TONIGHT's two films have a number of things in common. Both are adaptations of stage plays (though one remains stagey while the other is completely cinematic); both were made earlier as silent films; and both represent that very rare thing -- a remake that is probably superior to the original.

THE GREEN GODDESS (1929) From the play by William Archer; screenplay by Julien Josephson; photographed by James Van Trees; Vitaphone Orchestra conducted by Louis Silvers; Directed by Alfred E. Green. 8 reels.

Starring GLORIA ARLISS, with Ralph Forbes, H.B. Warner, Alice Joyce, Ivan Simpson, Peggy Sheffield, Betty Boyd, Michel de Brulier, David Tearle, Harry Semels.

There is no attempt made to disguise the play origins of "The Green Goddess", and indeed, in 1929, when 100% all-talkies were all the rage, there would have been no reason to make such an attempt. Yet the quality of the writing and the performances, and the elegance of setting, is such that the film moves far more quickly than many other films of the period not adapted from stage hits.

Of course, it's an Arliss vehicle from beginning to end, and from his point of view, one of his best. He is witty and menacing by turn, cultured at the drop of a hat. And though he plays an Indian Rajah, he is able to play his standard stock-in-trade -- the cultured, dignified Britisher -- by being contemptuous of the British, and therefore playing in parody of them. Above all, he permits himself the luxury of bask in his own reflected glory -- with every glint of those eyes, every measured movement, every line -- he tells the audience that he knows full well how great he is, and like a seasoned trouper, always pauses to let the effect sink in before he moves to something else. His Rajah is, hardly a brilliant piece of acting, but it is a brilliant projection of personality, and a wonderful example of the kind of theatrical bravura that has seemingly gone forever in a morass of Method mumbles.

The deliberate theatrical quality of the film is one of its basic charms. No casual lines, no unimportant comments to build up "atmosphere" -- every word has its place. A line either tells the audience something that it needs to know about the plot, in the shortest combination of words possible, or it is a flamboyant "sock" line guaranteed to leave the audience gasping. The final line of the picture remains of the great curtain lines of all time, ranking with the unforgettable final lines from "Jone with the Wind", "The Informer" and "I Am A Fugitive From a Chain Gang". The groupings of the actors has a nice stagey feel to it as well -- action on the left, action on the right, nothing to confuse one in centre stage! And the plot itself: what grand old melodrama -- but tinged with such wit that (providing it is well played) it will never seem quite as old-fashioned as it really is.

The playing here is first-class, Ralph Forbes and H.B. Warner, enunciating every word as if for the gallery, are superbly in character as the British stiff upper-lippers. Warner is supposed to be somewhat of a rotter, but being British it hardly shows of course, and true-blue gallantry wins out in the end. In one classic scene, the two intrepid Englishmen overpower a helpless servant of the evil Rajah, and without too much motivation, throw him to his death on the rocks below. "At least," says Warner squaring his shoulders, "we didn't take it lying down!". Alice Joyce, being somewhat un-British, doesn't come off quite as well -- but she is still a very lovely and charming person to watch. But of course, it's Arliss' show all the way, with every line seemingly written for his personality. Whether he's apologising for using British slang, or angrily exclaiming that "Asia has a long score to settle with you swagging Lords of Creation", he takes supreme command of every foot of film that he's in.

The first version of "The Green Goddess" was made in 1923 for Distinctive, releasing through Metro Goldwyn. Without Arliss' rich delivery, one can hardly imagine it being quite as good as this version. Arliss, Alice Joyce and Ivan Simpson played the same roles in that version too, with David Powell and Harry T. Moorey as the two Englishmen. In 1943 there was another remake with Paul Cavanagh in the Rajah (and some devil-worshiping thrown in) and John Loder, Ruth Ford and Warren Douglas in the three other leads. No players from earlier versions were retained this time - although there was one element in continuity in that James Van Trees again did the photography.

This 1929 version, though a handsome production to look at, was probably quite an economical one to produce. several scenes (easy enough to spot, due to
INTERMISSION

PETER IBBETSON (Paramount, 1935) Produced by Louis D. Lighton; directed by Henry Hathaway; Screenplay by Vincent Lawrence and Waldemar Young, with additional scenes by John Meehan and Edwin Justus Mayer, from a novel by George Du Maurier and a play by John Nathaniel Raphael, as adapted by Constance Collier; Music Score and Direction: Ernest Toch; Art Direction: Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; photographed by Charles Lang; Special Effects: Gordon Jennings; edited by Stuart Heisler; 9 rls.


