A WINDOW IN LONDON (GFD & B Filmes, 1939) Directed by Herbert Mason
Produced by Josef Somlo and Richard Norton; Screenplay by Ian Dalrymple and B. Cooper from an original French story by Herbert and Mace; Camera, Glen McWilliam; U.S. release in 1942 under title "Hated in Distress"; 62 mins.
With Michael Redgrave, Sally Gray, Paul Lukas, Patricia Roc, Henry Fonda, Glen Aly, Gertrude Muskroge, George Ormaey, Brian Coleman, Alf Goddard, Wilfrid Walter, John Salew, George Merritt, Pamela Randall.

"A Window in London" is a curiosity indeed, and a film as forgotten and ignored in England as it is unknown here. On star value alone one would have expected it to raise initial and sustained interest at least in Britain: Sally Gray was riding high as the star of both stage and screen versions of "The Labyrinth Walk", it was the fourth film for each of two rising new stars, Redgrave and Roc, and it represented a re-teaming of the hero (Redgrave) and villain (Lukas) of "The Letter" and a further attempt to make off-beat and non-topical themes 62 mins. (it was released in November, the same month as Brian Desmond Hurst's now-lost "On The Night of the Fire", a film discussed last week). It certainly isn't a major work, but it is neatly and economically put together, has a good script and a genuine surprise climax. If it seems to have the flavor of Paris rather than London, that's understandable, since it's a remake of a French film, "L'Applein le Maquis", the opening of which also influenced Leslie Channeris in his writing for "Two Girls on a Train". The only print available today is of the American release version, retitled "Lady in Distress", and edited by about ten minutes. These deletions make it tighter than ever and don't seem to disturb continuity to any extent; all that I recall from the original is that it is not in this version is a fairly lengthy scene in which the hero tells the snowgirl that he is married -- and that information is contained in later dialogue as well. The only striking difference between the two versions is that, for censorship reasons, the American edition added a newspaper headline stressing the story of the man who had married the woman for the New York News, and devoted a front-page and headline (in wartime) to a scolded little incident in London seems somewhat dubious! Otherwise it's a satisfying little film, possibly a waste of the major talents involved, but quite a worthy renewed lease on life. Herbert Mason, its director, was never a major force in British films, but he did direct some very pleasant comedies, a brace of good English thrillers, and, perhaps the best imitation Hitchcock thrillers of the late 30's, a little gem (hopefully saved) called "Strange Surrouders".

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

LE DIABLE AU CORPS (THE DEVIL IN THE BUSH) (1947) Directed by Claude Autant-Lara
Screenplay by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Boissot from the novel by Raymond Radiguet; Camera, Michel Kelber; Music, Rene Charles; Sets by Max Decy; Produced by Paul Graetz; this print dubbed into English; Two hours.

Although it seems incredible today, "Le Diable au Corps" was engulfed in controversy from its inception. It was poredly boycotted at a festival, its suppression urged in France, it was banned in Canada, initially seized by the U.S. customs, potentially banned in this country, ultimately released, but of course blacklisted. Its screens were very limited. Their Rev. Masters denounced it as "the worst film" on the current production list. It was condemned as one of the distinguished group of films that also included Michael Powell's "Black Narcissus"! (Fortunately the Legion's power and tyranny is now broken. It still exists and operates, albeit under a different name, but only its most loyal adherents pay attention to it, and it has totally lost the clout to force its demands and restrictions on the film industry). I am posting at the rear of the half-copies of a NY Times story on the film's censorship problems.

The main problem was not so much sex or explicit detail. The film was done, but it was one of attitudes. The film does present a rather sympathetic view of adultery -- though heaven knows with plenty of suffering as "punishment"; and the French were particularly upset about the condescending of a cuckolded of a soldier/husband in wartime, perhaps identifying too much with the problems of occupation in the more recent war.

In a very loose sense, the film is a kind of companion piece to "A Farewell to Arms"; an elegantly moving, done, exquisite piece. Autant-Lara (whose "Sylvia and the Phantom" we showed a few seasons back) and superbly acted by Michelle Presle and Gerard Philipe -- who are not only emotionally but physically exactly right for their roles. Michelle Presle is quite the finest of the newer French actresses who came into prominence during and since W2, and her performance here is undoubtedly her best. The single (and brief) aspect of the film that dates is the pan around the room and the roaring to life of the fire -- and the fire is done, alas, and unfortunately a near-disastrous one in these far more explicit days. What reminds you that this is a movie, and not life itself. Far more needs to be said about this outstanding film than there is space for; for those interested I refer you to my much longer article in the current "Love in the Film"; published by Citadel.

Incidentally, the dubbing is MUCH above normal standards; it was done in France, with Michelle Presle doing her own dubbing. —W.R. Eversen—

Program ends: 10:50.