

# SILENT

or

'Guess who's forgotten his lines again?'

A Play  
about the  
Silent Movie Era

by

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# SILENT

## Introduction

'Silent' is a play based on the Silent Movie Era for two actors and one actress. The costumes should be based on the simple styles of the 1910-20s. Perhaps a 'neutral' basic costume over which costumes can be worn would work.

There are repeated characters here so that distinctive clothes are imperative - as well as voices - to enable the audience to recognise them even before their speeches tie in with what's previously transpired.

I have given specific interpretations at points - most notably the wide-brimmed hat of the DW Griffith character - but the *type* of subject matter being delivered by the character should help in determining what is the most stereotypical outfit that could be employed to support the speech.

I have provided extensive interpretations and explanations where appropriate at the beginning of each scene to explain to the cast the 'why' of the text as many people are unacquainted with the early film industry and the problems that it encountered in the years leading up to the birth of sound (although, to be honest, the technology for 'sound films' existed long before it was ever employed).

Actor 1 should most definitely research the films of Buster Keaton to learn what type of bodily expression to use as the 'Clown' - having recently rewatched his silents, it's amazing to see just how detailed and comprehensive his body moves to express emotion - while the actress would need, at the very least, to watch the 'Putting the Wife to Bed' scene from Buster Keaton's 'The Spite Marriage' for the opening scene.

## Characters/Parts

	Actor 1	Actor 2	Actress
Referred to in the script as:	A1	A2	A3
1 - Silent (1920)	Clown		Drunk
2 - Full Circle (Undated)		Translator	
3 - Rehearsal (1915)	Bobby	DWG	Miss Annie
4 - Film Owner (1919)	FO		
5 - Censorship (1921)		Translator	Campaigner
6 - Rise to Fame (Various)	Star	(2 Words)	
7 - The Organist (1923)		Organist	
8 - Pressure Point (1921)	FO	Translator	Campaigner
9 - The Woman in the Back Row (1921)			Girl
10 - The Day the Laughter Stopped (1921)	FO	Associate	
11 - The Usherette (1926)			Usherette
12 - Everything's Fixed (1927)	FO	DWG	
13 - Silent End (1928)	Clown	Director	Drunk

The dates selected for each scene are given solely as a guideline and it's not an indication that the content could have taken place at this time. For example, one sketch from Scene 1 was written at the end of the twenties and I have taken a certain poetic license with Scene 8 to use some 'well known' cinema events of the seventies and transpose them back

to the early years.

There's also a 'Source' page at the end of the play.

The main 'plot' scenes are 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12 and 13 and should be kept in this order.

Scenes 4, 5, 8, 10 and 12 show the increasing pressure that the film companies came under to change their product and how, in the end, control was inevitable.

Scenes 3 and 12 contrast the two different treatments of the late, great DW Griffith who is used as a type of all the 'free' directors and actors who found themselves constrained to follow the film industries line if they wanted to continue to make movies.

Scenes 1 and 13 show the same scene before and after the control that was imposed.

Scenes 6, 7, 9 and 11 can, to a large extent, be moved around wherever they appear the most convenient. I have placed them where they are currently because, in my opinion, they give a better possibility for the actors to move between scenes seamlessly. If it's felt that a different order is preferable, they can be moved just about anywhere.

Scene 2 should be kept in the same place as written although it adds little to the plot. However, it summarises a historical observation that the lost witness of motion is regained in the birth of film and that, logically, its invention was a necessity.

Therefore, it may be best to begin with the plot order and four fixed scenes as:

1 - Silent (1920)	Clown, Drunk
2 - Full Circle (Undated)	Translator
3 - Rehearsal (1915)	Bobby, DWG, Miss Annie
Film Owner (1919)	FO
Censorship (1921)	Translator, Campaigner
Pressure Point (1921)	FO, Translator, Campaigner
The Day the Laughter Stopped (1921)	FO, Associate
12 - Everything's Fixed (1927)	FO, DWG
13 - Silent End (1928)	Clown, Director, Drunk

And intersperse the following four where it's deemed best:

Rise to Fame (Various)	Star, 2 Words from another actor
The Organist (1923)	Organist
The Woman in the Back Row (1921)	Girl
The Usherette (1926)	Usherette

Even the characters can be moved around, although ones that are repeated are best assigned to a single actor.

**SILENT**

Scene setting - 1920

Characters - A silent 'clown' (not a painted circus clown! - A1), a drunk (A3)

*[There are no words used throughout this scene. The idea is simply to use some of the material from the silents to portray an image and to give the audience an understanding of what the theme of the play will be. It's absolutely imperative that the male actor watches carefully some of Keaton's pre-1930 silents to observe the mannerisms that he employed to convey emotion and thought.]*

*[The 'Great Stoneface', Keaton, acted with his body, not his face (contra Lillian Gish) and it's those mannerisms that need to be employed here. So, for surprise, Keaton's stepping back and use of his hands must swap for any attempt to show subtlety in a change of facial expression.]*

*[Although it's quite true that Buster did use facial expressions (the raising of the eyebrows, the use of the mouth), it's important that the play begins with a bodily imitation of the Silent Screen's best comedy clown.]*

*[I have split this up into sections but they flow together as one visual dialogue. The one tricky bit is to have a newspaper large enough for the actress to be able to get onto the stage without being seen - and to make it look natural. But, although this will need careful planning, it isn't impossible]*

*[1. The imagined staircase by Buster Keaton from 'Back Stage'.*

*[The variation is that this opens the play with the clown ascending what appears to be stairs situated behind a three or four foot high panel (depending on the size of the actors) located centrally at the rear of the stage. When he reaches the top, he stops in his tracks, remembering that he's forgotten his newspaper and returns down the stairs to retrieve it, ascending the stairs again to be confronted by the door.]*

*[While downstairs, there could be all manner of unrelated sounds to add a touch of madness to the scene while he's out of sight - hammering, sawing, a bird whistle, a quack and so on. Something recorded on a CD player would work and it will be used again during the final scene. Although the scene is regarded as being 'silent', the later silent films did record a soundtrack with special effects, music and so on so it isn't out of place.]*

*[When he appears upstairs again after all the irrelevant noises, though, there isn't a touch of emotion on his face.]*

*[The screen must not be removed as it is in the silent film because it not only provides a way for the clown to get into position without being seen but allows the drunk to be ready to enter onto the stage when the newspaper is unfolded. An unseen entrance should be made behind the screen, therefore (unseen by the audience, that is).]*

*[The next sketch with the door should be performed off centre but close to the end of the partition. Perhaps a three foot gap between the end of the partition and the door would be best as the drunk in this scene will need to get through it easily under cover of the folded out newspaper]*

*[2. Cleaning the empty pane of glass by Fatty Arbuckle from 'The Garage'.*

*[The variation is that it's a full length door from which the top half panel of glass has been removed. The clown notices a mark, removes his handkerchief, breathes onto it, rubs it clean.]*

*[Putting the handkerchief away, he then extends his arm through where the pane should be to open the door with the handle, walks through the door surround and closes it behind him. He sits down at the chair that's located in front of the partition]*

*[3. Opening the infinite size newspaper by Buster Keaton from 'The High Sign'.*

*[The variation is that the clown is sat at a single chair positioned at the end of the partition previously mentioned, beside the gap between it and the door. He reads the newspaper and opens it, partially disappearing under the double-blanket size sheet of paper created after having had to stand on the chair to open it out to it's full size, all the while puzzled at the extent to which it's expanding.*

*[As this is done, the drunk enters the stage, unseen, through the hole beside the partition, allowing the newspaper to fall on her when the clown throws the newspaper down in disgust. The drunk should be lying on the floor with her face towards the audience but her legs bent as if asleep]*

*[4. Fear and surprise by Buster Keaton from 'The Haunted House'.*

*[As the clown actor moves away, the newspaper begins to move - surprise and fear are expressed in the same bodily manner as Keaton, looking at the audience expressionless, scratching his head. A Pork Pie hat would be an advantageous prop at this point as Keaton's portrayal of bewilderment was emphasised by a slight raising of the rear of the hat to enable him to scratch his head.*

*[The sheet subsides and the clown goes to run away but stops - he carefully slides the newspaper off the body to reveal a very drunk woman who remains motionless for the time being while he holds the paper up to one side and checks front and back to make sure there are no other women lurking in the print. He should also look behind himself to make sure there's nothing hiding itself.*

*[Again, he scratches his head in puzzlement.*

*[Going over to the body he lifts a limp wrist up and goes to check the pulse. What he actually does is to take the wrist up between one hand with his own wrist uppermost then, with his other hand, he takes his own pulse, rolling his eyes upward as if concentrating on counting the beats (I've seen this in a silent but I can't remember which one).*

*[As he places it back down, the drunk sleepily wakes up, sits up and waves in a sozzled manner, hiccuping as she places a hand to her mouth - but then she passes out again and rolls over onto the stage floor]*

*[5. Trying to move the drunk onto the chair from 'The Spite Marriage' - the scene is variously called 'Bedtime' or 'Putting the wife to bed' and was used by Keaton when he and his wife played the Cirque Medrano in Paris during the fifties.*

*[As I type this, no versions of the film are available in the UK (Region 2 format) so I shall describe it the best I can. It's available on a Region 1 DVD, however, and the start of this sketch (the part that I intend being used) is currently available on line as a streaming video at <http://www.turnerclassicmovies.com/Multimedia/Popup/0,,85334,00.html>.*

*[NB - A scene may be included here prior to the chair being brought over that took place during the 1931 Buster Keaton film 'Parlor, Bedroom and Bath'. However, it can be ignored and the following will flow together fine. The scene occurs at approximately 1 hr 7 minutes into the film that appears on the 2 DVD set 'Industrial Strength Keaton', available only in Region 1 format, I believe.*

*[The clown sits the actress up while the actress places her legs fairly wide apart. He lifts the woman up by her torso but only manages to elevate her into the splits position which is stable (that is, she doesn't collapse). He then tries to lift the woman further upwards by grabbing her waist but isn't successful, scratching his head and looking puzzled.*

*[He then crawls underneath her bottom from the rear and places his head between the actress's hip and waist, attempting to lift the woman up but only propelling her forward so that she collapses on top of his head.*

*[The clown is trapped under the body with his head sticking out and attempts to free himself for a second before pulling himself free, scratching his head. The actress is now in a similar crumpled mess to the way she was at the beginning and the routine with the chair can begin.*

*[The chair that the clown has been sat at to read the paper needs to be brought over to beside the comatose actress and the body shuffled round so that the legs face the chair and the body is furthest away from it. The drunk could have flopped over into this position previously after having waved to the audience.*

*[a. The first attempt is to raise the torso at right angles to the floor and to come from behind, circling the hands round the body but under the arms to lift her upwards. As the body is limp, all that is achieved is that the clown can't get any grip and the body and arms disappear through his own arms.*

*[b. He tries again with the same result except, this time, he does get a little bit of upward motion and, as the arms slip through his own, he does it slightly quicker and over-balances and stumbles over the drunk but doesn't fall over.*

*[c. Next, he turns the body (head towards the chair, feet furthest away) in the act of trying to lift her with one hand under the knee and the other supporting the back (which will slip to be around the neck at the appropriate moment) - this procedure can be made to swivel the body round the opposite way but, as he tries to lift her, the hip joint folds up completely and the drunk disappears through his arms.*

*[d. He tries again but attempts to join his hands together with a firm grip but this act of bringing his arms so close together simply causes the lower legs to be forced erect and the same thing happens. In trying to lift her, he realises that he isn't strong or capable enough to do it.*

*[e. Then, he places his arms around her backside and tries to lift it provisionally onto the chair which he succeeds in doing, the body lying on its side - the torso droops to one side and the legs to the other. But it's only perched on the edge of the front of the chair so that, when he leaves the backside perched there to lift the torso, his action dislodges her and she falls again onto the floor, feet first, as he tries to bring the torso up onto the chair above the seat.*

