

Alice According to Disney

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

(Disney-R.K.O.)

TO be honest, I dread the thought of reviewing Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*. I feel I shall certainly be shot at, and probably from more than one direction at once. There are so many ways of looking at a film like this. There are those who insist that a film based on this well-known, well-loved book must be a good translation of both Carroll's story and Tenniel's illustrations, and there are those who would be satisfied if it were true to the letter and spirit of the story only. At the other extreme are some who think the only test is whether or not it's a good film. I confess I have some sympathy with all of these points of view, though I think the last is this time harder than usual to maintain.

What has Disney done about it? Well, for a start he has taken some characters and incidents from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and left out others, added something from *Through the Looking Glass*, and presented the whole in a new order—a sort of Lewis Carroll medley. This will, of course, offend those who believe it impossible to improve on perfection. The second point is that there seems to have been little attempt to follow Tenniel's idea of Carroll's creations. Because of the universal popularity of the book and the wide distribution the film is sure to have, I think, a good case could be made out for following Tenniel, though it's very doubtful, to say the least, whether his drawings are as well-known today as they used to be. Since seeing the film I've browsed through a large bookshop and found a number of different illustrators of Alice. Children seeing the film might already have a mental picture of the characters, but it's not at all certain that Tenniel would be its author.

If, going even further, you try to look at this film as a completely new creation from the story up, as I suppose some children will see it, you may get a good deal of amusement from it. It obviously isn't possible here to take the film to pieces scene by scene; but I'll admit that I enjoyed some of the characters, like the Caterpillar (the Eastern music helped) and the Cheshire Cat. The fact that the Tenniel illustrations aren't the only ones I've lived with may account for this tolerance—or lack of taste.

I don't feel the same big-hearted fellow when it comes to the translation of the story (and specially the spirit of the story) into film. (I see an apparent flaw in the argument here which someone will be quick to point out.) I was irritated from the outset by the songs, which, anyway, fall far short of the best Disney has done. I balked at some of the spectacular effects and at the passages at dizzy speed. Both of these were part of a strong dream effect, which I frequently felt when seeing the film, but don't recall from reading the book. It's true there were pleasing moments, but I'm sure that even if I had never read *Alice* I wouldn't have felt that this was one of Disney's best. I don't like to use the word vulgar, though I'm afraid it's true of parts of the film. Certainly

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Alice in Wonderland."
FAIR TO FINE: "No Place for Jennifer."

there isn't the peculiar charm that I've always found in *Alice* in print.

I had thought this film might raise again the query about Disney for Children, and, though I've heard no discussion of this, I'm still not completely satisfied that it doesn't. I've heard of one child who, apparently from fear, cried during the screening. My own reactions of horror here and there (for instance, at the baby-like oysters with wrinkled faces climbing out of their shells to be eaten by the Walrus) were probably not of a kind that children would share. But I'd be interested to hear that I'm wrong.

NO PLACE FOR JENNIFER

(Associated British)

THERE was no place for Jennifer (Janette Scott) because her parents (Beatrice Campbell and Leo Genn) divorced and remarried. Jennifer was a happy child spending a day with her friends, the Marshalls, looking forward to Christmas, her mother's absence the only cloud in the sky. After she learns why there's a good picture of her puzzlement at the end of so much happiness: "Daddy, couldn't you ask Mummy to come home? . . . Do you mean we'll never be together again as long as we live?" Shocked when her father remarries, more shocked when she learns there is to be a baby, she is making progress again at a remedial school when her mother attempts to take her away to Paris. In a court action over her custody she hears that she may be called into court and flees into the London streets—a fine piece of work by actress, director (Henry Cass) and photographer (William McLeod), which reminded me of Edmund's flight from Henning's flat in *Germany, Year Zero*. In fact, I liked most of the following scenes, when Jennifer wanders in London before getting back to the Marshalls; and her attempt to escape from an old man who follows her is quite horrifying—so horrifying that I wondered if this sequence was really necessary. Happily, all comes right in the end.

I've seen a number of good child actors lately, and don't hesitate to add Janette Scott to those worth going out of the way to see. I imagine her screen parents weren't meant to appear particularly sensitive people, though they're not ill-intentioned. Anyway, I thought her performance (a bewildered child caught in a situation which she could do nothing about, yet which must have seemed monstrous and unbelievable) easily the best in the film. A scene such as one in which she wakes after dreaming that her mother has telephoned, rushes to the phone, and sobs while the exchange asks what number she wants, was impressive. There was a pleasant surprise, too, in finding Brian Smith (of *The Browning Version* fame) in a small but important role as Jennifer's friend.

Though this is not a deep study of divorce, it does give us the chance to share some of the feelings of one victim.

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 1, 1952.



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