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Film Reviews, by Jno.

DEATH OF A FUGITIVE

MAN ON THE PROWL

(United Artists)

THERE are occasions when filmgoing would be a good deal more pleasant if one could pick the audience as well as the picture. The return of Paul Muni, after a decade's absence from the screen, was half spoiled for me because I had to share it with a bunch of louts, teddyboys and crypto-adolescents. These obtrusive extraversts, reducing every situation to its lowest comic-book denominator, yelped and brayed at all the wrong moments and successfully rubbed the bloom off what could have been a sentimental, if not a memorable, occasion.

It might have been better for us all if *Man on the Prowl* had been a little less ineptly titled. It might be better in general if films could occasionally be classified "For Middle-aged Audiences Only"—and occasionally would be often enough, since the middle-aged (like the middle class) have scarcely come into their own yet as a pressure-group: or even as consumers worth cultivating.

A desire to renew acquaintance with Muni is, I suppose, in itself an indication of advancing years. Perhaps one has to be middle-aged to remember him at all, since the films which established his reputation—*The Good Earth*, *Pasteur*, *Zola* and *Juarez*—were all made in the thirties. *Man on the Prowl*, however, lacks both the scope of these earlier productions and the opportunity for picturesque impersonation which they provided, and which Muni seized so admirably. It lacks a number of other things, too—the most noticeable of these to me being originality—but at least it tries to say something worth saying about the times we live in and the pressures they exert upon the homeless and the rejected.

The film was made in Italy (about two years ago, I suspect), and the background of slums, spotty tenements and sunlit rubble is one that has become familiar to us in the work of Rossellini and de Sica, and their imitators—in films like *Paiza*, *Shoeshine*, and *Bicycle Thieves*. *Man on the Prowl* is reminiscent of the last of these for its general note of hopelessness—the impotence of the individual deprived by circumstance of the means to live—and also because the principal figures are a man and a small boy who tags along after him. In this case the small boy, Giacomo, is Vittorio Manunta, who made his first film appearance in Anthony Havelock-Allan's *Never Take No for an Answer*. At ten years old he is a little more self-conscious than de Sica's Enzo Staiola—once or twice you catch him reciting his lines—but his English is remarkably good and he has a small boy's liveliness and charm.

The boy and the man are thrown together by accident. Giacomo loses the few lire his mother has given him and steals a bottle of milk from a dairy. A few moments later Muni, a homeless, hungry and desperate D.P., steals a small cheese from the same shop and accidentally kills the proprietress in making his getaway. In the confusion which follows, the child clings like a burr to Muni's tattered coat-tails, in the belief that the man is trying to protect him from the consequences of his own

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Man on the Prowl."
MAINLY FAIR: "Sign of the Pagan."

petty theft. From here the film is on thoroughly familiar ground. The police surround the bomb-site in which the two fugitives have taken refuge, the buildings are inexorably combed and the action ends on the rooftops.

Muni gives a competent, if not an outstanding, performance, in a part which demands more from the body than from the voice. He has contrived a shambling gait to convey the hopelessness of the outcast and assumed the furtive glance of the fugitive, and he acts with integrity. I'm sure also that we cannot be reminded too often of the importance—and the relative scarcity—of charity and compassion. But I feel that other films have done so more effectively.

SIGN OF THE PAGAN

(Universal-International)

A PART from the fact that there wasn't anything worth doing that hadn't been done already, I had two reasons for going to see *Sign of the Pagan*, which is *All About Attila*. Neither of them had much to do with ancient history or self-improvement, but I was curious to see Jack Palance as the leader of the Huns, and I wanted to have a look at Rita Gam in fancy dress. What fascinated me most of all, however, was to discover how close was the parallel between the political situations of the 5th and 20th Centuries. Just 1500 years ago the great Roman Empire was split up into Eastern and Western Zones, and both areas were threatened by barbarians from Asia. And, even as it is today in the Anglo-Saxon world, the easterners were contaminated with the heresy of coexistence (or appeasement). *Sign of the Pagan*, in fact, is history as Hollywood likes to tell it—full of old saws and modern instances—with plenty of violent action, a helping of sex, and a solid plug for Christianity (just to be on the safe side). I thought Jack Palance, as Attila, downright entertaining, but I was out on the street again before I remembered about Rita Gam, and I had to check up on the cast-list to discover what part she played. Can't think for the life of me why I couldn't remember her face.



MUNI AND MANUNTA
Not for teddyboys

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 15, 1955.