Neither of tonight's two films received U.S. theatrical distribution, and were seen - if at all - only many years after their production, in sparse TV showings. Neither certainly are major works, but they have a great deal of charm, and they are delightful showcases not only for a large roster of British favorites, but perhaps more importantly, for the British countryside itself.

**"POET'S PUB" (Agulla Films-General Film Distributors, 1949)** Dir: Frederick Wilson
Produced by Donald B. Wilson; screenplay by Diana Morgan from a novel by Eric Linklater; camera, George Stretton; music, Clifton Parker; 7 reels
With Derek Bond, Roma Anderson, James Robertson Justice, John McLaren, Barbara Murray, Peter Croft, Leslie Dwyer, Joyce Grenfell, Iris Hoey, Fabia Drake, Andrew Osborne, Leslie Westen, Kay Cavendish, Roddy Hughes, Maurice Denham, Geoffrey Durrant

In the late 40's, during one of Britain's regular financial crises, and with the lush years of internationally successful prestige production behind them, the Rank Studios launched a series of deliberately economical minor films. They were initially called "Independent Frame" productions, the name being a grandiose term for back projection. The idea was to make films almost entirely in the studio, using prefabricated sets, a maximum of back projection, and simple stories of a nationalistic nature that could get their money back in the home market. Most of them were abysmal pictures, their cheapness showing, their contract stars wasted, although the back projection devices were of a high and often ingenious order. Apart from a good little picture called "Floodtide", little worthwhile came out of this policy. "Poet's Pub" is somewhat of an offshoot of this group, still being made by "Independent Frame" producer Wilson, but branching out rather more, and getting out of the studio into the fresh air. It's a forgettable film, but an enjoyable one while it's unreeing - both witty and wacky, with good dialogue and amusing slapstick - plus the delights of Madame Grenfell and the natural charm of Roma Anderson, one of the newer British starlets who never quite made the grade as a boxoffice name, but who was busy, useful and grateful - and is now a fairly regular fixture in bedroom and romantic farce on the London stage. Although "Poet's Pub" wasn't a boxoffice blockbuster in England and certainly couldn't have been here either, it was nevertheless quite superior to a number of lesser Rank "B" products (such as "Harry Ne") which somehow did get U.S. exhibition, and at single-art-house situations too, so its total bypassing is hard to understand.

**"NOW AND FOREVER" (Associated British Pictures Corp.-Pathe, 1954)** Produced and directed by Mario Zampi; Camera: Erwin Hillier; Photographed in Technicolor, print in Eastmancolor; Story and screenplay by R.F. Delderfield and Michael Pertwee; music by Stanley Black; 9 reels

I remember sitting in an Allied Artists screening room in 1954 (AA had the US franchise for the British Pathe films) and being initially delighted by this charming film - and then dismayed by the lack of enthusiasm it stirred among the AA executives, few of whom stayed until the end, and one of whom remarked that it was high time that Jan Grippo (producer of The Bowery Boys films) was sent overseas and taught them how to make movies! Needless to say, it got a very resolute thumbs down and was never heard of again - and I spend the next 15 years trying desperately to acquire a print for my own satisfaction - and, hopefully, for shared enjoyment with others. Pathe of course were always a very conservative and even Victorian company; even for 1954, it was, obviously, a very old-fashioned picture, too evenly (and unconvincingly) divided into blacks and whites, positives and negatives. Even so, with a little thought behind the ad campaign, it could have been sold in a limited way. Today of course its morals and attitudes are so hopelessly outdated that it might well be laughed off a commercial screen -- although who knows, its sincerity might well save it. In any case, today it's a visitor from another world, a shattering and rather sad reminder of how much values - moral and otherwise - have changed in the last two decades. In many ways, it is rather like a companion picture to precede the Hayley Mills "The Family Way" -- both would supplement one another rather well, not only for their story content, but in showing the changes that had come over the movies' treatment of love and sex in a decade or so. Of course,
"The Family Way" now seems rather prosaic too, and I suppose one would have to add one of the currently explicit "marriage manual" epics to make a triple bill that would truly show the movies' transitions over the past 15 years!

"Now and Forever" is a little slow and stodgy in its first third, but then takes off with much more warmth and humor, and spends most of its time in the heart of the English countryside. Occasionally they gild the lily a little, juxtaposing famous beauty spots into (apparently) a single location; for example, Bourton-on-the-Water, one of the loveliest villages in the Cotswolds, lends itself to being just a part of the little town in which the heroine lives. England is beautiful — but not quite as stunningly so in every direction as this film seems to imply!

The whole film has a pleasingly naive fairy-tale quality, and in fact some of the compositions — Janette Scott opening a flower-surrounded window for example — recall such Méliès films as "The Flower Fairy". Janette Scott, making a graceful transition from child roles to adult ones, gives a most sensitive and moving performance and — even though one can occasionally sense that she is being directed — it is probably still the best thing that she has done. The shift from schoolgirl to maturity is done very effectively, over and above such obvious devices as getting rid of pigtails and using lower-key lighting. It's a pity that so many subsequent films, primarily comedies ("Double Bunk", "School for Soothingly") were content to use her youth and beauty, instead of carefully developing her as a dramatic star as well, as Rank had done with Patricia Roc earlier one.

Throughout, "Now and Forever" is a thoroughly pleasant film — one can't really believe in the satanic evil of Sonja Preissell or the casual bitchiness of Pamela Brown, but it doesn't seem to matter. There's more conviction in the many delightful cameos roles in the second half of the film, especially Melvyn Landau as a frighteningly accurate (and typical) inn-keeper, lecherous, greedy, and harmlesslly crazy. Bryan Forbes, now systematically destroying his earlier reputation as he carefully wrecks the economy of Elistree Studio, has an interesting unbilled bit as an obnoxious drunk at a dance. The art direction has a few holes in it — the very compact, London semi-detached-house stairway obviously doesn't belong in the spacious mansion where it has been placed — but since the whole film is somewhat of a fable, it hardly matters. The film is a real breath of fresh air in the midst of our current overdoses of corruption and pollution!

William K. Everson