

The Buffalo Film Seminars



September 2, 2008 (XVII:2)

Ernst Lubitsch **TROUBLE IN PARADISE** 1932, 83 min.



Miriam Hopkins...Lily, alias Mlle. Vautier
Kay Francis...Madame Mariette Colet
Herbert Marshall...Gaston Monescu, alias La Valle
Charlie Ruggles...The Major
Edward Everett Horton...François Filiba
C. Aubrey Smith...Adolph J. Giron
Robert Greig...Jacques, Mariette's Butler

Produced and Directed by Ernst Lubitsch
Script by Grover Jones and Samson Raphaelson
based on Aladar Laszlo's play *The Honest Finder*
Original music by W. Franke Harling
Cinematography by Victor Milner

*Selected for the
National Film Registry*

ERNST LUBITSCH

(28 January 1892, Berlin—30 November 1947, Hollywood; heart attack, the morning after a big dinner and vigorous night with a new friend) directed 76 films, beginning with *Fräulein Seifenschaum/Miss Soapsuds* (1914) and ending with *That Lady in Ermine* 1948. (Lubitsch received credit as director on the film, but he died after the first week of filming and the job was taken over by Otto Preminger, whose name does not appear in the credits. Most Lubitsch fans would prefer that Preminger got sole credit because *That Lady* is a bore.) Lubitsch's first American film was *Rosita* 1923, with Mary Pickford. He directed the first all-singing all-talking musical, *The Love Parade* (1929) starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald. Some of his other films are *Heaven Can Wait* 1943, *To Be or Not to Be* 1942, *That Uncertain Feeling* 1941, *The Shop Around the Corner* 1940, *Ninotchka* 1939, and *The Merry Widow* 1934. Lubitsch was nominated four times for best picture and best director Oscars: *The Patriot* 1928, *The Love Parade* 1929, *The Smiling Lieutenant* 1931, and *Heaven Can Wait*. His was given an honorary Academy Award in 1947. The Academy, on occasions, is profoundly stupid.



MIRIAM HOPKINS (18 October 1902, Bainbridge, Georgia—9 October 1972; heart attack) appeared in 35 films, the first of which was *Fast and Loose* 1930. Her last film was *Savage Intruder* 1968. Some of the others were *Fanny Hill* 1964, *The Children's Hour* 1961, *Virginia City* 1940, *Becky Sharp* 1935, *The Story of Temple Drake* 1933 (an adaptation of Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, which caused such a stir it led, according to many film historians, to the repressive 1934 Code), and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* 1931. She started doing dramatic television work early, with an episode of "Studio One" in 1948. She also appeared in "Lux Video Theatre," "General Electric Theater," "Pulitzer Prize Playhouse," and "The Outer Limits." Her last role was in "Beretrille and the Silent Flicks," an episode of "The Flying Nun" filmed in 1967 but not aired until November 26, 1969.

KAY FRANCIS (Katherine Edwina Gibbs, 13 January 1899, Oklahoma City—26 August 1968, New York, New York; cancer) appeared in nearly 70 films, among them *Wife Wanted* 1946, *Four Jills in a Jeep* 1944, *Between Us Girls* 1942, *Charley's Aunt* 1941, *When the Daltons Rode* 1940, *Women Are Like That* 1938, *My Bill* 1938, *Secrets of an Actress* 1938, *Confession* 1937, *The White Angel* 1936 (she played Florence Nightingale), *Mandalay* 1934, *Mary Stevens, M.D.* 1933 (she played Mary Stevens, M.D.), *Street of Women* 1932, *Man Wanted* 1932, *Guilty Hands* 1931, *Transgression* 1931, *Vice Squad* 1931, *For the Defense* 1930, *Passion Flower* 1930, *Raffles* 1930, *The Cocoanuts* 1929, and *Dangerous Curves* 1929.

HERBERT MARSHALL (23 May 1890, London—22 January 1966, Beverly Hills; heart attack) was in 77 films, among them *The Third Day* 1965, *The List of Adrian Messenger* 1963, *The Fly* 1958, *The Black Shield of Falworth* 1954, *The Secret Garden* 1949, *Duel in the Sun* 1946, *The Razor's Edge* 1946, *Andy Hardy's Blonde Trouble* 1944, *The Moon and Sixpence* 1942, *The Little Foxes* 1941, *Foreign Correspondent* 1940, *A Bill of Divorcement* 1940, *Girls' Dormitory* 1936, *If You Could Only Cook* 1935, *The Good Fairy* 1935, *I Was a Spy* 1933, *Blonde Venus* 1932, and *Mumsie* 1927. *Mumsie?*

CHARLES RUGGLES (8 February 1886, Los Angeles—23 December 1970, Hollywood; cancer) was the voice of Aesop in

“The Bullwinkle Show” and Charlie Ruggles on the 1949-52 tv series, “The Ruggles.” Late in his career, he did a good deal of tv work, appearing in such series as “The Beverly Hillbillies” “Bonanza,” “Laredo,” “The Munsters,” “Bewitched,” “The Andy Griffith Show,” “The Man from U.N.C.L.E.” and “Wagon Train.” He also acted in more than 100 films, some of which were *The Parent Trap* 1961, *Give My Regards to Broadway* 1948, *Ramrod* 1947, *My Brother Talks to Horses* 1946, *Incendiary Blonde* 1945, *Beside Manner* 1945, *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay* 1944, *Dixie Dugan* 1943, *Go West, Young Lady* 1941, *The Farmer's Daughter* 1940, *His Exciting Night* 1938, *Bringing Up Baby* 1938, *Anything Goes* 1936, *Ruggles of Red Gap* 1935 (in which he played Egbert Floud), *Alice in Wonderland* 1933, *Madame Butterfly* 1932, *This Is the Night* 1932, *Husband's Holiday* 1931, *Beloved Bachelor* 1931, *The Girl Habit* 1931, *Charley's Aunt* 1930, *Peer Gynt* 1915, and *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 1914.

