WHILE PARIS SLEEPS (Fox, 1932) Directed by Allan Dwan; Original story and screenplay, Basil Woon; Camera, Glen MacWilliams; 8 reels

Tonight's two films provide a rather interesting comparison of how Hollywood and Britain saw Parisian underworld life. If the view is somewhat melodramatic and distorted, then it wasn't entirely one-sided; France's movie depiction of America was less frequent but no less bizarre, as witness such films as "La Loi du Nord", in which the Gallic conception of American court-room procedure seems to have been based on the premise of exaggerating what were already exaggerated cliches!

"While Paris Sleeps" is a fascinating and virtually unknown film; it was shown at the Museum of Modern Art's Allan Dwan retrospective a couple of years back, but all that was available then was a curious work print, minus all music and sound effects, with the editor as you'll find atmosphere-evoking role in the film. Despite his skill and professionalism, and some extremely good individual films, director Allan Dwan is not what one would normally call a stylist, nor - in view of the incredible variety of his films, most of them merely studio assignments - much of an auteur. Yet "While Paris Sleeps" is a very style-conscious film; it seems to evoke the atmosphere of the later 30's French film-noir essays ("грузь" might be a better term than "black") like "Quai des Brumes"; yet, its deliberately melodramatic content and its stunning pictorial impact - superb sets, lighting, camerawork and art direction - give the gloss of von Sternberg at his best. It's a very atmospheric film, yet it's a reminder of what so-called craftsmanship could, and often did, come out of unimportant films. Dwan himself, though he admitted having been to Paris and soaked up its underworld flavor before having made the film, also recently admitted being surprised at how well the film turned out and with surprising honesty said that its values were largely an accident, since nobody had really tried to achieve such stunning results. Obviously it was a question of everybody liking what they were doing, and their pooled enthusiasm showing up in the end result. It's a film very much reminiscent of the later silent, and rich in colorful melodrama. It's not rich in logic however: one wonders why the villains make such a fuss about not lighting cigarettes in their dynamite-laden hideout; when that hideout is situated in a baker's cellar, where huge tongues of fire frequently leap out from the furnaces! (The film also bears a superficial resemblance to the much later "Rio", which had Victor McLaglen in a not dissimilar role. However, "While Paris Sleeps" is not meant to be taken seriously or carefully analysed, merely enjoyed for the uninhibited and intensely visual (dialogue is often quite sparse) melodrama that it is. Incidentally, the film was originally intended for Rowland Brown's direction (and for Joan Bennett) and one wonders what totally different sort of film might have emerged from Brown, a specialist in crisp, underplayed, realistic gangster and crime melodramas.

-- Intermission, 10 minutes --

THE RAT (Rko Radio-British, 1937) Produced by Herbert Wilcox, directed by Jack Raymond; Screenplay by Marjorie Gaffney from a play by Ivor Novello and Constance Collier; Camera, Freddie Young; 7 reels

Although lambasted severely by the New York Times when it opened at the Gbge in NY in 1937, this "The Rat" is nevertheless, in many ways, the most satisfying of the four British forays into the successful Novello-Collier play, the first (silent) version of which we ran last week. That 1925 version was very much more elaborate with its tricky camerawork, color, and Folies Bergerees inserts, but it was too wildly melodramatic at times, and was often badly let down by its acting. Anton Walbrook is here far better than Novello, and surprisingly, Rene Ray is much superior to Mae Marsh, who was too old for the role and trotted out her Griffith mannerisms on cue, but without Griffith on hand to control and manipulate them. This version plays down the melodrama, and concentrates far more on the relationships; moreover, it establishes these relationships so carefully that the first one did not. Despite being slightly-fashoned, and with a British sedateness that does not at all convincingly with Gallic abandon, this is an extremely handsome film, helped by no little by good sets and fine camerawork by Freddie Young, one of David Lean's favorite cameramen. Direction is by Jack Raymond, a veteran Heyworth actor from the silent period, who specialised in comedies and thrillers, and whose last film, "Little Big Shot", was released shortly before his death in 1955 at the age of 67. The film was Wilcox's last under his old regime, its production company being dissolved to make way for the newer, bigger one that would make "Victoria the Great". The company was liquidated just days before Ruth Chatterton was to get paid, and she never did get paid. --- Wm.K. Everson ---