*[f. He then has the brilliant idea of making the drunk lie on the floor on her side in a sitting position and, once completed, brings the chair and lays it on the floor on its side so she's sat on the chair but horizontally against the floor (Keaton shows his anger that the first five attempts haven't succeeded by acquiring the chair with a slamming motion onto the floor as he moves it). Holding both the actress and the chair, he swivels them both ninety degrees so that the chair is now on its back with her sat in it and, raising the back up on the rear two legs - and supporting the woman - he manages to position her into the sitting position.*

*[g. Additional to the scene from the Spite Marriage, the clown should let go of the body as the chair bounces to a halt which catapults the woman once more out of the chair. This may be too violent for the actress who has to be totally limp for the scene to work so it may*

*be better for the actor to go to recover his newspaper (which will be to one side of the stage in a pile) and, while his back's turned, she flops off the chair more gracefully and less violently. The point is the same, the drunk is again on the floor.*

*[h. Action 6 is done all over again except, this time, instead of letting the chair rock into the upright position, he keeps it on it's back two legs and drags the woman off the stage once he's grabbed the newspaper in one hand on his way.*

*[So ends the first scene]*

**FULL CIRCLE**

Scene setting - Undated  
 Characters - The Translator (A2)

*[I am indebted for the concept of this monologue to the pre-work 'The Prehistory of the Screen' in 'A Million and One Nights' by Terry Ramsaye (pages xxxvii-lxx) in which he attempts to show the logical necessity of film as the conclusion of man's quest for reality.*

*[Although a lot of what Ramsaye wrote there went way over my head – I admit that I may have dozed off halfway through reading it and was only awakened by the erratic steering of the local bus driver on my way to work – the concept of film being the final stage of man coming 'Full Circle' prompted me to explain the first scene as a conclusion to what has preceded it in human history and, yet, to go on to be able to use it as the foundation upon which the play will develop with the final few sentences of this monologue.*

*[I have used the character of the Translator to deliver this speech but it may be reasoned that his later speeches make him out to be one from whom this depth of thought would be unlikely to come. In that case, a very 'matter of fact' character could be better employed.*

*[However, the Translator is the interpreter of many difficult matters that are represented in the play – for example, between the amoral Film Owner and the moral Campaigner, both of which are misrepresentative of Truth – so a more serious side of the character is not unlikely]*

*[The actor is stood close to a chair – probably the one used in the opening scene. He will need its support in the opening few lines and, afterwards, he can move away around the stage as required or use it as a prop to sit down on. Throughout this monologue, the Translator is going to need to illustrate what he's talking about with hand gestures to bring the concepts to life]*

The Translator: In the beginning, there was...*[a slight pause while he puts his hand to his mouth as if it's a megaphone directing actors on a distant stage]...*'Action!'

No words, no writing *[pause and, then, reflectively]* - no art students or ballet dancers *[using the chair as a support, he bends and raises one leg, then outstretches it and lowers it back to the ground – as if impersonating a dancer's movement]* – not that the last of these would have been a particularly bad thing.

*[Almost spoken under his breath and to himself]* Indeed, one wonders whether modern society might be better equipped for survival if these two types of people had never been invented in the first place.

*[Pause]*

Our ancestors watched, observed and did.

Yes, they *did* - did whatever they saw and whatever their minds compelled them to do. They were people of action, men of movement and deeds in a world that was to be experienced and understood. They made fire and tools, shot the greatest animals with the inventions of their imaginations – and they progressed to survive with style, beginning to control their own destiny.

Instead of being the victim, they became the victor.

Instead of the predated, the predator.

*[Pause]*

Then came mime and painting.

Now, strictly speaking, mime was still action but a scaled-down way of re-enacting the



action of their lives, stories told round the evening fires with hand gestures, and expression-filled faces. Pigments and powders gave them images on the walls of their caves, depicting the world they knew with colourful imagination.

So, action became conformed to expression, a representation of a reality that had once been experienced.

Then came writing – it was the most logical development from painting.

The head of the bull became the ‘a’ - symbols from the world around them - the round face and two horns projecting from the top. It was simply shorthand to denote a sound, a pronunciation that, when strung together with others, formed ‘words’, that changed over time with each succeeding generation.

And, yet, it wasn’t ‘action’ – if anything, it was further removed from what brought it into being than anything that had gone before, but it *did* mean that you could know what happened on the other side of the world without ever having seen it.

Indeed, it quickly transpired that even something that didn’t happen could be described as if it had – that was the birth of fiction.

The imagination of the reader embellished the word to produce in the mind an image of an event as if it had really happened – or as if it was actually in the process of happening as the message was being understood.

Of course, it wasn’t ‘action’ – it was a dim and distant representation of it – but, if you hadn’t experienced the action, you had to make do with *something*. Something that could stimulate you into believing you *were* there, that you’d seen the event in question and were witnessing it as if at first hand.

But it wasn’t reality – never could be.

And yet still, men strove to see, to witness reality even when they were living halfway round the world from where the volcano erupted or the president was assassinated. Cultures that had only been talked about behind closed doors with rumours and slander could now be represented on the page of a book, readers could be informed as to the state of the world around them – albeit in the opinion of the author.

If it’s true today that ‘Seeing is believing’, then ‘Reading was believing’ a long time before - and for a much longer time, too.

From action to mime, mime to symbol, symbol to writing – there had to come a time when the circle would be completed, when writing would prompt action once more and the world would be able to witness, at first hand, the events that it craved to see.

And that was film [*he turns away from the audience as if having finished his speech, only to turn back to deliver the rest as if an afterthought*].

Action in 2D, I admit, but action nevertheless.

It was what the world had been wanting for ever since action had been denied them, and imagination had had to be employed in the mind of man to put flesh on the skeleton of words.

Film is the witness of an event – sure, it may be simply an interpretation of the words of a man’s pen, something that never really happened and which never will, but that’s not the way of it to the person who sits in the third row from the front, sucking on his popcorn, glued to the screen of dreams.

To them, it’s reality – it’s a true event in history rather than a staged act of fantasy.

And that’s why it sells – it’s what mankind has been crying out for, for years – centuries even.

Full Circle – that’s where we’ve come.

The only problem now is that the fantasy we portray is accepted as being real, will move men to deeds that they may never have considered – and, whether that’s good or bad,

depends on representation, on the response of the individual.

Maybe, even, it'll depend on the *type* of individual.

*[Pause. He lifts up his hands as if perplexed as to what conclusion to draw]*

Now – you tell me! - just what type of society *are* we forming?

**REHEARSAL**

Scene setting - 1915

Characters - DWG (A2), Miss Annie (A3) and Bobby (A1)

*[DWG is meant to represent the great DW Griffith in type but is not here represented from a detailed study of the man - neither is it meant to be him but, rather, a summary of all types of early innovative movie directors. It was DWG who developed a 'new way' of acting and filming that relied upon close-ups in which facial expression was an integral and vital part (in truth, DWG wasn't always 'original' but he used so many innovative methods that he's probably best regarded as the one who had the foresight to bring them all together into a 'new' art form) - before this time, actors generally stood on the stage in the Theatre (and from a long distance in front of the camera) and used exaggerated movements of the body to express emotion (after all, you couldn't see the subtleties of expression on the faces very well so exaggeration was expected) and/or projected their voice for a similar effect.*

*[With the advent of the silent film, however, the latter was ineffective. However, Gish notes that two very famous actors from the UK came to their studios one day and recited a famous passage for them from Shakespeare - and they were all totally bored because their own subtle expressive acting had become the norm (page 173). Indeed, the film actors found the entire episode rather embarrassing.*

*[Based on that recollection - and the description of the first time DWG met Lillian and Dorothy Gish to get them to 'act' in front of him to see if they could carry off the needs of the silent screen (they were both stage actresses before that time - page 37) - this scene has been written. This improvised 'introduction' was what won the sisters their part in their first movie for Griffith ('An Unseen Enemy' of 1912).*

*[DWG often wore a wide-brimmed hat while directing, with the very top cut out of it because he had heard that giving ventilation to the head helped prevent hair loss. A similar prop may be advantageous although, in the photographs I have of DWG, he is sometimes seen wearing a straw boater and it's very rare for any hat to have the top cut out of it. As DWG came from Kentucky, it's unlikely that he had anything other than a Southern accent but his appearance in photographs always makes me associate him with a mildly aristocratic voice.*

*[This scene is meant to be self-contradictory - although the audience will probably not realise it to be so. The quote of DWG elevates film to a universal force that was hoped would transcend the barrier of language and bring in an age of unprecedented good (he believed it had been prophesied in the Bible and that the 'Millennium' when Christ comes to reign on the earth would be ushered in within the next few decades because of this new universal language - Page 358 of Gish) - but DWG so often depicted sexual threat and rape in his movies (notably in his 1915 classic 'Birth of a Nation' and the follow up to answer his critics in 1916 of 'Intolerance') that one wonders how he ever managed to reconcile the two.*

*[Therefore, such a 'threat' is employed in this scene to balance the ethereal ideal of the medium with the brutish reality of what was released into the cinemas]*

*[DWG (the Director) and Miss Annie (the Actress) walk together onto the stage with Bobby (the Payroll Actor) following along behind as if cowering before the presence of some great god]*

*DWG: Now, Miss Annie, let's see what you can do...*

*[Miss Annie walks into centre stage and turns to face the audience while DWG takes his seat to one side. Bobby stands beside him, furthest away from the audience so as not to obscure him]*

Miss Annie *[There must be no subtleties of facial expression here. It must, rather, be done with demonstrative arm and hand movements, movement about the stage and a very emotional voice that carries the nightmare that the speech from 'Macbeth' (Act 5 Scene I) demands. If anything, make sure this delivery is over-hammed - anything that wouldn't come across on film as well as on stage. Excessive movement was particularly problematical because of the normally static nature of the camera so Annie should walk about the stage on at least a couple of occasions. Throughout this delivery, DWG is fidgeting in his chair, scratching his head, folding his arms, unfolding them - anything to give the appearance of embarrassment and discomfort at the performance]:* Out, damned spot! Out, I say!

One: two: why, then, tis time to do't.

Hell is murky! Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard?

What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?

Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.

*[Pause]*

The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?

What, will these hands ne'er be clean?

No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that:

You mar all with this starting.

*[Pause]*

Here's the smell of the blood still:

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.

Oh, oh....

*[DWG Interrupts]*

DWG *[Almost impatiently]:* Yes, yes. Very nice, Miss Annie. But don't you think that the speech may not come across as effectively on the *silent* screen? How on earth could we follow you around over there *[Points to where she's walked in her delivery]*, over here *[Points]*, when our camera would be trained simply there *[Points]*. You're a cameraman's worst nightmare, my dear.

*[Miss Annie looks puzzled. She goes to speak but remains silent as DWG continues...]*

DWG: The screen demands *vision*, Miss Annie, not hearing. It's a medium of the eye, not the ear *[Pauses briefly, rubbing his forehead to show that he's retrieving something important from his memory. Moving towards Miss Annie who's centre stage, he delivers this 'speech' that Gish (page 130 - it is reproduced here, word for word, in the first paragraph only) remembers DWG encouraging her with..]*

Do you know, we are playing to the world! What we film tomorrow will stir the hearts of the world - and they will understand what we're saying. We've gone beyond Babel, beyond words. We've found a universal language - a power that can make men brothers and end war forever. Remember that. Remember that, when you stand in front of a camera!

Have you watched the films we make, Miss Annie *[rhetorical - he doesn't wait for an answer before continuing]*? I think not! I think that you've risen to the heights of your fame through the masterly command of the tools of your own trade - but you have to unlearn your skill and begin again like a small child if you're ever to reach and touch the hearts and lives of those who will pay to watch you act in front of them.

