



Bannister Merwin, the man who accepts Scenarios for the London Film Co., Limited.

SCENARIO EDITORS ARE LOOKING FOR GOOD PHOTOPLAYS

Many Canadians are writing photoplays and selling them in the United States
Some valuable hints for the beginner in scenario writing

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Anne Merwin, wife of Bannister Merwin, and a well known Scenario Writer.

PHOTOPLAY writing is an art peculiar to itself. A photoplay is purely and simply a story told in picture form by the aid of action rendered by the players. Where something cannot be explained by picture or action, a leader or insert is used.

A photoplay is life boiled down, and every incident that goes to build up the story must be feasible; fans will not swallow anything, and are keen to detect faults.

Writing a photoplay is not like writing a short story. In the short story you can write on almost anything; but in the photo-

play you must know the limitations of motion pictures. These limitations are many, and some things are utterly impossible to reproduce in a photoplay.

Before preparing to write a photoplay, get the idea that suggests the plot indelibly fixed in your mind. This idea must not be a commonplace incident that you may have picked up, but one sufficiently novel to permit of an original and entertaining photoplay being written around it, so that, should a hackneyed theme be chosen, there is sufficient originality in it to make the play salable.

It is hard to think out an original theme, but it is not hard to concoct an original plot; and in using a hackneyed theme you must give it a new twist; otherwise its selling chances are very poor indeed.

Then, when you have secured the idea, begin to weave a plot around it, all the time imagining how it will appear on the screen. If you keep that in mind, it helps considerably. When the play is planned, then is the time to arrange it, scene by scene. No fixed rules can be given on the methods of writing a scenario, as you must work on a plan according to your temperament. This is the usual way of going about it:

It is always advisable to specialize on one class of play. Dramas and comedies are always in demand, and it is for you to discover which class you are the more capable of writing.

There are many things that should be avoided in the silent drama. The more important are: Avoid showing the actual committing of crime, murder and burglary. Only take these undesirable subjects when a strong moral is to be pointed out. Such things only give the photoplay a bad name, and incite the weak-minded to crime. Keep away from the time-worn chase and any other situation that has been played out. Don't forget that happy endings are preferred.

Keep to a simple theme, devoid of nastiness in any shape or form, and you will gain the thanks of all those who are determined to elevate the motion picture. Stories told in silent drama, of real heart interest are generally acceptable. Avoid anything not in good taste. You should aim to write a scenario that can get over without words. Leaders and inserts should be used only when absolutely necessary.

The ability of the photoplaywright lies in writing and thinking in action, and not in dialogue and description, as is the case with the fiction writer.

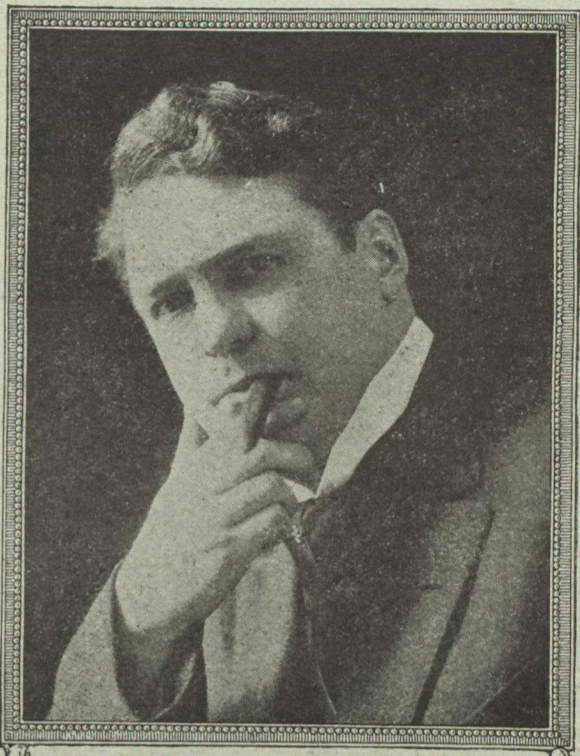
Scenario Form

THE most important part of all is the setting out of the photoplay in scenario form. Each section should be in the following order:

