OLD ENGLISH (Warner Brothers, 1930) Directed by Alfred E. Green
Screenplay by Walter Anthony and Nade Howell from the (1924) play by
John Galwayshy; Camera, James Van Trees; Musical Director, Arno Raped; 9 rls
With George Arliss, Leon Janney, Doris Lloyd, Betty Lawford, Iyan Simpson,
Harrington Reynolds, Reginald Sheffield, Murray Kinnell, Ethel Griffies,
Henrietta Goodwin.

"Old English" is perhaps the most "special" of all the Arliss vehicles; far
more so than any of his other stage-to-screen translations, it remains
resolutely a showcase for him, transcending even the term "vehicle". Apart
from the solidity of the sets, little attempt is made to disguise its origins
and even the plot, and the many intertwined characters, exist only to keep the
Arliss role in the spotlight. Even when, on one occasion, the hero
escapes his office to go home via - - - : handsome cab, the scene is there not to "open up" the
play, but to give us another facet of the Arliss action: using his body
rather than his voice, and indulging in some fancy foot-work that oddly
recalls W.C. Fields. Much of Arliss may well be considered ham, but only
really great actors could get away with it. In terms of conviction, and
submerging his own personality, his performance is admittedly open to
discussion - but in terms of sheer technique, it's a tour de force - as witness
every gesture and nuance of his prolonged eating scene. The question of its
dating as a film doesn't really enter into it, since it isn't really film;
but as a piece of high drama, it holds up as well as good theatre always does.
Members or the audience, especially younger ones, attuned to film as film
may be a trifle impatient with it, and doubtless it is because of such
anticipated reactions that the film is never shown; but as a record of good
theatre and magnificent if highly stylised acting, it's an invaluable record.
(Note: the copyrighted length of the film is 11 reels, but in the early sound
period of sound on disc, reel lengths often varied to accommodate the length
of a scene or two. Literally an "act"! In actual, realistic terms it amounts to
between eight and nine reels (about 87 minutes) and the print is fully complete.

FOCUS ON 1932 An interesting two-reel survey of that year, written and
compiled from newsreel footage by Robert Youngson as a pilot for a tv
series that didn't materialise. The factual depression of the depression
period should prove an interesting counterpoint to "One More Spring".

ONE MORE SPRING (Fox, 1936) Directed by Henry King; produced by Winfield R.
Sheehan; Screenplay by Edwin Burke from the novel by Robert Nathan;
Camera, John Seitz; NY premiere, Radio City Music Hall, Feb. '36; 8 reels
With Janet Gaynor, Warner Baxter, Walter Woolf King, Jane Darwell, Roger
Tumbo, Grant Mitchell, John Quaalen, Dick Foran, Astrid Allwyn, Lee Kohlmar,
Jayne Regan, Stepun Fetchit.

If "One More Spring" seems a little slow and uncertain in getting under way,
it is probably because one unconsciously tries to fit it into a well-
established depression-era niche. At first its wry satire suggests "My Man
Godfrey"; later its moments of poetry bring "Man's Castle" to mind, and its
overall impression of being a fable - allied with its Central Park location
recalls "In Hallelujah I'm a bum". Actually it has echoes or forshadows of all
class films, and even, at its best, it has a unique pattern and rhythm of its own. It doesn't
quite come off, it's treading water points off better if one doesn't assume it
is going to follow a pre-ordained path. Its slightly uneven quality may also
stem from the fact that it's a late 1935 film based on an early 1935 novel,
and attitudes about the depression had changed somewhat. The depression
had been a hard reality for too long for the lyrical, almost escapist route of
"Man's Castle" to be acceptable. Things were getting better, but not
enough so to call for exuberant optimism. Much more so than "My Man Godfrey",
which somehow fallen into an honored niche as "the" depression comedy,
"One More Spring" manages to escape the confines and comes up with a totally dishonest
Cinderella "solution", "One More Spring" is less to be discerned: the definitive
Hollywood look at the depression. It is far enough along to have
a certain perspective, realistic enough not to hide all the tragedy of the
period under a cloak of comedy, and honest enough to stick to a climax which
is hopeful and certainly within the context of the story a "happy ending",
but at the same time is clearly only a stop-gap, stepping-stone kind of
solution awaiting the prosperity that is still elusive just around the
corner.

Well reviewed at the time, it has almost been forgotten today for no
apparent reason other than that there never seemed any commercial validity
in a theatrical revival, and the loss of the original negative has prevented
its inclusion in the major preservation packages. As far as is known, all that is left
is one rapidly deteriorating 16mm print from which this 16mm preservation
copy was made. Neither pictorial nor sound quality is of the best, due to
the ravages of time on that one remaining original print, but it serves and
we're fortunate that at least this copy was made in time.
It does try to preserve the former screen image of Janet Gaynor—rapidly becoming out-of-date and perhaps accounting for her lessening popularity—even to the extent of transforming her from a prostitute in the novel to an out-of-work actress. (Although one sequence does cunningly suggest an adoption of the more obvious way of making a living, and then slaps us and the hero on the wrist for thinking so ill of her that we could even contemplate such a possibility!) The film is also a welcome addition to the list of "Americana" themes which have always proven to be Henry King's greatest strength. The rest of the cast has some particularly notable performances: Walter Woolf King, never a very interesting screen personality though admittedly often mis-used and wasted, here has his most solid role and grasps it with both hands, even though it is not always an attractive role. Grant Mitchell is excellent as the banker, even though one is a trifle reluctant to accept his humanity in the face of the generally more accurate parade of screen bankers given us by W.C. Fields and Preston Sturges. And best of all, there's Stepin Fetchit's magnificent sequence as the zoo-keeper; not only is it one of the definitive Fetchit performances, but for once his dialogue is really funny, AND if you try hard, you can even understand some of it!

William K. Everson