

The Film Department and Winters College present
A Frank Capra Film Festival

The aim of this festival is to trace the films that Frank Capra made during the twenties, thirties, forties and fifties. Each night will concentrate on a different period of his career.

There is no doubt that Langdon as an actor stands comparison with other similar figures of the silent screen. Numerous stories centre around the separation of Capra and Langdon. The most widely accepted is that the intelligensia convinced Langdon that he should exploit the pathos inherent in his screen character rather than the broad comedy which had won him a following. Capra disagreed on the ground that Langdon's pathos was a by-product of the comic predicaments which overwhelmed him. Langdon fired him. Whatever the truth of the story, two facts stand out: *The Strong Man*, greatly successful with the public and rich in the overtones which made Langdon admired of the intellectuals, was both written and directed by Capra; and no subsequent Langdon film was a box-office success.

THE STRONG MAN



Capra and Langdon, 1926

Friday, January 28, 7:30 pm

IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT



It Happened One Night was, with *The Thin Man*, the first example of what became known as "screwball comedy," a type of character-comedy which flourished throughout the thirties, and which was based on a calculated exploitation of all the trivial irrelevancies and non-sequiturs which, in life interrupt our most portentous moments (it is, in fact, an oblique version of Chekhov's method.) The reasons for the popularity of these comedies are suggested by Lewis Jacobs in *The Rise of the American Film*: "The loss of credibility in former values, the break-down of the smugness of self-confidence of the jazz era, the growing bewilderment and dissatisfaction in a 'crazy' world that does not make sense, has been reflected in a revival of comedies of satire and self-ridicule. . . 'Daffy' comedies became the fashion." Both he and Miss Colbert won the Academy awards of the year, as did Capra and the film itself.

"Society-controlled by racketeers strikes its last blow at the elements it cannot absorb, goodness, simplicity, disinterestedness. . . It sounds as grim as *Fury*: innocence lynched as effectively as a judicial inquiry as in a burning courthouse, but there is this difference between Lang and Capra: Lang's happy ending was imposed on him, we did not believe in it. Capra's is natural and unforced. He believes in the possibility of human happiness; he believes, in spite of the controlling racketeers, in human nature. Goodness, simplicity, disinterestedness: these in his hands become fighting qualities. Deeds sees through opera-directors, fashionable intellectuals, solicitors, psychologists who prove that he is insane merely because he likes playing the tuba and isn't greedy for money. . . he is never a helpless victim. . . he comes back into the ring with folk humour and folk shrewdness to rout his enemies for the sake of the men they have ruined." Graham Greene. Capra won an Oscar for his direction of this picture.

MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN



Gary Cooper, 1936

Saturday, January 29, 7:30 pm

LOST HORIZON



Ronald Colman, 1937

James Hilton's Hellenic daydream had already made Shangri-La a household word when Capra fell in love with it and induced Columbia to take the gamble. Everything possible was done by studio and director to reduce the odds: an awesome segment of the Himalayas was built on the lot. The film begins brilliantly. No director, with the possible exception of Pabst, has surpassed this visualization of icy wastes. This sequence was movie at its best, a seeming slice of reality. The affinity between *Lost Horizon* and Capra's general outlook is obvious, but heretofore the director had realized his theme in people and scenes which he knew. Here he was dealing with the unknown and indeed, the non-existent. It is undoubtedly for this reason that Riskin failed for once to transcribe the long scenes of dialogue in the book into action and 'business.' After the opening sequences, the film showed small trace of Capra's style. It resembled, more than anything else, a British costume or exotic piece.

" . . . It is Frank Capra's own doing that he has become the object of the most careful kind of critical scrutiny when he brings out a new picture. . . For some years now he has been concerning himself with something more than being merely entertaining. His social conscience has been more and more evident, leading him more and more to consideration of the lot of the ordinary the "little" man, and questions of wealth and poverty and the workings of democracy. . . Beginning with *Mr. Deeds* he took up a character that has remained practically unchanged ever since, involved in problems that have become a pattern — a pattern so little varied that it is getting almost too apparent. . . a simple honest young man, naive and innocent in worldly matter, suddenly forced by circumstances to confront some immense social-political problem, always coached by a wise-cracking disillusioned girl to whom he gives back her lost ideals and faith, and always, in the end, confounding the powers of darkness by his simplicity and honesty. . .

MEET JOHN DOE



Gary Cooper, 1941