June 15 1970  
The Theodore Ruff Memorial Film Society  

"PATHS TO PARADISE" (Paramount, 1925) Directed by Clarence Badger  
Screenplay by Keene Thompson from the play "The Heart of a Thief" by Paul Armstrong; Camera: K. Kinley Martin; 6 reels  
With Betty Compson, Raymond Griffith, Tom Santschi, Edgar Kennedy, Fred Kelsey.

Most of the Paramount Raymond Griffiths tend to disappoint a little, and too often they had to be carried by his own debonair charm and by a few well spaced highlights of the scenario. "Paths to Paradise" is a delight however and - subject to a revised judgment should more scenes become available. Although Betty Compson gets better billing, the film is obviously designed as a vehicle to establish Griffith and everything is done to focus on his individual pantomime style. (It was the first in his new series for Paramount, and followed the big impression he had made with a lesser role in "Miss Bluebeard" which we showed a few months ago.) The opening reel is brilliant; thereafter it seems to settle down to a lesser level, but always remaining sprightly and inventive, and then leaps back to top form again with a whole of a chase climax. Incidentally, due to deterioration, the very first sequence in the film is now missing; it probably sounds too much like a facile rationalization to say that the film may even be helped a little by this omission, but I really feel that it is. The lack of a "moral compensation" wrap-up gives the film the kind of cynical ending that helped "Trouble in Paradise" be such a delight - and the lack of which removed much of the sparkle from "The League of Gentlemen." To describe the original finale here would be to rob the present version of all surprise, so I'll say nothing - but after the screening I will fill you in on the contents of the missing sequence. Incidentally, "Paths to Paradise" was remade - after a fashion - in 1945 as "Hold That Blonde," with Eddie Bracken and Veronica Lake.

"GOODBYE MR. CHIPS" (MGM, 1939) Directed by Sam Wood; Produced by Victor Saville  
Screenplay: R.C. Sheriff, Claude West and Eric Haschwitz from the novel by James Hilton; Camera: F.A. Young; Edited by Charles Frend; Music by Richard Addinell; musical director, Louis Levy; 12 reels  

When MGM were planning their Color-Musical remake, they systematically began to withdraw the original from television and 16mm distribution. Contractually, all extant prints had to be handed over to the new producer, and were all shipped to England for storage; even MGM no longer has a studio reference print. Hence the need to be secretive with this print, which was somehow spared from the Last Roundup. Not having seen the film at all before, I was also to watch it - despite the little jolt from it. It's a typical MGM classic, and also typical of the unfaithful but rather uninspired adaptations of best-selling novels that were so prevalent in the late 30's. Its overall taste reflects the hand of producer Victor Saville (what a pity he didn't direct as well!) while its lack of imagination is equally reflective of the always rather stolid work of Sam Wood, who must hold some kind of track record for doing so little with so much on so many occasions! Basically, "Goodbye Mr. Chips" is an honest and literate film, but it is somehow never as emotionally touching as it should be. Despite the innate taste in underplaying the occasion. (How on earth was Louis M. Mayer supposed to let Greer Garson's death scene play off-screen?) It really only worked well when one can bring some of one's own personal experience to it, which makes its reception uneven and inconsistent. For example, the only scenes which really moved me were the World War One sequences where the headmaster, at morning assembly, announces the deaths of former students and head boys - which I perhaps found so touching because I recall such moments from my own schooldays in the second war. Robert Donat's performance is a joy to watch, though sometimes a trifle forgettable - it's unlikely obvious in a rather doddery that he ultimately becomes the physical stamina for running up steps. The supporting cast however is full of marvellous cameos, particularly Lyn Harding (an erstwhile Professor Moriarty) as a headmaster of the old school, saving his boys in alphabetical order at two-minute intervals! There are a few script holes - since Paul Hawthorne is approximately the same age as Donat. It's hard to conceive of him fighting in the front lines while Donat is practically in his dotage - but they don't rear up unless you're looking for them. The film has a rather too studio-bound look, but that too is typical of its period's "invidious, solid black workman" approach. It's not the emotional classic that many of us expected it to be. Incidentally, there are two dedications: one to Sidney Franklin, the other to Irving Thalberg. (One keeps hearing the myth that his name "never" appeared in credits, save for one posthumous tribute -- but there seem to be, at the very least, several of the latter!)