

Blossoms in the Dust

US : 1941 : dir. Mervyn le Roy : M-G-M : 100 min
 prod: Irving Asher : scr: Anita Loos : dir.ph.: Karl Freund & W. Howard Greene
[Richard Nichols](#); [Charley Bates](#); [Douglas Madore](#)
 Greer Garson; Walter Pidgeon; Felix Bressart; Marsha Hunt; Fay Holden; Samuel S Hinds;
 William Henry; Kathleen Howard; John Eldredge; Henry O'Neill; Clinton Rosemond;
 Theresa Harris; George Lessey; Cecil Cunningham; Ann Morriss; Marc Lawrence

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	≠	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5644	3½	12	2	1,766	-	-	-	-	-	No	unseen

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"Slick tear-jerker of Texas orphanage founded by Garson when she loses her own child. Tastefully acted. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above, but mistranslating "slick" as "handy"

Halliwell's Film Guide review

"A woman who loses her husband and child founds a state orphanage. Archetypal tearjerker of the forties, a glossy "woman's picture" which distorts the facts into a star vehicle. Excellent colour helped to make it an enormous success. Based on the life of Edna Gladney. Academy Award nominations: Best Picture; Karl Freund, W Howard Greene; Greer Garson ** "

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"The title refers to unwanted children and reflects only too well the gross sentimentality of this glossy movie, supposedly based on the life of Edna Gladney (played here by Greer Garson). Unable to have children she becomes a society gadfly till her husband (Walter Pidgeon) encourages her to start an orphanage. Strictly for determinedly unembarrassed romantics."

The MGM Story – the Complete History of Fifty Roaring Years – review:

"Greer Garson became a superstar with **"BLOSSOMS IN THE DUST"**, which established her and Walter Pidgeon as a team of durable value to MGM; and Irving Asher's production was so lush in Technicolor that it won an Academy Award for art direction (Cedric Gibbons, Urie McCleary) and set decoration (Edwin B Willis). "Heart-warming" was the adjective most often used for this drama based on fact, about Edna Gladney, famous welfare worker for children. It had orphan babies gurgling all over the screen, and vast audiences gulping tears all over the world. Miss Garson and Pidgeon were supported by Felix Bressart, Marsha Hunt, Fay Holden, Samuel S Hinds, William Henry, Kathleen Howard, John Eldredge, Henry O'Neill, Clinton Rosemond, Theresa Harris, George Lessey, Cecil Cunningham, Ann Morriss and Marc Lawrence. Mervyn Le Roy directed Anita Loos' screenplay, from Ralph Weelwright's original."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
 review:

"What might have been a strong, noble subject – the founding of an orphanage by a woman who has lost her husband and child – founders in the glossy, phoney MGM treatment. ** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"A lovely cry, ever since 1941. Greer Garson founds a home for illegitimate children. The shamelessly sentimental script is, astonishingly,

by Anita Loos, who wrote "GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES". 7 "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Glossy biopic of Edna Gladney, a childless Texan lady who channelled her frustration into taking up the cause of illegitimate children and running foster homes. Pretty Technicolor, but the tearjerking is shameless."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"The first film (it's about orphan children) that Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon made together started a box-office bonanza unseen at MGM since the peak years of Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy. The studio teamed them together seven more times in the next 12 years – years that included such highly praised hits as "MADAME CURIE" and "MRS MINIVER". *** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"What Father Flanagan is to "BOYS' TOWN" in Nebraska, Edna Gladney was to an orphans' home in Texas operated entirely on a strong mother love instinct and the gracious donations of Texans. The home is the Texas Children's Home and Aid Society of Fort Worth. "BLOSSOMS IN THE DUST" is a worthy production on which much care has been showered by Mervyn Le Roy and others, but the picture fails to impress as being big.

There are almost too many kids, with much attention paid to them. Result is a sentimentally sugary flavour which also extends over the romantic portions of the film. There is no comedy relief.

Pidgeon is the Texan who marries Edna Gladney of Wisconsin and worships her. The baby born to them dies and subsequently Pidgeon passes away suddenly after they have done some charity work for poor kids and foundlings. From there on Garson takes up the placement of unfortunate children as a lifetime work and ultimately is instrumental in passing a law which eliminates from public record whether orphans were born legitimately or not.

Playing Edna Gladney, Garson spans many years but does not appreciably age. Academy

Award 1941: Best Colour Interior Decoration (Cedric Gibbons, Urie McCleary); nomination: Best Picture. "

Excerpt from filmography of Garson in *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of the World's Great Movie Stars and Their Films*:

"Greer Garson starred in the sleekest, sweetest and most sentimental women's pictures of the '40s. Of their type, they are virtually unbeatable, but because glutinous kitsch is unfashionable now they have won little critical favour. Garson's career was brief, but magnificent in its own way. She came literally out of nowhere, snatched the crown of Queen of MGM from such seasoned troupers as Joan Crawford and Norma Shearer, won an Academy Award for "MRS MINIVER", and became a top box-office star in less than four years.

