
February 2nd 1970

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"HEARTS IN EXILE" (World, 1915) Distributed by Supreme Photoplays; Directed by James Young; From the story by John Oxenham, Owen Davis; 5 reels
With Clara Kimball Young, Vernon Steele, Montague Love, Paul McAllister, Claude Fleming.

World productions, made in and around Fort Lee in the pre-20 years (and most especially the Alice Brady vehicles) have a habit of looking exactly like the image that the uninformed have of the silent film: they tend to be theatrical, rather cheap and artificial looking, unsubtle in their plotting and acting, and full of over-florid titles. To a large extent "Hearts in Exile" falls into this category, although its old-fashioned plotting must have seemed far less old-fashioned then, when its background and milieu of pre-Revolutionary Russia was extremely topical. (And old-fashioned or not, it was remade on a bigger scale by Michael Curtiz for Warner Brothers in 1929!) However, for an early 1915 production, it maintains its interest, it makes a virtue of its own material, DeMille and Tourneur were making vastly superior films admittedly - but not many other directors were. The unsatisfaction of "Hearts in Exile" are primarily those of script; given that scenario, James Young (husband of Clara, and always a much under-rated director) makes the most of it. It is well-paced, extremely well lit and photographed, and the many picturesque groupings are well composed and designed, devoid of the tableau effect so predominant then. Occasionally it suffers from the lack of dramatic showmanship; Montague Love's death for example is too casual and un-exploded for such a delightfully villainous somnambulistic. But on the other hand, the final chase sequence - making the very most of a heavy and fortuitous snowfall in the Fort Lee environs - is exceptionally well done, and skilfully edited. Incidentally, it looks as though one horse-fall through the ice of a frozen lake was unplanned, and then hastily incorporated into the story via a few matching shots. At least, from the camera set-ups it doesn't seem as though the fall was planned, and a careful study of those shots on a freeze-frame viewer suggests that it is a genuine accident. Admittedly, one has to be an ardent devotee of Griffith films to be able to take its own sake to heart. The final "Hearts in Exile" in comparison with the other (non-Griffith-DeMille-Tourneur) films of the day; but even taken solely at face value as a rather primitive early feature (and there is a real dearth of surviving features from the 1912-15 years) it's an enjoyable piece of full-blooded romantic melodrama, and the titles and art-backdrops are a joy. Incidentally, we will apologise in advance for what is bound to be only a "token" musical score, since most of our time (and both of our hands) will have to be devoted to keeping the print in the projector. While it is a fine original toned print and looks beautiful on screen, it is also very brittle and shrunkken, and can sting some letters of its love due to that shrinkage. Therefore it needs incessant "nursing" and re-threading while in motion, while the screening should be uninterrupted, in the interests of protecting and preserving the print, major attention will have to be diverted to it rather than to its music.

- intermission -

"MANHANDLED" (Paramount, 1925) Produced and directed by Allan Dwan
Scenario by Frank Tuttle From a story by Arthur Stringer; Camera, Hal Rosson; Supervising editor, William LeBaron; edited and titled by Julian Johnson; 5 rls
Starring Gloria Swanson, with Tom Moore, Frank Morgan, Lilyan Tashman, Ian Keith, Arthur Housman, Paul McAllister, M. Collosse, Marie Shelton, Carrie Scott, Frank Allworth, and Ann Pennington and Brooke Johns as guest stars.

"Manhandled" was one of the first films played at the then very small and exclusive Huff society some 18 years ago; we've never repeated it because most of the prints that have turned up since have been missing the film's marvellous opening, the famous subway sequence. (Eastman House incidentally used that sequence to illustrate the work of Miss Swanson and cameraman Rosson in one of its Festivals, and it proved, in terms of audience reaction, to be one of the highlights of the evening). Unfortunately the rest of "Manhandled" doesn't live up to its dynamic opening; it's a typical Paramount "economy" product, rather tribe and mechanical, and perhaps not ideally served by Dwan - never at his best in the silent period in comedy - but of course tremendously enjoyable made but for its interesting if casual commentary on the morals and mores of the day. Like most of the Kodancope releases, this print is edited to a very full five reels - shy a little less than two reels of the original release length. Doubtless this editing is responsible for the rather perfunctory and unsubtle continuity as Gloria (innocently) goes from man to man, but the story is too slight to have lost much depth because of this; the main loss is Miss Swanson's reputedly outstanding imitation of Chaplin, an act she repeated 25 years later in "Smart Boulevard"