

Film Review

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Power of Strong Visual Images: *The Artist*



“If you want to be an actress, you should have something extraordinary which is not found in others.” George, the hero of the silent film “The Artist”, tells it to Peppy Miller while she has entered into the film world. Though the context of the comment is about her acting career, the inner philosophical expression of this line is applicable for all creative activities. It was certainly believed by French film director Michel Hazanavicius and that is why he made this film, “The Artist” about silence and sound, a black and white, almost silent movie; he added something extra-ordinary which is not found in other films. After

watching the movie we can realize why the film cannot be considered as a talkie, why the film can not be said a colour film.

Time and technology changes everything so as the physical and mental growth, organic and artistic development, aesthetic of the structure of the art and attitude of the performing artists too. What is important whether the artist can cope with the changes and transformations, especially with the technological changes or not. Well-established people fear to adapt to such technological transformations for two reasons: as Abraham Massel says that people dislike

changes and want to prevent these; secondly, they can not adjust to the new situation brought forth by these changes. If one cannot adapt to the new situation and changes he has to lag behind others in various aspects. He suffers from conflict and agony; at the end of the day, he has to disappear from the scenario. New-comers occupy his place. He suffers from an identity crisis. Sometimes he thinks of destroying himself. Several films on this theme have been produced earlier, but “The Artist” has “something” extra-ordinary in its body and soul.

Simply to say, the film is about love and sorrow, nuptial bond and separation as well as union and some other familiar, frequently used elements with a simple and easily imaginable conclusion. What is noteworthy--how this simple film presents the mystery through the director’s endless passion with exquisite intellectual presentation and how he binds all these elements within the frame of his camera. And? And how he creates magic with the help of camera and action; we watch all these events being bewitched and bewildered.

The movie begins just like a black and white film of silent era; only the letters of the credit title, the technique of projecting light, background music that creates an atmosphere where we view a silent, black and white film on the screen: police torture the hero to make him speak; but he says nothing. It reveals the main theme of the film: revolt against speech and sound. The dissatisfied wife of the hero wants to say something to his husband, yet he is speechless. Whether he does not speak or whether he has nothing to say is not clear. A question arises here. The first and foremost crisis of his professional life brings about centering round sound and specially words- dialogues. He is a star actor; the producer gives importance to his voice. The producer wants to bring sound to silent

films. But the hero is unwilling to accept words; he does not want any sound to be introduced in silent pictures.



His own opinion is that the audience would accept him in that form only. So, he does not feel the need of adding new elements to films. He refuses to unite his hands with sound. But the producer stops producing silent films. It has hurt his ego. The hero plans to produce the film himself to establish his own belief. He produces films investing all his savings, using all his estates; but the film proves a failure turning him bankrupt.

Another story, the sub-plot is also told parallelly with this story of the failure of his professional career--a story of an actress; Peppy Miller, a young girl who comes closer to this hero when she joins in a photo session just like other fans of the hero; while they pose together for a snap Peppy has kissed on his cheek. That interesting news is published in the newspapers. George’s wife reads the news; a quarrel begins between George and his wife. Then Peppy Miller steps into the film world; she acts together with George. Consequently, a kind of emotional relationship develops between George and Miller. None of them expresses it openly. But the technique of composing very sensitive scenes and visual images of Michal Hajanavicius makes the audience realize what has happened. In another film George takes part in a sequence of dance with Peppy; both of them come

closer to each other for a while. What is interesting the same sequence has to be shot again and again because of their mistake; the mistake happens due to their secret feelings towards each other. The co-artists begin to laugh silently pressing their lips which indicates that everybody is aware of their intimacy. Then Peppy Miller enters a special room, the dressing room of George. George is not there. Peppy walks inside the room; she tries to feel his presence. Suddenly her eyes fall on George's coat hanging on a stand. She expresses her love towards the coat as if to George-as if she comes closer to George's fame and glamour; she pushes one of her hands into a pocket of the coat; then she rubs the hand on her body. The hand turns to the hand of George. Immediately the coat transforms into George. What a wonderful and heart-touching composition of the pictures and scenes with effective visual images expressing the secrets of the human heart! Peppy Miller uplifts herself from co-artist and extra to a heroine of sound films.

Her first sound movie and the film directed by George to prove himself 'Tears of Love' (Tears of Loving Silence) are released at the same time. Ironically George's film becomes flop while Peppy's becomes a great hit. The conflict between the addition of new technology and revolt against it is, indeed, the conflict between the old and the new artists.

The first criterion for art is to show the path of progress. An artist may cling adamantly to a static situation, but art will choose its route. Art would surely look for a new option. One who keeps pace with the changes and progress only he can survive- that is vehemently revealed in this simple story.

Various types of orchestra are used in this silent movie. No sound is there relating to the visual images of the film. Yet the problem, conflict, and solution of the problem- all

centers around the herald of words. In the film words are used only twice- first, words will come to films, after George has heard it he starts listening to various sounds; he wants to feel what type of word would come to the films; every sound is extremely unbearable for him – suddenly the sound of laughter of a few young girls fall on his ear; the number of girls and their sound increase. These sounds have no attraction, no sweetness as if these words are the cause of fear and terror for him; as if these words mock at him; as if the words insult him in various ways. Then a feather of a bird falls on the ground; he hears the sound of falling the feather and the sound seems to be as horrible as a thunderbolt.



The second word is uttered while he goes to actively respond to the request of Peppy Miller. The shooting of a strange dance with Peppy Miller is going on- a dance performed on a piece of music composed by Lodovick Bronx, the music and dance create a very joyful atmosphere, it bears the sign of heralding a new thing; dance ends, the director

requests him for another track. this is the first speech in the film- George keeps his request by answering in English with a French accent; the audience, no doubt, realizes that George agrees to act in a sound movie. He not only accepts it but also cooperates gladly; Peppy Miller is there with him. George and Peppy become ready for another track. Slowly the movie goes back--the sound of shooting and clicking inside the studio is caught in the wide-angle; the message of the film is spoken vehemently; the film ends exuberantly.

The Artist presents a very important period in the history of cinema; the course of the event happened. This is a true story; the changes are true. The conflict brought by the change and the elimination of vanity is equally true. With the help of all these happenings, a story is told which presents the changes exquisitely in a multi-dimensional way.

After watching the film a question appears in our mind-are the features of a movie best expressed in a silent movie? The director can bring everything near the audience without using speech, color, and related words-that too is done with immense appeal and passion. The contribution of the

actors and actresses is also wonderful. Especially Jean Duzardin who plays the role of George Valentin very skillfully expresses the emotions and feelings, gestures, and image as par excellence. He has contributed a lot to make the dream of the director come to a reality. Any professional actor can express thoughts and emotions in a one-dimensional manner. But expressing the inner world of a character as well as the secrets of the heart is not so easy; the hero wonderfully performs it. An actor or an actress must have expertise and skill in revealing the deeper thoughts for which his or her technique should be faultless. It is always high art to express anything exactly. Jean Duzardin has done this. He has proved it through his classic art of acting. Berenice Bejo also does everything with much dedication and offering herself. No opportunity has been left by her in expressing thoughts, feelings, and the hidden world of a woman psyche within the limit of a few physical actions of this simple and liberal girl. Bejo can utilize every scope that she finds.

“The Artist” is a simple but wonderful film about the transformation of an anguished soul; here lies the success of the film-maker.

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