- Title
- Cast of characters
- Synopsis
- Scene Plot
- Scenario Proper

First, we have the title; and it goes without saying that this should be out of the usual. A crisply worded title has, in many instances, helped to effect the sale of a photo-

play. Make a point of selecting one that carries distinctiveness and originality. A good title leaves little to be taken for granted, and serves to whet the curiosity of the fans. In fact, it should be built upon the main idea, for



T. N. Mirando, Scenario Editor, World Film Corporation

then it greatly assists in obtaining a true description of the play.

In giving a cast of characters, write in all the leading



Edward J. Montague, Scenario Editor, Vitagraph Bay Shore Studios

rôles, together with a concise description of the characteristics of each, follow with the extras that are needed, a maid and policeman, for example. This assists the director in gathering suitable players from his stock company and outside sources. Never introduce a superfluous character, and be sure that each individual one is necessary for the smooth running of the photoplay.

Bear in mind that a whole host of leading characters is liable to confuse the spectator. It may be all right in a stage play, but in silent drama it is entirely out of place. Three or four principal players throughout a picture play make it more enjoyable, more easily followed, and complies with the peculiarities of this new art. Strive to identify your characters early in the play.

The synopsis is regarded by many as the advertisement of the play. It is not an infrequent occurrence for a busy scenario editor to purchase a scenario on the strength of the synopsis alone. The correct office of the synopsis is to tell the story of the play, not the action that takes place in every scene. The synopsis is the most important part of the scenario, and crisply worded sentences are needed. It should be written on somewhat similar lines to the brief resumé of a serial story in a magazine. In very few cases should it exceed three hundred words, and in its story telling is reduced to a fine art.

The point to be aimed at is to concisely explain the main plot of the play, with such minor details as there is room for.

A motion picture is made in portions. Suppose a scene is used more than once—a most frequent happening—then it is taken at one time. If Scenes 1 and 59 are set in the same back parlour, they will be produced together. This is how the scene plot is set out:

- Scenes 1, 59 Interior—Back Parlour
- Scenes 2, 15, 48. Exterior—Post Office.

Scenario Proper

LASTLY, we come to the scenario proper, as it is termed. This takes form in a complete outline of the plot, situation by situation, and should treat in detail the action in each play for each separate scene. To explain how a scene should be written, with explanatory matter sandwiched in, I think I cannot do better than to give an example:

Scene 4—Interior—Drawing Room—Elsie's Home:

Elsie enters. Sits down to read volume. Discovers note inside. Reads:

Screen: "Just a line to let you know how I admire you. From your devoted NAIRARBIL."

Back to scene. Elsie laughs. Tries to discover who her unknown admirer is. Succeeds.

Insert: "Elsie discovers that Nairarbil is librarian spelled backwards."

Back to scene. Elsie kisses note. Writes a few words on same.

A source of trouble to the average beginner in photoplay writing is as to what really constitutes a scene. Perhaps you have the mistaken idea that this portion of action comprises one scene:

Scene 1. Brown gets off train, walks down country road and enters his house.

The correct version is this:

Scene 1. Railroad Station Platform. Train in; Brown gets off with other passengers—exits.

Scene 2. Country road. Brown passes across picture.

Scene 3. Room in Brown's home. Brown enters with grip, etc.

A scene is the position in which one portion of action is taken without the camera being moved. Whenever the motion picture recorder has to change its position, a fresh scene is necessary. This is (Continued on page 45.)



In the picture on the left is Jesse Lasky, conferring with Cecile De Mille about the production of a new picture play. The genial Mr. De Mille has final say on all scenarios accepted for Lasky production.

Those in the picture at the right are from left to right: Lloyd Lonargan, Scenario Editor for Thanhouser and Author of "Her Beloved Enemy"; Doris Grey, Star in "Her Beloved Enemy"; Ernest Ward, Play Director, and Wayne Aray, Miss Grey's leading man.

