

**Ted Larson**  
**Narrator**

**Jim Baccus**  
**Interviewer**

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**JB:** Ted, it's a real pleasure to include you in this Heritage Education Commission. You will be put down, I guess, on a tape for posterity's sake by a commission that has interested itself in providing for posterity the activities and the ideas of a significant number of people. About a hundred and fifty, I understand, have so far been placed in this library for future researchers, and writers, and authors, and others. You are Assistant Professor of Speech at Moorhead State University and Director of Critical Film Studies. And it's...my interest is, I think, caught first by your film interests. Locally in Fargo-Moorhead you're known as the film man, the Hollywood man.

**TL:** [Chuckles]

**JB:** And for a number of years you have given a lot of pleasure to people that are interested in cinema. How long have you been on this...on the faculty?

**TL:** Ah, I've been at Moorhead State University since 1968. So I am into the twentieth year now. Before that I taught speech, theatre, and English at Ben Franklin Junior High School in Fargo, where I also managed to sneak some film studies into the curriculum. And hopefully interested a number of students in the...in looking at vintage film as a way to not only see the past, but in effect, to focus on what the future of this exciting medium might be.

**JB:** When you came to the university from Fargo, did you have, as your responsibility, films, critical film studies first?

**TL:** Well, it...it was the thing that I think enticed me to teach in college. I enjoyed high school, teaching high school very much. I taught ninth graders. I found it exciting. It was energy draining, certainly, from time to time, but I liked it a lot. However, when I was hired at Moorhead State, I was replacing somebody in teacher education in the speech department. So my basic responsibility, when I started, was to deal with those courses that worked with people who were going to go and teach in the high school in dramatics and speech. But, hmmm, the thing that was held out to me was: we want you to develop a film studies program in the department. [Chuckles] And I knew when I heard that...that that...that I would simply have to take advantage of that opportunity. And I'm very glad I did.

**JB:** Well, I think the community is, too. You have other duties. I notice you are busy in the theatre, particularly, I guess, in the Straw Hat Players.

**TL:** Ah, in the summer, yeah. In the summer, I work as managing director for Straw Hat, and people sometimes misinterpret that. I don't...ah, that...someone who is managing director does not direct the plays. But I take care of the administrative duties that free up other people to direct the plays. So I'm in charge of promotions, publicity, house management; I supervise in the area of ticket sales. You know, and I handle all of those administrative duties that will permit a creative director, someone working in the creative area, such as Del Hanson, the director of the company, to do the plays, and hopefully successfully.

**JB:** You have, obviously, a lively interest in cinema, in films. And has there been a growing interest on the part of undergraduates at this university and maybe in other parts of the community?

**TL:** Hmmm, I believe...I believe that this is correct, especially now in the area of cable and the videocassette. Ah...we find people being more curious than they had been before, I think, about the films of the past. And of course it is my belief that if you are going to go into a field, in the media field, that knowing the literature of that field is crucial. So a student certainly needs to know how *Citizen Kane* works, for instance, the 1941 Orson Welles film, as well as maybe how we got to that point. You know, it's like any other art form; you want to study the people who did the most creative work, and try to rediscover what they learned. And contemporary filmmakers are constantly going back to the past and relearning materials, or at least reworking materials, and making them successful for a contemporary audience.

So I think the film heritage, which shows us so much about what our tastes were, what our beliefs were, who our great artists were, you know, and how the art form itself developed, should be a part of people's backgrounds. They...they see more movies than any other form of entertainment or education. So some knowledge of how movies work...I don't mean technically how they work, but how they work on us, how they affect us, how we are affected by them. Hmmm...how we influence films, how films influence us, all of this needs to be a part of, I think, an educated person's background.

**JB:** These students who enroll in your classes, are any of them interested in becoming professionally interested in the...?

**TL:** Ah, some are. At Moorhead State University, the situation is that you can take...you can take film classes from, I think, three different perspectives. We teach courses in the liberal arts program, so that students are required to take a variety of courses in many different fields. And people choose which areas are of most interest to them, and they wouldn't necessarily be film students, but they are taking courses in film. Ah, but maybe they're business majors, or computer people, or are going into English, or science, or physical education, or whatever.

