THE THEODORE HUFF MEMORIAL FILM SOCIETY
Program for Tuesday June 17th, 1928

NEXT SHOW: June 24
REGINALD DENNY and LAURA LA PLANTE in "SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT"; Laurel & Hardy in "PUTTING PANTS ON PHILIP" and "CRIMINALS AT LARGE"; "3 LITTLE PIGS" etc

RONALD COLMAN
1891 - 1958

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN - 1925
THE NIGHT OF LOVE 1927

MADAME CARROLL

THE PRISONER OF ZENDA
1937

WITH DAVID NIVEN, DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, RAYMOND MASSEY, MARY ASTOR, MONIACUE-LOVE, C. AUBREY SMITH

BEAU GESTE 1927

(EXCERPT)
With the passing of Ronald Colman last month, the screen lost not only a fine actor and colorful personality, but also the leader of what might be termed the cult of the "gentleman-hero". It was a cult that had, unfortunately, all but died out on the screen, due partly to changing audience fads, but mainly to Hollywood's increasing preoccupation with the teenage market -- a preoccupation that has ruled out the mature hero apparently for all time.

In his leadership of the gentle, civilized school of leading-man, Colman was followed closely by Clive Brook, Lewis Stone, Herbert Marshall and of course John Barrymore, although Barrymore was not so "exclusively" a gentleman in his screen roles. The fact that Englishmen predominate in the lineup is perhaps significant, but not really conclusive, inasmuch as type casting had a great deal to do with it. Colman and Brook looked like gentlemen, and were cast accordingly. The British certainly had no monopoly on such roles however, and Adolphe Menjou, Warner Baxter and Warren William were also valuable members of the school.

What a joy were those films of the late 20's and early 30's, wherein leading men exuded good manners and courtliness at all times; Colman in "The White Sister" and "The Winning of Barbara Worth"; Lewis Stone in "The Girl from Montmartre" and "The Lost World"; Barrymore in "Grand Hotel"; Clive Brook in "Cavalcade". And being a gentleman in those days didn't mean being a colorless hero either; Colman in "The Night of Love" and Herbert Marshall in "Trouble in Paradise" were, despite all their courtliness, rogues of the first order.

With the passing of the years however, it was, alas, no longer fashionable to be a gentleman-hero. Ronald Colman survived better than the others because he was too big a name not to; he was able to select his roles with care, discard those which would not show him to advantage. But for the most part, the gentleman-hero declined into a position where he was either an object for comedy, or for sympathy. In the latter capacity, he at least retained a measure of dignity, but since he always lost the girl it was but small compensation. A typical example of this is provided by 1949's "Holiday Affair", in which Wendell Corey plays the gentlemanly hero in love with Janet Leigh. Not only has he loved her patiently, devotedly and courteously for a number of years, but in addition is a man of wealth and culture. Yet as soon as the penniless, talentless and perennially rude Robert Mitchum barges obnoxiously into Miss Leigh's life, Corey is promptly scorned, ridiculed, and cast aside. Today matters seem even worse, since it is no longer a case of leading lady choosing between gentleman and oaf, but between one oaf and another oaf.

Of course, this is not to disparage the few "mature" actors who remain: Herbert Marshall, Gable, Fredric March. But in terms of leading men, the word "mature" is perhaps a rather generous one. The tragedy is that no new players have arisen to replace the Colmans and the Marshalls as they were in their mature prime, and while there may undoubtedly be some good acting talent hidden in the non-ending welter of John Saxons, Cliff Robertson's and Don Murays (and even in the neurotic Actors Studio types exemplified by John Cassavettes), there seems to be none of comparable stature to the "old guard" -- except possibly Curd Jurgens.

Luckily old film remains to remind us of the glories that were, and while this program is of course devoted to Ronald Colman, it also - automatically - serves as a reminder of the days when movie heroes could be, and often were, gentlemen.
Far too few of Colman's earlier films are available to us today. A print of "Handcuffs and Kisses" exists in New York, but ironically enough almost all of Colman's scenes have been eaten away by film decay. "Romola", in which Colman was sadly wasted, was screened by this society some two years ago. "The Winning of Barbara Worth" was presented by the Museum of Modern Art not too long ago, as were the brilliant and underrated "Raffles", and "Cynara". Many of the early talkie Goldwyns are just unavailable at present, and early British silents, like "The White Sheik", exist only in the vaults of Elstree Studios in England. However, our compilation does cover some of the highlights of his career, and with "Beau Geste", "Lost Horizon" and "The Prisoner of Zenda", certainly demonstrates the tremendous appeal of the gentleman-hero projected so successfully by Colman.

