Monday next, March 22: Two British films by Launder and Gilliatt, with the Gainsborough ladies at war: "2000 Women" (1944) with Patricia Roc, Flora Robson, Phyllis Calvert; and "Millions Like Us" (1943) with Eric Portman, Anne Crawford.

A reminder: this coming Friday at the New School - DeMille's incredible "Kadam Satan" with Kay Johnson, Lillian Roth, Reginald Denny, Roland Young.

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March 14, 1927

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"BERGE IN FLAMMEN" (A Marcel Vandal-Charles DelaC production, Germany 1931)

Written and directed by Carl Harth and Luis Trenker; Camera, Serg Allgeier; Music: Giuseppe Becce; 9 reels (Uncut)

With Luis Trenker, Luigi Serventini, Lissy Arma.

Our showing of this German original of "The Doomed Battalion" is largely academic, since we have shown the American version twice at the Huff, and repeated it last Friday at the New School. In many ways, the Hollywood version is better: it is tighter, has a more frequent change of scene, has just enough comedy relief (brief glimpses of Herman Bing and Henry Armetta) to relieve the atmosphere and in addition makes greater use of the characters of the wife and the friend. With that type of absolute precision, the obvious cliches, it expands their roles in such a way that there is a logical reason for periodic outbursts to the wife, and this too tends to make it a much warmer film. The German original is longer, grimmer and more detailed in its stress of mountain warfare; the climbing scenes are longer, and without the comedy relief, there's more emphasis on the tedium and fear. However, our reason for showing the original is not so that one can decide which is the better, but merely so that - side by side - we can see the ingenuity with which a compressed version of this type was planned. An absolute minimum of original footage is maintained and some of the lesser characters deliberately speak with their backs to the camera, or into shadow so that the same footage can be used in the US version with new dialogue dubbed over. Charles Stumar's Hollywood camerawork is glossier and sometimes a little trickier, but on the whole he does a superb job of matching up with the photographic mood and style of the original, while the sets too, admittedly simple to begin with, are carefully reproduced. The print is a peculiar German work-print, made up in reverse, which doesn't do this original the pictorial justice that all inserts of signs, documents etc. superimpositions, as also do the occasional German subtitles for the Italian dialogue. However, you probably all know the plot backwards too by now, so this should pose no problem; it's a simple and very straightforward plot in which dialogue is relatively sparse and unimportant, but for the benefit of those of you who do not know the basic story-line, we are posting a couple of synopses by the door so that you can familiarise yourself with it. A limited number of copies of the notes from last Friday's New School showing are also available.

"CAMILLE" (Metro, 1921) A Nazimova production, directed by Ray C. Smilliewood; Scenario by June Mathis from the novel by Alexandre Dumas fils; Art Director, Natacha Rambona; Camera, R.J. Bergquist; 7 reels

With Nazimova, Rudolph Valentino, Patay Ruth Miller, Rex Cherryman, Zeffie Tilbury, Arthur Hoyt, Elisa Oliver, William Ormond, Consuelo Flowerston.

Perhaps the two major surprises of this curious and static version of "Camille" are that the major contribution of interest is made by the much-maligned Natacha Rambona, whose bizarre sets are both eye-popping and dramatically, and that Metro would allow Valentino to be cast in such a subsidiary role after his fantastic success in "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse". Nominally, he does have the male lead - but Mme. Nazimova contrives to keep him off-screen as much as possible, and in their big scenes together, it is mainly a matter of Nazimova (unannounced and filtered) close-ups for her, and a stress on two or three shots for Valentino who only wants a once-in-a-while close-up, no wonder he was so dissatisfied at MGM and quickly transferred to Paramount! Although a "modern" adaptation of Dumas, it is set in such a wild jack-age Never Never Land that it now seems an authentic (if rather strange) period piece, as I suppose Hadley Mettag's erotic-mude version will in a few years too. This Armanda and Camille are a strangely cold and passionless pair of lovers, who seem to come to life only remotely when they transport themselves into a curious拉萨m of the parallel "Hann Missau" story. There is no acting to speak of - it is all a matter of stolid tableaux posing against those incredible sets -- no performances anywhere, for example, to match Henry Daniell's marvellous De Verville in the Cukor-Dunaway version. But Natascha dramatically, though the film is, there are other aspects to hold attention. The florid titles are a delight, the camerawork interestingly inconsistent as it supplies Mme Nazimova with endless filters, and ruthlessly racks them away when anybody else comes into camera range. And then there are those sets and costumes, full of obligatory German symetry, a fireplace that looks like a Christmas pudding and a bedroom window like a goldfish bowl. Ray Smilliewood, who also directed "Pandora and the Flying Brazen Peacock", was obviously a man who could be totally controlled and dominated by his star, and was never allowed to make any suggestion that could turn this film into anything remotely resembling a movie.

-- W. A. Everson --