

Using the Camera to Illustrate Fiction

Models Pose for Photographs Showing Scenes in the Story— How Two Artists Originated the Plan

WITH the possible exception of the law, there is no profession in current life which comes in for more embittered criticism than that of the illustrator of fiction. The criticism comes from the author whose stories are illustrated, as well as the person who reads them. It often vents itself on a long series of inaccuracies or impossibilities where the illustrator draws something that couldn't have happened, or at least that didn't happen in the story which he is supposed to illustrate.

The idea of illustrating fiction with photographs, for which models are posed under expert stage management to represent the story's characters, has been developed recently and is attracting the attention of publishers and editors. In New York two illustrators, Lejaren A. Hiller and Henry Guy Fangel, have abandoned their drawing boards to make a profession of the new method.

Both of these pioneers, however, frankly express the opinion that the camera can never equal the best work of the illustrator by hand. Perhaps this view is due to the fact that they were both illustrators of this type before they became photographers, and they both still amuse themselves in their spare moments by compositions with brush and pencil. At any rate, their regard for the magazine illustrator is considerably higher than that of the average reader who looks at the pictures with a story and wonders why anybody ever thought the characters looked like that.

"Our photographs don't look like other photographs," said Mr. Fangel the other day, "but we have no new and secret method or process, with the exception of a private method of blending three or four negatives into a single print, which is very rarely used in the illustra-

tion of fiction. Such successes as we have achieved are due rather to the fact that, so far as I can learn, we are the first artists who have treated the camera as an instrument for the carrying out of artistic conceptions. A few portrait photographers have made mild beginnings in this line, but none of them has gone far, nor have they attempted to do anything beyond the mere photography of a single individual with a general idea of making him look like himself. In other words, practically all photographers so far have been mechanics who did not try to make the camera do more than the obvious thing which anybody could see it was meant for.

"We have regarded the camera as another tool which makes it possible for the artist to obtain some effects that cannot be obtained in other ways. There is room still for a great deal of development in the art; we hope to do a good deal of this development ourselves, for naturally we think we are doing better work all the time.

"We study the composition of a photograph as an artist would plan the composition of a drawing. We give special and careful attention to lighting, and we work often like stage directors to get the right expression on a model. But there is no new process which differentiates our work from ordinary photography.

"Mr. Hiller began this work several years ago, when he was a magazine illustrator with an amateur taste for the camera. He used to do rather unusual things with his camera by way of recreation, and often showed them to art editors of magazines who would be interested. Eventually one of them gave him a poem to illustrate by photography, and the results led to continuation of the

work and eventually took him out of his other work altogether. I was an art editor and bought a good deal of his output, and about two years ago entered into partnership with him. Either of us can do all the other's work. What makes us successful partners, I should think, is that his tendencies are decorative and mine are realistic. We balance each other. Of late we have done a good deal of illustration for advertisements, but that is only a side line. Our principal work is still illustrating fiction and poetry."

Naturally, the illustration by photography of fiction with a wide range of subjects calls for many models. Where a pen-and-ink artist may do a whole year's work from three or four models, and a painter who specializes in covers may work with only one, the photographers have laboriously collected and card-indexed something like 3,000. The outsider would be apt to think that most of these would be movie actors, but in fact only a comparatively small percentage are drawn from this class.

"If a movie actress can do work suitable to our purposes," said Mr. Fangel, "it is apt to be by accident. Our work is so much more refined, our details must be so much more carefully done, than in the movies, where rough general effects are required, that the two have very little similarity, and a face which may take well in the movies does not necessarily produce results for us."

Some of the best-known actors and actresses on the speaking stage, as well as those from the pictures, are on the list of 3,000, along with many artists' models, many working girls and men of various employments who like to make a little extra money in spare moments, and a considerable number—a rather surpris-

ingly large number—of women who do it largely for amusement and the pleasure of being photographed with exceptional care in their best clothes. This last type, naturally, is used principally in "society" scenes where good clothes and obvious good breeding are essential. Some of these women find convenient use for the money that is paid them, though they may be well to do, others pose simply for their amusement.

The two "illustrating photographers" employ a scout who is sent out to the locations where suitable models for the character required may be found, but most of the new models—and the list of 3,000 is receiving constant increments—come through the good offices of those who have already posed and who spread the word that it is easy money for pleasant work. When a story deals with east side or rural types or some other specialized characters, the photographs do not reproduce made-up actors, but originals—real east side tradesmen, real farmers from the high grass.

But it is not all easy work for the models. The makeup is done with extreme care, so that a model who is capable of transformation into adequate representations of different types may appear as something entirely different from his normal self, except in the case of characters where such accuracy is needed as can be obtained only by having a specimen of the exact sort of man portrayed. And the work of getting the right expression, to be held at the instant when the camera shutter is open, is something calling for a good deal of labor on the part both of model and director.

It may be all in the fact that artists are working with the camera, as Mr. Fangel says. But to an outsider it seems to be in part at least due to the fact that two artists also happen to be pretty good stage directors.