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Film Reviews by G.M.

SHE WAS THEIR STAR—AND THEY DONE HER WRONG

TWO-FACED WOMAN

(M.G.M.)

ONLY a strong sense of duty and the fact that he is an unquenchable optimist prevented our little friend who is slumped in his seat on the left, from doing a walk-out, but ollers in the audience were neither so scrupulous nor so long-suffering. Now. that is rather an appalling thing to have to write about a Garbo film, and I am profoundly sorry to have to write it, not so much for the sake of Messrs. M.G. and M., who made the picture and who therefore deserve all that is coming to them, but for the sake of Greta Garbo who was, I think, misled into starring in it. After all, Garbo films are so few and far between that each one is a cinema event and we are entitled

to expect something rather special from

Yet there is nothing special about Two-Faced Woman except its incredible futility and shallowness. It is probable that there have been worse films. but there haven't been worse Garbo filmsand that is the only relevant standard of comparison so far as a critic is concerned. What led the producers to waste one of the screen's finest actresses in this manner I can hardly imagine (or shall I say that I prefer not to imagine it?), Ninotchka was enough. It showed us that a consummate tragedienne could turn easily and gracefully to comedy, though it did nothing to shake my personal opinion that she is still at her best in tragedy. But Ninotchka was worth making: there was enough in the story for the actress to bite on, and however wrong-headed it may now seem to make fun of the Russians, the idea was at least new and provocative then on the screen.

HOWEVER, Hollywood producers can seldom let well alone. From comedy they have descended to slapstick, and

dragged Garbo with them. Two-Faced Woman has no ideas that were not old nearly 20 years ago when Constance Talmadge made a silent version of the same story called Her Sister from Paris. There is just one sequence with a sparkle of originality -- and that is where Garbo, as an open-air girl who doesn't dance, finds herself in a ballroom and inadvertently invents a variation of the rhumba by getting her foot caught in the hem of her dress. Otherwise the film is just a frothy, loquacious, and sexy farce about a deserted wife (she's a ski-ing instructress at a winter sports resort) who goes to New York and poses as her imaginary twin sister, a glamorous adventuress from the Continent with the kind of morals usually associated with the monkey-house at the zoo (which I often think is rather hard on the monkeys). Then she sets out to seduce her straying husband in order to teach him a lesson. Nor does she find it difficult, for the husband (Melvyn Douglas) is, speaking candidly, rather a despicable type—though in an attempt to wash the nasty taste out of one's mouth the producers have inserted a sequence to indicate that the husband knows almost from the start of the masquerade that his supposed sisterin-law is really his wife. As a mouthwash this is mere eye-wash.

IF I describe Two-Faced Woman as shocking, it is not for quite the same reason as the Legion of Decency, which advised Catholics in the U.S.A. that it would be a sin to see it. The film actually has a kind of leering, sniggering suggestiveness which several obvious cuts by the censor emphasise rather than conceal; but a film like The Guardsman. for instance, used much the same theme a: I was just as daring, and yet was brilliant adult entertainment. No, if I describe Two-Faced Woman as shocking it is not so much out of a concern for your morals (which are really not my province), but because the film is artistically in such poor taste. It is shocking in my view because it perverts the talents of one of the screen's few really great indigenous artists. To see the great Garbo being made to cut these fatuous capers had much the same embarrassing effect on me as when they held up Rudolf Valentino (who was also an artist in his day) to deliberate ridicule by reviving one of his silent films a few years ago. Valentino was dead and couldn't protect himself; and I'm not so sure that in this case Garbo could either. I have said that I think she was misled into starring in the film, because all the evidence points to the fact that, like some other great artists, she genuinely is a retiring, unworldly person who is largely content to let her studio find the right stories for her. It is therefore doubly unfortunate-I won't say more - that this, her last picture under her present contract with M.G.M.. should be such a deplorably stupid one.

Not, of course, as Pete Smith puts it in a short on the same programme, that there's anything wrong with Two-Faced Woman that a miracle couldn't put right!

SUNDOWN

Wanger—United Artists)

SUNDOWN is billed as The Adventure Picture That Has Everything, and I'm inclined to think it has, in fact, too much of everything. But if you like your

film fare strong and your local colour put on with a palette knife, you'll probably enjoy Sundown. And isn't it a suitable title for an Epic of the Empire on Which the Sun Seldom Sets? Actually it has to set sometimes, because quite a lot of action, including the dénouement, takes place at night.

But to get back to what the film's got.

- 1. A number of shots of herds of gnus ("no gnus is good gnus" as the natives quaintly put it, and "here is the gnus and this is Mumbo-Jumbo shooting it"), lions, giraffes, rhinoceri, etc. scampering over the plains of Nigeria much as they scampered over them in Sanders of the River, and we suspect they're the same rhinoceri, giraffes, etc., and the same plains.
- 2. Little Miss Zia ("Too alluring to be Trusted, Too Dangerous to Love"), in other words Gene Tierney, who trips round the desert in the vicinity of the Outpost of Empire, faintly Arabesque in flowing lengths of obviously unrationed material. This may be due to the fact that she runs her own chain of stores from Cairo to Zanzibar. She's extremely beautiful, too beautiful not to be a beautiful spy, and reputedly halfcaste (and less than quarter-chaste). However she turns out later to be 100% Pure White and half the romantic complications are thereby removed.
- 3. The White Man's Burden, ably borne by native tomtoms (there's a lot of incidental and often accidental music) and by George Sanders (not "of the River"), Bruce Cabot, and two others, who are all definitely White Men, and addicted to standing bare-headed and bare-kneed at Sundown on the veranda of their Empire-Outpost bungalow and looking calmly and courageously into the future. After Sundown they relax somewhat and even give little supper parties, or have fun dressing up as camel drivers and setting fire to things.
- 4. A Daring Plot to smuggle arms to the Shenzi, fostered by a Fifth Columnist of the lowest calibre. Actually it's rather difficult at first to decide which is the Fifth Columnist, but fairly soon you recognise the White Men because of their habit of standing on the veranda at Sundown, etc., and then you just count up, and you get the Fifth.

5. A Message.

6 A completely superfluous final scene in the ruins of St. Giles, in London, with Sir Cedric Hardwicke preaching an impressive sermon without the aid of native tomtoms, etc. And in the second row from the front are Empire-Builder Bruce Cabot, and the alluring Miss Zia, now Mrs. Bruce Cabot and attired in only four coupons' worth of material in the shape of a snappy suit. But what are they doing there, I asked myself. By this time they should be at least half-way back to the Farthest Outpost, just in case any more Fifth Columnists have taken advantage of their absence to start unbuilding the Empire

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