In the late 40's, during one of Britain's regular financial crises, and with the rash years of internationally successful prestige films behind them, The Rank Studios launched a series of doubtful ventures, including two which were intended to serve the additional purpose of training new players and directors. They were initially called "Independent Frame" productions, the name being a grandiloquent term for back projection and other trickery. The idea was to make films almost entirely in the studio, using prefabricated sets, a maximum of rear projection, and simple stories of a nationalistic nature, films that could get their money back in the home market alone. Most of them were abysmal pictures, their characters were abysmal, their的故事 was wasted. Although this film's projection devices were of high quality and often quite ingenious. Apart from one good little short film called "Floodtide", little worthwhile came out of this policy. "Poet's Pub" is somewhat of an offshoot of this soon-abandoned group, still economical, still being made by the same producer, but branching out rather more and certainly getting out of the studio into genuine fresh air and open skies. It's an unmemorable film (not quite the same as being a forgettable film), but a most enjoyable one while it's unrolling. It has charm, and since it is not ambitious, there's a pleasant sense of relaxation about it all. It's both witty and wacky, with good dialogue — and a good cast to deliver it — amusing slapstick, plus the delights of Madame Grenfell (seen in a much bigger role in next week's "The Happiest Days of Your Life") and the natural charm of (then) new coming Rona Anderson. She was one of the newer British stars of the period who never quite made the grade as a big boxoffice name, but who was constantly busy, useful and gentle, almost the Madeleine Carroll of budget movies. She married actor Gordon Jackson, and is still a fairly regular fixture on the London stage, primarily in bedroom farce and romantic comedy. Although "Poet's Pub" wasn't a blockbuster in England and certainly wouldn't have been one here either, it was nevertheless quite superior to a number of lesser Rank comedies, such as "Haven Bond" (Paul Osborne, Camera; Joseph Ruttenberg; Music, Frank Warman; 9 reels). With Lionel Barrymore, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Beulah Bondi, Una Merkel, Bob Waterston, Gilbert Roland, Henry Hall, Richard Macaulay. It's not a Rebel without a Cause, and is a lightweight comedy, but a most enjoyable one while it's on the screen. It's a pleasing, civilised little film and we think you'll be glad to make its acquaintance exactly 30 years after its production.

** 10 Minute Interruption **

On Borrowed Time (XX, 1959) Directed by Harold S. Bucquet; produced by Sidney Franklin; screenplay by Alice D.G. Miller, Frank O'Neill and Claude W. West from the novel by Lawrence Edmund Watkin and its stage dramatization by Paul Osborne; Camera: Joseph Ruttenberg; Music, Frank Warman; 9 reels. With Lionel Barrymore, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Beulah Bondi, Una Merkel, Bob Waterston, Gilbert Roland, Henry Hall, Richard Macaulay. It's not a Rebel without a Cause, and is a lightweight comedy, but a most enjoyable one while it's on the screen. It's a pleasing, civilised little film and we think you'll be glad to make its acquaintance exactly 30 years after its production.

Depending on one's attitude when one sees it, "On Borrowed Time" is either a lovely and moving fantasy — or a somewhat perversive piece of work. Generally, the former seems to prevail, since the film's plot, its performances and its gentle (if manufactured and occasionally over-produced) sincerity pull one into a receptively emotional state of mind. If one looks at it in an even remoter intellectual manner, it begins to crumble and even becomes offensive. If this happens, one is aware of two things: first, the subconscious channel for the film's duration, enjoy it to the full, and revert to a rational appraisal afterwards.

It may ways a very typical Louis B. Mayer regime picture, it's ironic that the film actually betrays most of the ideals that that regime stood for. Mayer and company felt that they had a sincere property with something worthwhile to say, and may not even have been too concerned about it being a major commercial success. And yet while emotionally it seems to propagate all of the elements of American and familial devotion of which Mayer was such an adherent, intellectually all of those elements are neatly staked in the film, and coupled with it are all of the story's gossips, hypocrites and petty nominal villains. Respect for old age and wisdom gets quite a wallop in the person of Grampa, who despite loveable old Lionel Barrymore, is really an incredibly selfish person. Far from least, the film literally states that it is better to be dead than alive — not just under certain circumstances, but under all circumstances. While this may be a comforting philosophy (especially when faced with the idea of extreme age or acute affliction), it hardly seems a very constructive one at (continued overleaf).
time: America was still emerging from the depression, and the threat of war was just over the horizon, for it not only seems to justify escapist but even encourages it.

