



Lights, Camera, Action!

These 2 books on film are worth superlatives

By DAN MERKUR

The Parade's Gone By ..., by Kevin Brownlow (London, 1968) Secker & Warburg Limited (\$19.95 Clothbound; \$3.75 Paperback)

Subtitled "a vivid, affectionate portrait of the golden days of Hollywood", *The Parade's Gone By ...* is a definitive effort, recapturing clearly the adventure of the silent days of Hollywood. It's not exactly the history of a film critic or a film analyst. It is a sort of document, the documentation of memories, as expressed in interviews with the greats — Monte Brice, Clive Brook, Clarence Brown, Francis X. Bushman, Charles Chaplin, Bebe Daniels, Marlene Dietrich, Allan Swan, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Sam Jaffe, Boris Karloff, Buster Keaton, Fritz Lang, Harold Lloyd ...

The still pictures, originally publicity stills, candid photos and on-the-set production stills are phenomenal in their scope, their quality, their number and their mounting. I have never seen better reproduction in a book on films, and with one exception, I have never seen a better choice.

The text is intelligent, and somewhat nostalgic. It is researched as no other text has ever been. The current edition contains an extra page of corrections that were the result of correspondence following the original printing. The research has been phenomenal. Almost forgotten silent film-makers like Abel Gance, Edward Sloman and Allan Dwan are brought to light and placed in perspective.

It is hard to think that Allan Dwan was D. W. Griffith's fiercest competitor, and that the competition was directly responsible for many of Griffith's innovations, and many credited to Griffith actually belonged to Dwan, whose early works are now lost. To me all Allan Dwan ever meant before *The Parade's Gone By* was *The Sands of Iwo Jima*.

There is no aspect of the silent film that Brownlow neglects. Everything about the early days, scenarios, editing, tinting, titling, stunt work and orchestra scores as well as the stars, directors, producers and cameramen is examined. It's a big book — 600 pages long. It warrants it.

Personally, the chapters devoted to Buster Keaton and William Wellman were particularly interesting. Much of what Brownlow recounts is material and information available only to him, through his ability to provoke good interviews. Keaton was never as eloquent: Wellman almost never grants interviews.

The title sprang from an interview with silent comedy director Monte Brice. He had been on the set of *The Buster Keaton Story* in 1957, when he tried to explain how the original gags had been done. But the film-makers wouldn't listen. The assistant director, a young man, walked up to him and said, "Look, why don't you go away? Times have changed. You're an

old man. The parade's gone by ..."
That's what the book is about.

Hitchcock by Francois Truffaut, with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott (New York, 1967) Simon and Schuster (\$11.25 Clothbound; soon to be issued in paperback)

Truffaut is, of course, the very talented film-maker of *Jules and Jim*, *The 400 Blows*, *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Bride Wore Black*. Hitchcock is, of course, the greatest director still active in films. *Hitchcock* by Francois Truffaut is only the greatest book on film ever compiled.

Hitchcock/Truffaut is a compilation of a 50-hour interview between the maestro and his great pupil (via interpreter). Truffaut's history as a critic for *Cinema du Cahier* gave him incredible insight into the journalism. His years as a director gave him a film-maker's perspective, and finally, Truffaut is a buff. He has seen every film Hitchcock has ever made, excluding only the very early lost silents.

But on top of that, his subject was Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock is a film-maker whose names is synonymous with a genre. There is no suspense beyond Alfred Hitchcock. Moreover Hitchcock is articulate and loquacious. And he has spent a great deal of time studying his craft. Hitchcock knows how he makes films, so he can talk clearly about them.

Truffaut is one of the best film analysts since Eisenstein and Pudovkin. Hitchcock is the best subject since Orson Welles. But the writing was still cleverly done. Unlike Eisenstein and Pudovkin, who are impossible reading even for a film student, Truffaut and Hitchcock closely analyse and discuss films in depth in terms understandable to anyone who has ever seen a movie. The skill of synthesizing a film is brought to light, explained, and discussed, and yet it remains as elusive as the flickering light playing upon the screen.

The text is liberally illustrated with frame blow-ups. In certain important montage sequences, the enlarged frames duplicate the cutting pattern, showing clearly what was on the screen.

For example, the famous murder in the shower montage in *Psycho*, all of 45 seconds of footage, a structured in 40 frame blow-ups showing the cutting rhythm of that very fast 45 seconds on the screen. This type of shot by shot breakdown is available in very few study conditions — well beyond York's current facilities. I said that *The Parade's Gone By ...* had only the second best choice of photos. Hitchcock by Francois Truffaut has the best.

