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Port of seven seas, Whale, James, 1938
The great Garrick, Whale, James, 1937
The road back, Whale, James, 1937
Remember last night?, Whale, James, 1935
One more river, Whale, James, 1934
By candlelight, Whale, James, 1934
The kiss before the mirror, Whale, James, 1933
Impatient maiden, Whale, James, 1932
Waterloo Bridge, Whale, James, 1931
Journey's end, Whale, James, 1930

Universal Director



JAMES WHALE

"It's alive! It's alive!"—*Frankenstein* (1931). First came the shot of a huge dead hand stirring feebly on the operating table; then the breathless cutting from full shot close-up, bringing us face to face with the hideous creature turning slowly round in the doorway; and finally the magical heart-stopping moment as the Monster suddenly reaches up to clasp the sunlight streaming down from the skylight. With *Frankenstein* two stars were born, and Universal's horror series was guaranteed a long and happy life.

So alive was the Monster, in fact, that neither Boris Karloff nor James Whale ever really managed to shake off its image. As a master of the macabre, Whale needs no introduction: his brilliant visual flair, his inquisitive concern for the private lives of his monsters, and above all his devastating streak of black humour, have deservedly immortalised *The Old Dark House*, *The Invisible Man* and *The Bride of Frankenstein* alongside *Frankenstein* in the horror pantheon. Slightly ashamed of his success in a despised genre, Whale saved his soul by undermining horror with humour, and in so doing created a kind of delirium uniquely his own. No one who has seen *The Bride of Frankenstein* is likely to forget the exquisitely funny yet ineffably macabre moment when Dr. Praetorius, turning from his panic in a dank vault to see the Monster lowering menacingly, graciously remembers his manners: "Oh, I thought I was alone. Good evening! Have a cigar? It's my only weakness".

This perverse mixture of social *savoir faire* and role-playing, reappearing in different forms and to different degrees in Whale's work, is the bizarre unifying factor in an oeuvre which ranges over the whole spectrum from drawing-room melodrama (*One More River*) to screwball comedy (*Remember Last Night?*), anti-war propaganda (*The Road Back*), swashbuckling adventure (*The Man in the Iron Mask*) and lavish musical (*Show Boat*). A psychiatrist could doubtless have a field day tracing Whale's effects to such causes as his snobbery (he went to considerable lengths to deny his working-class origins), his vanity (he was born in 1889, not 1896 as the reference books state; he died in 1957), and the fact that his Hollywood reputation as a "distinguished man of the English theatre" was based largely on one lucky strike with *Journey's End*.

At all events, Whale's mocking awareness of how lives are built on lies – whether the social proprieties of *One More River*, the romantic fantasies of *The Kiss Before the Mirror* or the theatrical myths of *The Great Garrick* – make his films such a fantastic treasure-trove of stylish wit that their consignment to oblivion seems incredible. Viewed today – with a few exceptions made when Whale was battling against an indifferent front office after the Laemmles sold out their interests in Universal in 1936 – they remain as vividly alive as his own *Frankenstein* monster.—Tom Milne.



Mon 25 Aug 6.15

Journey's End

Opening out R. C. Sherriff's play only to the extent of a chiaroscuro introduction to the war zone and a few interludes in no man's land, Whale's first film is fascinating primarily as a record of his own phenomenally successful stage production. Time has not been altogether kind to the strangulated English cast, but Sherriff's vision of how idealism died in the mud of the First World War still comes over with passionate sincerity. U.S.A. 1930/With Colin Clive, David Manners.



Tue 26 Aug 6.30

Waterloo Bridge

The only one of Whale's films hitherto unavailable for reassessment. Based on Robert Sherwood's play about an American soldier's wartime romance with a London prostitute, it was remade in 1940 with Robert Taylor and Vivien Leigh in the parts played here by Kent Douglass (later Douglass Montgomery) and Mae Clarke. Quite well received at the time but buried in favour of Mervyn LeRoy's remake, it offers Bette Davis in a small part. U.S.A. 1931.