VICTOR MILNER (15 December 1893, New York, New York—29 October 1972, Los Angeles) was cinematographer on more than 130 films, beginning with *Hiawatha* in 1913 and ending with *Jeopardy* 1953. He won a best cinematographer Academy Award for *Cleopatra* 1934, and he was nominated for 8 others: *The Furies* 1950, *Reap the Wild Wind* 1942, *North West Mounted Police* 1940, *The Great Victor Herbert* 1939, *The Buccaneer* 1938, *The General Died at Dawn* 1936, *The Crusades* 1935, and *The Love Parade* 1929.

from *World Film Directors, Vol. I*. Ed John Wakeman. The H.W.Wilson Co., NY, 1987

German and American director, scenarist, producer, and actor, born in Berlin. He was the son of Simon Lubitsch, a Jewish tailor who owned a profitable men's clothing store in the city. Ernst Lubitsch was educated at the Berlin Sophien-Gymnasium. He acted in school plays and at sixteen announced that he wanted a career in the theatre. He was a small, clumsy, and homely boy and his father assured him he would be better off working in the family business. For a time Lubitsch had to accept this judgment, though he was so inept in the store that his father relegated him to the back office as a bookkeeper. Then he met and became the friend of the comic actor Victor Arnold, who tutored him and helped him to find evening work as an actor and low comedian in Berlin music-halls and cabarets. In 1911, after a year of this hard training, Arnold introduced him to Max Reinhardt, who hired him as a member of his famous company at the Deutsches Theater—a company that included Emil Jannings, Paul Wegener, Rudolph Schildkraut, Albert Basserman, and Conrad Veidt, among other great names.

Lubitsch was nineteen when he abandoned bookkeeping and became a full-time actor. During the next year or so he appeared in a variety of minor classical and other roles, and in one major one, as the hunchback clown in *Sumurun*, and he traveled with the Deutsches Theater to Vienna, Paris, and London. Beginning in 1912, he began to eke out his small salary as a property man and general dogsbody [a person who is given boring, menial tasks to do] at the Bioscope film studios in Berlin. The following year he went to work as a comic actor for Paul Davidson, one of Germany's first cinema entrepreneurs. Having built over fifty movie theatres, Davidson decided that it would be more profitable to make his own films than to rent those of others, and established the Union-Film production company. Lubitsch's

first screen appearance was in the title role in *Meyer auf der Alm* (*Meyer in the Alps*, 1913). Thereafter he appeared in a succession of short Union-Film comedies, often as the archetypal Jewish *dummkopf* who makes good in the end, thanks to his indestructible optimism, good luck, and a winning way with the ladies.

These comedies were very popular and successful, and when the studio ran out of ideas, Lubitsch came up with some of his own, offering his services as director into the bargain. According to Herman G. Weinberg, author of the wonderfully detailed biography *The Lubitsch Touch*, Lubitsch's first film as director-author-star was *Fräulein Seifenschäum* (*Miss Soapsuds*, 1914), a slapstick one-reeler about a lady barber. Others maintain that his directorial debut was *Blinde Kuh* (*Blindman's Buff*), made the following year. By 1915, at any rate, Lubitsch was directing most of the comedies in which he starred, and sometimes writing them as well. In the evenings, nevertheless, he would appear in some topical sketch at the Apollo Theater and then go to eat at a show-business cafe called Mutter Maentz's. There he would often stay until dawn, swapping anecdotes and wisecracks with his circle of Berlin wits, and puffing on his endless cigars.

Lubitsch's first big success as a director was *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (*Shoe Salon Pinkus*, 1916). It was written partly by Hans Kräly, soon to become the directors's regular scenarist, and starred Lubitsch not as a clownish Meyer or Moritz but as Solomon Pinkus, a bumptious young man-about-town. The following year Paul Davidson and his temperamental new star Pola Negri persuaded a reluctant Lubitsch to direct his first serious drama (and first feature) *Die Augen der Mumie Ma* (*The Eyes of the Mummy Ma*, 1918), starring Negri as a temple dancer in ancient Egypt and Emil Jannings as her fanatical pursuer. World War I ended soon after its release and Berlin became a madhouse of inflation, blackmarketeering, hunger riots, drug peddling, and every kind of prostitution and pornography. But the arts flourished and so did the escapist cinema, greatly aided by the devaluation of the Reichsmark (which meant production costs could quickly be recovered if a film was sold abroad).

In this atmosphere Lubitsch made his second film with “that temperamental Polish witch” Pola Negri. This was *Carmen*, adapted by Kräly and another writer and told in flashback, with some hand-tinted scenes. Released at the end of 1918, it was voted the best German picture of the year and some years later was a success also in the United States (as *Gypsy Blood*). However, Jay Leyda, who saw it in 1967, found it devoid of Lubitsch's characteristic wit and “film logic.” After directing two or three comedy shorts (and starring in one of them, *Meyer aus Berlin*), Lubitsch then embarked on another feature, *Die Austernprinzessin* (*The Oyster Princess*, 1919). It had Ossi Oswalda as the spoiled daughter of an American “oyster king” who sets out to buy a Prussian aristocrat for a husband, and satirizes with equal good humor Prussian snobbery and American materialism. Lubitsch thought it his “first comedy that showed something of a definite style.” Another hit, it was followed by a drama called *Rausch* (*Intoxication*), based on Strindberg's *There are Crimes and Crimes*.

