

A Film Response to *The Sheik*

There are a lot of people who can hardly comprehend the beauty and perfection of silent movies that were so popular at the beginning of the 1900s. Nowadays, people prefer to watch actions, admire actors' appearance, listen to the actors' dialogues, and enjoy special effects being abundant in almost every film. However, there are some silent movies that may also capture one's attention, and the film *The Sheik* is one of the brightest examples. It was directed by George Melford in the year 1912 with Rudolph Valentino and Agnes Ayres starring there. *The Sheik* is the story about love, passion, patience, and other feelings peculiar to the relations between men and women; however, it is wrong to believe that this movie is only about male superiority over women. *The Sheik* introduces spectators into the world of Middle Eastern people with their own rules and requirements. The movie proves that love and relations play a significant role for everyone irrespective of one's position in society, color of skin, and age; it is an important milestone in movie industry, and will always be regarded accordingly.

The beginning of the 1900s was a crucial period in the history of cinema due to the rapid development of silent movie industry. Harsh make up, attention to lighting systems, and the necessity of title cards also known as intertitles – all these are the peculiar features of any silent movie, and *The Sheik* is not an exception to the rule. In spite of the fact that the plot of this film is more or less predictable, it is never boring to follow the development of the relations between the main characters and their mutual readiness to help each other. Despite the fact that the plot of the story is not based on real events, the fact that *The Sheik* depicts the stereotypes that are inherent to the Middle Eastern people living in deserts is evident and obvious, indeed. For instance, male domination is part and parcel of the Middle Eastern way

of life, which may amaze an ordinary American or Canadian citizen, but a native of the Middle East got used to this idea. *The Sheik* represents the idea of women obedience to men without considering their personal interests and own wishes.

The image of Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan helps to comprehend the extent to which the position of a man is strong and crucial in their society. In spite of the fact that he is able to love and respect women, his position does not allow him to demonstrate his true feelings. The society demands him to be strict and reserved corresponding to the rules and conditions accepted in it. So, he follows the rules, however, at the same time he does not forget about his personal wishes and principles.

Another important character in the movie is an independent British woman Lady Diana Mayo, who cannot accept the idea of getting married, lose her independence, and get forever obedient to one man only. In the movie, Diana refuses to accept the fact that she can fall in love and that her existence may become a nightmare if this man is not by her side. But within a short period of time, her obstinacy and willfulness gradually change into care and love.

These two characters prove that it is possible to save female independence in relations but at the same time feel respect to each other. On the basis of their example one might realize that destiny is something hard to escape or change. A number of events that happen to them demonstrate how important and crucial sincere feelings are. And if a person gets a chance to be in the power of the most amazing feeling, love, one cannot ignore it. Her desire to get into a casino borrowing an Arabic costume makes for Sheik and Diana's meeting; her attempt to escape and a sudden sandstorm stir up the feeling of Sheik's affection to Diana; Diana's abduction and Sheik's wounding prove that their love is true and mutual. Such

consecutive chain of events seem to be predictable but it usually leads to the happy end.

In general, *The Sheik* is one of the most successful silent movies that represent the nature of relations between people in the Middle East. Although it is mostly focused on loving affairs, such questions as gender inequality, cultural differences, and awareness about personal roots are also perfectly discussed in the movie. The director makes a wonderful attempt to unite the most important human feelings, the necessity to follow traditions, and the significance of human destiny. Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan and Lady Diana Mayo are amazing characters who provide a viewer with a opportunity to enjoy, feel, and believe that love has a magnificent power to change and improve everything around.

Works Cited

The Sheik. Dir. George Melford. Perf. Rudolph Valentino and Agnes Ayres.

Paramount Pictures, 1921. DVD.