

RUDOLPH CARTIER

Ask anyone 'Who made the Quatermass series?' and the odds are that you will be told 'Nigel Kneale'. Talk to Nigel Kneale, however, and he will immediately stress the vital creative role of the producer-director Rudolph Cartier. The two men also worked on both BBC versions of *Wuthering Heights* (1953 and 62), *1984* (1954) and *The Creature* (1955); but today, undoubtedly, it is Kneale who remains the better known. Start investigating Cartier's career, however, and one soon discovers a major figure of British television drama with more than 120 productions to his credit. So who is Rudolph Cartier and why is he not better known?

Cartier was born in 1904 in Vienna. He studied to be an architect, but harboured desires of becoming a film director or, even better, an opera director. When he was 19, Cartier attended a master class set up by Max Reinhardt in Vienna. It was a formative moment and Cartier describes Reinhardt as 'a hypnotic personality'. 'When he directed you, you had only to look into his eyes to know what he wanted.' Fired with an enthusiasm for films, Cartier submitted a script suggestion to a Berlin company. It was accepted and he arrived in Berlin in 1929.

Cartier's first script was *Der Tiger*, on which he collaborated with Egon Eis, who was to become a regular writing partner. 'We became famous as the first screenwriters of talkie crime stories. Anyone who wanted to make a crime story came to us.' In all, Cartier worked on some dozen scripts. They included *Das Gelbe Haus des King-Fu* (1931), directed by Karl Grune; *Der Zinker* (1931), an Edgar Wallace adaptation; *Die Pranke* (1931), directed by Hans



Steinhoff; E. A. Dupont's *Salto Mortale* (1931); and *Tropennächte* (1931), an adaptation of Conrad's *Victory*, which is interesting in the light of Cartier's later literary adaptations for the BBC.

He also co-directed *Teilnehmer Antwortet Nicht* (1932) and directed *Unsichtbare Gegner* (1933), which was photographed by Eugen Schüfftan and produced by Sam Spiegel. 'I was the first person who was employed by the famous, or infamous, Sam Spiegel. He promised to take me and two of the stars of the film—Peter Lorre and Oskar Homolka—to Hollywood. He took them, but he left me behind.'

At least two of the films on which Cartier worked, *Schuss im Morgengrauen* (1932) and *Stern von Valencia* (1933), were made for UFA, and Cartier's closest colleagues at this time were

Emeric Pressburger and Billy Wilder. By 1935, however, Cartier felt unable to continue living and working in Germany. Asked how he feels now about the Weimar period, he replies philosophically, 'It was wonderful while it lasted, but it came to an end, and one cannot reconstitute it like powdered egg.'

Cartier came to Britain in 1936, but for various reasons was unable to work in the film industry here. After the war, however, he re-established contact with the reconstituted German film industry and once again began working on scripts. By chance this led him to the BBC. 'One dark night I went into the old Charing Cross post office to catch the midnight post to Germany, and sheltering in the doorway from the rain was a young chap whom I recognised as a literary agent.

'We started talking, and he asked me why I never did anything for television. I told him it