Wed 27 Aug 6.30. 8.45

Frankenstein

Perhaps the most celebrated horror film ever made, subjected to countless parodies, plagiarisms and imitations, but rising majestically above it all. Unique in Whale's work in that the horror is played absolutely straight, it has a weird fairytale beauty not matched until Cocteau made *La Belle et la Bête*. As Carlos Clarens wrote, "In the light of later films, there is little gruesomeness in *Frankenstein*... Its terror is cold, chilling the marrow but never arousing malaise." U.S.A. 1931/With Boris Karloff, Colin Clive, Mae Clarke.



Thu 28 Aug 6.15. 8.30

The Impatient Maiden

A charming comedy about a romantic innocent who, acquiring a veneer of cynicism as a divorce lawyer's secretary, concludes that marriage (to a struggling young doctor) isn't worth the trouble. Not quite up to being a scarlet lady, she finds herself trapped in a sexual limbo between ravening wolf and respectful fiancé. Sharply sophisticated, the comedy is firmly anchored in a poverty-row milieu as tenderly observed as in Fejos' *Lonesome*. U.S.A. 1932/With Mae Clarke, Lew Ayres.

Tue 26 Aug 8.45

The Old Dark House

The ultimate in old dark house movies, adapted from a novel by J. B. Priestley and stranding a group of travellers in a remote Welsh homestead where the inhabitants are gripped, over and above their own uncontrollable hostilities and eccentricities, by an inexplicable terror which eventually erupts all over the place from a peculiarly sinister source. Basically a *jeu d'esprit* in which comedy of manners is edged into tragedy of horrors, the film never puts a foot wrong. U.S.A. 1932/With Boris Karloff, Charles Laughton, Raymond Massey, Melvyn Douglas.



Sat 30 Aug 4.00. 6.15

The Kiss Before the Mirror

Visually one of Whale's most stylish films, adapted from a play by Ladislaus Fodor in which a lawyer, increasingly obsessed by his client's confession that he murdered his wife because a "kiss before the mirror" mysteriously revealed her infidelity, gradually finds himself being drawn into a hallucinating repetition of the experience. Whale's direction, particularly of the crucial mirror scene, is so hypnotic that one completely forgets the basic implausibility of the situation. U.S.A. 1933/With Frank Morgan, Paul Lukas, Gloria Stuart.



Sun 31 Aug 4.00. 6.15. 8.30

The Invisible Man

With some spectacular special effects, not least the marvellous ending in which footprints mysteriously appear in the snow outside a remote farmhouse to give the game away, Whale gives the Invisible Man a splendid run for his money. Typically, however, it is the consequences of invisibility, rather than invisibility itself, that intrigues him: it's a cold and hungry world, the hero laments, when you can't wear clothes and food shows up visible even when the stomach doesn't. U.S.A. 1933/With Claude Rains, Gloria Stuart.



Wed 3 Sep 6.15. 8.30

By Candlelight

A dazzling display of romantic confidence trickery which takes on Lubitsch in his own territory. Convinced that he too can be a Casanova, a butler seizes his chance when his aristocratic employer goes underground to avoid an importunate mistress, but discovers that upstairs and downstairs aren't quite the same thing. Delightful in its complications and malicious social implications, the whole film – designed as a theatrical charade in which the butler casts himself above his station – fairly glitters with wit. U.S.A. 1933/With Paul Lukas.





Thu 4 Sep 6.15. 8.30

One More River

A glowing example of how to turn English drawing-rooms and stiff upper lips into the stuff of tragedy. Diana Wynyard and Frank Lawton are perfect as the married lady and nice young man kept apart by the barriers of convention; but what really astonishes is the skill and sensitivity with which Whale, adhering strictly to the social rules, manages to suggest the still waters of passion slowly coming to the boil under the surface. U.S.A. 1934/With Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Colin Clive.



