Based on a well-thought-of novel of W.R. Burnett, which apparently was an
intelligent study of the conflicts in the life of a compulsive gambler, the
resulting film, it must be admitted, is a surprisingly shapeless affair in
which sympathies are continually fluctuating. Too, it builds to a climax which
never really arrives; the film just finishes. It's unfair to be too demanding
of films that were never intended as more than useful and satisfying program pictures, and
director Green knocked off seven respectable films that year —
which was strikingly interesting "Gentlemen Are Born" — so obviously "Dark
Hazard" was shot to knock off a good deal of thought or care. It's good
enough in its basic material for one to wish it could have been real better, but
somewhere along the line it got diverted into a Robinson vehicle, given him
opportunities to snarl out tough lines or to start slugging, even though it
isn't a crime melodrama. The one real casualty of the film is Genevieve Tobin,
who as always gives a graceful and intelligent performance. By rights, hers
is the character that should get all the sympathy, but it's manipulated by
contrivance and not much logic to shift sympathy over to Robinson. Too, there
would be a good case for the loss of Robinson's losing Tobin to a
race dog (even though Glenda Farrell's is not a minor compensation
admittedly), but it's all so shallow that there's little chance for emotions to
thrive. However, like all Warner films of this type, it's fast, slick and efficient, and highly enjoyable regardless of shortcomings. The
score incorporates the "Honeymoon Hotel" melody from "Footlight Parade" and
the film was remade in 1937 as "Wine, Women and Horses" with Barton MacLane and
Ann Sheridan. Apparently all the press releases issued at the time included
Henry B. Walthall's name in the cast, since he is listed in all the reference books
(under the film, and in his own credit column) and even the NY Times review
includes his name in the cast. However, his name does not appear on the main titles of
the film, and he isn't in it, so presumably his role was either cut prior to
release (easy enough, since it's a very episodic film) or possibly even
eliminated before being shot.

--- Intermission ---

PRIVATE DETECTIVE 62 (Warner Brothers, 1932) Directed by Michael Curtiz
Scenario by Rian James from an original story by Raoul Whitefield; Camera,
Tony Gaudio; 67 minutes. NY premiere: Radio City Music Hall
With William Powell, Margaret Lindsay, Ruth Donnelly, Gordon Westcott, James
Bell, Arthur Hohl, Natalie Moorhead, Hobart Cavanaugh, Sheila Terry, Theresa
Harris, Renee Whitney, Irving Bacon, Georges Renavent, Eddie Phillips, Joan
Malley, Charles Sedan, Charles Lane.
(Note: print bears a tv title of "Man Killer", to avoid confusion with
Warner's 1939 "Private Detective".

Made about six months earlier than "Dark Hazard", "Private Detective 62" shares
a couple of things in common with it. One, it is a somewhat shapeless (though
far better written and directed) film that becomes essentially a
vehicle for its star; and two, it was again one of seven films that director
made that year. (Curtiz' others in '32 included such specials as
"20,000 Years in Sing Sing" and "The Mystery of the Wax Museum"). It's an odd
film, surprisingly short, again perhaps not reaching its fullest potential.
On the other hand, rather than griping that it's not a bigger picture, one should
perhaps rejoice that a mere 67 minute film can cram in so much. It starts out
in a moody, highly stylised fashion, seems to change directions into typical
Warner channels, and then switches to being a biting, hard-bitten film
again for its latter sections. The one thing it lacks is humor and this
is very typical of Curtiz, a good company man who shot EXACTLY what he was
given. If his script and cast provides humor, as in "Jimmy the Gent", he makes
the most of it. If it's not there, he gets along without it. One can imagine
that if Wellman or Del Ruth had shot this film, the first thing they'd
done would have been to send out a rush call to use Allen Jenkins, Red Sparks
or Frank McHugh for a couple of evenings as Powell's sidekick, and to use them,
and some snappy lines, too. They'd probably have also taken a brisk pace. Ruth Donnelly
is on hand and she tries, but her role is really there only for the sake of comic
punctuation. A minor flaw however, and the film is too good to make one want
to quibble. Margaret Lindsay afficionadoes will find her here at her MOST British,
afool and aristocratic, and the film has many pre-Code and depression references
to add flavor and period. The title by the way (or at least, the 62) is never
explained, and it may have been just a last-minute device to avoid confusion
with another film that was a companion picture to, "The Kennel Murder Case".
which Powell & Curtiz made at virtually the same time. One real surprise: the
constant usage of Rodgers and Hart's "Isn't it Romantic?" (from 1922's "Love Me
Tonight") as theme music. Since Paramount used it ad infinitum through the years,
it's odd indeed to hear the Warner orchestra saving away at it here.

Program ends: 10:59

--- William K. Everson ---