"MAN OF MANY SKINS" (S. N. Patha-John Haight Productions, 1955) Directed and produced by Robert Spafford; story & screenplay: Gerald Kerch; 3 reels with Eric von Stroheim, Denise Varnae, Pasquale Roberts, Duncan Elliott. This entry from the Paris-filmed "Orient Express" series is the first TV film that we've shown. Although it is certainly a cut above the average of its species, it still has many of the shortcomings and weaknesses of the TV series opus, and obviously could have been. It is the spectacular presence of Eric von Stroheim in one of his very last acting appearances before his death in 1957. He obviously revels in a part that provides him with plenty of sarcasm and ego, as well as a triple role replete with disguises. Hardly a worthy swansong for the director of "Ogre" or the player of "La Grande Illusion", but at least a colorful and dramatic one.

"ON THE WRONG TREK" ( MGM-Hal Roach, 1936) Directed by Charles Parrott (Chase) and Harold Law; Camera: Art Lloyd; 2 reels With Charley Chase, Rosina Lawrence, Clarence Wilson, Bonita Weber, Bud Jamison, Bob Kortman, Leo Willis, Laurel & Hardy in a gag appearance.

A well-paced and thoroughly enjoyable Chase comedy — though Charley looks a little older than his actual years. "On the Wrong Trek" is an adroit mixture of situation comedy and sight gags. Quite incidentally, it is also very much of a "depression" comedy with its usual use of a hobo camp and Gestapo-like California cops! Charley and the charming Rosina Lawrence (from "Way Out West" and "Pick a Star") also put over a very pleasing song and dance number.

"DOCKS OF NEW YORK" (Paramount, 1928) Directed by Josef von Sternberg Associate Producer: J. O. Backstrom; screenplay by Jules Furthman from the story "The Dock Wallopers" by John Monk Saunders; Camera: Harold Rosson; titles by Julian Johnson; 8 reels With George Bancroft, Betty Compson, Olga Baclanova, Gustav von Seyffertiz, Clyde Cook, Mitchell Lewis, Richard Alexander. An interesting companion piece to last week's German film "Homecoming" (also of 1928), "Docks of New York" couldn't be a more typical example of late silent Hollywood, when in both commercial and "prestige" films, style was everything and content almost nothing. It's remarkable that such a stylish and basically non-commercial film could be made as part of a studio's normal output — especially such an unenterprising and economy-conscious studio as Paramount. For students of film technique and film art, this is a fascinating period, with Hollywood in film after film exhibiting its total mastery of the silent technique as a kind of gloriously last stand before the talkies took over. But, of course, as it is to us today, one can't help wondering how the youngsters and the average entertainment-seeking audiences of the day felt about it all; after all, they'd been brought up on a much faster-paced kind of movie, and on action — Fairbanks, Mix, livelier Lloyd and Keaton. Audiences with a steady diet of montage and propaganda in Russia were certainly in for a worse shape; at least we still had variety over here, and reliable stars, but the movies were taking their art far too seriously in those latter days of the silent era and the slackening of pace was a general symptom, not just a characteristic of the Sternbergs and the Purnems. It takes almost a reel to get the sailors off the ship at the beginning of "Docks of New York", even though it's just an establishing scene; and when Bancroft at one point walks out to get Betty Compson a glass of something or other at the bar, it takes another third of a reel! But accepting the fact that the film's plot — or, to be more exact, "situation" — could be told comfortably in two reels, one can sit back and marvel at the elegance of camera movements and the brilliance of two sets and lighting. This is a New York waterfront that never appears any more than Sternberg's Russia and China — a world of shimmering reflections, mist, and, of course, fish-net. Undoubtedly it's one of Sternberg's best, but untypically, and not forgetting "The Blue Angel", it's also one of his very rare films to concern itself realistically with human beings and emotions. To succeed at all, it has to make one care about the protagonists — and to a large extent it does. For once the players — who seem to be handled by Sternberg with more respect than he usually affords his actors — rise above the plotting and the melodrama to become the dominant factors. People may say it has to be taken seriously. It is not as much fun as the run-of-the-mill Sternberg of "Shanghai Express" (run-of-the-mill not being a critical term in this case), but it is no less of an eye-popper pictorially. This extremely good print must be two or three generations away from the original, which will give you an idea of the absolutely stunning quality that the film has in 35mm. (Some or you may have seen that marvelous 35mm print at the NMA some years back). Betty Compson has never been better — and Jules Furthman ("The Outlaw", "Jet Pilot") would seem to have one of his best scripts here — if one could determine where Furthman leaves off and von Sternberg takes over!