Tonight's program couples two orphans rather curiously but, we hope, successfully. Initially both films were planned to supplement others; "Three Faces West" for example would have made an interesting contemporary follow-up to MGM's Kentucky-pioneering epic "The Great Meadow", a plan that was scuttled because MGM couldn't guarantee the print. So the only - and very tenuous - link between the films, other than their basic programmer-status similarity, is the opportunity to see two major Western stars, Buck Jones and John Wayne, in decidedly non-traditional roles.

THREE FACES WEST (Republic, 1940) Directed by Bernard Vorhaus; Screenplay by F. Hugh Herbert, Joseph Moncure March, Samuel Ornitz and Doris Anderson; Camera, John Alton; Assoc. Producer, Sol C. Siegel; Music, Victor Young; 80 mins.; (Produced under the title "The Refugee").


Wayne in an overnight star thanks to "Stagecoach" the year before. Republic was about to reap a bonanza with him - safely - and economically-under contract. He had been allowed to move into two more historical epics opposite Claire Trevor, "The Dark Command" and "Allegheiry Upising", and was now settling down to a string of fairly routine "A" films at Republic while the big ones were done on loanout to Paramount, MGM and Universal. "Three Faces West" - its title changed from "The Refugee" to suggest, not entirely fraudulently, that it was part of the big new Western cycle - shows signs of having been assembled rather hastily, partly to exploit Wayne, and partly to cash in on the publicity accruing to "The Grapes of Wrath". Speeded-up production and editing allowed Republic's film to go into release the same month as John Ford's. However, Republic go Steinbeck one better, their social crusade not only calling attention to the plight of the dust-bowl farmers, but also other problems arising directly out of the war. For Republic however, it was a small and intelligent little enterprise. Director Vorhaus, formerly associated only with "B"s and programmers in both film, finds it occasioning surprisingly well, and holds himself nicely in check when his Republic training must have urged him to let go with an all-out brawl or some other action. There's just enough to keep the film moving (and to provide customer-attracting scenes for the trailer!) but not enough to topple it over into melodrama. Only the too facile writing that provides a no-time-wasted happy ending really reveals the standard Republic modus operandi at work. Wayne is good, and his role is an interesting one, already showing elements of the type that forthright screen image that was slowly evolving. John Alton, that film noir cinematographer par excellence has space and dust to deal with this time rather than sleazy underworld dens and wet streets, but his photography is fine as always, while Victor Young's score is another plus factor. A virtually unknown film because it doesn't provide the dynamic Wayne image that is now expected, it is still a solid and pleasing little film.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

CHILD OF MANHATTAN (Columbia, 1932; rel: 1933) Directed by Eddie Buczell; Screenplay by Gertrude Parcell from the stage play by Preston Sturges; Camera, Ted Tetzlaff; 73 mins.;


Nancy Carroll's first film under her new contract at Columbia, following a prolific Paramount period, is no let-down except perhaps in terms of production values. Reviews at the time were exceptionally good, as they deserved to be, praising the film both for Nancy Carroll's excellent performance and for the film's careful adherence to the popular Preston Sturges play. And Edward Buczell, a director as much associated with minor product as Bernard Vorhaus, comes through equally well, taking good material and turning it into a very warm and moving little film. Preston Sturges gets in some typical brittle one-liners, but ending really reveals the standard Republic modus operandi at work. John Boles in a (for him) fairly traditional role is a little more animated than usual, though occasionally he seems to miss the point of a good Sturges line and almost throws it away. Buck Jones reminds us again what a good straight actor he could be, though the brawl sequence - while it does serve a narrative point - was probably more designed to keep the western fans happy. Although the print is complete and corresponds to the original release longer, it does appear to have had a solid chunk removed prior to release. The switch from seduction to, in the very next frame, a vengeful family reaction (with Jane Darwell again Carroll's mother, as she had been in "Hot Saturday") is just too abrupt. Clearly material here was deleted including, alas, Betty Grable who appears in stills for the film but only has one short scene, too brief a scene certainly to justify billing in a one-shot starring western. Fans of the western stars also get a glimpse of Matthew Betz and Edward Le Saint, all of whom have substantially more footage. However, the plot, while sprightly and honest in its writing, isn't spectacularly original - and it may have been that removal of footage at that point cut down on motivational complications and kept the story moving briskly.

--- William K. Everson

Program ends: 10:23
Discussion follows