



KIRK DOUGLAS as van Gogh

an odd thing in an American movie when there was every excuse to do otherwise. I am really sorry to make these reservations about a film which visually is so distinguished, and which even as biography is so much better than *Moulin Rouge*, the only comparable film I remember very clearly. But, incompletely realised, the best intentions are not good enough.

One must add that Mr Douglas gets strongest support from James Donald as van Gogh's brother Theo—a sympathetic, sensitively read part—and from Anthony Quinn, typically virile as Gauguin.

KNAVE OF HEARTS

(Transcontinental Films-Warner Bros.)

R: 16 and over

"It is always delightful to walk in a city one loves, but to do so in pursuit of a woman—that is better still," says André Ripois, and anyone who has enjoyed the pleasures of the chase must agree with him. André, however, had a tenacity, and a talent for seduction, that not every man could emulate, though his passion quickly cooled when his victims become possessive. *Knave of Hearts* is a short history of his London conquests as he confessed them to the only girl he ever really cared for—that was his story, anyway.

French film-makers have a genius for films such as this, and though *Knave of Hearts* was made in England with a cast largely English—Joan Greenwood, Margaret Johnston, Valerie Hobson and Natasha Parry are some of André's women—its director was René Clément (who made *The Secret Game*), and André Ripois is the charming incomparable Gérard Philipe. I doubt whether he has made a better film, or whether we shall see one more witty or adult this year or next. It's also part of its charm that its apparent heartlessness has an occasional pathetic overtone.

Apart from these more easily defined merits, *Knave of Hearts* has a quality often found in French films that's more elusive when you try to pin it on the page. We speak of a woman who has style—something much more than the clothes she wears or even the way she wears them—and that comes somewhere near it. Most obviously in *Knave of Hearts* it's a quality of Gérard Philipe's acting; less obviously it's a quality which director and cameraman (Oswald Morris) bring to the film, particularly to the more intimate scenes between André and the women he made love to. It finds poetry in a prostitute's flat and is an intangible presence even in the familiar streets of London.

THE RAINMAKER

(Paramount)

G Cert.

IN a poorer week I'd have been glad to write more than I can here about *The Rainmaker*, which I very much enjoyed. A gentle, likeable fellow who sells charms that protect against tornadoes and breaks droughts by various mumbo-jumbo, Burt Lancaster is wanted as a con man when he blows in on the Currys, a farming family whose worries include a drought and an apparently unmarriageable daughter. With something close to poetry he woos not only the menfolk, who are offered rain for 100 dollars, but the frustrated, edgy daughter, played by Katherine Hepburn with something of that feeling for a girl-looking-late-for-love that helped make *Summer Madness* so memorable. Other characters include Miss Hepburn's brothers—a stinker (Lloyd Bridges) and a likeable young fellow (Earl Holliman), with a love affair and a war for freedom on his hands. The ending is both right and happy, if not altogether what you expect. This is a film everyone should like. Joseph Anthony directed.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 16, 1957.

A THING OF BEAUTY

LUST FOR LIFE

(M.G.M.)

Y Cert.

THE facts of Vincent van Gogh's life are so dramatic that his name must be known to many people who have no interest in his pictures. Even so, he is not really a popular subject, and the most sensational fact of all—sometimes referred to tactfully as his self-mutilation—is probably known to relatively few filmgoers. For that reason anyone who set about making a film of his life must have been tempted to make it popular by concentrating on its more interesting human aspects. *Lust for Life* doesn't ignore them; but the odd, surprising thing is that, taking its story and its title from Irving Stone's popular novel of van Gogh's life, it has done so well by his paintings.

A man who had to dedicate himself to something, van Gogh failed in several careers before he became an artist for the last 10 years of his life. The film begins with his stay in the Borinage, a grim mining district in France; and this stark, uncompromising sequence is one of its best. Otherwise it is concerned mainly with his struggles as an artist,

his love affairs with his cousin and with the laundress Christine, his relations with his brother Theo and with Gauguin, and the bouts of insanity in his last years.

The world van Gogh bequeathed to us is a world of startling colour in recreating which the director of this film, Vincente Minelli, has used colour as well as any American film-maker ever has. This is as true of the sombre interiors as of the warm tones of flesh, clay and cornfield; and the sequences which capture a period with flowing shots of the paintings and the landscapes they gave eternal life are extraordinarily effective. Undoubtedly the film is a thing of beauty.

But a man's work and the world he lived in—which also the film re-creates with a good deal of feeling for time and place—is nothing without the man. Like every other filmgoer, I find people, any-

way, more interesting than paintings, or anything else for that matter. *Lust for Life* gives, as far as I can see, a truthful account of the main events of van Gogh's later life. It's a "straight" biography made by people of integrity. Kirk Douglas, a good actor who strikingly resembles van Gogh, has no doubt done as well as he could and in the more dramatic passages is often impressive, even if his strong American accent is a sad handicap elsewhere. But I don't think anyone who knows more than the bare facts of the artist's life will feel after seeing the film that they know van Gogh better.

The real reason he is not seen in greater depth is in the script. Irving Stone's dialogue was undistinguished, and I doubt whether Norman Corwin, who adapted it, has done much to improve on it. And beyond this, apart from the extracts from the artist's letters which provide an illuminating linking narrative, the film treatment as a whole never really gets inside its subject; van Gogh remains a tormented mysterious character. Even his relations with women, which seem to have been pretty influential, are treated only superficially—

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Lust for Life."

FINE: "Knave of Hearts."

FAIR: "The Rainmaker."