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Film Reviews, by P.J.W.

The Theological Mood

FIÈVRES

(Exclusive Films)

THIS is in the main a trifling piece of confectionery about a tenor with "sex-appeal" who gets badly mauled in his feminine encounters and eventually renounces the world to enter a monastery. It was made in France during the Occupation, but anyone expecting another *Enfants du Paradis* will be sadly disappointed. The story is a superficial bit of escapism, and the technique a curious mixture of imitation Hollywood and the genuine French article.

Yet in spite of these limitations *Fièvres* (anglice "Sanctuary") does amount to something out of the usual run of pictures, partly because it creates, however sketchily, the impression of a way of life as different from ours as chalk from cheese. There is one character—Tardival, the singer's manager—a witty, long-nosed, sophisticated little *comique* who is as typically French as the white cap and striped jersey he wears elegantly at times. To see him in action and hear him talk is to feel the very breath of France, and he contrasts strikingly with the hero, Tino Rossi, who sings beautifully but acts with a kind of cold cardboard efficiency.

Admittedly the plot doesn't give Rossi much scope. He appears first as happily married, successful, but inexorably pursued by another woman, a kind of female vampire who is not only young and beautiful, but fabulously rich with the wealth left her by five previous husbands. When she buys up the gramophone company where he makes his records he decides to become her lover, excusing himself with the quip that after seven years of marriage one needs a change. Through this liaison, however, he inadvertently causes his wife's death (she was tubercular) and in grief he gives up his career and disappears. He joins forces with a poor fisherman on the coast, but inevitably his new happiness is ruined by a second *femme fatale*. When he almost kills his fisherman friend in a quarrel over her, he decides to enter the monastery.

Although all this is presented rather crudely, *Fièvres* creates a definite mood in the audience. At the risk of reading too much into what is after all a second-rate film, it seems unintentionally to underline something very real that happened at that time, for if *Les Enfants du Paradis* was primarily a drama of frustration, *Fièvres* (literally "Passions") deals with passion not only frustrated but sublimated into the religious impulse. Perhaps it is just escapism with a difference, but it is interesting that the French are capable of fusing a theological mood with this tinsel tragedy about the disadvantage of having too much sex-appeal. It is something difficult for a race brought up in a tradition of English puritanism to understand. The dominance of the religious mood is assured by making the film actually open and close in the monastery itself, with the story told, by an ascetic-looking monk

BAROMETER

MAINLY FAIR: "*Fièvres*" ("Sanctuary").
FAIR: "*June Bride*."

to a later transgressor, as a kind of interpolation while Brother Rossi sings ecstatically at the organ.

JUNE BRIDE

(Warner Bros.)

THERE is an almost nonchalant skill about the way Robert Montgomery keeps you laughing in this picture as he plays the part of a worldly, wolfish, ex-foreign correspondent who gets a job on a women's magazine edited by his former sweetheart, Bette Davis. The job is to help cover a country wedding that is to be dressed up and photographed as a typical extract from American "Home Life" (the magazine's name). His complete poise, and the impish way in which he pokes fun at an affair that he regards as unreal and altogether phoney, help to make some thoroughly satisfying entertainment out of a well-worn theme.

The idea is similar to that of *Lady in the Dark*, where Ginger Rogers was the career-woman editor of a fashion magazine who had to be psycho-analysed into realising her secret love for one of the staff, in that case Ray Milland. But there is no psycho-analysis in *June Bride*, for the plot resolves itself into a simple conflict in which the male ego endeavours to assert its rightful dominance over the female. Robert Montgomery is, as he says, allergic to career women ("my mother used to nurse me by appointment") and he does everything he can to let his editor know it. He upsets the wedding by causing the bride-to-be to elope with a former boyfriend, and then saves it by marrying the groom off to the bride-to-be's younger sister. Thus the magazine gets its story and the reporter, having proved his superiority, gets his girl.

Bette Davis is unusually good in her role and the only criticism of the film is the lapse from taste out of which much of the humour is created. In order to make the magazine's wedding story fit in with the pre-conceived notions of the bulk of its readers, Miss Davis and her staff proceed to completely redecorate the country house in which it is to take place (and the family) so as to make them look "modern." Mother is massaged down to conform with dress-pattern standards, the wallpaper is disintegrated over, mantelpieces and ornamental scroll-work are ripped out, sofas are sawn in two, and so on. It is a travesty of good manners and a snobbish slight to country people that Hollywood seems to have been too thick-headed to perceive.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

IN a comprehensive study of the hundreds of disabled servicemen who have been successfully rehabilitated in the past three years, *Disabled Servicemen*, the National Film Unit Weekly Review which will be released on June 17, shows how the Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League has, through its seven training centres throughout the Dominion, trained men in new jobs or helped them to re-adjust themselves to their old ones. By studying each man's disability, background, inclinations, and needs, the League has helped him to find a place in our community, and happiness in doing interesting work.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JUNE 17