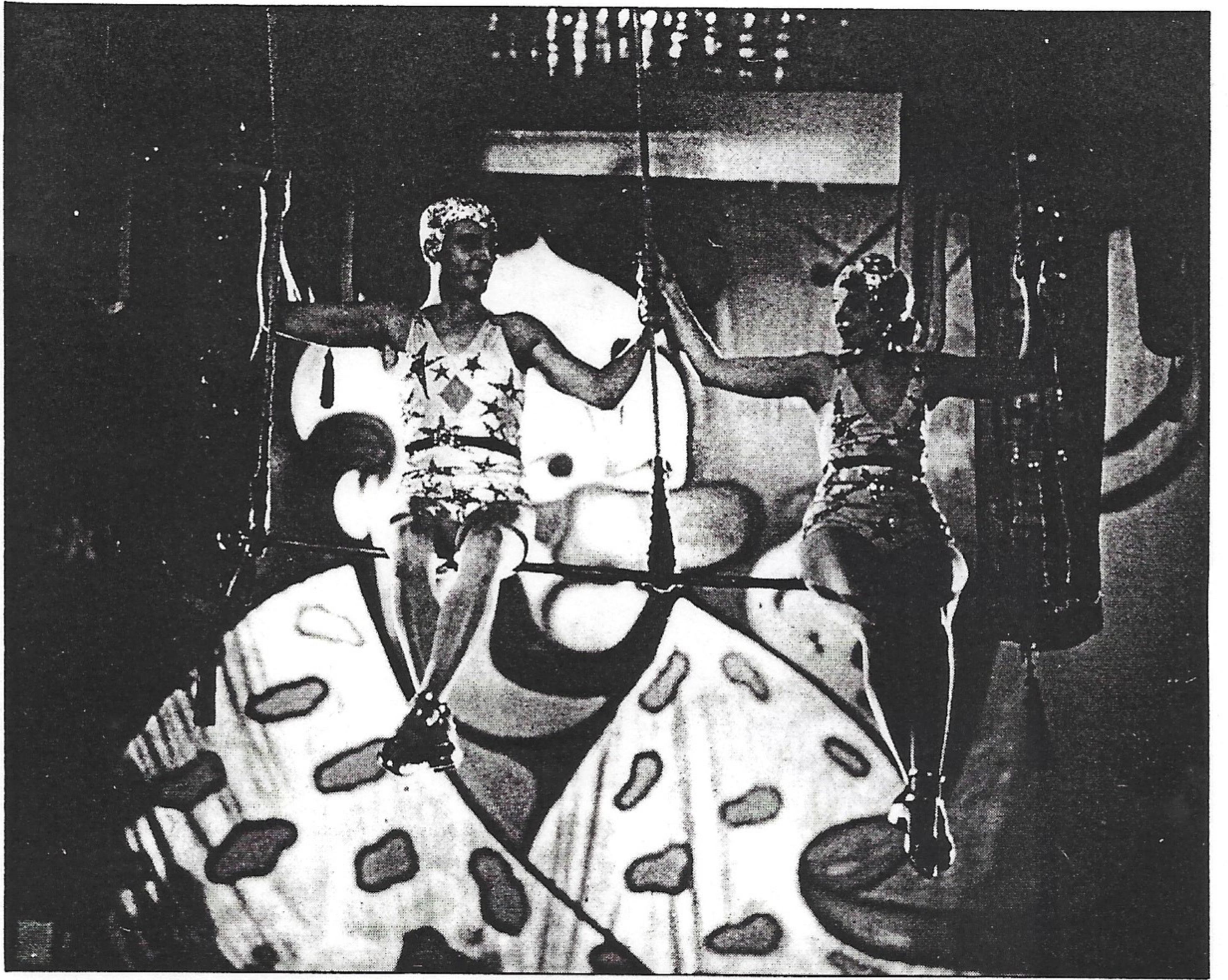
was because I had no contacts at the BBC. He arranged a meeting with Michael Barry who, together with Val Gielgud, was head of BBC television drama. I briefed myself by watching lots of television. I had also been to America in 1949 to study how they made films and television programmes over there. When Michael Barry asked my opinion of British television drama, I told him I thought it was terrible. I said that the BBC needed new scripts, a new approach, a whole new spirit, rather than endlessly televising classics like Dickens or familiar London stage plays.'

Cartier submitted a German story called *Arrow to the Heart*. This was accepted, and his production went out (live of course, in those days) on 20 July 1952, and again four days later. The

story of an army padre who comforts a young deserter on the night before his execution, it clearly prefigures Losey's *King and Country*. Cartier's choice of a non-British source for his first production is significant, in that one of the hallmarks of his originality in terms of British television drama is his penchant, right from the start, for continental literary sources—Schnitzler (*Liebelei*), Zuckmayer (*The Devil's General*, *The Cold Light*, *The Captain from Köpenick*), Hochwälder (*The Public Prosecutor*), Anouilh (*The Vale of Shadows*), Brecht (*Mother Courage and Her Children*), Tolstoy (*Anna Karenina*), Sudermann (*Midsummer Fire*), Dumas fils (*The Lady of the Camélias*), Sartre (*The Respectful Prostitute*) and Chekhov (*The Proposal*).

It's also interesting that Cartier followed *Arrow to the Heart* with two productions on supernatural themes: *The Dybbuk*, based on the famous Jewish ghost story, and *Portrait of Peter Perowne*, whose life-after-death plot makes for an interesting comparison with *A Matter of Life and Death*. As Cartier himself says, 'I became something of an expert on fantasy and science fiction.'

There followed not only the obvious examples of the *Quatermass* serials and *1984*, but *The Creature* (a fascinating piece about the Abominable Snowman, later made into a Hammer film); two contributions to the *Out of the Unknown* series (*Level Seven* and *The Naked Sun*); and one to the *Late Night Horror* series (*The Triumph of Death*). And although not exactly supernatural, plays such as *Rebecca*, *Sorry*, *Wrong Number*, *Thunder Rock*, *The Frog*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Survivors* (Cartier's contribution to the excellent but now seemingly forgotten series *Thirteen Against Fate*) all contained decidedly creepy and disturbing ele-



Anna Sten in E.A. Dupont's *Salto Mortale* (1931), from a Cartier script.

ments, often of a rather 'Gothic' nature.

