THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD (Universal, 1935) Directed by Stuart Walker; Associate Producer, Edmund Grainger; Screenplay by John Balderston, Gladys Unger, Bradley King and Leopold Atlas from the unfinished novel by Charles Dickens; Camera, George Robinson; Special Effects, John Fulton; Musical Score, Edward Ward; Asst. Director, Phil Karlson; 97 mins. With Claude Reins (John Jasper); Douglas Montgomery (Neville Landless); Heather Angel (Rosy Bud); David Manners (Edwin Droux); Valerie Hobson (Helena Landless); Francis L. Sullivan Rev, Septimus Crisparkle; Zeffie Tilbury (Opium den hag); Ethel Griffies (Mrs Twinkleton); E.B. Clive (Thomas Sapsea); Walter Kingsford (Hiram Gregwoul); Forrester Harvey (Durdles); Vera Harklad (Mrs Tope); Elsa Buchan (Mrs Tisher); George Ernest (Deputy); J.M. Kerrigan (Chief Verger Tope); Walter Brennan, Will Geer (Villagers); Louise Carter (Mrs Orstparkle); Harry Cording, D'Arcy Corrigan (opium addicts); Anne O'Neal (Maid); Lloyd Whitlock (guest).

Made in 1935, both the peak and the climactic year for the first big horror cycle, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" falls curiously between the "Horror" and the "Mystery" schools. Originally intended as a Karloff vehicle, it was put into production when Universal still expected big things of their "Great Expectations", also directed by Stuart Walker, but which ultimately proved disappointing. The grim (and surprising) opium delirium opening, the wild storm and the use of the old "Dracula" crypt set are reminders of its horror origins, yet it probably works best as an uncommonly good Dickens adaptation. Although made on an extremely economical budget by today's standards (reportedly less than $226,000!), it was an ambitious production for Universal; bypassing their standard European village set, they constructed a large-scale English village square, itself based on footage and photographs taken for that purpose in Rochester, England. Its main exploitation peg of course was its alleged running down of clues to approximate the way Dickens intended to finish the story. Actually, in this sense while it is satisfactory and possibly faithful to a projected Dickens solution, it is somewhat unimaginative - especially as Dickens left notes indicating that he was mulling three quite different endings, one involving Indian mysticism. It was good showmanship to make the most of all this, but actually showmanship is a little lacking in the film itself: Reins is quite obviously the villain from the word go, and Douglas Montgomery's disguise is revealed to the audience before it has time to be worked for any real suspense. But the handsome production values, the genuine Dickensian feel, and the first-rate work of many supporting actors, several of them British, make it a most enjoyable and satisfying film to watch, and a surprisingly little known one. Even in the '50's, when the NT Shakespeare Company revived the property as a musical, this original saw but little revival activity. A recent (apparently handsome but fairly sullen) British movie remake got a good review in "Variety" but hasn't yet appeared here, nor has more positive news about a bigger-scale American remake. (One envies the old-timers who might have been around in London in 1914 when a mock trial of Jasper was staged at Covent Garden, to try to settle all the theories put forward in several books subsequent to Dickens' death, with G.K. Chesterton playing the Judge and George Bernard Shaw dominating the jury!)

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

THE SECOND WOMAN (United Artists, 1951) Directed by James V. Kern; A Harry Popkin Production, produced by Norm Briskin and Robert Smith; Screenplay by Briskin and Smith; Camera, Hal Mohr; Music, Nat Finton; 91 mins. With: Robert Young (Mark Cohlan); Betsy Drake (Ellyn Foster); John Sutton (Keith Ferris); Morris Carnovsky (Dr. Hartley); Henry O'Neill (Ben Sheppard); Jean Rogers (Dodo Ferris); Raymond Largay (Major Badger); Shirley Ballard (Vivian Sheppard); Vidi Reaf (Secretary); John Gallaudet (Mac); Jason Robards sr. (Stacy Rogers); Steve Geray (Balthasar Jones); Jimmy Dodd (Mr. Nelson); Smokey Whitfield (porter); Cliff Clark (Police Sergeant)

Like its co-feature, "The Second Woman" (released in Europe as "Ellen") is a mixture of styles - it starts out very much like "Rebecca", both in its locale and in its key relationships, and then slowly slips into the mould of the later, more restrained film noir, concentrating on characterizations rather than visual style. It is a good film to watch: Hal Mohr's cinematography and Boris Leven's design are both major assets. And its understated dramatics create their own kind of suspense: unlike last week's "Footsteps in the Dark" the identity of the villain is not obvious from the outset, and his motives are more complex. Producer Popkin, who had made the classic noir "D.O.A." never quite got back to that level again, but "The Second Woman" was a very respectable effort; with a bigger name cast and a more dynamic director, it might have been a big hit. As it was, it was received with respect but no undue enthusiasm, and its early parallels to "Rebecca" tended to work against it, with both critics and audiences, who were then led to expect something that they didn't get. They tended to overlook that what they did get was different and quite original in its own way, and worth paying attention to. Nevertheless, "The Second Woman" gets a second look this evening. (Director Kern made but a handful of films; this was his only foray into noir territory).

Program ends approx. 10:45
Brief discussion session follows.

--- William K. Everson ---