Errol Flynn in transition: search for a new image

ANOTHER DAWN (Warner Brothers, 1937) Directed by William Dieterle; original story and screenplay, Laird Doyle; Camera, Tony Gaudio; Music, Erich Wolfgang Korngold; Dialogue director, Stanley Logan; 73 mins.


With "Captain Blood" and "The Charge of the Light Brigade" behind him, Flynn was now established as one of Warners' major new stars, and in 1937, faced with the prospect of not being able to continue with expensive swashbucklers exclusively, they sought to consolidate his popularity and extend his range by displaying him in four films of moderate cost and considerable variety. The four films were another swashbuckler, "The Prince and the Pauper", a modern comedy, "The Perfect Specimen", 2 romantic/dramatic vehicles, "The Green Light" (from a popular Lloyd Douglas novel), and a variation on an idealistic action and "Another Dawn". The system worked, and the following year Warners were able to tailor projects specifically to the Flynn image with "Adventures of Robin Hood" and "The Dawn Patrol". Actually, in accordance with an iron-clad contract, Kay Francis gets top billing in "Another Dawn", but her star was waning and she was now of far less importance to the studio than the fast-rising Flynn.

When I last saw, and wrote notes for, "Another Dawn" more than 15 years ago, I thought that it was either awful or in its own way marvellous, depending on one's personal point of view. Time certainly hasn't made it a better picture or one even remotely more attractive than it was; but it has broadened and, I think, an increase in respect for its sheer craftsmanship. As that commodity becomes rarer and rarer on the screen (and "craftsmanship" has little to do with the technical skills so constantly on display today) one tends to be more and more impressed with the talents exhibited in (and if you like, squandered on) the most routine of films, talents that we once took so for granted that we often tended to ignore them if the vehicle in which they were displayed was of little importance. By any standards "Another Dawn" is vastly entertaining novelette hokum, beautifully typical of the period, when such triangular plot lines could be sketched out on the back of an envelope and readily adapted to a score of different players and locations. It's clearly an "economy" production, utilising left-over sets from "The Charge of the Light Brigade", and keeping its action content to small-scale skirmishing or off-screen entirely, to be reported over the air and at a distance. As such, the sets are lush, and Tony Gaudio's glistening, gliding camerawork makes them look like a million dollars. Korngold's rich, romantic score is another major asset, drawing some inspiration perhaps from the music of "The Garden of Allah" of the year before, but generally surpassing it. Locations - which include at least one from Valentino's silent "Son of the Sheik" - are convincing, even though they are close to home and in some cases virtually on Warners' doorstep. The sedate English mansion where Ian Hunter enjoys his leisure is the still unchanged Greystone Manor in Beverly Hills, until very recently the American Film Institute's West Coast HQ, and frequently utilised as a movie location.

The plot-line brings in all the anticipated romantic and dramatic cliches of the Indian frontier, with the three leads being magnificently noble and honorable, and Herbert Mundin redeeming his white feather in the traditional manner. All the cliches seem to work today, because they are old and revered friends, and one never laughs at friends, even those of questionable value.

Love scenes are played out against a shimmering backdrop of a moon, the loveliest and the phoniest since the one gracing the Barrie-Dorothy Costello love scenes in "The Sea Beast". Flawlessly typecast, with Mary Forbes again the epitome of aristocracy, the film perhaps scores best on its consistently larger-than-life dialogue, marvellously florid in the romantic scenes, absurdly underplayed in pseudo-British fashion at other times. One memorable chunk of dialogue has one of the characters discussing on the great love of Francis' life, an aviator whom she loved passionately, and who died in a crash at the height of his fame. After eulogising on the hero of his death, he adds as a casual after-thought, "Bit rough on her, of course!"

Dieterle's best Warner films were now behind him, but he was now one of their prestige directors, one of the most important men in the studio next to Michael Curtiz, and wise enough not to reck the boat now that he had achieved the stature he'd worked so hard for. "Another Dawn" reminds one in some ways of a much glossier version of his earlier, cruder, but somewhat more interesting "The Devil's in Love", which we showed some seasons back.

As with both last week's films, there are indications of extensive pre-release cutting to make it less of a ponderous "A" and more of a zippy programmer. The automotors ladies at the English mansion hardly get a look in, though they're quite high in the cast, and there must have been more of them originally. George Regas is not seen at all during Flynn visits, but he hasn't a single frame in the picture, the meeting being referred to only in the dialogue. In view of the slickness and smoothness of the film, one can't really regret the cutting - except for the loss of the accompanying Korngold.

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music. Since he even manages to devise a musical theme for Ben Welden (the annoying passenger on the boat) one would love to hear the themes he might have created for the missing Regas and the barely visible Mary Forbes and Eilly Maloney.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---


"The Perfect Specimen" has been unavailable for some time, due to lapsed story rights, which have now been re-negotiated. Much, and perhaps ever publicised at the time of release, the fan magazines here and abroad lapping up every piece of trivia that Warners fed them, the film disappointed at the time, coming at the peak of the screwball comedy cycle. Now one tends not to expect too much, and it proves to be a pleasant surprise; it is a good film as much as it's a good comedy, and it does somehow convey an idea of wanting to be likeable and amusing, without having to be devastatingly funny. Possibly its air of relaxed confidence, backed up by such a strong cast of trouper, makes it a satisfying film—and possibly a good deal more.

William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.50 (No discussion session)

A post-script to last week's discussion session:

A question arose, out of the screening of the short "Respect The Law", about the number of films dealing with outbreaks of plague in large modern cities. Obviously there aren't many, but one I totally forgot to mention was the 1963 British "80,000 Suspects" with Claire Bloom, an extremely good film, and one that's available and that we may get to eventually.

A second question arose over Phillip Reed, and when he changed his name to that from Phillip Haversham. Both names appeared in the credits (one under the other) for "House on 56th Street", though I note that I listed only Reed's name in my program notes' castlist, so evidently I was subliminally aware of the duplication of names and eliminated one in doing the notes, though I'd forgotten that when the question came up. The same duplication occurs in certain cast sheets for "House on 56th Street" at the end of '53, so clearly the name change took place at that time, but the names were added in the back of the script, and Warners made so much—and so fast—that it's not surprising that these errors creep into their credits.

PLEASE NOTE: I will be on hand next week, so the program will start promptly at 7.30 with an introduction. Notes will be available as usual. In all probability, the silent program will not bring out the numbers that last week's program did, so the congestion at the box-office should not be repeated. In any case, steps are being taken to try to remedy that situation.