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at the end they are faced with the question again and are still debating it when the curtain goes down.

NOW these are troubled waters for any film director to sail upon, but in my opinion Alfred Hitchcock very seldom gets out of his depth. The main complaints of the film's opponents seem to be (a) That Hitchcock and Steinbeck are sympathetic in their treatment of the German; (b) that the Nazis, as symbolized by the U-boat captain, are shown to be far more efficient and far better organised than the democrats, who are literally all at sea until the German takes command, and are almost as helpless after they get rid of him; and (c) that the negro is depicted as servile and that he takes no part in killing the Nazi. There is a good deal that might be said about each of these points, but I think the main answers are clear enough. The U-boat captain is by no stretch of the imagination a "sympathetic" type: he is admittedly not the ordinary nasty Narzee of propaganda and fiction, but he is arrogant, wily, and ruthless. I agree that it may be improbable that any merchant seamen would be quite as ignorant about elementary navigation as they are here presented: at the same time it seems to me quite natural that a U-boat commander would know far more about this sort of thing than they do, and that the qualities of leadership in a crisis would be more highly developed in such a man than in the millionaire who is the self-elected leader of the boat at the start. As for the Negro, I can only say that I found him the most agreeable person in the whole boat.

But, as another critic has pointed out, what is really troubling the people who object to the film is not so much the way in which the case against the Nazis is stated as that they would like to see it over-stated. They don't want intelligent argument; they want exaggeration and super-salesmanship.

WHETHER *Lifeboat* is or is not ideologically sound, it is certainly a remarkable achievement. Those who have themselves been torpedoed and have spent days in an open boat may question its authenticity in some respects, and even those who have not had that experience may wonder, for instance, whether even a Nazi superman could row a boat this size by himself. Yet all such questions of realism, all such technical details, resolve themselves satisfactorily when one regards the film, as I am sure it is meant to be regarded, as an allegory and its characters as symbolic.

The acting all the way is excellent. Three of the cast in particular—Tallulah Bankhead, Walter Slezak and William Bendix—give performances of Academy-award calibre. It is on the technical side, however, that the film's achievement is most remarkable. Hitchcock holds the interest of his audience for nearly two hours with a story which has only one setting (the lifeboat) and only one backcloth (the sea and the horizon). That is something which few "legitimate" plays have ever successfully attempted. *Lifeboat* manages it because Hitchcock, while never obscuring the main theme, gives full value to all the side-issues of humour, heroism, bickering, romance and passion that occur within the narrow limits of the set; because the backcloth is a constantly changing panorama of cloud, mist, storm and calm; and because the usual

Hollywood tendency to produce incredible changes of heart in characters in these circumstances is heroically resisted.

Lifeboat, then, is a thoroughly grown-up picture. And although, as it must, it leaves its particular problem still unanswered, its general implication is clear: that, whether Americans, British, Germans or Czechs, we are all in the same boat when the unknown seas of the world's future have to be faced.



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