"A KISS BEFORE THE MIRROR" (Universal, 1933) Directed by James Whale 
Screenplay by William Anthony McGuire from the play by Ladislaus Fodor; 
camera, Karl Freund; edited by Ted Kent; 6 reels 
With Nancy Carroll, Frank Morgan, Paul Lukas, Gloria Stuart, Jean Dixon, 
Walter Pidgeon, Charles Grapewin, Donald Cook, Allen Connor, Walis Clarke, 
May Boles, Reginald Mason, Christian Rub, Dick Cramer, Francis Ford, Ernie 
Adams, Charles K. French, Mary Gordon. 

"WIVES UNDER SUSPICION" (Universal, 1936) Directed by James Whale; Associate 
Producer, Edmund Grainger; Screenplay by Nyles Connolly from the play by 
Ladislaus Fodor; Camera, George Robinson; Music, Charles Previn; 7 reels 
With Warren William, Gail Patrick, Constance Moore, Ralph Morgan, William 
Lundigan, Cecil Cunningham, Samuel S. Hinds, Jonathan Hale, Milburn Stone, 

Normally, playing a remake side by side with the original would be an 
academic exercise only. However, these two versions of the same story are 
sufficiently different to make the repetition fascinating rather than 
irksome, and in addition the comparison offers a striking illustration of 
the changes that took place in Hollywood over a mere five year period. 

When "A Kiss Before the Mirror" was re-discovered by the American Film 
Institute a few years ago, opinions were sharply divided. Many, as we felt 
that the atmosphere of Whale's best films, and certain. The nearest one to 
be considered one of the Nine Great Kinds of films of the early 30's, along with 
Lubitsch and Mamoulian. The opposing faction found the film frankly absurd, 
and as with the Marx Brothers - it appears that there was no moderating 
faction in between. 

Perhaps not quite enough was known about Whale's style, even those few years 
ago. Now, with **"BY CANDLELIGHT"** under our belts, we understand better 
his unique style of cinematic theatricality, and viewed under those terms 
"A Kiss Before the Mirror" survives rather well. It is highly sustained, and 
it is deliberately theatrical. Indeed, a stage version of this story would 
probably have been handled with a good deal more realism. From the very 
beginning, with its patently artificial garden set, through those typical 
Whale apartment sets - constructed so that the camera can sweep horizontally 
through the walls - and on to the police station and cell scenes, to which 
Whale adds a touch of the Gothic merely by re-using his sinister old 
"Frankenstein" sets - he is obviously aiming for high drama, not for realism. 
The acting of the principals is often conducted on a note of sustained 
near-hysteria, and even Paul Lukas' heavy eye makeup is of a theatrical 
rather than a filmic stylisation. Yet all of this intensity is neatly 
counter-balanced by the restraint of the supporting players - particularly 
Jean Dixon and Charles Grapewin, both of them given pithy dialogue to provide 
a well-disguised comedy relief. (Incidentally, after Menjou's savage anti-
feminist onslaughts in last week's "The Front Page", the ladies get quite a 
rough going-over in this film too) It would be difficult to sustain such 
dramatic intensity over a long period, and the film is wisely quite brief. 
And despite its theatricality it is, as with all Whale movies, pure film 
all the way, and stunningly photographed by Karl Freund. 

"WIVES UNDER SUSPICION" makes a number of changes, dictated both by 
censorship and by changing public tastes. The venue is shifted from Vienna 
To America, and Warren William (a recent Philo Vance and Perry Mason) is 
made a prosecuting rather than defending attorney. An added opening sub-plot 
places the film in the genre of crime melodrama, and by the time audiences 
realised that they were not after all going to get another gangster movie, 
Whale's skill had neatly hooked them. Even while the basic plot line then 
remains the motiviation and the explanations are all different, 
asylum being non-existent - or at least, non-acceptable - in the Hollywood 
of 1936. Whale's own directorial style is different too, aiming more for 
kind of glossy realism (acceptable since the film is played out against a 
background of rich living) than rich theatricality. The acting is toned down, 
as is the photography - here in the hands of George Robinson, a good, slick 
cameraman who photographed many of Universal's later horror films. But if 
less stylised, the photography is still thoughtful, with a frequent use of 
high-angle crane shots to inject a note of menace. The new opening reel has 
some of Whale's mordant humor which is not sustained throughout the rest of 
the film, and a definite minus is the over-emphatic and repetitive score. 
The (original used far less music, and then for a purpose). Some casual if 
unintended racism may raise a few eyebrows, and there's no doubt that the 
film is inferior to its inspiration. But knowing the restrictions of the 
period, it's still quite a solid film -- and much stronger if one hasn't seen the original. 

William K. Everson