Another way would be students who are in our department and are hoping for a career in the area of concentration that we offer, which is film and telecommunication arts. So they would be taking courses with the idea of becoming directors, producers, editors, teachers, ah...film distributors of some sort, or film exhibitors maybe. Then the third category are the evening courses that are meant for the community, where we frequently get a number of adults coming back, people coming back to school. As well as daytime students and others who are interested in studying a particular topic in film. So those are the three ways in which film is utilized in the educational curriculum on campus.

**JB:** Are you a Moorhead or Fargo native?

**TL:** Well, I...that's tricky. Because I was...I was born in Fargo. But until I taught there, I had always...I had lived in Moorhead. My father worked for the Great Northern Railroad before it became the Burlington Northern, and as such, I spent my early years in Moorhead. But then he was moved around a bit. And I lived in Crookston, Minnesota for a while, as well as Beltrami for a very little while. And then finally my parents settled in Glyndon, which is nine miles from Moorhead.

And from 1958 to 1962, after graduating from high school, I attended Moorhead State University and studied speech here and commuted from Glyndon. I have also attended Middlebury College in 1966 in Vermont to study English and drama. And I did a master's degree at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas following that, in the 1966-67 year. And then I am currently working on a doctoral program at the University of Minnesota, which I've been doing in bits and spurts over the last four or five years.

**JB:** As a youngster, were you interested in photography? Did you carry a box camera around? [Chuckles] Did you have any of that?

**TL:** Not photography as much as film. I have...I have *always* been interested in film. And I mean *always*. The earliest thing I can remember, I've always...I always had an interest in theatrical things. I remember getting some hand puppets as a little kid, sending in box top...my parents sent in some box tops of a breakfast cereal and I got some puppets. And I built a little puppet stage and would perform plays. My parents gave me a slide projector, and a filmstrip projector, and a movie projector at various times in my early childhood, and I loved to...to show movies for the kids in the community in the garage. So I've always had that interest.

I've attended a lot of films in the days...I go back to the days before television. Ah...and from a historical nature, since this tape is...is meant to do that, here might be something that has vanished from the scene but might be an interesting note for any future historian who goes through these tapes to consider. In the days before television, there were people...and they *really* affected my life, and I'm so glad you asked me this. There were people who went from town to town on Friday and Saturday nights with their movie projectors, sort of like a circuit preacher. But instead of preaching, they were showing films. And they were sponsored by the local merchants of the community. And in my hometown, Glyndon, Minnesota, a fellow would show up every Friday night at seven o'clock, set up his projectors outside in a vacant lot, and show

vintage films on the side of a store, put up a big canvas screen. That was for towns that didn't have movie theatres.

Now again, this...people have to realize this was *before* the days of television. Television killed all of that, of course, because then you had this moving picture box in your house. But...as a youngster in the, oh, fifth, sixth, seventh grade, I never missed a Friday night, you know. You'd...it was like a theatre, but without a theatre. People would drive their cars in, and sit on their running board—cars had running boards. Sit on the running board or the hood of the car. The speakers would be placed outside for the sound. A projector would be out there projecting on a screen, and it was...in my hometown, it was done on the side of a store. So the store would stay open on Friday nights, and you could go in there to buy your refreshments.

So...and that *really* had an impact on me. And it was fun because it...it taught me that a good film showing is...is kind of an event that you plan for, and an event that draws people together, and an event that you share with an audience. As opposed to say watching television, which is frequently just you, and/or a friend, or a relative, or a parent, or something. It's not the same experience. And of course I really *like* that experience.

**JB:** That might have been the original drive-in theatre arrangement.

**TL:** Well, and it...because it was in the era before drive-in theatres were popular. I...sure, you could do that. You could drive in. And I miss that, quite frankly. I miss all of that today. Because I would go early and watch the projectionist set up and ask if I could help. I was a kid. And I became his...I don't know, maybe he was just being nice to me. But I...I either became his pal or the guy he dreaded seeing! [Chuckles] And I was always there, and I'd hold the speaker, put the wire in, or lift the projector, or get him a reel, or whatever needed to be done to get that movie ready.

**JB:** I guess every...everyone has his recollections, you know. Mine is of the Ruby Theatre, where the serials were on Saturday. And they were fifteen...were fifteen cents, I think, for admission. And there were a number of serials that probably you...you would remember. The...ome of the exotic serials of those days. As a result of all that lifelong interest in films, do you...do you regard people...? Do you study someone and say, "Gee, she looks kind of like Norma Desmond!" [Laughs] Or, "I think she sounds like Norma Desmond!"

