographic compilations. This broad re-consideration of those films Barry regarded as key for their "pervasive social effect...and as the only new art-form of modern times" commences with the devastating *A Fool There Was* (1915), explores the dawn of sound with *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and includes the animation classic *Steamboat Willie* (1928). Each of the films in this series became early acquisitions, building the Film Library's emergent collection.

Organized by Anne Morra, Associate Curator, Department of Film.

***The Covered Wagon***. 1923. USA. Directed by James Cruze. Written by Jack Cunningham. Based on the novel by Emerson Hough. With Tully Marshall, John Fox, Alan Hale. Silent with musical accompaniment. DCP, courtesy Kino-Lorber. 98min.

"In *The Covered Wagon*, many of the best functions of the cinema are combined. There is the element of actuality, such as occurs most commonly in topical or travel pictures, for real cattle swim a real river, mountains and skies and dust are authentic. There is also the ability of the cinema to reconstruct past as well as to mirror present life, for this glimpse of American pioneer endeavor resembles the real thing as scrupulously as possible."

Fri, Nov 1, 1:30 T2

***Hydrothérapie fantastique. (The Doctor's Secret)***. 1908. France. Directed by Georges [Méliès](#). Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. Approx. 9 min.

"Georges Méliès, a French prestidigitator who made innumerable films between 1866 and 1914, combined with a Rabelaisian sense of humor a gift for making films and for imagining new kinds of machinery. Both are apparent in this early film, somewhat clinical for present taste but, nevertheless, abounding in imagery and invention the equal of any modern painter's."

***Gertie the Dinosaur***. 1914. USA. Directed and animated by Winsor McCay. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 12 min.

“Before either photography or the film were invented, children flipping over between thumb and finger little booklets of outline drawings had seen animated pictures. Years later, it was one of these flippers or *magic booklets* that inspired Winsor McCay, famous newspaper cartoonist and creator of the comic strip Little Nemo, to experiment with animated film cartoons. “

***His Bitter Pill.*** 1916. USA. Directed by Fred Fishback. With Ella Haines, Edgar Kennedy, Mack Swain. 16mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 20 min.

“Since nothing was sacred to Mack Sennett and his studio full of irreverent comedians, a skit on the Western film was hardly to be resisted. *His Bitter Pill* is apparently a genuine *Western*, complete with heroic sheriff, villain, robbery and hard riding: it is seen through an ingeniously distorted lens and the values are unerringly overemphasized or misplaced. The subtitles are pure mockery.”

***The Sex Life of the Polyp.*** 1928. USA. Directed by Thomas Chalmers. With Robert Benchley. DCP. 11 min.

“This mock-lecture was one of the first talking films to be recorded. Not for long afterwards did anyone else achieve so much naturalness or so ably grasp the intimately humorous or dramatic possibilities of screen-dialogue.”

(NOTE: need piano accompaniment for first three silent films in program; fourth film has sound)

**Mon, Nov 4, 1:30 T2**

***The Freshman.*** 1925. USA. Directed by Fred Newmeyer, Sam Taylor. Written by John Grey, Sam Taylor, Tim Whelan, Ted Wilde. With Harold Lloyd, Jobyna Ralston, Pat Harmon. 35mm Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 75 min.

“It was after he assumed horn-rimmed glasses in 1917 that Harold Lloyd developed his own ingenuous type of character-comedy, first in a number of one and two reel films and then in the full-length *Grandma’s Boy* and *Safety Last*. The Lloyd character, a typical American country boy, always struggles eagerly to adapt himself to the circumstances more complex and more sophisticated than are natural to him. In *The Freshman*, the Lloyd motif is worked out with especial perfection, and its satire on undergraduate ambition remains as fresh as it is goodnatured.”

**Tues, Nov 5, 1:30 T2**

***Cavalcade.*** 1933. USA. Directed by Frank Lloyd. Written by Reginald Berkeley. Based on the play by Noël Coward. With Clive Brook, Irene Brown, Frank Lawton. 35mm print courtesy Academy Film Archive. 112 min.

“Before the film *Cavalcade* was begun, the producers sent technicians to England to record the play as it was produced in London. An entire performance, complete with curtains and applause, was

photographed with sound in the theatre. This film of the actual stage production was used as a check while the film proper was being made. This explains why *Cavalcade*, except for the battlefield sequence, sticks so faithfully to theatrical form. It is in reality a reproduction of the play rather than an independent or an original motion-picture.”

**Wed, Nov 6, 1:30 T2**

***Underworld.*** 1927. USA. Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Written by Robert N. Lee. With George Bancroft, Evelyn Brent, Clive Brook. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 80 min.