The dust jacket bills the volume as "a definitive study of Alfred Hitchcock". It's the definitive book on Hitchcock, and the definitive approach to film analysis. Now if he'd tackle Ford and Hawks ...



The Parade's Gone By, a picture book about the early days of the movie industry, discloses that for several years its capital was the Vitaphone Company in Brooklyn. In 1911 the movies went to Hollywood.

Key word in Rain People is perspectives

By LLOYD CHESLEY

The key word in *The Rain People* is perspectives.

It seems that in France in the 50's there were some youngsters that had been weaned on movies. They got to be critics and they started to treat "film" as a serious art. They started to make movies too, trying to create a new form. These were the nouvelle vague film-makers and the ones we think of most are Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut.

In the United States, meanwhile, things were going on pretty much as they always had (by and large this if fine by me) ignoring the new horizons the youngsters were opening up.

But there were youngsters coming up in the States too. At the head was Francis Ford Coppolla, closely following Arthur Penn.

In the early days he was studying film at UCLA and working part-time as assistant director to Roger Corman (who did the Edgar Allan Poe adaptations in the early 60's.) He wrote an adaptation of *You're A Big Boy Now* as a master's thesis and then he got Warner Bros. to let him film it. This is one of the funniest, most level-headed and it seems, most overlooked, films about youth of the decade, a definite predecessor to *The Graduate*, better in many ways. Then, probably because he loves Fred Astaire and Frank Capra, Coppolla did *Finian's Rainbow*.

In some ways it seems that his early films were assignments from the studio that he did in order to gain power on the lot. It would seem he was building up to *The Rain People*.

Hollywood has, since its birth, treated film as a highly expressionistic medium with careful lighting, set design and performances used in a highly stylized form. Many old timers even dislike color because it cannot be properly stylized. This attitude made film into an exciting experience after the dull "documentaries" that were its first examples.

The work of men like John Ford, Josef von Sternberg, Howard Hawks, Fritz Lang and many of the early masters is just as exciting today as it was when created. Ingmar Bergman has carried on in this tradition, even spurning color.

But the new wave had had enough of this. They wanted increased reality and realization of the fact that cinema does distort reality. Godard has cracked many of the important rules of stylization to increase awareness of how movies lie. Truffaut has taken stories directly to the people, striving mostly for naturalism. They have spurned sets to go to the actual localities they discuss.

There are great limitations to this. For one, the cinema has its own reality, albeit created by tradition but reality as far as the audience is concerned. There are technical limitations, like rooms that echo, something rare in life but occurring because on the

sound tract rooms, unlike sets, must be treated to kill echoes.

Both the reality the cinema has created for itself and the reality of life that new wave films are after are threatened by these techniques. Godard is often self-defeating in this way.

But Coppolla has taken Truffaut's route. He loves the stylization of film form, but is after the naturalism of new wave scripts and scene construction. He has maintained his perspectives.

His story is the story of America today. A lady named Natalie leaves her husband when she finds she is pregnant because she isn't sure she is a good wife let alone bound to be a good mother. She doesn't know if she wants responsibility. Along her route she finds herself running into more responsibility until she finally realizes that it is a basic reality of life.

Coppolla took his cameras all over the country to get the background. Working with Hollywood technicians he managed to get naturalism and good color into the form of the piece.

To further the naturalism he used generally little-known stars. I don't know why they are little-known, because two have been around quite a while and all three are fine performers.

The lady is Shirley Knight (*Sweet Bird of Youth*). She is kinda pretty and very confused and kinda stupid. But we do feel for

her, much to her credit. Her flaw is that she is not powerful enough for such a major role; she cannot carry a film alone.

Her men are Robert Duvall (the cab-driver in *Bullitt*), who is a very strong performer, but on screen too little and James Caan, who hasn't enough variety to sustain us for his long domination. I might mention that the supporting cast is all very good in their bits, an important factor too often neglected.

Perhaps it is the whole story that cannot sustain an entire film. It is too slowly paced, too much on one quiet level (the best films are always the ones that shout), and often too repetitious. It becomes too natural, losing its force as drama. In this way Coppolla lost his perspective.

The natural cinema of the new wave is an entirely new horizon for movies. Properly controlled, as Truffaut manages, mixing old with new — remembering what the masters taught — can produce an entirely different form of exciting cinema.

Coppolla, along with Noel Black (*Pretty Poison*) and Arthur Penn pioneering this in the States. For this reason *The Rain People* is interesting to anyone who cares about movies. On top of that it is moderately successful, exploring a relevant theme in a way that is not always moving and not always being moving, but holding our attention and gaining its own measure of the reality that it sought.