Surprisingly, in view of its Muni-Davis star combination and its inherent interest as the inspiration for Raoul Walsh's later "They Drive By Night," "Border Town" is just as good at the revival houses - and on its infrequent television exposure, is often quite inexplicably cut. Admittedly, if one is seeing it for the first time, it doesn't live up to expectations, but it's a solid and satisfying work, if a rather disjointed one. The plot covers a great deal of ground, and one suspects that in script form it was probably longer and more ambitious. Somewhere along the line a decision seems to have been made to reduce it to a more melodramatic form, and this is somewhat confirmed by its title, not really inappropriate, but far more suggestive of a simple action film. "Border Town," a more precise title, is no more applicable really. It would have been had it been affixed to Orson Welles' "A Touch of Evil." As melodrama, it owes most of its strength to Bette Davis, who arrives on the scene quite late, but then proceeds to take over totally, playing some scenes for bravura, others with effective restraint. (The scene in which she gets the idea of murdering her husband is quite brief, but the interplay of emotions on her face - vindictiveness, fear, nervous excitement - is quite extraordinary.) Her big courtroom breakdown scene is rather surprisingly underplayed - but perhaps deliberately so, since Muni was the star, and after such a climax it would have been (and is!) tough slogging for him. Walsh made rather more of that scene when Ida Lupino played it in the unofficial remake. Playing opposite the extroverted acting style of Muni (who really gave a naturalistic performance only once, in "I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang") creates enormous problems for a strong but disciplined actress like Davis. It may be because of this that Warners teamed them only twice, and in both films (the other was "Juarez", in which she did not share scenes with Muni) contrived to have her go mad - one of the only ways of matching the exuberance of Muni's style. The print of "Border Town" is brand new and fully complete, though apparently made from a new dupe negative, and misses some of the stark contrast of original prints. The pleasant score as usual pillages contemporary Warner music, with especially frequent use made of "I'll String Along With You" from "Twenty Million Sweethearts", though whether its application is meant ironically or not is a matter for conjecture.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

THE MILLIONAIRE (Warner Brothers, 1931) Directed by John G. Adolfi Scenario by Julian Josephson and Booth Tarkington from "Idle Hands" by Earl Derr Biggers; Camera, James Van Trees; 82 minutes

With George Arliss, Evalyn Knapp, David Manners, Florence Arliss, Bramwell Fletcher, James Cagney, J. Parrell MacDonald, Noah Beery, Tully Marshall, J.C. Nugent, Ivan Simpson, Sam Hardy, Charles Grapewin, Charles Evans, Ethel Griffies, Ben Hall.

After the relatively high-pressure Muni-Davis film, this typical Arliss vehicle may seem relaxed and bland indeed - but now our audiences know exactly what to expect from Arliss, and the pity is that by now we've run all of the best of them, though there are some interesting lesser ones left that we'll get to in time. "The Millionaire" is actually remarkable in that it is not too long and oddly enough that one was written by an author of thrillers (Mary Roberts Rinehart) in a rare relaxed mood, just as this one was written by Earl Derr Biggers between Charlie Chans. It's predictable but civilised, and we suggest you just sit back and watch Arliss and his company of stock players go through their paces. Cagney has only one, but typically dynamic, scene as a salesman; some day it might be interesting to put together a compilation of all such single scenes of an actor making a major impression as a salesman. Such a compilation would have to include not only Cagney here but also Max Miller in "Barnes It". Like "Border Town" (and indeed, most Warner properties) "The Millionaire" was later remade, somewhat different in mood but still very entertaining, as "That Way With Women" with Sydney Greenstreet an ingratiating reincarnation of Arliss. The good supporting cast of "The Millionaire" includes David Manners and Bramwell Fletcher, both resting up before their trials in "The Hummy", and the always charming Evalyn Knapp.

--- Wm.K.Everson ---