ROBBERS ROOST (1933, dir. Louis King) A stylish, superior Zane Grey western, with George O'Brien, Maureen O'Sullivan, Reginald Owen; and KING OF GAMBLERS (1937) One of the biggest and best of Robert Florey's "B" thrillers for Paramount; with Lloyd Nolan, Akim Tamiroff, Claire Trevor, Buster Crabbe, Elynn Brent, Harry Worth etc.

Tonight's is our final program for the Summer period; new schedules will be mailed early in September. In the meantime, there are good things over the Summer at the New School, and our Fall schedule there has a number of rarities too. --

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

May 12, 1973

LE MAIN DU DIABLE (THE DEVIL'S HAND, France, 1942) Produced and directed by Maurice Tourneur; Scenario, Jean Paul Le Chanois; Camera, Armand Thirard; Music: Roger Dumas; 8 reels; US release, 1947, as "Carnival of Sinners";

Tonight's (British) print, dubbed English.


Apart from the loss of some of its biggest names to Hollywood - Duvivier, Renoir, Clair, Gabin, Micheal Morgan etc. - French film under the Nazi occupation was surprisingly healthy. There was an understandable tendency to shear escapism, fantasy and period romance, not least because of the need to avoid political controversy although certainly too because of the demand for light entertainment. But the Germans poured money into French films, and Dr. Goebbels himself owned one movie company outright. Good French films were useful propaganda tools in other occupied territories; moreover, it shouldn't be forgotten that the Germans considered France a permanent part of their empire. - Paris was being shaped as the entertainment mecca of that empire, and movies were to play an important part in the establishment of occupation movies had to be subtle, and it is no coincidence that during those years the French made number of films in which the Devil was personified, and the dangers of dealing with, and selling one's soul to, the Devil carried obvious collaborationist parallels. "The Devil's Hand" was one of the best of these, and if nothing else one can thank the Germans for giving Maurice Tourneur, that great silent pictorialist then near the end of his career, one last chance to get back to the fantasy films that he did so well. It's the kind of story that has its equivalent in the folk-lore (and film lore) of most countries; Sweden's "The Talisman" is virtually identical, while there are clear similarities in the USA in Disterle's "The Devil and Daniel Webster".

We had a problem with tonight's film in that two prints were on hand: a pictorially stunning print from the French negative, minus subtitles, and a duller and rather noisily tracked dubbed English version. We weighed one against the other and finally decided in favor of the dubbed version. Though the plot is easy to follow in essence, it is worry, and it's rather frustrating to sweat through the plot convolutions without total comprehension until the purely visual aspects take over in the final quarter -- particularly in a marvelously bizarre illusion sequence which harks right back to the best of Tourneur's pre-1920 pictorialism. The dubbing, a new system being explored in Britain right after the war, is better than most, and is certainly better acted - to the extent of many of the American actors (Henry O'Neill, Valentine Dyall etc.) and an experienced director (Jack Raymond) and gave them screen credit.

Unfortunately the print is an old one and the track now a bit scratched and noisy; still, it is probably preferable to seeing the untitled version and reading a synopsis first. The film is fully complete, other than for the very atmospheric title design (involving a clutching hand) and we hope you'll bear with the rough sound quality.

BOULE DE SUIF (France, 1945) Produced and directed by Christian Jacque; Screenplay by Henri Jeanson, Louis d'Hee and Christian Jacque from the de Maupassant story "Boule de Suif" and "Mademoiselle Fifi"; Camera, Christian Metzme; English titles, Herman G. Weinberg; US release title, "The Angel and the Sinner"; 8 reels;

With Micheline Presle, Louis Salou, Palau, Roger Kazl, Marcel Simon, Alfred Adam, Jean Brochard, Michel Saline, Denis D'Ines.

Made immediately after the war, "Boule de Suif" serves the dual purpose of taking a kick at the departing Germans, and justifying France's often enforced collaboration during the occupation. Christian Jacque was a rough-hewn and romantic, but he did make some very interesting films - "Carmen" and "Sortileges" among the better ones. Micheline Presle, then the threshold of becoming a major French star and actress, is a delight, Louis Salou reminds us again what an excellent sadonic villain he could be, and quite by accident the evening turns into a Palau festival, since he is prominent in both films. Though made several years apart, both films were released in the US in 1947 within two months of one another, when the big backlog of wartime Hureuropean film was being rushed on to the market. The affinity of "Boule de Suif" to Ford's "Stagecoach" becomes a little more apparent in this visualisation, despite its combination with another deMaupassant story.

W.R. Everson