

(continued from previous page)

apparent in many films these days; and I think the conclusion which might be reached in it is that certain aspects of the Fascist outlook which a war has just been fought to eradicate have been seeping unnoticed into the cinema.

This, however, is not the occasion for such an essay. But if it ever gets written I think you are likely to find *The Dark Corner* mentioned along with such other pictures as *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *The Blue Dahlia*, and *Confidential Agent*, as an example of a type of screenplay in which displays of violence, brutality, and moral irresponsibility are exploited far more openly and with much less restraint—and with much less condemnation—than they were before. By contrast, such human virtues as decency, fidelity, gentleness, and mercy seem almost outmoded.

Actually, apart from this flaw, *The Dark Corner* is a workmanlike thriller, directed with a good feeling of suspense and some artistic lighting effects, and with acting which is often a little better than merely competent. It has Mark Stevens as one of those private detectives who are a law more or less unto themselves (though the Law keeps a watchful eye on him, since he is a jail-bird out on probation); Lucille Ball as his attractive and useful secretary; William Bendix as a gunman gorilla who spends most of his time bashing-up or getting bashed-up; and Clifton Webb as a menace from the top-drawer of the social register. Mr. Webb isn't used here to as good advantage as in *Laura*, but he is a stage actor who knows all the tricks of his trade.

To soften slightly what may have seemed like a rather harsh opening to this review, I should add that the police in the film are treated much more sympathetically than usual. They are not, as is so often the case on the screen and in literature, just inverted gangsters themselves.

## SMOKY (20th Century-Fox)

[N reviewing this film I should perhaps begin by eating a few of the words I have just been using about Hollywood's current disregard of the more gentle virtues, for this at least is a thoroughly healthy, if rather naive, entertainment with even less than the customary amount of violence expected in a Western, and with not a neurosis in sight—unless it be a horse-fixation suffered by Fred MacMurray. He is a cow-puncher and horse-breaker on a gorgeously over-coloured ranch owned by Anne Baxter, and although momentarily distracted by tender feelings towards Miss Baxter and rather grimmer ones towards a rascally brother (Bruce Cabot), he really has no eyes or thoughts for anything except Smoky, the beautiful wild stallion. Though a good deal of the footage in this rather over-long new version of Will James's famous novel is devoted to outdoor scenery and the very agreeable singing and guitar-playing of a burly fellow called Burl Ives ("the Singing Troubadour"), the plot itself can easily be reduced to its bare essentials of man meets horse, horse meets man, man loves horse, horse loves man, man loses

horse, man finds horse, man gets girl. But this final outcome is assumed rather than explicit; for the producers, in an evident desire to please all the small boys in the audience, have cut the "love stuff" down to an absolute minimum, even eschewing the fade-out clinch between hero and heroine.

If you liked *Flicka* and *Thunderhead*, you will like this new horse-opera, and may even feel almost as sentimental about his four-footed friend as Fred MacMurray does.

To the Editor—

## Letters About Films

Sir,—According to a recent cable, Miss E. Arnot Robertson, the BBC film critic, has been refused admittance to M-G-M's previews on the grounds that her criticisms are "unnecessarily harmful" and that she is "out of touch with tastes in entertainment." This kind of thing is familiar to all outspoken film critics, including your own "G.M.," and no one will deny any film company's right to take such action, however misguided it may be. But M-G-M have gone further and asked the BBC to restrain Miss Robertson from reviewing their films even at the ordinary public screenings. Fortunately their request has been refused and they have been told plainly that the BBC has full confidence in its critic's integrity and competence.

But it is significant that people in an industry which is quick to pay lip-service to democracy and freedom of speech in its films should attempt to stifle the free expression of opinion.

FILM FAN (Wellington).

Sir,—Each week as I pick up *The Listener* and read G.M.'s movie page, I long to tell him just what I think of his gloomy, miserable reviews.

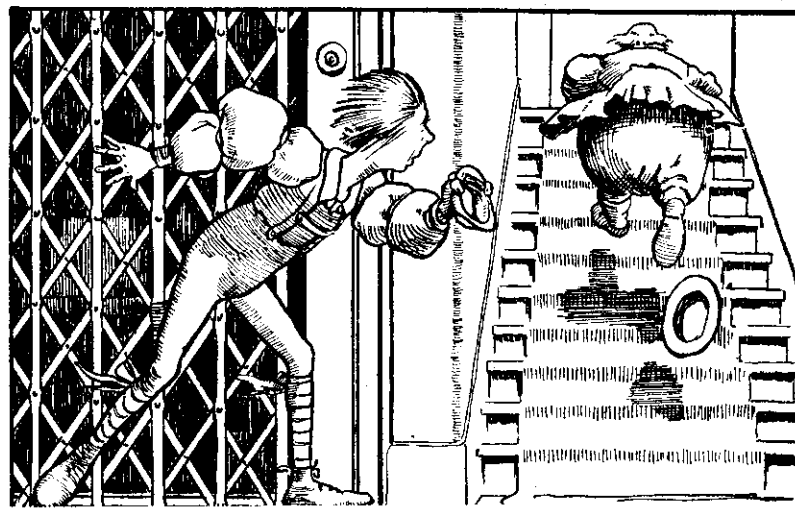
The other week, to cap all, he attacks Van Johnson. No doubt, G.M. belongs to the group of ancient critics who think that guys like Charles Boyer, John Barrymore, John Gilbert, etc., are of the school of perfect actors. But does he ever get a real good laugh or a thrill from their pictures? No siree! There he sits picking out all faults, listening to see if so-and-so pronounces a certain "t" or looking to see if somebody else times a gesture a fraction of a second too soon. If he doesn't! Well—that picture is due for a walk-out.

Anyway, G.M. is only a cut-and-dried pessimist against whose one-man criticisms nine out of ten film-goers protest.

Let the bobby-soxers have Van Johnson! When all is said and done, G.M. is just about half a century too late to be a bobby-soxer, and (presumably) he is of the sex that find it impossible to see anything in "the boy next door." If G.M. didn't have an idol, what a dull, impeccable childhood he must have had!

And if he thinks what he wrote about Van Johnson, what would he think (if he lowered himself far enough) when he saw Frankie Sinatra, the frail, weak-voiced, weak-bodied, big-hearted little guy who still bowls 'em down in rows?

ONE OF THE BOBBY-SOXERS  
(Dunedin).



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"I was chased up to bed with a cane,  
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I prize every minute I gain."

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