Paul Davidson, the entrepreneur behind all this, then decided that he should make “the greatest film of all time.” He raised funds from UFA, the government-sponsored production company in which his Union-Film was already an important element and put Lubitsch and Negri to work on *Madame Dubarry*. Emil Jannings begged for and got the role of Louis XV, and Lubitsch engaged over two thousand extras to fill his carefully researched costumes and his studio-built Paris. The film shows

what he had learned from Reinhardt about the direction of crowd scenes and also his own unique talent as a “humanizer” of history. Running over two hours, it was supplied with a specially written score, played at the Berlin premiere by a full orchestra. It was a huge success in Germany, then all over Europe, and finally in the United States. Some critics, it is true, objected to the presentation of the French Revolution as the outcome of an affair between a king and his *midinette* mistress. There was also some resistance to the picture in the United States, even though its distributor there, aware of the virulent anti-German feeling of the time, had retitled it *Passion* and removed all traces of its German origin from the credits (including Lubitsch’s name). Nevertheless with this film, as Andrew Sarris says, “Lubitsch almost singlehandedly lifted Germany into the forefront of film-producing nations.”

After this triumph, Lubitsch demonstrated his versatility in a string of successes for Union-UFA. *Die Puppe* (*The Doll*, 1919) is an E.T.A. Hoffman fantasy that makes audacious use of all the movie camera’s capacity for visual trickery (and opens with an extraordinary shot of puppet-master Lubitsch himself assembling a miniature set). Another hit (in spite of charges that it was anti-clerical), it was followed by *Köhlhiesels Töchter* (*Köhlhiesel’s Daughters*, 1920), a peasant *Taming of the Shrew* shot on location in Bavaria, then by a screen version of *Sumurun* (*One Arabian Night*, 1920, with Lubitsch repeating his stage performance (and vigorously overacting) as the hunchback clown in love with a beautiful dancer (Negri).

Anna Boleyn (*Deception*, 1920), starring Jannings as Henry VIII, was another spectacular essay on the influence of lust on history. Gerald Mast writes that if *Dubarry* “is convincingly eighteenth-century France, *Anna Boleyn* is even more magnificently convincing as Renaissance England. Lubitsch’s control of lighting gives the wood of sets and the faces of people the glow of Renaissance painting.” At the same time, in this as in all his historical epics, Lubitsch sought to “de-operatize” and to “humanize” his characters: “I treated the intimate nuances just as importantly as the mass movements and tried to blend them both together.” *Die Bergkatze* (*The Wildcat*, 1921) is by contrast an anti-militaristic satire, unique among his films in that its bizarre sets and stylized acting were evidently influenced by expressionism (and, in its day, a complete failure).

The last and most elaborate of the historical spectacles Lubitsch made in Germany was *Das Weib des Pharaos* (*The Loves of the Pharaoh*, 1922), which crowded the UFA lot with palaces and pyramids and many thousands of extras (at a total cost, according to one account, of only \$75,000). It is a movie on the scale of *Intolerance* or *Ben Hur* and took almost a year to make. There are notable performances from Jannings as the Pharaoh Amenes and Paul Wegener as the King of Ethiopia, who go to war for the love of the beautiful slave girl Theonis (Dagny Sevræs). In December 1921 Lubitsch paid his first visit to the United States, taking *The Loves of the Pharaoh* with him. It opened in New York a few months later and was hailed as “a magnificent production and stirring testimony to the genius of Ernst Lubitsch.”

Much interviewed in the United States, Lubitsch expressed his admiration for Chaplin, Griffith, De Mille, Stroheim, and the American cinema in general, but with one reservation: “The American moviegoing public has the mind of a twelve-year-old child: it must have life as it isn’t.” Back in Berlin, Lubitsch made one last film there, *Die Flamme* (1923), a relatively small-scale story set in *fin-de-siècle* Paris about a *cocotte* (Negri) who falls in love with a composer (Hermann Thimig), loses him, and kills herself. It was released in the United

States as *Montmartre* (1924), with an unsatisfactory happy ending tacked on for the public that “must have life as it isn’t.”

In December 1922, meanwhile, Lubitsch had committed himself to that public. The “greatest director in Europe,” the “European Griffith,” had been invited by “America’s sweetheart,” Mary Pickford, who starred opposite Douglas Fairbanks in Lubitsch’s first American movie, *Rosita* (1923). It is an agreeable fantasy about a street singer in nineteenth-century Spain who attracts the attention of a libidinous king with a satirical song about him. Lubitsch and Pickford clashed incessantly, personally and professionally, throughout the three months of filming, and the picture, perhaps because it gave Pickford her first grown-up role, was not a financial success. However, the critics, then and since, have praised it warmly as a “distinguished and lovely film,” and Lotte Eisner was put in mind both of Goya and of Sternberg’s later *The Devil is a Woman*.

As Gerald Mast says, *Rosita* “closed Lubitsch’s first period”; after it, romanticism gave way to irony, the crowded canvas was exchanged for the telling detail. The move to Hollywood must have had something to do with this dramatic change of style; marital comedies were then in vogue, and Lubitsch no doubt learned from the achievements of Stroheim and De Mille in this genre. But by far the greatest influence on Lubitsch at his time was Chaplin’s *A Woman of Paris* (1923), which tells its story about a provincial girl who becomes a “kept woman” with absolute moral detachment, great economy of means, and brilliantly suggestive imagery.