Fri 5 Sep 6.15. 8.30

The Bride of Frankenstein

The fourth, last and most delirious of Whale's horror films. Finally pressured into providing a sequel to *Frankenstein*, Whale went back to Mary Shelley for the delicious absurdity of the scene where the Monster learns to speak ("Alone, bad! Friend, good!"), stirred in the hideously epicene Dr. Praetorius as a maker of homunculi ("While you dig in graves, I grow my creatures"), and topped the whole irresistible creation with Elsa Lanchester's frizz-wigged Bride hissing with disappointed lust at her mate U.S.A. 1935/With Boris Karloff, Colin Clive.



Sat 6 Sep 4.00. 6.15

Remember Last Night?

Emerging from a party which echoes the wilder excesses of Feuillade's vampires, the cast find themselves embroiled in a murder mystery made even mysteriuser by alcoholic memories which dredge up such clues to the crime as an image of the heroine perched on a diving-board in a white cloak crooning "I'm Dracula's Daughter!". Parodying the detective thriller in a dazzling cascade of gags, this brilliant divertissement eventually takes off as pure surrealism. U.S.A. 1935/With Constance Cummings, Robert Young.



Sun 7 Sep 6.15. 8.30/Wed 24 Sep 6.15. 8.30
Show Boat

Although saddled with a grossly sentimental ending and a soppy hero (Allan Jones), *Show Boat* is a stylish and very creditable job of work by Whale. The moments when it sparks into something more all belong to Helen Morgan, truly magnificent as the star-crossed Julie (though given disappointingly little to do). You haven't lived until you have seen her sing "Bill", leaning against the piano with face and hands vibrantly alive with the tragedy of the song. U.S.A. 1936/With Irene Dunne, Paul Robeson, Charles Winninger.

Mon 8 Sep 6.15. 8.30

The Road Back

Erich Maria Remarque's sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front* (shot partly on the same sets), following the survivors of the First World War's battlefields back to a Germany torn by revolution and nascent Nazism. Not much liked at the time, it now reveals a political awareness surprisingly mature after the naivetés of *All Quiet*. The overriding sense of *angst* is lightened (but not lessened) by some marvellous Whale grotesques among the minor characters. U.S.A. 1937/With John King, Richard Cromwell.



Tue 9 Sep 6.15. 8.30

The Great Garrick

A delightful theatrical in-joke, elaborated from the fact of Garrick's visit to the Comédie Française as guest star and the fiction of a plot by Beaumarchais to discredit the upstart Englishman thought to be planning to teach the French how to act. Poking gentle fun throughout at the theatre and its mystiques, Whale turns *The Great Garrick* (his first film away from Universal) into a stunningly elegant exercise in illusionism, featuring some of his most entrancing grotesques. U.S.A. 1937/With Brian Aherne, Olivia De Havilland.



