PAINT AND POWDER (Chadwick Productions, 1929) Produced and Directed by Hunt Stromberg
Story and adaptation, Harvey Bates; Camera, Scl Polito; Titles, Fredric & Fanny Hatten; 75 mins.
The Cast: Elaine Hammerstein (Martha) [Martha); Theodore von Eltz (Jimmy Everett); John St. Poulis (Detective) [Norma); Stuart Holmes (Philip Andrews); Russell Simpson (Dago Mike); Tom Ricketts (Old man at party); Derelys Perdue (Maize Hull); Pat Hardigan (Steve McCardell); Charlie Murray (Cabbie); Ernest Balcher (Dancing Master); Fred Kelsey (Detective).

Like Herbert Brenon's "Dancing Mothers," "Paint and Powder" is a formula picture that lifts itself well out of the rut by unusual ingredients, in this case some decidedly off-beat plot elements and some really first-rate independent work. Although it is hardly a jazz-age film in the sense that many of the contemporary Clara Bow and Colleen Moore films were, it inevitably reflects many of the more colorful aspects of 20's movies. One wild, drunken party is an especially delightful and reminds one more of von Stroheim's Viennese orgies than of the night-life of New York's theatrical crowd. The show-business background naturally brings in a number of typicall and nostalgic dance numbers of the period, and there are some nice shots of a clean and attractive Times Square. The film is interesting too for its slight but imaginative attempts at symbolism; for example, it prefaces Paul Paeo's "Broadway" with its impressionistic opening of a giant figure of Destiny hovering over Manhattan. It also prefaces Murnau's "Sunrise" in the use of one gag routine, possibly not original here either, but developed a step further in the Murnau film.

No world-beater at the boxoffice, the film nevertheless did well enough and the critics praised Stromberg's inclusion of the off-beat even at the risk of lessening popular appeal. Chadwick was one of the more enterprising independent film companies of the 20's; curiously, all of their films ran a pressbook to two reels, not too long to be expensive, long enough to justify top-of-the-ball booking. They were all models of how to make neat, expensive-looking independent films, and they often had a class of film in terms of production values superior to that offered in films by major studios. They were also quite canny in picking up stars who had slipped, or in other words, roving in the Tomblin; their names still had prestige value, but their salaries were often cut-rate. Chadwick's fortunes - and his formula - didn't last past the silent period however; his talks were really cheap, and every dollar that wasn't spent more than showed up on the screen. "Paint and Powder" plays its clichés for all they're worth, but every so often it surprises by avoiding the expected. The main and later titles are snappy and bright, and the pacing tight. It's sometimes a little difficult to believe in Elaine Hammerstein as a combination of Sarah Bernhardt and Marilyn Miller, but she certainly puts her all into it. Formerly a Selsnick star, she was here trying for a comeback. However, she retired from the screen a year later when she married Los Angeles businessman James Kays. Both were killed in an automobile accident in 1948. Theodore von Eltz, his career hindered somewhat by a close resemblance to Edmund Lowe, nevertheless continued as a reliable actor (and good voice-over narrator) well into the sound period. Hunt Stromberg, whose peak as a producer was under Thalberg at MGM in the early 30's, later returned to independent production at United Artists. "Paint and Powder" was remade much later in the 20's and on an infinitely smaller scale as "Showgirl" with Mildred Harris. And some of the impressive establishing shots of New York theatres and dives, including the giant "Destiny" figure, were later sold as stock footage, adding production value to many cheaper of 1927-29. Our print is a particularly fine original, probably the only one extant today. It was unearthed some 30 years ago in a Connecticut camera store, and no other print has surfaced since.

THE LOVE FLOWER (Griffith-United Artists, 1920) Directed by D.W. Griffith; based on the story "Black Beach" by Ralph Stock; Camera, J.W. Bitter; Asst. Dir., Elmer Clifton; 75 mins.
With Richard Barthelmess, Carol Dempster, Anders Randolf, George MacQuarrie, Florence Short, Crawford Kent, Walter James.