COMPILATION

We're opening with a 5-minute compilation of Colman scenes; some production scenes with Doris Kenyon and Jane Wyatt, and short scenes from LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN (1925) and THE NIGHT OF LOVE (1927). Directed by Lubitsch, LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN had some very amusing visual touches, but on the whole, and not surprisingly, failed to catch the real bite of Oscar Wilde. Colman's debonair presence was a big asset, but his voice was sadly missed. We have taken one short sequence from toward's the film's end. "THE NIGHT OF LOVE", directed by George Fitzmaurice in fine, flambouyant style, is never shown publicly (by film archives) these days for fear of offending Catholic sensibilities. Unimportant as a film, it was nevertheless a wonderful piece of hokum, superbly mounted and photographed, and with some fine love scenes. And some magnificent villainy from Montague Love! We are including one short scene in our opening compilation as a reminder of the great Colman-Banky romantic team that was so enormously popular in the late 20's. Sally Rand is the gypsy dancer.

"BEAU GESTE" (Paramount, 1927) Director: Herbert Brenon.

P.C. Wren's classic tale of Foreign Legion adventure gave Colman one of his best silent roles, and was in every way superior to the talkie remake (although that too, was a well-done film). Produced on a large scale, it marked a temporary return to the extravagant location-filmed spectacle that had once been Herbert Brenon's main stock-in-trade, but which had lately been replaced by a concentration on straight drama and whimsy ("Peter Pan", etc.) Our lengthy excerpt is from the second half of the film, and contains some typical Colman sequences -- as well as some very typical Noah Beery episodes too! Beery was at his best as the villainous Commandant. The excerpt also includes a substantial portion of the finely staged Biff attack on the fort.

"LOST HORIZON" (Columbia, 1937) Produced and directed by Frank Capra.

James Hilton's novel provided Colman with possibly his most famous role, and certainly one that seemed tailor-made for him. "Lost Horizon" may be sugary and hokey (it was no less so in 1937 than it is today) but it is so expertly made that one can readily forgive flaws that are really due more to James Hilton than to any of Capra's crew. Joseph Walker's
photography is quite superb, the sets remain as eye-catching as ever, and Dmitri Tiomkin's score (directed by Max Steiner) is still one of the finest of all movie scores. From a technical standpoint, the only serious criticism one can make is of the rather obvious interpolation of non-matching stock footage in the final reels, when Luis Trenker and sundry other refugees from the film library stalk through old footage supposedly as Colman.

The film is particularly fortunate in its casting. Among the supporting players, H.B. Warner is particularly fine as one of the lesser llamas; a sincere and beautifully done performance. What might have been obtrusive comedy relief from anyone else is, from Edward Everett Horton, genuinely funny. And Sam Jaffe is so good that he almost makes one believe in the imbecilic and feeble-witted philosophies that he has to expound. Of course, there is nothing feeble-witted about the basic premise of "Lost Horizon"; sadly it seems more pointed as the years go by.

Our excerpts include one of the Colman-H.B. Warner discussions, some of the charmingly done love scenes with Jane Wyatt, the idyllic swimming sequence (surely one of the most pleasant and non-erotic of all nude bathing sequences) and the concluding sequence of the departure from, and return to, Shangri-La. Even though Colman is not too prominently featured in this final material, it is such good movie-making - stock-shots or not - that it seemed the ideal way of winding up the first half of the program.

- INTERMISSION -

"THE PRISONER OF ZENDA" (1937, 12 reels) A David O. Selznick production, released through United Artists.

Directed by John Cromwell; from the novel by Anthony Hope and the dramatization by Edward Rose; screenplay by John Balderston; adaptation by Wells Root; additional dialogue by Donald Ogden Stewart; edited by Hal C. Kern and James E. Newcom; photographed by James Wong Howe; musical score by Alfred Newman; Assistant to the producer: William H. Wright; Assistant Director: Frederic A. Spencer; Art Director: Lyle Wheeler; Interior Decoration: Casey Roberts; Special Effects: Jack Cosgrove; Technical Advisers: Prince Sigurd Bernadotte and Count Igor Enorming.