After his fourth television play, Cartier was asked by Cecil McGivern, Controller of Programmes at BBC Television, to join the staff on a permanent basis. 'Nothing could have been more welcome, because I wanted a permanent job whatever the salary. I wanted a continuous flow of work, and I made this one of the terms of my contract. I also stipulated that the BBC would accept all my suggestions for plays, money permitting. So they swallowed these very tough terms and offered me a salary which worked out at £18 a week. They increased it when ITV came along. And they were so ashamed of what they had offered me that, whenever I had a

successful production, McGivern wrote me a very nice letter offering me a bonus of £60. Anyway, from this point on I was in continuous work with the BBC for 23 years.'

Cartier and Kneale met when the latter lent a hand with the script of *Arrow to the Heart*, but their collaboration really took off with *The Quatermass Experiment*, which was also the first original teleplay on which Cartier worked. The *Quatermass* story is too well known to bear repeating here (see, for example, *Primetime*, Winter 1984/5, and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1989), but it's worth noting Cartier's remarkable generosity to Kneale: 'He had all three stories in his mind from

The Quatermass Experiment: Reginald Tate (left) as the first Professor Quatermass.



the start. We decided to do *Experiment* first because we thought it would give us less trouble with exteriors and things like that. They were all born in Kneale's mind, and I had nothing to add to them. The writer is more important than the director; the director can only interpret. I can only say that I would have been nothing without Nigel Kneale.'

A look at the way in which Cartier directs the remarkable film inserts in *Quatermass II*, which were shot in a Shell refinery on the Thames Estuary, makes one realise that he is being decidedly over-modest here—and, incidentally, points up the extent of Val Guest's 'borrowings' in the Hammer film version. His comment that, 'If one has a story of fantasy or science fiction, one must believe in it and try to make it credible for audiences, rather than make fun of it,' goes some way to explaining the series' remarkable power to unsettle and disturb.

After the success of *The Quatermass Experiment*, Cartier was summoned to McGivern's office and asked whether he would like to have a go at 1984. 'Since it was such an important subject, Kneale was given a whole year to prepare the script. But nobody guessed that it would have such an impact. After the first transmission, the BBC received threatening phone calls about me, so for the repeat they engaged two burly bouncers to guard me in the studio.

'We thought that after all the fuss over the first transmission we would get an enormous audience for the repeat, but it was actually very small. Everyone who had wanted to see it did so the first time round. The BBC even wondered whether it should do the repeat at all, but then Prince Philip made a speech at the Royal Society of Arts saying that he and the Queen had watched it and liked it and couldn't understand what the



1984: Harry Lane, Wilfrid Brambell, Peter Cushing, Campbell Gray.

fuss was about. So that was all right, and the BBC decided there should be no cuts in the repeat.

'I suppose it was a bit tough for the public in those days, especially the torture scenes, but the critics in their stupidity made far too much of the live rats. In fact the rats kept falling asleep under the heat of the lights, so when it came to the all-important shot of them in the helmet their keeper had to prod them into some sort of activity. As we had 17 different sets but only one studio, I had to arrange for filmed inserts when the camera was moving from one set to another. Next to the studio were the remnants of an old exhibition from 1925, all ruins and pools of water—

that's where we shot the scenes in the Prole Quarter. Similarly, in *Quatermass II* we shot some of the scenes in the alien base underneath the studios, amid all the heating equipment.'

1984 was a landmark in television drama production, in terms of its scope and scale and its engagement with serious contemporary issues. It was also one of the first occasions that the BBC got into trouble with MPs and the self-appointed guardians of public morality in the daily press, run-ins which have since become boringly familiar.

Five Tory MPs tabled a motion deploring 'The tendency evident in recent BBC television programmes, notably on Sunday evenings, to pander to sexual and sadistic tastes.' The *Daily Mirror* fulminated: 'There was no moral in this nauseating story, which held out no hope for the future that could justify its being shown on television.' Meanwhile, a *Daily Express* headline alleged: 'Wife Dies As She Watches', and the *Daily Sketch* shrieked: 'Tortures On TV Start Biggest Protest Storm.' Sounds depressingly familiar nearly forty years later, doesn't it?

