

# Ars Gratia . . .

By ROGER EBERT

Hayley Mills is too accomplished an actress to be caught in "The Parent Trap." Wide-eyed, mistress of innocent larceny, and possessor of a curled-under lower lip that is nearly the equal of Terry-Thomas' tooth-gap as a trademark, Miss Mills is possibly the best actress under 20 now performing in this country, Tuesday Weld notwithstanding.

Yet in the latest of Walt Disney's "all-family" feature films, which also include a saccharine "Pollyanna" and an amusing "Absent-Minded Professor," Miss Mills' double role is hardly the equal of her alone in a film of "Tiger Bay" calibre.

It is important, in this case, to understand what Mr. Disney apparently means by "all-family" film. Dealing as it does with divorce and the efforts of identical twins to reunite their parents, "The Parent Trap" is hardly appropriate for tots expecting another "Dumbo" or "Snow White." Yet since the plot is over-simplified almost to situation comedy level, and the film's adults are at best only slightly less bright than their offspring, Disney's feature is hardly entertaining to mature movie-goers.

It apparently exists, then, as a hybrid for that nebulous group of people between children and adults—teen-agers—who will sit in the balcony and hardly care what it is about.

Hayley Mills very nearly carries the film by herself. She is forced to. The supporting cast is bogged down by a mumbling, Cigar Store Indian-type father, Brian Keith, who seems ready to fade completely off the screen at the drop of a bit of ectoplasm. And the mother, Maureen O'Hara, seems to be acting competently enough on a level just slightly removed from that of the rest of the players. She might be termed Brian's Other Wife, isolated as she is from whatever it is the others are attempting.

"The Parent Trap" itself makes use of what someone has dubbed an "idiot plot." This sort of plot takes advantage of the supposition that all of its characters are idiots. They have to be idiots, or they could see through their problem and bounce to a happy ending in something under the length of the newsreel.

But to prolong the agony to feature-length, they are forced to stumble about in what can only be a vague parody of life.

Miss Mills, as I said, is much too good to be assigned to something like this. In "Tiger Bay," which played last week at the Art Theatre, she was two years younger and a world more convincing.

She played a London slum girl who becomes involved in the protection of a murderer. The film explored the possibilities of pre-adolescent morality and duty to self and authority in a mature manner that raised the film above the conventional "thriller" level. By finally contributing to the killer's capture through her loyalty to him, the girl resolves the plot while preserving her personal morality and allowing the "bad guy" to get caught. The film was human, convincing, memorable . . . and buried, both times around, as half a double-feature. Now that Miss Mills has become justly famous in "Pollyanna" and "The Parent Trap," we hope she finds a film which will reveal her substantial dramatic talents to a wider audience.

\* \* \*

Philip Jose Farmer was a student on this campus when his short story, "The Lovers," first appeared in the science-fiction pulp *Startling Stories*. It was one of his first published works, and one of his best. At the time, it was compared to the work of Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, and the other literate writers of science fiction. The comparisons were deserved.

That was in 1952. And if Farmer has since sunk to more conventional s-f, and even to sex-and-sadism for the Galaxy-Beacon line of paperbacks, he has still, from time to time, produced something that recalls his early work and its sharp, sincere honesty.

Now, with the publication of a greatly-expanded "The Lovers" by Ballantine Books, Farmer has put behind him a work upon which a substantial reputation might be built. "The Lovers" as a novel loses some of the impact and surprise of the short story. But it gains in depth and characterization in the longer length, and emerges as a science-fantasy novel of the stature of Sturgeon's "More Than Human," Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451," or Alfred Bestor's "The Demolished Man."

It is a very well done work in a field which is too often written off as "space opera." Exploring the possibilities of a love situation based on an entirely alien and other-worldly code of behavior, it manages to circumvent convention and throw light on human relationships in a way that strictly realistic, contemporary novels cannot quite equal.

"The Lovers" is more outstanding for its thinking, and for the breadth of its concept, than it is for its writing style. But the writing is much improved over the original pulp appearance, and carries a light, careless mood that contrasts with and expands upon the sombre tone of the plot.