Much of what Lubitsch learned from Chaplin is already evident in *The Marriage Circle* (1924), the first of five movies he made for a relatively new and still minor studio called Warner Brothers. It is a sophisticated comedy studying the collision between a hopeful new marriage (Florence Vidor and Monte Blue) and one that is failing (Marie Prevost and Adolphe Menjou). It impressed Iris Barry that Lubitsch “has shown, not told, the story. Everything is visualized, all the comedy is in what the characters are seen or imagined to be thinking or feeling, in the interplay, never expressed in ... [subtitles], of wills and personalities. ... Gestures and situations, so lucidly presented that one is perfectly aware from the ‘pictures’ alone of what is happening, give rise to other gestures and other situations which—because of the permanence of visual memory—one recognizes as the logical outcome of what has occurred before.” The *New Yorker* called it “a champagne picture in a beery movie world.”

In a moment of exasperation Mary Pickford had referred to Lubitsch as a “director of doors,” and there is justice in the charge. As Arthur Knight has pointed out, “prior to *The Marriage*

Circle, almost any decoration would do—either wholly nondescript for a routine film or, for a more elaborate production, rooms choked with bric-a-brac and overstuffed chairs set off by loudly ornamental drapes and busy wallpaper. Lubitsch cleared away the clutter, providing clean playing areas for his action. The advantages were so immediately apparent that they were incorporated into the majority of pictures from that moment on. Few directors, however, have quite his ability to use settings to their fullest advantage. To Lubitsch, a door was always more than simply a way to get into or out of a room; it was a way to end an argument, to suggest pique or coquetry or even the sexual act itself. Corridors, stairways, windows—all had a dramatic function in the Lubitsch films.”

Three Women (1924) is a harsher picture about a “lady-killer” (Lew Cody) who plays mother (Pauline Frederick) against daughter (May McAvoy)—the first for her money, the latter as a recruit to his “harem.” It was the first of Lubitsch’s American films to be written by Hans Kräly, who had followed him to Hollywood and who was thereafter his principal scenarist until 1928. Pola Negri also arrived in Hollywood, and she starred in *Forbidden Paradise* (1924) as Catherine the Great of Russia, equally interested in power and virile young officers. The visual economy of this satire has been much discussed—for example the officers’ revolt which is put down in three shots: the generals hand moving to his sword; the chamberlain’s hand pulling out a checkbook; the general’s hand releasing his sword. The movie’s general air of mockery extends to totally unrealistic sets and the deliberate anachronisms, which endow eighteenth-century Russia with automobiles and flashlights to underline the universality of human frailty.

Lubitsch’s sexual comedies always preserve this mood of sardonic but affectionate amusement at the dismal antics of his characters, and it was this, as much as the obliqueness of his innuendos, that earned him his apparent immunity from censorship in both Germany and America. He demonstrates both qualities again and again in *Kiss Me Again* (1925), adapted from a Sardou farce and starring Marie Prevost as a wife who wants to divorce Monte Blue in favor of a long-fingered pianist (John Roche). Much loved scenes include one in which Blue, to facilitate the divorce, is urged by all concerned to strike his wife but cannot bring himself to do so; and the final scene in which Roche, awaiting his beloved (and unaware that she and her husband are reconciled), serenades her on the piano. Blue enters in pajamas and urges him to play more softly before hurrying back to the marital bedroom. It was strokes like this, crystallizing in a single shot the whole essence of a (generally outrageous) situation, that became known as “the Lubitsch touch.” Robert Flaherty, asked to name his favorite film, usually said it was Dovzhenko’s *Earth* because “that’s what they expect me to say.” But, he told Weinberg, “between you and me, my favorite film is Lubitsch’s *Kiss Me Again*.”

The movie was chosen as one of the ten best of 1925; so was *Forbidden Paradise* and so was Lubitsch’s adaptation of *Lady Windemere’s Fan*: an unparalleled achievement. *Lady Windemere*, as Ted Shane wrote, substituted Lubitsch’s “own great sense of cinematic wit and the dramatic” for Wilde’s “perfumed sayings.”... Georges Sadou considered this Lubitsch’s best silent film, full of “incisive details, discreet touches, nuances of gestures, where behavior betrays the character and discloses the sentiments of the personages. With Lubitsch a new art carried on the subtleties of Marivaux, and the comedy of manners made its debut on the screen.”

So This is Paris (1926) was another “sophisticated comedy, full of marital complications petty jealousies, and humors of the married but otherwise unemployed,” and another huge success for Warner Brothers. It captures the frenetic spirit of the twenties in the sequence which shows us “a host of dance-crazed revelers performing the Charleston. Like an animated Cubist painting... [Lubitsch’s] camera has caught the pulsating pandemonium of the scene, and the tempo of his dissolving scenes has the swing of a futuristic rhapsody....”

Lubitsch was then thirty-four and one of the most admired and successful film directors in the world—some placed him second only to Griffith among Hollywood directors. According to Weinberg, his directorial technique was “simple, direct, patient. He didn’t believe in many rehearsals, feeling they tired the actor and robbed him of his spontaneity. If a scene *had* to be done over several times, he never lost his patience or courtesy.... Sitting on a small camp chair, he would lean forward in his intensity.... And his face would mirror all the emotions of the players, male or female. Sometimes he would jump up and show an actor how to do a scene.... Some directors liked to improvise—not he. It must all be down in the scenario, everything thought and worked out.... Each scene has to ‘grow’ out of the preceding one; a film was a series of propulsions or combustions, like an engine which keeps a vehicle going.” Because his scripts were “complete blueprints,” very little footage was wasted; in effect his pictures were edited before they were shot.

By this time all the major studios were putting their directors to work on Lubitschian comedies, the master’s many imitators including Richard Rosson, Lewis Milestone, and Malcolm St. Clair. Lubitsch himself was naturally much in demand, and in 1926 he left Warner Brothers and, under the auspices of MGM, returned to Germany to shoot exteriors for *The Student Prince*. Based on the operetta *Old Heidelberg*, this was a shrewd “fusing of sentiment and highbred comedy,” charmingly played by Norma Shearer and Ramon Navarro (though according to Weinberg it was considerably “doctored” by the studio).