**TL:** Hmm, well, I'm...I frequently encounter people...That's...that's the thing, when you deal in vintage film, sort of everybody seems contemporary, you know. I think students would consider Humphrey Bogart, for instance, to be an old timer. But I don't. *The Wizard of Oz*, to me, just is...I mean it isn't an *old* film, you know, before they had *Star Wars*, that kind of thing. [Chuckles] They all sort of exist to me in a continual...feeling of affection and meaning.

What's been exciting though is to see how the area of film studies in the country has grown. And, you know, frequently...and I'm sure people listening to this tape may...may have a similar view; that is, well, movies are...they're entertainment. And because they're so popular, how can they be academic? How can they be intellectual? How can they be aesthetic? I guess that would

represent the discovery of that. Represents the first, for me, the first great understanding of film. Like everybody else as a kid, I thought films were just...they delighted me and they entertained me. I never felt that there was maybe anything there that was...I mean they were...they were special to *me*, and they enticed me, and excited me, but I never thought there might be something there that's artistic. In fact, I suppose, as most kids, I never thought much about the world of art and aesthetics at all.

Hmmm...but when...Piece by piece, I began to realize that taking pieces of motion picture film with images on them and cutting them together and then supporting them by the music that creates an emotion or a mood could be a way of telling a story as masterfully as any of the great writers of our time. It could create images, or powerful emotions, or sway audiences as much as any art or music that any of the masters created. Of course, like every other form, it has the people who deal in less desirable attitudes and materials, you know. And that's, I hope, what we try to sort out in critical film studies. You know, where is the merit in the movies? Hmmm, how should you...how can you look at a movie? How can you find what's really there?

I have enjoyed, through my lifetime study of the people who make the movies and the people who perform in the movies, learning about the lives of people who considered film to be a great art form, and who themselves were artists, and worked in it in a meaningful manner. One of the ones that's most obvious to a casual movie viewer would be someone like Alfred Hitchcock, you know, who can manipulate the medium in a particular direction, and is generally regarded as a great artist. Well, there are many others, certainly the equal or the master of Hitchcock, that are not as well-known, and that are worthy of attention, and whose films have really become the literature of our time.

**JB:** I believe that many a casual viewer has not stopped to think that a film is made of those tiny little pieces, maybe just little flashes, maybe just inch or two. And I've...I've really forgotten how many separate pieces are in the murder scene of *Psycho* in the shower scene. And that's been calculated, you know, the hundreds of pieces. [Chuckles]

**TL:** Yeah. I believe Hitchcock...yeah, I believe Hitchcock said it's something like seventy-three in that...in the short...in the few seconds that create the most terror. And it's *that* arrangement of *those* particular images, plus the soundtrack, that lead you to believe that you see things that you don't. You know, there's no real gore in that scene as much as you would swear there is. Ah, you don't actually see a knife entering a body, you don't see blood gushing out like you might in a contemporary movie, you know. What happens instead is you feel the emotional intensity of the scene through the way that it has been photographed and edited, and ultimately put together into what Hitchcock would call a montage or an assemblage of images in a particular way in an attempt to create a sensation. Which of course it has obviously been successful in that...in that instance.

**JB:** Let's talk more about movies. What...what are your five favorite movies then?

**TL:** Oh, people are always doing that to me!

**JB:** [Chuckles]

**TL:** And hmmm...I don't know. I never know what to say, because I'm always thinking about some films of some type that are of special interest to me. One I'm anxious to see, that I'm going to get to see soon and haven't, is John Ford's *The Long Voyage Home*, which is based on, yeah, Eugene O'Neill's short stories of the sea. And so I might, you know, be curious about that. But I could certainly identify some films that have meant a lot to me. And it's hard to say, you know, what are your favorite movies, or what are the best movies, or what are the movies that are the most meaningful. Hmmm...that's like if someone in literature had to pick out the best work of literature of all time. That would be kind of tricky.

