Monday, February 28, 1977
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"LET US LIVE" (Columbia, 1935; rel. 1939) Directed by John Brahm
Produced by William Perlberg; Screenplay by Anthony Veiller and Allen Rivkin from a story by Joseph P. Dineen; Music by Karol Baskauskas;
Camera by Lucien Ballard; 6 reels
With Henry Fonda, Maureen O'Sullivan, Ralph Bellamy, Alan Baxter, Stanley Bidges, Henry Kolker, Peter Lyman, George Douglas, Ann Doreen, Dick Curtis, Philip Trent, Martin Spellman.

"Let Us Live" is a curio indeed, its plot an obvious melange of three previous Fritz Lang "social" films ("You Only Live Twice" "The Big Heat"), the similarity being enough to make having Henry Fonda virtually repeat his "You Only Live Once" role. Why Fonda should accept such a derivative role in a virtual "B", and why Maureen O'Sullivan, obviously on loanout from MGM and some kind of a coup for Columbia, should be so unexploited, are further mysteries. But if one can ignore such enigmas, the picture is quite rewarding and certainly entertaining making a token gesture to the social commentary of its genre, but concerning itself far more with speed, melodrama, and a really tense - if not too logical - climax. Sometimes it moves too fast for its own good, and it doesn't become clear until it's too late for it to matter whether Alan Baxter is a victim or a rat? But nothing John Brahm did was of interest, whether it be a pseudo-Lang as here, or a really stylish little horror film like Fox's "The Undying Monster". He makes more than the most of Columbia's always marquee-resources, and the picture would be a credit to a bigger studio - or a larger budget. Although with its cast of virtually every Columbia stock, bit and extra player, there's never much doubt as to its studio origin.

"DE BULL" (Fox, 1933) Directed by John Ford
Scenario by Paul Green and Jane Storm from the novel "The Last Adam" by James Gould Cozzens; Music, Samuel Kaylin; Camera, George Schneiderman; 7 reels
With Will Rogers, Marian Nixon, Louise Dresser, Bochelle Hudson, Berton Churchill, Howard Lally, Vera Allen, Tempe Pigott, Elizabeth Patterson, Ralph Morgan, Andy Devine, Nora Cecil, Patsy O'Byrne, Effie Ellsler, Veda Bockland, Helen Freeman, Robert Parrish, Si Jenks, Ethel Griffies, George Humber, Mike Donlin, Dell Henderson, Sara Hadden, Claire McDowell, Otis Harlan, Charles Kiddleton, Francis Ford.

Made right after "Pilgrimage", "Dr. Bull" is a perfect example of Ford's oft-cited policy of following a major film with a small, relaxed, entirely personal one. Long unused, we have always suspected that "Dr. Bull", the first of the Ford-Will Rogers trilogy, would be the weakest - for the not-very-logical reason that the other two ("Judge Priest", "Steamboat Bound the Semb") were so good that it could hardly hope to equal them. As it turns out, it is the weakest - but the criticism is only comparative, for it's still a charming and interesting film, particularly graceful in evoking its small-town atmosphere, and especially good in doing so via a few deft strokes via a series of really lovely establishing scenes right at the beginning. The first shot incidentally - the train arriving at the country station - is one of the most stunningly convincing miniatures I've ever seen. The camera panning over the deserted station makes it look for all the world like a full-scale set; only a split second wrongie in the crushing train suggests that it might be a toy rather than the real thing. This is then continued by the rest of the scene - a total lack of extras, and a cutaway to a detail shot (train wheels) at just the moment when a real train would come to a halt and passengers would alight. It's a beautifully smooth piece of trickery, and the scene is happily repeated later in the film for those who really want to study its mechanics. I haven't read the Cozzens novel, but I suspect that its Dr. Bull may have been a bit cranky and irritable; Will Rogers humanizes him almost totally, yet the fact remains that a country doctor who can never be found when you need him, and whose phone is never answered, isn't realistic, and the way Rogers makes him appear, and this possible conflict between conception and execution may be what thwarts the film partially off-balance. But it hardly matters very much, since it's not an evenful film - and it's enough that we sit back and soak up the rich assortment of characters (with Louise Dresser in a strangely subdued and unsympathetic role for her land rural atmosphere.

Wm. K. Everson
Advance notice for those wishing to avoid a crowded room: "She", shown at the Huff Post May 13th, will be repeated that same week on Friday the 17th of May at the New School, as a replacement for the still unavailable "Smillin' Thru"