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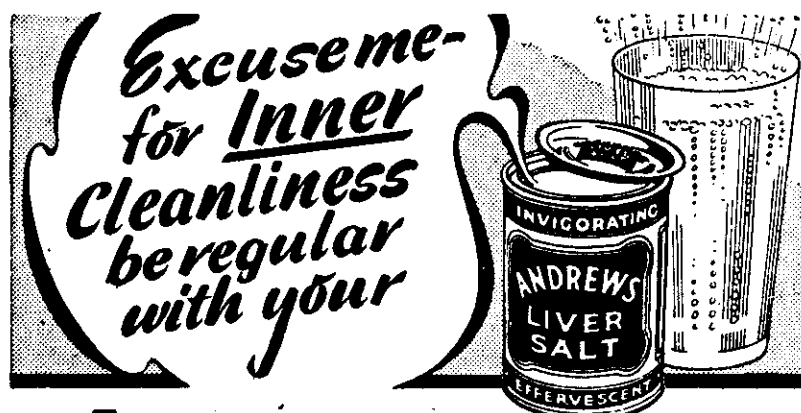
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Film Reviews by G.M.

HAMLET IN OCCUPIED EUROPE

THIS LAND IS MINE

(RKO-Radio)



TWO new films this week bring the total of cinema stories about Occupied Europe well above the 20 mark. *This Land is Mine* is

perhaps the most ambitious of them all to date, and in some ways, it is one of the best. In other ways, it is one of the worst.

With France as its obvious setting, this film goes in not so much for physical violence and broken heads as for psychological turmoil and split personalities. What we get here is chiefly a study (coloured, perhaps, by some wishful thinking) of what goes on in the minds of people in occupied countries. There is one bombing raid from "our friends in the sky" (generously so described by a French schoolteacher), and there are a few acts of sabotage, but this violence is primarily interesting for its effect on the complex motives and reactions of the conquered townsfolk and the conquering Germans. Under the terror of the bombs, Albert Lory, the schoolmaster (Charles Laughton), is revealed as a blubbing coward as well as a mother's darling, but individual acts of resistance by his fellow-citizens, and reprisals by the Nazis against people he loves or admires, gradually turn him, almost against his will, into a hero.

* * *

I AM not being original if I liken Laughton's role to that of Hamlet: some other critic spotted the resemblance first. And there is a similar interplay of conflicting emotions and motives in nearly all the other characters: for instance, the director of the railway company (George Sanders), who collaborates with the conquerors because he fears and distrusts the "working classes," and sincerely believes that Hitler's New Order will keep them in their proper place for their own good, but who shoots himself when he realises where his acquiescence is leading. Then there is the mayor of the town, an unimaginative self-seeker, who is easily won by subtle flattery into becoming the pliant accomplice of the invaders. Even the German Commandant himself is treated with some understanding and near-sympathy: like the Commandant in Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*, he is prepared to rule with a fairly light hand—provided the townsfolk will be "reasonable" and make things easy for the conquerors. But this, of course, is just what some of the townsfolk will not do (especially some of the workers and a courageous professor). There is underground resistance; a secret newspaper is distributed; trains are blown up. And so, though the commandant does not strike one as being naturally vicious, duty and circumstances compel him to act viciously. In one way or another, nearly all the characters in the story are forced to take arms against a sea of troubles. And in most cases, they are overwhelmed.

* * *

IN directing this drama of ideological dilemmas in Occupied France, Jean Renoir has given us a clue to the

dilemma of a realistic French director who is forced to work in pre-occupied Hollywood—pre-occupied with romantic clichés, emotional absurdities, and extravagances of acting. Sometimes Renoir collaborates; sometimes he resists. So you get some fantastically bad bits of film bang up alongside some extremely good bits. For example, there is Laughton's ridiculous confession of love for Maureen O'Hara in the court scene right after he has delivered that effective speech of defiance against the Nazis; the flamboyant acting of Una O'Connor as Laughton's silly, doting mother as compared with the restraint of Philip Merivale as the head of the school; the unevenness of Laughton's own performance; and the banality of some of the photography contrasted, say, with the imagination of the opening scenes.

And, of course, mixed up with the melodrama and the psychology, there's all the propaganda in favour of sabotage and underground violence. I can't quite make out at whom this propaganda is supposed to be directed. If it's directed at us, the citizens of free countries, it can at the most, give us only a vicarious glow of self-righteousness, since we aren't called on to put the film's dangerous precepts into practice. The only people who might be expected to derive some real encouragement from the propaganda would be the citizens of Occupied Europe—and I doubt if the Nazis will run any cheap matinees for their benefit!

* * *

ON the whole then, I think that Renoir, the director, Dudley Nichols, the script-writer (he wrote *The Informer*), and their excellent cast have all attempted rather too much. Shakespeare might have been able to draw the portrait of the vacillating Albert Lory with such clear strokes that the theme of his transformation from coward to patriot would not have been obscured by the difficult, superimposed themes of mother-fixation and repressed love—but Laughton, Renoir, and Nichols can't do it in a Hollywood picture. One gets the impression throughout not so much of loose ends but of a confused pattern.

Yet, despite all this, the film does make the attempt, and I for one applaud its enterprise.

BELLE STARR

(20th Century-Fox)



WELL, there's no psychology or psychosis here, anyway—at least, I didn't notice any—but only old-fashioned violence and bloodshed (all in Glorious Technicolor), with Gene Tierney as a fighting daughter of the South—99 per cent fictional, one per cent historical—who insists on continuing the Civil War after it is over, becomes the bandit queen of Missouri (with help from Randolph Scott), and gets turned into a Legend after she has been shot.

(Continued on next page)