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'Pit and the Pendulum'

Traduces Poe Classic

BY CHARLES STINSON

If American-International's new version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," which opened Wednesday at the State and elsewhere, does nothing else of merit, it does at least two things: it reveals just how well Vincent Price manages a swoon. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Price faints away more gracefully than a reviewer can describe.

The picture also reveals that James Nicholson and Samuel Arkoff's onetime low-budget quicky company has come of age—physically at least. The 85-minute "Panavision" film is handsomely turned out: the color is rich, true and easy on the eye; the props, costumes and special effects are very carefully and very expensively done.

Sagging Scenario

But the scenario sags. Badly. And the acting finishes the betrayal of this classic horror tale about a young Englishman (John Kerr) who comes to Spain in the mid-1500s to investigate the mysterious death of his sister (Barbara Steele) who was married to a Spanish nobleman (Vincent Price).

His investigations lead him up deep into the madness and devilish intrigue lurking in the old castillo which broods over the Mediterranean coast of Spain, the Costa Brava. He ends trapped in a pit in the castle's horror chamber—once used by the Holy Inquisition. He is pinned there while a great razor-like pendulum swings, whistling through the air, ever so slowly downward.

The uncredited scenario violates Poe's gothic style with passages of flat, modernized dialogue and touches of well meaning but rococco exaggeration — lines or visual effects repeated several times too often. For emphasis no doubt. But the audience I sat with finally thought it was funny. And that is not the effect which Poe wished to create.

(And then, too, there were such blunders as the use of the titles Don and Dona with

the family name alone. This will fail you in Spanish 1.)

But the peccadilloes of the script pale beside the acting. Price and Kerr should get some sort of joint award. They do, solo and in tandem, the worst work I have seen since last January 1.

Price mugs, rolls his eyes continuously and delivers his lines in such an unctious tone that he comes near to burlesquing the role. His mad scenes were just ludicrous. The audience almost died laughing. After he had moaned: "Elizabeth, where are you?" five or six times, an adolescent male voice, somewhere down front and distinctly unsympathetic, rasped: "Right here, dear."

Kerr seemed to be trying to balance things by hacking out his lines so stiffly and disjointedly that he might have been a driller working on a block of concrete. He is not a very volatile or mobile actor, but he can do better work than this.

'Truth' Explains French Justice

Courtroom scenes in "The Truth," controversial film screening at the Beverly Canon Theater and starring Brigitte Bardot, were the result of painstaking research by French director Henri-Georges Clouzot.

Because French justice, unlike criminal procedures in many other parts of the world, is more concerned with judging the criminal than the crime itself, Clouzot had to be meticulous in explaining the action for foreign audiences.

Miss Steele has a certain sense of the gothic and grotesque but Miss Luana Anders, as Price's sister, is too chirpingly sweet and Anthony Carbone, as Price's physician, is too close to Eliot Ness to be convincing in a 16th Century horror story. Roger Corman's direction seemed uneven.