TWO BRITISH DRAMAS

ACTION FOR SLANDER (United Artists-Alexander Korda, 1937) Directed by Tim Whelan;
Produced by Victor Saville; Screenplay by Miles Malleson from a play by Mary Berden;
Camera, Harry Stradling; 83 mins. (Last NW showing: April 23 '37)
With Clive Brook (Majer George Daviet); Ann Todd (Ann Daviet); Margarette Scott (Josie Bradfor); Arthur Margetson (Capt. Bradford); Ronald Squire (Charles Cinderford); Athela Stewart (Lord Frederick) (John William Callier (Sir Bernard Roper); Prisoner Dyer (Judge Trotter); Gus McNaughton (Tandy); Francis L. Sullivan (Sir Quinton Jessops); Anthony Holles (Grant); Enid Stamp Taylor (Jenny); Kate Cutler (dowager); Felix Aylmer (Sir Ernest Buckminster); and Lawrence Hanray, Albert Whelan, Allan Jeayes, Googie Withers, Edgar Miles.

Perhaps what strikes one most about "Action for Slander" today is its at least superficial similarity to Renoir's "The Rules of the Game." For a large part of the film, the setting is the Park and Norland estates and the house party at an aristocratic country house. There is the same juxtaposition of class-conscious behavior between the elite and the semi-comic servants; there is even a shooting match with sly innuendoes about the rules. But whereas Renoir was cynical about rules of conduct, this British film is deadly serious; Renoir lets adultery slide into near slapstick, whereas the British dispose of it discreetly before the film even starts, and merely refer to it casually via the throw-away line of dialogue. I don't want to make too much of the affinity between the two films, but it does seem entirely possible - even probable - that Renoir saw "Action for Slander," or the play on which it was based, and saw some of it as a framework for his own story. ("The Rules of the Game" is a 1939 film, so the situation couldn't have been reversed).

"Action for Slander" was produced by Victor Saville's own newly set-up company, releasing through Korda and using his production facilities. (American) director Tim Whelan was a good and versatile director, but the film so much reflects Saville's own style and sensibility in the characters and the way one can almost recognize in his review to Saville as the director, making no mention of Whelan, either a mistake or an unfair slight, but certainly an indication of how strongly the film bears Saville's stamp. It is all pretty undisguised play-into-film, but it is such a pleasure to watch such stylish acting and to listen to good dialogue, beautifully spoken, that it hardly seems to matter. As in "The Winslow Boy" the big concern is abstract justice, and a character's honor - in this instance, whether a respected army officer did or didn't cheat at cards. Such issues may seem rather old-fashion today - which is a pity, for they shouldn't. The British Army probably has more pressing matters to worry about today, but the Regular Officer who would sell Government secrets, or defect, is precisely the kind of individual who would cheat at cards, so maybe the issues aren't so outdated after all. In any case I can confirm from my own British army years (where the class system gave me no opportunity to cheat at cards) that the type played by Clive Brook was (and almost certainly still is) very much present in the Army set-up. He's the kind of officer one expects to be there, but a certain priggishness that irritates. Brook's performance is quite perfect, and seems almost an extension of his Captain Harvey in "Shanghai Express". One can almost visualise the years in between, dull peddling work in a peace-time army, a low rate of pay and increasing boredom after those exciting years in China with Dietrich! I don't mean to poke fun at Brook's stolidly honorable professional soldier, and the films are both quite different, but the line of similarity is worth making. For the rest, the film is chiefly interesting and here the phrase is used advisedly. Just think of it - the film is "famously" shot in the Park. And here the phrase is used advisedly. And here the phrase is used advisedly. And here the phrase is used advisedly. As a hairdresser, Britain's own Monroe Owsley, is just right as the rotter (he had a very brief Hollywood career too), and Francis L. Sullivan, with glowing eyes and dramatically poised pencil, is again ideal in the courtroom.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

NO PLACE FOR JENNIFER (Associated British Picture Corp., Pathe, 1949) Directed by Henry Cass;
Produced by Hamilton G. Inglis; Screenplay by J. Lee Thompson from the novel "No Difference To Me" by Phyllis Naylor; Camera, William McLeod; 90 mins. US premiere, July 5
With Janet Scott (Jennifer); Leo Genn (William); Rosamund John (Rachel Kershaw); Beatrice Campbell (Paula); Guy Middleton (Brian Stewart); Anthony Nicholls (Baxter); Jean Cadell (Aunt Jacqueline); Megs Jenkins (Mrs Marshall); Edith Sharpe (Doctor); Ann Creden (Miss Hancock); Brian Smith (Martin Marshall); Ande Morell (Counsel); MacDonald Hobley (Salesman) and Harold Scott, Anthony Wager, Chris Castor, Viola Lyell, William Simons, William Fox, Ruth Ledger, Jean Shepherd, Arnold Bell, Stanley Lormer, Lockwood West, Silly Thatcher.

