Inevitably, "Smart Money" disappoints a little, inasmuch as it was not only a follow-up to Cagney’s "Public Enemy" and Robinson’s "Little Caesar", but was also to be the only film in which these two stars appeared together. Robinson and Bogart frequently gravitated together, as did Cagney and Bogart, but curiously this Karloff & Lugosi of the gangster film never did re-team. But as a non-formula oﬀ-shoot of the gangster film, "Smart Money" is rather a rewarding film, relatively unmelodramatic, more relaxed and naturalistic than most of its genre. As with "Blonde Larceny", it’s sometimes an uneven film and one of shifting moods; the generally randy and bantering atmosphere gives way rather suddenly to stark tragedy in the closing sequences; but more power to it for being so unpredictable.

Robinson’s role is by far the bigger of the two, and he makes the most of it with his anticipated scenes of menace, pathos and comedy. One suspects that the Cagney role was written before he was actually slotted for the part. If one of the lower-pressure Warner crime films, "Smart Money" is still a most enjoyable one, and not the least of its appealing qualities is its steady stream of hard-bitten but still delectable blondes.


After having for so long regarded "The White Angel" as primarily a Kay Francis vehicle, it is rather a surprise to find what a sober and literate work it is, and how well it maintains the standards of Dieterle’s other biographical works. It resists most of the temptations of its genre to over-romanticise and nass-drop, and is generally realistic and consistent in its style - the one rather James Whale-made, 18th century scene excepted. If there is a major flaw, it is in the traditional, one-dimensional Saint level performance by Kay Francis as Florence Nightingale, the same kind of serene and rather saug performance that Anna Neagle gave in her interpretation. One can’t help but conjecture what Lillian Gish (in the 30’s) or Celia Johnson (in the 50’s) could have done with the role. The script of course does tend to give Miss Nightingale the same kind of God-like aura usually reserved for Abraham Lincoln, so the one-dimensional playing isn’t entirely Kay Francis’ fault, and in any case she is not at all bad. (Undoubtedly, the script tactfully sidesteps Miss Nightingale’s battle-from-acquiring of Hillilis. Even this would have been mild compared with a recent British play dealing with a lesbian relationship between Miss Nightingale and Queen Victoria! Since both Queen and nurse were taken on by Anna Neagle, that ugly rumor can surely be taken with a grain of salt.) Sometimes the writing is a bit too pat, and the scoring a bit too Hollywood (especially in its insistent and often inappropriate use of "Cherry Hips" as a motif), but the sincerity, style and care do show through - and especially in the ending (George Curzon as Herophilus). Even this would have been mild compared with a recent British play dealing with a lesbian relationship between Miss Nightingale and Queen Victoria! Since both Queen and nurse were taken on by Anna Neagle, that ugly rumor can surely be taken with a grain of salt.) Sometimes the writing is a bit too pat, and the scoring a bit too Hollywood (especially in its insistent and often inappropriate use of "Cherry Hips" as a motif), but the sincerity, style and care do show through - and especially in the ending (George Curzon as Herophilus), to make it one of the more satisfying Hollywood biographies. The print has areas of bad splices and scratches - rental prints like this one invariably prove to be in weaker shape than those that we just borrow - but on the whole it is acceptable, and certainly complete.

December 10 1968
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"SMART MONEY" (Warner Brothers, 1931) Directed by Alfred E. Green
Scenario: Kubea Glasmann, John Bright, Lucian Hubbard, Joseph Jackson;
Camera: Robert Kurrie; Editor, Jack Kiliffer; 8 reels

"THE WHITE ANGEL" (First National, 1936) Dir: William Dieterle

Good news for the future. Thanks to the cooperation of the Canadian Film Institute, which to be honest was an inspired choice - "The Sentimental Bloke" will be shown in March. And waiting for us in London to be picked up over Christmas is a print of the long withdrawn John Ford film, "The Plough and the Stars".