THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 71: Program #7
July 15, 1972

JOSEPH CONRAD/Graham Greene

DANGEROUS PARADISE (Paramount 1929, rcl. 1930) Directed by William Wellman; scenario by Grover Jones and William Slaven McNeill from "Victory" by Joseph Conrad; Camera, Archie Stout; Song by Leo Robin and Richard Whiting; produced under the title "Flesh of Eve"; also released in a silent version; 59 minutes; NY premiere, Paramount Theatre, Feb.1930
With: Richard Arlen (Heyst); Nancy Carroll (Alma); Gustav von Seyffertitz (Mr. Jones); Warner Clad (Schonberg); Francis McDonald (Ricardo); George Kotsoros (Pedro); Clarence Wilson (Zangiacomo); Dorothy Wollpert (Mrs. Schonberg); Willie Fung (Wang); and Evelyn Selbie, Wong Ming, Lillian Worth.

When we last played "Dangerous Paradise" at the New School, on July 3 1973, our notes were exceptionally long and ran a full page. Since the last three sets of notes for this series have had to be written within a few hours on a brief return to the city, they have all had to be fairly brief. However, we'll try to have a few extra copies of the notes of "The Nun's Story" (which is a marvelous and available tonight. The second of three movie versions of Conrad's "Victory" (there has since been a fourth version either lost in the shuffle or sold directly to tv), this one--less plotically eloquent than Tourneur's silent, less literary than Cromwell's 1940 version--had to diplomacy to bill itself in the credits only as an adaptation of a Conrad story, not claiming to be a bona-fide version of "Victoria". Actually it is fairly good co-stripe adaptation, racing through surface color, characterizations and action, and not bothering too much with depth or psychology. Conrad has always been difficult to film well; perhaps only Carol Reed's "Outcast of the Islands" did filmic justice to any Conrad original. Here Conrad's ending is supplanted by a more traditional happy one, but hints of the original show through, especially in the world weariness of Nancy Carroll, and the polite yet sadistic villainy of Gustav von Seyffertitz, surrounded by a wonderful array of co-villains. (It must be admitted though that Cedric Hardwicke's cold Mr. Jones in the 1940 version remains one of the screen's finest and most disturbing villain portrayals.)

William Wellman, the director, and Richard Arlen (a rather stolid performer) and given only featured billing) had, over ten years earlier, collaborated on one of Paramount's biggest successes, "Wings". Here all the billing goes to Nancy Carroll, Paramount's new star.

However, Wellman regained his lost prestige the following year with "The Public Enemy". Catalina once again doubles effectively for a far more exotic locale, and given the talk-dominated and slow-moving pace of most of Paramount's 1929 films, "Dangerous Paradise" is, for its period, good movie-making if not good Conrad.

--- 10 MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

THE HEART OF THE MATTER (British Lion, 1953) Directed by George More O'Ferrall; produced by Ian Dalrymple; Screenplay by Dalrymple and Lesley Storm from the novel by Graham Greene; Camera, Jack Hildyard; US release by Associated Artists; 105 mins; NY premiere, Normandie Theatre, Oct.1954.

With Trevor Howard (Harry Scooby); Elizabeth Allan (Louise Scooby); Maria Schell (Helen Holt); Peter Finch (Father Bank); Denholm Elliott (Wilson); Gerard Curz (Yussel); George Colouris (Portuguese Captain); Earl Cameron (All); Colin Gordon (Colonial Secretary); Evelyn Roberts (Col. Wife); Michael Hordern (Commissioner of Police); Cyril Raymond (Carter); Orlando Martins (Rev. Clay); Gillian Lind (Mrs Carter); and John Rae, Peter Burton, Eileen Thornike, Anthony Snell, Jane Henderson, Stanley Lemin, Eugene Leahy, Christopher First, Judith Purse, John Glynn-Jones, Evan Roberts, Jack Allen, John Akar, Saidu Fafana, Anesey Kamara Wilson.

Graham Greene's "serious" novels, as opposed to his "entertainments", are open to even more problems and pitfalls than Conrad's novels, due to their underlying Roman Catholic theastics, which, if present in detail would mystify non-Catholics, and which if deleted would alienate both Catholics and Greene devotees. Greene himself claimed not to be satisfied with his original novel "The Heart of the Matter" and found that he could not re-read it. He was not even sure which path it would follow when he began writing it, or who its hero would ultimately be. However, apart from some mild compromises here and there, and a subtle (but major) change in the way that the solution is brought about (something that can be discussed after the screening), the film is remarkably faithful to the novel, and reproduces a great deal of its dialogue intact. It is helped by a superb performance from Trevor Howard, a stunningly good supporting cast with Denholm Elliott a standout, and location work in Sierra Leone which provides pictorial color and atmosphere to at least partially conceal the stress on talk.

It is a relationship to Greene novels (including, rather surprisingly, "The Ministry of Fear") and the importance of understanding Catholic dogma to appraise some of the nuances of the narrative are elements discussed in detail in Gene Phillips' excellent book "Graham Greene: The Films of His Fiction", highly recommended on both filmic and literary levels. All in all, and stressing that Greene's own disappointment was mainly with his original work, not this film adaptation. "The Heart of the Matter" represents one of the better Greene translations, and is a surprisingly powerful film considering that Greene's original was actually by a pioneer British Irish producer (from the thirties) whose film work didn't begin until the fifties and then was infrequent. (It also included "The Holly and the Ivy"), the flawed ending apart (dictated at least partially in consideration of American censorship rulings) the one minor shortcoming of the film is Maria Schell. There's nothing wrong with her quite moving performance, but she is just too old for the role. The Howard character is drawn to her (in the novel) because she reminds him of his dead teen-age daughter; in the film she is too much of a woman for that man to come through, and the relationship comes across as a more traditional affair, complicated primarily by religious guilt.

--- William K. Everson

Program ends app. 10:35. BRIEF DISCUSSION SESSION FOLLOWS.