

Short Review: “The Man in Half Moon Street” (1944) by Dr. John L. Flynn



Man in Half Moon Street, The (1944). British/Paramount, b/w, 92 min. Director: Ralph M. Murphy. Producer: Walter MacEwen. Screenwriter: Charles Kenyon. Based on the stage play by Barre Lyndon. Cast: Nils Asther, Helen Walker, Reinhold Schuenzel, Paul Cavanagh, and Edmund Brown.

Adapted by Charles Kenyon from Barre Lyndon's play, the screen version concerns a 104 year old surgeon who has learned to prolong his life but at a very terrible cost. At a social reception to announce his engagement to Eve (Helen Walker), the titular character Dr. Julian Karell (Asther) renews acquaintance with a former friend and colleague from his college days Dr. Kurt van Bruecken (Schuenzel). Bruecken, the one who actually discovered the life extension process, abandoned his research because of a flaw in the glandular transplantation process. When Bruecken demands to know how Karell corrected the flaw, he admits that he hasn't and confesses that he must commit murder every six years to secure a vital spinal fluid for his continued longevity. In time, Karell hopes to find a more permanent solution; but before he can, his actual age catches up to him, and he reverts to the appearance of a corpse before Eve. Less horrific but probably more compelling than most of its American counterparts, “The Man in Half Moon Street” represented one of Britain's earliest excursions into the field. The atmosphere of terror and tension in the film is conveyed through a very literate, well-acted screenplay and the dark, moody photography of Henry Sharp. Each of the scenes, which are bound tightly together

by Miklos Rozsa's clever score, purposely downplays visual horror in favor of psychological horror and, as such, avoids many of the standard pitfalls of the genre. Remade several years later as “The Man Who Could Cheat Death” (1959) and “The Night Strangler” (1973).

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