But...and this isn't necessarily the top of my list. The movie that affected me the most...the earliest point in my life...is a film called *Of Mice and Men*. That was made in 1939, directed by Lewis Milestone. And I saw it as a part...I saw it first when I was nine years old, as a part of this film showing I was telling you about, that on Friday nights it came to the community. And it was the first time that a movie had touched me deeply with its emotional feelings and themes. I couldn't quite fathom or understand, but I just kept wanting to go back and back to that film. Well, of course, credit is...is owed to the original creator of the story, John Steinbeck. It was based on...on his play. Novel was made into a play, and play was made into a movie. But the performances of Burgess Meredith and Lon Chaney, Jr.—Jr. playing Lenny Small, who isn't very small, a very large character in fact. And he's the one who is mentally retarded, but is very strong and very loving. And the story of these two migrant workers during the Depression somehow touched me and still does. I...I seek this movie out, I will teach it when it is appropriate in a class, and I can...I never fail to get lost in that film when I see it.

Now maybe it's because...maybe if some other movie had that been the first to really affect me, I would feel that same affection about it today. Certainly...if you're asking about like top five films, I would say that on an intellectual basis, I have the greatest respect for Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, as do most film teachers and critics. As a movie that did so much for film. I am particularly fond of the silent comedies, feature comedies of Buster Keaton. It's a lifelong love of Keaton's work. I have great respect, of course, for Chaplin, from that period. I tend...I tend to...ah...have great feelings for the major silents, you know, the films that don't generally get viewed today. Or at least if they do, they don't get viewed under the same circumstances.

Ah...I...because actress Colleen Moore from the silent era was kind enough to come to Moorhead State, twice in fact, and do sessions with my students, and also at the Fargo Theatre as a part of programs we produce there. And she established a scholarship at Moorhead State for university students going into the field of film. That...it caused me to try to track down and locate a number of her lost films. And I suppose it's a fondness for her, as well as the films, but I see special merit in her work. Maybe I can hasten to add here that she was the original flapper from the 1924 film called *The Perfect Flapper*. And then in 1926 and 1927 she was the highest paid actress in Hollywood, the best known personality in the world, and was one of the major comediennees of the time, one of the few females who was successful at creating a comic image in film.

So, you know, there are all of these little currents and eddies in film history and finding those elusive films, the ones that aren't generally known or available. Ah...rediscovering somebody like a Raymond Griffith, for instance, a comedian from the 1920s, whose work is generally not known, because most of his work has been lost...*that* kind of thing appeals to me. And I know I gave a long and rather roundabout answer to your question about five favorite films, but I suppose I can always toss in *Casablanca*. I can never...you know, I never fail to enjoy that.

And if we open it up to maybe foreign pictures, too, there are lots of others. I tend to like German silents from the 1920s, especially those in the style of the macabre, that use an expressionistic style, where the scenery expresses the attitude. You know, all of those things based on myth and legend. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* from 1919, considered the first horror film, is of interest to me. *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang's film of 1926 is another one. So they...they just kind of go on and on.

**JB:** How do you feel about the coloring of the older films? Particularly, I'm thinking of...hmmm...well, there's been quite a...quite a hassle, quite a debate, you know, in the industry about coloring of such films as *The Maltese Falcon*, for example.

**TL:** Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah, well, I'm...I'm absolutely against it. But I guess I...I refuse to get too wild about it, because it...When it first came out, I really was active in...and any opportunity to speak against it, I would. I guess I've sort of gotten used to it now, and I think what'll happen is...I'm still opposed to it. But I think, you know, as usual, things will survive. The argument for colorization is that audiences will watch the film. You say, "Well, if your..." People will say to me, "Well, if you're a teacher of film history, you want people to see these films. And you can entice more people to watch them if they'll be in color." Well, I'm sure there's truth to that, because people flip the dial, and if they see a black and white program, they may not stop there when they're watching TV.

On the other hand, I guess I feel is a greater challenge for me to attempt to...hmmm...educate people that...what's wrong with watching a film, you know, in its original version? For instance, in contemporary times, many filmmakers have chosen to make their films in black and white. Woody Allen made *Manhattan* and other films in black and white. Ah, Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which you had mentioned a few minutes ago, was made purposely in black and white. It could have been in color. *The Last Picture Show*, a wonderful film from Peter Bogdanovich, was made purposely in black and white. And I'm sure we could think of...of many, many others. So it...it's a tool.

