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THET 659A
Revised *Cabaret* Concept and Research

We open in a Cabaret- a rich red curtain hangs on the stage, surrounded by a shimmering marquee chase, the suggestion of what is to come. The roll of a drum brings down the houselights, and on the crash of a cymbal, a followspot, crisp against the red of the curtain finds the Emcee where he has appeared from within. As he welcomes us, the curtain rises, revealing the stage and the dancers, who move through light bright and alluring, rosy and romantic- it suggests the promise of the Cabaret, sumptuous and idealized. There is just a hint of footlights on the dancers as they sing, redolent of theatre and vaudeville the world over. As each dancer is introduced, they are just kissed with a second spotlight, before the focus returns to the Emcee, who introduces us to the glimmering world of Berlin, reflected in the still shimmering marquee, which seems to dance with the music and the dancers, a character unto itself.

It is into this same world that Cliff will enter- charmed by the cabaret and by Sally all at once, and in this same way, we watch him become disenchanted by both and by the encroaching terror that we know to be just on the horizon- for example what was before charming footlight becomes a harsh and unnatural glow that unsettles us and warns us of the horrors to come, the soft pink of a love song becomes the crimson of impending violence- and promises the end of the world that Cliff can see them heading towards on his way to Paris.

When we first properly meet Sally Bowles outside of the cabaret, we find her settled in Cliff's small room, lit by a shabby light with a shade, and by the wan light that pours in through the window, as cool as a fall morning. It is cramped, and light catches in the dust in the air, but as Sally begins to weave her promises, the world seems to come to life- what before was a low rent boarding room becomes a stage in itself, Sally the main attraction- she is bathed in gold, color as rich as the story she weaves for Cliff. The Emcee's song as Cliff and Sally's scene recedes is bathed in these same colors, and more- in deep magenta and deep indigo that hang around his shoulders and the bodies of those he dances with. It is a richness only possible in the magic of the cabaret stage, but that gives voice to Cliff and Sally's scene all the same.

The next time we find Cliff and Sally, Sally is telling stories once again- and, for just a moment, lingering in the dream of one. Where before, her dream was big, and brash, and as much for Cliff's benefit as her own, this dream is for her- a flickering flame of possibility that she has cupped in her hands. As she finds herself in the thrall of it, we join here there, in the softest of glows, of shining possibility clinging around her shoulders and bathing the rest of the room in dark, as Sally shields this one flickering chance in her hands- and then as quick as it was here, the moment is gone, lost to the return of the stark reality of the boarding house. If Sally has extinguished it or reality has is difficult to know.

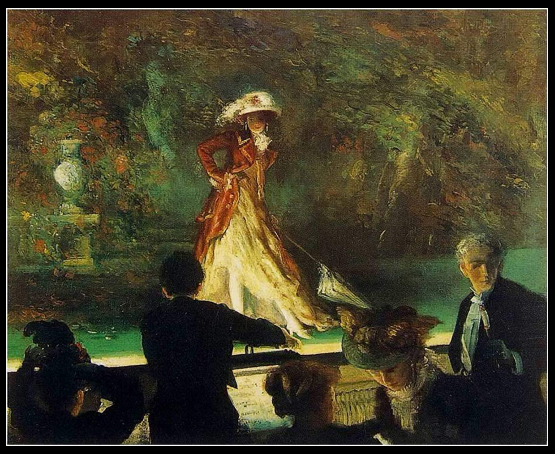
When we find the Emcee onstage with a Gorilla, both in spot lights, the incongruity is stark and comedic, a seeming relief from the brutality of the brick that has just been thrown through Herr Schultz' window. What begins as a love song- casting both members of the couple in a rosy glow, slowly shifts as the song builds, and by the end, it is not so romantic at all- and what was rose has become blood red with the promise of some yet unseen violence- what was a charming fill of the cheeks has become garish and very nearly uncomfortable, and when the Emcee delivers his final condemnation, the stage is flooded to black in an instant, and we are left to linger in it- before Cliff and Sally pick up the thread again- in a world less kind, from now on, than the one we have known to this point.

When we welcome back an old friend to the Kit Kat Klub, any magic in Sally's songs, in her tales, has very nearly been lost- the Klub, Sally, Berlin itself has lost its luster. The light, like the Klub, and most importantly like Sally, can't quite convince itself of its magic any more. The spotlight's cast is a little too harsh- what color it is is not quite right, almost sickly- even the marquee itself cannot quite find its footing. They say in show business to never let them see you sweat- but this time we watch every beat of the labor, and know every strain. Something has been lost- and even the end of the song, what was once the most glittering moment of all, has lost some of its joy.

By the time Cliff has gotten on the train to Paris, any joy in the Cabaret has receded- the colors, once splendid, have now fully turned in to a horror house- sickly and off kilter- and even now, as Cliff spins his dream of the Emcee, and Sally, and the Berlin he knew, we watch the Emcee and the rest of the denizens of Berlin face their fate, with no Cabaret (real or imagined) to save them. There is nothing beautiful left here- Cliff has taken the last memories of it with him. The Emcee reveals his fate, and we are given only a moment to process it- the suffering it promises- the way the footlights, too bright, too terrible, catch the rough wool of the uniform and the deep hollows in his cheeks that have appeared all at once.

There is a flash! Perhaps it was a train, hurtling down the tracks-

and then nothing- just the end of the world.



'Footlight Flirtation'
Everett Shin

Footlight
Wally Ballach