“Realistic treatment of violence and crime, fairly common in the earlier days of the movies, had been so steadily, if imperceptibly, banished from the screen latterly that *Underworld* upon its appearance created a considerable impression with its relatively frank and uncompromising picture of gangster land, and its comparative lack of whitewash. This was the first professional film of Josef von Sternberg, though he had previously directed *The Salvation Hunters*, which made independently in Hollywood at amazingly little cost...”

**Thu, Nov 7, 1:30 T2**

***The Cat and the Canary.*** 1927. USA. Directed by Paul Leni. Written by Alfred A. Cohn, Robert F. Hill. Based on the play by John Willard. With Tully Marshall, Gertrude Astor, Creighton Hale. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 75 min.

“The director of this film was the late Paul Leni, distinguished German stage-designer and artist, and director of the film *Waxworks*. He was brought to Hollywood when the German invasion of the film capital was at its height and this was his first American film. Curiously enough, Leni apparently was not appointed to design the sets of *The Cat and the Canary*; those are attributed to Charles D. Hall. The oblique camera angles, the scene looking downward on the assembled characters, the shot through the high back of a chair were expected not only of any German director of the time but of directors in Hollywood generally. 1927 was the year of camera-angles.”

**Fri, Nov 8, 1:30 T2**

***The Skeleton Dance.*** 1929. USA. Directed by Walt Disney. Animation by Ub Iwerks. 16mm. 6 min.

“Fame and fortune waited on the second Mickey Mouse, *Steamboat Willie*, made with sound. It scored an immediate success as its first showing in September, 1928. *The Skeleton Dance*, first of the Silly Symphonies, was made the following year. In the Mickeys and the Symphonies alike, the brilliant use of sound as an integral part of the cartoon, rather than as an accompaniment deserves special attention.”

***Der Golem.*** 1920. Germany. Directed by Carl Boese, Paul Wegener. Written by Paul Wegener. With Albert Steinrueck, Ernst Deutsch, Paul Wegener. German main titles, English intertitles. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. 87 min.

“Wegener made an earlier version of the subject in 1914, working with a group of associates, Stellan Rye the Danish director, Henrik Galeen, the writer and Guido Seeber, the cameraman as he had done in the making of *The Student of Prague*. (In the 1920 version) the clay image of the Golem (is) brought to life by the old Rabbi. This legendary figure of the middle ages is afterwards instrumental in delivering the Jews from the oppression of their overlord. The entire film, of considerable interest for its exterior settings and its lighting as well as for the acting of Wegener (as the Golem).”

**Mon, Nov 11, 1:30 T2 (NOTE: need piano accompaniment for only DER GOLEM)**

***Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari. (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari).*** 1920. Germany. Directed by Robert Wiene. Written by Hans Janowitz, Carl Mayer. Based on a story by Hans Janowitz. With Conrad Veidt, Lil Dagover, Werner Krauss. Silent with musical accompaniment. German main titles and English intertitles. 35mm. Approx. 75 min.

“It was for its settings that *Caligari* was first acclaimed and has remained famous. They are not particularly cinematic and, indeed, hardly anything takes place in the film that could not have been presented identically on a stage. They derive from expressionist paintings, through the settings of expressionist plays and particularly of *Der Sturm* group, on view in Berlin at that time. The actors, especially Krauss and Veidt, in make-up and in movement alike succeed in harmonizing with this atmosphere of unreality.”

**Tue, Nov 12, 1:30 T2**

***Der Letzte Man. (The Last Laugh).*** 1924. Germany. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Written by Carl Mayer. With Emil Jannings, Olaf Storm, Max Hiller. 35mm. Silent with English intertitles. Approx. 80 min.

“it was this film that constituted the revolution: it broke with the past both in technique and in theory. Hitherto, a discontinuous method of pictorial narration had been in general use. In *The Last Laugh* a new and continuous method of narration was used, for here appear prolonged stretches of uninterrupted and uncut images, in which the camera itself had moved to follow the progress of the action. It was actually, the joint product of four men—Murnau, the director, Freund the cameraman, Mayer the scenarist and Jannings the principal actor—who conceived and developed it (the film) as a pictorial unit, working with unusual freedom in a studio unparalleled anywhere, at that time...”

**Wed, Nov 13, 1:30 T2**

***Hamlet.*** 1920. Denmark/Germany. Directed by Svend Gade, Heinz Schall. Adapted by Erwin Gepard. Based on the play by William Shakespeare. With Asta Nielsen, Paul Conradi, Hans Junkerman. DCP

courtesy DFF-Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum. German and English intertitles. Music track by Michael Riessler. 110 min.

