

To Have and Have Not

THE BREAKING POINT

(Warner Bros.)

TO find a film with a comparable punch to *The Breaking Point*, a new adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's novel *To Have and Have Not*, I found myself thinking of John Huston's *Treasure of Sierra Madre*. They have a good deal in common as far as toughness of character and violence of action are concerned, and from the photographic point of view the similarity is more than coincidental. The same cameraman, Ted McCord, was responsible for both of them. His signature is most noticeable in the Mexican scenes, which in tone and atmosphere are practically identical with those in the early part of *Treasure of Sierra Madre*. Indeed, his presence behind the cameras is a guarantee of visual excellence. His artful evocation of emotion and locale hardly falters, from the glaring heat of the sleepy waterfront town to the sparkle of the open seas where most of the story takes place.

John Garfield gives one of his best performances in the central role of Captain Harry Morgan, a hard-bitten, intensely honest launch owner who gets mixed up with crooks because he can't make a living at the business of hiring his craft out to big game fishermen. Garfield's interpretation runs remarkably true to the spirit of the original Hemingway character. He presents Morgan as a lonely individualist who has tried to fight the whole world on his own and has reached the bitter stage of realising that he has "nothing to peddle but guts"—and doubting whether he has even that. In the climax, after he has been shot full of holes by a gang of race-track thieves who try to escape in his launch, he makes the fundamental discovery which is the theme of the

BAROMETER

FINE: "The Breaking Point."
MAINLY FAIR: "The Mating Season."

book, that "a man ain't got no chance alone." The moral of his eventual survival is that courage is the supreme virtue.

The hero's personal struggle is complicated by the presence of two women: his frightened but loyal wife, played by Phyllis Thaxter, and a beautiful blonde entertainer, played by Patricia Neal. The scenes of his home life bring out the value of domestic affections without becoming sentimental, but Garfield is less well assisted by his other supporting players—Juano Hernandez (the Negro actor of *Intruder in the Dust*) as his boat-hand, and Wallace Ford as the shady lawyer who helps him into trouble. These are conventional portraits without much depth or realism.

On the whole, I thought that Michael Curtiz, the director, made this film too much like a cut-to-pattern thriller. There is a fundamental moral dilemma in the situation which the clever slickness of his handling tends to obscure. But when *The Breaking Point* is compared with the rather superficial 1944 version of *To Have and Have Not*, made with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, the high quality of this production stands out. It can be credited mainly to Garfield's sensitive and penetrating performance, and to the photographer's excellent command of atmosphere.

THE MATING SEASON

(Paramount)

THELMA RITTER is the newest comedian of the American screen, and her arrival deserves a small fanfare. She doesn't look more than five feet tall, and she has the glum, rather ugly face of a clown. Her voice is cracked, and her jokes are delivered either dead-pan or with a deceptively guileless smile. She has neither youth nor beauty, but whether she is dishing up hamburgers in a snack bar, hitch-hiking to her son's society wedding, or offending the snobby rich with her outspoken servant's contempt (her invariable role is in the kitchen), her humour is warm, earthy, and immensely sympathetic.

When I first saw her as the maid in *A Letter to Three Wives* she had only a small part, but there was something memorable about her style. In *All About Eve* she played the personal servant of the great actress (Bette Davis) with a cheerful *l'es majesté* that showed she was destined for better things. *The Mating Season* was produced and partly scripted by Charles Brackett (of the famous Brackett and Wilder team which made *The Lost Weekend* and *Sunset Boulevard*) but the only credit he deserves for it was in letting Thelma Ritter steal so many scenes from the principals, John Lund and Gene Tierney (the happy couple), and Miriam Hopkins (the mother-in-law). Even for comedy, this film contains a set of artificial situations and poisonous characters which are hard to stomach. Let's hope that in her next film Miss Ritter has the full-sized role and decent story which she deserves. It should be really funny.



JOHN GARFIELD
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