What I think can happen is in *certain* films, like *Citizen Kane*, for instance, *that was meant* to be in black and white. And without it, ah...if you add color to it, you're simply going to wreck all the tonal balances in the materials that they strove *so* desperately to accomplish in the film. I think that would be a desecration. I suppose if they want to color episodes of *Leave it to Beaver* or other films that are...you know, I...I think it brings one into the argument about a judgment as to whether this is worth more than something else. Now the man responsible for most of the coloring, Ted Turner, tends to say, "Well, I'm not damaging the original film, because they are

still there, and people who want to can see them in black and white, or you can turn the color off if you feel that way.”

The thing that’s...that’s destructive, I think, is that you’re imposing one artist’s view...well, I should say, you’re destroying one artist’s view, you’re changing one artist’s view. You’re imposing somebody else’s view—even if the person is an artist who is doing the colorizing—you’re imposing one person’s view on the work of somebody else. That’s...to me, it’s as if I went through the plays of Eugene O’Neill, or Shakespeare, or Oscar Wilde and said, “Well, I don’t think...I think we should change this. You know, we should do this, we shouldn’t have it this way. We should change it to another way.” And you...you see, since everything in a movie is calculated, not just those little bits of film, but the lighting, the color that character would wear, whether they’d be wearing a yellow shirt, or a red shirt, or a blue shirt, you know, all of this in a contemporary film is...is...part of the overall artistic design.

If you just go back to these pictures and put them the way you want them to be, you have tampered with something that’s a work of art. And of course as a...as a critic, and someone who is concerned with artistic integrity, and studies analytical studies, one could never approve, I don’t feel, of somebody making those kinds of judgments about somebody’s work who is no longer here to defend himself or herself about it. [Chuckles] So...it’s a long way of saying that I...I really don’t support it. But it does provide me with an opportunity to discuss the kinds of things you brought up here with students and with people who are interested. So, in that way, it at least provides that.

**JB:** During your long career, which is by no means over...

**TL:** Let’s hope! Yeah. [Chuckles]

**JB:** You’ve seen a lot of changes in Hollywood; Hollywood as you and I understand it. Lots of changes, some of them good, some of them not so good. Ah, they went on location, and that certainly changed the industry. And the smaller producers began to have...the studio idea, you know, of contracting. You’ve seen all that. Well you...What do you...? How do you...? What do you look...in Hollywood as the...for a future? Ah, do you think it’s going to be what we’ve characteristically thought of it for a long time?

**TL:** Well...no. Well, with the...the only thing that’s sure about the future, as always, I suppose, is change. You know, and it’s interesting...as you point out, it’s interesting to study the things that have affected Hollywood, because practically everything does. Hmmmm, the coming of television, certainly, you know, frightened Hollywood into doing widescreen pictures, 3-D pictures, pictures that were more daring, more mature. Ah...actually, the coming of television solidified the fact that most pictures had better be made in color. Because at the beginning, of course, TV was in black and white. So if you wanted to attract people to the theatre, you could always say that you had color and television did not, see.

And you’re right, on location shooting. Ah, the Paramount decisions, Supreme Court decision in the...in 1948, which said that studios could no longer own theatre chains was every bit as



important as television, and a decision that...that decision caused the breakup of the studio system. And other factors put the 1950s in an awkward place in movie history. But there always seemed to be major personalities. Now, we have the videocassette. And that was...they...they fought the Betamax machines at the beginning, Hollywood did, feeling that it would wipe out their business. Well, as of...what was it, yesterday? The sales of *E.T. [The Extraterrestrial]* on tape, they anticipated that they would sell six million, and they were preparing for that, but they had eleven million advance orders.

So then here's a good example: Hollywood discovers that it can popularize a film through the film medium, but then sell cassettes of it to home viewers to have and to use. That does two things. It indicates that there are enormous profits in film, in distributing it in that manner, and it also says people want to see these films more than once. Of course, that's always my argument. You *do* want to see films, great films, more than once. You want to return to them in the same way that you might return to favorite music that you feel has artistic merit, or a book that's a favorite, and you enjoy reading again because you enjoy doing it again. All of these things will affect what...what Hollywood does.