And think of the universality of this medium! Why, which nation on earth can we not reach with silent film? In five, ten - perhaps twenty - years from now, we might have so

persuaded the minds of mankind that we see peace ushered in on the wings of our creativity.

These are exciting times, Miss Annie [*He stops short, smiling*].

Now, my dear, let's try something else [*Turns to Bobby*]. Bobby, you be the thief breaking in to the house at midnight to steal the household valuables [*He turns and begins to meander back to where he was watching her*], while you, Miss Annie, are on your own, helpless, defenceless...

Miss Annie [*As he's returning to the side of the stage - and with Bobby, taking up his position behind Miss Annie at an imaginary window - she interjects*]: Where's the telephone?

DWG [*Stops in his tracks and turns towards her*]: Sorry?

Miss Annie: I said 'Where's the telephone?'

DWG [*Looking puzzled*]: I don't follow you.

Miss Annie: Well, given the position I'm in, I'd call the Police.

DWG [*A little impatiently*]: No, no. You don't have a phone. The doors are all locked, the windows jammed shut and you have no way of escape except to confront the thief as he comes through the window.

Miss Annie [*Half-whispering but full of a realisation of her predicament*]: Shit!

DWG: 'Shit!' exactly, my dear. Now let's see you act 'Shit!' subtly as if I'm the only one you're trying to convey meaning to. The demonstration of your emotions should be to individuals - as if you're trying to make them *personally* aware of what you feel, what you're thinking. You're not acting to a conglomerate mass of theatre-goers.

*[There's a short pause while Miss Annie loosens her neck, moves her shoulders to get 'ready' for the part. Bobby raises his shirt collar up to look 'threatening', moves his legs on the spot to show he's eager to begin. He shows no emotion on the face until the action starts]*

DWG: Okay, Bobby. You begin - set the mood for the scene. You're evil, Bobby, you're a child of satan, himself [*Bobby lowers his neck, stoops - he rounds his shoulders and rubs his hands to show wicked intention, narrowing his eyes to make himself 'shifty'*]. Good, good! Has anybody seen you? Are you sure you're alone under the cover of darkness?

*[Bobby reaches for the window, but, with his hand extended, looks round about him to check that his deed is going unwitnessed]* Now, you see him at the window, my dear. You're alone, no one expected home for days. Trapped and defenceless - show me how you feel.

*[Miss Annie cowers before the form at the window as Bobby gently and slowly raises the window open allowing time for Miss Annie to act. She pulls at her clothes in anguish with no speech whatsoever, she paces a couple of steps nervously, places a shaking hand to her brow, trying to think what to do - Bobby climbs in through the imaginary window and stands still, peering about in the darkness, squinting, trying to make out the forms in the room. Bobby is not looking at Miss Annie when the next stage direction is given]*

Now, my dear, you move against a small table, dislodging a vase that smashes onto the floor.

*[Miss Annie bumps dramatically into furniture that isn't there, reaches out a hand to try and stop a vase from sliding from the top but recoils in shock as it smashes onto the floor. Bobby's head flicks round to observe her and his face lights up with sadistic pleasure, an evil grimace, rubbing his hands]*

Okay, Bobby, you forget the silver and decide to give your attention to the maiden [*Bobby moves slowly, deliberately towards her*]. Come on, Miss Annie, you can't stand there accepting your fate - move! [*Pause while she's given the opportunity to move which she doesn't take*] MOVE! [*She holds her hands out and looks towards DWG for a suggestion*] Try to get away. Carefully! Carefully! - there's furniture everywhere, broken porcelain on the floor and you're barefoot.

*[Miss Annie turns one way, then the other, shaking, fear visible on her face. With each move, the thief matches her flight until, with one quick attempt towards her left, arm outstretched, the thief grabs her arm and pushes it behind her back, forcing her to arch her back away from him]*

That's it, good. Bobby, leer, look evil. There's lechery in your heart, show it in your face *[Pause]*. Now, Miss Annie, you remember that there's another vase behind you - reach out behind your back with your free hand. That's it! *[Annie is all the while pulling away from his body, arching her back]* Carefully, gingerly. Don't attract his attention. Grab it firmly - now, violently, swing it across his head.

*[As Miss Annie swipes at the thief making contact, she forces him to release his grip, casting him, unconscious, onto the floor away from her, only momentarily moving before lying still. Miss Annie breathes quickly and shallowly, bending over with emotion, beginning to cry with relief...]*

DWG: Good, good *[Pause]*. Well, that's a wrap *[...and he walks off stage grinning]*.

## THE FILM OWNER

Scene setting - 1919

Characters - The Film Owner (A1)

*[In the early days, the film industry boomed because the working classes flocked to the cinema to see the 'moving pictures'. These were the 'easy profit' days although the industry was fast changing and, while some made just enough to get by, others were willing to improvise and try new things that drew bigger and bigger audiences.*

*[The companies who were unwilling to change the format of their product were soon floundering, but the 1910s were the years when so many 'new' techniques were thought of and used that, by employing them, you continually stood on the crest of a financial wave if you gambled.*

*[The character here who gives this speech is not wholly true to the time in which he's set as I've played down the negative aspects of the risk taking involved - innovations in film directing didn't guarantee being accepted by the Public, the same as subject matter and film length (which jumped to epic proportions from 1914 onwards - the original 1916 version of 'Intolerance' was eight hours long but was released only as an approximately three hour epic). And, besides, a lot of owners and distributors wanted simply to 'keep the films the way they were' and guarantee their money.*

*[Before the 200 minute 'Birth of a Nation' was released in 1915, those over DW Griffith (such as the generic character of this scene) balked at allowing him to produce 'features'. They saw no future in anything other than 'shorts', two or three reel movies that could be churned out at the rate of two or three a week. Even though they were against change, they were quite willing to take the money and command more 'features' to be made when the profits could be seen to be real.*

*[In the early years up until the mid-1920s, improvisation and invention within a very loose - if sometimes non-existent - plot was what made the great films 'great'. Without such freedom, the likes of Keaton, Arbuckle and Chaplin would never have produced the classic comedies that are still enjoyed today.*

*[However, when profitability became more and more necessary, invention and improvisation were leaving acceptability to chance. Scripts were written and were meant to be kept to, scene by scene - whereas actors researched and developed their own character, rehearsing their scenes weeks in advance of shooting, now they were more than likely to learn their parts by rote and 'turn up' on the day of shooting.*

*[Film Company Owners needed to guarantee profits, and films such as Keaton's 'The General' of 1927 was such a huge financial flop (and yet, also, probably the best film he ever made) containing the most expensive special effect of the entire silent screen, that new films couldn't be allowed to be made unless everything had been scripted, costed and planned beforehand.*

*[The 'great' owners of companies - such as Mayer, Zukor and the like - began by being nobodies. They simply took the risks and anticipated that the films weren't a passing fad, mortgaging themselves and what they had to invest in them. Their returns were out of this world. But, to maintain it, they eventually had to fossilise the movie-making process - a subject that will be dealt with later]*

Film Owner *[Begins by standing at the front of the stage]:* It's big business now - films,

that is.

*[Pause]* It's always been 'business' - never been anything else. It's just that, recently, it's become 'big'. Very big. *[Turns away towards the desk, then back to conclude...]* In fact, if it continues at the present rate, we could be looking at having the turnover of a small federal state in the not too distant future.

*[He sits on the front of his desk, facing the audience - the desk will be what identifies him in the second scene in which he takes part]* Our stars are already earning more per year than the President does - our best directors are similarly paid and have almost god-like reputations - and that means I'm creaming off the profits like there's no tomorrow.

I'm entitled to it, too.

I took the chance, you see, in the beginning - I had the vision, the foresight to mortgage all I had (and much more besides) to get behind this craze, this phenomenon, from the first stumbling steps of the Nickelodeons to the grand cinemas that take thousands a day.

A nickel, a dime or a quarter for admission - it doesn't matter. When you're filling thousand-seater venues three or four times a day, the profits are multiplied beyond measure. And when you think that, just a few years ago, the nation passed the 17,000 cinema mark - why, with a half-decent film, we can recover our production costs in a week - let alone a month. *[Pauses and laughs]* Ha! Let alone a year.

And there's one still running all over America from way back, too - only cost us \$80,000 to produce. It's like we're printing money. The faster we produce them, the faster we make it - the more films we make, the more profit there is. The Public sure have an insatiable hunger for what we send out.

It's an 'invest and prosper' industry right now - a golden window of opportunity that doesn't come along more than once in any person's lifetime. Give the Public what they want, keep production costs low, distribute it everywhere - I don't know how I can lose!

It's not like I'm selling chocolate bars, making a cent a sale. Every time I'd want to make a cent, I'd have to make another product - but get yourself a good film, a good product that people want to buy, and you can sell that *one* item over and over and over again.

Of course, we'd be nowhere without the actors and actresses, nowhere without the directors - but they don't have to be that good. With the public hungry for anything that moves, we can largely pass off mediocrity and shove it down their throats *[Perhaps an action should accompany it that's similar to that which goes with this phrase in 'Spinal Tap' where the assumed mastery over the subjugated slave is evident in the facial expression of the delivery]*.

Let the actors improvise, let them make it up as they go along, let them start with nothing and end up with something trite - it really doesn't matter. One failure amongst a hundred isn't important - the public will keep paying, keep watching, keep putting their bums on the cinemas' seats...and every person's buttock is worth ten cents or more to me.

*[He stands to his feet and reclines in the chair behind the desk]*

You see, it doesn't matter if Chaplin makes a duff movie or two - everyone raves about it. Keaton and Arbuckle, too - same old, same old is good enough to keep them flocking through the turnstiles. DW Griffith? Now that he's had a few successes, attendance is guaranteed for years. Sure, some are better than others, but if the public want the person, they'll get them whichever way they're presented - and be thankful for it.

*[Places his feet on the desk to show how comfortable he is with the life he has]*

Of course, we have to arrange the odd scandal for them - nothing *too* debauched you understand. But Hollywood has its own image to maintain and, well, if you want the public to keep coming back to see their heroes, you have to invent a few 'untruths' about them to raise



their image when their popularity is starting to wane.

And their history before film is important to us, too. Sow that little bit of intrigue, distort the facts ever so carefully to bring them down on the side of the majority and the people will associate themselves with them for years.

*[He removes his feet and leans forward as if answering a question]*

Oh yes, we've got our own departments working on image and acceptability as I speak - it isn't just a good actress who'll make it. You have to create a persona, an image, that announces to the world something dark or shady that will make them want to come to the cinema to see it on film.

*[Sits back once more]*

We'll even distort titles, you see? Titillate them with a provocative phrase and you'll get bums on seats alright - it may have nothing to do with the content of the film but that's not my problem, is it? I just have to fill cinemas.

*[Uses his hand to show the titles of the films he's about to quote as if high up on a billboard, but he delivers the rest of the sentence to the audience]* 'The Husband's Plaything' - that was about an executive in the toy industry. We got twice as many people in to see that one than if we'd called it something neutral.

'Fallen Women' - that was a story about parachutists.

Oh, and what about 'Lusty Stallions' - not released that one yet but it's going to be a wildlife film when it comes out of production.

*[Pauses]*

See, I didn't want to stay a grocer all my life - early hours off to the markets, presenting the produce to the public, looking at minuscule profit percentages. Going to bed at night fed but tired, waking up the following day still tired from the previous day's work.

That wasn't for me!

Which would you have preferred? Making a cent from selling half a dozen apples or another ten thousand from recycled nitrate? Limousines, furs, servants, mistresses and mansions - that's the lifestyle! Not eking out a pittance on the street corners of the city.

