Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"THE ORIT OF THE GIRL TELEGRAPHER" (Kalem, circa 1913) Director: Not stated
With Anna Q. Nilsson; one reel.
I must admit to having fallen down rather badly on this one; I screamed the print once some six months ago, and when I went to re-screen it this evening - to sift clues for its exact date and try to identify some of the supporting players - I suddenly discovered that the print was out. It is being returned in time for our showing, but not in time for careful examination for these notes. It is an enjoyable little melodrama in the "Hazards of Helen" mould, rather slow in getting under way, but with a lively finish.

"EARLY TO BED" (KCM-Hal Roach, 1928) Directed by Emmett Flynn; supervised by Leo McCarey; camera: George Stevens; 2 reels
Starring Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy.
Silent Laurel and Hardys that we haven't run before are so rare that when we come across one it is churlish to complain about inexcusable print quality (despite hypo, this is made from original negative and should be much better) or slightly disappointing comedy content. Actually this one has a very funny story-line, with a rather different Laurel-Hardy relationship. But Emmett Flynn, a once big prestige director who had slipped spectacularly, seemed to have little rapport with the boys, and the most is not made of the material at all. However, it is consistently amusing, and the climactic, semi-surrealistic gag is a lulu - even though borrowed (and improved upon) from an earlier Roach comedy with Mabel Normand.

"SEX" (Associated Exhibitors, 1920) Directed by Fred Niblo;
Written by C. Gardner Sullivan; Supervised by J. Parker Reade jr.;
Camera: Charles Stumar; Edited by Ralph Dixon: 6 reels
With Louise O'Clair, William Conklin, Myrtle Stedman, Irving Cummings, Peggie Pearce
Few of Louise O'Clair's colorful-sounding sex dramas of the early 20's really delivered all they promised, but they all packed a dynamic head of steam into the opening couple of reels - presumably to entice exhibitors who often booked just by running the first reel or so of a film. (In the same way, serials usually shot half their budgets in dressing up the opening chapters, since that is all the bookers ever bothered to run!) "Sex" starts off magnificently with wild night-club stuff, including a Spider Dance that predates Betty Compton's "Caught in the Web of Love" in "The Great Gabbo", wild parties, much lechery, and a Stroheimesque night-club where bearded and masked gnomes comprise the orchestra! It runs out of steam somewhat at the half-way mark, changing from sin to sobs, but it remains colorfully interesting nonetheless. Women smoke constantly to remind us of their depravity, while having a pussy-footing Chinese manservant is apparently the status symbol for those who have sunk into the abyss beyond redemption. Fred Niblo, who had a habit of turning B-grade material into rather stodgy fare ("Ben Hur" specifically) also had the knack of blowing up trite material so that it managed to look important. "Sex" certainly benefits from his rather pretentious hand, and from the marvellously over-blown titling of C. Gardner Sullivan ("Along the High Road of Surfeited Folly, ...)". Gardner's scripting is somewhat lacking in motivation or logic, and in his final wrap-up title is not only ungrammatical but more than a little confusing, but it seems unfair to be too demanding of a film like this -- any more than we should take Edgar Ulmer's "Her Master's Secret" really seriously when it plays at the Huff in 1955. "Sex" is fun and academically interesting (we refer to the film, not to primitive instincts) and perhaps we should let it go at that, Logic was never a strongpoint of the vamp movies anyway -- if just one of the jaded mistresses or bored wives had ever had a child, and been concerned with mixing cereal or changing diapers, the whole genre would have collapsed, or at least have mated itself with "Stella Dallas". "Sex" is an enjoyable example of the species, complete and in good shape, although since it is clearly taken from the original 1911 negative, the script should be of somewhat better standard than it is.
"The Leopard Woman" less prone to be taken seriously, is even wilder and woollier (spies and intrigue in Darkest Africa) and this further adventure of Louise O'Clair is something that we can look forward to in June.

William K. Everson