In those days of live television drama, there were about three weeks of rehearsals without cameras for each play. 'As we only had one studio capable of doing live television,' explains Cartier, 'the producer of the Sunday play could have only a day and a half of rehearsal with the cameras, from Saturday lunchtime till 10 p.m., and from Sunday morning till shortly before transmission time.

'It was an absolute nightmare going out live. The actors were sometimes terrified, and you never knew what was going to happen next, like a camera breaking down. It was particularly difficult for me, as I was known for vast subjects with large crowds. There was always a breakdown caption standing by. This live business had a great deal

The Cold Light: John Robinson, Marius Goring.



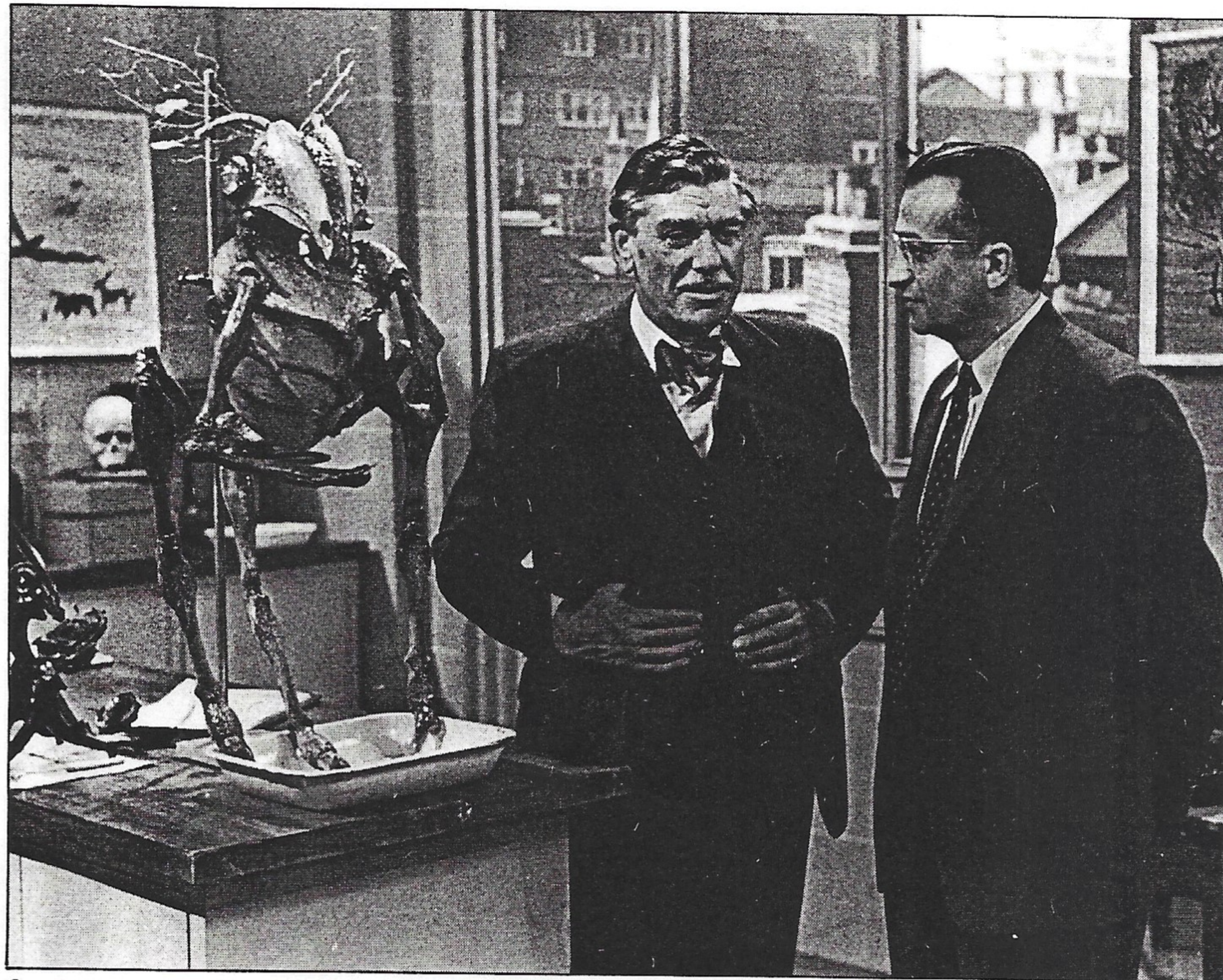
to do with Equity, who wouldn't let the BBC pre-film anything but out-of-doors scenes. I finally broke the Equity spell when I did *Mother Courage* with Flora Robson. She was unwilling to do a continuous live performance, so we had to pre-record some of her scenes in the studio. Someone denounced us to Equity, there was an expensive court case and the BBC had to pay compensation. After that, however, the situation was changed to enable pre-filming to take place in the studio.'

