

SR Goes to the Movies

MR. MAUGHAM, MR. GUINNESS, AND MR. ELIOT

MR. MAUGHAM wonders aloud, during the opening moments of "Encore" (Paramount), if movie audiences aren't getting a little weary of looking at him. Rather bothersome for them, he felt, that he should show up first in "Quartet" and then in "Trio" and now again. Perhaps they'd like to look at the garden of his Cap d'Antibes villa? So we see his flowers, and also his swimming pool, a very handsome swimming pool. Well, I was grateful for the short tour around the grounds, but I was anxious to get back to Mr. Maugham. Sure enough, he's his usual charming self, and the movies he introduces have the qualities that we are by now, happily, accustomed to. Like "Trio," they are a group of three, all held together by Mr. Maugham's gracious talks on how the original short stories happened to be written. And many of the people who were seen in earlier Maugham movies are here again in this one.

Nigel Patrick and Roland Culver play in a story about two brothers, "The Ant and the Grasshopper." The ant (Roland Culver) works hard and respectably for the material rewards of life, while the grasshopper (Patrick) is a ne'er-do-well who meanders along a frolicsome, irresponsible path and achieves a beautiful, charming, and immensely wealthy wife and life. The Maugham irony is typical, and Patrick and Culver illustrate it richly.

The best of the three, to my taste, is "Winter Cruise." It's a delight and a gem, and it has in it Kay Walsh, one of the best of the British actresses. Here she is an extremely talkative spinster on a holiday from her Liverpool tea shop, out to get the most from her winter cruise to the Bahamas. Through a combination of circumstances, the ship's officers find her the only passenger on board during the return trip to Liverpool. Their very understandable problem is how to keep her quiet, and the method they hit upon is both hilarious and touching. Noel Purcell, Ronald Squire, and John Laurie do a great deal to keep the fun going, and Anthony Pelissier's direction is first rate.

It is only "Gigolo and Gigolette," the last of the three, that faintly disappoints. Glynis Johns, who gets my vote as one of the most accomplished and attractive young actresses in England or America, has the role of a



—From "The Man in the White Suit."
Alec Guinness—"extraordinary talents."

daredevil high diver, but the story makes a sentimental point that was not in the Maugham original. Miss Johns earns bread for herself and her husband by risking her life twice nightly on the terrace of a Monte Carlo hotel. She is always filled with understandable trepidation when she makes an eighty-foot dive into a circular tank below, but when she begins to have doubts about her husband's love the trepidations turn into premonitions of approaching doom. The trouble is, the husband is colorless and unattractive to such a strong degree that one constantly wonders why Miss Johns risks her throaty voice and pretty limbs for him. Or why he would allow her to. The whole thing filled me with morbid doubts of my own, and none of them were quite satisfied when Miss Johns's head bobs up in the pool after that last successful leap. Eric Ambler, who did the screenplay, did Mr. Maugham wrong, I'm afraid, or maybe it was some producer lurking behind the ladder who said, "Now look, we've got to end this on a lighter note, please." Nevertheless, it has its good moments and even gets in some satiric comment on audiences that enjoy watching daredevils flirt with disaster.

EALING Studios, too, has provided an encore of sorts, for they have followed "The Lavender Hill Mob" with another movie utilizing the extraordinary comic talents of Alec Guinness. "The Man in the White

Suit" (Universal) is so clever in its story and filled with so much whimsical invention that I was unable for some time to decide which I liked better, this or the predecessor. Guinness is a much younger man this time, and he has an even bigger idea in his head than the mere robbing of a million pounds from the Bank of England. He wants to invent an artificial fabric that will never wear out and that has the additional advantage of repelling dirt, stains, and moisture. The consequences for the British textile industry are—it proves when he does invent the fabric—absolutely enormous. The representatives of both capital and labor get highly upset, and naive Mr. Guinness (when it comes to matters not pertaining to his research) must dodge first the one and then the other of them, with both finally in hot pursuit. The satire is rich and pointed, but—after lengthy consideration on my part—not quite so funny as "The Lavender Hill Mob." Perhaps because of the very pointedness of the satire.

