"GRAINQUEBILLE" (Jacques Feyder, 1922) 4 reels.

Starring Maurice de Féraudy as Grainquebille; with Marguerite Carré (L'Amour); Jeanne Cheirel (L'Agent); Mme. Payard; Mmes. (Le Président Bourricle); Félix Oudart (L'Agent); Kosnier (Le Docteur Mathieu); Jean Worms (L'Avocat Lenerlé); Roques (L'Agent 121); J. Forest (La Souriès); Françoise Rosay (customer in store).

"Grainquebille" was the very first film shown by the Huff Society, when it was still a small group of a dozen or so people, back in the early 50's. We haven't shown it since, and a revival seems long overdue.

"Grainquebille" is usually either completely ignored — or vastly overrated. Based on the novel by Anatol France, it is really little more than a vignette; just as a longer treatment would destroy its fragility and casual qualities, so would too much analysis and discussion lessen the elements of surprise and sudden tenderness that make it such an interesting movie. Actually made by Feyder more or less as a move to keep pace with the then-flourishing French avant-garde movement, it makes its points far more tellingly with its completely realistic aspects than with its occasional experimental sequences. Quite a lovely little film, with some very touching moments, it has what amounts to "neo-realism" long before the Italians coined the phrase and used it as an excuse (DeSica and one or two others excepted) to cover slovenly workmanship and lack of imagination. The camerawork is particularly striking, but as in so many Feyder films ("The Kiss", "Knight Without Armor", "La Kermesse Heroïque") rather inconsistent; a particularly lovely and uncomplicated image will be followed by a forced, or quite common-place one.

In England, "Grainquebille" was titled "Coster Bill of Paris"; in the U.S., it was released as just "Bill". D.W. Griffith liked the film a great deal, and his unofficial endorsement helped its boxoffice chances quite a bit. Probably Griffith's interest in the film is responsible for the very Griffithian foreword, which would seem to be patterned after the foreword on D.W.'s "The White Rose".

"Grainquebille" has been remade twice; once in 1933, and again in 1954. It is difficult to imagine either of them being more effective than this slight, simple but sensitive version of 1922.

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"THE MAD WHIRL" (Universal, 1924, 7 reels) Directed by William A. Seiter; from the story "Here's How" by Richard Washburn Child (U.S. Ambassador to Italy); adapted by Frederic and Fanny Hatton; screen treatment by Lewis Milestone; scenario by Edward T. Lowe Jr.; Assistant director: Nate Watt; photographed by Kerritt B. Gerstad; titles by Harvey Thew; edited by Thomas Pratt; Art Direction, E.E. Sheely.

Starring RAY McAVOY and JACK MULHALL, with George Fawcett, Marie Astaire, Alec D. Francis, Kyrtle Stedman, Barbara Bodford, Ward Crane, and Charles King as an extra.

The still from THE MAD WHIRL in Richard Griffith-Arthur Mayer's "The Movies" leads one to expect a typically frenzied essay in bawdy, boozing, and wild parties. But while those elements are present to a degree,
the film is by no means a film of the "Our Dancing Daughters" or "Walking Back" school. To the contrary, it is one of the most curiously gentle and even charming films of the jazz age that I've seen; it is developed so casually that for a while the basic story-line isn't even apparent; and then, quite unexpectedly, it produces a quiet power around reel five that is most effective. I hesitate to say too much about the film for fear of over-selling it; to me it was one of the most interesting re-discoveries we've made in some time, and part of that was due to its totally unexpected approach to the jazz-age, and its civilised, non-hysterical, yet quite telling condemnation of that era.

William Seiter, who directed the best of the Reginald Denny comedies for Universal, had a wonderful flair for light comedy and it pays off here in the hectic beach and boose parties. But he had fine dramatic stuff in him too, and a flair for unspectacular but pleasing compositions and groupings. Seiter never "milks" a scene, but makes the very most of a quick image; the delightful scene of Muhlhall examining a flapper's ankles (she is sitting high in a tree) as he looks for May McAvoy for example; or the lively sequence of May's runaway buggy. (There again is a pleasant break from cliche, which I won't spoil by describing). What an added sense of speed and drama Seiter gets by having her buggy race under a bridge in one direction while a locomotive speeds over it in the opposite direction. Seiter was never a showy or a spectacular director, and he rarely seemed to handle more than trifles, but how well his direction stands up today!

Apart from the authentic nostalgia of a flapper-age film like "The Mad Whirl", there are so many other pleasing elements; "unnecessary" but very pleasing little vignettes, like the scene in the ice-cream parlor where George Raft gets a banana-split. And the performances are all first-rate - particularly, in the supporting cast, from pert Marie Astaure, one of the most diverting of all flappers. (Remember her with Harry Langdon in Sennett's "Boobs in the Wood"?).

Sincerely handled all around, extremely well photographed, and equipped with particularly deft partially-visual subtitles, "The Mad Whirl" is a most interesting film -- and we'd dearly love to be able to sort out the sundry writing credits and determine just how much Lewis Milestone had to do with it all.

Like "Craigmichele", it's a fine toned print, and appears quite complete.

Program Notes & Enquiries: Wm. K. Everson, Hotel Bradford, 210 W. 70th St., NYC 23 Committee: Edward Gorey, Sandra Everson, Charles Shibuk, Dorothy Lovell.

May Programs

These haven't definitely been settled as yet, but you will of course be notified as usual in the second week of the month. One of the shows will be, as per requests, a Val Lewton double-bill - THE GHOST SHIP and Diabolik. Another show will probably be a pot-pourri of short subjects, as we have built up another big backlog of really interesting one and two-reelers. However, more about that in a couple of weeks.

Notes: the diligent researches of Macrae, Kirk Bond and Andy McKay indicate that last week's mystery item was an excerpt from Robert Vienne's "GENUINE". We have the posses out now searching for the rest of it, and will report in due course.