"ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES" (20th Century-Fox, 1939) Directed by Alfred Worker; Associate Producer, Gene Markay; Art Directors, Richard Day and Hans Peters; Camera, Leon Shamroy; Screenplay, Edwin Blum and William Drake from the play by William Gillette; music, Cyril Mockridge; 9 reels

One of the minor tragedies of the screen is that none of the many Holmes adaptations—and they date back to 1923—has had a really felicitous director. James Whale has done more to bring out the right combination of the Holmesian personality and Gothic excitement to Holmes, and Fritz Lang might have done almost as well. But most Holmes directors have been placid and unimaginative—Britain's Maurice Elvey being typical—and the best directors to tackle Holmes have usually been somewhat out of their element; William K. Howard's forte, for example, was pace and visual elegance and his 1932 Holmes had too little Doyle. However, within directorial limitations, this "Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" is arguably the screen's best—though Rathbone himself must run second to Britain's Arthur Wontner, the finest screen Holmes of them all. Officially based on the Gillette play, it bears no more resemblance to the story than the 1922 "adaptation," though Barrymoore's silent version was rather more faithful. A follow-up to Fox's first Rathbone-Holmes "The Hound of the Baskervilles," it has a less famous story to fall back on (though the admirably complicated screenplay is excellent pseudo-Doyle) and not quite such elaborate production values, or such an enjoyable atmosphere of horror. Yet in most ways it is superior to its predecessor, it's faster paced, and has more of a spirit of fun in its spectrumanlike tiltings between Holmes and Moriarty, who play "in the same style" with its top photographs of the eerie standing sets; always one of Fox's biggest assets, it's an extraordinarily handsome production, and has none of the artificial, studio-bond atmosphere of "Hound" with its stylized but not too convincing Grimpen Mire. The cast is top-notch, but of course it is the Holmes-Moriarty roles that dominate. Rathbone, a little less aggressively hammy than he was to become in the later, modernized series at Universal, even takes time out to masquerade as a sea-sonic comic and fast-step his way through "I do like to be beside the seaside," while good old George Zucco, he of the long years of Holmes and of those light up like neon's every time he conveys of something especially nasty, is both a worthy intellectual opponent and one of the very best of a long line of screen Moriartys that have included Gustav von Seyffertitz, Iyn Harding, Ernest Torrence, Lionel Atwill and Henry Daniell. The climax does dispose of him in rather too ordinary a fashion, but it's such a good climax—set in the Tower—all height, shadows, spiral stairs and muffled breathing—that one hardly feels inclined to complain. Incidentally, the American Film Institute is mounting a definitive Holmes series in Washington next month, and will include such rarely seen items as the 1929 "Return of Sherlock Holmes" with Olive Brook—10 Minute Intermission—

ARSENE LUPIN (MGM, 1932; released 1933) Directed by Jack Conway; Screenplay by Carey Wilson, Leonard Coffee and Bayard Veiller from the original story by Maurice LeBlanc and François de Croisset; Camera, Oliver March; 8 reels

As with last week's "The White Sister", the directorial choice here is a strange one: someone like Sidney Franklin would seem far more suited to this elegant frou-frou than an action-oriented director like Conway. "Lupin" was a busjy lot in those days; the ideal director for such films would have been available, and in that light, MGM films were spared far more to star images than directorial styles. If a director was wrong for a project, he was promptly replaced. In any case, Irving Thalberg—much interested in salvaging Barrymore's career—took a close personal interest in this production and may well have brought in other directors at times. In any event, it's an elegant, witty and charming showcase for Barrymore. This was his first of several films opposite brother Lionel, and their jockeying for position is a joy to watch. Lionel, knowing he's the lesser actor, tries to out-MGM him at every turn. John, supremely confident, has the scenes of those purely physical tricks that he had mastered. At one point, having inhaled cigarette smoke, he releases it in well-spaced single-mostril puffs to punctuate Lionel's ranting! Apart from an obviously Beverly Hills-located car chase, the French atmosphere is well-maintained complete with sexual piquanances that, mild today, did cause censorship problems (overseas) in 1932. There have been only a small handful of lupin films, and this one, even without the final polish of a musical score, is far and away the best.——William K. Everson