Women's Lib advocates should adore this film until their betrayal in the last five minutes, while herauxepics - who have to wait until the second half of the picture for hero George Brent to arrive and begin turning the shrew - at least have the satisfaction of the last laugh, and the knowledge that Brent married Miss Chatterton off-screen too! There's nothing radically new in its super-efficient-business-woman-tamed-by-love story -- Leatrice Joy and Pauline Fredericks had done it in the silents, and Rosalind Russell and Joan Crawford would do it in later talkies. But somehow, through its speed and bare-bones concentration of plot, "Female" becomes something of a prototype for the whole genre. Michael Curtiz keeps it all moving so fast, and his new characters and rushing in the new characters and rushing out the old (Miss Chatterton's discarded lovers are all transferred to the Montreal branch, certainly an effective way of cooling anyone's ardor!), keeping the dialogue on a consistent level of blockbuster theatrie, that it's incredibly to realize the t so much plot is covered in a mere sixty minutes. Oddly enough, Warner Brothers, who had so much casual realism in their early-30's movies about working men and day-to-day living, seem to have gone somewhat awry in their conception of how the rich live. It seems unlikely that any executive as hard-headed and sensible as Miss Chatterton would live quite like an Oriental potentate. Her backyard swimming pool seems to be quite literally part of the gigantic swimming pool set from Busby Berkeley's "Footlight Parade", with a modest adjustments, but even this pallies beside the magnificently ornate foyer to her home -- a sweeping circular staircase that is a mixture of old Germanic Gothic and futuristic H.G.Wells, and topped off by an organist perched precariously half-way up the wall, with no apparent means of access or retreat.

However, in other ways, Miss Chatterton's tastes are quite down to earth -- for her Cathering-the-Great -like seductions of her handsome employees, she plays appropriate mood music -- which nearly always turns out to be "Shanghai Lil", although "Shuffle Off to Buffalo" gets a brief look-in too, even to having Rafaelo Ottiano sing the line about the scanties! Presumably the Clarke novel was somewhat more lurid. Here it is always tasteful if not convincing, and owes a great deal to the warmth and personality of Ruth Chatterton. Her performance here, even in a rather trivial role, makes one realize how superb she could have been in "A Farewell to Arms" had she played the nurse as originally intended.

-- ten minute intermission --

"A FAREWELL TO ARMS" (Paramount, 1932; released 1933) Directed by Frank Borzage; scenario by Benjamin Glazer and Oliver H.P. Garrett from the novel by Ernest Hemingway; Camera: Charles Lang; Art Directors, Hans Dreier and Holand Anderson; 10 reels With Gary Cooper, Helen Hayes, Adolphe Menjou, Larry Phillips, Jack LaRue, Blanchard Friderici, Gilbert Emery, Henry Armetta, George Hurbert, Fred Fadlesta, Beryl Forbes, Herman Bing, Tom Ricketts, Robert Coutierio, Peggy Cunningham, Augustino Borgia, Paul Forcasli, Alice Adair, John Davidson, Doris Lloyd, Gorges Regas, Reinhold Schuntzel.

Curiously, although it was in reissue distribution until 15 years ago, "A Farewell to Arms" has become a lost film in this country. Neither Paramount, who are the copyright holders, nor any producer who retains the rights under the "Forces of Arms" with William Holden and Nancy Olsen nor Selznick, who now own the property as a result of their gargantuan-sized remake with Rock Hudson, seem to have any preservation prints, and all of the circa-1950 distribution prints appear to have been junked. When the television-tribute to Helen Hayes was paid about a year ago, the section used to represent "A Farewell to Arms" had to be copied from tonight's print. We are lucky indeed to have this European print which is of reasonably good quality and so to the point is fully complete and even has the original ending rather than the compromise ending used on the U.S. prints. One note of hope: Paramount, in recently turning over all of their nitrate prints to U.C.L.A. for checking and hopefully preservation, did unearth a print of the film (which for years they had denied having) as part of the package. Thus far there are no actual confirmations of its existence, let alone its condition, but hopefully it's in good enough
shape to enable a preservation negative to be made from it.

When I first saw the film in 1950 I must confess to being somewhat disappointed in it. This may have been partially due to a not yet fully developed appreciation of Borzage, but more essentially I suspect it was due to the cutting in that version. "A Farewell to Arms" was never a long film; its 10 reel copyright designation is misleading, for in actual running time its original length was only 80 minutes. It was compact, tight, with no wasted footage; its story is underway immediately. When you start cutting a film that is that compact you're asking for trouble - and the reissue cuts, partly just for the sake of trimming, but mainly to overcome then current censorship requirements, severely damaged the delicate balance and structure of the film. When I saw it in Europe two years ago, for the first time in its full form, I was quite stunned by its power and beauty, a beauty enhanced by a particularly luminous 35mm print. European lab work not always being what it might be, this 16mm print is a bit soft, sometimes on the dark side, and the pictorial beauty is lessened - particularly in the German-made stylised war montage in the second half. But enough quality remains so that one can read between the frames and imagine what it looks like in a really fine 35mm print.

Hemingway wrote "A Farewell to Arms" in 1930, and this film was in fact the first Hemingway story to be filmed at all. Hemingway purists may argue that it is too romantic an interpretation and that, even if less interesting filmically, "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" are more authentic Hemingway. But it is still probably the best film to emerge from any Hemingway story. Although a handsome and glossy production, with big sets, plenty of extras and superb camerawork, it carefully remains non-epic in scope, thus avoiding the dreadful pitfalls that made the overblown Selznick remake such a disaster. It is "emotionally big" in the way that few movies are any more, yet Borzage could get away with scenes and cliches that other directors couldn't. Ricardo Cortez battling the waves in a small rowboat to get to Greta Garbo in "The Torrent" was merely ludicrous -- yet one accepts an almost identical scene here without question. Similarly, the very last shot - almost theatrical hokum if you like - somehow remains tender and poignant despite its size, music and sweeping camerawork. There's just no explaining how Borzage could exploit yet control sentiment at one and the same time, yet he did it over and over again, even in such unlikely films as "Flirtation Walk" and "China Doll".

Gary Cooper's performance - comparatively early in his career - is surprisingly mature and quite steals the thunder away from Helen Hayes' theatrically efficient but mannered and self-conscious acting. Considering that it is such an important role, it is rather a shame that the director didn't play up to it more. Borzage, after all, was a director par excellence. Hitchens, Miss Hayes, the poet, and the nurse all have their own problems over this love affair, problems that are not so easily solved. Miss Hayes still alive - but it was the kind of gallant ending that allowed the audience to make up its own mind as to whether she lived or died, and was by no means the traditional happy ending. Its major flaw, cinematically, was that it forced the excision of the final, extremely powerful climactic shot - which of course is in our print this evening.

-- Wm. K. Everson --