Wed 10 Sep 6.15. 8.30

Sinners in Paradise/Hello Out There

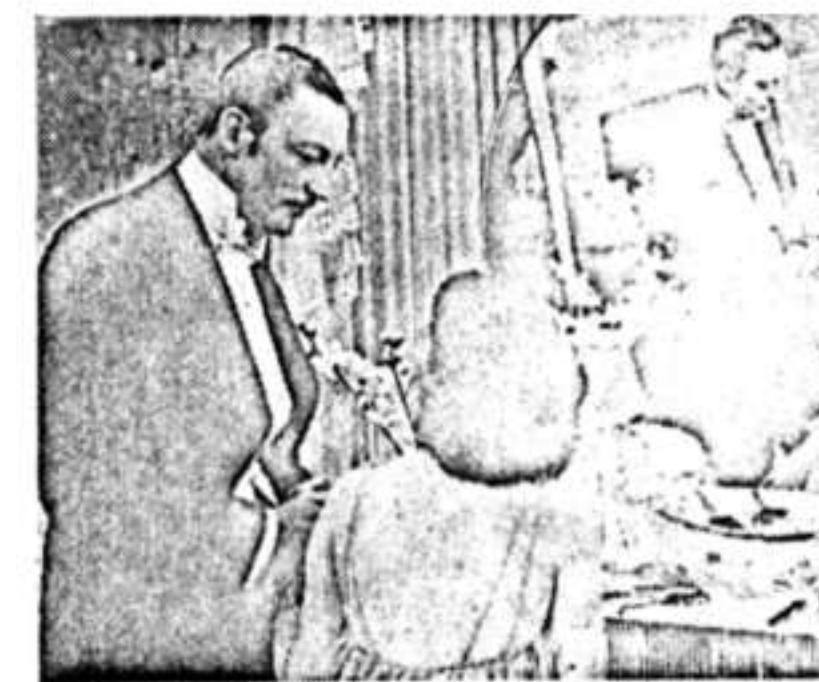
Take a plane-load of assorted characters, subject them to a disaster, and then strand them on a desert island: the well-worn formula gets treatment to match from Whale in *Sinners in Paradise*. But *Hello Out There*, his last film — excised from the portmanteau film *Face to Face* and never released — is a fascinating expressionist exercise which almost succeeds in overcoming the whimsy of Saroyan's playlet about a prisoner calling to the unfeeling world outside his cell. U.S.A. 1938/With John Boles, Bruce Cabot; U.S.A. 1949/With Harry Morgan.



Sun 14 Sep 6.15. 8.30

Wives Under Suspicion

A remake of *The Kiss Before the Mirror*, switching the setting from Austria to America and giving the story a sardonic edge (as well as credibility) by turning the hero into a 'hanging' District Attorney who chalks up his victims on an abacus. Fascinating to see how Whale, tailoring the subject to his own tastes, starts it off as wisecracking comedy but still manages to make the 'kiss before the mirror' sequence a strange and hallucinating focus for a crisis of conscience. U.S.A. 1938/With Warren William, Gail Patrick.





Mon 22 Sep 6.15. 8.30

Port of Seven Seas

Since the accents and settings are half the battle in *Marius, Fanny and César*, this attempt to cram Pagnol's trilogy into a very American portmanteau was obviously doomed from the start. Even so, Preston Sturges contributes a literate script, Whale directs with as much conviction as possible in the circumstances (which include some heavy mugging by Wallace Beery), and Frank Morgan's performance as the gentle, self-effacing Panisse is an unqualified success. U.S.A. 1938/With Maureen O'Sullivan.



Wed 24 Sep 6.15. 8.30

The Man in the Iron Mask

Almost as elegantly stylish as *The Great Garrick* and with Louis Hayward excellent as the royal twins, *The Man in the Iron Mask* is Hollywood swashbuckling at its best. One moment of pure horror when the bad twin is finally encased in the grisly iron mask – "I can feel them growing, they'll strangle me" he shrieks, realising that there is no way for him to trim his hair or beard – is also pure Whale. U.S.A. 1939/With Joan Bennett, Warren William, Alan Hale.



Sat 27 Sep 4.00. 6.15

Green Hell

An exotic jungle melodrama, graced by some weird sets and even weirder dialogue, in which a group of adventurers cope with buried treasure and poisoned arrows in the intervals of fighting for the favours of a singularly wooden Joan Bennett. So bad that Whale must have had his tongue in his cheek while coaxing George Sanders to repeat his impossibly 'English' lines and George Bancroft to sing "Home on the Range" for the umpteenth time, it is all really rather fun. U.S.A. 1939/With Douglas Fairbanks Jr.



Sun 28 Sep 6.15. 8.30

They Dare Not Love

One of Hollywood's slightly embarrassed contributions to the war effort, *They Dare Not Love* begins electrifyingly with a montage of dark, glistening streets, scurrying feet, furtive hands exchanging guns, as the Nazis prepare to overrun Austria. Subsequently turning into a soulful romance, it never quite recaptures this initial impetus, thanks mainly to George Brent's stolid unbelievability as an aristocratic figurehead behind whom all Austria is expected to rally against the Nazi threat. U.S.A. 1941/With Martha Scott, Paul Lukas.