*I'm living like a king - and that's the way I intend keeping it...*

## CENSORSHIP

Scene setting - 1921

Characters - Campaigner (A3), Translator (A2)

*[The two characters used in this scene alternate speeches and are not meant to converse in the normal sense of the word. The translator will always respond to what the Campaigner has said but not vice-versa, hopefully creating the impression that she is unconcerned with what anybody else thinks but herself.]*

*[The Campaigner will enter the stage first and deliver her first speech and will then 'freeze' while the Translator enters and delivers his first reply. Then he freezes while she speaks and so on until the last two speeches, at the end of which each of the characters will exit the stage. The characters will also 'freeze' momentarily when there's an interjection although I haven't always added a note to this effect as it makes the text look cumbersome.]*

*[The Campaigner should be an older, matronly woman who has 'gone past the age at which she attracts men'. That may not be possible, I agree, but this paraphrased quotation from 'Intolerance' has the film continue with a visual representation of their features which reinforces the inter-title statement]*

*[The Campaigner walks onto stage, her frame pushed high and proud with a pair of hand-held glasses fixed to the end of her nose to give her an air of authority and intelligence. She can remove them periodically as an expressive way to make a point. Her voice should certainly be 'high brow' and 'old' - something akin to the way aristocratic old ladies were portrayed in the 1950 films. Think 'Margaret Rutherford' and you won't go too far wrong]*

Campaigner *[she turns towards the audience only a few yards after entering the stage with a look of horror on her face as bad as Miss Annie who was trying to show her fear at the sight of an intruder coming into her house]:* Have you seen what they're doing now? It's disgusting!

Loosening our nation's fine morals and throwing them into the gutter to be trampled underfoot by the evil and adulterous! What *is* the world coming to? Debauchery on every street corner and the populace witnessing riotous living and drunkenness on every cinema screen throughout the length and breadth of this fine nation!

*[Reminisces]* I remember the good old days when you *might* not have understood what life was about *but at least you were happy!* You may not have had enough to eat sometimes but at least you didn't go hungry! Those were the days...

But all this 'wealth', this 'new prosperity' - it's disgusting! It's just a temptation to loose morals and riotous living!

*[She freezes as if in mid-thought. The Translator enters from the opposite side of the stage. He's more mobile than the Campaigner and can amble about the stage at will. He's meant to be seen to be 'freer' with less restrictions on his mobility, thus contrasting with the rigidity of the Campaigner who moves very little from the spot at which she stopped.]*

*[The Translator's voice should be ordinary - not common and neither posh. He represents no section of society but is provided for the audience simply to add an alternative viewpoint and to 'translate' the Campaigner's words into speech that explains what she means]*

Translator: Of course, if you were to listen to this lady, you'd think there were hordes of unregenerate mobs sweeping their way down the streets of her nation, great thronging masses of people intent upon one thing and one thing only - excessive freedom to the point

of debauchery.

That's the problem with words, you see? They mean what the listener interprets them to mean. What do you understand by 'debauchery' *[points into the audience]*? Or you, sir, how would you understand 'immorality' *[points to someone else]*?

Let me translate for you - I know the times in which this lady lives.

You see, in *her* day there was this Bill pending in the Law Courts *[Speaks with eyes wide in mock horror]* for one of the most outrageous acts of loose living you're ever likely to witness. Oh yes, I'm serious - it gave provision for the imposition of a fine or, in really horrible and debauched transgressions, even imprisonment for those women *[illustrates the offence with his arms and the raising of his foot]* who wore their skirts out in public with their hems higher than three inches above the ankle.

*[Half-laughs at the thought of it]* Wicked, or what?

And there was this other law, too - now this one was even more important to restrict the gradual fall into anarchy and rebellion - that was being brought in that would forbid any woman *[again, he uses his hand to illustrate]* from wearing tops that displayed more than three inches of their throat. In some States the measurement was only two - they were the *really* strict societies, of course! Three inches was positively liberal by comparison.

Looks like polo-neck sweaters were the order of the day, even in high summer.

Oh, and the films were the 'promoters' of this 'new fashion', of course. Well, at least, they were held responsible for eroding the stability of the society in which this woman lived.

Just over 25 years ago in New York *[from Ramsaye, page 268]* - 1896 to be precise - and recorded in the local papers of that fine and great city, there was a sermon on the subject... *[he pauses, raises a index finger at the audience to indicate they should wait a moment while he reaches into his rear pocket to retrieve a notebook]*

Let me get the title of the sermon word for word - I wouldn't want any of you thinking that I'd embellished it *[thumbs through the book until he arrives at the appropriate page]*. Ah yes, here it is.

*[He reads it slowly and deliberately with an increasing state of bewilderment descending on his face as he does so.]*

'You cannot serve God and skylark on a bicycle'.

I can see that you're as puzzled as I was when I first read it, but let me explain - after all, if you were around in those days, you'd realise that this was no isolated sermon. No, not at all! You see, before the movie era, one of the main objects of attack by the orthodox was the bicycle *[then with wide eyes to emphasise that what he's about to say he doesn't actually agree with]*, that most sinful of inventions.

You see, the fundamental sin of the bicycle was its involvement of the use of the legs, the existence of which was not admitted by any proper female person *[pointing over his shoulder at the Campaigner. Then, quietly, so as not to be overheard by her]*. Mind you, judging by the stature of my learned colleague here, I doubt if the bicycle could have supported her anyway so she was probably safe from satanic temptation.

*[Back to his normal voice]* But there was worse to come. The bicycle led to the widespread donning of bloomers, just as inevitably as a tin of baked beans leads to flatulence *[he pauses and then reflects]*. And that was probably a sin, too - especially if you were wearing bloomers and were cycling at the same time.

Today, the movies *daily* reveal more and better legs than the entire world's output of bicycles from the reign of Queen Victoria to date - it's hardly surprising that the orthodox have progressed in their diatribes from the bicycle to the movies...

*[The Translator freezes and the Campaigner begins another objection]*

Campaigner: There's a real need for the masses to be educated *[pause]* - but not immorally. Men and women need to know what's right and wholesome *[pause]* – not be led into outrageous behaviour by degenerate images.

Translator: Well, I have to agree with my most learned colleague.

Sort of, anyway.

There's never been a more necessary time for the education of the American public. Someone once told me that you could always tell an American – not that you could tell him much but it was worthwhile at least trying to tell him.

*[Ramsaye pages 515-6]* When the European Movie Industry tried to promote their making of the Classics onto film, it was largely wasted on the Americans.

A certain Mr Craft went out on the road with a foreign production of the *[the next five words are spoken slower so that the audience will understand the relevance of the punch line]* ancient Greek classic 'Homer's Odyssey' and a considerable percentage of his patrons asked the question *[in mock inquisitiveness as if the people are now speaking]* 'Will Mr Homer be travelling with the show and will he be making personal appearances?'

*[To the Campaigner]* History tells us *not* that innocent pastimes lead to innocent people, my dear, but that men and women find a way to take what's innocent and hurt their fellow man. For nearly every invention there's both a good and an evil application – and no matter how hard you try, man errs towards the latter.

What's needed is a change of heart, not a ban on invention.

Campaigner *[With no regard for what's just preceded it]:* Do you know where these 'film stars' come from? Why, they're the very off-scourings of society!

I know for a fact that some of these frauds are nothing more than failed bartenders, butcher boys, scruffy newspaper sellers, restaurant waiters and street corner shoe-shines.

Translator: And Jesus wouldn't be seen dead near them, would he, my dear?

Campaigner *[Quieter as if depending upon the audience's confidence]:* I even heard of one who's been a carpenter's apprentice!

Translator: Oh, hang on! You're saying Jesus *is* one of them?!

Campaigner: Such are the off-scourings of our society, the dregs of humanity - it's these who have wrested the control away from us for the education of our children. They're the ones whose views of life and character are forming unhealthy habits in the youth of this nation.

*[Getting excited]* We must censor this debauchery, this immorality, this wickedness - and replace it with good old fashioned values of temperance. Look at me! My behaviour is the perfect example of what life is all about!

*[She freezes]*

Translator *[He unfreezes and walks over to the Campaigner, examining her clothes, looking carefully at her face and figure. He gives a 'knowing' look at the audience and begins...]:* It's just as I thought. 'Women who cease to attract men often turn to reform as a second choice' *[Quote from 'Intolerance' - it's almost the equivalent of our modern day expression 'She needs to get laid' although it means much more than that - and something totally different, too].*

*[To the Campaigner]* You know, I can't help wondering that, if you were just a little bit more *acceptable* to the people you condemn, you might be halfway towards your quest of winning their hearts.

*[To the audience]* Still, you can't have everything, can you?

I think what really gets to me is this disdain of the common man, this distrust that anyone who's on the line between poverty and comfort - or even those who've slipped below it, way,

way below it - must necessarily have a lifestyle reflecting lawlessness.

It must 'stand to reason' in some schools of logic, I admit, but what about history's greats who've 'risen from the ashes' to great heights and who we now look up to as the pillars upon whom our society's built? And what about the *real* debauchery of society's *elite*, eh? It wasn't for no good reason that the House of Bourbon was overthrown by the peasants of the Revolution.

*[As an aside or after thought]* Mind you, the French have always been revolting if you ask me.

*[The Translator freezes once more as the Campaigner begins her last diatribe. She will need to exit the stage after this speech as will the Translator following his last one that follows]*

Campaigner: If it was just their films that were vulgar, perhaps we'd have a chance to redeem our children. But their private lives...well, what can I say?

*[Getting increasingly agitated and angry]* Have you heard what they do in private? Although why they call it 'private', I have no idea! The papers are full of the details and, well, you just have to read them to get to know what they're doing.

Drunken, riotous parties are everywhere taking place with illicit alcohol and, I've no doubt of it, orgies and goings-on the like of which Sodom and Gomorrah never witnessed. Just thinking about it makes my blood boil!

And have you heard who've they've caught now? Fatty Arbuckle - yes, that's right. I always knew his films were debauched. Loose-living, philandering, adultery-loving rapist! Why do they need a trial? Tell me that!

*[With vitriol]* String him up by his testicles until he's dead if you ask me! It's the only humane way of getting rid of this filth from our society.

*[She recovers herself, pushes herself up into the same aloof air with which she entered the stage and delivers the final lines as she turns and exits]* And I think I represent the voice of the majority...

Translator *[With a hand raised to one side as if to prevent the Campaigner from hearing]*: Actually, he isn't guilty - but don't break it to her, will you? She'll continue supporting the censorship of all his films throughout America simply because he was accused.

*[He removes his hand]* For her, you see, it's enough that he was *in the room* with a bottle of booze. Oh yes, that's a big issue over here, ever since prohibition swept the land. Now you can't get a decent drink unless you're a gangster or a film star...or both. Yes, both is preferable.

Just to be *associated* with alcohol...man! That's wicked! Alcohol is evil in liquid form - just as certain as many feel that the film industry is satan in the flesh, evil personified and stalking at the very life breath of society.

*[Turns to walk off stage]* The voice of reason *[He contemplates his statement]*. Yes, that would be nice. Perhaps, one day, we might get to hear it...

