Monday next, Dec.28th: Two thrillers by Jacques Tourneur: BERLIN EXPRESS (1948) with Merle Oberon, Paul Lukas, Robert Ryan; followed by CIRCLE OF DANGER (1951) with Ray Milland, Patricia Roc, Naunton Wayne, Hugh Sinclair, Marius Goring.

Dec.21 1970
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Two thrillers by William K. Howard

"MONEY AND THE WOMAN" (Warner Brothers, 1940) Directed by William K. Howard Associate Producer, William Jacobs; screenplay by Robert Presnell from an original story by James W. Cain; Camera, L.W. O'Connell; 6 reels

Considering that the elaborate and successful "Fire Over England" had been only three years earlier, it's odd that Howard's last years as a director, back in Hollywood, should be almost exclusively on minor pictures - a couple of Bs at Warners, one (though a stylish one, "Klondike Fury") at Monogram, and one - his last, "A Guy Could Change", at Republic. Only one "A" film was sandwiched into this period - "Johnny Come Latley", actually a rather good film, but just not what audiences expected of a James Cagney vehicle. Reputedly Howard had a drinking problem, but it seemed not to affect his films: they were brought in on budget and showed a proficiency and especially considering their relative unimportance - all showed extra directorial effort in getting just a little bit more out of them than their scripts entitled one to expect. Moreover, Howard wasn't just marking time; he didn't consider himself finished, and had hopes of making important films again - among them a remake of his silent "White Gold", which the Pommer-Laughton-Mayfield group was reputedly interested in backing. Sadly, a comeback was not in the cards. He died in the early 1950's. "Money and the Woman", while certainly not an important picture, is an unusually good Howard pro-am film for this period. It was the good looks of many a more important film, moves along very briskly, draws some surprisingly good and naturalistic performances from a Warner stock company that often just walked through the Bs, and makes the most of its limited melodramatic action content. Within its rigid limits, it's a very solid and satisfying little movie.

"SHERLOCK HOLMES" (Fox, 1932) Directed by William K. Howard; scenario by Bertram Millhauser based on a story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the play by William Gillette; Camera, George Barnes; 6 reels

Long unavailable because of (still in force) legal complications, this "Sherlock Holmes" owes rather more to Howard's style than to Doyle's plotting - or what remains of it. By no means a remake of the silent John Barrymore version, even though both were based (somewhat) on the Gillette play, this edition seems to have undergone a great many changes immediately prior to, or possibly during, production, since the story-line in no way resembles the official Fox synopsis for the picture! It starts magnificently, with Ernest Torrence dominating the dramatics, and Howard's stylistic camerawork, shadows and moving camera even dominating Torrence! Then it settles down for a while to being a rather civilised melodrama, with several sequences that certainly bear the imprint of Doyle, and then returns to Howard's control again for a visually exciting climax. It may not be the very best movie Holmes - but on the other hand, when one considers how many dull and/or disappointing Holmes films have been made through the years (most especially the dreary 1922 "Hound of the Baskervilles" by Maurice Elvey), one is persuaded to the conclusion that it is probably in the top three or four regardless! It's always a pleasure to watch and listen to Clive Brook, but he does "do" Holmes in the rather priggish manner that he did his British officer in "Shanghai Express" that same year, so it's not difficult to divert one's attention and even sympathies to the more florid and colorful acting of Ernest Torrence, a perfect Moriarty. This was Brook's 2nd foray into Sherlock Holmes (the third, if one counts the burlesque episode in "Paramount on Parade"; the first, a cheapie rehearsed on the boat coming over from England, and directed in a tiny New York studio by Basil Dean, has apparently vanished, much to Brooks' delight. Last year in England incidentally, I ran the remnants of the Barrymore Holmes for Albert Parker (its director) and Clive Brook, who hadn't realized on all of the Holmesian characterizations (modestly pointing out how much better his version was!) While Parker unwittingly assumed the role of a forgetful but decidedly irascible Watson! They made a delightful team, and I hope to repeat the experience by showing them this version during the coming year. The Watson of this film, Reginald Owen, is surprisingly subdued - but he made up for it by playing Holmes himself in "A Study in Scarlet?"