You asked, you know, what might we see for the future? Hollywood, for a long time, has just been a state of mind, really. I mean you don't...it isn't like going to Disneyland, where you can say, "Here is where it is." You go in, you walk through the door, and there it is. People are frequently disappointed when they go to Hollywood, because it's kind of an area or a series of buildings. There's nothing special to see. Unless, of course, you go on the Universal Studio Tour, then you feel you've *been* to Hollywood. But you've just seen a kind of a superficial entertainment show that's on one corner of a lot that lets you sense that you've been a part of the experience, you know.

What I think is going to happen, especially with the growth of film production in Florida and in Canada, is that there are going to be like many Hollywood's. I suspect we'll always think of the word "Hollywood" as the era of glorious and grand entertainment and Clark Gable, you know, and Greta Garbo and all of that. But I think that the production centers are going to spread out, and that there's going to be more done outside of the physical Hollywood area. And that other places will grow up and be an attractive place in which to make films, in which to create these mythical feelings about the magic of the movies.

**JB:** Ted Larson, you and I have been visiting here in 1988. And what's being produced now by Hollywood, as we say, hmmm...does it strike you that some of them have gone over the edge? That they are...are becoming much more subject to criticism and to censorship? Are you pleased by some of the...ah...the limitations, I guess [chuckles] that have been tossed aside?

**TL:** Well, more...more than anything, I would say, the trend that I find most encouraging, and at a contemporary time, is that Hollywood *seems* to have discovered again that there are adult audiences out there. That...whose material that...ah...who would be interested in thoughtful, meaningful entertainment. Granted, the standards in filmmaking, and the use of profanity, and maybe the more blatant depiction of sexual scenes and materials...I feel, I suppose, coming from the generation that I did, that, ah, it isn't necessary, or isn't needed...at a time, and I...it becomes,

I guess, a sense of evaluation. But film...film seems to fall into so many different categories. But for some...for a while in Hollywood, we just seemed to have movies like [*The*] *Blue Lagoon*, if you remember. [Chuckles] Ah...being when Hollywood discovered, well, the audience for films is thirteen years old, so we'll make movies that might appeal to thirteen-year-olds.

What has happened in the age of the videocassette is that Hollywood is discovering that there's a market for pictures out there that...And I'll give you one example of one that seemed to turn their heads. Maybe it's not the first one to do this, in recent times, but turn their heads in the direction of doing things that are more mature: *Kramer Versus Kramer*, the story of the breakup of a marriage and how it affects not only the people involved in the marriage, but the youngster, was a tremendous hit with a wide audience range. Hmm...you know, *On Golden Pond* was a film that brought audiences that hadn't been to the theatre in years.

*E.T.*, which we mentioned earlier. I...I saw the first showing of *E.T.* in Fargo-Moorhead. I've been a Steven Spielberg fan, and enjoy his work, so I was anxious to see what this would be. What I liked about that first viewing that I went to was that it seemed to be families were there. You had...you had grandpa, and you had mom and dad, and you had the kids, and they were all having the time of their life, together, at the movies. Well, we haven't seen that since the 1940s, you know! Well...ah...generally, we haven't, I think.

And so it is encouraging to me that with cable...Cable, cassettes, say to me, it is now possible to produce material for...I hate to call them special interest groups. But, you know, from the exercise videos, to cassettes for children, you're...you can once again produce material that can cover a full spectrum. And that, to me, is very encouraging, because you have cable channels dedicated to doing arts and entertainment. In fact, there's one by that name. Plays, major plays, major shows being adapted, you know, into film, ah, that to me is very exciting. I think now is an exciting time to get into the field, to do what I do, which is to examine and analyze the field and try to come up with some conclusions. Oh, that's tricky, you know. It's sort of like attempting to determine what's going on while you're in the middle of everything, rather than having the advantage of looking back on things.

But still, hmm...I may have given a roundabout answer here. I guess...I don't feel that...ah...there aren't too many restrictions anymore. What I think we need, the best kind of restriction, I feel, is the people voting with their dollars at the box office. Ah...not that I think anything should go; I think community standards have to prevail on materials. And I believe in classifying movies, and I believe in adhering to that classification. You know, if a movie is classified as R, then I don't think that people under seventeen should be able, you know, to get into the film if that's...That's what England has been doing for a number of years, before we did, and classifying movies, and I think that's very good.

