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## Marihuana, Motherhood Madness

*Bret Wood*

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#7771783 in Books 1998-02-19 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.74 x .96 x 5.66l, 1.13 #File Name: 0810833751272 pages | File size: 37.Mb

**Bret Wood : Marihuana, Motherhood Madness** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Marihuana, Motherhood Madness:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. if you searched for this, you know you want it...By dan actonHere are three of Dwain and Hildegard Esper's most infamous exploitation scripts of the 1930s. Not exactly camp, Esper's films are wild, no-holds-barred sleeze that go for the jugular. If you've had the privelege of seeing the truly uncanny

Maniac, you'll probably know just what editor Bret Wood is talking about as he describes the queasiness with which we watch a scene of an amateur cat skinner, knowing that there's no way a film of this budget could have afforded to FAKE such props...Esper's films were not only creepy side-shows--there's an artistry at work here, too. Besides the scripts, Wood has contributed excellent essays and notes on the films, with tantalizing biographical information on, I think it's safe to say, the most bizarre husband and wife team in the movies. I can't wait for an exhaustive biography on the Espers, but in the meantime this is a fascinating appetizer.

Marihuana, Motherhood Madness features the complete shooting scripts of three Depression-era films directed by independent filmmaker Dwain Esper. A topic of growing interest among cinema aficionados and scholars, the lowbrow exploitation genre was the means by which small-scale entrepreneurs could compete with the major studios. Exploitation films addressed such controversial topics as drug use, prostitution, abortion, child marriage, and even bestiality topics the major studios were forbidden to address by the Production Code Administration salaciously exploiting the profitability of such taboo issues, while justifying their prurience by posing as educational tracts. Dwain Esper (1894-1982) was the exploitation industry's most audacious figure. Without any formal training in filmmaking, he operated his own film lab and studio (which he acquired when a debtor defaulted on a loan) and in 1932 began tapping into Depression America's appetites for iniquity. As technically crude as his films are, they possess a savage beauty and are highlighted by moments of sublime tenderness and startling horror, proving that Esper had a natural gift for the medium, even if he was only involved for the money. The screenplays included are: Modern Motherhood (1934), a social commentary on liberal marriages, abortion, and face-lifts; Maniac (1934), a treatise on mental illness delivered in the low-budget horror-movie format; and Marihuana: Weed with Roots in Hell (1936), a "drug scare" film in which a few puffs set an innocent high-school girl on a downward spiral to become a heroin-addicted, drug-pushing kidnapper.

...a useful addition to the very sparse, accurate documentation of the exploitation film racket. (Classic Images) Each script is appended with Wood's extensive annotations, which are an education in themselves...there's also an extensive introduction, which...lends candid insight into Esper's character. (Video Watchdog)...a fascinating social commentary on liberal marriages, teenage drinking and facelifts. Bret Wood understands his subject better than anyone outside the Esper family. (Paul Holbrook The Big Reel)...a wild youth tale. (Movie Collector's World, Feb. 99, #570)...valuable to students of the genre. We wish there were more...an interesting appendix includes correspondence between Mrs. Esper and the New York Censor Board. (Past Times) From the Back Cover Marihuana, Motherhood Madness features the complete shooting scripts of three Depression-era films directed by independent filmmaker Dwain Esper, prominent in the exploitation film industry for his daring, low-budget movies about taboo issues like sex, drugs, and insanity. The screenplays included are Modern Motherhood (1934), a social commentary on liberal marriages, sexually transmitted disease, and abortion; Maniac (1934), a treatise on mental illness delivered in a B-grade horror-movie format; and Marihuana: Weed with Roots in Hell (1936), a "drug scare" film in which a few puffs set an innocent high-school girl on a downward spiral to become a heroin-addicted, drug-pushing kidnapper. About the Author Bret Wood is a freelance writer who has published articles in Film Comment and Filmfax. He currently resides in New York.