Joan Greenwood and Cecil Parker are to be seen prominently, sometimes for and sometimes against Mr. Guinness. Roger MacDougall thought up this fine idea, and we must not neglect the special effects expert, Sydney Pearson, who designed the white wonder suit. The invention of the Guinness invention is another matter deserving comment. This is an array of test-tube apparatus that makes the most peculiar noise ever heard on a sound-track. Whenever you hear it you know Guinness is somewhere in the neighborhood, working hard on that artificial fabric. Alexander MacKendrick helped create the sound, a rhythmic one that should eventually be as popular as the zither tune in "The Third Man," and he managed to find time for part of the writing chore and for directing the movie.

T. S. ELIOT has turned screenwriter for, I believe, the first time in his illustrious career, and I fear it may have been a mistake. Although I haven't seen "Murder in the Cathedral" performed on a stage, others I have talked to tell me it is an impressive experience. As a film (Classic Pictures) it is one of the most solid bores I have yet to come across, the static qualities of the play being enhanced and magnified in the version that George Hoellering has produced and directed. To begin with, I have an innate distrust of any movie that starts out by allowing the camera to poke lasciviously around a piece of statuary, and there is a great deal of such poking about in this film. There is also much lighting and snuffing of candles by a group of Canterbury

women with utterly dreary expressions on their faces. They have, it seems, intimations of the coming immortality of Thomas Beckett, their archbishop, and so does he. Father John Groser recites him efficiently enough, but while the elegant speech and poetry of Mr. Eliot is being heard, the camera has a way of standing stock still for as much as half a minute at a time, or else slowly creeping up on him so remorselessly that one feels like calling, "Watch out, it's coming closer!" For variation Mr. Hoellering has tossed in some shots of the sea, waves pounding in towards shore, that have a mystic symbolism beyond me. The argument between temporal and spiritual power seems singularly dreary as presented here, and the rituals and rites that were probably effective on the stage only slow the film down all the more. I have strong admiration for the poetic drama that Mr. Eliot wrote, but in its transference to the screen he and Mr. Hoellering have failed to take account of the irritating fact that in a movie the pictures are really more important than the words. The words embellish often enough, but it's seldom the other way around.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

SR Recommends

Encore: Reviewed in this issue.

The Man in the White Suit: Reviewed in this issue.

My Six Convicts: Prison lore based on Donald Powell Wilson's book of same name. (SR Mar. 29.)

Deadline—U.S.A.: For once, a true-to-life film about the newspaper profession. (SR Mar. 29.)

The Belle of New York: Fred Astaire as nimble as ever, with some captivating Currier & Ives backdrops. (SR Mar. 22.)

The Marrying Kind: Matrimony runs a bumpy but witty course as delineated by actress Judy Holliday, director George Cukor, and writers Kanin & Gordon. (SR Mar. 22.)

The Magic Garden: A light-hearted comedy from South Africa, with a plot compounded of miracles and a substratum of satire. (SR Mar. 15.)

Navajo: American Indians in conflict and contact with mid-century USA. (SR Mar. 15.)

5 Fingers: L. C. Moyzisch's "Operation Cicero" turned into a spy film that avoids all the usual clichés of the genre and includes an abundance of the Mankiewicz sophistication. (SR Mar. 8.)

Cry, the Beloved Country: A sensitive screen translation by Alan Paton of his moving novel of South African life. (SR Feb. 2.)

