Two Barities by Henry King

She Goes to War (United Artists-Inspiration, 1929) Director: Henry King Produced by Victor and Edward Halperin; Scenario by Howard Estabrook and John Monk Saunders from an original story by Rupert Hughes and an adaptation by Mae Fred De Grasse; Camera, Tony Gaudio and (special effects) John Fulton; Art Direction, Al D'Agostino; John M. Haskell; editor, Lloyd Nosler; songs, Harry Akst; originally released in a 10 reel sound (music, separate, talking sequences) version, and also an 8-reel silent version; this version a 5-reel edited version released in 1939.


One of a handful of feminine versions of "The Big Parade" ("Corporal Kate" was another) "She Goes to War" also cashed in on the new cycle of war films, and as a transition-to-sound film also provided a logical excuse for noise, sound effects, and wartime songs. It is difficult to judge the original from this cut reissue, itself designed to cash in on the renewed interest in war films ("The Fighting 69th" etc.) as World War Two seemed imminent. Its propagandist use at that time has some interest too, although it is hard to accept its own self-praise as the greatest of all films on war! The size and handsome visuals of the original remain, and to a degree the winning and warm personality of Eleanor Boardman, while the climactic battle scenes with their cunning John Fulton special effects seem virtually intact. But absolute innocence is made of the story: all of the motivations are gone, and since the titles have been removed too, it is difficult to know who is who. In a plot sense, it is now incomprehensible, and becomes instead a kind of documentary. It was probably a slow and rather stodgy film, albeit a big one, and the speed and size of this version may make us a little generous in assessing its original value. (King was not at his best in this period). The homely humor seems rather sweet and touching too, though it has a poignant payoff and might have had more point in the full original version.

Marie Galante (Fox, 1934) Directed by Henry King; produced by Winfield Sheehan; Screenshot by Reginald Berkeley from a novel by Jacques Deval; Camera, John Seitz; musical director, Arthur Lange; 10 reels


"Marie Galante" must surely be one of the most expensive and, in its own perverse way, fascinating fiascos ever perpetrated by Hollywood. Based on a slightly notorious novel which was then turned into an operetta (in France), it bore little resemblance to either, especially in the character of the heroine, decidedly "experienced" in her Galileo state, and here so innocent and naive as to border on immaturity. Like so many Winfield Sheehan productions, it bears all the marks of tampering before and after production. Motives are never explained, the plot takes forever in getting under way, much time is spent over trivia, key plot elements are ignored or stagéed off-screen, nationalities are deliberately vague - presumably out of concern for offending those nationalities and perhaps losing their markets - and from a sex and musically oriented melodrama it is transformed into an action melodrama without any action! Even Monogram could have dreamed up a slightly more exciting climax. While it has been a year since I ran the film, I recall that there were many physical peculiarities in the film's character which I could only change accounts without reason, Frank Conroy's voice (he is not otherwise in the film) being dubbed in for another player, titles obviously inserted later, removal of dialogue without replacement and I feel sure many other little oddities which contributed to the original mustness I felt when confronted with the film. It is a 10 reeler, and came in 10 reels, but all of the footage actually boils down to a full eight reels. It's meandering and without purpose, but obviously cost a lot of money, and for its curiosity and mystery value alone is worth studying. It adds nothing to King's or Tracy's reputation. Ketti Gallian was quite well received by the press, but to my knowledge this and *Under the Pampas (France)* were the only films she made. It's the kind of film where one wonders how on earth it could ever have gotten made, given its script, and then one wonders why it couldn't have been given a far more efficient editing and salvage operation. Let us hope at least that it's not a case of a film being 50 years ahead of its time, and that a generation hence it will be acclaimed as a misunderstood masterpiece.

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