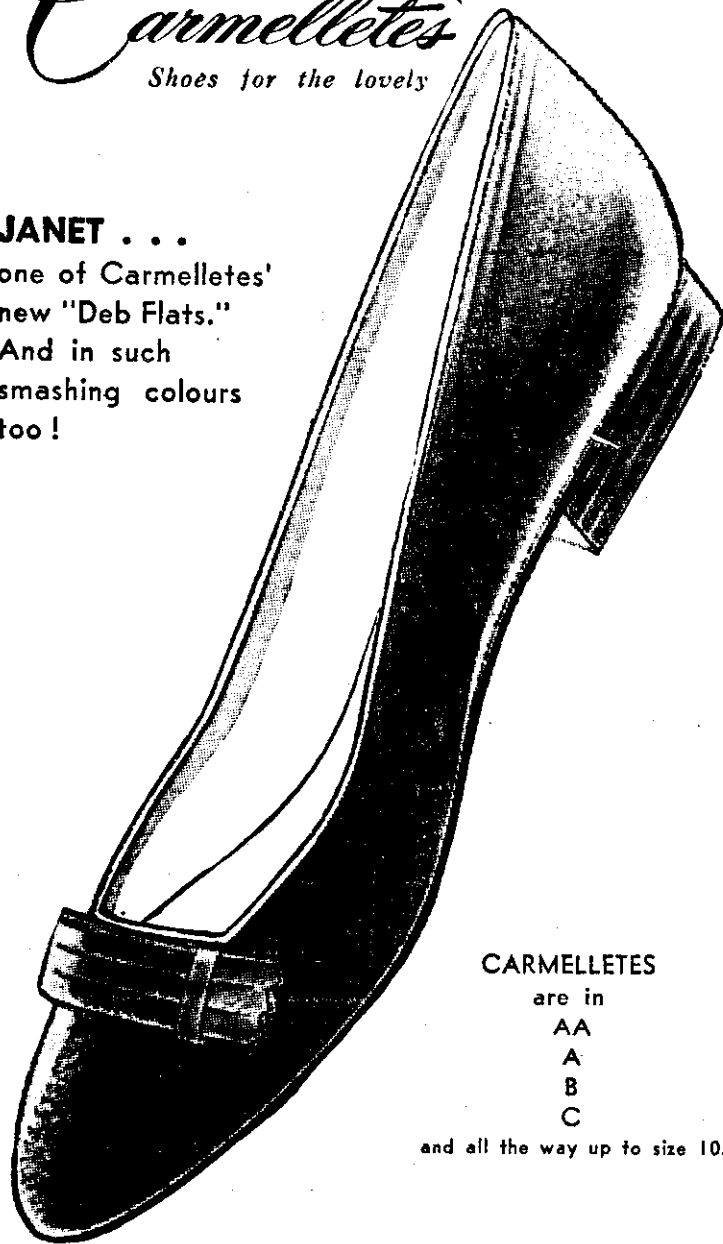


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FILM REVIEWS, BY JNO.

Putting Out The Tiger

TIGER IN THE SMOKE

(Rank-Leslie Parkyn)

A Cert.

Did you put the tiger out, Min?

—I didn't know it was on fire, Henry.

WHERE there's smoke there should be fire, and there is murk enough in the opening sequences of this Margery Allingham thriller to suggest quite a cheery little blaze to come. Indeed, for a while it looks even more promising than that. There are one or two passages near the start where camera-angles and lighting (or the lack of it) reminded me strongly of that vintage gaslit shocker *Hanover Square*. And in that one the late Laird Cregar lit a bonfire which (for me, at least) has hardly been extinguished—or eclipsed for macabre horror—in the intervening decade.

Tiger in the Smoke offers us post-war London instead of Victorian London, neon tube for gaslight and taxis in place of hansoms, but fundamentally it belongs to the same genre and uses the same devices—darkness and a neurotic, unpredictable killer at large—to raise the hair on the back of our necks. And when the blanket of the dark is reinforced by fog (a full-bodied London particular), neon tube might just as well be gaslight anyway.

No, I have no fault to find with the *mise-en-scène*. The ominous night watches in the London streets, which occupy most of the film; the sunlit vertiginous perspectives of the Brittany cliffs in the last sequence of all, are ready-made for melodrama and tension. And if Geoffrey Unsworth's photography only occasionally rises above the competent it does not fall below it.

No serious criticism either could be levelled at the lower echelons of the cast. Christopher Rhodes, though he didn't rate large type in the credits, made an admirable Chief Inspector—brusque, bothered at times, and always completely credible. Beatrice Varley's Mrs Cash was chillingly effective, and the raggle-taggle band of villainous street musicians, who might easily have slipped from the ominous into the ridiculous, didn't.

What contributed most to damping down the blaze was miscasting in the upper bracket. Muriel Pavlow did not manage to persuade me at any stage that she was panic or terror-stricken, and it would not have been difficult to find someone more convincing than Donald Sinden—bowler-hatted, Savile Row suited—as her stout-hearted defender. But it is the Tiger himself, the homicidal *Havoc*, who is the most unfortunate agent of deflation. When we had been told that meeting him was like seeing death for the first time, it was a catastrophic let-down to discover that he would have made a passable stand-in for Alan Ladd. Tony Wright might do reasonably well as a romantic lead, but villainy is not his *métier*. *Havoc* was what he played, I would agree, but with a small *h*.

FOUR GIRLS IN TOWN

(Universal-International)

G Cert.

THOUGH *Four Girls in Town* takes a little time to marshal its resources—Gina Scala, Elsa Martinelli, Marianne Cook, and Julie Adams—and though Jack Sher, who wrote and directed the piece, has yesmanfully resisted the temptation to make it the nippy satire on Hollywood folkways that it could

BAROMETER

MAINLY FAIR: "Tiger in the Smoke."
MAINLY FAIR: "Four Girls in Town."
DULL: "Lisbon."

and should have been (the script is littered with lost opportunities), I didn't go home feeling that I had altogether wasted an evening.

I can't allow Mr Sher a great deal of the credit for that. His script had a few passable lines in it, but they were widely separated, and his one little visual joke was worn threadbare by repetition before the film ended. Nor did there seem to be any strongly personal touch in his work, beyond a determination to plug the message that all was for the best in the best of all Hollywood lots.

But I was obliged to the casting department for the opportunity to meet Marianne Cook (*née Koch*). She has good looks and a demure grace (I found myself being reminded of Claire Bloom), and a capacity for adding conviction and dignity to the commonplace which should stand her in good stead in Hollywood. Playing opposite her was Sydney Chaplin, and between them these two contrived—with minimum assistance from the script—a romantic interlude as tender and persuasive as it was unexpected.

LISBON

(Republic-Herbert J. Yates)

Y Cert.

SOME films get off to a bad start and never recover. *Lisbon* is one of them. In was apparently felt necessary to establish at the outset that Mr Claud Rains is a suave and ruthless villain, so he is discovered enticing birds to his bedroom windowsill with cake-crums. He then bats one with a tennis racquet and feeds it to his cat. This piece of gratuitous viciousness (alike in kind to the fried-egg incident in *To Catch a Thief*, but a good deal more revolting) induced a queasiness in me which the remainder of the film did little to dissipate. The film is, in fact, concerned with varying degrees of human frailty and depravity—not for any sound dramatic reasons, but for the purposes of a cheap and pandering sensationalism. Only the photography deserved commendation. Portugal in Tru-color is delicately limpid and Naturama (which sounds awful) looks quite good.



MARIANNE COOK

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 20, 1957.