

D. W. Griffith: His Biograph Films in Perspective

By Kemp R. Niver (Ed. Bebe Bergsten). Published (1974) by Historical Films, P.O. Box 46505, Los Angeles, CA 90046. 192 pp. Illus. 8½ by 11 in. Price \$10.

With the intention of making a realistic evaluation of the contribution of D. W. Griffith to motion pictures (art and technique), separating the legend from the actual achievements, Kemp R. Niver screened some 350 films directed by D. W. Griffith between 1908 and 1913 for the Biograph Company. (The films had been restored during the Library of Congress Paper Print Program.)

From the 350 films 50 were selected as containing the best examples of Griffith's "last-

ing film techniques as well as being representations of the essence of the man as a director and filmmaker."

The book consists of illustrations (nearly 200 frame enlargements from the motion pictures together with brief descriptions of the films. The descriptions emphasize the production techniques of those early days — for example in *An Awful Moment* (photographed 19 21 November 1908)" . . . the gypsy climbs up a trellis to reach the balcony. Griffith increased the drama of that moment by panning the camera up to record her climb. Such camera use seems an innovation for both Griffith and Biograph . . . It is the only example of such camera movement in all the Biograph films we looked at."

The information for each film includes the

dates it was photographed, the date of copyright, the production location, the cameraman, the cast and the length.

Griffith began directing films in the summer of 1908 at the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company in New York City. Since then he has been credited with inventing or developing nearly every film technique in use today. But, Mr. Niver points out, "the truth is that the majority of these techniques had been developed and used by some predecessor before he ever dreamed of becoming a director." Mr. Niver notes that a check through Biograph bulletins showed that Griffith followed a pattern of making two feature motion pictures and one short comedy per week during the first few months of his career as a director.

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Obituaries



Don G. Williams

Don G. Williams, 70, a pioneer in university film production and teaching programs, died 12 April in San Diego after a long illness. Known internationally for his work, he retired in 1968 from the University of Missouri at Kansas City where he was Professor of Education and Director of Audiovisual Services. Earlier, he had held similar positions at Syracuse University and at Indiana University where he had been Director of Motion-Picture Production. During World War II he served in the Training Films Branch of the U.S. Navy. In 1949 he was sent overseas by the U.S. Information Agency to survey existing facilities for local motion-picture production. As a result, the Syracuse University Film Project was set up. Under Dr. Williams' direction, 16mm crews went to Iran, Turkey and Greece under the auspices of USIA to make information films for use in those countries. The films generally dealt with agriculture, health and nutrition, child care and education.

Dr. Williams was a former President of the University Film Association. He had also served as President of the International Liaison Center of Schools of Cinema and Television. He was a founder of the American Science Film Association, the Council on International Nontheatrical Events (CINE) and a founder and secretary of the University Film Foundation.

In 1967 the French Government made him Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and the following year he was the recipient of the Pioneer Award given by the Association for Educational Communication and Technology.