*[Exits]*

## RISE TO FAME

Scene setting - Four different time periods

Characters - The Star (A1), One off-stage phrase (A2)

*[Many of the silent stars rose from nothing to become highly paid entertainers. This didn't endear them to the moral reformers of the day who - as I pointed out in a previous scene - seemed to take exception to their talent on the grounds of their previous occupation, accusing them of immoral behaviour and debauched living solely because of it.*

*[Furthermore, Yallop (in his biography of Fatty Arbuckle entitled 'The Day the Laughter Stopped') notes that at one boarding house there was a sign which read 'No dogs or actors' - and the new Silent actors were regarded as being even lower than that!*

*[This scene is designed to show the meteoric rise to fame of one specific individual who is used generically for all those who threw themselves into films - sometimes in desperation where others feared to tread - and obtained a huge return for their risk taking.*

*[In the early years, many stars changed their names to prevent themselves being identified in case films shouldn't make it big (DW Griffith, for example, used a pseudonym for his first films) - had they not done so, their reputation by association would have ostracised them from earning an 'honest' day's wage.*

*[I have adapted what's known of Chaplin's early life but do not intend this to be taken as necessarily accurate to him. What's known about Chaplin, however, is that, when he became famous, his past was re-written or 'adapted' to make it more acceptable to American Society. As Lynn showed, his 'early years' are packed with inaccuracies. Perhaps the silent stars had their pasts edited and adapted for them by the companies who they were contracted to and who knew it to be in their best interests to maintain popularity for their own profit.*

*[I have split this scene into four specific sections (introduced by the headers A to D) that represent the four 'ages' of the star's rise to fame and to show how they 'cultured' themselves to become more acceptable to the society that had made them stars.*

*[Therefore, the first 'voice' must be extremely common - I have in mind a cockney accent. The last must be as posh as Chaplin's when he re-edited 'Gold Rush' in 1942 and provided a voice-over narration - this should be the actor's guide (if anything, this transition is absolutely perfect to what happened to Chaplin who educated himself as he grew in stature in American society).*

*[The middle two accents should be transitions between the two. Four different types of hats could be employed here - ones that can be associated easily with different types of society. However, this may confuse the audience as they may envisage them being four different characters. I've also added some contrasting actions to try and reinforce the changing voice.*

*[There must be a recognised break between the four sections - they mustn't run into one]*

*[A - The Early Years - Common Accent]*

Star: My childhood was the slums - grime and dirt in the streets and rooms where I grew up. Grime and dirt in the one-roomed flat where the three of us huddled together to sleep. Grime and dirt just about everywhere we went, our clothes reeked from the acrid smell of the factories that spewed their poison into the air.

Mother was a showgirl - which could mean a lot of things in those days - but she really did act on the stage, singing her heart out most nights to earn what she could to feed us.

Just when our father left us, I can't remember - I always thought he'd return with a vast fortune as I grew up but, by the time I was fourteen, I guess I'd given up hope of ever seeing him. My poor brother didn't know who his father was - not even sure mother knew his name, either.

It was a part-time profession, you see - entertaining men. If you didn't have the income you couldn't go down the Social and draw support. No, you had to make the money whichever way you could and, well, when you were young, you could earn more than others. Though some men weren't so fussy.

*[Coughs loudly but with no hand in front of his mouth]* That dislodged something I'm sure.

But it was only a temporary occupation when things got tough - you didn't make it your profession, your sole line of trade.

I used to hang around the Theatre whenever mother got a date, I knew all the acts - I saw them all. That was what got me into the business - the opportunity, I mean. One time they needed a child for a part - couldn't pay much but mother pushed me forward. Looked after me, made sure I was paid what was decent.

Been in it ever since.

*[B - A Talent Discovered - Common/Posh Accent]*

Becoming eighteen didn't mean much. I was working - a troupe of actors up and down the land, taking bit parts when the season ended in whatever I could. When it got *really* bad, I'd wait on tables, run errands, help the boss with his private business.

Anything to earn a few coppers.

*[Throughout this paragraph, he picks his nose once and then wipes his nose on his sleeve]* We got well-known - we worked hard enough for it, too. Day and night we'd rehearse - it was my training ground, you see. The place where I learnt a trade that could've kept me going treading the boards, being able to live well enough, although scarcely like a king.

But the boss got us a tour of America - they were intrigued at what our style of humour was, I guess. We sailed on a sea of expectancy - but no one really thought it would be anything more than a one-off tour.

*[He notices his shoes are dirty and he rubs one on the back of the other leg's trouser]*

The Guv'nor told us to behave ourselves, keep our noses clean. It was the first time some of them had ever seen the English at first hand - we must've been a sight! But certainly a different sound.

*[C - A Talent Develops - Posh/Common Accent]*

I got this telegram, you see. One-fifty a week it said.

Well, it was worth a risk - the tour was ending, where was I to go? Back to England? What did I actually have to lose? Except perhaps the rain and cold of London's winter weather. California was the new frontier, a land of incredible opportunity - I'd been reading about it as we travelled overland by day and acted by night.

And these movies, well...they were just beginning to catch on.

*[Coughs loudly but places his hand in front of his mouth]* Please excuse me, I have a slight cold.

Anyway, I couldn't imagine myself prospecting for gold - but prospecting I did even if it was after a different fashion.

Hard work it was, too - I barely slept. Three films a week we did, four if it went well - six days a week if we could finish them in time, eight if we couldn't. I didn't get much of a chance to spend the money - I didn't need to.

But that's where I learnt the movies - learnt what they wanted to see. That's where I started to see my name on billboards, outside cinemas in large writing - 'Coming soon, in a brand new two-reeler...'

Never been tempted to go back to Vaudeville - upwards is where this road leads, not back down again.

*[D - Being There - Chaplin's 1942 'Gold Rush' accent]*

I have a mansion as large as an entire terrace back where I was born - the ground's as big as the park where we used to go at weekends. I've three cars that I use on different occasions and a handful of servants who make sure everything's kept clean and in its proper place.

I can't imagine how I ever produced three films a week - the crudity of it all just astounds me! Now I give it time, consult scripts - rejecting so many more than I accept.

*[He takes a few short breaths as if about to sneeze while he reaches quickly for a hanky and then sneezes into it. A voice from the wings shouts out 'Bless you!']* Thank you, my good fellow.

The Public deserve better quality pictures, you see - more thought out and well-rounded plots although, apart from my tried-and-tested image, most of the other characters need little or no developing. You just need the archetypal criminal, the borg-standard attractive-but-not-so-good-at-acting heroine (except she needs to be able to look threatened at appropriate points - they're two-a-penny in Hollywood and they're usually willing to do *anything* to get into pictures) and a host of extras that can be drafted in daily from passers-by, people on the bread line or those who've come here hoping for a break.

*[He notices his shoes are dirty, holding it out in front of him, inspecting it for marks]* I really must get my butler to give these a decent polish when I get home.

Anyway, the Film Industry is a totally different ball game from when I started - rags to riches were commonplace stories amongst us. Now budding actors and actresses descend on Hollywood thinking they'll make the same fortune - but it's unlikely. You can see the slums and ghettos where a million and one dreams have died, where dreamers have woken up to the harsh realities of the acting profession.

I guess it's come full circle - I made it from the slums to riches. They seek the riches but achieve the slums.

But *I* made it - that's the important thing.

This is where *I* am - and *I* intend keeping it.



## THE ORGANIST

Scene setting - 1923

Characters - The Organist (A2)

*[Most of the speech of the Organist is self-explanatory and is aimed at informing the audience of the importance of 'sound' within the showing of silent films. It may sound peculiar to say this, but silence is not conducive to watching the old black and white 'silents' - neither is the wrong type of music.]*

*[As to the former, try watching a classic silent like 'Sunrise' or 'Broken Blossoms' with the sound turned right the way down and you'll see what I mean. As to the latter, I once purchased a series of Chaplin shorts from his time at Keystone and was horrified to find that the musical accompaniment was Jazz that bore little or no relevance to the business being enacted. Even the 2004 brand new musical score for Keaton's 'The General' is, in my opinion, atrocious, for it doesn't interpret the action correctly (whereas the 1995 score enhances the film).]*

*[Musical accompaniment, therefore, was incredibly important for a satisfactory acceptance of the movies of the 'pre-sound' era.]*

*[I recently read (in Stuart Oderman's biography of Lillian Gish) that, when the sound films came in, 22,000 musicians became unemployed throughout America - although 'talkies' were phased in gradually due to the need for specialised equipment so that the numbers became redundant gradually. Only 200 of these were able to be employed in the recording of musical accompaniment for the 'old' silents and the ones that were to be released with their own soundtrack]*

*[The Organist enters the stage carrying a wad of sheet music, loosely held in one hand or under his arm. He shuffles through the pile, muttering to himself...]*

Organist: First reel - okay, that's the theme. *[He hums a few lines]* Develop that in the second with the anti-hero's signature and, then, the climax. *[Pause while he reads a few lines and utters a tune]* Build to a crescendo and a finale of romantic interpretation. *[He scans the manuscript once more and pronounces..]* Yes, that should be fine.

*[He sits down on a chair or, if the theatre has a piano, behind it while placing the music on the stand above the keyboard. He looks directly at the audience]*

I guess that the term 'Silent Movie' is a misnomer. 'Non-Talkie Movie' would be better but that's still a bit cumbersome. How about 'Speechless Movie'? I guess that would be the best of all.

You see, 'Silent' movies aren't silent - never were. Sometimes, in the early days, you'd get dialogue sent to be read with the film - other times, speakers would tour and be part of the package. They were as important to the film as the hand-cranked projector.

Nowadays, of course, it's nearly always music - a single instrument for the smaller venues and films, large orchestral arrangements for the really important stuff. And then you'll see the admission price rise. They say it's worth it for the 'experience'.

I wouldn't know. I've never been to the 'really big' cinemas. I don't get much cause to travel outside this small town - but there's no competition for me. Oh no, I'm the *only* Organist in town at the *only* cinema and, well, so long as there's a demand for film, there'll be a demand for me.

*[Pause]* I didn't have much competition to fight off.

When the movies began, I was still learning the piano and organ and devouring all the tunes of the day I could find. The cinema's first Organist was a middle-aged guy who could only play *[Emphasised]* one melody, that was all. He'd come from the English music hall, emigrated over here sometime at the beginning of the century.

Now, no one's got anything against that tune or the sentiment it expressed but - well, let me set the scene for you. *[All the while, after initially setting the scene, the Organist speaks progressively faster to show the build up of tension and suspense. He also uses increasingly expressive gestures and looks upwards at an imaginary cinema screen]* A young woman is surrounded by a band of outlaws, locked within a farmhouse with one gun and a single bullet. From town, the Sheriff's men saddle up and ride to deliver her from danger.

The tension builds - You see the bandits breaking in through the front door as the girl contemplates turning the gun on herself to protect her honour. Then a cut to the posse, riding the dirt track at breakneck speed *[He imitates the riders, holding guns above their heads and urging their horses on by throwing the reins in front of them].*

Another cut to the siege - *[To the audience]* the audience are on the edge of their seats by now. *[Back to the screen]* The girl is placing the bullet into the barrel, closing it gently, pulling back on the trigger. Meanwhile, the Sheriff's men are riding for dear life, nearing the farmhouse when, in front of the screen, you hear the tune being struck up *[He sings the line, looking upwards]* 'Who were you with last night, out in the pale moonlight...?'

*[Pause. Then, at the audience]* Hardly 'Ride of the Valkyries' is it?

*[Pause]* You see, it's all about interpretation - and, to do that, you need to have a wide repertoire of tunes immediately available up here *[Taps his temple]* that you can translate to here *[Lifts his hands and imitates playing a keyboard]*. You don't always get a musical score with the new films - sometimes not even an outline of the plot.

Every time we get a change of program, I get to see it first, early in the morning. If there's no instructions, I have to time scenes, write down interpretations, note scene cues if I have to change suddenly from one mood to another.

Then I go home and develop the performance. Oh yes, it's certainly a performance. Some people don't realise just how important a good musician is to the success of a film. If I get it wrong, what was certain to run for weeks might get kicked off the screen in a couple of days.

*That's* how important a person like me *[Points to himself with his thumb]* is! *[As if defending himself from accusation]* As important as *any* concert pianist.

*[Somewhere in the middle of the next paragraph (which isn't important to deliver in its entirety), the lights will gradually dim and he will be caught in mid-sentence]* You know, I was saying to the owner just this morning that I should be getting paid as much as the stars are up on the screen - I'm the invisible performer that supports whatever they do...

*[The Lights begin to dim]*

Oh, I must go, that's my cue - the film's about to start.