"No Place for Jennifer" is an attempt to handle a difficult subject - divorce, and its effect on a young child - with honesty, compassion, a sense of drama and British understatement. Obviously a difficult assignment, especially for a relatively new director; this was Henry Cass' fourth film, though his next, the Alacum Pictures "Lost Holiday," would establish him as a relatively important one. The problem with "Jennifer" is that it tries to make all of its points while remaining fair to both sides, yet the script is a bit too even-handed at times it is the film's greatest flaw, the "neutral" view (which would have been the more interesting and poignant line to maintain throughout) and sometimes through the eyes of the mere配套的set of remarried parents. As a result, emphasises shift - and as if realising that, the script veers far more to melodrama and somewhat artificial suspense in its closing reel. It isn't the film it might have been, but not for want of trying. A very

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strong cast and the fact that the film has been virtually unseen for 40 years are among the good reasons for reviving it today, but the main one is the remarkable work of its nine-year-old child star Janette Scott, in her first major role. (She had made four earlier appearances, as for example, in a Unicon-Jack waving babe in her mother's arms in a German prison camp in "2000 Women"). She was one of the very few British child actresses who had a natural and intelligent acting talent and never looked as though she was being directed off-camera. With acting parents, Thora Hird and Jimmy Scott, perhaps this wasn't surprising. Although her British career was somewhat mishandled, considering her early success and prominence, she made a successful transatlantic move with a solid back-up - "Me Highway in the Sky", "School for Standards", "The Devil's Disciple", "Now and Forever", "Crack in the World" etc. - before her ultimate retirement. We're on the track of a CinemaScope print of her unreleased-in-the-US remake of "The Good Companions" in which she plays the Jessie Matthews role, and if it works out we'll be giving it its US premiere (and our first CinemaScope), at the New School in 1952.

Program Ends approx. 10.40. --- William K. Everson

Brief question/discussion session follows.

FALL SERIES: FILM SERIES 69: Friday nights at 7:30.

Space limitations prevent more than a reference listing of dates and titles, without unfortunately room to explain why certain combinations have not been put together as they have, or why some quite unknown titles are really interesting, but for this information we refer you to our more detailed listing in the NS Fall Bulletin, which should be issued very soon. As always, silents will be accompanied by Stuart Gieran at the piano.


4. Oct.18: Two British musicals: INSIGHT (1935, d. Herbert Wilcox) with Anna Neagle, Arthur Tracy, Jack Buchanan; WARNING: this is an edited for early American tv version, but a lot better than nothing; SAILING ALONG (1938, d. Sonja Hesse) with Jessie Matthews.


6. Nov.8: SILENT WESTERN program; COWBOY AMBROSE (1922) Mack Swain's elaborate 2-reel comedy remake of his earlier "His Better Half"; THE NARROW TRAIL (1917, d. Lambert Hillyer), one of the very best and most definitive William S. Hart westerns, much more action than most, fine San Francisco locations, a film admired by Jean Cocteau; RED RAIDERS (1927, d. Albert Rogell) Non-stop spectacular action and stunt; KEN MAYRAND.

7. Nov.15: First showings: two rarely off-beat films from World War Two; RESISTING ENEMY INTERROGATION (1942) Loyola Molina, Arthur Kennedy, Carl Esmond, Kent Smith. Also Training film that is a fascinating narrative thriller; SALUTE JOHN CITIZEN (1942, d. Maurice Elvey) Britain's "Mrs Miniver"; eclipsed by it even at home and never released here. Less gloss and showmanship, more honesty, with Stanley Holloway, Dinah Sheridan, Peggy Cummins, George Robey, Edward Rigby.


11. Dec.20: British Comedy; Farcial and sophisticated filmed theatre: TURKEY TIME (1933, d. Tom Walls) with Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn, Robertson Hare, Dorothy Hyson, Mary Brough. The Pen Travers Alwythfarces are very specialised, but if this one doesn't make a successful Atlantic crossing, then the other film will MORE than compensate! THE FINAL TEST (1955, d. Anthony Asquith) An unusual British print of a lesser but enormously enjoyable Terence Rattigan work with Jack Warner and Robert Morley in magnificent form as a pompous egomaniac writer of arty tv plays.