Tuesday next, July 25: Imitation of Life (1934, John Stahl) with Claudette Colbert, Warren William and Rachelle Hudson; "The Odyssey of Rita Hayworth", the 3-reel Wolper documentary on the star; and at least one other short subject.

July 18 1967

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Two Ealing Films: 1935

JAVA HEAD (A.T.P., 1935) Directed by J. Walter Ruben; produced by Basil Dean Screenplay by Gordon Wellesley and Martin Brown from the novel by Joseph Hergesheimer; Camera: Robert Martin; Music: Ernest Irving; Editor: Thorold Dickinson; 6 reels

With Anna May Wong, Ralph Richardson, Edmund Gwenn, Elizabeth Allan, John Loder, Herbert Lomax, Harry Curzon, John Harriner, Gray Blake, Roy Emerson, Amy Brandon

Clearly too ambitious a subject for Ealing to have tackled in 1935, "Java Head" would have benefited from the better budgets and production values that Gainsborough could have given it at that time. Two approaches were open: to make a sweeping romantic melodrama, making the very most of the seafaring theme and the various exotic locales; or to concentrate on the interesting group of characters, and through them tell the story of an era and a changing economic structure. Welles did so brilliantly in "The Magnificent Ambersons". Unfortunately, it tries a little of both, and the attempts to avoid costly production expenses by side-stepping and suggesting just don't work. It is an inadequate production, although by independent British standards of the day, a worthy effort, and reviews were quite good. Some six of Hergesheimer's novels have been filmed, but only two were ever done twice - "Tol'able David" and this one (which had been done as a silent by Paramount, with Leatrice Joy and Betty Bronson). It's an interesting tale, soft-spoken but fairly explicit in such colorful sub-plots as that involving George Washington and the Revolutionary War (which I have not read) presumably had a New England locale; here it is logically switched to Bristol, but the geographic locale is unimportant and anyway unstressed within the limits of its budget, it is quite a handsome little film, though the ladies are far from flatteringly photographed, and the cast is unusually strong, with a number of big names on the threshold of stardom. Director Ruben (often also spelled Ruben) was an American, and most of his films were done in Hollywood; he was prolific but not very distinguished, making a number of Richard Dix and other melodramas for Bko, and such big but lesser MGM films as "Old Hoot" and "Biff Raff".

--- Intermission ---


3 reels

With Gracie Fields, John Loder, Edward Rigby, Enid Stamp Taylor, Fred Duprez, Madeleine Seymour, H.F. Maltby, Monty Banks, Margaret Yardie.

For a detailed background on Gracie Fields and the gradual evolving of a formu for her, we refer you to the notes on our first Gracie Fields program, spare copies of which are available this evening. There are only four years between her first film, the primitive "Sally in our Alley" and tonight's "Queen of Hearts", and the difference is quite staggering. The production values have been upped considerably, and the song numbers are here quite elaborated, one even adapting the kind of "in parentheses" story construction so beloved by Busby Berkeley. The songs are among her best, pathos has been reduced, slapstick emphasized (as are e., but decidedly vigorous) and in Monty Banks (also her husband) she has an ideal director. (Banks also appears twice in the film, as a bowler hatted ockney, and later as a stage performer, with a close-up of the theatre program listing him as Montague Banking!) In terms of plot, it is by now fairly formula; there's more studio work, less locations, less emphasis on a realistic representation of the depression era. It also has those odd stereotypes of British movies of the 30's -- the aggressive, distrustful mother, and the caricatured American/Jewish theatrical impresario. But if it's formula, it's a slick and entertaining one, and provides Gracie with some of her best songs. The film was a huge success in England, being chosen to open the new Paramount Theatre in Tottenham Court Road - and so cleaning up there that its run was literally doubled. John Loder (exactly the same age as Gracie incidentally) was the leading man she returned to most frequently, and indeed was one of the most useful and overworked British screen heroes of the 30's being one of the few stars who could do costumers and modern roles comfortably, in addition to being "brave enough to handle the rugged actioners like "King Solomon's Mines" and "Non Stop New York" or the sophisticated thrillers like Hitchcock's "Sabotage". Actually his stardom preceded Gracie's and also preceded his acceptance in British films, since he was quite extraordinarily prolific in silent and early talkies in both Germany and Hollywood in the 1929-1932 years. He was also quite remarkable in other ways, if one is to take Hedy Lamarr's autobiography at its face value!

--- William K. Everson ---