

# DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON

## BLOOD AND SAND

(20th Century-Fox)



LONG memories are often a great nuisance, and not only to politicians. They can be an affliction as well to film critics, who are unable to see Spencer Tracy in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* without being reminded that Frederic March did it so much

better ten years ago come Michelmas, or who start sighing for the good old days of Doug. Fairbanks when Errol Flynn grabs Robin Hood's longbow—whereas if they only knew it the majority of filmgoers probably don't care a hoot about any show earlier than last Christmas. Having myself sometimes erred in this direction in the past (and probably shall in the future), I am pleased to be able to say now that, although I did see the silent film of *Blood and Sand*, I have forgotten nearly everything about it, which relieves me of the obligation of making any comparison between the respective styles of Messrs. Rudolph Valentino and Tyrone Power as Juan Gallardo, the matador. I shall merely hazard the opinion that Mr. Power is not quite so strong on "oomph" (or

whatever is its male equivalent) as his Latin predecessor.

BUT beyond all argument, the new *Blood and Sand* has one big advantage. As a technicolour production, it is just about the best thing the cinema has attempted. As a technicolour production, mark you. With a palette as richly stocked as that of any of the Old Spanish Masters, Director Rouben Mamoulian has splashed on the screen all the fierce and strident colours of the bull-ring, as well as many other aspects of the kaleidoscope of Spanish life; the glare of sunlight in the market place; the softness of moonlight on the hills; the cool half-tones of church interiors; the flowers; the finery of the fiesta. Not to mention the red blood, the yellow sand, and the beautiful black Mura bulls. Mamoulian has done this deliberately; his scenes are as "composed" as those of any artist with the brush; and apart from its merit as a pure spectacle, his scene-painting does actually convey much of the real fierceness and stridency, the cruelty and mad excitement, of the bull-fighting sport—the goading of the animals; the exquisite grace of the matador with his swirling cape as he side-steps death by inches; the blood-lust of the mob as it howls for the "kill"; its fickleness as it acclaims its new hero while his predecessor lies dying within earshot. This is "death in the afternoon" as Ibanez and Hemingway have described it, the barbaric yet thrilling sport that is so peculiarly Spanish. Or is it? What about wrestling? Except that wrestlers seldom get themselves killed, and that it is hardly possible to arrange things with the bull beforehand, there is perhaps not much essential difference. "Reactionary" is how one of the screen toreadors (John Carradine) describes his profession, and that just about fits it. Yet, although you may feel, as I do, that it was one of the virtues of the Spanish Republicans that they were trying to discourage the sport, and one of the lesser evils of Franco that he has re-established it, the bull-fighting in *Blood and Sand* is well worth watching—particularly that magnificent sequence where the little boy, clad only in a breechcloth and armed with a stolen horse blanket, tries conclusions with a huge Mura bull in a moonlit plaza de toros.

YES, *Blood and Sand* certainly has its moments, and there are a good many of them, but there are also a good many other moments in between, and you will have to decide for yourself whether colour is a sufficient substitute for drama, whether scenic highlights make up for the exceeding flatness of much of the narrative, whether the uninspired acting of Tyrone Power is compensated for by the fine performance of Nazimova as Juan Gallardo's patient mother, of Laird Cregar as the fickle critic, and especially of Rita Hayworth as the stream-lined, honey-haired enchantress, Dona Sol who lures Juan from his wife (Linda

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Sextants (Sounding).  
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