"Peter Ibbetson" is a largely unknown (or forgotten) American film. Europe however, has always regarded it highly, and in recent years has been slipping it more and more into those insidious lists of the classics of all time. Certainly it is a lovely and poignant film that doesn't deserve its domestic obscurity; neither on the other hand does it entirely warrant its European (and especially French) worship. Its true value seems to lie somewhere in between; it is an amazingly good film considering its star and director (of which more in a minute); it is a curious film to have been made at all in the mid-30's; and in many ways it is a minor classic. Yet its appeal is almost solely emotional. Its real story-line doesn't develop until the latter half of the picture; and while its mysticism and romance is tremendously impressive while one is seeing it, somehow, half-an-hour later, like a Chinese dinner, it leaves one a little unsatisfied. Perhaps the dream world of the lovers is just a little too studio-conceived to be as convincing as it must be -- we are just too familiar now with the effects of dry ice mists and filtered sunlight for those devices now to seem anything but tricks. Autant-Lara's "Sylvie et le Fantome" for example avoided all such devices -- yet managed to be one of the most convincing and almost unbearable-poignant films of its type that I've ever seen. So, in its own way, was "On Borrowed Time".

But if "Peter Ibbetson" disappoints, it is really only because of the film it might have been. The silent version, released under both that title and as "Forever" was directed by George Fitzmaurice (whom one would think entirely wrong for such a delicate story) and starred Wallace Reid and Elsie Ferguson. Gerald McDonald, who remembers it well, was not too impressed by the film itself, though Elsie Ferguson's performance he says, was superb. This sound version seems to have a similar handicap in that Henry Hathaway, a superb director on action, western or melodramatic material, appears to be an extremely odd choice for its guidance. And Gary Cooper, who had worked with Hathaway in "Lives of a Bengal Lancer", likewise seems out of his element in a role that cries out for Ronald Colman. It takes some time before one really accepts Cooper, and he never seems quite comfortable. The direction however, considering Hathaway's normal chores, is often excellent and sometimes quite subtle, but ultimately it is on the direction that the blame must fall for that almost indefinable lack of delicacy.

The script, certainly, is first-class. Like most adaptations of great novels and love stories in the 30's, it is a little too stately, a little over-simplified, a little over-reverential perhaps, but it is both good translation, and good cinema. Many sequences are nicely introduced via extreme long shots which themselves look like engravings from old books. The writing is economical -- it jumps right away to essentials, with a minimum of extraneous pudding. Oddly enough, its mysticism succeeds best in the early scenes -- the storm, for example -- when it is merely suggested, in contrast to the outright statement when the film plunges into full fantasy.
Pictorially the film is extremely handsome; how much we took that for granted in the thirties! Today shabby matte-work has replaced the expert glass shots of this film, and set design has become a lost art. Films just aren't pictorially interesting at all any more, but of course most of the time they aren't even dramatically interesting either.

Cooper apart - and it may be only the conflict of his established "image" that keeps one from really accepting him - the cast is flawless. The serene and lovely Ann Harding, who rarely had a chance to do more than suffer nobly, certainly makes the most of a not-too-substantial role. And that excellent actor John Halliday — did he ever give anything but a first-rate performance? — is so good that one regrets his role, though important, is so small.

Ernst Toch's musical score is unusual and most impressive — undoubtedly the best of his very limited writing for the screen — and makes an ironic use of Halfe's "I Dreamed I Dwelled in Marble Halls" at one point.

One final, and relatively minor, flaw: despite a title placing it in "the middle of the last century", it often seems difficult to keep a sense of time and period. At moments it seems almost up-to-date, and then some little incongruity suggests a shift of a couple of hundred years. Again, it all boils down to a question of direction — and for a man reared almost solely on westerns and actioners, Hathaway did do an extremely creditable job. Indeed, the question arises, who, in 1935, should have done it? Borsage perhaps — but his strength has always been in more down-to-earth love stories. Brennan would have been ideal — but in 1935, not '35. Incongruous as it may sound (until one gives it second thought) — James Whale might have been the ideal director. But, why conjecture? The film exists as is — a welcome reminder of a style and romanticism that has completely vanished from cinema today.

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m. k. everson ---

Next PrograM:es;
March 25th;
Sunday next, New Yorker Theatre, 9.30 a.m. 35mm material --

HARD BOILED, a 1928 six-reeler directed by Ralph Ince, with Sally O'Neil and Lilyan Tashman — seems to be a typical late jazz-age epic — back-stage story of gold-diggers and (presumably) their reformation! Plus: Three reels of odd material - some early Pathé-color films, new reels of the 20's, some (as yet) unidentified early silent Technicolor footage, a meticulously tinted Robert Bruce travelogue, etc.

Episodes two and three of The BLUES FOX (1921) with Ann Little; and at least a couple of extra reels of shorts.

Next Tuesday, March 27th, Adelphi Hall, room 9c, at 7.30 --
The All-American Boys —

HIS PICTURE IN THE PAPERS (1916) — one of the best of Doug Fairbanks' Triangle frollics — a subtle spoof on American publicity-crazes, with the customary acrobatics and stunts from Doug, and villainy from Eric von Stroheim.

SPIRIT OF THE USA (1924) — a lovely toned print of a good Johnnie Walker—Mary Carr vehicle.

His Mother's Influence (1914) — Wallace Reid in a fine Griffith-supervised one-reeler.

In The Tennessee Hills (1915) — Charles Ray in a powerful little Thomas Ince two-reeler.

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