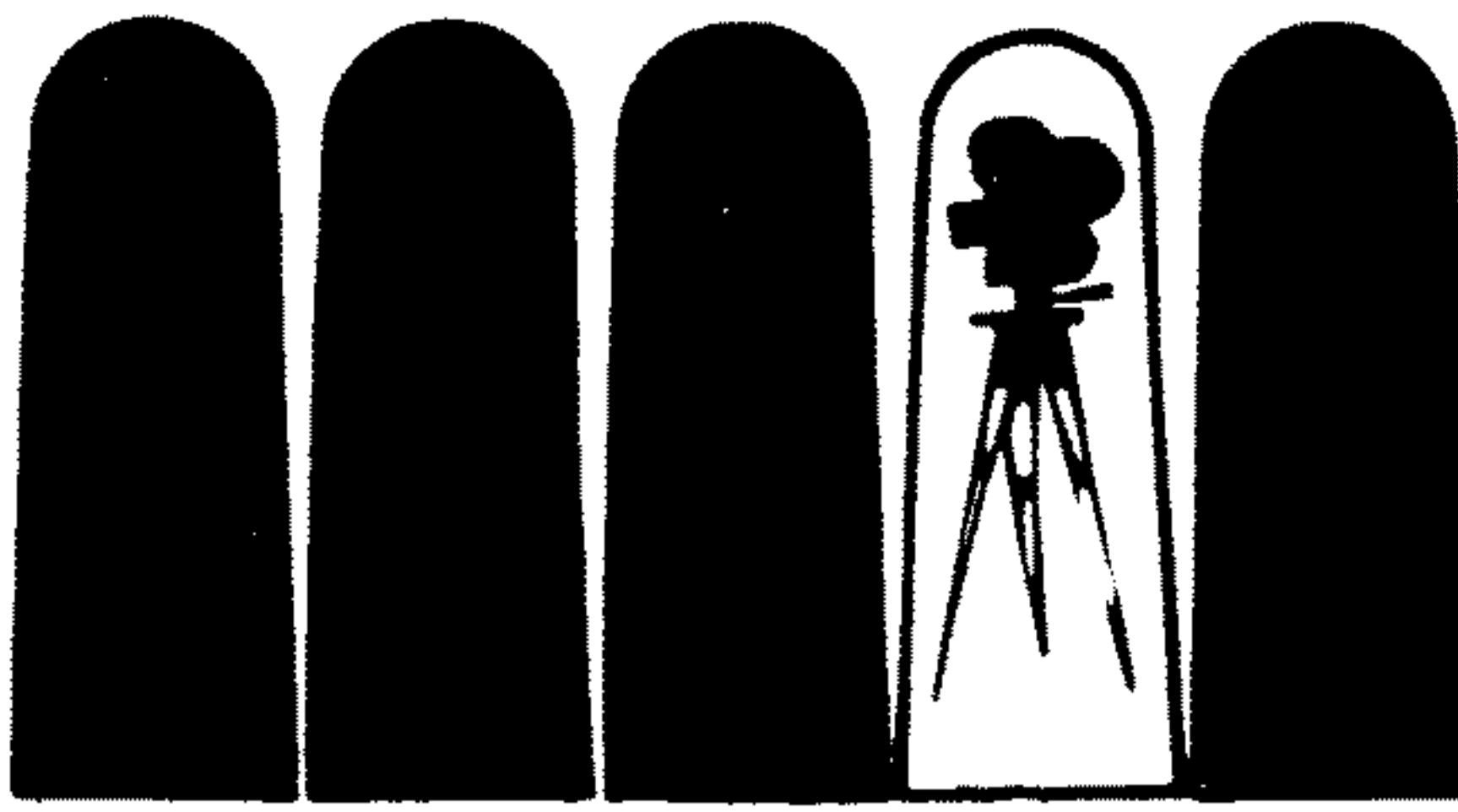


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ANNA KARENINA (1935)

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|------------------|---------------------|---|
| Anna Karenina | Greta Garbo | Adapted from the novel of Leo Tolstoy |
| Vronsky | Fredric March | Screenplay by Clemence Dane and Salka Viertel |
| Kitty | Maurean O'Sullivan | |
| Levin | Gyles Isham | Dialogue adapted by S. N. Berman |
| Sergei | Freddie Bartholomew | Film edited by Robert Kern |
| Karenin | Basil Rathbone | Music by Herbert Stothart |
| Countess Vronsky | Mary Robinson | Directed by Clarence Brown |
| Stiva | Reginald Owen | Produced by Mr. Brown and David Selznick |
| Hashvin | Reginald Denny | An MGM production |
| Dolly | Phoebe Foster | |

Among Tolstoi's novels, only Resurrection rivals with ANNA KARENINA in screen popularity. The latter work was made into films in 1915 and 1927 (as LOVE with Greta Garbo and John Gilbert), and it was filmed in England as a vehicle for Vivian Leigh more recently. Yet Clarence Brown's 1935 version with Garbo is generally regarded as the best of the lot.

The screen adaption of the lengthy novel was, of necessity, rather tightly condensed. The love affair of Levin is almost completely eliminated, in order to concentrate on the Anna-Vronsky-Karenin triangle. While many felt the novel was treated unfairly, the adaption made good cinematic sense. Also among the casualties was Stepan Oblonsky. However, many of the scenes caught the spirit of the novel, particularly the meeting of Anna and Vronsky at the train station and the marvellous steeple-chase, which comes across with great vigor.

But the film is centered around Garbo, who really convinces the spectator that she is Anna. She is tragic, lovely and glamorous at the same time, and projects a certain magic that makes Anna one of her most interesting roles. Fredric March looks, acts and talks like Vronsky but he is far from being Vronsky in the same way that Garbo is Anna. And Freddie Bartholomew is too mature and experienced in his scenes with Garbo to be a convincing child. Basil Rathbone is a chilling Karenin, but still makes him a man with whom the audience can feel a certain sympathy.

In the film, the plight of the lovers is linked to the decadent and hypocritical society of the day, although that society is not too different in our own time. The one original addition to the familiar story is the gigantic orgy that opens the film, a scene that is worthy of Stroheim at his best. The ball scenes also have an elegance in the finest tradition of MGM design. On the deficit side, there is the usual miserable musical score of Herbert Stothart, and some of the minor roles are overplayed. Clarence Brown was a rather strange choice for the director of this film, but he did a surprisingly good job with such a sprawling production. Many years later Brown made the powerful INTRUDER IN THE DUST.

If the film version of ANNA KARENINA is far from being what Tolstoi wrote in the pages of his novel, it is nonetheless a better than average attempt to do justice to that author and also superlative entertainment.

David Stewart Hull