Theodore Buff Memorial Film Society
March 24, 1975

A Decade of British Melodrama

DETECTIVE LLOYD (Mutual Pictures, 1931, for Universal release) Dir: Henry MacRae
Story by Henry MacRae and Elia N'Vell; Camera, Desmond Dickinson; British title, "Lloyd of the C.I.D.", also released as a feature version in Britain as "The Green Spot Mystery"; US release, 1932; episode one, "The Green Spot Murder", 2 reels.
With Jack Lloyd, Warren Geoffrey, Janice Adair, Mariel Angelus, Emily Fitzroy, Rumerburne Wright, Diana Wilson, Shayle Gardner, Lewis Dayton, Tracy Holmes, Walter Goehr; released. In 1932 by Grand National as "I Was a Spy"; 8 reels.

SECRET LIVES (ABFD-Phoenix Films, 1937) Directed by Edmund Greville; produced by Hugh Parceval; scenario by Basil Mason, Hugh Parceval, Edmond Greville and D. Jeffrey Bell from a novel by Paul de Saintes Colomes; Camera, Otto Keller; Music, Walter Goehr; released in Great Britain in 1937 by Grand National as "I Was a Spy"; 8 reels.

Phoenix Films was an enterprising but curiously handled subsidiary of Associated Talking Pictures, forerunner of Ealing Studios. They tried - too hard - to bring real quality to smaller program pictures. When they made a genuine "B", as in "The Silent Passenger", it had such solid production values and such a good cast that it didn't hope to recoup its costs from the "B" market. When, as with "Secret Lives", they produced a film that almost approached an "A" stature in terms of length, size and content, so much of the budget went on production values that there was little left for stars of importance, so they were stuck with an "A" product getting "B" playing time for five years. But they made a number of very worthwhile films, according to British standards for that kind of film, and served as useful training grounds for actors, actresses, directors, and cameramen on the way up, before they folded, "Secret Lives" an ambitious World War One " Mata Hari" type story, is a good example of their sincerity if misguided initiative.

THE CHINESE BUNGALOW (British Lion, 1940) Produced and directed by George King;
Screenplay by A.W. Rawlinson, Ronald Payne and Gordon Wellesley; from the play by Matheson Lang and Marion Osmond, and the novel by Marion Osmond; Camera, Home Glandinning; US release 1941 as "The Chinese Den"; 7 reels.

This honorable ancestor to "The Bitter Tea of General Yen" was an old British stage reliable, Matheson Lang, writer and star of the play, also starred in a 1926 silent version, and a 1930 talkie (with Anna Neagle and Jill Esmonde). This 1940 film was, with the exception of some later Hammer thrillers, the last gasp of traditional Yellow Peril material on the British screen, and was considered outdated even then.
Slaughter played it - straight, and effectively - on stage in the mid-40's. It is straightforward but quite handsome production from an independent producer-director who specialized in Slaughter melodramas and Edgar Wallace thrillers; for what it's worth, it's one of his best films. The beautiful and under-rated Jane Baxter is, as always, a pleasure to watch and listen to, and the film also boasts one genuinely classic line. Sitting way at the back of a smoky Chinese den, two jingoistic Britshers notice Kay Walsh walk on to the stage, and before she can open her mouth or really be seen through the haze, one of them exclaims, "Good Lord, an English girl!" For the rest it's a polished if creaky Oriental sex melodrama in which the Chinese live up to their sinister reputations, but generally come off rather better than in Hollywood counterparts.