"The Goddess of Sagebrush Gulch" (Biograph, 1912) One reel; directed by D.W. Griffith; photographed by G.W. Bitzer; with Blanche Sweet, Dorothy Bernard, Charles West, and in bits, Alfred Paget and Christy Miller.

From 1911 on, there didn't seem to be any really bad Griffith Biographs -- either they were fine, like "A Girl and Her Trust" and "Musketeers of Pig Alley", or they were smoothly accomplished -- like this one. There are no startling innovations here, and the melodramatic climax isn't milked for suspense the way it might have been, but it's a good, solid little film. The photography is crisp and attractive; the story tense and fast-moving; and the playing generally good -- especially from lovely Blanche Sweet.

"Golden Rule Kate" (Ince-Triangle, 1917) Excerpt -- 1/4 reels; directed by Reginald Barker; with Louise Glaum, John Gilbert, Mildred Harris.

By now members of this society are used to the rugged, gutsy little westerns that Ince turned out, so we needn't amplify on that; in any case, the film's narration does it for us. However, we should say a word or two about the film's seemingly complete story-line. Initially this material appeared to us as a careful condensation of a feature, complete with a Triangle end title. It made perfect sense that way, and its television narration approached it with that story-line in mind. Only later did we find that although at some period between 1917 and now it had been released in this form, the "condensation" consisted merely of the first couple of reels more or less as they were. We couldn't find any more film -- but we did find the original script, and it went on for another three really rugged reels. In the rest of the film, Golden Rule Kate's kid sister is about to bear an illegitimate child, and the minister is blamed. "The Heller" (John Gilbert) sets out to kill him, only to find at the last moment that the heavy is responsible. Sounds like a really rugged little opus in the "Hell's Hinges" tradition, and I only hope that one day we get a chance to see it all. Louise Glaum as the "good bad girl" here has a role that curiously foreshadows her role in our feature, "Greater than Love". Personally, we like a more fiery Louise as the "bad bad girl" in the Hart westerns like "Hell's Hinges" and "The Return of Drew Erwin" -- but, she gives an appealing performance, and looks a good deal more than five years younger than she does in "Greater than Love".

"Isle of Lost Ships" (Warner's, 1929) Dir; Irvin Willat; with Jason Robards, Virginia Valli, Noah Beery, Robert Emmett O'Connor, Ethan Laidlaw. This one-reel condensation written and edited by Robert G. Youngson.

It terms of editing the action highlights out of a complete feature, this one-reeler is one of Bob Youngson's best; in terms of over-writing and facetious gagging it's one of his least attractive. But it's a delightfully full-blooded, roaring melodrama, done with real style and (possibly?) a few establishing shots borrowed from Tourneur's earlier version. The special effects are exceptionally fine, and for a film that was, after all, a talkie (the original sound discs have been lost) it is wonderful fluid moviemaking in a period when so much was static and dialogue-bound.

= Intermission =
"GREATER THAN LOVE" (Associated Producers-Parker Reade) Directed by Fred Niblo; written by C. Gardner Sullivan; starring Louise Glau, with Mahlon Hamilton, Eve Southern. 7 reels

Camera: Charles Stumar

When we first came across this title, we asked Gerald McDonald, our most reliable film historian, about it. He hadn't seen it, but suggested that it would probably show Louise somewhat past her prime -- and in a dazzling display of costumes of her own design. It proved to be a most apt description; after all, this was more than my own initial impression of the film. Initially I was unable to see more than a couple of reels (the opening reels of the film), and on the strength of those reels, which promised all sorts of delights (and on the strength of the trade reviews) grabbed the film for tonight's showing.

Unfortunately the promise of those opening reels isn't quite fulfilled; tantalising glimpses of dope dens and bizarre night-clubs remain just that, and the film does rather bog down into sentimentality in its latter half, not that we wouldn't have shown it anyway even if we had seen it all before announcing it -- it's the sort of film that we feel we have no choice but to show (as long as it maintains reasonable quality) since, Eastman House excepted, this kind of programmer doesn't seem to have any other outlet.

