"THE BATTLE OF PARIS" (Paramount, 1929) Directed by Robert Florey
Story by Gene Harkey; songs by Cole Porter ("They All Fall in Love", "Here Comes the Band Wagon") and by Howard Dietz and Jay Gorney; 8 reels
Starring Gertrude Lawrence, with Charlie Ruggles, Arthur Treacher, Joe King, Walter Petrie, Gladys du Bois, Luis Alberni.

"The Battle of Paris" is one of those unremembered films that certainly made no dent in the onward march of the movies, and was not even honored by a New York first-run, but which seen today is a surprisingly enjoyable film, the more so in a sense for being so obscure and thus so unpredictable. It was made during Robert Florey's second year as a director, and considering how little real plot that the film has, that it was made at Paramount's Long Island Studios (fine large stages, but inadequate facilities for exterior shooting) and above all that it was made in the transitional silent to sound year of 1929, it all moves along rather nicely. It has good pace, no prolonging of dialogue scenes, and a pleasing visual mood. One of the basic sets is clearly the same street set used in "Gulliver's Travels," shot during the same period; curiously too, one notices another street set still standing from D.W. Griffith's "The Sorrows of Satan" of three years earlier. Despite the wartime locale, wartime footage is relatively brief; an elaborate zenzelm sequence is presumably lifted from another film, and a montage of war action, including clips from "Wings" and other war movies, is admittedly marred by the rather primitive sound mixing facilities of the day. The whole film concludes with a mildly melodramatic episode in a Parisian den wherein Miss Lawrence is threatened with the provincial fate worse than death, although she looks quite capable of holding her own. In the lighting of this very atmospheric set and in the costuming of the extras (one of the Anachronisms is director Florey!) and of course in the situation itself, this all smacks of the French serial adventures with which Florey had earlier been associated. The film offers action, melodrama, same charming Cole Porter songs, a curious episode of racial humor, and some interesting performances, though it does take a little time to get used to Charlie Ruggles' French accent! The costuming seems unusually authentic; Miss Lawrence wears some fine period gowns, and the war-torn slum has an extremely fetching outfit. When a crowd scene occurs on the right bosom. The prime interest in the film was, and I suppose still is, vested in Gertrude Lawrence making her film debut after her huge U.S. successes in "Oh Kay!" and "Trendy Girl". She is both wonderful or irritating, depending on one's attitude towards her. Always "on", fully conscious of being "THE STAR" she is nevertheless relaxed, quite graceful and often charming - no mean feat for a star making her first feature movie at a time when even established stars were being hampered by the restrictions of sound. If one is irritated by her, one must also respect her tremendous verve and self-assurance.

-- 10 Minute Intermission --

"PRIVATE LIVES" (FOX, 1931) Directed by Sidney Franklin
Scenario by Hans Krals, Richard Schayer and Claudine West from the play by Noel Coward; Camera, Ray Binger; 8 reels
With Norma Shearer, Robert Montgomery, Reginald Denny, Una Merkel, Jean Hersholt, George Davis.

Directed with the same wit and elegant taste that Sidney Franklin lavished on the Lunts! "The Guardsman" (which we screened a few seasons back) "PRIVATE LIVES" is remarkably undated for a film that was made in 1931 and made no bones about being based on a very talkative stage play. Cottinly the static, immobile period of movie-making was over by now and the transition to talkies that were also movies was virtually complete as so amply illustrated by another 1931 film and stage adaptation, "The Front Page". Yet the stage-derived drawings-from almost full swing, making little concessions to the screen, and most films of that ilk do date badly today. But "PRIVATE LIVES" still sparkles, both in its staging, in its acting, and most of all of course in its dialogue; if it dates at all, it is only in the sense that nobody bothers today to lavish such literary style on basically unworthy characters. We still have the characters -- as witness "Carnal Knowledge" -- but not the wit or the charm to make them worth our time. "PRIVATE LIVES" inevitably disappointed many at the time because memories in film Coward and Gertrude Lawrence in the stage version were too fresh and far too scintillating, and admittedly Montgomery and Shearer, ideal substitutes though they are, just do not have the elan of the originals. Curiously, Norma Shearer seems rather obviously to be basing her performance on Beatrice Lillie characteristics; nevertheless it's a graceful and acceptably British interpretation, and the film as a whole is so infinitely superior to "Design for Living", "Her Cardboard Lover", "Bitter Sweet" (a different genre, admittedly) and other Hollywood attempts at Coward that it must rank not only as the best of its kind, but as the equal of many native Britain forays too. ---- Wm. K. Everson --