Lubitsch’s next picture began his ten-year tenure at Paramount. The “German invasion” of Hollywood had continued and Emil Jannings was now on the scene. Lubitsch starred him in *The Patriot* (1928) as the mad Czar Paul I.... *The Patriot*, made on the eve of the advent of sound, was given a synchronized musical score, together with some sound effects and occasional voices.... Lubitsch’s own first talkie was *The Love Parade* (1929), adapted by Ernest Vajda and Guy Bolton from a successful play... and the cast included Jeanette MacDonald in her first screen role as the Queen of Sylvania, Maurice Chevalier as her bored and erring consort, Lupino Lane as his valet, and Lillian Roth as the Queen’s maid (with Jean Harlow as an extra).

Lubitsch had his doubts about sound, but when it came he took to it with the greatest ease and panache. *The Love Parade* is witty in its dialogue, lavish in its settings, startling in its sexual innuendos, and adroit in its introduction of songs.... Theodore Huff called this “the first truly cinematic screen musical in America.”...

From time to time throughout his career, Lubitsch seems to have become dissatisfied with his court jester role and to have set out to demonstrate a capacity for something more serious than sexual comedies. He did so in *Rausch*, *The Patriot*, and *Eternal Love*, and he tried again with *The Man I Killed* (1932), adapted from a Maurice Rostand play by Sam Raphaelson and Ernest Vajda. It is a somber pacifist tract about a young Frenchman who kills an enemy soldier in World War I and later goes to Germany

to beg the forgiveness of the dead youth's parents. Adulated by the critics, it failed at the box-office. More recently, Andrew Sarris has suggested that the public knew better than the critics—that the film is "Lubitsch's least inspired and most calculated effort, all surface effect, all ritualistic piety toward a 'noble' subject."

At any rate, Lubitsch returned to his *métier* with *One Hour With You* (1932), a remake with music of *The Marriage Circle* that apparently was directed by George Cukor (credited only as dialogue director), and followed it with *Trouble in Paradise* (1932). This masterpiece stars Miriam Hopkins and Herbert Marshall in a totally amoral comedy about a couple of high-class thieves in Venice. The tone is set in the opening sequence, when a gondola gliding through the moonlit canals is seen to be collecting garbage; the gondolier throws a pail of slops aboard and launches into a heartfelt rendition of "O Sole Mio." There is never the slightest hint that the protagonists might be redeemed by love or anything else; they are thieves; never mind, they only steal from the rich, and the rich are thieves too. Gerald Mast writes that "the delights, the gags, the comic business, the brilliant dialogue, the technical grace and ingenuity of camera, cutting and sound have never been surpassed by any Lubitsch film"; many would agree. It was the director's own favorite among his pictures and marked the high point in his career.

For his screen version of Noel Coward's *Design for Living* (1933), Lubitsch set Ben Hecht to work rewriting Coward's dialogue, explaining that the play was too static for the cinema and that "things on the screen should happen in the present," not be recalled in conversation. This effrontery worried contemporary critics, who also found Lubitsch's cast (Frederic March, Miriam Hopkins, Gary Cooper) inferior to the *soigné* trio of the stage original (the Lunts and Coward himself). There was a mixed reception also for *The Merry Widow* (MGM, 1934), a sumptuous Chevalier-MacDonald adaptation of the Lehar operetta that failed to recover its costs.

In November 1934, tired and a little shaken, Lubitsch acquired a new job as production chief at Paramount. He supervised Sternberg's *The Devil Is A Woman* and Borzage's *Desire*, but in 1936 was abruptly replaced by William Le Baron. Lubitsch's own next film, *Angel* (1937), was his greatest failure. Set in London and Paris in the mid-1930s, and with a cast headed by Marlene Dietrich as a neglected wife, Herbert Marshall as her oblivious husband, and Melvyn Douglas as an amorous bachelor, it builds its plot around the fact that the "salon" where Dietrich and Douglas meet is in fact an elegant brothel. Given the ever-increasing puritanism of the period, this was a very nearly impossible theme, but Lubitsch found ways of telling his story without ever mentioning its real content....

This decline in Lubitsch's reputation was halted by the enormous popularity of *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938), his last film for Paramount. It has Gary Cooper as a much-married American millionaire who finally succumbs to the daughter (Claudette Colbert) of an impoverished French marquis, and the brilliant dialogue was supplied by Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder. The same team, supplemented by Walter Reisch, wrote *Ninotchka* (MGM, 1939), Lubitsch's only film with Greta Garbo. She plays a dour and dedicated Soviet commissar sent to Paris to straighten out three comrades who have been seduced from the path of duty by capitalistic self-indulgence. She meets an aristocratic French playboy (Melvyn Douglas) and herself succumbs to Paris, glamour, and romance. Cheerfully satirizing both communism and capitalism (and thus antagonizing some Marxist critics), it is one of the wittiest and also one of the

warmest of Lubitsch comedies. It is not particularly well endowed with "Lubitsch touches" but remains perhaps the best loved of all his works, largely because of Garbo's ineffable impersonation of beautiful iceberg slowly lighting up from within and melting into imperfect but irresistible humanity. Garbo herself once said that "*Ninotchka* was the only time I had a great director in Hollywood."

A leather goods and novelty shop in Budapest is the setting of *The Shop Around the Corner* (MGM, 1940). James Stewart is the head clerk, Margaret Sullavan a salesgirl, and they quarrel so much that they eventually realize they must be in love. It is one of the few Lubitsch films not concerned with the antics of the rich and idle, and it is difficult to understand why it did not fare better at the box office.... *That Uncertain Feeling* (United Artists, 1941) was a disappointing and much altered remake of *Kiss Me Again*, translated from Paris to New York.

