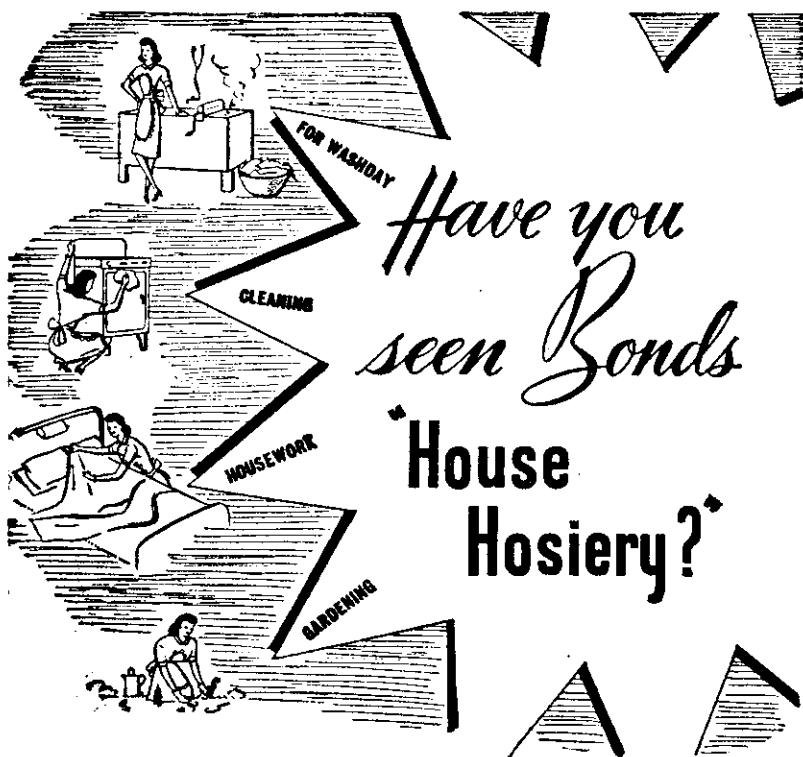




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Film Reviews, by P.J.W.

Gregg Toland's Last Film

ENCHANTMENT

(Goldwyn-RKO Radio)

ENCHANTMENT has the distinction of being the last production to be photographed by Hollywood's top cameraman, Gregg Toland, the man whose inspired innovations contributed so much to the critical success of films like *Wuthering Heights* and *Citizen Kane*. Coming at a time when technicolour was beginning to attract a lot of over-enthusiastic praise, *Wuthering Heights* proved beyond all doubt that black and white photography could produce results far more effective (in the dramatic sense) than the colour camera, while *Citizen Kane* (made by Orson Welles in 1941) was technically one of the most revolutionary films to come out of America, and is still, nearly ten years later, ahead of its time.

Toland was only 44 when he died at the end of 1948, but he had photographed many other notable films, including *The Long Voyage Home* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*. He was always an innovator with the movie camera, and at the time of his death was concentrating on the "ultimate focus" lens, which makes both near and far objects appear equally distant. Although many of his ideas did not catch on (for instance the trick used in *Citizen Kane* of taking all indoor shots so that both floor and ceiling come into the picture) his talented combination of creative imagination and technical skill are bound to be sorely missed in a Hollywood not overstocked with the first of these.

As it happens *Enchantment* is not among the best films he helped to make, although it is in many ways an interesting one. Right from the start it is handicapped by one of those hackneyed devices in which a voice on the soundtrack representing the spirit of an old house whispers nostalgically about the inhabitants it once knew, while the camera tracks sadly through its empty rooms. The plot is just about as stereotyped, involving an old general who comes home to dream about his youthful mistakes in love (shown in flashbacks) and who warns his grandniece and her RAF boy-friend not to do the same.

Yet the film overcomes the restrictions of its story remarkably well, thanks to some charming acting by David Niven and Teresa Wright, while added point is given to some of the best scenes by Toland's subtle photography. The interlacing of the tales of the old lovers and their young counterparts (Farley Granger and Evelyn Keyes) is accomplished by the use of some very skilful camera dissolves—indeed I felt that all of Toland's ingenuity must have been needed to make the creaking mechanism of the picture's framework move with any smoothness at all. One of the best shots occurs when young Niven tosses to his sister the keys of the house after he has decided to leave it for ever. The whole screen blacks out to a tiny pinpoint of light concentrated on the bunch of keys in her hand, and then slowly brightens to show the keys in the hand of Evelyn Keyes as she opens the door two generations later.

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Enchantment."
OVERCAST: "The Red Pony."

The setting is wartime London, flashing back to the gay 'Nineties when Niven was a handsome young cavalry officer setting off on an expedition to Afghanistan. The contrast in temper between the modern lovers with their veneer of sophistication and the simpler, more leisurely progressions of the past is well enough brought out, and Jayne Meadows gives a thoroughly shrewish performance as the elder sister who ruins the first romance. The surprise ending is effective, although it only serves to emphasise the artificial slickness of the plot as a whole. Director Irving Reis would have done better simply to tell a straightforward tale of the old love affair between David Niven and Teresa Wright, and leave it at that.

THE RED PONY

(Republic)

DESPITE the rough-and-ready appeal of its homely philosophising, this film is rather a damp squib. The scintillating display one might have expected from script-writer John Steinbeck (adapting his own short story), director Lewis Milestone, composer Aaron Copland, and players Robert Mitchum, Myrna Loy and Peter Miles, turns out to be only a fitful glimmer. This is one of those productions that seem to suffer from disunity of purpose. In some ways the authentic atmosphere of Steinbeck is preserved (in the small details that etch out the routine of Californian farm life, for instance), and in others (the mystic significance of wild life) it is often obscured.

The story describes how a little ranch boy (Peter Miles) gets a red pony as a present from his parents, how he learns about human nature from his experiences in training it, becomes bitter when it dies, and eventually rediscovers the sweetness of life on the land. The matrimonial differences between his parents, and the Wild West reminiscences of his aged grandfather, may have been brought in to give the film a rounded wholeness of vision, but once again they tend to detract attention from, instead of illuminating, the main theme. In a film that is a mixture of moral pretension and rustic simplicity the most attractive feature is Aaron Copland's wildly atonal musical score.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT.

"Glass Making" is the principal item in Weekly Review No. 436, issued by the National Film Unit for the week beginning January 13. The fine silica sand used in this new industry is brought down in scows from Parengarenga to the 14-acre factory at Penrose, which produces 60,000,000 individual items each year. The complete process of glass making is shown in detail in the film, from the sand hills of the far North to the gleaming, smooth glass articles ready for retail throughout the Dominion. Supporting items are "Preparing the Baths" for the Empire Games, and "Factory Kindergarten," which shows how an Auckland factory has established a kindergarten for the children of mothers employed there.

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 13, 1950.