

(continued from previous page)

bring it fully to life is perhaps a little beyond the capacity of Claude Rains. Shaw created the role nearly 50 years ago for Forbes Robertson; and though of course I didn't see that great actor, I think it unlikely that Rains is in quite the same class. His is, however, a very fine performance: provocative, authoritative, and neatly balanced between seriousness and levity. As might be expected, Rains's acting seems to improve as the role develops: his apostrophising of the Sphinx in the early scene is not quite convincing, and the first few encounters with Cleopatra have a touch of farce, even of buffoonery, which is, I believe, outside the author's intention. There is, after all, a strong flavour of pathos, almost of tragedy, in the relationship between a middle-aged man who is intelligent enough to accept the limitations of age, and a young girl who thoughtlessly does not let him forget them. But as the action develops, so does the stars' mastery of their parts. Cleopatra (Vivien Leigh) grows under Caesar's tutelage from a petulant and kittenish child-queen into an imperious and dangerous young woman who has learnt the great secret of leadership ("It is not that I am so clever, but that the others are so stupid.")

In almost all of Cleopatra's changing moods, Vivien Leigh is convincing, besides being beautiful to gaze upon. There is an exotic regality in her bearing in the later sequences which is not entirely the product of mask-like make-up and lavish ornament.









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THE other character-players are nearly all competent and sometimes excellent—particularly Flora Robson as Ftatateeta and Francis L. Sullivan as Pothinus. Even Stewart Granger, whom I have not up till now found much occasion to admire, seems to do all that Shaw expected of him as the handsome pop-injay, Apollodorus the Sicilian. He is the obvious box-office bait in the film, designed to catch the young women of the audience; but the director has kept him in his proper place (just as, apparently, Cleopatra also did.)

But the Egyptian mob and the Roman legions, the temples, the palaces, and the Pharos lighthouse? Does it add much to your enjoyment that you are able to see them on a scale of magnificence which Cecil B. de Mille might envy? There are some beautiful individual scenes, some combinations of colouring which entrance the eye; but not so very many. On the other hand, there is never the blending of dialogue and spectacle that was achieved so admirably in *Henry V*, and in this film the battle scenes are a positive detriment. Ancient Egyptian politics, everyone knows, were murky and confused, and military manoeuvres in any age have never been exactly easy to follow. But *Caesar and Cleopatra* makes them needlessly obscure. Now that we have Agincourt as an example of how imaginatively exciting a battle sequence can be, no director should be content, as Pascal has been here, simply to throw together a few haphazard shots of extras milling and charging about in all directions. Better to leave well alone.

Better, then, for the film not to have been made at all? Well, perhaps, in view of what it cost in time and money. With what they put into this super-colossal production, they could have made three or four good, average-sized British films; and that is no small consideration these days. But it's easy to be wise after the event; and since the film is here you should undoubtedly see it and judge for yourselves.

## Index of Film Gradings January 17—August 29, 1947

 The Body-Snatcher (9.5)	The Bells of St. Mary's (17.1)
 Boomerang (6.6)	The Big Sleep (11.4)
Brief Encounter (7.2)	The Brasher Doubloon (18.7)
My Darling Clementine* (18.4)	Dead Reckoning (4.7)
A Diary for Timothy (28.3)	The Egg and I* (29.8)
Great Expectations (4.7)	The Jolson Story (28.3)
La Kermesse Heroique (30.5)	Margie (14.3)
The Overlanders* (7.2)	The Magnificent Lady (21.3)
The Southerner (21.2)	Men of Two Worlds (13.6)
Stairway to Heaven (25.7)	Of Human Bondage (11.4)
 Beware of Pity (23.5)	Piccadilly Incident (15.8)
 Black Angel (21.3)	Pink String and Sealing Wax (16.5)
Blue Skies (14.2)	A Scandal in Paris (28.2)
The Captive Heart (7.3)	The Secret Heart (11.7)
Cloak and Dagger (18.4)	Sister Kenny (20.6)
The Dark Mirror (3.4)	Song of Scheherazade* (1.8)
The Great Mr. Handel (25.7)	Time Out of Mind (15.8)
I See a Dark Stranger (27.6)	Trois Valses (11.7)
Isle of the Dead (28.2)	Two Years Before the Mast (7.3)
The Killers (14.2)	The Years Between (13.6)
Lady in the Lake (18.7)	 Bedelia (13.6)
The Late George Apley (1.8)	The Beginning or the End? (15.8)
Mildred Pierce (2.5)	Deception (13.6)
A Night in Casablanca (2.5)	The Diary of a Chambermaid (14.3)
Nine Bachelors (29.8)	Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man (9.5)
Notorious (24.4)	Gilda (21.3)
Quiet Week-end (24.4)	Heartbeat (27.6)
The Razor's Edge (3.4)	Holiday in Mexico (24.1)
The Strange Love of Martha Ivers (28.2)	The Magic Bow (29.8)
Rue Madeleine (23.5)	Make Mine Music (6.6)
The Yearling* (29.8)	A Stolen Life (21.2)
 Along Came Jones (8.8)	 Caravan (3.4)
 The Bandit of Sherwood Forest* (24.1)	The Outlaw (8.8)
The Beast with Five Fingers (9.5)	

\*(Films to which the Little Man took the Little Boy)

### NATIONAL FILM UNIT

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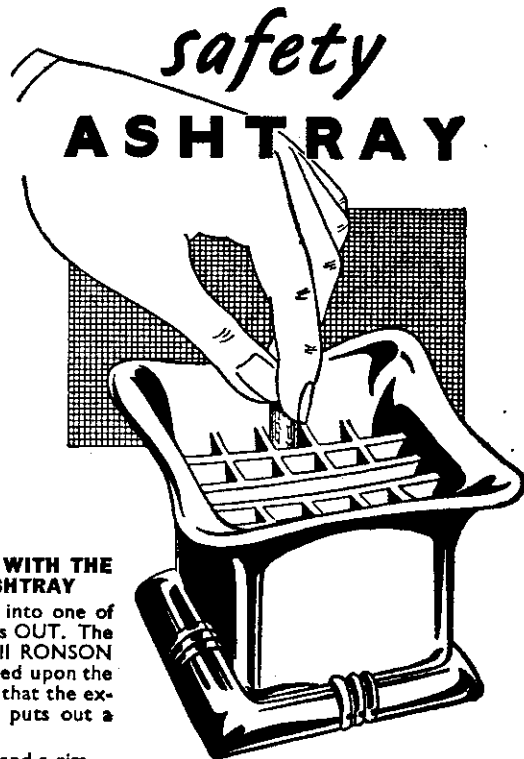
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