Yet with all of this, it still works as a humanistic, often very amusing and frequently very moving piece of emotionalism. Some moments, as for example the death of Seunah Bondi, are so poignantly done that they approach classic stature. Not all of it is as consistent as it might be. Elly Malony's age of an aunt would be justified if more of the film had that same exaggerated fairy-tale quality. But while the visuals and the studio sets (particularly MGM's rather alarming view of heaven) do lend themselves to this universality, the rest of the performances are for the most part restrained and realistic. One major defect is the changing of the Cramps role (played on stage by Dudley Digges) into a typical Barrymore role, a change heightened by the taming down of some of the novel's (and especially the play's) mildly saucy dialogue. Admittedly, in 1959 a few of the lines might have upset the Production Code a little, but even then they were tasteful and added a little more depth and reality to the role. However, the major defect is the obvious blubbing machine, Bob Watson, who, alas, was employed at this time mainly for his ability to screw up his pudgy little face and unleash a veritable Niagara of tears. (One suspects that no- nonsense Michael Curtiz, fed up to the teeth with his blubbing in "Jogge City" contrived or at least hastened that scene where Watson is dropped to his death by a runaway horse!) Doubtless with the benign approval of Mr. Mayer, Master Watson is given his head here, and this key performance is alternately cute, coy, bretty and maudlin—almost succeeds in alienating the audience single-handed. (Whether or not that Bill Watson's ingenuity and his involvement with the contemporary "The Biscuit Eater" is still a beautiful job.) Watson is really the one major liability of the film, and it isn't the role. The child, with almost identical action and dialogue, emerges in a thoroughly engaging fashion in Watkins' original novel. Still, Mayer's own presence and Watson's physical presence notwithstanding, these Capra-ness capers still have the power to move, and certain elements come from MGM's prime traditions of marshalling all the resources of camera, music and acting to wring a tear from the emotional situation. If I seem a little irked at the film's shortcomings it's probably because it used to move me on the same level as "Of Mice and Men"—and it is unflattering in later years to find that one's emotions could be manipulated so easily by basically superficial techniques. "Of Mice and Men" still works superbly on both emotional and intellectual levels, whereas "On Borrowed Time" (like "Lost Horizon" of a couple of years earlier) now seems limited to the heart rather than the mind—although that in itself is no minor achievement.

The film probably represents the style and innate taste of producer Franklin, rather than director Buquet, a Britisher who had only just graduated from MGM shorts, and was the resident house director for the Dr. Kildare series. Few of his later films had even the surface emotional gloss present throughout "On Borrowed Time." The film's history in Europe is rather interesting. Since romances and fantasies about death ("Peter Ibbetson" for example) have usually done better in Europe than domestically, it is likely that the very fact that Billy Bevan left it uncut, and with some anticipation, helped prevent it getting into release. In England it was banned for many years by a then curiously rigid censor who had unassailable but indefinable ideas about "taste," especially where religion was involved. Also a film dealing so exclusively with death was thought to be ill-timed in those early war years. When it finally was released in England many years later, it was with the "H" [for Horrific] certificate, which was then the only certificate possible to keep a film under 16 away from realistic. It opened in a secondary London theatre with a much-cut-down version of Dieterle's "Mtenessie Johnson" (likewise held up, though for different reasons). Reviews were good, and the critics deplored the "H." Since it was not a horror film, and that label would keep away the very audience that would enjoy it most, it had practically no distribution at all, and vanished after a couple of months of limited bookings. After the war, MGM had too many big unreleased properties available for one so inauspicious a bag of tricks—and even got posthumous release and attention and may well become a startling cause célèbre for the Cahiers du Cinema contingent in years to come.

A final thought: after years of seeing Death personified in grim, expressionist and even glamorous fashion in such films as the Swedish "The Phantom Chariot," the German "Destiny" and Hollywood's "Death Takes a Holiday," it's rather reassuring here to find that Death is really like a proper, punctual, English gentleman. Sir Cedric Hardwicke's superb performance and flawless diction, combining warmth with the barest suggestion of menace, is not only comforting but quite pulls the rug out from under Lionel's usual swastikaproof bag of tricks.

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Program Ends Approx. 10.30

Please note: Since I will be out of town next week, next Friday's program will start promptly at 7.30 without an introduction. Notes will be available as usual of course.

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William K. Everson ---