

habitual moviegoers are, at best, tardy. It does not make a vital difference to a publisher if his book sells in the first week of its publication or in the tenth, but with movies prompt patronage is of the essence. Every first-run theatre has a weekly hold-over figure. If a picture falls below this amount of business it is losing money and few exhibitors have the intestinal fortitude to prolong the engagement in the hope that patronage will "build." After an unsuccessful showing of this nature it becomes almost impossible to obtain subsequent runs for a picture. The finest French film of the Resistance, "Bataille Du Rail," for example, has been exhibited on less than half-a-dozen occasions. Time after time friends have told me that they heard that a picture which I was handling was superb and that they fully intended to see it. Before they could tear themselves away, however, from such agreeable pastimes as discussing how juvenile were most movies, it had been relegated to a can on a shelf, only occasionally dusted off for a select showing at a university or an art museum.

The success of a limited number of English importations like "Tight Little Island," "Kind Hearts and Coronets," and "The Cruel Sea" at New York City small first-run houses has led to premature rejoicing among myopic Manhattanites. West of the Hudson, however, and south of the Bay, such films are still regarded with profound suspicion. Small-town patrons find their Oxford intonation so unintelligible that they suggest the need of

subtitles similar to those used for French or Italian importations.

Two years ago my associates and I imported an English melodrama, "Seven Days to Noon," which dealt with the threat to mankind encased in the atomic bomb. The picture grossed less than \$225,000 and of this disappointing figure we took about 65 per cent out of the New York metropolitan area. The average for a Hollywood picture for that territory is 15 per cent! "Hamlet" and "Henry V," aided by the vigorous support of Women's Clubs, school authorities, and other public-spirited groups, which apparently Shakespeare can enlist but which we have never been able to muster for authors who have the misfortune to be alive, both grossed over two and a half million dollars. But for every "Henry V" there are a dozen other English pictures which fail even to return the cost of prints, accessories, and advertising. Such splendid features as "Cry the Beloved Country," "Ivory Hunter," and "The Brave Don't Cry," will not transfer an American dime to their dollar-hungry creators. As for foreign-language films, their business, contrary to the general impression, has been steadily shrinking since the halcyon days of "Open City" and "Paisan." Rarely do they succeed in obtaining 200 bookings; fifty is much closer to the average, and many secure even less.

**I**F the art theatre is to justify its existence it must free itself from its present bondage to the films of for-

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fact and Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
INTRUDER FROM THE SEA <i>Gordon McDonell</i> (Little, Brown: \$3)	Air vet abandons bus south of San Francisco, runs into large difficulties.	Too much geography; biography; story clogged with detail.	Slow motion
A KISS BEFORE DYING <i>Ira Levin</i> (S&S: \$2.50)	Conceited youth at Midwest college plans death of lovey-dovey, goes on from there.	Over-tailored and too long, but has good zing in spots.	Stylized but effective
TOO MANY COUSINS <i>Douglas G. Browne</i> (Macmillan: \$2.50)	Death takes British heirs; Mr. Tuke, gov't. lawyer, plays detective, has fun.	Cast agreeable, realistic; handling suave, literate.	Can't go wrong here
YOU WILL DIE TODAY <i>R. I. Wakefield</i> (Dodd, Mead: \$2.50)	College prof. strangled; faculty, students, gratified; Lt. Marshall is not.	Several members of cast unconvincing; pace choppy, confused.	Average
UNINVITED GUEST <i>George Harmon Cox</i> (Knopf: \$2.75)	She-souse smothered on Barbados cruise; second victim clobbered; shipmate finds answer.	Pace warms up slowly; yachting set largely stereotyped.	Not up to his usual

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eign nations. Much as we may appreciate European realism and candor, it does not appear to me unduly jingoistic to believe that we also require pictures about the American scene written by American authors, directed by men with an American point of view, and performed by American actors. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there are many such men and women now available. Some of them are Hollywood exiles whose youthful idealism misled them into joining organizations which a decade or more ago gave the impression of being wholly praiseworthy in their objectives. Many of them in the past participated in making some of our best pictures. They are now out of work and eager to demonstrate their devotion to democratic rather than totalitarian ideals. In addition, there are the old-time non-ideological rebels who never were able to adjust themselves to big studio practices or politics, not to mention the 1953 brand of irreconcilables bitterly averse to the new epic techniques. Lastly, there is a talented younger generation knocking on the door—a door which with a production cut of probably 50 per cent will prove harder to pry open than ever before.

In the past, independent pictures—except for the costly creations of such

FRASER YOUNG'S  
 LITERARY CRYPT NO. 541

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 541 will be found in the next issue.

SGULRC, RI PRUL YGK

LUVSAK, YQGL QGCPK NBV

YBVDP QBDP! — OQGUDZK

DGSH.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 540

“Of all failures, to fail in a witticism is the worst.”—Walter Landon