It was followed by the controversial comedy *To Be or Not To Be* (United Artists, 1942), in which a Warsaw theatre company during the Nazi occupation combines its work with a little sabotage against the invaders. According to Theodore Huff, the piece was called "callous, a picture of confusing moods, lacking in taste, its subject not suitable for fun-making." It didn't help that it was released shortly after the death in a plane crash of its star, Caorle Lombard. In fact, the film is rich in the kind of "black humor" that only became acceptable years later. Peter Bogdanowich wrote in 1972 that it "survives not only as satire but as a glorification of man's indomitable spirits in the face of disaster—survives in a way that many more serious and high-toned works about the war do not."

In 1943 Lubitsch joined 20th Century-Fox as a producer-director, performing both functions for his first movie there, *Heaven Can Wait* (1943)...It was Lubitsch's first film in color, which he used well enough to earn an admiring comment from D.W. Griffith. In 1945 the director has his first heart attack while working on a remake of *Forbidden Paradise* called *A Royal Scandal*. Otto Preminger took over and Lubitsch was credited as producer, though the film has nothing of his style. The same is true of *Dragonwyck* (1946) of which he was also the nominal producer.

Lubitsch went back to work in the spring of 1946. He produced and directed *Cluny Brown*, an excellent satire on English society with a fine cast headed by Charles Boyer and Jennifer Jones and including Reginald Gardiner, C. Aubrey Smith, Peter Lawford, and other pillars of Hollywood's "British Colony." In 1947 Lubitsch began work on *That Lady in Ermine*, a screen version of an operetta starring Betty Grable. After a week's shooting he became ill and Preminger again took over. Lubitsch died later the same year at the age of fifty-five.

Theodore Huff defined the "Lubitsch touch" as a "swift innuendo or rapier-like 'comment' accomplished pictorially by a brief camera shot or telling action, to convey an idea or a suggestion in a manner impossible in words." Lubitsch himself thought that "one shouldn't single out 'touches.' They're part of a whole. The camera *should* comment, insinuate, make an epigram or a bon mot, as well as tell a story. We're telling stories with pictures so we must try to make the pictures as expressive as we can." Gerald Mast thought Lubitsch the American cinema's greatest technician after Griffith and wrote: his "art is one of omission....he consistently shows less than he might, implies more than he shows." In this way Lubitsch "transformed melodramatic and sentimental tripe into credible human stuff and forged deeper into sexual desires, needs, frustrations and fears

than most of his contemporaries (and descendants) dared to go.” Jean Renoir thought that Lubitsch “invented the modern Hollywood.”

Robert E. Sherwood described the director as “an extremely short, dark, thickset man, with ponderous shoulders and huge, twinkling eyes. In appearance he resembled a combination of Napoleon and Punchinello; in character he combined the best features of each.” Lubitsch’s 1922 marriage to Irma Kraus ended in divorce in the early 1930s. Some years later he married an Englishwoman, Sania (whom he called Vivian); they were divorced towards the end of World War II. Lubitsch had a daughter, Nicola, by this second marriage. He was a hyperactive man who drove himself relentlessly, a gourmet, a wit, and a practical joker; he never lost his music-hall German accent nor relinquished the big black cigars that became his trademark. He loved to dance, and he played the piano and the cello badly but with enthusiasm.

For Lubitsch, the crucial stage in making a film was the preparation of the script, and he worked so closely with his writers that they could seldom remember afterwards who contributed what to the finished product. Many of his writers became close friends. Samson Raphaelson, his favorite scenarist of the post-Kräly period, remembered him like this: “Lubitsch loved ideas more than anything in the world, except his daughter Nicola. It didn’t matter what kind of ideas. He could become equally impassioned over an exit speech for a character in the current script, the relative merits of Horowitz and Heifetz, the aesthetics of modern painting, or whether now is the time to but real estate. And his passion was usually much stronger than that of anyone else around him, so he was likely to dominate in a group. Yet I never saw, even in this territory of egoists, anyone who didn’t light up with pleasure in Lubitsch’s company. We got that pleasure from the purity and childlike delight of his lifelong love affair with ideas....As an artist he was sophisticated, as a man almost naive. As an artist shrewd, as a man simple.”

Raymond Durnat, *The Crazy Mirror Hollywood Comedy and the American Image, 1969*

“...the famous ‘Lubitsch touch’ is misleadingly named, for it is not so much something added to a story as a method of telling a story through ellipsis and emphasis. Omitting the obvious presentation, Lubitsch substitutes allusive detail, and then emphasizes that detail, not simply to be sure that even a hick audience gets the point, but in such a way that the sweet nothing becomes the ornamental equivalent of the dramatic sense. As one of the censors bitterly complained, after the Hays Code had clamped down in 1933, ‘you know what he’s saying but you just can’t prove that he’s saying it!’”

Andrew Bergman, *We’re in the Money: Depression America and Its Films, 1971*

Trouble In Paradise (1932), which Dwight Macdonald thought “as close to perfection as anything I have ever seen in the movies,” was a dazzling directorial performance. Lubitsch demonstrated a fluidity of movement which most talkies still failed to achieve; his camera never lingered unnecessarily and subtleties abounded. The story line involved a romance between two thieves...who fall for each other while plying their trade. She lifts his watch, he steals her garters and they embrace. Lubitsch’s sophistication about sex, and his rebellion against Hollywood’s monumentalization of illicit love, also is demonstrated by his treatment of the protagonists’ cohabitation; he makes no comment.

They are obviously living together (casually sipping their breakfast coffee) and they are just as obviously not married. It is taken as close to granted as it could be in 1932. (After the Production Code was strictly enforced in 1934, such blithe sexuality would vanish from the screen)..

Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000):

In that Golden Age of Hollywood that everybody’s always talking about there were only two directors whose names meant anything to the public and critics: Cecil B. De Mille and Ernst Lubitsch.

Claudette Colbert

None of us thought we were making anything but entertainment for the moment. Only Ernst Lubitsch knew we were making art.

John Ford

“I’d like to repay you. . .” “All right, give me a letter of introduction to Lubitsch.” “I might be able to . . .Who’s Lubitsch?” *From Preston Sturges’s “Sullivan’s Travels”*

In the car on the way back to the office, Wurzel asked the invariably affable director why he was wasting his time on an insert shot. “Young man, let me explain something to you,” said Lubitsch. “Every shot in a picture is the most important shot in a picture.”

Likewise Peter Bogdonavich, who notes in his invaluable *Who the Devil Made It* that “Lubitsch . . . is the one director whom nearly every other director I ever interviewed mentioned with respect and awe as among the very best.”

When Paramount Pictures was foundering while trying to escape from bankruptcy, he took over as production head, the only major director in Hollywood history to run a large movie studio. In a Hollywood career lasting a quarter century, he was the only studio director whose work was contractually sacrosanct, immune from tampering by studio heads like Jack Warner and Darryl Zanuck.



He was a pet hate of Hitler’s, who reputedly demanded that a large blowup of his face be mounted in the Berlin train station over the words “The Archetypal Jew.”

As the critic Michael Wilmington observed, Lubitsch movies “were at once elegant and ribald, sophisticated and earthy, urbane and bemused, frivolous yet profound. They were directed by a man who was amused by sex rather than frightened by it—and who taught a whole culture to be amused by it as well.”



For this was the secret of Lubitsch’s films: they were fantasies of blithe sexuality and emotional noninvolvement, not just for the audience, but for him as well. In this superior world of the imagination, the men are tall and elegant and humorously adept

at getting a beautiful lady into bed, and the women are capable of giving as well as receiving love.

[when filming *Madame DuBarry* with Pola Negri and Emil Jannings] Standing in for Versailles was Frederick the Great’s Sans Souci, in Potsdam. When the company arrived to do their location work, the weather was cold and Negri was wearing flannel underwear under the thin silks of her costumes. Noticing the slight bulkiness, Lubitsch lifted her dress and snapped, “Get into some silk panties. Can you imagine DuBarry wearing those?” Negri obeyed, and froze for the rest of the location shoot.

Leni Sonnet was an attractive, very sensual woman, just the sort to bring a hidebound, lonely man suddenly roaring out of his workaholic’s closet. She was also another in a long line of non-Jewish blondes that Lubitsch would be attracted to. A typical man of his time, Lubitsch would tell Leni that he would never be able to marry a Jewish woman. “It would be like marrying my sister,” he claimed. [they married shortly thereafter]

Lubitsch was probably thinking of Negri when he wrote in 1932 that “The relation between a director and an actress is like the relation between a man and his mistress. They are bound together by contract, but there is no sentimental attachment.”

As the first German to emigrate to Hollywood after World War I, Ernst was the point man in a brain drain that, over the next ten years, would decimate German film.

Nathan Burkan, the attorney for Charlie Chaplin, Pickford’s partner [she’d chosen Lubitsch to direct her in her first adult film role] in United Artists, quietly met Ernst in New York in an effort to defuse any bad press. Lubitsch’s appearance did not jibe with the image of a director who had “humanized history.” He wore egg-top trousers and banana yellow boots, and had several gold teeth in the front of his mouth. He looked like a middle-class Jewish burgher.

After considerable struggle, Burkan outfitted him with a new wardrobe and had his own dentist replace the gold teeth with porcelain ones. [When he arrived in LA there were WWI American veterans protesting his working in America.]

[working on *Forbidden Paradise* with Negri she protested a negligee was unwieldy and dangerous to run in]

“Nonsense,” Lubitsch soothed her. “You’ll manage perfectly.”

“If it catches on the railing I’ll break my neck.”

“What’s wrong with you? We did much more dangerous stunts in Berlin.”

“I was younger then.”

“Three years younger.” Furious, Lubitsch marched her into a dressing room, snatched the negligee off her, and stepped into it. Dressed in the negligee, puffing on his cigar, Lubitsch dashed down the stairs and back again, conclusively proving that the costume was not dangerous and that it looked better on Negri.

For Negri, this was just like old times, “fighting on a set again and both enjoying it enormously.” But Lubitsch’s tolerance for temperament had decreased as his own importance had increased; he would never work with Negri again.

[Patsy Ruth Miller] “What particularly endeared him to me was the fact that he loved America. Some of the foreign directors, like Victor Seastrom, were so scornful. Not a warm personality. But Ernst loved America, loved the American people.”

Lubitsch felt comfortable with Miller and let down his guard of impersonal geniality when he told her that “You must take care of your money. You must save your money. You must always have enough money.”

Confused, the actress asked why.

“Because then you don’t have to be nice to anybody you don’t like.”

Lubitsch would freely admit that the picture was worked out in his mind to such an extent that, once the script was done, “I’ve finished the picture, All I have to do is photograph it. . .As you write the script, you cut the film, you build the sets, you light your players, you design their wardrobe, you set the tempo, you delineate the characters. . .For me, it is virtually all done in the script.” By the time a script was finished, Ernst almost never referred to it, having long since committed it to memory. Shooting a film rarely took more than eight weeks.

