August 13, 1920

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"HARD TO GET" and "CAUGHT" — two Boy-Meets-Girl variations

"HARD TO GET" (Warner Brothers, 1938) Directed by Ray Enright
Producer: Hal B. Wallis; Associate Producer, Sam Bischoff; screenplay by Jerry Wald, Maurice Leio and Richard Macaulay from "Classified" by Nally Klein and Joseph Schrank; Art Director, Anton Gross; music and lyrics, Harry Warren & Johnny Mercer; Camera, Charles Rosher; 8 reels

Initially, we had some doubts about playing this diverting but minor film at the Huff; then unexpectedly favorable reactions at a couple of screenings, and an almost universal unfamiliarity with the film decided us — so here it is. It’s a typical late depression comedy, with one of those zany families out of "My Man Godfrey" and "We’re Dvellig We Live", all pointing the valuable moral lesson that even if you’re just a gas station attendant you’ll come out on top if you’re true to yourself and your integrity — and also marry a millionaire’s daughter. It’s fast and unpredictable, never productive of classic comedy, yet always coming up with the good line here or the sight gag there — and with Penny Singleton stealing most of the honors. Dick Powell sings, and Olivia de Haviland is luscious; what more had one a right to expect of a movie in 1938?

"CAUGHT" (Mon-Enterprise, 1949) Directed by Max Opuls
Producer: Wolfgang Reinhardt; Screenplay by Arthur Laurents from "Wild Calendar" by Libbie Bleck; Camera, Les Greene; edited by Robert Parrish; music, Rudolph Polk; 8 reels

A decade later, and with war — and prosperity — having intervened, the burning question now was not how to marry rich, but whether one should. The obvious answer is to try it both ways, which "Caught" does — and, thanks to Opuls’ taste and style, manages not to look like the soap opera it is. The dialogue is pungent, the acting sensible, Greene’s camerawork very Wellesian, and the overall production mounting extremely handsome. Robert Ryan, playing a thinly-disguised Howard Hughes, frankly makes a good deal of sense, and seems particularly justified in turning on a wife who has the temerity to giggle in his private projection room. He would doubtless win all the sympathy had not the wife been played with her usual restraint and skill, by Barbara Bel Geddes, who makes the empty-headed and selfish wife seem quite important and even rational. "Caught" is one of the least revived of Opuls’ American films and it’s one of his best; less in his own special field than "Letter from an Unknown Woman", it is nevertheless an unusually expert and disciplined film. All of the traditional Opuls tricks are there, particularly the long tracking shots, yet they work and are applied only when there’s a reason for them. Very often one misses them entirely, so unobtrusively they are brought it, which of course is as it should be. One is never conscious of style for its own sake as one was in his later European prestige films from "La Ronde" on.

William K. Everson