“The plot of this *Hamlet* is drawn from Danish history as recorded by Saxo Grammaticus in the 12<sup>th</sup> century from *Fratricide Punished*, a German drama possibly based on a lost pre-quarto Shakespearian version, and from the Shakespearian play as we know it. But its somewhat startling denouement, revealing that Hamlet was actually a woman, is derived from Edward P. Vining’s *The Mystery of Hamlet* (1881) a book from which the scenarist of the film drew both his characterization of Prince Hamlet and several incidents not met with in any other source.”

**Thu, Nov 14, 1:30; Wed, Dec 11, 1:30 T2**

***Potomok Chingis-khan. (Storm Over Asia).*** 1928. U.S.S.R. Directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin. Written by Osip Brik. Based on the story by I. Novokshonov. With Boris Barnet, Valeri Inkizhinov, Ann Sudakevich. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. English main and intertitles. Approx. 74 min.

Not actually included in Iris Barry’s 1935 programs, she notes the following in the text supporting Series VII, Program 4, “When Pudovkin was four his family moved to Moscow, where all his schooling took place. He said he took no interest in the *silly* cinema until Kuleshov, whom he met in 1920, took him to see *Intolerance*. In 1920 the First State School of Cinematography was opened by the Commissariat of Education under the direction of Vladimir Gardin. Pudovkin joined the school and became wholeheartedly absorbed in his new studies. “ Observing the editing in *Potomok Chingis-khan*, Barry calls it a “ technical tour-de-force”.

**Fri, Nov 15, 1:30 T2**

***Paris qui dort (The Crazy Ray).*** 1923. France. Directed by René Clair. With Albert Préjean, Henri Rollan, Madeline Rodrigues. 16mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. English intertitles. Approx. 62 min.

“The frank use of familiar exteriors recalls not only Feuillade but Zecca; though only Clair thought of using the Eiffel Tower as his setting. And, throughout the film, he continues to express his conviction that the function of the cinema is to teach us to look.”

***Ballet mécanique.*** 1924. France. Written and directed by Fernand Léger. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. French titles. Approx. 12 min.

“*Ballet mécanique* employs a minimum of drawn or painted geometrical forms and a preponderant amount of photographic images. Even in the repeated scenes of the woman mounting the steps, it nevertheless remains abstract...”

***Ménilmontant.*** 1925. France. Directed by Dmitri Kirsanov. With Yolande Beaulieu, Guy Belmont, Jean Pasquier. 16mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Intermittent French titles. Approx. 38 min.

“Made at a minimum expense and with poor equipment by a young Russian émigré who had previously been a violinist in a movie theatre in Paris, this is unquestionably one of the most remarkable of amateur films.”

**Mon, Nov 18, 1:30 T2**

***Greed***. 1924. USA. Written and directed by Erich von Stroheim. Based on the novel *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* by Frank Norris. With Jean Hersholt, Chester Conklin, Sylvia Ashton. 35mm print courtesy Warner Bros. Silent with musical accompaniment. 123 min.

Jay Leyda, Soviet film scholar and assistant to Iris Barry, wrote, “Eight years before, while von Stroheim was a movie extra, he had come upon this Norris novel and determined to make a film of it someday. When his chance came, von Stroheim insisted upon adapting the accumulative structure of the novel by including its every details and *filming every scene against its original background and not against studio-made imitations no matter how perfect they might be.*”

Tues, Nov 19, 1:30; Thu, Dec 12, 1:30 T2

***Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie. (The Italian Straw Hat)***. 1928. France. Directed and adapted by René Clair. Based on a play by Eugene Labiche, Marc Michel. With Albert Préjean, Alexis Bondireff, Paul Ollivier. 35mm. With French main titles, English intertitles. Musical score by Rinaldo Alessandrini. Approx. 84 min.

“For René Clair, the Labiche comedy had a quite particular appeal. It was not so much that its irreverence delighted him, or its unflagging pace, or its sharply delineated characters—though these qualities undoubtedly attracted him, as the film which he based on it most unquestionably reveals. Now in *The Italian Straw Hat* he was beautifully able to humor his own predilection for this past by adapting Labiche’s play into a film which was not merely staged but costumed in the period of the cinema’s birth but which was to look *as though* it had actually been filmed in 1895.

