

## Document Citation

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THE WHITE TIGER (Universal, 1923) Direction and original story by Tod Browning; scenario by Browning and Charles Kenyon; Camera, William Fildew; 75 mins approx.  
With: Priscilla Dean (Sylvia Donovan); Wallace Beery (Count Donelli); Raymond Griffith (Roy Donovan); Matt Moore (Dick Longworth)

Tonight's two films pair well together in that they are both Universals from 1922/23. However, "The Kentucky Derby" holds up well on its own not too ambitious level, whereas "The White Tiger" is a disappointment, hence its shunting into an "Archive Night" framework. Because it is a Tod Browning, and because so many other apparently lost Brownings have surfaced in the past 20 years, there is, certainly, an academic reason to see it. Also, both of tonight's films are extremely rare; whenever they are shown (which is not frequently) as at the Museum of Modern Art's Universal cycle many years ago, or at the Paris Cinematheque's similar cycle, it is these two prints that are always shown. And since "The White Tiger" was a rather shabby print to begin with, we felt that if we were going to show it at all, it should be as soon as possible. (Although choppy and clearly missing bits of scenes, it is substantially complete, and not far short of the original running time). Although most of the MGM Tod Brownings now available again are disappointing, they are at least reasonably glossy and polished, and in comparison with them "The White Tiger" has always seemed rather primitive. However, considered side by side with the Browning-Priscilla Dean "Under Two Flags", also fairly recently rediscovered, it now seems decidedly less primitive. Moreover, it also confirms that Browning's basic story patterns (and he tended to borrow and re-use a great deal) were set up early in his writing/directing career, and that the later and more famous Chaney vehicles showed little sense of real development or progress - other than benefitting from the persona of Chaney himself. As with "The Show", "The Blackbird" and many others, "The White Tiger" starts with a bang. It is pictorially and dramatically exciting, and sets up an interesting group of characters and relationships. There is a hint of the macabre, and the roots of themes which will crop up again and again with Browning, at least until as late as 1936's "The Devil Doll", one of his best pictures. (In fact the more one sees of Browning's silents, the more one tends to feel that his best films are his often under-rated talkies). But - as with so many of his silents - once Browning has tantalized us with his opening reels, he lets it all spiral downhill, and two-thirds of the way through (e.g., "The Show", "Outside the Law" and others) contrives to get all of his protagonists locked up in a confined space, and literally talk their way to a climax -- disappointing enough in a talkie, but doubly frustrating in a silent. However, it has its academic interest, not least in its cast. It's incredible how Raymond Griffith, given a modicum of pantomimic (and not even comedic) material, can make a film suddenly spring to life. Priscilla Dean's huge popularity is hard to understand; a harsh and uninteresting actress, she seems totally unsuited to sympathetic roles, and possibly needed von Sternberg to work on her the magic he bestowed on Evelyn Brent and Betty Compson. Moreover, the other Browning-Dean films that survive ("Under Two Flags", "The Virgin of Stamboul") are singularly unexciting, and only her "A Cafe in Cairo" (an independent, directed by Chet Withey) has the color, excitement and exotic adventure that her films for Browning were supposed to have.

----- William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 10.35.  
Short discussion session follows

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