



BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL

Dark Victory

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A Long Island socialite (Davis) who lives life to the full is unaware of an unwelcome medical diagnosis while becoming close to the doctor (George Brent) who is treating her. This unashamedly melodramatic tear jerker sees Davis brilliantly navigating a role that requires multiple layers and a commitment to the genre, and it saw her rewarded with another Oscar® nomination, securing her status as one of Hollywood's leading talents.

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Contemporary reviews

Last quarter I had the rare treat of seeing two Bette Davis films. I say I, and not we, because I believe it to be true that Bette Davis is not everyone's choice, but that does not shake my conviction that she is the greatest, the only actress in the cinema. And indeed after seeing those two films, *Dark Victory* and *Juarez*, my conviction is stronger than ever.

The essence of acting on the films, as opposed to appearing on them, lies in the ability to communicate to an audience what a character is thinking and feeling. The feeling is comparatively easy, once the control of facial expression has been mastered. Garbo has an unfailing camera instinct in this respect; she always looks right without the least difficulty, but she never seems to be thinking beyond the immediate moment. With Bette Davis one is always two jumps ahead with her of her dialogue. Every shot is a build-up for the next one, so that when her part is finished, her characterisation has the inevitability of completeness. She lives her characters rather than acts them. There is no one else in films today who can quite do that. No one who can so successfully overcome the technical but unavoidable disadvantage of building up a character in scenes that are not consecutive in the story. Muni, Tracy, Laughton, Rainer, Bergner and the rest can be relied upon to act any scene without fault, but when the director says 'cut' the performance is finished and complete; everything has been said and done, the thought current is switched off instead of being left on to illuminate the next shot.

But to return to criticism. *Dark Victory* was all about a young high-spirited girl who suffered from dizzy spells and refused to see a doctor, partly from fear, partly from obstinacy. When she is finally persuaded to see Doctor George Brent we learn that she has an incurable brain disease. An operation is performed which gives temporary relief, but her days are numbered and sudden death will come within a very short time. On such a medical foundation is the story built and it is never a particularly convincing one. But Bette Davis forces one to swallow it all, and when death does come to put an end to a life that has been pitifully misspent and all too briefly atoned for, one is genuinely moved, such is the persuasiveness of her acting. But, unfortunately, we are rudely reminded by a sentimental anti-climax that it is, after all, a highly melodramatic piece of hokum that we have been watching.

Alan Page, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 1939

The story is high-pitched melodrama and there is a stupid anti-climax. But it is well directed and holds the interest. Bette Davis, as Judith, has a real actress’s part with every kind of opportunity. The power and artistry of her performance are of a dazzling brilliance. She creates a character that surmounts all the improbabilities of the story; in short, a very great piece of acting. George Brent is excellent as the understanding Steele and Geraldine Fitzgerald, as Bette Davis’s friend, contrives not to be entirely out-acted by the star.

Monthly Film Bulletin, May 1939

DARK VICTORY

Director: Edmund Goulding
©/Production Company: Warner Bros.
Production Company: First National Pictures
In Charge of Production: Jack L. Warner
Executive Producer: Hal B. Wallis *
Associate Producer: David Lewis *
Unit Manager: Robert Ross *
Assistant Director: Frank Heath *
Screenplay: Casey Robinson
Based on the play by: George Emerson Brewer Jr, Bertram Bloch
Director of Photography: Ernie Haller
Editor: William Holmes
Art Director: Robert Haas
Gowns: Orry-Kelly
Music: Max Steiner
Music Director: Leo F. Forbstein
Orchestral Arrangements: Hugo Friedhofer
Sound Recording: Robert B. Lee
Technical Adviser: Leo Schulman *
General Press Representative: S. Charles Einfeld *

Cast

Bette Davis (Judith Traherne)
George Brent (Dr Frederick Steele)
Humphrey Bogart (Michael O’Leary)
Geraldine Fitzgerald (Ann King)
Ronald Reagan (Alec Hamin)
Henry Travers (Dr Parsons)
Cora Witherspoon (Carrie Spottswood)

Dorothy Peterson (Miss Wainwright) *
Virginia Brissac (Martha) *
Charles Richman (Colonel Mantle) *
Herbert Rawlinson (Dr Joe Carter) *
Leonard Mudie (Dr Driscoll) *
Fay Helm (Miss Dodd) *
Lottie Williams (Lucy) *
Diane Bernard (Agatha) *
Jack Mower (veterinarian) *
William Worthington (first specialist) *
Alexander Leftwich (second specialist) *
Ila Rhodes (secretary) *
Stuart Holmes (doctor) *
Frank Darien (anxious little man) *
Johnny Harron (1st man) *
John Ridgely (2nd man) *
Sidney Bracey (bartender) *
Rosella Towne (girl in box) *
Edgar Edwards (trainer) *
Jeffrey Sayre, Will Morgan, Wedgewood Nowell,
Nat Carr, Ed Graham, Jack Goodrich (doctors) *
Maris Wrixon, Richard Bond, Wilda Bennett, Leyland Hodgson, Mary
Currier, David Newell, Marian Alden, Paulette Evans, Frank Mayo
(Judith’s friends) *
Speirs Ruskell (Dr Steele’s assistant) *

USA 1939©
104 mins

* Uncredited

BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL

Dark Victory

Fri 6 Aug 14:15; Mon 23 Aug 18:00

The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex

Sat 7 Aug 15:00; Sat 21 Aug 11:40

The Letter

Sun 8 Aug 15:45; Tue 17 Aug 17:50

The Man Who Came to Dinner

Sun 8 Aug 18:20; Thu 19 Aug 20:40

The Little Foxes

Mon 9 Aug 18:00; Mon 16 Aug 20:30; Thu 19 Aug 17:40

The Whales of August

Wed 11 Aug 14:30; Thu 26 Aug 20:30; Tue 31 Aug 18:10

Old Acquaintance

Wed 11 Aug 17:40; Sun 22 Aug 15:30

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?

Wed 11 Aug 20:30; Mon 16 Aug 18:00; Sat 28 Aug 17:20

Promotional drinks partner



Of Human Bondage

Thu 12 Aug 18:00

Marked Woman

Thu 12 Aug 20:40; Sat 14 Aug 14:45

Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte

Fri 13 Aug 17:40; Wed 18 Aug 14:30; Sat 28 Aug 20:30

Dangerous

Fri 13 Aug 21:00; Wed 18 Aug 18:10

Mr. Skeffington

Sat 14 Aug 17:10; Sun 29 Aug 11:30

All about Eve

Sat 14 Aug 20:25; Sun 29 Aug 15:00

Jezebel

Sun 15 Aug 15:30; Fri 27 Aug 18:00

The Star

Sun 15 Aug 18:30; Wed 25 Aug 20:45

Dead Ringer

Fri 20 Aug 17:45; Mon 30 Aug 15:20

The Nanny

Tue 24 Aug 20:45; Mon 30 Aug 12:40

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