



**THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE is a January, 2018 LVCA  
dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage**

**United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that silent film.**

**13 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*\*1/2 of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**United States 1920 black-and-white 132 minutes**

**(Turner Film Library print version) silent live action feature drama**

**Metro Pictures Corporation Producer: Rex Ingram**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**Points:**

**1 Direction: Rex Ingram**

**2 Editing: Grant Whytock\***

**1 Cinematography: John Seitz 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit Camera: Jack Wagner  
Stills Photography: Arthur Rice\***

**1 Lighting**

**1 Special Visual Effects**

**2 Written by: June Mathis, based on the novel Los Cuatros**

**Jinetes del Apocalypsis by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez**

**Non-original Music composed in 2009 by Keith Taylor**

**2 Art Direction: Joseph Calder\* and Amos Myers\***

**Art Titles: Jack Robson**

**2 Costume Design / Wardrobe**

**1 Acting**

**0 Creativity**

**13 total points**

**Cast: Pomeroy Cannon (Madariaga, "the Centaur"), Josef Swickard (Marcelo Desnoyers), Bridgetta Clark (Doña Luisa, Marcelo's wife),**

**Rudolph Valentino\* (Julio Desnoyers, brother to Chichi and son of Marcelo and Luisa), Virginia Warwick\* (Chichi, Julio's younger sister), Alan Hale (Karl von Hartrott, Marcelo's brother-in-law), Mabel Van Buren (Doña Elena, Karl's wife and sister to Luisa), Stuart Holmes (Otto von Hartrott, a son of Karl and Elena), John St. Polis (Etienne Laurier), Alice Terry\* (Marguerite Laurier, wife of Etienne), Mark Fenton (Senator Lacour), Derek Ghent (René Lacour, son of the senator and boyfriend of Chichi), Nigel De Brulier\* (Tchernoff, the Stranger), Bowditch Turner (Argensola, Julio's Parisian secretary), Edward Connelly (Lodgekeeper), Wallace Beery (Lieutenant Colonel von Richthosen), Harry Northrup (The General), Arthur Hoyt (Lieutenant Schnitz), C. E. Collins (Pestilence), Xavier Cugat (Violinist in tango bar scene), Jacques D'Auray (Captain d'Aubrey), Claire de Lorez (Mademoiselle Lucette, a model), Rose Dione (Flag Bearer), Beatrice Dominguez (Tango Dancer), Louise Emmons (French Mother Bidding Farewell), John George (Argentine Ranch Hand), Jean Hersholt (Professor von Hartrott, a son of Karl's and brother to Otto), Noble Johnson (Conquest), Isabelle Keith (German Woman), Kathleen Key (Georgette), Henry Klaus (Heinrich von Hartrott, another son of Karl's and brother to Otto), J. Jiquel Lanoe (German Woman's Husband), Andy MacLennan (Drunk Hallucinating in Saloon), Minnehaha (The Old Nurse), Bull Montana (The French Butler), Steve Murphy (Drunkard in Saloon), Ramon Novarro (Guest at Ball), Curt Rehfeld (Major Blumhardt), Brinsley Shaw (Celendonio), Georgia Woodthorpe (Lodgekeeper's wife), Patrick Youch (French Soldier in Trenches), others**

The first major American drama to suggest the World War I's futility, **THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE** attempted to marry an adulterous romance with patriotic fervor, a combination doomed to failure. Playing romantic leads Julio Desnoyers and Marguerite Laurier were youthful Rudolph Valentino and Alice Terry. Both delivered restrained, finely tuned characterizations in credibly realistic acting style.

The same cannot be said for Josef Swickard's Marcelo Desnoyers, Pomeroy Cannon's Madariaga, or Beatrice Dominguez's repulsive tango dancer. In fact, there's nothing in her tawdry, vulgar demeanor a dashing cavalier of Julio's stripe would be likely to find the least bit attractive. Like Swickard and Cannon, Dominguez was locked into Victorian stage conventions, overemphasizing every gesture while relying on costuming and makeup to define a personality. Such archaic approach to drama stood in sharp contrast to modern, minimalist gestures of Valentino and Terry, an incongruity director Rex Ingram either ignored or failed to harmonize.

