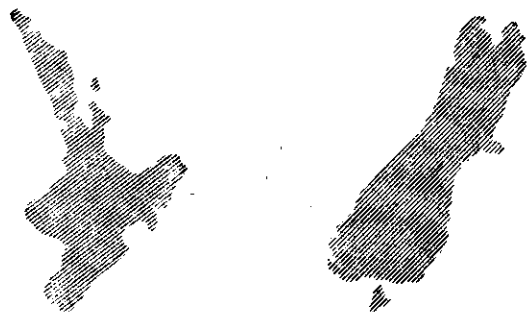


# ELECTRICITY 1947



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Film Reviews by G.M.

## SPEAKING CANDIDLY

### MY DARLING CLEMENTINE

(20th Century-Fox)



THOSE picturegoers who are more interested, and rightly so, in the methods of directors than in the vagaries of stars are pretty well catered for by the new releases of the past week. In *My Darling Clementine* John Ford turns his attention again to the great American outdoors; while *Cloak and Dagger*, and *Notorious* (which I cannot review till next week) present Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock respectively at work in their favourite field of the thriller.

John Ford's *Stage Coach* probably still ranks as the finest Western since the talkies came, but *My Darling Clementine* comes pretty close to it in many ways. Like its almost-classical predecessor, it is an example of what a great director can do with a well-beloved subject, even when the material with which he is dealing is no different in kind from that used in the construction of ten hundred hackneyed horse operas—the lawless border town, the sheriff who avenges his brother and cleans up the bad men, the siren of the saloon who turns up trumps, the pure sweet maid from back East so romantically out of place in this uncouth setting, the cattle rustling, the poker games, the hell-for-leather chases across the desert, the gun duels at sunrise. Under John Ford's affectionate care, all this hoary material becomes fresh, vital, exciting, and pictorially beautiful.

FORD'S outstanding achievement here,

I think, is that he establishes the border town of Tombstone as a real place; not just a collection of shanties run up on a studio lot, but a locality which actually exists and has a character of its own, so that you could find your way around it if you ever stopped there. That this is, in fact, something you couldn't possibly ever do, since the town pictured here is the Tombstone of 1882 and in this form has long since disappeared, merely emphasises how genuine is Ford's feeling for period and place. The same is true of the magnificent surroundings—those sweeping landscapes of mountain, sandhills, cactus and weird rock formations rising from the desert, with clouds massed above—all so familiar to the picturegoer yet seen now, one feels, as if for the first time. Technicolour is not needed to accomplish this: Ford's black-and-white photography has a lifelike quality and a richness of texture beyond anything the colour-process can yet achieve.

A comparable air of verisimilitude surrounds the inhabitants of Tombstone; they are figures partly from history, mostly from history, but with a few exceptions they seem to belong to the place as much as the dining-room of the "Mansion House" belongs, or the bar-room and the barber's shop. Only patient analysis could reveal the means whereby Ford establishes this sense of authenticity of setting and character in the midst of a highly melodramatic plot; but clearly it owes something to his meticulous observation and his loving attention to detail, which makes him pause in the telling of his story for the camera

to examine an item of dress, or to catch and preserve a gesture or the modelling of a face. The feet tapping out a square-dance on a sunny Sunday morning, a shadowy mass revealed by the breaking day as the head and shoulders of a waiting desperado, three small black figures advancing down a road, the flash of guns through swirling dust clouds—these are details that catch the imagination and stay in the memory.

HENRY FONDA, with a heavy black moustache this time and that slow, almost languid, manner of his, plays Wyatt Earp, the semi-legendary marshal of Tombstone—and plays him to perfection. For an outdoor role there is nobody better than Fonda. Victor Mature, who was once tagged as "that beautiful hunk of a man" and gave no indication of being anything else, comes to light with a surprisingly mature and considered performance as the renegade doctor with T.B. seeking forgetfulness through the aid of whisky, a lush dance-hall girl oddly called Chihuahua (Linda Darnell), and spasmodic bouts of violence. The darling Clementine of the title, the good sweet maid from back East, seems mainly an afterthought, introduced to give the film a name and a theme-song; but she is a charming enough afterthought. Around these principals, Director Ford has assembled a cohort of such estimable old-timers as Walter Brennan, Alan Mowbray, and J. Farrell MacDonald—players who not only act but look their parts and assist in no small measure in making this film the honest and unassuming work of art as well as of entertainment that it is.

### CLOAK AND DAGGER

(Warner Bros.)



NO period romance this, as the title might suggest, but another story about the U.S. Office of Strategic Services whose operatives, because of the adventurous nature of their wartime jobs, were known familiarly as the "cloak and dagger boys." The film could be dismissed as a highly-coloured, fast-moving, routine spy melodrama of about the same calibre as Paramount's earlier O.S.S. were it not for two factors which set it above the average. One of these is the direction of Fritz Lang; the other is the acting of Lilli Palmer.

Neither of these distinguishing marks is, however, noticeable until the story is well under way. That opening sequence of the interrupted radio message, with the secret agents shot down by the Gestapo before they can get their information across to the O.S.S., plunges us without palaver into the story, and is certainly the kind of thing one associates with Lang; but then it is also the kind of opening that has frequently been imitated and could have been done by any one of a dozen other directors. It isn't until Gary Cooper, as a mild Mid-western professor suitably fired by the threatened prospect that the Nazis may discover the atomic bomb first, has left his test-tubes and arrived in Europe on his dangerous mission of finding out exactly how much the Nazis do know about nuclear fission—it isn't until he has failed in Switzerland and gone on to Italy, that one really becomes aware of the hand of the old master, Fritz

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