

THE FILM SPECTATOR

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The Audience Laughed

NEW YORK audiences laughed at some of the dialogue in *War Nurse*. When Anita Page in the extremity of her anguish exclaimed, "I want my mother!" the audience laughed. When a nurse said, "Here is your son," and placed her newly-born babe beside Anita, the audience laughed. There was everything in both scenes to make them poignant and sympathetic, and still the audience laughed.

It was not so much at these isolated bits of dialogue that the audience laughed, as it was a resort to laughter caused by the absurdity of the ceaseless chatter that prevails throughout the entire production. In all its essentials *War Nurse* is a noble picture, splendidly directed by Edgar Selwyn, adequately produced by Metro, and well acted by a capable cast; but its dialogue—in a picture of the sort distinctly a non-essential—is so verbose and so out of sympathy with what is presented visually, that it is understandable why an audience finally should laugh at it.

Consider the scene in which Anita Page is lying in bed, and her baby, born out of wedlock, is brought to her. Like scores of other scenes in the picture that are marred by dialogue, this one should have been silent throughout. If only the necessary amount of talking had been done in the entire production, Anita's pathetic cry for her mother would have been one of its great moments, a moment that would have stabbed the heart of every understanding person in any audience.

As I pointed out in the last *Spectator*, when the screen became audible it made silence the principal element of screen art. Before the advent of the sound camera, it was their enforced silence that made pictures the greatest entertainment force the world ever had known. At that time silence was an element that did not have to be manipulated, one that made no demands on the brains of those who made the pictures. Now silence has become a specific and potent element, and its wise use is the test by which the scenarist and director must be judged.

Metro spoiled a great piece of property when it made *War Nurse* talkative to the point of absurdity. In the same manner it greatly lessened the entertainment value of *Those Three French Girls*, which might have been a bright and amusing comedy. It did its best to ruin *a Lady's Morals*, which I review in this *Spectator*, by making it also a victim of the studio's senseless verbosity. Metro should send for a print of *Dich Hab'ich Geliebt* and make everyone on the lot study it. The whole industry should study it and learn the proper place of dialogue in a motion picture.

What one British statesman said of another might be applied to the motion picture industry. It is "intoxicated by the exuberance of its own verbosity."