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The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"LORE KOUNTDRAGO" (Howard & Wyndham Films, for BBC-TV, England, 1970)
Directed by Joie Armstrong; produced by Verity Lambert; scenario by Derek Ingrams from the original story by Somerset Maugham; Camera, Brian Tutano and Ken Westbury; Production Design, Evan Hercules; print by Technicolor; 5 reels
With: Michael Goodliffe (Lord Kountdrago); William Squire (Owen Griffiths) and Yochta Joyce, Paul Whitman-Jones, Peter Birrel, Cyril Luckham, Bernard Hepston, Peter Clay, Anthony Dawes, A.J. Browne, Will Stampe, Royton Tickner; Series Hostess: Diana Rigg.

Apart from movie-oriented compilations and documentaries, we've always stayed very far away from TV material at the Huff - but we make an exception here. For one thing, Lord Kountdrago is a pilot for a series, and thus far more carefully and elaborately produced than the average TV film. Secondly, it is filmic, and despite a great deal of (good) dialogue, it is walk-out, visually interesting, and avoids the static one and two set look typical of so much television work. Actually, it is a good deal better than the last filmed version of the Maugham story, which formed the climactic third of the early 50's British-Korda film, "Three Cases of Murder". It had, admittedly, the bravura presence of Orson Welles, but was otherwise a rather disappointing film. This version is expanded considerably, and takes advantage of the new liberty of the screen to include a good deal of Freudian and erotic imagery in its dream sequences. A bizarre, semi-supernatural thriller, it takes on a good deal of the flavor of Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray", and is certainly illustrative of the dramatic and literary superiority of much of British television. A good story, some extremely handsome production mountings, good performances from a generally little-known cast (Goodliffe is the only really familiar player in the entire film) and a determination to be as mobile and cinematic as possible make this a really interesting and off-beat tele-film. I do not know whether or not the subsequent planned Maugham films were ever made, but certainly this particular one has, as yet, been unsold for the United States.

"IN OLD KENTUCKY" (Fox, 1925) Directed by George Marshall
Produced by Edward Butcher; screenplay by Sam Hellman and Gladys Lehman from a story by Charles T. Dazey; Camera, L.W. O'Connell; 8 reels

Will Rogers' last year in movies, before his death with Wiley Post in a plane crash, was both his most prolific year (with five films) and also his worst year. With the exception of "Steamboat Bound the Bend," the beautiful and joyful film that he made for John Ford, his four other 1925 films - "County Chairman", "Life Begins at 40", "Doubting Thomas" and "In Old Kentucky" - were programmers pure and simple. They delivered the corn and romance that went down so well in the rural areas, but they were showing distinct signs of mass production, mechanical construction, and too little of the care and rich comedy that went into the trio of films that Rogers made for Ford. "In Old Kentucky" is an entertaining trifle, containing enough sure-fire ingredients to please the Rogers devotees, but unlikely to him him any converts. Even the title reflects the lack of thought and care, since it is very much a story of contemporary Kentucky. Although at that, even today Kentucky hasn't really changed in its people or its attitudes or its way of life, and it quite belies Griffith's title from "The Birth of a Nation" about the country where "... life runs in a quaintly way that is no more..." The film does have some genial racism (some amusing, some less so), some good dancing highspots for Bill Robinson, one very exciting horse-fall, far too much of Charles Seaton and far too little of any other kind of comedy. But it has one major asset in its heroine, the lovely Dorothy Wilson, a graceful and intelligent performer who was given far too little to do in the 30's, but who was and is always a pleasure to watch.

--- Wm. K. Everson ---