Neither of today's films are particularly good or important, but they are frankly the kind of films that provide the basic reason for our existence today. Look around you at the current schedules of the NY Cultural Centre, the New School and Theatre 80, and you will find that the kind of films that used to be our speciality have now caught on on a large and semi-commercial scale. It's good that they have found a market, but it also cuts down on our need to show them. Thus our main function now is to show the films unlikely to get exposure elsewhere, and tonight's films certainly fit into that category.

"THE VORTEX" (Gainsborough; Britain, 1927) Directed by Adrian Brunel; produced by Michael Falcon; screenplay by Elliot Stanard from the play by Noel Coward; r'l The Cast: Ivor Novello (Nicky Lancaster); Wilette Kernshaw (Florence Lancaster); Frances Doble (Bunty Mainwaring); Alan Hollis (Tom Veryan); Simeon Stuart (David Lancaster); Kay Field (Mrs. Quentin); Julie Suedo (Anna Hollof); Dorothy Fame (Helen Saville). US premiere: August 1928, Fifth Avenue Playhouse.

The British Film Catalogue describes the somewhat complicated plot of "The Vortex" in these right-to-the-point terms: "ROMANCE. Youth discovers his fiancée is mistress of another love". Describing such a tale (and not bothering to mention that the family is also embroiled in such un-chic activities as drug addiction) as romance is not so much an example of British understatement, as an illustration of that astonishing ability to look on the bright side no matter what the circumstances. The result is a more adventurous (but never very successful) British directors, Adrian Brunel, who tried via such films as "The Man Without Desire" to bring German expressionism into British films long before it was fashionable, and who later directed Keaton's one British sound feature, "The Vortex" is a curiously flat version of the Coward play. Alfred Hitchcock, adapting Coward's "Easy Virtue" earlier that same year for the same company, has got far more street - and certainly far more sense of cinema - out of much less promising material. Nor does "The Vortex" hold a candle to Clarence Brown's 1924 film "Scandalizing Fires", which likewise managed to be thoroughly visual and cinematic while telling a not dissimilar (in relationships, if not in content) triangle story. One major problem of "The Vortex" is its (probably) wholesale lifting of delightful Coward dialogue to provide titles, but this results in a superficial and light-hearted approach without the undercurrents that it must have had on stage. When the film goes wholly dramatic in its last third, the switch is just too sudden. Too, without the right kind of delivery, many titles are merely old fashioned. The title "You cad!" followed a few seconds later by the back-up title "You utter cad!" almost invites levity, though spoken, and in the right context. It probably worked quite well. Anyway, the film is an interesting curiosity, if nothing else illustrative of the period when Britain was at least breaking away from the blatant imitation of Hollywood, and trying - through new directors like Hitchcock and Asquith, and the work of writers like Coward - to establish its own identity in film.

"HEADWINDS" (Universal, 1925) Directed by Herbert Blaché; Screenplay by Edward T. Lowe Jr. from the novel by A.R.Sinclair Wilf, published in the Saturday Evening Post; Camera, John Stum; Art Director, B.S.Shealey; edited by Harold Mosher; titles by Benjamin de Casseres. 6 reels. With: House Peters (Peter Rosaly); Patay Ruth Miller (Patricia Van Felt); Richard Travers (John Templeton Arnold); Arthur Hoyt (Winthrop Van Felt); William Austin (Theodore Van Felt); Lydia Yeaman Titus (Nurse); Togo Yosamoto (Woo Lang); George Kuwa (Nat Sai); K. Nambu (Foo).

A curious little "Taming of the Shrew" film, "Headwinds" goes in so many directions at once - romance, light comedy, action, farce - that it never settles down long enough to play off in any one department, but at least it is fairly lively and has quite a few surprises. Although not an elaborate production, it has good sets and a lot of outdoor locations, and is always good to look at. Although not intentionally racist, the Orientals get quite a going-over in the subtitles, which reflect some of the "Yellow Peril" attitudes of the 20's. Incidentally, one of the structural books of Charlie Chans - George Kuwa - has a good supporting role. House Peters, one of those stolid, reliable types that had such a following from the older feminine patronage in the 20's, has never seemed quite at home as the adventurous hero, but does well enough, and Patay Ruth Miller as always is charming and vivacious. The film is probably also one of the very few (and hopefully not one of the best) surviving works of director Herbert Blaché, perhaps better known (if he's known at all) in this woman's-lib era as the husband of one of the foremost early women directors, Alice Blaché.

--- WM.K. EVenson ---