

Document Citation

Title	The world of William Shakespeare: La kermesse héroïque
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Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	La Kermesse héroïque, Feyder, Jacques, 1935

THE WORLD OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



APRIL 3rd to MAY 23rd

LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE

France (1935)

(also known as CARNIVAL IN FLANDERS)

The Burgomaster	Alerme	Baker's Wife	Maryse Wendling
The Burgomaster's Wife	Françoise Rosay	Inkeeper's Wife	Ginette Gaubert
The Duc d'Olivarès	Jean Murat	Brewer's Wife	Marguerite Ducouret
Siska	Micheline Cheirel	The Innkeeper	Pierre Labry
Jean Brueghel	Bernard Lancret	The Fishmonger	Arthur Devere
The Butcher	Alfred Adam	The Baker	Marcel Carpentier
The Swarf	Delphin	The Captain	Alexandre d'Arcy
The Friar	Louis Jouvet	The Lieutenant	Claude St. Val
Fishmonger's Wife	Lyne Clevers		

Adapted from a story by Charles Spaak. Adaption, dialogue and screenplay by Bernard Zimmer. Décors by Lazare Meerson. Costumes by J. K. Benda. Technical supervision by M. Sterling. Photographed by Harry Stradling. Music by Louis Beydts. Produced by Films Sonores Tobis.

Directed by JACQUES FEYDER

The setting is the tiny Flemish town of Boom, in a grim September of 1616. Rape and pillage are in the air as the armies of the bloodthirsty Duc d'Olivarès make a bee line for the helpless town. The brave burgers take to their beds or into hiding, while the wives, who may perhaps have dipped in Bocaccio or Lysistrata come up with a unique solution which will not only outwit the enemy, but teach their recalcitrant husbands a lesson at the same time.

So runs the basic story of La Kermesse Héroïque, a nouvelle of Charles Spaak which was adapted into this great film. (Mr. Spaak is the brother of the Belgian Prime Minister and the father of Catherine Spaak, the actress). With a budget of \$750,000 (in 1935), and the great set designer Lazare Meerson, Tobis set to work on their most ambitious project. Two great stars, Françoise Rosay, the mistress of the innuendo, and Louis Jouvet, the screen's favorite cynical comic, were enlisted in the project along with a large number of fine character actors, who were garbed in costumes which look lived-in, and matchlessly directed by Jacques Feyder.

The result was a film which won the 1936 Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival, and was named Best Foreign Film of the Year by the New York Film Critics. Twenty-eight years later, the film looks almost as fresh and funny as the day it was released.

The form of the film is a sort of wry satire, with humor both obvious and hidden. It is, in fact, a definitely immoral film, although the action is so fast and furious, and played so beautifully that we do not realize the full impact until the last image has vanished from the screen.

But the censor was ever watchful, at least part of the time. On October 1, 1936, the Legion of Decency reviewed the film as follows: "Seventeenth-century Belgium provides the background for this delightfully refreshing farce." Something prompted second thoughts, for on October 29, 1936, the

following review appeared: "On second viewing, we find this picture to be definitely objectionable because of subtle indecent dialogue and incidents. Its entire tone is unwholesome and in addition most of it is quite boring."

We will agree that a lot of it is indecent, but it is definitely not boring!

As Graham Greene wrote about it: "It is an admirable film, a little obscene like most good comedies and beautifully acted. I admired particularly the Dominican chaplain with his mannered austerity and his concealed humour, the unctuousness which slips aside to disclose a pleasing natural frailty: the screen seldom allows one the pleasure of seeing more than a single layer of the human mind. M. Feyder's camera picks out with vividness and invention absurdities in costume and character and almost as skillfully as a Restoration dramatist he lightly works into his ribald story a touch of the genuine, the simple emotion. Even Mrs. Pinchwife has her moments, and so has this war-weary Duke and this woman of character married to a Flemish clod."

Mr. Greene was not the only admirer of the film. Dr. Joseph Goebbels on the other side of the border liked it, too, although for slightly different reasons. He felt that the story, which advocates voluntary surrender to the enemy, was just right for his propaganda machine. Rather than having a German sub-titled version prepared, he made a second version, in the German language, with a different cast (excepting Mme. Rosay) by Tobis, which was a Dutch firm controlled with German money. Directed by Arthur Maria Rabenalt, *DIE KLUGEN FRAUEN* was the result. But when the war with France broke out, Dr. Goebbels ordered the film banned on September 7, 1939.

The director of the French film, Jacques Feyder (1888-1948) was a Belgian like the characters of his film. After a series of successful silent films, he came to America to direct Garbo in *THE KISS* (1929), a late silent, along with her first talkie, *ANNA CHRISTIE* (1930). Feyder directed the German language version of this film, while the familiar English language one was directed by Clarence Brown (and not nearly as well.) Feyder's career came to a virtual halt with the start of World War II, but *LA KERMESE HÉROIQUE* has made him immortal.

Françoise Rosay (b.1891) is one of France's greatest comedians. From 1913 until the present day, she has appeared in countless films, few of them worthy of her great talents. Louis Jouvet (1887-1951) was probably France's finest cinema actor, also working on the stage. During his long career, he was associated with Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné among many famous directors.

It might be noted that one of the best inside jokes occurs early in the film: Jan Breughel is shown busily painting a Franz Hals!

David Stewart Hull