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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

OUR HEARTS WERE YOUNG AND GAY

(Paramount)

WHAT is a "period" picture? Is it different from a "costume" or "historical" picture, and if so, in what way? When does a period in time qualify to become a period in quotation marks? A thesis of no particular value but of some interest might, I feel, be written in trying to answer those questions. My research so far inclines me to the view that by "period" is meant a period not immediately our own; at present the line seems to be drawn by the film industry at about the year 1890, which enables those multitudinous screenplays set in the Naughty Nineties and Edwardian England to fall just outside the "period" class, while those on the other side of the date-line bear what many film men seem to regard as the box-office stigma of antiquity. On the whole the term "costume picture" strikes me as being more appropriate (though unintentionally so), because the players in them often look about as much at home in their costumes as the average adult does at a fancy-dress dance.

WHAT prompts these thoughts is the foreword to *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*, which states: "This is not a 'period' picture—unless you are under 35 years of age." Well, one cannot speak with authority about the way in which callow picturegoers of 33 or 28 or thereabouts are likely to react to this film; but for anybody like myself who is just a little beyond the half-way mark, it should prove a delightful excursion back to the days of one's youth; the days of the flapper, the fox trot, and Rudolph Valentino; the days when the world was just getting its breath back after one war and was not contemplating another. It all seems a very long time ago. Yet these intimations of mortality from recollections of early manhood are not at all disagreeable. On the contrary, the comedy is as joyous as it is sustained.

Trailing clouds of nostalgia, the film recounts the innocent but hilarious adventures and embarrassments of two young American girls on a trip to Europe in the year 1923, primarily in pursuit of a husky college youth, but with the general purpose of meeting "other men, older men, maybe even Frenchmen." It is based on the real-life experiences of Cornelia Otis Skinner (daughter of the famous actor, and now a famous actress in her own right) and her friend Emily Kimbrough, and owes its spontaneous charm as much to this authorship as to the performances of Gail Russell and Diana Lynn. Miss Russell we have already seen as the heroine of *The Uninvited*; if she can retain her freshness and vivacity; if she can continue to combine a pose of sophistication with the air of the *ingenue* she will, I feel sure, achieve a niche for herself in the cinema. I have not noticed Diana Lynn before, though I may have seen her. As Emily Kimbrough, it is she who contrives most of the extraordinary but usually logical situations in which the two innocents abroad find themselves—notably the encounter with the "old geezer" and the night on the bell-tower

of Notre Dame. I like Diana Lynn: she has enormous vitality and a nice sense of timing, and she, too, should go far if Hollywood does not spoil her.

Some of my more serious-minded readers may be amazed to see the Little Man reacting so exuberantly, but his heart also was once young and gay and he likes to be reminded of the fact. There is no "message" in this film; it is not great cinema; but there are times when simple pleasures are hard to beat, and this is one of them.

MURDER, MY SWEET

(RKO-Radio)

FOR some reason, this film has been released in several parts of the world under the name of *Farewell, My Lovely*, the title of the novel by Raymond Chandler on which it is based. It has also apparently been called *Murder, My Sweet* at one time in the U.S. and *Farewell, My Lovely* at another, and for the life of me I can't see any basic distinction to justify the consequent confusion. Under either title, however, the film is a tough and energetic thriller of the *Double Indemnity* school, but with enough of the marks of the old-style gangster melodrama upon it to give it an air of intelligent parody.

I would suggest that you do not cramp your appreciation of the acting, the direction, and the sideplay by making too strenuous an effort to follow the plot. I gave up the attempt myself fairly early in the piece. I think I know who Valma Valento, the missing showgirl, was and why Moose Malloy, the ex-convict with a child's mind and a giant's body, was so keen to find her and so upset when he did; I am fairly clear in my mind about who bumped off the fellow in the car, and why the old millionaire's daughter (Anne Shirley) was so angry with her sexy, blonde step-mother (Claire Trevor). But I am still largely in the dark about that priceless jade necklace; and even though this is a story in which nobody can be expected to behave with restraint, I doubt if there was sufficient logical reason for the unfortunate detective-hero (Dick Powell) to be derided one moment and courted the next (which is a mild way of putting it), to be slapped down, stood up, slugged over the head with a blackjack, smacked over the face with a pistol, pumped full of cocaine and whisky, and to end up half-blinded by gun-scorch but apparently happy and certainly full of spirits. Still, it does not really matter much why these things happen; it is sufficient that they do happen—and that they are enacted with verve and verisimilitude in an atmosphere which continually suggests that although something horribly sinister has just taken place it is nothing to what is coming next.

The director of *Murder, My Sweet*—a gentleman with the engaging name of Dmytryk—carries realism so far that on several occasions he ventures outside the purely physical state into the realm of the sub-conscious, showing us what goes on in the mind of the hero when he passes out under the influence of doping and clubbing. These nightmare sequences, done with distorted camera-angles and double-exposure, recall the famous epileptic scene in *Un Carnet Du Bal* and some of the weird confections

(continued on next page)