**PRESSURE POINT**

Scene setting - 1921

Characters - The Film Owner (A1), the Campaigner (A3) and the Translator (A2)

*[In 1922, the Hays Office was instituted within the Motion Picture Industry to prevent the possibility that an external Governmental censoring board might be imposed upon it. It made more sense because film scripts could be checked out before they ever went into production, thereby eliminating wastage of film if it was deemed to be 'unacceptable'.*

*[However, had the film moguls not been forced into censoring their own productions, it's unlikely that it would ever have happened. What it meant was that, once a movie script had been accepted as being potentially moral for America (an oversimplification, I admit), it was unwise to make too many alterations to the movie itself.*

*[Although I can find no evidence to suggest that the future rigidity of production (dealt with in a subsequent scene) was primarily a safeguard against censorship, it makes sense to see it as a minor, but important, factor. Of course, the main reason for the future fixed production methods was, no doubt, to maximise profitability.*

*[This scene is meant to demonstrate the relationship between the film owners and the moral campaigners outside their jurisdiction who hammered away at the Public's conscience until the Hays Office was an inevitability]*

Film Owner (FO) *[The Film Owner of a previous scene is sat behind his desk. He presses a console on the desk and announces to his secretary..]:* Would you send the lady in now? Thank you. *[It may be necessary to have the FO do some business before he asks the lady to come in as she will be the actress of the previous scene and will need time to change. Perhaps he could sign a few papers on his desk?]*

*[The Campaigner enters as the Film Owner stands to his feet and reaches across the desk to shake her hand]* Please, please take a seat, Miss...?

Campaigner *[With absolutely no smile on her face whatsoever]:* Miss Althropp. *[She takes her seat, leaning forward on the desk like a boxer straining at his opponent's body, waiting for the bell to sound for the start of the round]*

FO: Now, Miss Althropp, I understand that you represent the voice of the National Women's Guild of America... *[This named organisation is an invention on my part and not meant to have existed. If it's found to be a real organisation, it should be changed]*

Campaigner *[Brusquely]:* That's right, yes.

FO: ...and that there are certain, er, 'issues' that you wish to raise with us. *[The Campaigner nods as the FO continues]* Now, before you begin, I really must assure you that the movie industry is delighted to be able to meet one of its concerned viewers firsthand...

Campaigner *[Interrupting]:* Oh, I didn't say I watch your trashy films - none of us do. No, we're just concerned about the immoral content that you fill them with.

*[The Translator enters the stage in the same manner as he previously has done while the others 'freeze' for the duration of his speech]*

Translator: 'Concerned about the content but doesn't watch them'. Mm, I can't help but notice a slight contradiction in her statement. Or is it just me? I always thought that to object to something's content meant that you had to have experienced what that content was!

I mean, it's like saying that you hate the taste of baked beans when you haven't opened the tin, isn't it? Still, you have to realise that she represents the voice of 'Moral America' - an

oxymoron if ever there was one - the conscience of millions of citizens who hate the flicks but who love the Jazz Age and everything that goes with it.

You might as well pronounce yourself a pacifist and then go to war. Or claim to have given up smoking if it wasn't for the cigarettes.

*[The Translator freezes]*

FO *[In a heavily condescending tone]*: Mrs Althropp *[The Campaigner gasps in horror at being 'married off']* - er, Miss Althropp - let me assure you that we in the Film Industry take very seriously our moral responsibility when it comes to the maintaining of society's standards in the things we show. Why, just yesterday, we decided to edit certain scenes out of a future release because of their content. We have morality issues *[He uses his hand to emphasise]* way up here on our agenda.

Campaigner *[Pulling a magazine out from her pocket]*: So, tell me, then, why are there breasts all over this advert for one of your new releases? *[The FO eyes the article carefully and shows on his face that he's trying to think up an excuse quickly that might satisfy his adversary. He pulls at his collar as if beginning to overheat. Both characters freeze]*

Translator: Breasts are just a little bit of a give-away, don't you think? Even worse when they're a woman's. *[Pause]* I think they're a woman's. Hang on, let me check *[He walks over to the magazine and eyes it carefully although not lecherously]* Oh yes, definitely a woman's - I'd recognise them anywhere, I have the experience.

But this explanation, I've just got to hear... *[He freezes]*

FO *[Removing a handkerchief to mop his brow - a pair of woman's frilly knickers is actually what he recovers and, when he realises, he throws it over his head with a horrified expression. The Campaigner doesn't perceive what they are]*: Would you like me to open a window - it really does seem to have gone rather warm in here, don't you think?

Campaigner: Answer my question!

FO *[Very sympathetically with a tone in his voice that makes the audience think that even he doesn't believe what he's saying either]*: Well, it seems to me as if the photograph has been taken from the wrong angle, Mrs Althropp. I can't imagine how such massive *[Heavily emphasised - he could also gesticulate with one hand to show size but held in front of him, it's obvious to the audience that he's inadvertently describing a woman's breast]*, er, how such a profile could have been inadvertently exposed, er, I mean, captured on camera and got past our censorship board. We have the finest boobs, er, brains working with us to maintain the very highest moral standards. *[They freeze]*

Translator: This guy could become the world's second greatest escapologist after Houdini. *[He freezes]*

Campaigner: Look! You won't fool me by your faked sincerity - you're in the acting profession so I'm wise to your performance. I have a Congress full of concerned Senators *[The FO now looks positively horrified at the mention of the Government]* contacting me daily about the profanity and deprecation that your industry is promoting...

FO: Well...

Campaigner *[Not listening]*: ...and they're as concerned as the tens of thousands of people who I represent that insist that *something must be done!* *[Pauses for breath]*

FO: I agree, and...

Campaigner: So, unless you take us seriously, you will find that your debauched way of earning a living will soon be brought to a swift and cataclysmic end. Or don't you own this nation as the land of your fathers? *[They freeze]*

Translator *[Gasps]*: Ouch! Now that's hitting below the belt! Most of the industry's chiefs are immigrants or sons of immigrants. In three decades' time such an accusation would be

tantamount to being labelled a 'Communist' and the case considered proven whether you were one or not.

I can't help but think that the hand is being forced up the back, so to speak. That his head is being pushed onto the railway line and the times of the next express train being read out to him. *[He freezes]*

FO *[Visibly shaken - but with a sound of objection in his voice as if his sincerity is being doubted]*: I can assure you madam - er, miss - that we are already working on it and you will see in the Press in just a few days that a solution will be forthcoming from *[sounds as concerned as Margaret Thatcher used to. His phrase is nothing more than a cliché that he knows the Campaigner wants to hear]* a concerned and truly righteous management who are as much worried about the moral decline in our nation as millions of others like you.

*[He rises to his feet, the Campaigner following his lead moments after. He takes her by the arm to lead her to the door to show sympathy but she snatches it away from him and follows him as he indicates that she should leave - as he concludes...]*

FO: Well, it's been most pleasant getting acquainted with you, Miss Althropp. I'm sure that our paths will cross again at some time in the future and that I'll again have the pleasure of your insight into the Film Industry. Goodbye, miss...

*[She exits, looking at him contemptuously as he turns his back on her and returns to his desk and sits down, rubbing his chin in deep thought. He freezes]*

Translator: Find the pressure point of any individual and you can persuade them to do whatever you want them to for the sake of self-preservation. *[As he begins to walk off stage]* This guy's got the horse-bit in his mouth and the oh-so-delicate Miss Althropp is pulling at his reins.

FO *[He presses the button on the intercom]*: Get me the board of directors, Miss Brown. Table a meeting in my diary for first thing tomorrow and cancel anything else that interferes with it.

## THE WOMAN IN THE BACK ROW

Scene setting - 1921

Characters - Girl (A3)

*[The early movie industry was supported almost exclusively by the poor and lower sections of society, the rich and influential feeling that the modern phenomenon was beneath them, a form of mass entertainment that was both crude and vulgar.]*

*[The woman speaking here, therefore, is one of the 'lower classes' so nothing fancy should be worn - the drabber and 'cheaper' the costume, the more realistically it will be reflecting the position of the lady within the American society of the day. Although an American accent is not necessary, a common sounding one is most appropriate.]*

*[1921 has been chosen as the setting for this year as it was the release date of 'Orphans of the Storm' which is used as the main attraction that she's looking forward to on the strength of her previous enjoyment of 'Way Down East' (1920), Broken Blossoms (1919) and 'The Birth of a Nation' (1915) all directed by DW Griffith and starring Lillian Gish.]*

*[When I write 'starring Lillian Gish', I'd best explain myself. The 'star system' as we know it today didn't begin to develop until the late tens of the twentieth century but, as the film industry pushed on into the twenties, the name of the actor or actress was very often what was able to sell the film to the Public who wanted and demanded more and more films by the faces they enjoyed on the screen - or, perhaps more accurately, by the character they saw portrayed by the person on the screen.]*

*[Some actors and actresses became so stereotyped that they rarely, if ever, managed to pull away from the fictitious character that had been glorified by the Public]*

Girl *[Excited and hardly able to contain her emotion]:* It's opening tonight! Seven o'clock and I got tickets, I have. Back Row - look! *[She holds the tickets out to the audience, flapping them so that everyone can see. She begins to calm down]* Can't wait to see it... *[Stares off into space imagining the film. Her face lights up with excitement again and she jumps up and down, stamping her feet and placing the tickets carefully inside her handbag as if they were the Holy Grail]*

Must get myself ready early, I must - best make-up, lipstick. *[Ponders]* Might wash my hair - well, you have to look your best when you're watching *them* *[Points and speaks as if the place she's recounting is an altar]* up there on the screen...don't you? I mean, you've got to do your bit.

*[Pause]* Not going with anyone. No. Not interested really. Oh there've been men from time to time, taking me out, walking, chatting - but the last thing you want is for the back row to become a mass of writhing arms and legs, lips pressed against your own, hands down your dress and popcorn flying all over the place - No!

*[A quiet aside as if in reflection]* You wouldn't believe the places I've found fruit gums when I've been getting ready for bed.

When you're trying to watch, physical exercise spoils the plot, I say. If you're going to pay twenty cents to watch a film, you want to give it your undivided attention - get your money's worth. You don't want to be removing popcorn from your brassière the rest of the evening.

*[She uses her hands to portray the billboard film title and looks upward at an imaginary display as she says almost in a hushed whisper of reverence..]* 'Orphans-of-the-Storm' by DW Griffith. Starring the Gish sisters. *[Pauses, then excited once more]* I can't wait, I really

can't wait!

You know, I've followed his films for years - Griffith, I mean.

'Birth of a Nation' was my first - three hours twenty minutes of my undivided attention. I just sat there in silence all through the interval, I couldn't wait until the projector fired up again and the film began to roll. I remember it all as if it was just yesterday.

The chase. Oh yes, the chase!

Men in white costumes [*She imagines she's wearing one, holding out her arms to inspect the robes and running her hands down her body, almost feeling the fabric clothe her*], galloping across the plains [*she grabs imaginary reins in one hand and an imaginary sword in another*] to rescue the heroes holding out against the forces of evil. The vengeance of the righteous on the wicked [*She slashes her sword into an imagined enemy. Then she pauses in silence before jumping with excitement to announce to the audience..*]

I saw that film eleven times! Cost me a week's wages, it did!

[*Her face lights up as she recalls another film but is almost instantly tinged with the sadness of the film's plot*] And then there was 'Broken Blossoms'. I cried myself to sleep over that one - [*Again her face lights up*] and 'Way Down East'...

...[*She half-whispers*] Richard Barthelmess. What I wouldn't do to meet Richard Barthelmess! I can imagine it, you know - taking me out to a fancy restaurant, [*in awe*] staring deep into the pools of his eyes across a candlelit meal [*wakes up from the slushy daydream to some form of reality*], a dance hall [*she grabs at an imaginary figure and begins singing a wordless tune as she dances with her hero across the stage..*]

[*In a deeper voice, something akin to Noel Coward*] 'My, you're looking ravenous tonight, my dear'

[*In a higher pitched and posher voice than her own*] 'Oh, darling, I'm glad you've noticed. Do you like my gown? I bought it at Woolworths this afternoon?'

'Let us elope, Cynthia. Let me take you away from all this'

'Oh, Richard. Whatever will we do for money?'

