

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE PHOTOPLAY

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The Technique of the Photoplay by Epes Winthrop Sargent

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EPES WINTHROP SARGENT

**THE TECHNIQUE OF
THE PHOTOPLAY**

The
TECHNIQUE
OF THE
PHOTOPLAY

SECOND EDITION

BY
EPES WINTHROP SARGENT

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INTRODUCTION TO SECOND EDITION

It is less than eighteen months since the first edition was placed in the market, following serial publication in the columns of THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD, but those eighteen months have been marked by great changes in photoplay needs and construction. Then the cut-back was merely a device for avoiding the showing of unpleasant or prohibited action; now it figures importantly in the development of the story. The "punch," too, was then a thing unnamed, though the punch has always been the requisite of the real story. The past year has also seen the acceptance of the multiple-reel as a regular release instead of an occasional novelty.

These and minor changes have rendered it expedient to issue a completely new volume under the old title. With the exceptions noted above there is little herein contained that may not be found in the first edition, but all matters are treated in greater detail and an effort has been made to teach rather than to set forth the rules, and leave the writer to make his own application of the same. Instead of one there are four complete sample manuscripts, for two of which we are indebted to the Lubin Manufacturing Company and to Lawrence S. McCloskey, their Editor-author, and in addition there are many examples in explanation of certain developments.

An effort has been made to set forth clearly all of the matters treated, but this information will be useless to he who merely reads and does not study this little volume. It is not a magic wand to be waved over the typewritten page. It is a text book for the earnest student who seeks to make progress, and to all earnest students, who realize that the Photoplay is by no means the least of the branches of literary work, this volume is dedicated in the hope that they will find as much pleasure in the study of its pages as has the writer in preparing the work.

New York, June, 1913.

EPES WINTHROP SARGENT.

Technique of the Photoplay

CHAPTER I.

THE PHOTOPLAY

**Told in action instead of words—a distinct literary form—
requisites of a writer—not all may achieve success.**

Although not technically correct, the simplest and most understandable definition of the photoplay is that it is a story told in pictured action instead of being described in words.

A series of incidents, closely connected, leading from a start to a definite ending, is a story when told in words. If it is told in dialogue form with appropriate action and gesture, it becomes a play. Done in action and gesture, but without words, it is a pantomime, but pantomime as it is understood on the stage, is not a photoplay. The pantomime of the stage employs a "language" of its own. Certain gestures mean certain things, and pantomime is told in a sort of sign language, not understood by many in America, but intelligible to most European theatergoers. Photoplay has no arbitrary gestures.

The photoplayer who asks for food, stretches his hand toward the spread table and looks more or less appealing, according to the circumstances in which he finds himself. The pantomimist would open his mouth and point down his throat with the first and second fingers of his hand. If it were drink that he desired, he would use the thumb, extending from his clenched fist, instead of his fingers.

In the early days, copying the work of the French producers, this elementary language was employed in part in the making of the motion picture plays of that period, but as the art advanced, the stilted, arbitrary and unconvincing "language" of pantomime was replaced by natural gestures and actions.

Photoplay, in a word, is not an adaptation of another branch of literary work, but is possessed of a technique all its own. There are, of course, the broad basic rules of literary construction and dramatic development, applicable to all forms of literature, whether written or verbally expressed, but in the past few years the art of writing photoplays has become possessed of a technique that is applicable only to the writing of picture plays and to no other form.