Live transmissions were not the only bugbear of television drama's early days: 'Our budgets were ridiculous. The biggest I had then was £3,000 for 1984. But there was no money for musicians, so I went on bended knees and asked for another £200, which I got. There was no particular policy about what could or couldn't be adapted; I could purchase and put on whatever I wanted, the only limitations were financial.' But, money or no money, Cartier's output was by today's standards phenomenal. For example, in 1953 he put on five plays (all which were repeated) and six episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment*; in 1954 ten plays (four of which were repeated); and the following year six plays (with three repeats), six episodes of *Quatermass II*, and so on.

Cartier was also among the first to attempt opera on television, perhaps not surprising considering the copious and dramatic use of music which he made in many of his plays. He had always wanted to do *Turandot* on television, but in fact his first tv opera was Menotti's *The Saint of Blecker Street*, followed by *Othello*, *Tobias and the Angel*, *Carmen* and *The Bear*.

There is a good deal more to Cartier's contribution to television drama than simply elaborate *mise en scène*. 'I stressed the importance of new scripts, and also new actors, who, incidentally, aren't always as expensive as the old ones. It was important in those days to find a style that got away from the stage. Television should go right into the actors' hearts and minds. Unlike in the theatre, the audience wants to see what is going on in the actor's face. I'd tell the actors that no matter how successful they had been in a play on the stage, when that play was done for television it was something new and they must find new ways of acting it. But I never told them how to act, only what to feel. It's no good if a director tries to be an actor himself and to influence the acting style of his cast.'

Certainly, some remarkable television performances are among the many rewards of watching Cartier's productions. For example, Marius Goring as a scientist clearly based on Klaus Fuchs in *The Cold Light*; Peter Cushing in 1984; André Morell in *Quatermass and the Pit*; Sean Connery and Claire Bloom in *Anna Karenina* (not long before Connery became James Bond); and most notably Joseph Furst and Anton Diffring in *Dr Korczak and the Children*, a real tour-de-force of acting and direction and, as Cartier accurately



Quatermass and the Pit: André Morell (Quatermass), Cec Linder.

describes it, 'the first television play without scenery, without costumes and without props.' Intriguingly, the subject has now been filmed by Andrzej Wajda, in a production in which the BBC was co-producer.

As drama developed in the 1960s towards what we would now think of as tv films (the BBC's devotion to the term 'play' notwithstanding), Cartier's output inevitably slowed down. Productions such as *Stalingrad* and *Lee Oswald—Assassin*, however, show him taking full advantage of the flexibility offered by pre-recording to deliver something far closer to a 'film for television' than the traditional idea of a 'BBC drama'. His location work on the *Z Cars* episode *Scare* (a Liverpoolian *Panic in the Streets*) and the Maigret story *The Golden Fleece*, set in atmospheric Parisian

Stalingrad: Edward Ogden, Ian Colin.



canalside locations, also display a decidedly cinematic sensibility.

As early as 1958, writing in *Films and Filming*, Cartier was looking with considerable insight into the future relationship of cinema and television: 'tv films have developed into a marketable commodity which can be sold to different transmitters, as they fit easily into the various gaps between bigger tv events. Whether they will, one day, become the sole food of the rapacious tv screens remains to be seen. It is possible that through improvements in film transmission (no film is yet as crisp and clear on the tv screen as a 'live' broadcast), merging of financial interests, and pay-as-you-see tv, a gradual rapprochement between the now bitterly opposed camps will take place; and larger screens and colour tv (which is not so far away as one might imagine) will help to that end.' Of contemporary productions which he himself would like to have done, he names *The Mahabharata* and *Edge of Darkness*, beside which, 'everything else new seems very small.'

If Cartier's work is less well known today than it ought to be, this may partly be because of the continuing ascendancy of what one might call the Loach/Garnett/Sydney Newman school of television drama in critical histories. Another reason is the invisibility of so many of his productions. Most of those which survive do so in murky 35mm prints, making it difficult to gauge their visual style—though stills and frame enlargements suggest an almost UFA-like quality of chiaroscuro. And much of Cartier's work has literally vanished, lost or destroyed over the years, along with so much else from the television output of the period. ■