


# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## DOUBLE INDEMNITY

(Paramount)

 NOBODY (except perhaps the producers) could be more agreeably surprised than I am that this film ran for an extended season in Wellington, for it is certainly not designed for 13-year-olds, the mental age at which the average Hollywood film is directed. Movie audiences, as well as Hollywood itself, are showing signs of growing up when the one can make and the other can take such a film—and like it.

*Double Indemnity* is adapted from the novel of that name by James M. Cain. Those who have read the original, or Cain's other more famous story, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, will know that Cain does not write stories for children, and they may not be expecting much of the full, rank, meaty flavour of Cain's writing to have been transferred to the screen. It has been, thanks largely to the tough, intelligent direction of Billy Wilder, who treats the account of a sordid crime not as a conventional mystery melodrama with clues and cops scattered all over it, but as a study of the tensions and terrors in the mind of the murderer himself.

Picturegoers may also not be expecting to find Fred MacMurray as a killer, or Barbara Stanwyck as the *femme fatale* whose physical allure is as marked as her scruples are lacking. But they say that every comedian longs to play tragedy and every hero to be a villain. Robert Montgomery tried the experiment in *Night Must Fall*, and MacMurray does it here. He must have been risking his popularity with the fans who have come to accept him as a nice, dependable character, but he establishes himself as a first-class actor. He is particularly good in those scenes which require him simply to keep quiet in the background while other characters, not yet suspecting him, piece together the crime he has committed. He is almost certain that it was a perfect crime, but he cannot be sure. Did he perhaps make a little mistake? Overlook one insignificant detail? In these scenes MacMurray's pent-up quietness is more eloquent than words.

Barbara Stanwyck's reputation does not suffer, either, except in the story, by her portrayal of a woman who is the very reverse of the sympathetic characters she customarily portrays. As Phyllis Dietrichson she is evil personified; carnally corrupt and criminal from the top of her blonde curls to her painted toenails. By comparison, MacMurray even gains some sympathy from the audience; although he plans the murder and carries it out, he is really just the infatuated accomplice, she the guiding spirit.


Almost as striking a departure in characterisation is offered by Edward G. Robinson. Often cast as the hard-boiled criminal, he here appears on the side of the angels; as hard-boiled as ever, but this time devoting his skill and energy to fessicking out the flaws in bogus insurance claims. And what adds to the psychological tension of the picture is the affectionate friendship existing to the last between him and MacMurray. For MacMurray is an insurance salesman in

Robinson's office who has been egged on by Phyllis Dietrichson to trick her husband into signing an insurance policy and then to murder him in such a way that the murder looks like a fall from a train—an obscure type of accident which involves the payment of double indemnity to the widow.

Not nice people, and not exactly a savoury story, but a fascinating and expert piece of film-making.


## LADY IN THE DARK

(Paramount)

 THIS is getting a little out of date by now, but as even critics may be expected to take annual holidays I have few excuses for noticing it so tardily or so briefly. It presents Ginger Rogers as a psychological mess who is reconverted into a normal American young woman (suitable for marrying to Ray Milland) by the application of a little elementary psychiatry. But although the psychiatry itself is elementary, the application isn't: it must have cost Paramount an enormous amount of time, trouble, and technicolour to think up all those dream sequences in which Miss Rogers's subconscious runs riot to music. I have been told that there was a great deal of daring Freudian symbolism in these dream sequences, but there must be something wrong with my Id, because I didn't notice any. Perhaps I was too busy looking at the colour and Miss Rogers. Both are well worth looking at.

## YANKEE DOODLE DANDY

(Warner Bros.)

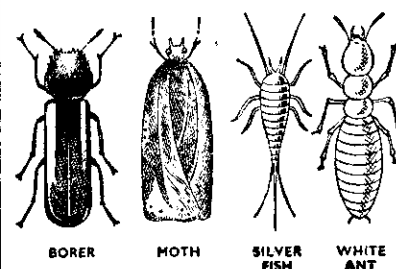
 ANOTHER old-stager which an advertisement informs me was "claimed by the New Zealand critics as the most brilliant performance ever screened in Wellington City." I have no desire to seem cantankerous, but since I was not consulted I must really ask them, in Sam Goldwyn's words, to include me out. *Yankee Doodle Dandy* is an orthoox musical story of the flag-wagging, local-boy-makes-good type which has such a sure-fire appeal, particularly to Americans. It is lavishly and tune-fully produced, with James Cagney giving a sterling performance as George M. Cohan, the composer and producer. But it is not *that* good.

## Christchurch Playwrights

"FOR THIS WE LIVE," a radio serial concerning the exploits of the 2nd N.Z.E.F. in the Grecian-Cretan campaign, and written by Robert Newman, of Christchurch, has been part of 3ZB's programme at 10.30 p.m. on Mondays for some weeks. When it ends early this month, "Candles in the Wind," by Alan de Malmanche, is to take its place. Messrs. Newman and de Malmanche who are 21 years of age, appear regularly on the air as actor-playwrights, finding time between university lectures to indulge their hobbies. They have recently been touring New Zealand with the Canterbury College Drama Society in performances of "Othello" and "Hamlet."



## THE ROGUES' GALLERY

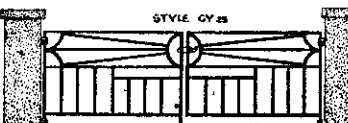


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