


# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## TEXAS


(Columbia)

 If you haven't any special taste for Western melodrama I would not make much effort to persuade you to go out of your way to see this show, as I would for instance with *Stage Coach* or *Destry Rides Again*; but if you just want a good, routine tale of wild and woolly adventures in the old West, with an abundance of gunplay and hard riding, then I should say that you won't go far wrong with *Texas*. And in spite of the foregoing, you will in fact find that the film has moments when new ingredients are added to the old formula of the two friends (William Holden and Glenn Ford) who take the same trail out West away from the chaos of the Civil War but whose tracks diverge when they get there, one keeping to the straight and narrow path, with hard work and disappointment on the way but marriage to a rancher's daughter (Claire Trevor) at the end of it, the other following the easy, crooked path of cattle-rustling, with a bullet as his final reward.

Strictly speaking, these extra ingredients are not new. George Marshall, the director, has been adding them to nearly every Western on which he has worked during his 30 years in Hollywood. They were specially noticeable in his *Destry Rides Again*, and although *Texas* hardly ever comes within sight of that fine effort, it has the same humorous approach to stock scenes (for example, the prize fight at the beginning), the same colourfully comic character-drawing (the enthusiastic dentist who turns out to be the Brains behind the Bad Boys), the same full-blooded treatment of a melodramatic situation, whether it is a wholesale shooting match or merely a matter of two friends being in love with the same girl. So, although *Texas* is just a collection of Western clichés so far as its story goes, it is, thanks to its direction, rather more than just another Western.

## YOU BELONG TO ME

(Columbia)

 THIS unenlightening title conceals the story of what happens when "a mator woman with the coldly clinical mind of a doctor" marries a very rich and idle young man with certain tendencies which are appropriately described as those of "a one-man Gestapo." In other words, it is again the story of the conscientious woman doctor and the husband who is jealous of her profession (and more particularly of her patients), and if I hadn't seen it enacted just about a month ago by Margaret Sullavan and Charles Boyer in *Appointment for Love* I should probably have been more impressed than I was when I encountered this Barbara Stanwyck-Henry Fonda version.


I shall not discuss the respective merits of the two starring combinations, except to say that I like them both. The Stanwyck-Fonda team carries on in

the tradition, but without quite the gusto, of *The Lady Eve*, with Miss Stanwyck making the pace and Mr. Fonda dancing attendance with a long-suffering, sickly grin on his face when he isn't scowling with jealousy. Miss Stanwyck, as his medico-wife, is certainly attractive enough, and some of her patients are young and male enough, to warrant a certain amount of uneasiness from a uxorious husband, but Henry Fonda makes Othello look like a tyro. Though there's no doubt that Mr. Fonda must have considerable talent as an actor to be able to make such a consummate ass of himself, I suspect that this sort of role makes him just about as unpopular with the women in the audience as Charles Boyer's boudoir presence does with the men.

From my mention of Othello don't run away with the idea that *You Belong To Me* is a tragedy, which ends with the innocent wife being strangled with her own stethoscope by her distraught husband. It's a comedy, and it ends with the husband deciding that what he really needs is some work to keep his mind off his wife's patients—so he buys a hospital for them to run together. It would be a better comedy if Henry Fonda's fits of jealousy were reduced in number, and if they cut out a few of those uncomfortable early morning breakfasts and farewells. After all, the majority of picturegoers aren't so dumb that they have to be shown a thing about half-a-dozen times before they can grasp the general idea. However, I have a feeling that Columbia may come to the same conclusion before the film is publicly released and do a bit of surgery on their own account. If the operation were successful the film's grading might be improved from C to B.

## JOAN OF PARIS

(RKO Radio)

 WHAT I liked most about this film (how easy it is to say "liked" in that sense about something you actually abhor) was the presentation of the Gestapo in occupied Paris. It afforded an interesting contrast with the way the Nazi bloodhounds were depicted in *Pimpnel Smith*. In both cases there was an obvious element of exaggeration, but whereas in *Pimpnel Smith* this amounted to burlesque, in *Joan of Paris* the sinister menace of the Gestapo is the most real thing in what is otherwise a fairly conventional romantic melodrama.

It has to be remembered, of course, that *Pimpnel Smith* was an avowed fantasy, while *Joan of Paris* intends itself to be taken very seriously. But the means employed are not quite adequate to the intention: much of the dialogue is of the stilted "We-love-each-other—Nothing-else-matters" school, and despite the topicality of the setting, some of the incidents and characters lack conviction. However, perhaps that is due less to faulty direction and acting than to the fact that so much current history is stranger, and certainly more horrible, than fiction. At any rate, the film is realistic enough to give the impression

that Paris to-day is not a healthy place for Allied aviators who have been shot down and who are trying to evade the Germans and get back to England, nor for the French men and women who are helping them to do it; though at the same time I didn't get the impression from this film anyway that the average Parisian who isn't looking for trouble is actually groaning under the heel of his conqueror. He still sits drinking on his beloved boulevards, and the curfew doesn't appear to worry him much. But possibly the explanation here is that the film was made before the reprisal shootings started in earnest.

Curiously enough, the most exaggerated character of the story is also the most convincingly sinister. This is "the human postage stamp," a squat little actor named Alexander Granach who speaks not one word but who, as a Gestapo agent, patiently and tirelessly sticks to the hero, a Free French airman, through foot after foot of the film and street after street of Paris. Sometimes his ability to get so quickly from one place to another could only be explained by supernatural powers (and I should hate to have to attribute those to the Nazis), but the squeak of his superhuman boots heralding his approach comes to have a horribly real meaning. Laird Cregar is colourfully unpleasant as the Chief of the Gestapo; Thomas Mitchell is heroic as a patriotic priest; and the French actress Michele Morgan and the Austrian actor Paul Henreid make an attractive enough pair of lovers—but the little man's boots walk off with the picture.

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