



Lights, Camera, Action!

Sad farewell for Mr. Chips

By LLOYD CHESLEY

James Hilton intended that his novel, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, be a simple intimate story of the quiet life of a public school teacher in England. As the story comes across in the new musical version it is as sprawling as an epic, as intimate as a census.

Legendary in the cinema is the performance, in 1939, of English actor Robert Donat in this part. The film has been out of reach for some time and has now been withdrawn from circulation, due to the release of the musical. I cannot attest to its excellence, having never seen it, but should it become available again, we at Cinematheque will surely show it.

Peter O'Toole is the new Mr. Chips and it is trite to call it one of this year's best performances, for it is more than that, it is a great performance. The story, as scripted by Terrence Rattigan, is quite beautiful, and the supporting cast, yes, even Petulia Clark, are all fine, if not better.

But this is a musical. Leslie Bricusse did fine working with Anthony Newley, but his tepid score for Chips proves that he needed the help he then got. The lyrics are silly, the score repetitious.

But this is an intimate story. The director has the most frustratingly self-conscious mannerisms in the use of his camera, making a small story into a grand epic. Great zoom shots make the characters miniscule in a giant screen canvas and totally destroy any attention given to them. The lens is clouded with more gauze and vasoline than most hospitals keep on hand and the camera jumps around until we are dizzy and lost.

Goodbye Mr. Chips had potential as a fine musical and the script and cast, especially O'Toole, did their best. But the limp music and high school direction have done it irreparable damage.



Peter O'Toole plays the musical Mr. Chips.

Faulkner would like The Reivers on film

By DAN MERKUR

The *Reivers* is a movie William Faulkner would have liked; which is saying a hell of a lot for the movie adaptation of his Pulitzer Prize winning novel.

Many novels are concerned with a man's quest of self-discovery and the end of self-deceit, but the protagonist of *The Reivers* is Lucius, an 11-year-old boy in Mississippi of 1905, and his quest is just beginning of his self-discovery. He is just beginning to learn.

It is not Lear's realization of the scheme of the world. It doesn't have the finality of Willy Loman's discoveries. It is a simple search for the meaning of honour in a world of deceit and strange morals.

The type of integrity that Lucius finds is quaint and archaic, but as vital as anything *The Arrangement* tried to say. The quest is like Don Quixote's—achronistic, but once meaningful.

Only the love Faulkner bore for the era, and the love captured in this celluloid canvas make it meaningful once again. As Faulkner's farewell to the South, it is an amazingly powerful story.

The visuals are good — the colour is superb and some of the direction is great. The horse races — cut to speed the first up, and then slow motion for the second to expand time — are truly beautiful. The whore house is caught somewhere between the gaudy cheapness and the gilded splendour of different views — we see it as strangely gaudy and splendid. The Yellow Linton Flyer is a thing of beauty and elegance, with the power of 16 horses beneath its hood.

The mood is vanishing elegance — an old man's looking back with affection on a vanished boyhood, the bitter remembrances of things long gone.

The voices are all perfect — from stars Steve McQueen and Sharon

Farrell's studied faint drawl, to Lucius' air of innocence, and including of course all the background Southern voices of the supporting players. Dub Taylor shows up as a lecherous quack, and the familiar character actor, whose name I'll never learn, who plays Lucius' grandfather, has to have been chosen for the perfection of his voice. And of course Burgess Meredith was an ideal choice as the narrator, who looks back on his first trip to a whore house at age 11.

There is a certain type of film whose primary aim is to create and sustain a given mood. In a film like *The Reivers* where an era is recreated, rather than actually recreate the era and have the audience slowly experience it, thereby evoking a feeling of knowledge, nostalgia and understanding, the film-makers shorten our path by stylistically creating the feeling gotten from living in that era. Since we are concerned only with the reaction, the filmmakers take a shorter route to obtaining the reaction they want.

All this lends an air of fiction to the film — but then film is not

concerned with 'airs of fiction'. For example if we were to see in a single long shot two men making passes at each other with knives and then burying their knives in each other and then collapsing, you would undoubtedly react.

But if instead the camera cut in to a close-up of the two men, and then to extreme close-ups of the knife-blades flashing in the light, and then to the men's grim faces, followed by fast cutting through the action and the stabbing, and then slowly tracking out as they fall, you would undoubtedly get more involved in the action.

The second scenario is more interesting, more engrossing. But it is no less real than the first. It just requires more documentary camera shooting simultaneously than the first.

Which is something most documentary filmmakers don't use, and so the first description has more of the documentary "real life" feel to it, while the second uses the full vocabulary of creative fictional filmmaking. The trick to fictional filmmaking is to place the camera in such a position that it not only records objectively, but emphasizes and de-emphasizes

different actions, in other words, subjectively reacts to the stimuli.

I never lived in the South of 1905, but I'm far happier living it, albeit second-hand, through Faulkner's recreation translated onto the screen, than in learning about it, again second-hand, in history books. It's not the facts of 1905 that concern me. It's the way people thought, the views they held. And that *The Reivers* tells me.

It is important to note that, in effect, *The Reivers* is like *The Glass Menagerie*, an autobiographical remembrance, and so if things aren't quite right — like the hydro wires along the dirt road — well, that's okay. Remembrances aren't the facts of the past, they are the feeling of the past. And if it is one thing *The Reivers* has, it is the feeling of Faulkner's boyhood.

When you come down to it, there isn't much about *The Reivers* I didn't like except my seat, but then I expect it to be leaving the Imperial for five other theatres in the chain quite shortly. But then it might close. Be sure to catch it, if you have any liking for nostalgia, innocence, or William Faulkner.

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Lavish, 'B' grade, describes new Bond

In *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, the latest James Bond formula film, there is one highly memorable line. On hearing of Bond's flight down a mountainside, villain Telly Savalas tells his henchmen, "We'll head him off at the precipice," which summarizes the movie nicely. OHMSS is probably the gaudiest, most expensive, most lavished upon, most exploited "B" grade action film ever made.

OHMSS has one thing going for it — its pace is frenetic. In order to cover the occasional lapse in action when some dialogue is necessary to further the plot, the camera pans up and zooms in, or tracks in and cranes downward, or tracks parallel and pans up, but is never, never still.

The elements of suspense that are built into the story are in general sound track gimmicks. An off-camera slamming door sounds like a gunshot, or after thirty seconds of silence a church bell rings at 120 decibels. You jump. Who wouldn't? But do you pay \$2.25 for it?

The kind of action, of excitement, in this flick is not my style. The pace, though incredibly swift, is still not fast enough to fully engross me. Diana Rigg is little more than adequate, though George Lazenby is surprisingly OK as Connery's successor. There is nothing about the film that is bad though, but it's still not a film I'd make an evening of. But on a dull, wet afternoon... Maybe.

— D.M.

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