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"CYNARA" (Sam Goldwyn-United Artists, 1932) Directed by King Vidor
Scenario by Frances Marion and Lynn Starling from the play by H.M. Harwood and
Robert Core Brown, and the novel "An Imperfect Lover" by Brown; Camera, Ray
June; Music, Alfred Newman; 7 reels

With Ronald Colman, Kay Francis, Phyllis Barry, Henry Stephenson, Vivian
Tattersall, Florine McKimsey, Clarissa Selwyn, Paul Porcasi, George Kirby, Donald
Stewart, Wilson Benge, George Humbert, Erville Alderson, Montague Shaw, Emily
Pitzroy, Halliwell Hobbes, Charles Hall.

"Cynara" is both a good glossy Goldwyn and an ideal Colman vehicle; moreover it
moves briskly and is well acted. Having covered those plus factors, one can't
otherwise be too satisfied with it. Possibly the play (with Philip Merivale)
made more sense, but everybody in the film behaves with dignified imbecility
throughout, and it is difficult to accord much sympathy even to the most
deserving characters. Vidor borrows from himself (the idyllic lateral tracking
shot of the boat, borrowed from "Bardseleys the Magnificent") and also steals
Dieterle's beautiful out (tossed papers dissolving into flying pigeons)
from "Her Majesty Love" which was later re-pillaged to great acclaim for its
originality by Wyler in "Dodsworth". Vidor also, somewhat illegitimately, twice
uses a rather menacing overhead shot of a stairway, as if establishing it for
a dramatic highlight that never comes. The period is decidedly nondescript too;
the clothes and decor are all strictly 1932, even for rather backward London;
yet since a visit to the cinema producer Chaplin's "A Dog's Life", presumably
the period is much earlier. To be playful, with that film as a criterion, it
should be 1918 and wartime - which makes the flippant England to Europe
travelling a little eye-brow raising too. "Cynara" probably disappoints most
because it is a simple and uncomplicated story, and could easily have gone in
the direction of either Lean's "Brief Encounter" or King's silent "Stella
Dallas"; as it is, it tries to be both an intelligent adaptation of a mildly
notorious play, and at the same time a good popular soap-opera, probably coming
closest to the latter. On those terms, and with the sensitive playing of
Colman and Barry, and the effective scoring by Newman, it's considerably more
than a misfire, but somewhat less than a success.

Wm. K. Everson

T. Huff. Memorial Film Society

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