THE MAN WHO DARED (Fox, 1933) Directed by Hamilton MacFadden; story and
screenplay by Dudley Nichols and Lamar Trotti; Camera, Arthur Miller; 77 mins.
With: Preston Foster (Jan Novak); Zita Johann (Teena Pavelic); Joan Marsh (Joan);
Irene Biller (Tereza Novak); Clifford Jones (Dick); June Vlasek/June Lang
(Barbara); Leon Waychoff/Leon Ames (Josef Novak); Douglas Cosgrove (Dan Foley);
Douglas Dumbrille (Judge Collier); Frank Sheridan (Senator McGuinness);
Leonid Sneckoff (Posillopo); Matt McHugh (Karel); Jay Ward (Jan Novak as a boy)

Political dramas, biographies and satires have always proven to be commercially
somewhat dubious, and usually only when politics have overlapped into
Americanism, as in the various Abraham Lincoln films, have the results been
satisfying both critically and at the boxoffice. "The Man Who Dared",
officially cited as a loose biography of Chicago's assassinated Mayor Cermak,
actually sticks to the facts rather more closely than many biographical films
claiming fidelity. At the time it was quite a rare specimen in that regard.
Now that the various media keep us if anything too well informed on the
political arena and its participants, we realize that politics has close links
both melodrama and bedroom farce. In some ways "The Man Who Dared" is most
interesting as a forerunner of the "rise and fall" type of biography exemplified
by "Citizen Kane" and "All The King's Men". It's a courageous undertaking,
one admirably served by Arthur Miller's fine photography, but let down (to a
degree) by a routine director and a star (Preston Foster) whom Fox were trying
to build at that time, and who admittedly parlayed a limited talent into a
successful career, but who always lacked subtlety. One wonders why on earth
the property wasn't handed to John Ford and Spencer Tracy, both Fox contractees
at that time, and who could almost have made this a dry run for "The Last
Hurrah". However, one should be grateful that such films were made at all,
not complain that they were not made according to the specifications of
hindsight. And of course, it's always good to see that intelligent actress
Zita Johann in a role worthy of her.

-- 10 minute intermission --

THE NARROW CORNER (Warner Brothers-First National, 1933) Directed by Alfred
E. Green; screenplay by Robert Presnell from the novel by Somerset Maugham;
Camera, Tony Gaudio, 71 mins.
With Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (Fred Blake); Patricia Ellis (Louise Frith); Ralph
Bellamy (Eric); Dudley Digges (Dr. Saunders); Arthur Hohl (Capt. Nichols);
Reginald Owen (Mr. Frith); Henry Kolker (Mr. Blake); William V. Mong (Swan);
Willie Fung (Ah Kay) and Sidney Toler, Edwin Maxwell, Josef Swickard.

From 1915 to date, there have been well over 30 movie adaptations of Maugham's
novels and plays, most of them rating two or three versions apiece. The second
version of "The Narrow Corner" was made only three years after the first, as a
very routine Humphrey Bogart "B" under the title "Isle of Fury". A little
gem from the pre-Code era, "The Narrow Corner" is one of those curious films
that is so good and/or interesting that one just cannot understand its lack of
reputation. Odd though it may sound, some of it is even an improvement on
Maugham's novel, since some of the richest characterisations and choice lines
that seem so "typically" Maugham aren't in his original 1932 novel at all, but
are creative extensions from it. And they work doubly well because the film is
so well cast; the William V. Mong, Dudley Digges and Arthur Hohl roles could
almost have been written with those actors in mind. Although the novel has
an additional plot line and tends to philosophising more than melodrama, the
movie version is faithful to it and seems to add depth to what, in the novel,
is a matter of past-tense dialogue exchanges. True, the tragic end of the
novel is resolved more happily on screen, but under the given circumstances
the change hardly seems a betrayal. While Reed's "Outcast of the Islands" (from
a Conrad novel) is admittedly a finer and more elaborate film, it's worth
noting that its technical qualities, including obvious trickery in storm scenes,
falls far short of the expertise shown here. --- Wm.K. Everson