

Asked to explain what *Dance* is about, people tend to flounder. Whereas other episodes are clear cut, the social comment of *A Change of Mind*, the political satire of *Free for All*, the revenge in *Hammer into Anvil*, or the misuse of education in *The General*, *Dance* is enigmatic. On the surface it is about the unauthorised use of a radio. However, it is the undercurrents that measure its true appeal. It has an ethereal quality, a dream-like feel to it. Perhaps more than any other episode, this is the most Kafkaesque. In fact Skene's three episodes make up a mini series in themselves. *A. B. and C*, *Many Happy Returns* and *Dance* all share certain elements.

All either feature dreams, or could be dreams. Everything that happens in *Many Happy Returns* could be a dream whilst Number Six is in the shower. *Dance* could be a dream, although because the final scenes were never filmed, this is not made clear. The last scene would have had Number Six returning to the ballroom where a hectic dance is in full swing. Everyone dances as if the devil is playing. The music increases its speed, and the camera pulls back to reveal the Village as only a distant glow in the darkness of the night. Other elements that the three episodes share are cats - the enigmatic cat in *Many Happy Returns*; mirrors - Number Six tries to straighten the crooked mirror in *A. B. and C*; night and death, both figurative and literal. All three are superior quality stories, each with a twist at the end.

So from where did Skene draw his inspiration for *Dance*?

This scene setting episode, where Number Six finds himself descending into the labyrinth, inexorably drawn toward his trial, has its origins in two sources. In a film made in 1941 entitled *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, Jabez Stone sells his soul to Mr. Scratch (The Devil) and the film features a melancholic dance of death, where a room full of dead people slowly gyrate to unearthly music and the life is drained from a poor unfortunate who preceded Daniel in making a pact, after which there is a trial, that serves as a model for the *Dance* trial. Eagle-eyed observers will note other connections too. For Number Six, the illicit radio will

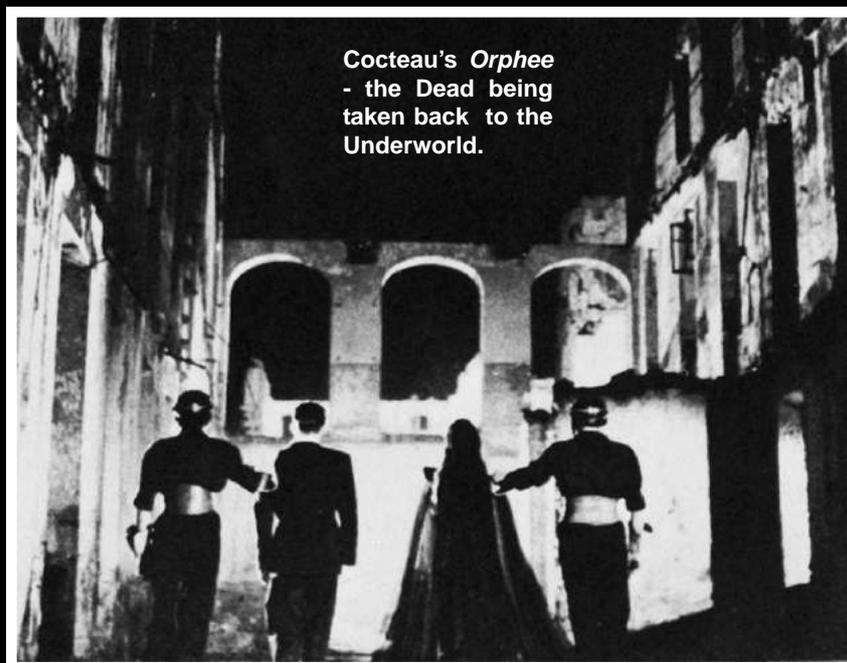
will illumine the world..."), the dead poet equates with Dutton, Death becomes the Mary Morris character, the journey to the Underworld, all this and more combine to give us the episode that is the high point of and embodies this series' values.

What unites the work of Cocteau and Skene's three episodes is Greek mythology, the descent into the labyrinth, both physical and spiritual. A psychotherapist friend commented to me: "The myth of Orpheus is about the breaking of rules and the loss of identity." Number Six is Orpheus descending, as he is enticed into the Underworld, below the Village. The strength of Skene's work, especially *Dance*, is that nothing is what it seems, for we are dealing with dreams and shadows.

W h e n c e the title? Cocteau kept a diary whilst making *Beauty and the Beast*. For his entry January 20th 1944 he says: "France, truly a collection of individuals and unfitted for mobocracy, will be a place that

only exceptional beings can tolerate...Poets will be able to live in France as long as they don't get trapped by positions and honours. I have the luck of being one of those people who can help to prevent that dance of death...I myself would joyfully die for this priesthood of total liberty."

Skene drew upon Cocteau, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, and his own fertile imagination. *The Prisoner* would be far poorer without his contribution. All these years on *Dance of the Dead* has lost nothing of its power.



Cocteau's *Orphee* - the Dead being taken back to the Underworld.

prove to be the devil's work.

The second connection drawn on by Skene is Jean Cocteau. This poet, playwright, actor, filmmaker, influenced Skene enormously. Even today Cocteau's films (amongst them is *Orphee* [1949] and *Beauty and the Beast* [1946]) captivate and dazzle us with their inventiveness and originality. *Orphee*, described as "The closest the cinema has ever come to poetry" (Halliwell,) is the true father of *Dance of the Dead*. With its enigmatic messages heard from the car radio ("One glass of water