But you know, it's hard to take the recent flap over *The Last Temptation of Christ*...Hmm...people argue, "Well, the movie should never have been made." Well, is that a logical argument in a free society? You know. A person's right not to go, or a person's right to say, "This is not good entertainment," or, "Not what I think should be done," or, "Not content that I feel should be treated," all of that is not only protected, but it's very valuable. But on the

other hand, to tell someone they can't do something, that they can't make something...Ah, I'd have a little problem with that, with that phase.

**JB:** Who is your favorite male star of the contemporary...?

**TL:** [Laughs] Boy, you know, I'm not sure that I can...I can come up with a...I suppose you're going to ask me then who my favorite female is, too? [Laughs]

**JB:** Well, I'll ask you then, your favorite female star?

**TL:** I...I don't...I don't know that I would...I tend to deal so much in vintage material...I suppose I think Bette Davis is a contemporary star. That would hardly be appropriate, would it? If I thought a while, I'm sure I could come up with some people, but I might have to think on that one just a little bit. Hmmm...so maybe before we wrap up, I can...I can come up with something that would...I presume it has to please me, and then anybody who is listening would say, "Oh, no, not that one!" You know.

Hmmm. One thing I do notice, since you brought this up, one thing I do notice is that it's...it's more difficult for people to establish themselves these days as major talents. Oh, I just thought of one, now that we're thinking about it now. Ah, De Niro, Robert De Niro is...is a career who...that I have studied and I can always enjoy in a film. I like Sean Connery in his after James Bond pictures. Yeah, I like the James Bond pictures, too, I don't mean that. But I have taken him more seriously in some of his major roles.

**JB:** He did a marvelous job in *Untouchables*, I think.

**TL:** I thought it was an excellent film.

**JB:** Yes.

**TL:** Ah, and of course, while...what I'm...you know, now that I...the names start coming back here. I'm thinking of some films I've taught recently or whatever. Ah, you know, I certainly jump on the Jack Nicholson bandwagon. Hmmm, you were asking me earlier about some of my five favorite films. I don't know if this would fit in the five, but *Chinatown*. Do you know...? Is that a film you know?

**JB:** Yes, indeed.

**TL:** See, that...that film has things that appeal to me. And...and it's a period film.

**JB:** Yes.

**TL:** Now I don't know...ah...well, you know, we...we can't assume, I suppose, that our listeners on this tape know that film. Or we can maybe assume that if they're listening to this, years from now, they know everything! [Laughing]

**JB:** It had John Huston. [Laughs] And they maybe know that!

**TL:** [Laughs] Yeah, John Huston as an actor in *Chinatown*. Hmm...it's...to me, that kind of story, with complex characters, with people who are flawed...you don't...you don't have a hero in the same sense of a [Humphrey] Bogart, you know, the Nicholson character in that film is...is anything but heroic, in a way...I mean, he does heroic things, but he's certainly flawed. And Faye Dunaway, who...a wonderful performance. And then just watching them recreate the 1930s in the Los Angeles area, and doing it so beautifully. That's a film I could...I could watch it this afternoon, believe me.

**JB:** That's a marvelous film.

**TL:** Yeah. To me it is. To me it's a...it's a film that's really intriguing, and it...I get something from it every time I get a chance to see it. So, you know, that's very, very exciting for me.

**JB:** Some interesting people have been graduated under the aegis, you know, of Mr. Hanson and you; have gone into television, and...is there any young graduate here who might be going into films or has gone into films?

**TL:** Well, we have...hmmm...our program is a young one. Ah, even though I've been around for twenty years here at Moorhead State, we haven't been...our critical film studies program has grown slowly and deliberately, and it's been...At the beginning, it was basically a service to other areas and departments in learning about film. But of course that generated people who wanted to make film.

A few years ago, a student named Chris Lapalm was in my courses, and I thought he had major talent. And as it turned out, he did. Hmm, he made a picture for a class, a short film, and entered it in the Sony Movie Contest. And he won the contest for this region, and they gave him a video moviemaking kit: camera, lights, editor. And that prompted him to make more videos, video films, on video. They were...he was using cinematic technique, but he was producing a film on videotape rather than on the motion picture medium.