'Forget the money, darling, we have each other! Our love will look after us no matter where we find ourselves, no matter what trial we find ourselves in...'

[*She stops, smiling broadly - then giggles with delight and twirls about the stage, laughing and holding herself, imagining her hero clasping her gently but firmly in his arms. She comes back to reality with a sigh and a vacant expression, looking into the distance. Then she looks puzzled as she begins, directly at the audience...*]

I wonder what they do sound like? [*Again she looks puzzled before trying out different voices, some more ludicrous than others. My suggestions for accents are just that - only suggestions*]

[*SW accent*] 'My, you're looking ravenous tonight, my dear' [*laughs*]

[*NE Accent*] 'My, you're looking ravenous tonight, my dear' [*giggles with a hand raised to cover her mouth*] Oh, I sincerely hope not!

[*In a broad and deep American accent*] 'My, you're looking ravenous tonight, my dear' [*She stops short. Then smiles again...*] Oh yes! Yes, please! Like that!

[*She dances again about the stage, singing her music in time with steps, before becoming humorously confused, laughing and coming to a standstill. As she recovers control of herself, she starts, wide-eyed, staring at the audience...*]

It's opening tonight! Seven o'clock and I got tickets, I have. Back Row...

## THE DAY THE LAUGHTER STOPPED

Scene setting - 1921

Characters - The Film Owner (A1), an Associate (A2)

*[The Fatty Arbuckle trial of 1921 did a great deal of harm to the Film Industry - although, if truth be told, it had been teetering on the brink of being externally censored for a few years. Although Arbuckle was totally innocent of the rape and murder of Virginia Rappe (and was finally acquitted in 1922 of all blame), from the moment his name was associated with the incident, the press (notably the Hearst-owned newspapers) 'went to town' to convince the Public that it was already certain he was guilty.]*

*[Maude Delmont - a reputed blackmailer and extortioner - invented a story that was contradicted by just about every other person present at the party at which Rappe died but the District Attorney for San Francisco was so blinkered as to Arbuckle's guilt and, it is often said, saw the case as a way to raise his political profile by getting the Public on his side, that he twisted truth, threatened witnesses until they changed their story and removed other witnesses who presented a threat to his own case.]*

*[The Public would believe nothing other than Arbuckle's guilt.]*

*[Indeed, the moral campaigners and religious leaders of the day, fuelled especially by the testimony of the Hearst-owned newspapers, threw aside reason and decency and became as much like animals as the person they attacked was claimed to be.]*

*[The Film Industry teetered on the brink of total censorship - vitriol was directed not just against Arbuckle but against anyone and anything associated with him.]*

*[Fearing a loss of their livelihood, the Film Companies distanced themselves from Arbuckle by failing to sue for breach of contract the theatres who were refusing to show his films and by washing their hands of the star who had been the only comedian who could rival Chaplin (although they did fund the legal team that defended him - their self-interest was promoted by an acquittal not a conviction).]*

*[Will Hays was invited to take over an internal censorship of the Industry (just a few days after the first 'mistrial' and by a letter that had already been formulated while the first trial had been in process) and, even though he attempted to allow Arbuckle to return to work after the acquittal, the Public refused.]*

*[It would appear that, although American religious society was willing to condemn, it was impossible that it could forgive - just like the Squire in DW Griffith's 'Way Down East' who, in this case, is an outstanding example of morally outraged America. Although many have commented on this film that it portrayed an era that no longer existed, the traits of that bygone time were very much present and active in the twenties]*

*[The FO is sat behind his desk with an associate in front of him]*

FO: *[In extreme perplexity and in answer to a question that was asked before the scene began] What a-bout Arbuckle? [He rises abruptly from his desk, pushing the chair at which he was seated back with force, perhaps even sending it flying across the stage behind him]. The entire movie industry is much more important to salvage than one star's blackened image!*

*[He walks across the stage as the other character follows his movements]*

You don't realise the stakes we're dealing with here. Sure he's innocent! That's not the issue - the issue is whether the trial-by-newspaper is going to tarnish *us* and cause *us* to fall with him!



Associate: *[Trying to appeal to reason]* I don't see what the problem is. We've the best defence team money can buy on the case and the report I've just got back from them is that they're *certain* he'll be acquitted. The prosecution don't have any evidence they can make stick against him. *[Pauses]* It's just like we said in the beginning - the guy's innocent. He's just been the victim of a vindictive madam.

FO: *[Turns to face him]* You don't *see* what the problem is? You don't *see*? What is it that you're so blind about? Look! All Hearst's papers - as far as I can tell - are printing only the negative. And the Public are lapping it up. It doesn't matter how positive a defence we run, how carefully we bring our witnesses forward, there's always a dozen to our one who'll announce - ever so innocently, mind you - 'Yes, Fatty Arbuckle was an animal on set. He chased all the women'.

The man they all loved is now the one they all love to hate - it doesn't help that the prosecutor wants to be known as 'the man who cleaned up the movies'. The Public are on his side, what chance do we have?

Associate: Give the trial two weeks and...

FO *[Interrupting]*: Two weeks? We could be ruined in two *days* let alone two *weeks*!

*[There's a pause in the proceedings as the FO shows his nervousness by fidgeting with his hands, pacing up and down, rubbing his hand behind his head trying to decide the best course of action. He begins much calmer...]*

Look! This is what we'll do. I've three of his feature films already cut and ready to release into the cinemas but no one will handle them. I could pay them twice what it cost me and they'd still refuse.

We'll do a press release - talk about the millions of dollars that are tied up in the prints, say that we understand the Public outrage against him. We'll make it look as if we're bowing to the Public's assessment of his guilt and are willing to clean up the industry's morals. We'll make a big show of it...

Associate *[Indignantly]*: Come on! What about Fatty Arbuckle?! You and I both know that there wasn't an actor less interested in women than he was! Are we just going to let him rot in jail?

FO: *[Even calmer]* No. We'll continue to pay for the best lawyers we can get. I'm not concerned with his guilt, though I expect he's innocent - I'm concerned with what might be transferred to us right now. The censorship wolves are already baying for blood - *any* blood. Perhaps *all* our blood.

If the accused had been a John Doe, he'd never have been prosecuted. It's the reputation of Hollywood, casting its shadow over the proceedings, that's prompted this media circus. We'll have to cut our losses and wash our hands of him...

Associate *[Louder, but in control]*: You can't do that! What about the contract?

FO: Oh, don't worry about that. We could insert a 'retrospective morality clause' if we really wanted to but, to be honest, he's already in breach of his contract by not turning up on the set to begin shooting his next film with us.

Associate *[Puzzled]*: Whoa! I thought he was still in jail?

FO: He is! That's why he didn't begin shooting. Not our fault, was it? Anyway, I've already advised our Finance Department to stop paying his wages.

Associate: But, I thought you said he was innocent? That's not something you do against an innocent man!

FO: *[Looks puzzled, then realises the confusion]* Oh, give it a rest, will you? He was caught throwing a party with bootleg booze! If we have to, we'll use that! *[He begins to return to his desk - still thinking]* I'm sure the legal department will be able to swing it our way - he

won't have grounds to sue us with. *If he's acquitted, that is.*

*[He picks up his chair if it's fallen over and sits again behind the desk]* Yes, we'll use him as the scapegoat. If we can hide behind him, we might just get away from being sacrificed by the population. *[He stares into the distance contemplating the next move. He only half hears the next few words]*

Associate *[Cynically, but not obvious to begin with]:* I do believe this is a fulfilment of a Scripture in the Bible - perhaps it was even a prophecy of what was going to happen.

FO *[Looks puzzled - then realises what he's said]:* Eh? Prophecy? What do you mean?

Associate *[He gets up from his chair and goes to leave as he delivers these lines. He only exits the stage once the FO has begun his reply to it]:* Yes, in the Bible. In the Gospel of John, I think. *[He pauses]* It says there that the Good Shepherd would lay down the sheep for his life.

FO *[Smiles initially, then he realises that two words have been interposed and his face changes to a frown as he shouts after the departing colleague...]:* Hey! You've changed that!

## THE USHERETTE

Scene setting - 1926

Characters - The Usherette (A3)

*[The Usherette has an extremely common accent and brandishes a torch that she uses to read seat numbers on ticket stubs and to direct people to their seats. What the set up of the usherette was in the twenties, I have been unable to determine so this scene is a bit of artistic license.]*

*[She stands at one of the entrances to the stage, chewing gum (if there's enough time to get a piece in after the last scene) pretending that cinema-goers are coming into the cinema through the entrance to which she has her back turned]*

Usherette *[To a couple who she turns to greet as she catches sight of them through the corner of her eye]:* Hello, deary. Welcome to the Astoria. *[She extends her hand to hold the tickets while using her torch to illuminate them]* Fifth row from the back? Here, let me show you. Walk this way...if you can, my dear *[She giggles and hands the tickets back, walking down the aisle in an exaggerated swing of her hips]* Seen this one before? One of his best if you ask me. *[She directs them to their seats and returns to take her regular stand]*

*[To the audience]* I've seen them all, I have - and not just once, either. I guess that's one of the perks of being the Usherette. You can watch them every time you work and *they* pay *you* for the privilege.

You get a free uniform and a very trendy little hat - I don't think. Just got to watch where those men put their hands when you're striding down the aisle in the middle of the film.

*[She turns to someone who's approached her from the cinema, turns her ear and listens intently. She speaks as if it's a recorded message, simply reeling it off at a higher pitch than normal while her hand gives appropriate interpretation as she speaks extremely quickly so it's impossible for it to be remembered]* Ladies is through the corridor, then right, second left til you get to the popcorn stand - then up the stairs, follow the carpeted area to your left, then right where you see the 'Forthcoming Attractions' sign, immediately left and *[Slowing down]* through the little door that's facing you. If you don't find any toilet paper, the ticket clerk at the front of the Astoria where you came in will be able to supply you with as much as you require. *[She pauses to hear what they've said].* Sorry?

Gents?! Oh, I'm so sorry - terribly dark in here *[She clears her throat]*. It's just there on your left, lovey.

*[She returns her attention to the audience]* The cinema was a real boon for me when it opened. There's four in this town of ours now, all showing different films. You see, it depends who's got the money as to what they can afford. This one, the 'Astoria', is the best - we get all the films as soon as they're out, straight from the studios, probably. But that's not my business so I wouldn't know.

My favourites are the romances. Make me drool they do - when he tells her that he'll love her always despite her wooden leg and her acne. You really do feel as if there's someone out there *[She points away from the audience]* just like him, just waiting to be met, to whisk you away from all this drudgery. And those sad, sad farewells - *[In a posh voice]* 'Oh, my darling! Just one more advance on the enemy and then I'll be yours forever. Will you wait for me?' *[Pauses]* Definitely a gonner - he'll be dead within the next two scenes.

*[She sees the gent returning and she turns to greet him]* Did you find it, deary? Yes, not

hard is it? Oh, wait! Is it raining in there? Only, your shoes are wet. *[She smiles]*

*[To the audience but much quieter as if she's letting them in on a secret]* There are certain parts in the theatre where you can be assured of finding certain types of people - *[Puts her hand to one side of her mouth to stop people over-hearing]* if you know what I mean.

Now, the back row *[She points]* is where you'll get your lovers - it's the darkest place of the entire cinema. What goes on back there, I can only imagine - but I don't think they see much of the film. Well, you can't do if you're not watching it, can you?

Last week, the lights came up early when the film broke in the projector and I caught a couple so entangled that you'd've needed a crowbar to separate them. He was so far down her throat, she could've been gargling with him.

The kids'll sit at the front - furthest away from me. They think I can't see them. But that's the lightest part of the cinema, you see? The screen reflects all the light back onto the first row so it's like daylight down there. Well, moonlight at least. If you see any dark object fly across the screen, it'll be them. I once caught them doing hand images - mind you, it was a boring film.

