

direct, outward manifestations of nightmare as maniacal laughs, the eerie cry of a night-bird, the echoing silence of a dark corridor, and the horrid splintering of a coffin in which a woman has been prematurely buried. But these are jittery enough sights and sounds in all conscience, and they are here dispensed not with the heavy-handed obviousness which marks the usual horror movie but with the educated, almost pedantically literary flavour which has distinguished all the infernal little masterpieces to date of Val Lewton and his colleagues.

This is the story of what happens when a well-assorted group of people, quarantined on a funereal little island off the Greek coast, following the death of one of their number by plague, begin to get on one another's nerves. Their fear of death grows and spreads as pervasively and destructively as the plague which strikes them down one by one. Old superstitions begin to take control; there is vaguely disturbing talk of a Something called the "Vorvolaka"; and this preoccupation with death and the unseen produces a tension not matched by many films. Interestingly enough, but not surprisingly, the story has a reasonably logical explanation: it does not rely on any far-fetched supernatural thesis. Nor does it depend for its macabre success on a plaster of weird make-up or the grisly posturings usually affected by players in this type of movie, though Boris Karloff, who plays the role of a haunted old Greek general, looks sufficiently like a Greek tragedy himself to cause a shiver in any but the most conditioned horror-fan.

A SCANDAL IN PARIS

(United Artists)



I AM considerably more impressed by the form of this picture than by its contents. A far-from-literal account of the life of Eugene Francois Vidocq, the first great French detective, it gives George Sanders a chance to spout Wildean epigrams and engage in elegant love-making in a manner which suggests that his role in *The Picture of Dorian Grey* has rather gone to his head. But it also gives its producer and director (Arold Pressburger and Douglas Sirk respectively) the opportunity to embellish a frothy tale of larceny and lust with many distinctively Continental mannerisms. The result is an artificial but fairly amusing period-piece with what may be described as a high French polish. It is therefore an entertainment rather less likely to commend itself to the ordinary picturegoer than to the student of the cinema who is interested in noting how the polish is applied.

The whole story is played on a note of suave irony, from the moment of the hero's birth in prison, through his apprenticeship in crime, right up to his elevation to the office of Prefect of the Paris Police, when, deciding that virtue pays better dividends, he puts his intimate knowledge of the underworld to good account. True love (represented by Signe Hasso) plays some part in his conversion, and so does conscience; but the other type of love is equally well represented (in the person of Carole Landis), and throughout there is a tongue-in-cheek attitude towards some of the things which Hollywood often treats with dire solemnity. This flippancy of outlook is reflected not only in the mock-serious dialogue, but also in the musical score by Hanns Eisler, the treatment of the settings and costumes (circa 1805),

the brightness of the lighting, and the acting of all the players (including Akim Tamiroff and Gene Lockhart). It is even to be detected in the treatment of such a normally-serious situation as the murder of a faithless wife by a jealous husband, and a fight to the death between Vidocq and his erstwhile henchman-in-crime.

Val Gielgud's Autobiography

VAL GIELGUD'S autobiography, "Years of the Locust," is coming out soon. "Until I was 28," says Mr. Gielgud, now the BBC's Director of Drama, "I was simply a rolling stone, and the worst actor who ever trod the board." Then, he says, he went to the BBC in 1929 as Drama Director and got himself a position in the entertainment world unlike that of anyone else. "I have tried," he says, "to balance my BBC respectability by writing novels, mostly of the romantic kind, and plays. The plays have been notably unsuccessful, probably simply because they are what I should most like to have succeeded."

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