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Sixty-Five Years of British Cinema

September 9 - November 12, 1971

Monday, October 4 (1:00 p.m.)

Thursday, October 7 (5:30 p.m.)

THE FALLEN IDOL. 1948. London Films production. Produced by Carol Reed. Associate Producer: Phil Brandon. Directed by Carol Reed. Assistant Director: Guy Hamilton. Script by Graham Greene. Additional Dialogue by Lesley Storm, William Templeton. Photography by Georges Perinal. Edited by Oswald Hafenrichter. Sets by Vincent Korda, James Sawyer. Assistant Art Director: John Hawkesworth. Music by William Alwyn. Music Director: Dr. Hubert Clifford. Sound Supervisor: John Cox. Assistant Recordist: Bert Ross, Red Law. Courtesy The Walter Reade Organization, and George Eastman House Motion Picture Study Collection. 92 minutes.

Cast: Ralph Richardson (Baines), Michèle Morgan (Julie), Bobby Henrey (Felipe), Sonia Dresdel (Mrs. Baines), Denis O'Dea (Det. Insp. Crower), Walter Fitzgerald (Dr. Fenton), Karel Stepanek (First Secretary), Joan Young (Mrs. Barrow), Danby Nichols (Mrs. Patterson), Bernard Lee (Det. Hart), Jack Hawkins (Det. Lake), Geoffrey Keene (Det. Davis), Hay Petrie (Clockwinder), James Hayter (Perry), John Ruddock (Dr. Wilson), Torin Thatcher (Policeman 'A'), George Woodbridge (Police Sergeant), Dora Bryan (Rose), Gerald Hinze (Ambassador), Nora Gordon (Waitress), Ethel Coleridge (Housekeeper), Ralph Norman (1st Policeman), James Swan (2nd Policeman).

"...Carol Reed's new film, THE FALLEN IDOL, seems to me the best thing he has ever done, because it is full of heart as well as intelligence, wisdom as well as wit, and with all the decision of its statement it manages to be curiously gentle. It is not so powerful a piece as ODD MAN OUT, but some people will find it more completely satisfying, and I have no doubts at all that it was more difficult to execute, dealing, as it does, with the delicate balance of human relationships, and not with a drama outwardly imposed by plot and action. In my own mind I couple THE FALLEN IDOL with that other strangely private picture, BRIEF ENCOUNTER. Both these films make a peculiar sort of intimate appeal to the spectator, whispering directly and persuasively to the individual rather than speaking to an audience as a crowd.

THE FALLEN IDOL is based on Graham Greene's short story, The Basement Room, and tells how a small boy, left in charge of the butler and his wife in a big London house during his parents' absence, becomes a bewildered witness of the woman's accidental death and the man's unhappy love affair. Because the butler is his hero, the child lies valiantly to save him from a murder charge, and because he is very young and lies badly, his sheer devotion gets the innocent man deeper and deeper into trouble. It is only at the cost of the boy's painful discovery that his hero has been systematically lying to him, little white lies, but lots of them, that the story arrives at a more or less happy ending. 'There's lies and lies; some lies are just kindness,' the butler tells the little boy quietly; and the discussion of this argument is really the picture's theme.

The acting of this very tricky work seems to me almost perfect. Sir Ralph Richardson brings a gentleman's gentleness to the part of a gentleman's gentleman, and I don't think he has ever played a scene on the screen more moving than the one in which, in a shabby genteel Chelsea tea-shop, he is trying under the watchful eyes of the child, to persuade the girl whom he loves not to go away and leave him. In every movement, every fumbling phrase, every guarded look, he conveys the terrible frustration of the secret meeting, and as he walks home across the square with the boy trotting gaily at his side, you can feel the agonising weight of the limbs that drags one down after parting. Michèle Morgan gives the girl a sweetness and natural goodness that justifies the butler's devotion to her, and Sonia Dresdel plays the wife with just the right sting and savagery. Whether the remarkable performance of the small boy, Bobby Henrey, is the result of conscious art or of Mr. Reed's gifted direction, it is unprofitable to try to judge, but there is no doubt that this is one of the most endearing child studies ever given in the cinema.

At every turn THE FALLEN IDOL is a true picture of life as seen, heard, and interpreted through the delicate senses of an artist; true in speech, behaviour, instinct, mood and atmosphere; a very lovely, heartfelt film."

-- C. A. Lejeune, The Observer, 3.10.48