Fred Niblo, whom we always thought a very stodgy director, but who seemed to come very much to life in last month's "Dangerous Hours," seems here to be caught, much of the time, in the lethargy that marked his "Blood and Sand" of the same year, and most of his later work. How much of the merit of "Dangerous Hours," we wonder, can be attributed to Ince's supervision? Certainly the "personal supervision" of Parker Reade on this opus doesn't seem to have aided Niblo to any marked degree. But there's always C. Gardner Sullivan with his magnificent titles in this tale of "Painted Lillies who Bloom at Night" -- when all else fails, Sullivan's titles, and Charles Stumar's often quite exceptional photography, rivet one's attention to the screen.

Having gotten off to a critical note, let me hasten to add that the film is still interesting, entertaining, and often quite touching. It would be more so were it not quite so long-winded about it all, and had it just a shade more substance in its plot. It was apparently far more a run-of-the-mill film for 1921 than we might assume today -- the same day it was shown to the trade critics, three remarkably similar (in overall theme) films were also being shown to the press -- "Sign on the Door", "Is Life Worth Living?" and "Good Women" -- the latter yet another work of the tireless C. Gardner Sullivan. The critics on the whole were kind to "Greater Than Love", classing it as rather more of a shocker than we would today. Film Daily, commenting on its glamorous presentation of rather sordid NY night-life, said that it "...appeals to the sensation-loving crowd, and holds plenty of shocks for more delicate souls". It also predicted censor trouble because of its wild orgies and suicide, and suggested that responsible exhibitors should see it before booking it. Of Miss Glau, Film Daily remarked "She has played the same type of role before and there is no exception to her work here."

The bizarre sets of night-clubs and apartments are all quite wonderful, but how many, we wonder, were created for this film? The Germanic figure of Destiny, smiling down on the city and moving the human pawns around, turned up again (the same footage) in 1925's "Paint and Powder", shown by this society in 1955. Its use there was as contrived as it is here, indicating that even in this earlier film it may already be stock footage from a pre-1920 picture. Likewise some of the elaborate night-club scenes into which, suspiciously, few of the principal players ever seem to inject themselves.
With this (presumably) stock footage interpolated early in the proceedings -- and remarkably smoothly interpolated too -- the film gets off to a somewhat false start with what it promises, so that the gradual descent into straightforward dramatics is even more marked in contrast. ("Dangerous Hours" wisely followed a happier path -- starting on a fairly normal level, and building steadily). It may well be that we do the film an injustice by suggesting that the imaginative Destiney-figure footage is already stock here; but the rest of the film does rather bear out such a theory. It's not a "cheap" picture -- it's merely a very economical one, cunningly made to look far more expensive than it is. Among the budget-paring devices is that old one of using the front of the old Ince studio as a set itself.

We must apologise for a somewhat inadequate representation of the cast. Only Louise Glaum and Mahlon Hamilton are identified by billing -- and of course nobody could fail to recognise the lovely Eva Southern. Other faces look frustratingly familiar -- especially the old lady, veteran of several Ince films -- and we're hoping that some of you volunteer information in this respect. We received the film only the night before the show, so there has been no time for subsequent checking on the players involved. Other than Glaum's, no role has any prominence however, and since the film is an independent one, the supporting players are presumably very definitely "lesser" names.

If we seem to have been overly-critical of the film, it is probably because of unfulfilled expectations. Probably it will come to life far more with music and, most of all, a responsive audience. This is the kind of film which, even without any special merits, is well worthy of revival just because it is such a typical film from a genre and a period, that is exposed to us too little today. Treat it with kindness and patience, and you may be very pleasantly surprised by it.

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Next program: Tuesday August 23rd, room 11-C

"ALLES FÜR GELD" ("FORTUNE'S FOOL") 1923 - starring Emil Jannings, directed by Reinhold Schunzel.

"THE WANDERER" (2-reel version) 1926, starring Greta Nissen, Wallace Beery, Tyrone Power ar. William Collier jr., dir: Raoul Walsh

"A Race to New York" - Edison, 1914 - Mary Fuller in "What Happened to Mary?"

"Cowboy Ambrose" - a wonderful Mack Swain spoof on westerns

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