Vivien Leigh's 2nd film, and her first leading lady role, was a minor independent "E". Her poise and beauty were already so marked that it is incredible that it would be another full two years before producers began to take notice of her and give her more worthy roles.

"TWENTY ONE DAYS" (London Films-Columbia, 1938) Produced and directed by Basil Dean; screenplay by Basil Dean and Graham Greene from "The First and the Last" by John Galsworthy; Camera: Jan Stallich; music: John Greenwood; sets, Vincent Korda; editor, Chas. Crichton With Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Leslie Banks, Hay Petrie, Francis L. Sullivan, David Horne, Robert Newton, William DeWurst, Meinhardt Maur, Esma Percy, Elliot Mason, Fred Groves, Muriel George.

I haven't read the Galsworthy story on which this film is based, but it has the same obsession with conflicts between moral and legal guilt which characterises so many of his works (including such filmed ones as "Escape" and "One More River") so presumably it is reasonably faithful to the original, except possibly for the climax. This climax can't be discussed without lessening story and suspense values, so I will say only that while it seems somewhat of a compromise today, in 1938, when production code influence was at its height, it was quite a mature solution. That the climax doesn't entirely work is due to a conflict in audience sympathies. All of our sympathies are with Leigh, practically none with Olivier, due partly to the character itself, largely due to his mannerisms and self-indulgent playing. Despite the Korda production crew, the film has far more the "look" of one of Basil Dean's much earlier Ealing films, and was considered somewhat of a misfire at the time; so much so in fact that its release was delayed by over a year, pending the anticipated rise in Miss Leigh's boxoffice stature. Olivier apart, it is well-acted by Leigh (stunningly beautiful) and Leslie Banks in particular, and the story itself is still holding. The mechanics of British police, also less than those of the US, do admirably seem to have accelerated for the purpose of dramatic effect, but that is a small quibble. For its US release, it was retitled "21 Days Together" and cut by ten minutes; our print tonight is of the original uncut version.

"WATERLOO BRIDGE" (MGM, 1940) Directed by Mervyn LeRoy Produced by Sidney Franklin; Screenplay by S.M. Behrman, Hans Rapgeau and George Froeschel from the play by Robert E. Sherwood; Camera: Joseph Ruttenberg; music, Herbert Stothart; With: Vivien Leigh, Robert Taylor, Luella Watson, Virginia Field, Sir C. Aubrey Smith, Maria Ouspenskaya, Janet Shea, Janet Waldo, Eleanor Stewart, Jimmy Aubrey, Norma Varden, Wilfrid Lucas, Leonard Mudie, Gilbert Emery, Ethel Griffies, Phyllis Barry, Steffi Duna.

The second and most elaborate of the three movie versions of "Waterloo Bridge", this one holds up rather surprisingly well considering the dated content of the story (dated that is, in terms of today's morality), although in the milieu of World War One it still seems reasonable that it did. That it holds up so well is due almost entirely to the work of Miss Leigh; just as "A Streetcar Named Desire" today seems ludicrous and dated, but is saved by the universal and timeless quality of Leigh's performance, so does this "Waterloo Bridge" draw its strength from the poignancy and sensitivity of her acting.

Otherwise, it is a rather typical MGM product of the 40's, bearing the signature of the producer (in this case, happily, the tasteful Sidney Franklin) rather more than that of the director. It should be a spectacle or a film, and that director a Borzage or an Onibula (How well his "Letter From an Unknown Woman" survived and how unadvent it seems) which makes it all the more sad that the original 1931 version by James Whale, an ideal choice for it, is currently unavailable for reappraisal. After his dynamic work in the early 30's, LeRoy's direction in the 40's always seemed glossy, expert, and somehow mechanical. There is nothing that can be faulted in "Waterloo Bridge"; Ruttenberg's camerawork is fine, the handling of players smooth, the art direction effective, even if almost every detail of a London milieu in peacetime brisk. The scoring, with its "Swan Lake" motif is unobjectionable and over-obtrusive, but this was a common fault of films of the 40's. Possibly the film is over-produced, leaving no need or room for any personal style from the director, but of its type it is unusually expert, and today it is quite a pleasure to wallow in the expertise of the sets, the camerawork, the hand-picked cast and the general slick professionalism of it all. But when one is moved, as one should be, it is not by any of this, but by the work of Miss Leigh who - in this film, "Gone With the Wind" and "Lady Hamilton" was at her very peak. -- Wm. K. Everson