Tuesday next, April 29th: "THE TURN OF THE TIDE" (1935), an ignored minor British classic, with Geraldine Fitzgerald, John Garrick, Wilfrid Lawson; and "I MARRIED ADVENTURE" (1940), a compilation of 20 years footage from Martin and Osa Johnson.

April 22, 1969

"THE WAKEFIELD CASE" (Lawrence Weber Photo Drama Inc., 1921) Dir: George Irving Released through World Films; scenario by Mrs. L. Case; Russell from an original story by Shamoon Fife; Camera, Walter Arthur; reels With Herbert Rawlinson, Florence Billings, Joseph Burke, J. P. Wade, H. J. Gillmoun, Charles Dalton, Jerry Austin, William W. Black, H. L. Dewey.

In spirit if not in poetry and imagination, "The Wakefield Case" is somewhat akin to the old French serials. It is also possibly the silent screen's answer to "The Big Sleep": few mysteries have ever been quite so full of inexplicable characters, red herrings and plot complications! No little of the prevailing confusion can be traced to the fact that its scenario is written by a woman, based on an original story by a woman, so its total lack of logic must be accepted tolerantly. Characters are introduced too quickly, and events happen too fast - but apart from the feminine hand beneath it all, its chaos is one of the rules of the genre, and very much part of the fun. Even if one never knows quite what's going on, it's too intriguing ever to be boring, and its old-fashioned pacing and masked villains hold constant interest. The film also comes physically to life in its closing reels, and the climactic prowlings, chases and fights have a lot of vigor and gusto behind them. Filmed here in the East, most of its exteriors are presumably in the Fort Lee environs. Well photographed too, and preserved in a good complete toned print, it's an enjoyable piece of minor hokum. Not the least of its delights are its lengthy and ultra-floral titles, though at least one of them seems, to say the least, redundant. The villain has just been shot in the eye by a detective, and his faithful aide advises him: "Wakefield has put out your left eye" - a circumstance of which one would assume he was already quite aware.

--- intermission ---

"DADDIES" (Warner Brothers, 1926) Directed by William A. Seiter, assisted by Lewis Milestone; scenario by Julian Josephson from the play by John L. Hobble as presented by David Belasco; Camera, Charles Stumar; original length 6 reels; this version, 5 reels.

With: Mae Marsh, Harry Myers, Claude Gillingwater, Crawford Kent, Willard Louis, Boyce Comte, Nuriel Frances Dunn, Claire Adams, the Bricco Twins, King Evers.

Looking at this pleasing but fairly predictable little trifle today, it's hard to believe that it originally saw the light of day on stage as a highly successful Jeanne Eagels vehicle for David Belasco. It doesn't seem to have the showmanship built into it that one associates with Belasco, and furthermore it must have been drastically reshuffled in its transference to the screen. Mae Marsh, though not given star billing, nevertheless gets the biggest billing - and is yet little more than a cameo performer. She doesn't make her first appearance until the second reel, and thereafter appears only sparsely. Critics at the time were very much up in arms about this, and since this (well) edited Kodascope version is a reel and a half shorter than the theatrical original, the gaps between her appearances have presumably been shortened somewhat. Were this a minor independent film it would be easy to understand, since it was a common practice to hire big name stars for perhaps a single morning, shoot half a dozen scenes and then interpose them throughout the rest of the film. But Warners would hardly have resorted to these tactics, and in any case, after Griffith's "The White Rose", Mae was again a name of some importance.nder at the time of "Daddies", her name was unknown, and she in the film briefly, but either she is unsympathetically directed (unlikely, with Seiter at the helm) or for reasons of her own, was just walking through the role. Whatever the reason, the few moments for pathos and whimsy, usually her strongpoints, just aren't fully realized. But even though a disappointing film as a Marsh vehicle, "Daddies" has the usual Seiter taste, and Stumar's photography shows up well in this fine toned print. Its plot is in the same vein as "Three Wise Fools", familiar and again as a somewhat lugubrious MGM talkie. Claude Gillingwater could do this sort of thing in his sleep of course, and continued to do so right through the 30's. That odd and ill-used actor, Harry Myers, so often illogically teamed with young beauties (Laura LaPlante in "The Beautiful Cheat" for example) is here a none-too-convincing romantic team-mate for Mae Marsh - although her prolonged absence from the screen undoubtedly make it hard for him to bring much conviction to such a shadowy romance.

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