THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 61: Program #10
April 28, 1989
Two British Films

THE AMAZING QUEST OF ERNEST BLISS (United Artists, 1936) Directed by Alfred
Zeisler, a Garrett-Klement Production (Robert Garrett, Otto Klement);
screenplay by John Balderston from the novel by E. Phillips Oppenheim;
Camera, Otto Heller; US release, cut by 20 minutes, under the title
"Romance and Riches"; 80 mins.

With: Cary Grant (Ernest Bliss); Mary Brian (Frances); Henry Kendall (Lord
Honton); Leon M. Lion (Donnington); Gary Marsh (Buyer); John Turnbull (Masters);
Peter Gawthorne (Doctor); Iris Ashley (Clare); Arthur Hardy (Crawley); Frank
Stanmore (Mr. Mott); Buena Bent (Mrs. Mott); Marie Wright (Mrs. Heath); Hal
Gordon (Bill Bronson); Alf Goddard (Butcher Bill); Monty Woolley (Goldman);
and Charles Ferrall, Andrew Malandrinos, Alfred Welsley, Quinton McPherson.

Oppenheim's popular novel was first filmed in 1920 (directed by and starring
Henry Edwards) as a five-part serial that was also released in feature form.
It was filmed again in 1926, and Cary Grant stars in the latest of the British
films, made not only as a major coup for the British at the time, but also
caused it to be re-released twice in England (and once in the US) as its popularity
grew. It was made at the end of his Paramount contract, and admittedly the last
half-dozen films under that contract had been variable. Grant wanted to freelance,
and the film also gave him a chance to get back to his homeland where his
father was living. Even though his Hollywood career hadn't really taken
tissue off as yet, he had made some big and successful films, and this film hardly
exploits his persona to the full. Although it's a relatively glossy film,
especially in the interior scenes, he isn't too well placed as an actor to fill
these roles, his shirts are ill-fitting, and his suits have a cheap look
not at all befitting the millionaire he plays! In the US it was heavily cut,
but our copy is of the full British original. It's a lightweight tale (scripted
by John Balderston, more at home with horror and fantasy) of a millionaire's episodic
and thus easily edited) adventures, both melodramatic and romantic,
and as he accepts a wager to prove himself a man by living a full year without
access to his wealth... a popular theme in the Depression years, and a story
that has loose parallels in such later films as "Guillemot's Travels" and "The
Lady Vanishes." Most of the budget probably went on Grant's car and to a much lesser degree that of
his co-star Mary Brian, whose boxoffice value was dwindling in the US, but who
still seemed an impressive Hollywood name to British audiences. Charles Higham's
recent tome on Grant says almost nothing about the film, dismissing it totally
(indicating that he probably hadn't bothered to see it) except as background to the
disintegration of a planned Grant/Brian marriage. Director Zeisler, late of Germany
and en route to Hollywood, later made some interesting little American films like "Fear!" Cary Grant devotees will see 20 minutes they
probably hadn't seen before, and while a minor film, it's both pleasing and
engaging. The print has been seen far better days, so light a candle for it;
after one more showing in Toronto next weekend, it'll be retired from public
life.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

MR. PERKIN AND MR. TRAILL (Two Cities-Rank-GFD, 1948) Directed by Lawrence
Hunttingon; Produced by Alexander Galper; Screenplay by L.A.G. Strong
and T. J. Morrison from the novel by Hugh Walpole; Camera, Erwin Hillier;
Music, Alan Gray; US release by Eagle-Lion; 92 mins.

With Marius Goring (Vincent Ferrin); David Peel (Mr. Ferrin); Laurence Olivier
(David Trall); Greta Gynt (Irene Hector); Raymond Huntley (May-Thompson); Edward Chapman
(Birkland); Mary Jerrold (Mrs. Perkin); Finlay Currie (Sir Joshua Varley); Ralph Truman
(Comber); Lloyd Pearson (Mr. Dormer); Archie Harradine (Mr. White); Viola
Lyel (Mrs. Comber); Donald Barclay (Rogers); Maurice Jones (Clinton); Fay Nye
(Matron); Mary MacDonald (Mrs. Dormer); and Howard Dougal, Sheila Huntington,
Marjorie Gresley, Lavender Lee.

1948 was a very good year for British films, and "Mr. Perkin and Mr. Trall" had the misfortune to be flanked by "The Red Shoes" and "Oliver Twist" on one side,
and "The Fallen Idol" and "The Winslow Boy" on the other. It was appreciated,
but being a leisurely and literary film, rather lost in the shuffle. Too, it must be admitted that it could have been better; Lawrence
Hunttingon was a good director of slick thrillers, but he was never subtle nor
inspired, and these are qualities that this very complex story from a bizarre
Hugh Walpole novel really needs. Nevertheless, it's an absorbing and
unpredictable story, a fairly honest depiction of British school life (although
that is not its main thrust), well written and certainly well acted, with
Raymond Huntley (the British stage's original "Count Dracula"); and still going
strong in his 80's particularly effective as the sadistic headmaster. While
not notably cinematic, it has all the satisfaction of a "good read," and a
strong story well told has become quite rare on the contemporary screen.

Program ends: approx. 10:35. Opening comments --- William K. Evenson
will be brief in order to allow time for a discussion session since this is our last screening
in the current season. Upcoming schedule printed on leaflet.