LOVE 'EM AND LEAVE 'EM (Paramount, 1926) Directed by Frank Tuttle

Scenario by Townsend Martin from a play by John Van Alstyne Weaver and George Abbott; photographed by George Webber; editor, Ralph Block; 6 reels With Louise Brooks, Evelyn Brent, Lawrence Gray, Osgood Perkins, Arthur Donaldson, Narcia Harris.

Only four of Louise Brooks' silent Paramount films are known to survive, and it is fortunate that "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" is one of them, for it does offer marvellous opportunities for the Brooks face, figure and personality, and for the kind of bewitching harmony that only silent screen chemistry exists only in her Paramount films. Love 'Em and Leave 'Em, based on a play, is also an earlier version of the 1929 Clara Bow talkie "The Saturday Night Kid". Both films run fairly parallel in plot substance, but differ greatly in emphasis and incident. There's no doubt that this is by far the better of the two, although the talkie has its points too. Here, Evelyn Brent is such a stolid heroine, and Lawrence Gray such a dour-headed hero, that one's sympathy would fall to Louise even if she weren't such a charmer. In the remake, Clara Bow and James Hall are far more likable hero-heroine team, and while Jean Arthur walked away with the show (because the bad sister role is the best one in the film) at the same time her "villainy" was so obvious and unsubtle that one was surprised rather than glad that she got away with so much. Comparison of the two films makes one realise what a marvellously exciting film it would have made had Brooks and Bow been co-starred in this 1926 version. Not only does Bow look enough like Louise (with the right hairdo and camera angles, viz certain shots in "Mantrap") to convincingly play her sister, but what a powerhouse combination that Bow and Osgood Perkins would have been! One could hardly blame the hero here for straying in Brooks' direction - but having to choose between Brooks and Bow would really provide a dilemma!

On the whole, this first version aims at comedy rather less than the remake, and plays up the dramatic elements more -- including the turning of that excellent actor Osgood Perkins into a really seedy and lecherous villain. Throughout there are pleasant surprises: alangorous opening, a lively Charleston for Brooks, some excellently-lit interiors (the film was made at Paramount's Long Island Studios) and a pleasant love-scene by the lake in Central Park. Like so many Paramount silents, it is slightly slow-paced. A better director could have made much more of it, and without Brooks it would scarcely rate attention. With Brooks however, it becomes something rather special -- and the print, we're happy to say, is in fine condition and processed from the original 35mm negative.

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TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION

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Piano Scores for both films arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN

MANTRAP (Paramount, 1926) Directed by Victor Fleming; assistant director, Harry Hataway; screenplay by Adelaide Heilbron and Ethel Doherty from the novel by Sinclair Lewis; titles by George Marion jr., camera, James (Wong) Howe; 7 reels With Clara Bow, Ernest Torrence, Percy Marmont, Eugene Pallette, Tom Kennedy, Josephine Crowell, William Orlamond, Charlie Stevens, Miss Du Pont, Lon Poff, Chief Big Tree.

"Mantrap" has been long unseen, not just because of the virtual absence of prints, but also because Paramount's rights to the Lewis novel have expired. For that reason the remake, 1940's "Untamed" (Ray Milland-Patricia Morrison-Akim Tamiroff), in which the emphasis was changed to heavy-breathing sex melodrama, has also vanished. "Mantrap" is a lively film all the way, the performances just right, the direction fast-paced. The plot and titles are snappy, fully reflective of the 20's attitude to divorce and other sophistications and the film (despite the greater reputation of later films like "It") is quite one of the best vehicles and showcases for Bow's pep and vivacity. This vivacity was neatly (if extraneously) enhanced by Paramount's policy of giving her leading men who exuded anything but vitality -- the rather stolid Clive Brook for example or, as here, the virtually emaciated Percy Marmont, and the considerably older Ernest Torrence! (Rather like giving Marilyn Monroe John Carradine and Maurice Schwartz as co-stars). As always, Bow is a flirt and a tease, sexy and provocative - but chaste. Her freshness and sense of humor hold up beautifully; that is, in scenes with Bow, but when Bow's on screen, even he doesn't stand much of a chance. While Bow belonged very much to the 20's, and just didn't fit into the early 30's (the fault of her scripts primarily), her unique appeal transcends both nostalgia and camp, and were more of her films available, she might well enjoy the cult appeal of Mae West, Fields or the Marx Brothers - not that cults are necessarily a good thing. The print (for reasons that we'll outline in the introduction) isn't as good as we'd like, but it's complete, and the best there is, and possibly will seem inferior only because of the stunning quality of the first film.

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