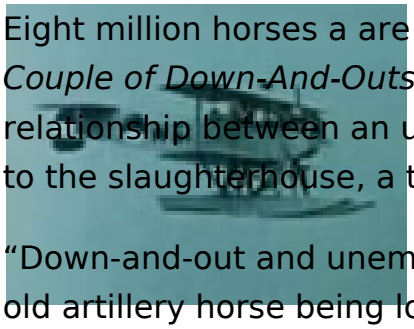
“De twee overgeblevenen” ("A Couple of Down-And-Outs", UK 1923)



Eight million horses a are estimated to have died during the First World War. *A Couple of Down-And-Outs* by British director Walter Summers depicts the relationship between an unemployed ex-soldier who finds its war horse on the way to the slaughterhouse, a topic similar to Steven Spielbergs THE WAR HORSE.

“Down-and-out and unemployed ex-soldier Danny Creath (Rex Davis) recognizes his old artillery horse being loaded for shipping to the continental knackers’ yard. He has no alternative but to steal him, and the two go on the run, with the support of a friendly girl with a stable, and her policeman father, ready to turn a blind eye. These three humans and the horse (played by two different animals) are virtually the only characters in the film, though the flashbacks to the Western Front have an impressive reality which clearly marks the film out as the first work of the British screen’s war poet, Walter Summers (1896–1973). When the war broke out, the cavalry was still supreme, but was almost instantly rendered archaic by the new horrors of trench warfare and the machine gun. In a last cavalry charge rashly launched by the British in March 1918, all but 4 of the 150 horses were cut down by the German machine guns. The new and vital role of the horse in the First World War was as the most reliable form of transport to the front line. There are innumerable records of the close and often sentimental comradeship that grew between men and animals at the front. *A Couple of Down and Outs* recalls this kinship, but also the widespread indignation at the fate of the equine heroes after the war, sold off fast and cheap, many exported to Belgium as human food. (The universal British aversion to horsemeat undoubtedly has its roots in the nation’s sentimental attachment to the animal.)” *David Robinson, “Le Giornate del Cinema Muto” 2012, Festival Catalogue, pp. 145-146.*

EYE’s 35 mm copy of *A Couple of Down-And-Outs* was presented at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival 2012. EYE Film Institute will make accessible a total of 100 hours of films related to the First World War in EFG1914.

» See *A Couple of Down-And-Outs* at the EFG portal

Dir: Walter Summers, Prod: G.B. Samuelson; Cast: Rex Davies (Danny Creath), Edna Best (Molly Roark), George Foley (P.C. Roarke), Philip Hewland; 1332 ft,. 64 mins, silent, Print Source: EYE Film Institute Netherlands, Amsterdam; With Dutch intertitles. An English translation of the intertitles can be downloaded here.