*[She's distracted by another couple coming in. She looks at their tickets]* There's no dogs allowed, I'm afraid, sir. *[Pause]* Oh, I'm so sorry - How was I to know that it's your wife? You're straight down the aisle and to your left. Enjoy the film.

*[To the audience. She sounds excited]* You know the rumours, don't you? They say that sound's coming to the films real soon. Won't *that* be grand? I can't imagine it, though. Mind you *[She points with her thumb behind her]*, the Back Row probably won't even notice. You know, one day, when they're old and grey, they'll see a re-run of this film and wonder why they never saw it first time round.

*[Pauses]* Now, you'll have to excuse me - almost the interval. I have to go and get the ice creams...

**EVERYTHING'S FIXED**

Scene setting - 1927

Characters - The Film Owner (A1), DWG (A2)

*[I've previously noted under 'Film Owner' that improvisation and freedom to invent were integral parts of the early silent movie industry. So long as such things were done within the framework format, there was little objected to - when features as opposed to shorts were first being proposed, however, film owners/companies objected to the move because it cut away from the tried-and-tested way to make a fast dollar although, in the end, they proved to be the way ahead.*

*[But the actor's involvement in the production of the movie also began to wane. Gish (page 275) notes that around 1925 or just after when she contracted to MGM 'The whole structure of film making had changed. Unions had been formed. Everybody's job was circumscribed. Actors could not move a prop. Most of the time they had nothing to say about the choice of costumes. Most astonishing of all, some of the directors were merely part of the machine, doing mechanical jobs. The director no longer searched for a story, cast it, planned sequences and supervised every detail of his picture until its release. He was simply handed a finished script and ordered to film it, scene by scene, line by line...'*

*[And she goes on to note (page 279) that full rehearsals were unheard of at MGM. Actors may have rehearsed a scene before shooting but they never fully developed their characters by learning the entire role, researching and developing their characters to be consistent.*

*[Keaton also suffered the 'production line' style of film making. When he contracted also to MGM and gave up his 'independence', he had to battle fiercely with the directors just to include improvisations in his only two silent films for that company ('The Cameraman' and 'The Spite Marriage'). The 'chair scene' from 'The Spite Marriage' (used in Scene 1) was something Keaton wrote but had unnecessary problems trying to get the director to accept it into the script because it wasn't in what had been handed to him by the writers and approved by the 'management' - it turned out, however, to be the one truly hilarious scene in the film.*

*[The Film Industry, in my opinion, had died a long time before the birth of sound and actors and actresses who had caused the flowering of the movie industry often found themselves squeezed between the presses of a movie-making machine that restricted invention for the sake of profitability and censorial acceptability.*

*[I've used the generic character DWG that I've used in a previous scene as he also became an alcoholic and I've adapted a few quotes from Gish's book (pages 314-6) that she wrote about him referring to his alcoholism in the 1930s. But it could have been equally said about Keaton who also turned to alcohol dependency when he had huge personal problems and film creativity was removed from him by the people he was contracted to]*

*[DWG is sat at the table with a bottle on the table that he opens, pours himself out a large drink and knocks it back in one shot - this needs to be kept realistic as it's meant to be whiskey, so only an amount that can be taken into the mouth and swallowed in one. He stares off into the distance before opening the bottle to pour himself another as the FO walks in and takes his place beside him]*

FO: You wanted to see me?

DWG *[Obviously the worse for wear but not so far gone that he's rolling drunk. There should be a slight slur in his voice accompanying mannerisms that portray induced tiredness*

from intoxication. But also a weariness from the position he now finds himself in because of the 'new policy': Yes. Yes, I did. *[He pauses, takes a sip on the refilled glass]* I have this script - well, you know. I sent it to your office two weeks ago. If I can raise the money, I want to know if I can have the resources to shoot.

FO *[Although sympathetic, he cannot give in]*: You know the answer, David. If you can't make movies the Hollywood way, then you can't make movies at all anymore *[Page 314]*. It seems that there's no longer any place for you - not just with us but in any of the industry's studios. *[Pauses]* You've got to change with the times or get left behind.

DWG *[Quietly pleading]*: You know I need artistic control to make successful pictures - it was always the same. I've failed completely whenever I've deliberately set out to make a commercial movie *[Page 315]* but *[With restored enthusiasm]* give me the freedom and you may not get something popular but you'll get something that'll pay it's way.

I just need time, inspiration - a fresh roll of film and actors who'll listen.

FO: Oh, come on! Those times are over - you know they are. We've moved on.

DWG: Listen to me! If film making is removed from me, you remove my purpose for living! It's not just what I do, it's who I am! *[Page 315]*

FO: Come now, David! You're being as melodramatic as the movies you made! Sure, they were successful - because you captured the Public's imagination. But not now. Now things are different.

The Public demands new restraints, new styles, *[Pause]* new films. Talkies are just around the corner, the era of the silent movie has almost drawn to a close. You can't expect to fossilise an entire movie industry and expect it to exist with life in the present.

*[Pause]*

You always saw yourself as something of a prophet, didn't you? On your lone Crusade to affect not only the country but the world *[Page 316]* - but it never worked. You didn't change anything for the better.

And now the world has changed against your design - and you can't handle it.

The Public demands censorship, my backers demand a successful return from the films - time after time. I can't take risks anymore on the off chance that you can produce something so innovative that people will flock to see it.

The days of innovation are over, David. Long gone.

*[There's a Pause while DWG pours himself another drink]*

Look, I'll tell you what I can do. We have a few scripts coming up that have already been approved and all they need is for you to follow them, line by line. It won't take a genius to direct them and we can ease you back into the studio in the next year or so.

*[Silence]*

Well? What do you think about that?

*[Silence. DWG rises from his chair and finishes his whiskey off in one final gulp, turning to walk off stage. He looks at his empty glass, then back at the half full bottle and returns to leave the glass on the table while picking up the bottle. He turns once more to exit the stage but half turns and looks at the FO, saying slowly and deliberately...]*

DWG: I'll tell you what I think about that. I think you've stolen creativity and replaced it with an aspiration for profit *[He exits the stage]*.

**SILENT END**

Scene setting - 1928

Characters - A silent 'clown' (A1), a drunk (who isn't drunk in this - A3), the director (A2)

*[This scene begins as a carbon copy of the first but soon deteriorates into an argument about improvisation and invention. It has already been noted that Buster Keaton had to fight strongly to include the 'bedtime' scene from 'The Spite Marriage' against a dictatorial director who was more concerned to adhere to a pre-written script than he was to produce something that was genuinely humorous.]*

*[This scene is meant to show what would have happened with the treatment of the same scene had something additional been added to a script once production had started in the late twenties, a couple of years before the advent of sound]*

*[1. The imagined staircase by Buster Keaton from 'Back Stage'.*

*[2. Cleaning the empty pane of glass by Fatty Arbuckle from 'The Garage'.*

*[3. Opening the infinite size newspaper by Buster Keaton from 'The High Sign'.*

*[The clown sits at the chair (a second chair should have been placed beside the first prior to the play beginning so that it's removal isn't a problem). The drunk waits in readiness behind the partition but as far away from the gap as possible (whereas, the first time, she was as near to it as she could to get out quickly).]*

*[As soon as the paper begins to be unfolded, the director enters the stage holding an opened script in his hand]*

Director *[Annoyed]*: Cut! Cut! *[The clown looks puzzled and freezes in shock]*

Clown: What's the problem? That was going well...

Director: I don't care *how* well it goes, where did you get this business with the newspaper? That's not in the script! You're not meant to be even carrying one! *[He holds the script out as if offering the clown an opportunity to read it]*

Clown: We've been working on a new twist to the scene. It's a specially doctored paper - I open it out large, you see *[He smiles]*, and we get my co-star to conceal herself underneath it *[Begins to laugh]*...

Director *[Very irate]*: You can't *do* that! Your contract states that you do the scripts that are given you, not improvise around them!

*[The drunk rises quickly up behind the partition at the supposed lowest point of the steps, showing the audience - if they hadn't already guessed - that the staircase behind the false wall never existed]*

Drunk: But it works, mate! We practised it all night! *[She walks round the partition to take her position close to the director]* Look! The sketch will be the high point of the film!

Director *[He raises his hand for silence]*: I don't care *what* you've improvised - this script *[he shakes it in both their faces]* has been approved by our censorship board, it's been rubber stamped for release so long as we keep to it! Do I make myself clear? We're not going to waste expensive nitrate simply on the whim of your creativity.

Drunk: But...

Director *[Extremely firmly]*: There are *no* buts, my girl - now get back to your positions and let's do it from the top!

*[All three actors exit - the drunk and the clown through the hole at the back of the partition and the Director off stage the way he came. The Director then shouts from off*

stage...]

Director: And, action!

*[The clown ascends the stairs without the newspaper under his arm, does the business at the door with the imagined pane and takes up his seat on the chair. The drunk (although she isn't drunk this time) also ascends the stairs, through the door (without cleaning the window) and the two greet one another, the clown rising to his feet to kiss her on the cheek.*

*[The clown allows the drunk to take him by the arm, lips moving in pretended conversation as they stroll across the stage and off, signifying the end of the play as the Director shouts after them...]*

Director: Good, good! That's a wrap!



## Literary Sources

'The Hays Office' by Raymond Moley, First Edition published 1945 by the Bobbs-Merrill Company. I have used, mainly, details of the laws being brought in regarding censorship and a quote from the US Senate although I have not quoted them but adapted their intent. Moley also pointed out certain film titles of the 1920s that were employed to draw crowds but which weren't representative of the content.

'The Movies, Mr Griffith and Me' by Lillian Gish, First Edition published 1969 by WH Allen and Co. I have used page numbers that refer to this edition where I've quoted her (although some of them are 'quotes of quotes').

'Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth' by Paula Marantz Cohen and published by Oxford University Press was instrumental in helping me to realise the difference between Keaton's use of the body and Lillian Gish's use of the face in their respective careers.

'American Silent Film' by William K Everson and published by Da Capo Press is just such a splendid overview of the silent film industry as a whole that it was an invaluable resource to read through, even though I disagree with some of the author's assessments of films.

'Charlie Chaplin and His Times' by Kenneth S Lynn and published 1997 by Aurum Press Ltd raises interesting objections to the normally accepted remembrance by Chaplin of his childhood and it seeks to place him back into the *proper* setting of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century London before moving on to deal with his films.

'The Day the Laughter Stopped' by David Yallop and published by Corgi Books in 1991 gave me background to the Fatty Arbuckle case and was the book I was reading while writing the play. I had already read another dedicated book concerning the trial and various other reports concerning the trial prior to beginning the work.

'A Million and One Nights' by Terry Ramsaye in its 1964 reprint by Simon and Schuster of New York was used after most of the play was put together. The pre-introduction was the inspiration for Scene 2 and I added one of Ramsaye's observations for a section of Scene 5, using some of the phrases as written.

There are a great many other books that have been read prior to putting this play together *but which have not been consulted* during it, especially biographies and autobiographies of those stars who interested me. It's interesting how their testimony is very often complimentary and confirmatory.

## Film Sources

I have quoted directly from DW Griffith's 'Intolerance' and used a few extracts from silent films by both Buster Keaton and Fatty Arbuckle and have named them where appropriate - but there is a multitude of silent films which have given me good background to this work and it's best to say that I'm indebted to all the silent films for the wonderful resource they provide in seeing the actors' and directors' work and beliefs first hand.

It's a shame that so many of the silent films have been lost or have disintegrated before restoration was possible. An even greater shame is that those that do exist have not yet been converted into a digital format and been made available cheaply to the general public and interested fans who usually have to rely on either special screenings and 'movie fairs' (that seem to all take place in the US!) or what limited titles are available that seem to be commercially viable to the people involved.

It surely must be time when these silent films - a part of the American Cultural Heritage -

should be freely placed in digital format on the Internet.