

that the duds are not very noticeable. This is the fourth in the series of comedies which have already taken Hope and Crosby to Singapore (1940), Zanzibar (1941), and Morocco (1942), and it is quite the maddest and probably the funniest journey they have made to date. Yet I think they must just about have reached the end of their *Road* shows. These esoteric jokes, these gags which demand specialised knowledge on the part of the audience, are in some ways an unhealthy sign; they mean that the producing studio is feeding on its own fat. But such considerations apart, *The Road to Utopia* is good for a big laugh.

UNCLE HARRY

(Universal)



[T is something of a responsibility to say it, but I would advise you to disregard entirely the notice which comes on the screen at the end of *Uncle Harry*, to this effect: "In order not to spoil the climax for others, you are asked not to reveal the end of this film."

I would go further: I would suggest that you should ascend forthwith to your housetop and there shout out the news that this is a good film spoilt, though not ruined, by a silly device which pretends that the murder committed in it is only a dream. In this way you may safeguard the enjoyment of your friends and neighbours. When one knows what to expect, the deflation isn't quite so bad.

In fact, having been forewarned I enjoyed *Uncle Harry*, a psychological thriller, quite a lot. But I am still marvelling at the wonderful ways of Hollywood; because this "dream" business, tacked on in order to provide a happy ending at all costs, is exactly the same stunt as was used in *A Woman in the Window* just a few months ago (only here it is an even more dismal failure). Still more, however, I marvel at the Hays Office, which will not let a film get away with murder, but lets it get away with incest. The film is pretty discreet about this, of course, but it is the unnatural and thoroughly unhealthy affection of a sister for her brother which motivates this screen version of a stage play by Thomas Job: it leads to a broken romance, vengeance which miscarries when the wrong victim swallows the dog-poison, and a brilliantly sardonic sequence (building up for the big let-down) in which the neurotic sister goes to the gallows for the murder her brother committed—and goes rejoicing fiendishly because of the tortures of conscience she knows he will suffer for the rest of his days.

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AS will be realised, this isn't exactly a "nice" picture, but except for the finale which treats the customers as if they were children, it is an adult one. As the girl whose feelings are more than sisterly, Geraldine Fitzgerald gives an intense yet contained performance which is remarkable less for what it reveals than for the undertones of suggestion which it contains. George Sanders is the gentle, amiable, rather ineffectual brother, bowed down by the task of maintaining a decayed family tradition in a gossipy small American town and

keeping two quarrelsome sisters out of reach of one another and himself; Ella Raines is the girl from New York who breezes into the town, wakes him up, and makes him think feverishly about matrimony; and Moyna MacGill is the well-meaning but empty-headed other sister who approves the marriage but gets the dog-poison by mistake.

Uncle Harry was directed by Robert Siodmak and produced by Joan Harrison, Alfred Hitchcock's one-time protégée. The respect which I felt for Miss Harrison on seeing her previous production, *Phantom Lady*, is increased by her work in this new picture, especially since I have learnt that she gave up her contract with Universal in disgust at the tagged-on "dream" ending.

I LIVE IN GROSVENOR SQUARE

(British Empire Films)



[T was, I suppose, unreasonable, but I was put in rather the wrong mood for seeing this film when, in the tram taking me to the theatre, I glanced up and saw an advertising panel announcing *I Live in Grosvenor Square* as "the Greatest Picture to ever come from Britain."

Well, in these days of splitting the atom I suppose it is a minor thing to split the infinitive, but as a traditionalist I felt a trifle jaundiced.

Having recovered a little, I read on and learnt that this is "Not a War Film . . . Not Propaganda . . . But a Love Story which Bridges the Atlantic . . . and the Pacific."

"Not a War Film." Let's examine that. The statement, as it happens, is roughly correct if you overlook the fact that the story is all about the American invasion of Britain (circa 1943); that everybody in it is either in uniform or engaged in some form of patriotic enterprise; that one of the heroes (there are two) loses his life when a bomber crashes while returning from a raid over Germany; and that the other hero is last seen preparing to drop by parachute in a commando raid. Still, apart from the whole plot and atmosphere being dependent on the fact of war, it isn't a war film.

"Not Propaganda." Oh, come now. that won't do. The whole picture swims in propaganda (and occasionally gets a little out of its depth). It is dedicated to the purpose of fostering the hands-across-the-Atlantic relationship of the English and the Americans (I don't know exactly how the Pacific comes into it, but that may be a legitimate flight of the adman's fancy). There is little doubt that the film achieves this highly commendable purpose, for it treats the behaviour of the Yanks in London not with resignation or condescension but with the utmost cordiality, and at the same time is warmly affectionate towards the foibles of the English, and full of praise for the forbearance with which they suffered the high-spirited strangers in their midst. In fact, Herbert Wilcox is to be congratulated both as a diplomat and as a businessman: he has produced a picture which is certain to make a lot of money as well as a lot of goodwill for Britain in the States (where it is being shown under the title of *A Yank in Lon-*

don). And very often—I was almost going to say "in spite of the propaganda"—there are flashes of shrewd and truthful observation; several scenes, particularly a conversation in a train between a couple of girls who are checking over their loot, will evoke vivid memories of our own American invasion.

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[N some other respects, however, *I Live in Grosvenor Square* is almost as much a parody of English life as *Mrs. Miniver* or *The White Cliffs of Dover*. Says Anna Neagle at one point, "I'm not an hysterical girl in a magazine story." Well, maybe she's not hysterical, but she's certainly in a magazine story. She plays the role of Lady Patricia, the granddaughter of the dear old duke (Robert Morley), and she is a corporal in the Waafs. Lady Patricia is engaged to an officer in the Guards (Rex Harrison), but loses her heart to a waist-gunner from Arizona (Dean Jagger) who is billeted in the ducal mansion. The American is pretty good at winning hearts; he even succeeds in capturing that of the flinty housekeeper, with the result that she is soon darning American socks in secret. The dear old duke, who has white side-whiskers and very liberal ideals, would put no obstacle in the way of an alliance between democratic America and aristocratic England, and the Guards officer, stout fella, is prepared to grin and bear it (he has just been beaten by an Independent candidate in a by-election, so it's doubly tough on him). However, the fortunes of war and the script-writer decree otherwise: the American is killed in a deliberate crash-landing to avoid destroying the ducal village—it's strange that out of all England this spot should be chosen—and is given a movie hero's funeral. Though this device leaves the duke's granddaughter free to marry the Guards officer, and thus preserves the pure British blood-strain, American sentiment is doubtless satisfied by the handsome obsequies accorded the lad from Arizona; but I can't help thinking that Anglo-American relations might have been cemented even more firmly if the script-writer had taken his courage in both hands and killed off the Guardsman instead.

If he had, this would still have been a good box-office film—by which, according to the definition of C. A. Lejeune, is always meant a film that confirms the customers in the tastes they already hold. And it is with this thought that we come to regretfully say good-bye to *Grosvenor Square*.

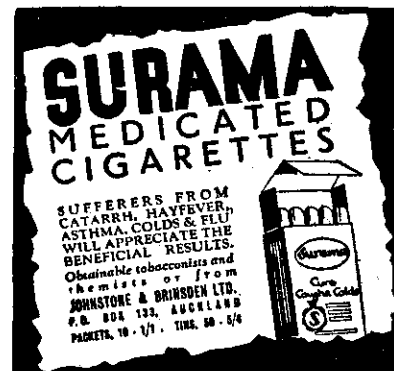


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