

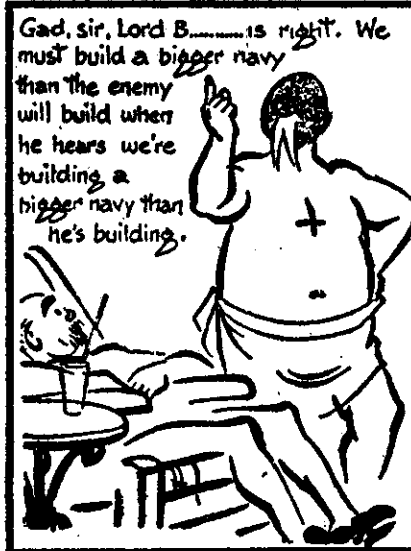
any value this sequence might have had as anti-German, pro-"hard peace" propaganda is largely discounted by the subsequent sympathetic treatment of the German character when he arrives in Britain as a refugee and, in a most moving speech (a tour de force by Walbrook), explains why he has renounced his own country. It is, in fact, typical of the film's lack of clarity that the impression left by the train sequence is so strong that it is some time before one can accept Walbrook's conversion from Nazism as genuine: you keep suspecting that he may, after all, turn out to be a Fifth Columnist. Eventually of course he does persuade you.

Now if the intention of this picture was to show that there are some very nice Germans, and that even a Nazi is capable of seeing the error of his ways—well and good; here at least is a strong witness for the defence. But was this the producers' considered design? I doubt it.

Again, you might argue that what *Colonel Blimp* is advocating is a more ruthless and realistic prosecution of the war; is suggesting the need to adopt some of the enemy's methods in order to beat him (rather curiously it is the German character who acts as chief spokesman in this connection). And you could make out quite a good case along that propagandist line—until you came slap-bang up against the contradiction that this film was, in fact, held up for export from Britain for some time, on the ground that to show an enterprising young officer starting a war six hours before it was officially due to be declared might give the outside world the impression that the British Government countenanced what the Japs did at Pearl Harbour!

Silly maybe; but Gad, sir, we've got to be careful.

THESE are only some of the places in which the film has got its ideological and propagandist wires crossed. Perhaps that fact won't worry you. You may even go so far as to suggest, as one of my friends did, that the muddled thinking in the film is intentional; is in itself only a part of that deliberate satire on the British character of which the whole film consists. But that seems to me altogether too subtle.



LOW'S BLIMP

The screen "Blimp" is very far from the original.

However, even if you are worried for any of the reasons I have mentioned, you will still, I think, be able to enjoy the fine quality of the production, the direction, and the acting of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. Yet you may feel, as I did, that the second part of the title is unduly optimistic. Blimp isn't dead, not in this film he isn't. Gad, sir, we old soldiers never die!

## THE HAIRY APE

(United Artists)



SINCE I have not seen or read Eugene O'Neill's 21-year-old play, *The Hairy Ape*, I cannot be expected to get as excited over deviations from the original as some overseas critics of the film have been. And since most modern picturegoers are probably also in the same state of blissful ignorance, I doubt if they will worry much either. But there are some things in the film they should get excited about: one is the performance of William Bendix, that unbeautiful hunk of a man, as the anthropoid stoker, Yank; and a second is Susan Hayward's portrayal of the heartless Society girl—another of those sultry, amoral dames to whom I have recently devoted some attention in these columns.

Although I have not read the play itself, I have read a good deal about it; enough to be sure that the Ape has had many of the hairs plucked out of his chest by Hollywood censors. Anybody who is expecting *The Hairy Ape* to have been filmed as O'Neill wrote it is forgetting that the Hays Office does not approve of the class war or of gutter dialogue, and that tragic endings are not regarded as being popular with audiences. Still, the film, as a film, is well above the ordinary. Whereas in the play the characters were apparently chiefly important as social symbols, in the film they are much closer to being real human beings; and occasionally—particularly in the case of Paddy, the poetic stoker (Roman Bohnen)—they do seem to be speaking genuine O'Neill dialogue. It is well worth hearing.

But the picture stands or falls by William Bendix's portrayal of Yank. It is his first starring assignment, in the role made famous on the stage by the late Louis Wolheim, whom Bendix fairly closely resembles. To look as dumb and to behave as stupidly as Bendix does requires intelligence of an uncommon sort. In her own impassive way, Susan Hayward is almost as clever in the role of Mildred, that spoilt, utterly selfish heiress, who collects men and tosses them aside as casually as she does her expensive dresses. "You like to tease the animals but never feed them" is the bitter comment of one rejected suitor. With one male animal, however, she goes too far. Slumming in the stokehold on a voyage from Lisbon, she runs into Yank, recoils from him with the cry, "Get away from me, you hairy ape!" Till then his primitive mind has found contentment in the knowledge of his body's great strength and in his proud belief that he is the man who makes the ship go. But the girl's loathing shatters his self-esteem. He cannot rest until he has humiliated her as she has humiliated him.

Bristling with inferiority complexes and Freudian repressions as it is, this is a difficult sort of theme to get on to celluloid. Some of it doesn't stick, but enough does to make *The Hairy Ape* a meaty, adult melodrama.

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