MARIE GALANTE (Fox, 1934) Directed by Henry King; A Winfield Sheehan Production;
Screenplay by Reginald Berkeley, based on a novel by Jacques Deval;

The 17th of the 19 films that Tracy made for Fox between 1930 and 1935, most of which still exist but few of which are generally available, "Marie Galante" is a "lost" film which, if it hadn't resurfaced, would hardly have been cause for wailings and gnashings of teeth. It is not a good film; but any film directed by Henry King, with such an interesting cast, and that is one of the most expensive and poorly made movies ever made, surely deserves to be made available at least once, if only to set the record straight. Based on a mildly notorious French novel which was turned into a French operetta, it transforms itself from a sex and music oriented drama into an action melodrama - without action. How it got past the script stage is somewhat of a mystery; how it then got to be released without being "filmed at least via Monty Python" is another mystery. There are signs of both script and technical tamperings throughout. The decidedly "experienced" heroine of the French original is now naive almost to the point of imbecility; the meandering plot takes a long time getting under way, and spends a lot of time in colorful sets and on triva, while motives go unexplained, key action takes place off-screen, and an important bit of explanatory dialogue is played next to a machine that drowns out much of the dialogue. Fox's "cry boy" has to hold up a sign "for one of the characters part of the time; dialogue is removed from the track and not replaced; titles have obviously been inserted at the last minute, and the whole film is deliberately vague about the nationalities involved. It certainly doesn't add to the reputations of either Tracy or King, but is such a melange that it is constantly fascinating. Ketti Gallian survives it all rather well and is both impressive and charming; however, she never achieved the starry status that film quality and box office colorer, and any other "official adaptation of "Dead End" "The Devil is a Sissy" (the title is dragged in by the h e a l s , or perhaps one should say the horns) is obviously a less "important" film than "Dead End"; it's also less pretentious, and in its own casual and relative way, more honest. It's also less grim than one might expect, and even tragedy is soft-pedalled in an effectively off-hand way - for example, Jackie Cooper casually telling the school-teacher that Mickey Rooney probably won't be in "because there's electronics now in his life" seems a trifle inflated, even by the standards of MGM's executives, and a classroom that could encompass Rooney, Bartholomew and Cooper seems a bit too flexible in its age requirements. Van Dyke keeps it moving fast enough too for one to be unaware of the relative paucity of sets; one of the art directors incidentally, was Paul Palmentola, later something of a master at creating sets out of literally nothing for Sam Katzman at Columbia. The acting is also strong, and such so that at one point (early in the film) Ian Hunter fluffs a delivery, neatly recovers, carries on, and Van Dyke keeps the scene as is. Also at one point, Charles Trowbridge's voice is dubbed in for a dainly-seen player (who leaves the set, and then in the next scene Trowbridge- (presumably unavailable while the other scene was shot) briskly steps in and takes over. (Van Dyke could have been wondering his older "Marie Galante" fast on two screens, whereas this was touching film, and while the best individual scene goes to Etienne Girardot - a marvellous silent glare as he leaves his class- the performances of Bartholomew, Rooney and Cooper are all first rate and a pleasure to watch.