Ah, he ultimately ended up being selected to attend the AFI [American Film Institute] school in Hollywood in Los Angeles, and he completed that successfully, and is now out there. He made a short film at the AFI which has been shown on HBO. A film called *Two Soldiers*, based on a Kurt Vonnegut short story. It's an excellent film. I think he's been back to the campus and shown his film and talked about it. Ah, and he's out there waiting for that break to direct a TV movie-of-the-week or maybe make a lower budget film in Hollywood, and hopefully that will lead to something else.

Well, I have students, however, who have gone into various phases of film, and have been quite successful, if not as well-known in what they do. I have one student who is a major exhibitor in Minneapolis, working for a theatre chain. He exhibits movies. Ah, I have a student who is a film librarian, who was working in a library in North Carolina, and has recently applied for a job at

the Library of Congress as a historian archivist there. I have a student who went from here and attended graduate school at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and completed a Ph.D. in film, and currently is the film instructor at the University of Las Vegas, in Las Vegas, Nevada.

I have one...one of my earliest students teaches film at Concordia. Who knows, maybe he'll end up on a tape one of these days? Ah, his name is Harold Casselton, and he teaches media and film, and we worked together on a lot of restoration projects. We...hmmm...we're always looking for films that might find themselves in barns or garages. And in the area, we've found quite a few, pictures that have just been left, for various reasons. Discovered they still hadn't rotted, so they were able to be donated to the Museum of Modern Art or the American Film Institute and preserved, and help to teach us more about the movie heritage. So those are a few of the people we're quite proud of.

**JB:** Well, you wish them well.

**TL:** Absolutely.

**JB:** I...I believe that the industry has kind of come to its self about preserving films, and about establishing libraries, and allowing them to be seen, and working on ways of preserving the color. And ah...it used to be, unfortunately for technical reasons, that they just decayed or dissolved in the can. And what a tragedy that some film, some remarkable film is gone.

**TL:** Well, yeah, we...hmmm...you get me started on that subject, we'll probably be doing this for about five hours! But I can condense, I can condense. Ah, I couldn't agree with you more in your attitude. And it's...to me, you know, I suppose a lot of people have loved film like I do, and a lot of people have studied it, and a lot of people teach it. But if there is something that...that I could do that's maybe special, I hope it would be in the area of restoration. Restoring films and finding some films, locating some.

Ah...you may be interested to know that over half of all the movies that have ever been made in America are lost. Most of that comes from the early period. In the silent era, only fifteen percent of the films that were made at that time survive. They were photographed on a nitrate-based film stock, which had a life expectancy of ten years. And you see, you...when movies first came out, it wasn't thought that they were ever an art, or needed to be...it was like the...if you'll pardon the expression, a newspaper. You know, so you assume somebody is keeping copies of a newspaper, but you don't necessarily do it. Well, maybe you do, but...[Chuckles] Ah...because of your background. But you see, the average person gets a newspaper, you read it, and you're done with it. And, you know, out it goes. And so then if you suddenly had to refer to something from even a month back, or a week's back, or heaven's sakes, years back, you'd have to go to the library or somewhere, some archive. And you'd hope that they would have a copy of it.

Well, there wasn't such a thing for film. And so as these...these films just kept deteriorating. And companies went in and out of business in those early days of moviemaking, you know, before it got solidified to the major studios. Hmmm, and films simply were not preserved. And then when we went from the silent period to the sound period, that was...even worse, because everything

was considered to be *obsolete*. Up to the 1950s, people thought, oh, who cares about that junk? You know, I mean...it was old, it was primitive. [Coughs] It doesn't have any merit, any necessity of keeping that, so out it goes.

During World War II, we scrapped a lot of the films for silver content. Hmm...there they go. And you're right, color...color was fading until they recently developed some more stable color stocks. Hmm, that left us. So you end up with a rather sorry state of affairs. And movie history would probably be different, recorded differently, and would...the books on what are the important films would no doubt be changed if it were possible to go back and *see* once again what really happened at the time. So we just have...the ones that are left, we have to go by that.

**JB:** Ted Larson, I'm sure that the Heritage Education Commission here at Moorhead State University appreciates the time that you have taken. It's been a pleasure for me, personally. I've been visiting with the Assistant Professor of Speech and the Director of Critical Film Studies at Moorhead State. Ted Larson, thank you very much.

**TL:** And thank you.

[End of interview]