Those clashing styles annoy and frustrate contemporary audiences accustomed to realistic personifications on screen, shrinking significantly a potential circle of admirers for this film.

Plot one concerned Madariaga's inheritance. Who would get it: the Desnoyers family or envious rivals, the Hartrotts? Scales are tilted in favor of the former due to the climate in Europe and the United States at the time of filming. Germans were still regarded as Huns, enemies of civilization. Probably no commercial filmmaker in 1920 Hollywood would have dared make a Prussian family story protagonists.

So scriptwriter June Mathis elected a non-partisan equal split of property and cash, a decision unexpectedly overturning Madariaga's

obvious favoritism towards the Desnoyers. His will should have reflected long-cherished intent to distribute wealth primarily in the direction of Marcelo's children and his younger daughter. It didn't, proving inexplicably democratic. Nor was any explanation for the change of mind offered.

A discontented, greedy lot, the Hartnotts decided to take what they could get and remove to Prussia, where their children could be steeped in superior German culture such as Nietzsche's Superman theory.

Left to his own inclination, Marcelo would have remained contentedly in Argentina. But spouse Luisa couldn't bear too distant a separation from her sister. What in the world could her family find in South America to spend newly arrived wealth buying? No, the Desnoyers should hie away to France, pursuing art and marriage there. Julio could study painting with expert tutors. Chichi would be able to choose a mate from among the finest specimens of French male aristocracy.

Poor Marcelo. He had left France years earlier at the time of the Franco-Prussian conflict in order to dodge a draft. His countrymen might still regard him as a criminal. France, for him, was no beckoning Lady Liberty. But numbers carried the day. The Desnoyers sailed off to Europe in spite of his fears and preferences.

Once resettled in Paris, they held court with elegant upper crust visitors. Chichi fascinated a Senator's son. Julio ingratiated himself with disreputable female models and an apparently accommodating secretary named Argensola, who in return for an irregular salary might have been providing an array of additional libertine services.

In a sparsely furnished room above theirs resided a gloomy Russian named Tchernoff, presumably exiled from his homeland. He and Argensola became friendly during those tedious hours when Julio ordered his assistant to leave in preparation for private trysts. Disinclined to simply walk the streets while his master entertained, Argensola ascended the stairs instead, seeking hospitality with a generally taciturn Russian neighbor. They discussed current politics, Tchernoff predicting Europe's fatal slide into wartime chaos.

His pessimism and disengagement from adoption of forestalling measures were admirably communicated by actor Nigel de Brulier, who had the additional advantage of being gifted with June Mathis's punchiest line in the film's concluding scene.

Plot Two began to unfold when Julio Desnoyers' tango teaching brought him into contact with Marguerite Laurier, melancholy wife of a considerably older man who viewed her more as trophy than helpmate or mother. Bored, self-pitying, ripe for assignations, Mrs. Laurier took to the dance floor, amusing herself with tango instruction provided by a sympathetic Julio.

Soon she found thinly veiled contempt and whispered rumors unbearable. Surely Julio too could see the illicit pair needed to retreat from public, prying eyes. Where could they find a better refuge than the Argentine profligate's studio?

Marguerite and Julio pursued amorous adventures with growing incaution until an anonymous tipoff led Marcelo and Etienne, the woman's vengeful husband, to catch them together in a compromised situation.

Etienne proposed settling matters via a duel.

**Marcelo was appalled. What a scandal would follow! Was that truly in his former friend's best interest? He prevailed in reducing fallout to a legal divorce proceeding, something which would have the side benefit of allowing a liberated Marguerite to visit Julio under whatever terms she wished.**

**At that point, just when state censorship boards would be irately demanding cuts or rewrites, Mathis backpedaled into Plot Three: War and Redemption.**

**War broke out engulfing France and Prussia. Old hostilities were renewed with relish. Marguerite's husband marched off to defend his homeland. A chastened wife plunged into nursing studies to match his contribution to public welfare.**

**Marcelo, having bought himself a castle folly in the Marne River Valley, decided to leave Paris and a berating wife and daughter. He traveled north and decamped at his country manor, its interior stuffed with antique bargains purchased at auctions. If German troops came, well, so what? He was a civilian, not likely to be molested by them. Hah.**

