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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE RAZOR'S EDGE

(20th Century-Fox)



THE ideas behind Somerset Maugham's new novel may not be particularly profound or original, but they remain important ones—that goodness is still a powerful influence in the world if only because it is likely to prove contagious, and that the road to salvation, though hard, is worth following. Because it at least tries to express these ideas, even because it contains an idea at all, this film deserves a sit-down clap, despite the fact that it is sometimes a little muddled, more often than not pretentious, and certainly over-long. Regarded purely as a technical feat, *The Razor's Edge* resolves itself into almost as great a conflict between good and evil as any portrayed in the story itself: there is some very good and some very bad acting; some highly realistic and convincing settings and some appallingly artificial ones (I am thinking particularly of those devised for the hero's Himalayan retreat); some sequences that are absorbing and moving and a few that are deadly dull and flat-footed. But for those picturegoers who, in the manner of the hero, have "lost confidence in the accepted values" of the cinema, *The Razor's Edge* should, on balance, prove worth walking along to see, though it will probably not restore one's whole faith in either human nature or Hollywood.

CERTAINLY Tyrone Power, returning to the screen after his wartime absence as a Marine, is considerably more mature and at ease than one might have expected, in the role of the young man, Larry Darrell, who is much more troubled than the average person by the familiar problem of what life is all about, and who eventually turns his back on the world, the flesh, and—so far as he can—the devil in his search for a religious faith. This a far from simple and straightforward role to play, and sometimes Power is bogged down in the story's shifting quicksands of philosophical platitudes and romantic cross-purposes: there are moments when the audience feels just as baffled as the hero when he cries out, "It's so hard to explain: and anyway, where is all this going to lead to?"

Where it does actually lead is into the Latin Quarter of Paris and down a French coal-mine, after Darrell has broken with the fleshpots of America and the worldly girl who wants to marry him; thence to India where he acquires spiritual serenity; and thence back to France where the threads of his own and the other characters' lives become most perplexingly entangled again. Now in "the grip of the most powerful emotion known to man—self-sacrifice," Darrell succeeds (a) in resisting the very unspiritual approaches of the heroine, by this time married with two children, (b) in curing her husband, John Payne, of headaches by means of a little yogi trick picked up in India, (c) in enabling Clifton Webb to die snobbishly happy. He fails, however, in (a) rescuing Sophie, an old friend (Anne Baxter) from a sordid death in the backwaters of Marseilles, (b) in convincing himself

or anybody else that he has finally found the answer to the Riddle of the Universe. Yet as he disappears on to a freighter to work his passage back to America, more than two hours after the picture began, one is left with the feeling that Larry Darrell has become an unusually contented young man, and that Tyrone Power, portraying him, has developed into a pretty competent actor, who can in future rely on his ability as much as on his good looks.

The same cannot, unfortunately, be said of Gene Tierney, as Isabel Bradley, the girl who loves the hero without ever (except perhaps at the last) appreciating his unusual qualities. Miss Tierney yearns toothily and emotes freely, but her acting is seldom more than clothes-deep—and in such a very introspective film that is scarcely deep enough. Anne Baxter walks the razor's edge between pathos and bathos with vastly more assurance: her performance contains a note of desperate unhappiness which is mainly convincing. As Somerset Maugham in person, Herbert Marshall drifts through the film with a knowing and rather self-satisfied expression on his face, due no doubt to the circumstance that, as the author of the story, he is fully aware of what is going to happen (including the fact that he has written a best-seller).

THE three top-notch performances are given by players who are not the product of Hollywood: by Fritz Kortner in a terrific little sequence which presents him as an unfrocked priest; by Elsa Lanchester in a comedy cameo as a Scots secretary; and especially by Clifton Webb, the Broadway stage star, in the long and important part of a desiccated dilettante whose most cherished accomplishment is to be disagreeable. Mr. Webb is the kind of actor who can say "What bloody nonsense!" in the first five minutes of his role without causing a hair to be turned either on his own or anybody else's head. For these three performances alone, *The Razor's Edge* should be worth a visit. But it has other virtues as well.

THE DARK MIRROR

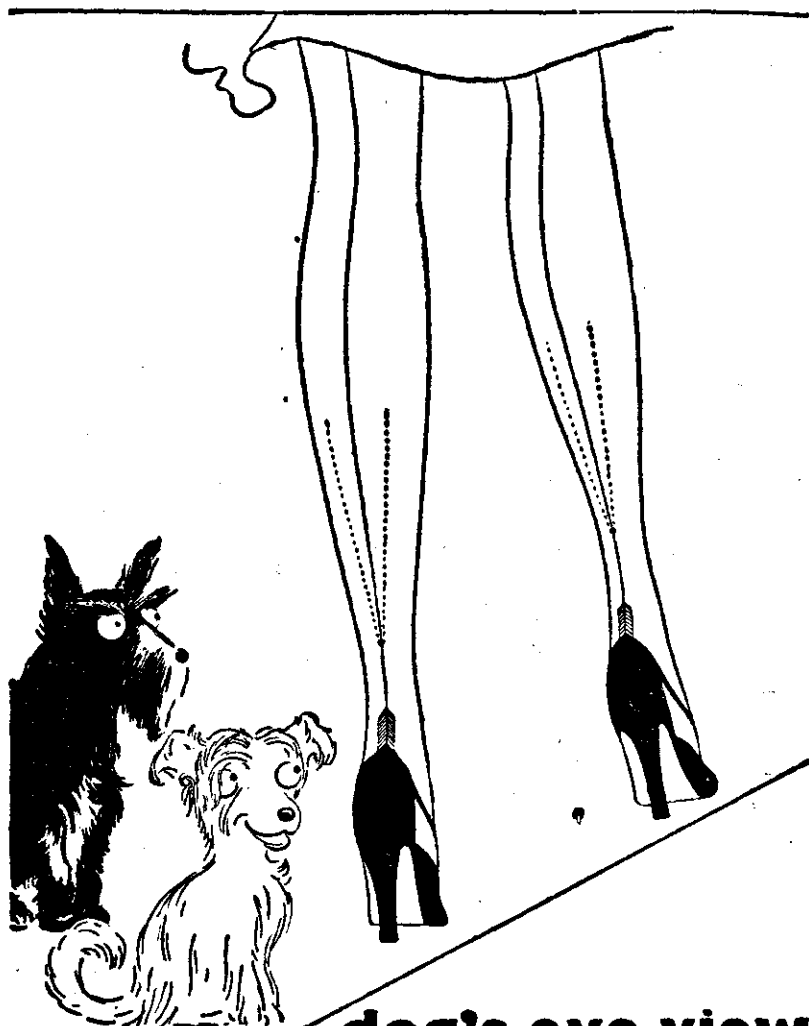
(Universal-International)



ROBERT SIODMAK, who made *Phantom Lady*, *The Suspect*, *The Spiral Staircase*, and *The Killers*, is back on the job again; and again reveals his interest in diseased minds and homicide. Both subjects are by now more than a little frayed at the edges, but if there is one director, other than perhaps Hitchcock, who can put them to entertaining advantage it is Siodmak. In the present instance he has the assistance of three gifted players in Olivia de Havilland, Thomas Mitchell, and Lew Ayres.

There was a time when I regarded Miss de Havilland as being principally a Beautiful Face; and since it was an unusually beautiful one, that was enough. But recent evidence (including the otherwise regrettable *To Each His Own*) suggests that she has developed from an ingenue into an Actress. And

(continued on next page)



dog's eye view

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14