"ON SUCH A NIGHT" (Paramount, 1937) Directed by E.A. Dupont; produced by Emanuel Cohen; screenplay by Doris Halkoll and William L TAM from an original story by Morley F. Cassidy, S.S. Field and John D. KIower: Camera, Charles Schoneman; Art Director, Ward Immen; Special effects, Fred Jackman; Musical score by Ernst Toch; musical direction, George Stoll. 7 reels

We spent some time on the enigmatic career of E.A. Dupont in our notes for "Moulin Rouge" a little less than a year ago, so there is no need to cover the same ground again here. "On Such a Night" however is a correspondingly enigmatic film; not a good one certainly, but a fascinating one. It's far too elaborate a film, with too much crassly talent behind the cameras, to be just a vehicle for its cast indicates that it could never be intended as an A. On the whole it smacks more of a salvage job — getting the most out of a property on which money had already been spent, but for which enthusiasm had waned. Frankly it looks as though it had been planned for production much earlier in the 30's, perhaps as a kind of all-star dramatic film in the manner of "If I Had a Million". Quite clearly the Alan Howbray role was written for W.C. Fields; not only have all the Fieldian lines been retained, but Howbray even plays it more in his style, complete to traditional Fields grimmness, than in his own style. Nick Monte presumably was called in to substitute for Carl MONTI when fields would either refuse to do the role or Fields wouldn't let her! (The Montis were presumably sisters, and their career seems to parallel that of the Roberti sisters; one girl more vivacious than the other, one career trying to take over unsuccessfully when the other dwindled). It's as much fun to conjecture what "On Such a Night" might have been as to enjoy it on its own rather misfire grounds, but it's still a most interesting little work.

Grant Richards, as always, is a rather dull hero, but the rest of the cast more than makes up for his lack of color. Eduardo Ciannelli has some superb lines and plays the slimy villain with great gusto, and the handling of the Negro contingent would give the NAACP convulsions today. Although it must be admitted that it isn't really very helpful or inspiring of them to sing a mournful rendition of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" to speed the hero on his way while he's out battling an aphroic fight to save all their lives! The camerawork is stylish, and the special effects handsomely done, and all in all it's a most curious footnote to the history of the film in the mid-30's.

"THE ROAD BACK" (Universal, 1937) Directed by James Whale; produced by Charles R. Rogers; Associate Producer, Edmund Grainger; Screenplay by R.C. Sheriff & Charles Kenyon from the novel by Erich Maria Remarque; Camera, John Hesell and George Robinson; Music, Daithi Tionkiin; 9 reels.

Even allowing for the fact that last-minute cuts made to satisfy the German government weakened the climax, "The Road Back" is not as good a film as one would like it to be. It was both an artistic and boxoffice disappointment in 1939, and the years haven't changed that, although our knowledge of Remarque's original makes it even more of an interesting film. Whale obviously always cared more about making films of great visual style than in making social comments here the scenes of social unrest in post-war Germany clearly excite him only because he can bring Paul Pepe's old "Broadway" crane camera into play for some exciting overhead movement shots. He copies Milestone's lateral tracking of the battlefield "exterior" have a typical Whale-Gothic look, and he cunningly re-decorates one of his old "Snowboat" sets. His old "regulars" — Atwill, Frye, Walcott, and the rest— are cast in roles more particularly the inept John King, who is responsible for most of the film's weakness. As a sequel to "All Quiet on the Western Front" it is structurally quite well done, although most of the principals died in the original and have to be merely referred to here, but as a film it can hardly compare with it. It's handsomely made, with most expensive production values and care over such details as coothing, but it fails because it lacks the passion that would show that Whale — or Universal — really believed in it as an important contemporary comment rather than as a potential boxoffice success. Whale's handling of its visual and more superficial aspects makes it commendably worth seeing and studying, but more particularly worth remembering. However, it's good to have such a rare one back with us.