The Cast: Major Rudolf Rassendyll and King Rudolph V (RONALD COLMAN); Princess Flavia (Madeleine Carroll); Rupert of Hentzau (Douglas Fairbanks Jr.); Black Michael (Raymond Massey); Antoinette (Mary Astor); Colonel Zapt (C. Aubrey Smith); Fritz (David Niven); Detchard (Montagu Love); Kraftstein (William von Brincken); Lanengram (Philip Sleeman); Black Michael's butler (Torben Meyer); Marshal Strakinez (Lawrence Grant); Cardinal (Ian McLaren); Bersonin (Ralph Faulkner); Johann (Byron Foulger); Josef (Howard Lang); British Ambassador (Ben Webster); Ambassador's wife (Evelyn Beresford); Master of Ceremonies (Boyd Irwin); Lord High Chamberlain (Emmett King); Orchestra Leader (Al Shean); Customs official (Charles Halton); Second official (Francis Ford); Railway porter (Spencer Charters)

We selected "The Prisoner of Zenda" as the film to be shown in its entirety not only because it is such a typical and top-ranking Colman film and not only because it hasn't been seen around in a good many years (due to a more recent MGM version) but also because it is such wonderful movie-making. Really it can almost be said to represent the last of the great romanticist adventure films. From the opening titles, which have a lush, romantic flavor all their own, everything is just right. The cast is hand-picked -- its equal just couldn't be found today. So many of the grand old character actors like C. Aubrey Smith and Montagu Love have passed on; and players like Mary Astor and Raymond Massey, fine performers though they still are, have passed their prime -- and have not been replaced.
The staging is sumptuous, the sets and decor stunning, and the camerawork of James Wong Howe is a joy to behold. (Howe is one of the few cameramen who still seems to take real pride in his work, and who delivers more than just a workmanlike job; his photography in "The Old Man and the Sea" is both beautiful and creative). Howe's sharp, beautifully lit camerawork in "Zenda" is magnificent throughout; and he brings in one of the most elaborate pullback shots since 1929's "Broadway". How little is the camera really used in current movies! And Alfred Newman's score - like Tiomkin's for "Lost Horizon" - is yet another reminder of how much the movies have lost. It's a wonderful, virile, melodic score, which particularly enhances the big romantic scenes.

It would be easy enough to find things in "Zenda" to criticise. Possibly one could carp at John Balderston's rather talkative screenplay; as in his screenplay for "Dracula", it stays inside four walls rather more than necessary, and plays down vigorous action -- at least until the rousing climax, with its great duel sequence, and exciting stunt horse falls. But who wants to find things to criticise in such a glorious piece of movie hokum? And in any event, it would be churlish to condemn the preponderance of dialogue when it is such wonderful dialogue; in magnificent old theatrical tradition, one block-busting line follows another. The lines roll effortlessly from the lips of Colman ("Then -- will you believe this -- without understanding -- I love you!") and venomously from those of Massey ("It's the day -- the hour -- and very nearly the moment!") Madeleine Carroll is at her loveliest, and the big love scenes with Colman, backed by the combined efforts of Messrs. Howe, Newman and Balderston, are BIG in the fine old tradition.

This version of "The Prisoner of Zenda" is undoubtedly the best of the four important screen versions (although admittedly we haven't seen the 1915 one). Rex Ingram's 1922 version with Lewis Stone was ornate, but strangely stodgy and disappointing. Ramon Novarro was fine as Rupert, and von Stroheim, in a strange little sequence presumably directed by himself (it had nothing to do with the rest of the story, and wound up with his body floating away in the moat!) made a small part stand out. Alice Terry was Flavia, and Stwart Holmes - of course - played Black Michael. The most recent MGM version was surprisingly good, all things considered, although Stewart Granger was hardly able to do justice to some of the retained Colman lines. Deborah Kerr was Flavia, James Mason an ideal (if rather heavy) Rupert, and Robert Douglas was Black Michael. Jane Greer was hardly an improvement on Mary Astor as Antoinette.

Incidentally, although our print is a particularly good one, it is a dupe, and strangely, odd sections at the ends of reels are even second-generation dupes. Not knowing the history of this print, it is difficult to explain this, but it does rather look as though the original negative and/or fine grain may have been damaged, and that a new negative had to be made from a print which was also partially damaged (hence the second-generation duping in spots). Presumably MGM made some kind of a deal with Selznick whereby this version wouldn't be reissued anyway, but even so it's sad to think that the original negative of such a fine subject may have gone. Let's hope we're wrong in so thinking.

"The Prisoner of Zenda" opened in 1937 at the Radio City Music Hall, and was a tremendous popular success. The critics liked it too, although they didn't take it too seriously, and poked fun at some of the dialogue. Certainly it is all gloss and hokum -- but what wonderful gloss and hokum it is. How much in sheer zest and the joy of good movie-making have we lost in the 20 odd years since it was made! And how much will we miss Ronald Colman in the future.

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