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The Earrings of Madame De . . . *Madame de . . .* (1953) — Perfection. This tragedy of love, which begins in narcissistic flirtation and passes from romance to passion to desperation, is set, ironically, in aristocratic circles that seem too superficial to take love tragically. The very beauty of Max Ophuls' film is sometimes used against it: the gliding, sensuous camerawork, the extraordinary romantic atmosphere, the gowns, the balls, the chandeliers, the nuances of language, and the sense of honor are regarded as evidence of lack of substance. But Ophuls loved Mozart and Stendhal, and he also calls up a third master: the opera sequence that gives the film its musical theme is Gluck's *Orfeo*. The performances by Danielle Darrieux as Madame de, by Charles Boyer as her husband, Monsieur de, a general, and by Vittorio De Sica as her lover, the Baron, are quite likely the finest each has given. Ophuls' lush, decorative style, his re-creation of a vanished elegance, and his darting, swirling camera are used to evoke the protection that style and manners and wealth provide, and to demonstrate that passion can destroy it all. Even the fashionable and secure become rash, make fools of themselves. Boyer, the general, attempting to use military discipline to cure his wife of her unseemly displays of emotion, is as helpless as she is. Anna Karenina gets her lover but she finds her life shallow and empty; Madame de's life has been so shallow and empty that she cannot keep her lover. She is destroyed, finally, by the fact that women do not have the same sense of honor that men do, or the same sense of pride. When she lies to the Baron, how could she know that he would take her lies as proof that she did not really love him? What he thinks dishonorable is merely unimportant to her. She places love before honor (what woman does not?) and neither her husband nor her lover can forgive her. With Jean Debucourt as the jeweler, and Lia de Lea as the general's mistress. Based on Louise de Vilmorin's novella *Madame de . . .*, which is far more astringent than the film; the script is by Marcel Achard, Annette Wademant, and Ophuls. Cinematography by Christian Matras; sets by Jean d'Eaubonne. In French. b & w