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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE SEVENTH VEIL

(Sydney Box—G.B.D.)

THESE days you can't expect to get anywhere as a movie actor or actress unless you're prepared to suffer from some sort of psychosis. The way to the stars leads now through the consulting-room of the mental specialist, and the more strange and complex the inhibition or obsession you are able to turn on the better chance you have of getting there.

However, the psychic disorder which in *The Seventh Veil* brings Ann Todd to our notice as Britain's best-paid and most promising screen actress (she has a seven-year contract to make films for Mr. Rank), is a good deal more convincing than the average, and so is its manner of treatment. She plays Francesca Cunningham, a famous concert pianist—they're popular on the screen too, these days—who, following a motor accident in which she suffered only minor injuries, has tried to commit suicide and then has fallen into a mysterious coma. A psychiatrist (Herbert Lom) gets to work on her with narco-hypnosis and proceeds to strip away the veils of fear and repression which conceal her true desires. "The human mind," he explains, "is like Salome at the beginning of her dance, hidden from the outside world by veils of reserve. With friends the average person may drop two or three veils; with a lover five or even six. What the psychiatrist has to do is to tear away the seventh veil and reveal the mind in all its nakedness."

The revelation which results when, under the hypnotic influence of a drug, Francesca tells the psychiatrist and through him the audience, the full story of her life from the age of 14, is a good deal less startling than this exotic simile might lead one to expect, but it makes for a film which is at least 75 per cent successful as melodrama. The rating as entertainment is even higher when one takes into account the fine music and the fine acting which embellish the film.

IT soon becomes clear that Francesca has two secrets weighing on her soul. One is the morbid fear of injury to her hands, arising in the first place from a caning given her as a schoolgirl on the eve of a music examination, and strongly reinforced years later by the action of her savage-tempered guardian, Nicholas (James Mason), in striking her across the knuckles with his cane. The other is her unconfessed and, almost unrealised, love for her guardian, an eccentric, sardonic, and crippled bachelor who is himself pretty badly in need of psycho-analysis. This secret dread and this secret desire are, of course, intertwined; Nicholas, who is her second cousin, has moulded her with single-minded purpose into a great concert pianist, depriving her of all normal pleasures in the process. When he discovers that she is intending to go away and live with another man he realises his own love for her, and lashes out at her hands with his cane ("if I cannot have you,

you shall not play for anyone else," etc.). The disentangling of these twisted threads, the curing of these assorted neuroses, is a sufficiently complicated business without dragging in at the end two other men—an American band-leader and a portrait-painter—with whom Francesca once believed herself in love, simply in order that she may be able to turn them down finally in favour of Nicholas.

THIS unnecessary prolonging of the plot and the failure to round it off neatly is just about the only major fault one can find with *The Seventh Veil*, which is in other respects a remarkably adult and intelligent piece of work, especially when one considers the melodramatic pitfalls in the theme. With less imagination and restraint on the part of the director, Compton Bennett, this film might have been almost as gross an absurdity as *Leave Her to Heaven*. Ann Todd develops the character of the heroine from adolescence to womanhood with conviction and unusual charm, her style of beauty as well as of acting being a compound of Garbo and Bergman, with a dash of Hepburn; and James Mason makes a highly effective Svengali to her Trilby. But the film does raise an interesting ethical issue. Through seeing *The Seventh Veil*, thousands of people are going to give Ann Todd credit for being a magnificent pianist as well as a fine actress. In the course of the film she supposedly plays excerpts (some of them fairly long), from works by Beethoven, Chopin, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, and others; and she certainly goes very skilfully through the motions of playing. The music, however, was actually provided by Eileen Joyce.

Now, this kind of thing has been happening a lot lately: in *A Song to Remember* Cornel Wilde got the credit for playing as brilliantly as José Iturbi; Harriet Cohen supplied the sound-track for Margaret Lockwood in *Love Story*; and Robert Alda's performance in *Rhapsody in Blue* depends largely on the off-screen music of Oscar Levant. Since Eileen Joyce, like these others, receives no mention in the credit titles of *The Seventh Veil*, I presume it was intended that she should remain anonymous. But I feel it is proper in such cases that the truth should be known, not because Ann Todd is guilty of any attempt to steal the reputation of Eileen Joyce (who obviously agreed to the deception and could have insisted on her part being mentioned), but because it is wrong for any actress to acquire a reputation as a pianist to which she has no title. This is unearned increment if you like!

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS

(Individual Pictures—G.B.D.)

A MORAL issue of a different kind is raised by this film—whether his death as a brave, if not exactly obedient, soldier is sufficient to redeem a young man whose life in peacetime has been that of an unmitigated rotter. I think myself that the