"THE BELoved BOUe" (United Artists, 1927) Directed by Alan Crosland
Screenplay by Paul Bern; Art Director, William Cameron Menzies; Camera, Joseph August; special effects, Ned Mann; titles by George Marion Jr. and Walter Anthony; Assistant Director, Gordon Hollingshead; Comedy construction, Bryant Poy; edited by Hal C. Kern; 10 reels
The Cast: François Villon (JOHNN BARRYMORE); Louis XI (CONRAD VEIDT); Charlotte de Vauxcelles (Marceline Day); Duke of Burgundy (Lewston Butt); Thibeul d'Auassigny (Henry Victor); Jehan (Slim Summerville); Nicholas (Mack Swain); Beppo the Dwarf (Paul Sylva); Astrologer (Nicholas) (Vincent Price); Mother (Lucy Beamount); Olivier (Otto Matieson); The Abbess (Jane Wilton); Margot (Rose Dione); Duke of Orleans (Bertram Grassby); Tristan (Dick Sutherland)

In our last two seasons we have shown at least two of those films from the late 20's ("Moulin Rouge", "Underground") that, together with such additional films as Sternberg's "Docks of New York", Muram's "City Girl", Howard's "White Gold", May's "Homecoming" and Taylor's "Tenement" came rather like glorious last stands of silent film technique and grammar all gloss and displaying a triumph of style over content. Fascinating as these films are to us today, a steady diet of them in the late 20's must have been a trifle grating to veteran movie fans, who had grown up on movies that moved, and who now found that pace and action was being sacrificed to the self-indulgences of autonomous directors. In one sense, "The Beloved Rogue" fits into this category. Visually it's a stunner, with some of the most impressive sets, decor, costuming and photographic composition that the silent screen ever created. Looking just at stills from the film, one is struck by its rather formal eloquence, and reminded particularly of Fritz Lang's "Siegfried". Certainly it has a tremendous amount of Gothic/Germanic feeling to it. Yet its deliberate and occasionally self-conscious artistry never gets in the way of its being first and foremost an entertainment; apart from its cooperative dearth of swashbuckling action, its mood is that of a Fairbanks romp. While not exactly played solely for laughs, it is certainly played tongue-in-cheek despite the grandeur of the closing reels. It's a perfect welding of entirely disparate moods, and makes one wish all the more for the great Alan Crosland ("Old San Francisco", "Don Juan", "When a Man Loves", "The Jazz Singer") had a chance to work with Douglas Fairbanks. What life and vitality he would have breathed into the slow and stolid "Robin Hood" or "Don Q, Son of Zorro"!

BARRYMORE is perhaps a shade too self-indulgent, playing it on a broader comic note than is necessary; yet when he gets a tour-de-force scene he makes the most of it, as in the remarkable episode (played theatrically, in a long-held closeup) where he is able to convey grief and despair even while his features are totally hidden by a clown's makeup. Conrad Veidt was reportedly so much in awe of Barrymore, and so honored at being brought to Hollywood to appear with him, that he never really relaxed with his role. Fortunately the role itself hides his insecurity, and he almost matches Barrymore in grotesquerie. If King Louis was really as he has been played on screen (by Tully Marshall, Basil Rathbone and others) he must have been quite a character! The plot and credits make no acknowledgement to the then hugely popular (and since thrice-filmed) operetta "The Vagabond King", and doubtless for legal as well as Barrymore's reasons, the story-line takes off in slightly different directions. The threatened "comedy-relief" of Mack Swain and Slim Summerville is happily kept well in check, and all one really misses is the sinister omnipresence of Barrymore's old buddy Countess Effortitz. Fortunately, Dick Sutherland substitutes rather well (in one of his best roles) as the torturer and executioner, always hovering behind the King's throne on the off-chance of picking up a little extra business. It's surprising (but pleasing) that that superb but non-artey cameraman Joseph August (long a favorite of Bill Hart and John Ford) should have been chosen to photograph it - but the choice is merely another example of Crosland's taste, and August comes through brilliantly. Incidentally, no comment or explanation is made as to why the normally temperate Parisian winters have been transformed into a seemingly permanent Arctic blizzard - but the pictorial effect is most pleasing, even if the snow doesn't look very real. More of a visual eye-popper than even Menzies' " Thief of Bagdad", "The Beloved Rogue" is a major re-discovery, and one that was made just in time. You'll note the enroaching decomposition in certain scenes, more especially in the last reel; with that much of a head start, the negative probably wouldn't have survived the 1970 Summer heat.

--W.K.Everson--