



straight off the deep end, indicating again that the British are slightly more sluggish than their U.S. counterparts in responding to the mating-call of the scenario-writer. Or perhaps it merely indicates that British screen-plays, in general, approximate rather more closely to real life.

However, the time element is not the only factor to be noted in analysing the boy-meets-girl situation in the cinema. Just as important are the circumstances in which the meetings are shown taking place—whether the divine spark is struck as the result of a purely accidental or unorthodox or casual first encounter between hero and heroine, or is the outcome of a first encounter in normal and “unglamorous” circumstances, for example, by the boy and girl being introduced to one another by a third person. To meet in some way by introduction (carried out with varying degrees of formality) is, after all, probably still the basis on which the majority of real-life romances begin. But it is altogether too mundane

and unexciting a starting-point for the average scenario-writer. He prefers to launch his characters on their course toward matrimony from much more unorthodox rocket-sites.

When one studies all cases of the hero-meets-heroine situation in the 300 films (whether L.A.F.S. or L.A.G.), it is found that 69 per cent of them depend on unusual meetings—that is, situations, such as the boy rescuing the girl from danger, which the average young person would have little chance of encountering in real life—while only 31 per cent arise from meetings in normal or probable circumstances. It may also be noted that, in Hollywood films, 83 per cent of cases of love at first sight between hero and heroine occur in unusual circumstances, the corresponding figure for British films being 67 per cent. The British were ever more formal and more likely to insist on a proper introduction even when instantaneously smitten.

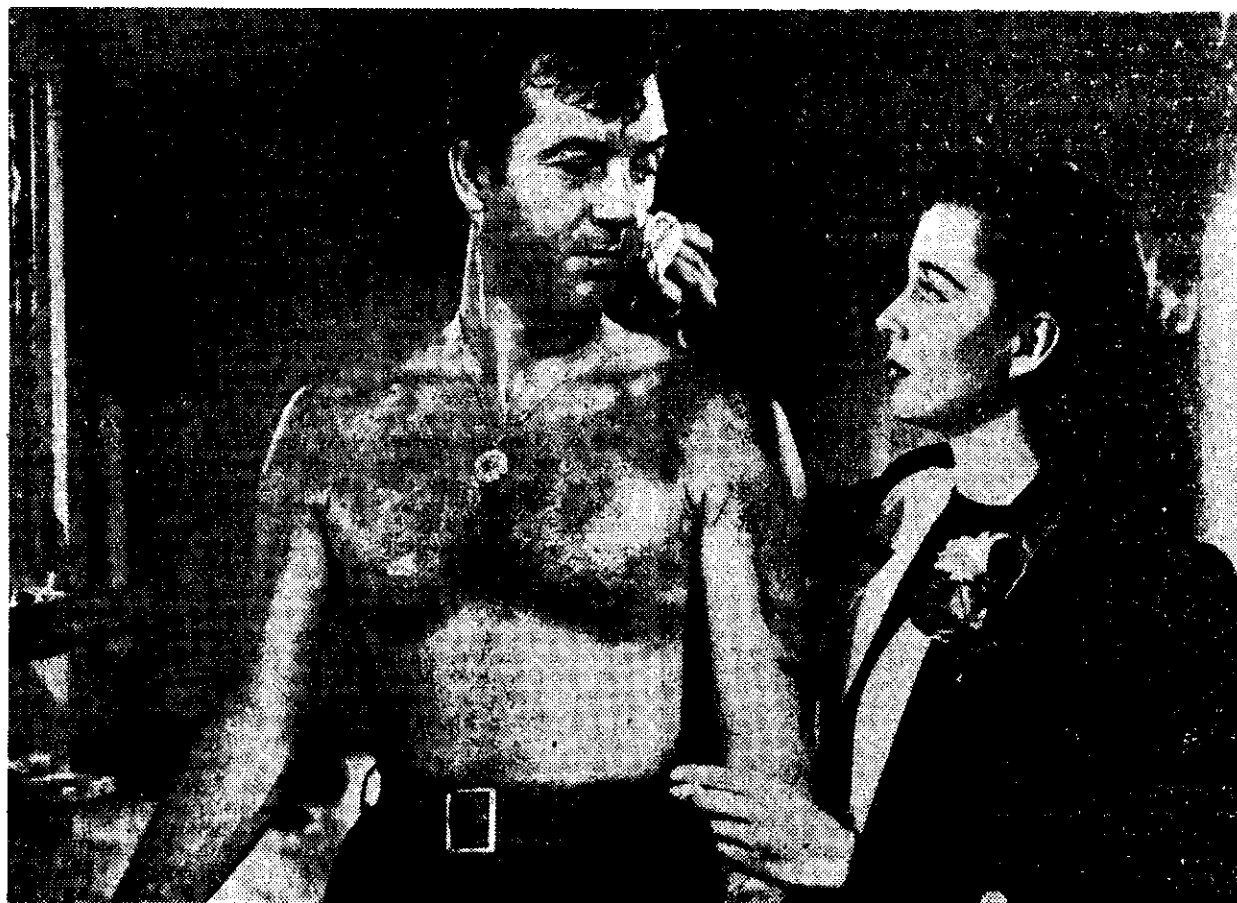
To a surprising extent the Love-At-First-Sight formula is not merely implicit in the majority of screen plays: it is explicitly acknowledged and, of course, approved of, in 10 per cent of all cases. The hero himself admits that he was smitten when his eyes did see Olivia first—or Jane or Mary as the case may be.

