A LIVELY EVENING IN HELL FOR THIS SEASON'S ARCHIVE NIGHT

With a diabolical piano score arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN


Although marred slightly by being a rather pale dupe of what must originally have been a pictorially very striking film, this "primitive" from the prolific actor-director de Liguoro is an astonishing film in its way. A version exists in 1909, reminding us that in terms of length and trick manipulation of the camera the Italians were certainly ahead of the Americans. Some of what must be termed the special effects are quite incredibly sophisticated for that early period, and the design is impressive too. Dramatically it is a primitive perhaps, but still it tells us more about the Inferno than almost any film since, and perhaps more than most of us care to know. One of my (very few) religious acquaintances tells me that not long since he had a dream and a dramatic license taken, but this may be at least partially due to American graphic novels recasting. Much of it is surprisingly grim, but fortunately is presented tableau-fashion in medium and long shots. Were it in full closeup, some of it might well rival the gore/horror films of today. The Italians seem to have some rather curious priorities too; the punishment for political graft and corruption seems much more dreadful than that for such run-of-the-mill crimes as murder.


This rare example of early San Diego-based filming was originally a 5-reel feature, but our print tonight is all that apparently survives - the edited, two-reels reissue. It was copied from a 35mm nitrate print that was quite magnificently tinted and toned, but was on the threshold of decomposition, much of which unavoidably shows up in this print. As with so many early (and later) films built around drugs, it links drug-taking physically with hell, and even has the drug-abusing doctor sprouting horns at one point. The scenes in hell are quite intriguing, though of course the color prints are badly mangled. Harry Pollard, who later became one of Universal's top directors (in a commercial sense) in the 20's; star Margarita Fischer was his wife, and appeared in his late 20's version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin". A brief misplaced frame line is in the print, and not the fault of the projectionist by the way!... ten minute intermission...

DANTE'S INFERNO (Fox, 1924) Directed by Henry Otto; Story by Cyrus Wood, adapted by Edmund Goulding; Camera, Joseph August; 70 mins approx. With: Lawson Butt (Dante); Howard Gaye (Virgil); Ralph Lewis (Hortimer Judd); Pauline Starke (Marjorie Vernon); Joseph Swickard (Eugene Craig); Gloria Grey (Wildred Craig); William Scott (Ernest Judd); Robert Klein (fied); Winifred Landis (Mrs Judd); Lorimer Johnston (doctor); Lon Poff (secretary) Bud Jamison (butler)

Despite its pompous foreword about all the years of careful and reverent thought that went into this production, "Dante's Inferno" bears all the earmarks of having been build around footage from a European film. Only very rarely do the performances take recognisable form in odd medium shots that could have been matched up; and if it is a version of the same thing as any other, it seems to be too ambitious to have been entrusted to a minor director (who never made as big a film again) and an unimportant cast. The source material, if indeed it is from a European film, has yet to be identified, but in the meantime it's a most enjoyable piece of melodrama - rather like Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" crossed with a Cecil B. deMille structure. The flamboyant tinting, with a predominant red, not only helps to disguise the mixture of footage, but also adds a great deal of value, successfully turns a pot-boiler into a hell-raiser. The more elaborate 1935 talking version, so from Fox, is not a remake although it is similarly structured morally a play, a top melodramatic production with a melodramatic but serviceable plot. Spencer Tracy starred.

His Majesty THE SCARECROW OF OZ (Oz Film Co., 1914) Written and directed by Frank Baum, with Vivian Reed, Violet MacMillan, Tod Wright.

Though cheaply made, this carefully edited down feature - one of a number made by Oz author Frank Baum - does feature some extremely ingenious effects. The new narration is a bit over-written, but necessary in view of the story-gaps caused by the shortening.

----- William K. Everson

PROGRAM ENDS APROX. 10.30 (dependant on running times, which are only approximate due to variable projection speeds this evening. A short question and answer period will follow. Schedules for Film Series #51 will be available at the two remaining screenings in this series.

(PS: No, the OZ film is not set in Hell, though it does have witches. But its mood seemed appropriate for this program, and it also provides an encouragingly optimistic change of pace for our climax).