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NEVER FEAR

Producer:	Collier Young
Director:	Ida Lupino
Scenario:	Ida Lupino/Collier Young
Editors:	William H. Ziegler and Harvey Manger
Music:	Leith Stevens
Photography:	Archie Stout
Choreography:	Bill Daniels

CAST:

Carol Williams	Sally Forrest
Guy Richards	Keefe Brasselle
Len Randall	Hugh O'Brian
Phyllis Townsend	Eve Mills
Dr. Middleton	Larry Dobkin
Josie	Rita Lupino
Walter Williams	Herbert Butterfield
Red Dawson	Kevin O'Morrison
Dr. Taylor	Stanley Waxman

U.S.A. 1950 Ida Lupino Production.

As an independent producer and director working in Hollywood in the 1950's, Ida Lupino chose to work largely in the melodrama, a genre which, more than any other, has presented a less reified view of women, as Douglas Sirk's films indicate quite clearly. NEVER FEAR represents a classic case of a film which, at the unconscious level, expresses the idea of the oppression of women, while retaining the conventional narrative structure of run-of-the-mill Hollywood products. The story is highly conventional. A dancing team - Guy Richards and Carol Williams - is broken up when Carol falls ill from polio. The rest of the film traces her struggle to walk again and culminates in a "happy ending" in which she is once again united with Guy. However, Lupino overlays this story with a disturbing sense of ambiguity in her depiction of male/female relationships, in which the cloying optimism of the film text is totally subverted from within.

In all Lupino's films, the sign of disablement stands as a metaphor for the impossibility of fulfilling relationships between men and women within the sexist ideology. The first sequence of the film in which Guy and Carol perform their dance routine in a night club succinctly sums up the real nature of the "happy partnership": a highly stylised sword dance. Below the surface reality of the film, Carol's paralysing illness expresses a secondary reality: her oppression as a woman and her frustrated desire for independence. As the film progresses and she learns to walk again, Lupino confronts her with a number of choices and all are made to appear equally bleak. Guy becomes a real-estate salesman for "Happy Homes", revealed as a cut-throat business trading on fantasy and bad faith. The possibility of friendship and camaraderie is presented in a macabre scene in which the hospital patients perform a square dance in their wheel-chairs. The ability to walk and enter the outside world involves an oppressive discipline leading ultimately to the film's "happy ending", which Lupino depicts with the image of the walking stick - the metaphor for her disablement - dominating the frame.

It would be wrong to claim that Ida Lupino is a feminist director. However, her films are of great interest in the development of women's cinema. At the unconscious level, they express a world of adolescent fantasy which is far more valid than that expressed by Leni Riefenstahl in THE BLUE LIGHT. The metaphor of paralysis stands as a powerful image of repression and frustration.

Claire Johnston.