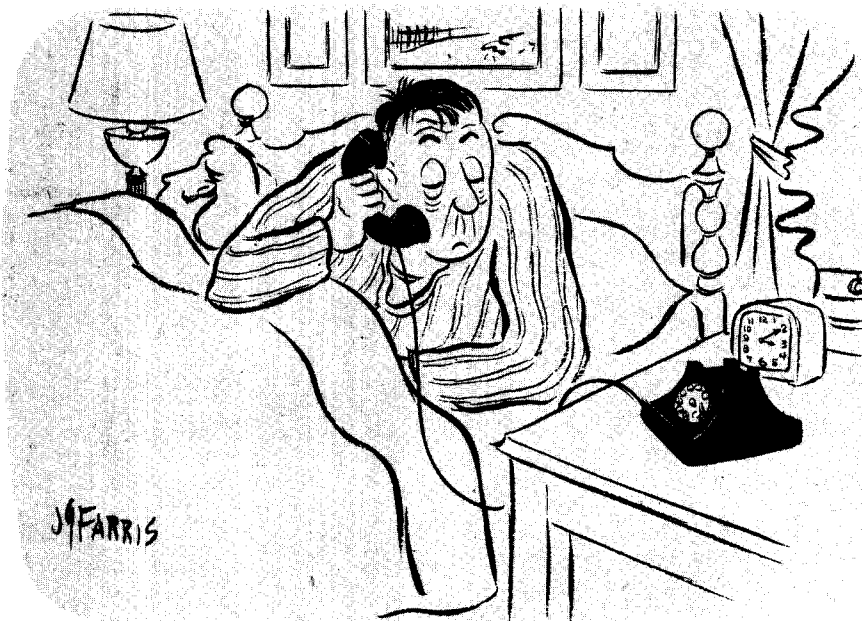
Decision Before Dawn: An exciting, but arguable presentation of a "good German" PW who spies for us. (SR Dec. 29.)

Death of a Salesman: An honest, dignified filming of one of the decade's most moving plays. (SR Dec. 22.)

The Young and the Damned: Luis Bunuel's enlightened and enlightening study of Mexico's juvenile delinquents, reviewed here under its original title, "Los Olvidados." (SR Sept. 15.)

TV and Radio

I'M SORRY, DEAR



"Hello—this is the Mallop Night Radio Listener's Survey. Are you awake?"

SEVERAL devoted fans of these erudite essays have sent letters to *The Saturday Review*, not necessarily addressed to me, but the editors in their infinite wisdom routed the letters my way when they came across salutations such as idiot, moron, ignorant, and the ever dependable hole-in-the-head. The descriptions fitted no other contributor to this classic booklet.

The letters are in connection with a moronic piece I wrote here some weeks ago about a poll conducted in Cincinnati among 1,000 children. The poll showed that 860 children were watching Milton Berle on television, and 310 children were watching Frank Sinatra. Since these two shows are on at the same hour on the same evening, I—like an idiot—added 860 and 310 and got 1,170. At that point the thought passed through the hole in my head that here was a poll which proved that 1,170 out of 1,000 were watching television that night.

I got the same fatuous thought about the Groucho Marx show and "Stop the Music," which appear opposite each other, in which the number of children watching was greater than the 1,000 questioned. The same bewildering thing happened in several other instances in the poll.

However, the bewilderment has been dispelled, and I wish to make abject amends now that I have been enlightened, thanks to my readers. All

four of them. Four letters may seem a small sample for a survey to prove my idiocy, but since there were no letters corroborating my line of reasoning, I must accept these four as a cross-section of my readers. A very cross section. And I wish to pass on to you the solution to this "mystifying illusion" of 1,170 children out of 1,000 watching television at the same time. (Ha, ha.) I can laugh now because it all seems so simple since it has been explained to me.

Twenty-five per cent of the letters received (one) came from a Mr. Kenneth O'Meara, Caribbean Imports, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Please read it:

Gentlemen: On January 26th Goodman Ace demonstrated he has a hole in his head you could drive a truck through . . . Ace is convulsed at his discovery that some children appear to be watching two simultaneous programs at once. Now like all mystifying tricks this one is ridiculously simple upon being explained; but for a so-called TV critic not to see through the trick—my word! . . . He better find out about kinescopes. Sure, Uncle Miltie and Frankie Boy may be working the same shift in New York, but there are a heck of a lot of places where they can be seen at different hours and on different days.

Kinescope, of course! That's the filmed version of a television show which can be played in any city on any day and at any hour. To have