**Wed, Nov 20, 1:30 T2**

***La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc. (The Passion of Joan of Arc)***. 1928. France. Directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer. Written by Joseph Delteil, Carl Theodor Dreyer. With Antonin Artaud, Renée Falconetti, Henri Maillard. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. English intertitles. Approx. 84 min.

“*The Passion of Joan of Arc* is largely made up of enormous pictures of faces, separated by dialogue titles. Although there is considerable amount of nervous movement on the part of the camera, the substance of the film as a whole is inherently static when compared to that of the best silent films of the period though not, of course, in comparison to contemporary talkies.” Iris Barry includes a comment by MoMA Department of Photography curator Beaumont Newhall concerning the camera work by Gösta

Kotulla and Rudolph Maté: “*The Passion of Joan of Arc* is a display of the emotional power of photography. “

**Thu, Nov 21, 1:30 T2**

***Hotel Imperial.*** 1927. USA. Directed by Mauritz Stiller. Written by Jules Furthman. Based on the novel *Színmy négy felvonásban* by Lajos Biró With Max Davidson, Pola Negri, James Hall. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 82 min.

“When Mauritz Stiller came to Hollywood in 1925 with Greta Garbo under his wing, the *foreign invasion* was at its height: European directors, cameramen and actors were being engaged by most of the major American companies. He did not succeed in directing any picture of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the company that brought him over, and made only the present film and *Street of Sin* (1928) before his death in 1928.”

**Fri, Nov 22, 1:30; Tue, Dec 3, 1:30 T2**

***The Wind.*** 1928. USA. Directed by Victor Sjöström. Written by Frances Marion. Based on the novel by Dorothy Scarborough. With Lillian Gish, Lars Hanson, Dorothy Cummings. 35mm. 72 min.

“In *The Wind* both the power and the limitations of his (Sjöström’s) American direction are clearly visible. It cannot be said that his handling of Miss Gish is entirely effective; her restlessness becomes a mannerism, her acting seems a stylized relic of her years under Griffith and fails to build up a characterization for which she was, in type, so admirably cast. Lars Hanson, who had played with her before under Sjöström in *The Scarlet Letter* (1926), creates by comparison a very solid and convincing Lige.”

**Mon, Nov 25, 1:30 T2**

***The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.*** 1921. USA. Directed by Rex Ingram. Written by June Mathis. Based on the novel by Vicente Blasco Ibañez. With Wallace Beery, Alan Hale, Rudolph Valentino. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. . Approx. 137 min.

“Mr. Terry Ramsaye, who recounts entertainingly in *A Million and One Nights* the circumstances under which *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* came to be made, states that it cost the considerable sum of \$640,000 and by the end of 1925 had grossed \$4,000,000. It had also established the reputation of its leading man, Rudolph Valentino, who became the idol of a cult that persists years after his death. The scene in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in which Valentino most effectively registered his remarkable poise and grace was that of the dance in the Argentinian café. “

**Tue, Nov 26 1:30 T2**

***Anna Christie.*** 1930. USA. Directed by Clarence Brown. Written by Frances Marion. Based on the play by Eugene O'Neill. With Greta Garbo, Charles Bickford, George F. Marion. DCP courtesy Warner Bros. 89 min.

"Artfully the film kept everyone waiting. For well over a reel, George Marion and Marie Dressler admirably sustain interest, and yet there is impatience to hear and to see Greta Garbo. At last the saloon door opens, the graceful-gawky figure appears, slouches over to the table, sits down, says to the waiter *Gif me a visky* in that haunting, husky growl."

**Wed, Nov 27, 1:30; Mon, Dec 9, 1:30 T2**

**Thanksgiving Day CLOSED**

**Thu, Nov 28**

***Dream of a Rarebit Fiend.*** 1906. USA. Directed by Edwin S. Porter. Written by Winsor McCay. With John P. Brown. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx 6 min.

"Films of this type were made first in Franc, notably by Méliès. Here any number of tricks and devices are used—stop motion photography, painted backgrounds, double exposure—in a picture remarkable successful in its time."

***The Navigator.*** 1924. USA. Directed by Donald Crisp, Buster Keaton. Written by Clyde Bruckman, Jean Havez, Joseph Mitchell. With Buster Keaton, Clarence Burton, Noble Johnson. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 60 min.

"The plot of *The Navigator* is particularly amusing in that it restates the problem of *Robinson Crusoe* with an inadvertent sign, so to speak; where Robinson Crusoe on a deserted island has to create the rudiments of civilization; Keaton, finding himself and his girl marooned in an over-technicalized environment, has to create the rudiments of natural existence..."

**Fri, Nov 29, 1:30; Mon, Dec 23, 1:30 T2**



