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Film Reviews, by Jno.

GONE FOR A SAILOR

THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI
(Columbia)

SOBER reflection will, I think, persuade most filmgoers that *The Lady from Shanghai* is a little too bizarre, too complicated, and too much of a virtuoso performance to be good art (if we agree that the cinema can at times reach that level). But it is also a good deal too tense and too exciting for one to entertain such academic objections other than as after-thoughts; it is, in fact, the best whodunit I have seen since *The Stranger* was around these parts almost a year ago.

To be sure, if one is to abide by the letter of the word, neither film could be classed as a whodunit. In *The Stranger* Mr. Welles himself done it, quite early in the piece, and the excitement arose from speculation on whether he'd manage to do it again before the forces of law and order caught up with him. *The Lady from Shanghai*, on the other hand, saves up its violence for the final scenes, and the problem is not so much whodunit as who is going to. It is perhaps hardly necessary to add that both are vastly superior to the ordinary conventional murder mystery.

In this latest excursion into crime and punishment (as in so much of his screen work) Mr. Welles, who is a monstrously clever fellow as well as one of Hollywood's few saving graces, almost stands on his head to show you how versatile he is. He wrote the screenplay, and it is a minor *tour de force* of dramatic manipulation; he produced and directed it, and has done a first-class job in these departments; he plays the principal role (an Irish seaman with a hobnailed brogue), and plays it well. The photography is unmistakably Wellesian—it fits the mood of the scene, is at times prosaic, at times beautiful, often fantastic in its angles and perspectives, occasionally brutal and shocking. But it never bores.

The predominance of the fantastic both in the story itself and in the photography is, however, the real weakness of the picture. *The Stranger*, despite its bizarre climax, was essentially a simple and straightforward story. *The Lady From Shanghai* is, one feels, made unnecessarily confused and complicated (particularly in the later sequences) merely to provide Mr. Welles with the opportunity to demonstrate the felicity with which he can unravel it. He makes good use of the opportunity, and the climax of the action, in which the two principal villains (the cast is predominantly villainous) shoot it out with one another in the mirror maze of a deserted amusement park, sticks in the memory for its crazy horror, if for nothing else.

What I would prefer to remember the film for, however, is the gang of curious characters with whom Mr. Welles has this time surrounded himself. Everett Sloane, as a criminal lawyer (in both senses), Glenn Anders as his rascally partner, and Ted de Corsia as the lawyer's butler-cum-private detective are all outstandingly good, even when measured against Welles himself, and of these three Anders was the one who intrigued me most. He has a

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "The Lady from Shanghai."
MAINLY FAIR: "Green Grass of Wyoming."

pudgy, porous face, furnished with a pair of the most sinister and shifty pig-eyes I have ever looked into, and since he figures frequently in big close-ups (there are rather more than the normal quota of such shots in this film) you get the full impact of these evil but fascinating features at point-blank range. Add a gruesome snigger and the result is an authentic chill. I hope I see more of Mr. Anders.

Though the enthusiasm of Mr. Welles and the strength of the other players did occasionally strike an answering spark from Rita Hayworth, her performance as the lawyer's money-hungry wife gave me no cause to revise an earlier opinion that her proper function is decorative rather than histrionic.

THE GREEN GRASS OF WYOMING

(20th Century-Fox)

LIKE the blue grass of Kentucky, the green grass of Wyoming breeds beautiful horses, and if you enjoy the sight of them galloping freely over tough up-land pasture, with a backdrop of craggy mountains behind them—all in glorious technicolour—then this is the show for you. It is almost exclusively a horse show. There are humans in it, among them Charles Coburn as a sadly sodden trainer of trotters, Peggy Cummins (his grand-daughter), and Robert Arthur who is innocuous and rather insipid. But the real stars of the show are the horses—the white stallion Thunderhead (son of Flicka), and the glossy members of his harem, headed by a dainty little mare called Crown Jewel.

Thunderhead, who is a half-wild range stallion, has built up his harem by serenading its individual members and then eloping with them from the home-paddocks of their yahoo owners, and when the story opens there is considerable heart-burning in the ranch-houses. When Crown Jewel kicks over the traces, a punitive expedition is organised to rescue the errant blood-stock and restore them to the freedom of the training-track, but once the horses were brought down off the range, and Thunderhead tricked into returning to civilisation, I lost interest in the film. There was subsequently a good deal of contrived excitement in the running of several trotting heats (to enable Charles Coburn to Fight the Drink, and redeem himself in the eyes of his grand-daughter and the trotting fraternity), but I thought them pretty flat races after Thunderhead's ballet-dancing courtship and the breathless flight through the hills. I was left, too, with an uneasy feeling that Swift was right, and that the horse was the nobler animal.

"DRILLING for Oil" in the Taranaki district, an item in the National Film Unit's Weekly Review No. 370, which will be released on October 8, tells the story of an enterprising man who drills for oil, refines it, supplies the district with a good grade of petrol and markets quite a quantity of oil.