"The Love Flower" and "The Idol Dancer," both starring Barthelmess, were shot back-to-back in 1920 when Griffith's company journeyed to the Bahamas — and incidentally were reported lost at sea on route. Sandwiched in between the big ones — "Way Down East" and "Orphans of the Storm" — they are frankly melodramatic pot-boilers. However, even with lesser pictures, Griffith made distinctions (and of course, in the advertising, there were no "lesser" Griffith pictures!). "The Idol Dancer" interested him but little and was made hurriedly to fill a contractual obligation to First National whereas he obviously spent more time and talent on "The Love Flower," which he channeled to his own advantage. By virtue of stronger characters and a minimum of love moments, "The Love Flower" is by far the better of the two, even though admittedly still a minor Griffith. What really gives it distinction is the very fine photographic by Bitter of land and sea scapes. Griffith was then married in love with Carol Dempster and wanted to marry her, and the film is also clearly designed as a kind of love poem to her. She later gave far better performances, but she never looked more beautiful than she does here. Even given the marveous scenery he had to work with, Bitter's photography has a lyricism that he rarely achieved in other films; it quite surpasses the always over-rated cinematography of Flaherty's "No man," and equals the work of Clyde de Vinna in Van Dyke's "White Shadows in the South Seas."

The film's visual poetry is matched of course by Griffith's lush subtitling, much of which has real beauty and charm although it is not always consistent. Griffith intercuts between titles much as he does between images, and after three or four flamboyantly poetic titles at the beginning, he suddenly thrusts in a bald documentary title about the raising of vegetables.

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At its best, "The Love Flower" is good, solid, lesser-eclalon Griffith. Who else but D.W., in a fairly unimportant manhunt sequence, would amplify it by showing us police in London, India and New York getting to work on a minor case in Jamaica? But if for no other reason, it's justified by the lovely shots of police at work (though one wonders what they're looking for?) in New York's snowbound harbour and Central Park. The underwater sequences, and there are three of them, are extremely well done, and the Dempster presence imparts a certain eroticism to some of them too. And there's one of those uncanny sequences with a kitten (as also in "Way Down East" and "America") that looks as though D.W. caught it almost accidentally, with a lucky first take.

The Dickensian influence is far less apparent than in "True Heart Susie" or "Orphans of the Storm", but Griffith seems to know his Victor Hugo equally well, for the Anders Randolf character is a fairly obvious steal from Javert.

At least one title is a refreshing if unintended delight. After having sat sometimes rather impatiently through Griffith heroines dancing with their shadows and behaving with unlikely animation, it's rather pleasing when a gamboiling Carol Dempster's step-mother brings her up short with a to-the-point "Oh, do stop running around like an idiot!" But apart from some of the rather hair-brained melodramatic plotting, the main serious criticism one can level at "The Love Flower" is for its editing, and more specifically, the often sloppy non-matching of scenes. Griffith by now, aware of what he had achieved and what he stood for, was getting careless. Even allowing for the fact that originally it would all have been tinted blue, there is no excuse for a yacht sinking in the middle of the night, Carol preparing to leap off, and completing the leap under the mid-day sun. And Griffith's obstinate insistence on tempering with a finished work and inserting closeups willy-nilly, a practice that was harmful to key scenes in "Way Down East", was never more outrageously in evidence than in the latter portion of this film. Almost every closeup of Dempster (and some of the other players too) was shot back in Ramaroneck, with an unchanging black background. Her lip rouge different, her hair style different, obviously being told to grind out so many feet of given emotions, this later Dempster footage is out in regardless of location or context, and is not only jarring visually, but plays havoc with what is otherwise quite a good performance.

But it seems unfair to carp when the film itself is clearly no masterpiece, nor designed to be anything more than money-making fodder to finance Griffith's more ambitious undertakings. The film was unseen for many years, and this print was made in 1964, the last one to be made from the original camera negative than on the verge of being eaten up by decomposition. (This decay was then only just beginning, but it is quite visible in certain shots). Even in 22 years since this print was made, the film has had only two or three showings in New York, and it's one of the least familiar of Griffith's 20's movies.

William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.20., to be followed by discussion session.

Please note that next week is one of those few dates when a concert in the auditorium precedes our screening. (This is the reason for the 7.45 starting time this season). We will do our best to see that the delays attendant on the last such occasion are not repeated, but be advised that there will be some congestion in the lobby. If it suits your plans, it might be easier to get your ticket first, disappear for dinner, and reappear around 7.35. In any event, next week's program is of modest length, and if there should be delays, we will wait until everyone is seated.