Here are a few random examples of L.A.F.S. from the 300 films:

In *Tension* the hero accidentally knocks the heroine off a ladder, catches her in his arms. Love is born on the spot.

In *On the Town*, one of the sailors sees in a newspaper the photo of a beauty-contest winner, falls in love with it, estimates his chances of meeting her in person in New York, and the next moment bumps into her. A case of love at first impact.

★ LEFT: “On the Town”—“a case of love at first impact.” BELOW: “The heroine is attracted to the hero when she sees him in a fist-fight”—a scene from “Captain China” ★



In *The Lady Takes a Sailor*, the heroine is thrown into the sea and rescued by the hero when his one-man submarine surfaces underneath her yacht. Inside she is jolted into his arms. Later he confesses his instantaneous love for her, while thinking she is unconscious.

In *Stage-Coach Kid*, hero rescues heroine from stage-coach hold-up; immediate bickering does not conceal mutual attraction.

In *Key to the City*, the heroine, a public official, enters the hero's private apartment, thinking it is a committee-room; the hero mistakes her for a night-club girl, and starts making passes at her. Later they fall into each other's arms as the result of an accident.

In *Singing Guns*, at first meeting, the hero knocks gun from heroine's hand; at second meeting he grabs and kisses her; she burns his neck with cigarette, then passionately reciprocates embrace.

In *Gay Lady*, the boy drops into backyard of girl's house from a balloon.

In *Diamond City*, the hero bumps into and upsets the collection-box of heroine, a missionary.

In *The Great Lover*, the first sight of the heroine takes the hero's mind off the girls of Paris, and induces him to follow her on to a liner for the U.S., to pursue the romance.

In *The Dancing Years*, the heroine, an opera singer, walks into an inn-yard, hears music composed by the hero, and starts to sing it. They admit that under the influence of this music they fell in love at first hearing.

In *Captain China*, the heroine is greatly attracted by the hero when she sees him in a violent fist-fight; he kisses her hard to annoy villain; she pretends to be annoyed, but obviously isn't.

In *Holiday Affair*, the hero poses as the heroine's husband to get her out of a jam in a shop, and kisses her. She is engaged to be married to a nice, substantial type—“a wonderful fellow but not romantic.” On the other hand, the hero is charming but erratic, a rolling-stone. The whole emphasis of this film is on the merits of romantic and exciting love as opposed to “sensible” marriage. The hero says, “It is impossible to be safe and secure when you are in love.”

THIS survey has established, then, that love (and marriage) in the movies is usually a matter entirely of impulse—something you can, and should, have no control over. It has demonstrated statistically that in every two out of three films containing a romantic element the heroes and heroines fall in love almost literally at first sight, and in romantic circumstances likely to be outside the experience of the average member of the audience. The general emphasis is certainly on the unorthodox, the glamorous, and the physical.

However, the purpose of this article is not to draw conclusions, pass judgments, or suggest remedies. That will possibly occupy the attention of others, and of myself, in another place. Yet one point needs to be stressed here. To single out the cinema for criticism would be grossly unfair.

Because of its easy accessibility, because it is this country's major form of entertainment, and because of its direct visual impact, the cinema has special powers and therefore should have special responsibilities to its audiences. Yet when this factor is taken into account, the treatment of the boy-meets-girl situation in the movies, and the assumptions on which it is based, are no different from those of a good deal of “respectable” fiction as well as of comics and pulp literature, of radio serials, of television, or popular songs, and of many forms of advertising. All of them reflect—although often in an exaggerated form—the underlying attitudes and habits of our society. Therefore, when we accuse any of the mass-media of communication and entertainment of inculcating and fostering a false sense of values and wrong standards of behaviour, we are really putting 20th Century Western civilisation itself on trial.