**Far to the south, Marguerite located her blinded husband at Lourdes. Contritely, she devoted herself to nursing him.**

**Julio tracked his amour down, then attempted to persuade her to once again desert Etienne. No dice. She was genuinely repentant about her adultery. That amazed her tempter, who for the first time felt shame. He decided to appease awakening conscience by enlisting in the French army. Julio, too, would become a hero and patriot.**

**Back north, invading German soldiers attacked the hamlet where Marcelo sheltered, shelling church, shops, and quaint residences, but leaving untouched the Desnoyers property. It would serve them**



beautifully as staff headquarters. Here they could riot at will, despoiling the mansion's furnishings in an orgy of destructiveness commanders wouldn't dare to inflict on their own country's burgers. When civilians resisted, they were dispensed with by firing squad and vindictive bayonet. A protesting landowner was imprisoned in his own cellar to await daybreak and probable execution. As prelude to that, the prisoner's assigned burial squad duty, a task he escaped only through intervention from a French military counterattack which finished off the one remaining intact structure in town. Much to Marcelo's dismay.

In the aftermath of that disaster, an enlightened landholder returned to Paris, reuniting with the rest of his family, including suddenly militant Julio.

More horrors awaited them, though. Each of Madariaga's grandsons were eventually felled in war, leaving parents bereft of male heirs. Nothing but graves and shattered hopes remained of their plans for future happiness.

Julio was as dead as his love affair with Marguerite. Her only solace came from obligatory preservation of a passionless marriage.

One reviewer during the film's initial release period pointed out the need for audiences to ponder larger issues of the war, those having been lost in the drive to victory and overwhelming grief over its cost. This bloodletting was perceived at the time not only as the greatest struggle ever in the history of western civilization but also as the "war to end all wars." It didn't of course, which was the tragedy of both the twentieth century and humanity.

Though the relationship of Julio and Marguerite matured from sheer sensuality to one of mutual admiration and friendship, it took



second place to scenes of carnage and memorial which concluded the drama.

Indeed, among World War I films, only **ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT** and **VERDUN: LOOKING AT HISTORY** attained an equivalent level of exhausted despair in their unforgettable resolutions.

Plenty of money and research were expended on recreating a time period barely past with precise verisimilitude. Close-ups of firing squad victims and starving peasants mingling with recreations of artillery bombardments brought novel genuineness to scenes of wartime devastation. Not just for veterans who had experienced those firsthand but also for home front civilians who had only previously observed such inhumanity from a discreet distance. The trench warfare episode was similarly remarkable in bringing to viewers an almost tactile representation of battlefield conditions at the front. For this achievement alone, later generations ought to be overflowing with gratitude. For it took the disgusting, hidden aspects of war and shoved them in the faces of remote onlookers as never before.

It wasn't courage or peacemaking that triumphed on Armistice Day. The Great War was merely a warm-up exercise solving nothing, preparing foundations and excuses for even greater conflicts and exterminations to follow.

John Seitz's cinematography was not so inspired here as his work in **THE VANISHING AMERICAN** five years later. There, authentic locales supported the drama majestically and incontrovertibly.

Annoying intrusions of animal metaphors to echo emotional responses plagued Ingram's production, though the Capuchin

thespian repeatedly appearing as a family pet outperformed numerous higher salaried marquee names.

While references to the Biblical Revelation of John of Patmos were by no means irrelevant, murky portrayals of Beast and Horsemen should have been left to more vivid imaginations. They were inadequately and ineptly realized here.

Still, this was an estimable adaptation of a serious philosophical novel, something rarely even attempted in Hollywood. Its makers merit applause rather than denigration for their artistic efforts.

With a strong secondary theme of adultery and suggestion of divine punishment for persistent hedonism, **THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE** is only suitable viewing for adults. For them, it's definitely even today an extremely worthwhile experience, showcasing the state of American film art in 1921 even more effectively than artistic and commercial rival, Chaplin's **THE KID**. Appropriately selected for The National Film Registry, thus guaranteeing a continued existence for study, it is also available to home viewers in somewhat truncated form thanks to Nostalgia Family Video. A 150-minute plus fuller print is in circulation. That one has not been released on dvd in North America. So this shorter edit must suffice for most screeners at present.

Definitely one of the ten most impressive American dramas of the silent period. Don't overlook it.