Sights: the insanity of ‘Emily’

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Any architect can tell you what happens when a piece of illustration board is left outdoors on a cold winter day. It warps.

Now, let us turn from a piece of paper to cellulose, and once more we discover that plot left out in the open air of Omaha beach will also warp, and nobody seems to notice. Perhaps that’s a pity.

Picture this: You are lying gracefully on the grass atop a curvaceous young thing (Julie Andrews) who sibbles delightfully at your left nostril and whispers (simultaneously) “I love you, Charlie (or Tom or Dick or Melvin).”

What do you do now?
Kiss her? Make passionate advances? Proclaim your own affection? Don’t be ridiculous; you get pangs of conscience and lurch off into a lengthy discussion of the reasons for your cowardice.

Now, don’t be deceived, Charlie (James Garner) is nothing like a sexual coward—it’s just that he’s a military coward who can’t help being obsessed with the idea.

Emily (that’s the girl’s name) is an army lieutenant (English) who has the hots for Charlie (American) and Charlie teaches her the American way all right. The whole thing is completely unmotivated.

The plot to “The Americanization of Emily” is perhaps the most contrived rain of idiocy to strike this coast in many a moonlight season.

Charlie, the coward, is a “dog-robbber”—that is, he serves steak to the admiral while the masses starve—and therefore is, in Emily’s estimation, something of a heel.

Still, chemistry is at work, and po! We have splendor in the grass. Emily is still unconvinced, however, of Charlie’s sincerity—since, after all he is a coward.

Omaha Actions

It is at this point that Charlie’s admiral decides that “the first dead man on Omaha beach must be a sailor”—and decides that Charlie should be there to take pictures of the men falling in action.

Up to now the whole film, from time to time, has been something of a semi-successful satire on army life and inter-service rivalry between the admirals, generals and marine corps commanders. However, it is at this point that the plot goes to pieces.

It is obvious that the Admiral is insane. Therefore, Charlie accepts the assignment (albeit reluctantly). He and his buddy are lowered into the water of the English channel and slog onto Omaha to be there when the troops arrive.

Cowardly Hero

Yep! You guessed it! Charlie falls in action—and everybody but the audience assumes he’s dead.

It would have been better for the picture if he had been.

So now the coward is the first dead man on Omaha Beach—and he’s a posthumous hero who happens, by the by, to be alive.

Now, what do you think happens? Is he court-martialed for having tried the various tactics he tried to get off? Omaha? (His buddy, you should know, had to force him up the beach at gun-point).

Is he thought a fool for having obeyed the orders of an obviously insane man?

Of course not—he’s taken to Washington and given a hero’s welcome.

So now Hollywood has finally got around to assaulting Country after finally deciding that Motherhood and God were sufficiently buried. Oh well, you can’t blame them for trying.

Emily Is Americanized

Charlie is on the verge, however, of chickening out on the whole deal and telling everybody what asses they are—but he is convinced to lie by (whom else?) Emily.

Which is only logical.

You can look for the satire in this film—and be insulted by the preaching of the gospel of cowardice—or you can look for the rational debate on the nature of bravery—and be insulted by the slap-stick idiocy.

At any rate, one thing is clear: “Emily” is certainly Americanized and it certainly is a pity.