



BROKEN BLOSSOMS

D W GRIFFITH CORPORATION 1919

Directed by D W Griffith



CAST

Lucy, the girl...Lillian Gish
The Yellow Man...Richard Barthelmess
Battling Burrows...Donald Crisp

Based on a story by Thomas Burke
Photography... G W Bitzer



A tinted print
Duration: 90 minutes
Projection speed: variable
Aperture: full



Score by Louis Gottschalk
arranged by
Carl Davis (31 players)



LIVE CINEMA

BROKEN BLOSSOMS

Made immediately after the end of the Great War, this is the most poignant of Griffith's pacifist films. Citing racial hatred as the root of human conflict, Griffith used an intimate drama to mirror the theatre of war. Reading news from the front, a policeman remarks, 'Better than last week, only forty thousand casualties.' On seeing the film, Griffith's financier Adolph Zukor said, 'You may as well put your hand in my pocket and steal the money. Everyone in it dies.' But the film's beauty and compassion overshadowed its uncommercial pessimism, and it was a huge success.

Griffith based his film on a story *The Chink and the Child*, from Thomas Burke's book, *Limehouse Nights*, a classic tale of love crushed by racial prejudice. Cheng Huan is a student priest who comes to London to spread the Buddhist message of universal peace. Years later, bitter and disillusioned, he is a 'chink' storekeeper in Limehouse, lost in an opium haze. His life is transformed by Lucy, whom he befriends after she has fled from her brutal father. Disgusted at finding her living with a Chinese man, the father takes Lucy home and beats her to death. Cheng Huan, having lost the only thing of beauty in his life, shoots the father then kills himself.

The father, Battling Burrows, is a racist bully: 'Above all, Battling hates those not born in the same great country as himself.' The gentle Cheng Huan is an idealist, motivated by the philosophy of universal love. Although a far superior human being, he has neither the physical strength nor mental obduracy to overpower Burrows. Lucy is blameless and defenceless, a victim of chauvinist aggression.

Griffith bathed his film in atmosphere to capture the shadowy world of Limehouse. Many of the sets were inspired by a series of watercolours by the artist Charles Baker. The film became famous for its imaginative use of studio sets. Some shots were designed virtually as moving paintings using miniatures and even cutouts. It was a stylisation absolutely new to the screen. The photography made use of new soft focus techniques, and these, combined with elaborate tinting throughout, gave the film a striking new look. It remains one of the most beautiful and poetic films of the silent era, and is presented in a tinted print made from a nitrate original. It is accompanied by Carl Davis's adaptation of Louis F. Gottschalk's original score – for which it is claimed Griffith himself contributed a theme.