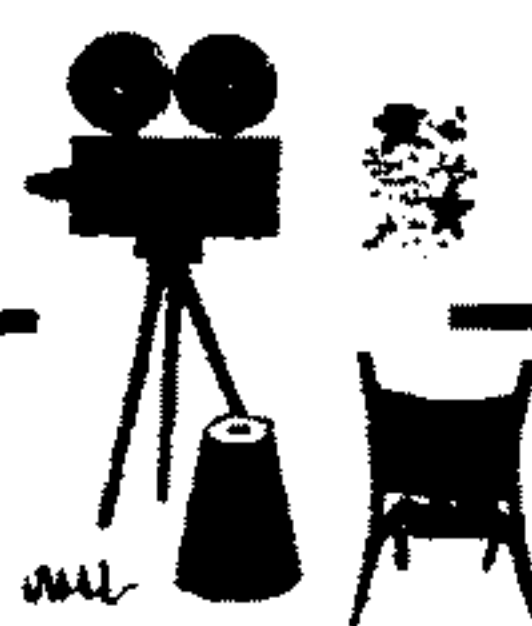


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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Shirley Booth Drowned in Suds

happy airman troubled by the things of this earth. But as the picture plunges into the murky emotions of the Vina Delmar novel it is all drowned in suds.

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WHAT makes a soap opera? There must be something instantly recognizable about the form, for at the showing of *"About Mrs. Leslie"* everybody but the people from Paramount mumbled "soap opera." The people from Paramount said: "Woman's picture." Now soap operas obviously concern themselves with many different dramatic conflicts; some of them, indeed, are based on the same themes we have seen in the great plays. Yet there must be some transition place at which the form turns from drama to detergent. Let us see if we can discover the emulsifying point.

Is it that soap operas have women for their central characters? They do, but *"Medea,"* *"Born Yesterday,"* and *"Little Women"* all have ladies at the center of the stage, and none of these is a soap opera. Are they concerned with star-crossed lovers? They are, but so are *"Romeo"* and *"The American Tragedy."* Do they exhibit a high percentage of infirmities which are disabling but not disfiguring, such as blindness and paralysis from the waist down? Indeed, yet the characters in *"About Mrs. Leslie"* walk clear-eyed and upright from main title to the end, and one reel of *"About Mrs. Leslie"* gets dishes miracle clean in seconds.

All right, then, what makes a soap opera? It is, I believe, its special attention to gallant female suffering. The word "gallant" is controlling here. I don't believe there can be a soap opera without some woman-past-the-petal-bloom-of-youth-but-still-attractive who gallantly endures some form of living hell.

In *"Magnificent Obsession,"* recently remade, Jane Wyman loses her doctor husband because his resuscitator is being used on a rich wastrel who got himself in a motorboat accident. Later the rich wastrel chases Jane Wyman out of a car; she is run over and blinded. Three Swiss doctors tell her she will never see again. What does Jane Wyman do? She lifts her chin and smiles gallantly.

In *"About Mrs. Leslie"* Shirley Booth, a nightclub singer, falls in love with an aircraft manufacturer, Robert Ryan. He is married, has two sons, and is working in a key post in government. The best he can offer Shirley Booth is an annual six weeks' holiday in a house on the California coast. Each year when the holiday is ended he drives away back into his own world, and this is very hard for Shirley Booth. What does she do? She lifts her chin and smiles gallantly.

Now at the business of lifting her chin and smiling gallantly Shirley Booth is away off by herself, and I venture to say that at this moment she will surely break your heart. But the loyal defenders of Shirley Booth, who make a mighty army when assembled, will rise up and smite Paramount for causing the lady so much suffering for so small a reason as *"About Mrs. Leslie."*

The director, Daniel Mann, has begun the film with a bite of realism. Miss Booth is discovered operating a rooming-house near Hollywood. Tides of life flow around her, and at the beginning it looks amazingly like life. There is a young man, Alex Nicol, who drinks too much because his sister married a rich old man, and when he has a hangover it is a sick hangover, not a joke about slamming doors. There is a young girl, Marjie Millar, who was once a bit of a butterfly around the movie colony but is now trying to break into television. Daniel Mann gives her an audition in which she is mediocre—not hopelessly bad, not good-but-misunderstood, just mediocre. In the midst of this is Shirley Booth, practical, independent, slightly acid, quietly doing what must be done to get through her busy but empty days. In a series of flashbacks the film explains how she came to this butt-end of her days and ways. She was singing in a night club, met the aircraft manufacturer, went to California with him for this unblessed holiday, kept doing it until he died, and then was left with nothing. Nothing, that is, but a bitter lesson which enables her to say to the young people when they discover their love for each other: "Get it all. Don't settle for half."

The company is superbly chosen. Shirley Booth is moving when allowed to be, and Robert Ryan is rock-ribbed and stalwart as the un-