She met a popular need for a nobly-suffering but capable and lady-like mother figure for the war years, and then began to fade away almost as soon as the war was over; she was a good actress, but was cast in a mould by Louis B Mayer, the head of MGM, and was never able to break out of it – she acerbically described herself as "Metro's Glorified Mother".

Garson was born in County Down, Northern Ireland, on September 29, 1908 and won a fair reputation on the London stage in the '30s, playing opposite Laurence Olivier and being directed by Noel Coward. Mayer saw her in a play called Old Music (he had thought it was a musical) and signed her for MGM. She made her debut in 1939 with the small but meaty role of the young wife who dies in "GOODBYE, MR CHIPS", portrayed Elizabeth Bennet opposite Olivier in "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE", and began her suffering, self-sacrificing career with Walter Pidgeon in "BLOSSOMS IN THE DUST" (the first of eight films they made together)... "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"All the MGM gloss in the world can't hide the fact that this is a first-class tear-jerker. It's a fine

biopic that tells the tale of Edna Gladney, who started a children's home for orphans and strays. And nobody could be better equipped to play her than Greer Garson. Trouble is, there are far too many children to keep track of¹ and Garson evidently refused to age alongside the narrative. Nevertheless, it's well worth a look. *** "

"Biographical drama. After her own life is touched by tragedy, Edna Gladney establishes a home for orphans and unwanted children. *** "

"Film biography of Edna Gladney, who founded the Texas Children's Home and Aid Society when her own life was touched by tragedy. *** "

Sunday Times review:

"Greer Garson gives one of her most affecting performances as the real-life Edna Gladney who, after the death of her son, was unable to have more children and dedicated herself to founding an orphanage in Fort Worth. In time, she forced a change in the Texas state law regarding illegitimacy. Walter Pidgeon plays the devoted husband whose untimely demise spurs her to new endeavours. Garson's flaming tresses look wonderful in vintage Technicolor."

"The story of a woman who set up a children's home at Fort Worth in Texas. * "

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Richard Nichols:

"This limpid, curly child had been preceded on to the screen by four elder brothers: Paul, Ray, Buster and Eddie. (All but Paul are on display in **"VIGIL IN THE NIGHT"**, and Paul and Ray were both in **"BOYS TOWN"**.) It's not Richard's fault that because he looked angelic he was made to play, by and large, a series of lachrymose little creeps."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Charley Bates:

"The dark, usually disruptive Bates was in many famous films of the Forties. He was Teresa Wright's kid brother, for instance, in

"SHADOW OF A DOUBT", Gregory Peck's guilty buried self in **"SPELLBOUND"** and Ernest Severn's antagonist in **"PURSUED"**. Later, Charley was in **"SHOCKPROOF"** (49) before fading from the scene."

¹ *What – in a children's home?*

"*The MGM Story*" review lists sixteen cast members, and none of them are children, which gives some indication of the film's priorities. Children, as the saccharine title makes plain, are pretty flowers in Ms Garson's garden, but the story is about the gardener. Indeed, she has far too many flowers, we are told several times. Orphans should not be seen **or** heard.

There was a war on, of course, and if the major studios thought the public wanted syrup and high-gloss escapism, they probably weren't far wrong at the time. And if the facts underwent major surgery in converting this story into a star vehicle, no-one worried about that too much. TV "biopics" of fifty years later were taking just as many liberties with their "based on a true story" soaped-up melodramas.

One could fill a large hole in the desert with films in praise of noble women selflessly devoting their lives to orphaned/handicapped/maladjusted children, but *Variety* is right in pointing out that this is only the flip-side to those 1930s "**BOYS' TOWN**"-style social conscience melodramas in praise of noble priests and educators. Children make for a more decorative conduit to nobility than, say, the criminally insane or the elderly and senile. Social work must never be allowed to depress the audience. The stigma of illegitimacy was still very real in 1941, and that aspect of the story is perhaps the most interesting.

Well, but there **are** some children in there somewhere. Richard Nichols was about 6 (he was seen in "**LITTLE MEN**" the previous year), while Douglas Madore, age unknown, had appeared in "**BAD LITTLE ANGEL**" (39 – not in the title role), "**HERE COMES MR JORDAN**" (41) and "**ON THE SUNNY SIDE**" (41, with Roddy McDowall) among many others. Charley Bates, ±8, later chalked up such titles as "**I MARRIED A WITCH**" (42), "**THE STRANGE DEATH OF ADOLPH HITLER**" (43, as a Hitler Youth) and "**THE GREEN YEARS**" (46, with Dean Stockwell).

See subject index under **ORPHANS / ADOPTION / CHILDREN'S HOMES**.