With his passion for all things Hungarian, Lubitsch probably knew of [the swindler and thief Georges] Georges Manolescu, whose name, in the film, was slightly altered to Gaston Monescu. [Manolescu’s 1907 *Memoirs* had previously resulted in at least two silent films]. *Trouble in Paradise* continued Lubitsch’s habit of latching onto an obscure, inferior play, usually Hungarian, and playing Pygmalion to its dog-eared Galatea. Although these works were nearly always structurally flawed (“You could have a play that fell apart and still have a success in Budapest,” remembered Raphaelson), they invariably had an intriguing central situation and romantic characters. That was all Lubitsch needed. Psychologically, it made more sense to him to fix what was broken than to build from the ground up. (In the fifteen years remaining to him, Lubitsch would produce only one entirely original script. Proving that he was a gifted creator as well as an interpreter, *To Be or Not to Be* was one of his greatest films.)

Some parts were written for specific actors such as Edward Everett Horton and Charlie Ruggles. The hushed, murmuring Herbert Marshall seems to have come in later in the casting process. Lubitsch must have been amused by Marshall’s way with women; while very much married, Marshall managed affairs with

both Kay Francis and Miriam Hopkins, as well as a serious relationship with Gloria Swanson, all within the space of a few years.

As always, Lubitsch and “Sem” slaved over the script. “We spent—oh, maybe three days getting that opening shot,” remembered Raphaelson. “He wouldn’t be content unless we got a brilliant opening shot. We wanted to introduce Venice. . . Now, pictorially, the conventional way of saying that is to open on a long shot of Venice, medium shot of wherever you want to be, and close shot on the canal and the house, and then you go inside the house or hotel or whatever it is. That’s [the] conventional way.

“Now,” Lubitsch would sit and say, ‘How do we do that without doing that?’”

What Lubitsch and Raphaelson finally came up with was the famous opening where the singer of a glorious operatic air turns out to be a trash collector. Even in glorious, romantic Venice, someone has to pick up the garbage, but this being Venice—and Lubitsch—they must do it with panache. This sardonic undercutting of the ordinary is quintessential “Lubitsch touch,” but the director was careful not to overdo a good thing.

“Other times, he started [writing the script] right away,” Raphaelson told Barry Sabath. “He didn’t want to get a brilliant opening shot. Here, he felt he wanted it. He wanted to open with laughter and with style—and style, of course, is the essence of Lubitsch.”

Lubitsch orchestrates his film with matchless grace and style to the nth degree, using all manner of optical devices—dissolves, wipes—even near-recitatives to move the film along on its toes. And, his professional luck was holding; *Trouble in Paradise* was released just a year and a half ahead of the imposition of the Production Code, which would have made a story centering on sexual swapping and resolutely unpunished crime impossible.

More heavily scored than most 1932 films, Lubitsch directs *Trouble in Paradise* as if it were an art deco musical, with the dialogue in place of lyrics and the characters as the elegant score. Miriam Hopkins runs at her usual frantic pace, but Herbert Marshall and the languid, knowing Kay Francis become the film’s shimmering, tranquil erotic center.

Trouble in Paradise is perhaps Lubitsch’s clearest statement yet on the tenuous nature of romantic relationships, and on the necessity of variation and some gentle mutual deceit to stave off lethargy and boredom. It’s a dazzling Möbius strip of erotic allusion, genial irony and dégage visual lyricism and elegance. There’s self-consciousness in the characters—their arch sophistication is always poised on the precipice of parody, yet never quite tumbles in—but there is no self-righteousness. Gaston may be cheerfully amoral, but he never mocks the pretensions and vanities of the rich while he’s stealing from them, because what he really wants is to live like them. It’s nice work if you can get it.

At the same time Lubitsch creates a world that, underneath the glowing surfaces of Hans Dreier’s furniture and sets, is recognizably real. People steal while pretending to be honest, they fret more over a lost handbag than over the starving people they pass on their way to work. These ironies are never stated directly, but they’re there nonetheless.

The rate of consumption of Madame Colet and her friends is so spectacular—and so casual—that Lubitsch’s clear implication is that they deserve to be robbed. What sets Madame Colet apart is that she seems to realize that. That a man like

Gaston Monescu is doing the robbing is merely poetic justice. Although without work or training, his industriousness marks him as their (im)moral superior. Equally ruthless, but swifter, more elegant, he is one of them.

“There is Paramount’s Paris and Metro Paris, and of course the real Paris. Paramount’s is the most Parisian of all.” *Ernst Lubitsch*

“As for pure style, I have done nothing better or as good as *Trouble in Paradise*,” he wrote in 1947.

Coming up in the Buffalo Film Seminars:

Sept 9 Marx Brothers **DUCK SOUP** 1933

Sept 16 Michael Curtiz **THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD** 1938

Sept 23 Jules Dassin **BRUTE FORCE** 1947

Sept 30 Richard Brooks **THE PROFESSIONALS** 1966

Oct 7 Károly Makk **LOVE (SZERELEM)** 1971

Oct 14 Francis Ford Coppola **THE CONVERSATION** 1974

Oct 21 Lina Wertmüller **SEVEN BEAUTIES (PASQUALINO SETTEBELLEZZE)** 1975

Oct 28 Elia Kazan **A FACE IN THE CROWD** 1957

Nov 4 Krzysztof Kieślowski **BLIND CHANCE (PRZYPADK)** 1981

Nov 11 Wim Wenders **PARIS, TEXAS** 1984

Nov 18 Wong Kar-Wai **IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE (FA YEUNG NIN WA)** 2000

Nov 25 Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck **THE LIVES OF OTHERS (DAS LEBEN DER ANDEREN)** 2006

Dec 2 Stanley Kubrick **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY** 1968

CONTACTS:

...email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu...email Bruce Jackson bjackson@buffalo.edu...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>...to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to addto@buffalofilmseminars.com...for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/>

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center and State University of New York at Buffalo with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News