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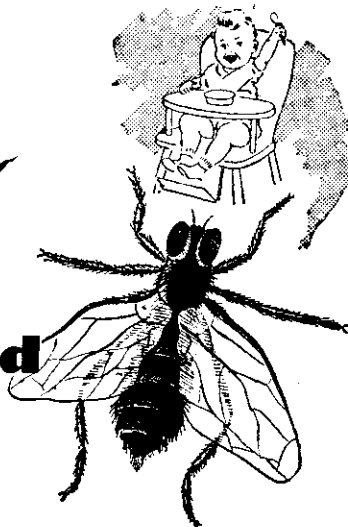
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Film Reviews, by Jno.

Comedy a Posteriori

THE BEAUTIFUL BLONDE FROM BASHFUL BEND

(20th Century-Fox)

WHY it should be funnier for a stage or screen comedian to sit on his hat than to stand on it is a problem which I have never seen explained to my entire satisfaction, though I have heard it discussed with appropriate solemnity by several near-psychologists of my acquaintance. Why it should be even funnier to see someone shot in the stern is perhaps capable of explanation in simpler terms, but most of us would prefer, I imagine, to forgo explanations which might only interfere with our enjoyment of these primitive emotions.

I say so much by way of introduction to *The Beautiful Blonde From Bashful Bend*, because I feel it is a circumstance not unworthy of record that in this production, for once the emphasis is less on Miss Betty Grable and her legs than on another member of the cast, and a different (if more or less contiguous) portion of the human anatomy.

For this unorthodox manipulation of raw material, we are indebted to Preston Sturges who not only wrote the screenplay, but also produced and directed the picture. Sturges, who generally combines these three functions, has other characteristics which further set him apart from the general run of Hollywood producers, and which rather predispose one in his favour. He refuses to toe what might be called the Hollywood party-line (generally the line of least resistance), he monkeys about with *The Formula*, fits stars to his stories instead of vice versa, and in general is about as non-conformist as it is possible to be in Hollywood, and still survive.

Against him it may be said, in the present instance at least, that once he has turned everyone and everything upside-down he is occasionally uncertain what to do next. Miss Grable inadvertently shoots the Hon. Alfalfa J. O'Toole (a puerile judge on a Wild West circuit) in the crupper and all that one can be reasonably sure about is that the same thing is going to happen again before the final fadeout. And just to be different, Sturges makes it happen twice—which is rather rough on the judge. The film is, in fact, a wild farrago of nonsense and seems (like one of Thurber's drawings) to have reached completion by some other process than the common one of intent. As you might expect, it is uneven. More than once Sturges tries too hard or stands on his head too long, but the film contains one or two scenes as funny as anything in, say, *Walter Mitty*. Hugh Herbert, as a myopic bush-surgeon attempting to extract the first bullet, figures in one of these, and in another Betty Grable and Rudy Vallee, soulfully harmonising *In the Gloaming*, really bring the house down.

For the Gable fan *pur sang*, I should add that the star's manifold attractions are not left unexploited. There is, of course, not a bashful bend in her entire collection and Sturges (who has apparently an artist's eye for balance and symmetry in its proper place) has even added a bustle.

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend."

FAIR: "Edward, My Son."

DULL: "Daybreak."

EDWARD, MY SON

(M.G.M.)

I WAS a good deal more impressed by the supporting cast of *Edward, My Son* than by the two principals, Spencer Tracy and Deborah Kerr. Tracy, I will say, worked harder and was much more convincing than he was in the last two films I saw him in—*Cass Timberlane* and *The World and His Wife*. But he is not the type to play the ruthless and amoral Lord Boulton. Where a suave urbanity would be in order he is cosily familiar—geniality oozes from every pore; and when he is being ruthless one senses that a mask is being placed in position instead of being dropped. Nor did Deborah Kerr seem altogether comfortable either. Her voice is always good, as if she constantly listened to it herself, and in the earlier and middle reaches of the film her acting was adequate if not always inspired. But as the aging and despondent Lady Boulton she was too maudlin for my taste and the make-up man seemed to have gone to work a little too enthusiastically. Neither she nor Tracy produced in me the authentic shudder which the story should have evoked. And I must also register a mild protest at the dramatic dishonesty of the prologue and epilogue, in which Boulton addresses the theatre audience directly. Good drama has no need of an interlocutor, and certainly should not depend on one for dramatic effect.

Among the smaller people of the cast—the secondary players and the walk-on parts—the drama is good. As Boulton's secretary and later his mistress, Leueen MacGrath stands out sharply, and Mervyn Johns gives a neat performance as the timorous swindler who eventually commits suicide. In the part of a private detective, Ernest Jay introduces a piece of short-lived comic relief which came most effectively in a rather overheated sequence and one or two other even more abbreviated character-parts were equally good. All of these players helped substantially to atone for unevenness on the higher levels and the result was a film which, if on the whole undistinguished, was still a worthy effort.

DAYBREAK

(Rank-Sydney Box)

I HAVE occasionally wondered what ultimate fatuity a film-director might be led into through preoccupation with the flashback technique—and now I think I know. This sordid tale concerns a hangman (Eric Portman) who contrives the condemnation of his wife's lover on a charge of murder, so that he shall have the pleasure of hanging him. But instead of beginning at the beginning, one gets the climax in the first scene and the rest is recapitulation—if one can use the word in that context. Most of the action takes place on a barge and what Ann Todd is doing in that galley, goodness alone knows.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 18, 1949.