Tuesday next, November 28th: THE GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN (1942) with Chaney, Atwill, Lugosi; and LADY & THE MONSTER (1944) with Erich von Stroheim.

November 21 1967  The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society
THE CUP OF LIFE (Associated Producers, 1921) Directed by Rowland V. Lee Supervised by Thomas Ince; scenario by Joseph Poland from a story by Carey Wilson; Camera: J.O. Taylor. 5 reels
With Hobart Bosworth, Tully Marshall, Madge Bellamy, Niles Welch, May Wallace, Monte Collins.

Those of you who remember the Bosworth-Lee-Poland "The Sea Lion" (run at the H ush some years ago) will know the kind of rugged melodrama in store here. It starts off promisingly off the familiar Catalina coastline, with one of those old schooners that Ince used so frequently, and a title introducing Hobart Bosworth as "Bully Brand ... who defied the laws of God and Man". Shortly thereafter however it switches from outdoor adventure to Far East melodrama, and attacks the race question with the same uninhibited gusto. "Would you want a white girl to marry a chink?" asks one title, while the caricatured art work in all of the illustrated title cards leaves no doubt as to how the poor Oriental is meant to be regarded! (Earlier on, for good measure, the South Sea islanders are dismissed as "black devils") It's a minor work, obviously; even at his peak, Rowland V. Lee was an indifferent director with no style of his own, so one can hardly look to these earlier works to show blueprints to his later development. But it's a handsome little film, splendidly photographed, and packing a lot of story and incident into its fairly brief running time. The print is a fine amber toned original, which adds to the richness of the visuals.

-- intermission --

PAINTING THE TOWN (Universal, 1927) Director: William James Craft Scenario by Harry O. Hoyt and Vin Moore, from an original story by Hoyt; Camera: Allen James; 6 reels
With Patsy Ruth Miller, Glenn Tryon, George Fawcett, Charles Gerrard, Sidney Bracey, Monte Collins, Max Ascher, Al Ferguson

William James Craft was never one of the major Universal contract directors, and usually got the lesser properties to handle -- the last vehicles of stars who were slipping for example, and whose contracts were not going to be renewed. So if his little dramas and comedies always seemed a little below the standards set by Harry Pollard, William Seiter and other contemporaries at Universal, it wasn't wholly his fault. "Painting the Town" however seems to have given him much more to work with. The plot never takes itself very seriously, but keeps skimming along at a brisk pace; Glenn Tryon's bumptious personality has enough humour interwoven this time for it to pay off, and Patsy Ruth Miller, wearing some stunning "Follies" gowns, looks lovely and charming, and plays with spirit. The role really has nothing to it, but it's a pleasure to sit back and watch her make the very most of it. The titles, ranging from the chatty style of Fairbanks to some of those awful puns so popular with title-writers in the 20's, are constantly lively if not always as witty as they were doubtless thought to be!

The story is a curious kind of reverse parallel to Langdon's "Long Pants", with the small town hick meeting his dream girl as she passes through town -- and venturing to the big city himself. This time however he's a conceited go-getter who proceeds to show the city slickers that he's every bit as smart as he claims. Pleadingly (and unusually, for this kind of picture) he never does get his come-uppance, and remains as lacking in humility at the end as he was at the beginning! Universal's familiar old main street -- unchanged through the years, seeing service as a background to Ken Maynard's western heroics and as a Welsh mining town in "The Invisible Man Returns" -- is put to good use again, and the Opera House from "The Phantom of the Opera" doubles as a NY theatre. Lean convincing as New York are the fine street exteriors of Los Angeles in the final chase -- but it's excellent and nostalgic footage, and we can even forgive a Central Park scene with the California mountains clearly visible! Again, a minor work, but an extremely pleasing one, and a most welcome reminder of a vivacity in Patsy Ruth Miller that was exploited all too seldom.

------- William K. Everson -------