THE NEW SCHOOL  
FILM SERIES 49: Program #4  
June 27, 1984

THE MAN WHO LIVED TWICE (Columbia, 1936) Directed by Harry Lachman
Screenplay by Tom Van Dyke, Arthur Strawn, Henry Altmus; Camera, James Van Trees; Special Effects, Kenneth Wheeler; 73 minutes
With: Ralph Bellamy (Jim Blake/Slick Rawley); Marian Marsh (Janet Haydon); Thurston Hall (Dr. Schuyler); Isabel Jewell (Peggy Russell); Ward Bond ("Gloves"); Naia Bryant (Mrs Schuyler); Henry Kolker (Judge Treacher); Willard Robertson (Insp. Logan); Edward Keane (Police Commissioner); Edward Le Saint (Judge) Ann Doran (Nurse) Franklyn Farnum (Juror)

Despite its sensationalist (though not inappropriate) title, a title that caused the film to be later on included in a tv horror-film package, "The Man Who Lived Twice" is and, primarily according to the picture's writer, a programmer, where the temptation to go overboard must have been considerable, obviously realised what a basically good story it was, since they remade it twice first as "The Crime Doctor" in 1943, and again ten years later as "Man in the Dark", one of the first of the 50's films. The story - of a callous killer turned into a useful citizen by a brain operation - obviously caused all sorts of problems for the censorship of the day. (If it hadn't been for the Code, the property might well have been handled in a better manner.) However, the solution is a rather neat example of outwitting and placating the code at one and the same time. Director Harry Lachman is surely one day due for a serious reappraisal; nobody is going to discover that he's a great unassuming genius, but his body of work is solid and off-beat. We've shown a number of his films here in the past, ranging from "Paddy the Next Best Thing", "Face in the Sky" and "Dante's Inferno" (as Frank Capra's Secret) - and he also did one of the most bizarre Laurel and Hardy films, Our Relations.

Ten Minute Interruption

THE MIRACLE MAN (Paramount, 1932) Directed by Norman Mleod; screenplay by Waldemar Young and Samuel Hoffenstein from the story by Frank L. Packard and Raymond S. Fosdick; Recorded on film by George M. Cohan; Camera, Davide Abel; 86 mins. With Sylvia Sidney (Helen Smith); Chester Morris (John Madison); Irving Pichel (Henry Holmes); John Wray (The Frog); Robert Coogan (Bobbie); Hobart Bosworth (The Patriarch); Boris Karloff (Nikko); Ned Sparks (Harry Evans); Lloyd Hughes (Thornton); Virginia Bruce (Margaret Thornton); Florine McKinney (Betty); Frank Darlen (Hiram Higgins); Lew Kelly (Parker); and Jackie Searle.

Preceded by a brief excerpt, apparently the only surviving material, from the 1939 version directed by George Ioslow Tucker, and starring Thomas Meighan, Betty Compson, Lon Chaney, J.M. Dumont (in the Ned Sparks role) and J.J. Dowling (as the Patriarch)

Unfortunately the original "Miracle Man" seems to have been long since lost, and while one can assume (from original reviews, and from those still around who remember it) that the first version was superior, this 1932 remake is still a powerful film. (The original was something of a labor of love, financially supported by its director and some of its cast who wanted to see it made despite studio conviction that it was not commercial, and sincerity of that type usually has a way of showing through on to the finished film.) The remake is still close enough to the silent period to be able to mix its religion and its melodrama in that skillful, tasteful way that seemed such a part of the 20's. Its bizarre plot has been preserved, and actually altered, its film is good too, having the "The Unholy Thre" and "The White Tiger" - although of course the original preceded them. There has been no move to update its mood or modernise the motivations. The film never attempts to explain the faith healing process, which has to be taken on trust, nor has the on-man hero been made more "acceptable"; indeed, in Morris' hands he is a little less sympathetic than in Meighan's. He "reforms" at the end, not through an almost-died faith, but because it is the only way he can keep his mistress, and lastly, the limited but most effective use of background music is done in the richly emotional style of the scores for silents. All in all, it remains a most satisfying film. Ned Sparks' wisecrackes are a little dated, though his performance is good, and after the moving miracle sequence at the midway point - done in a rich silent style, and entirely without dialogue - there is an inevitable let-down for a reel or so. By the end however, that lost ground has been recovered. Norman Meledo's unprimarily directs and gets a lot of its merits on the way, and gets some real zip into a fight scene. Sylvia Sidney, apart from giving a good performance, manages to be surprisingly sensual too. John Wray is quite astonishingly good, obviously basing his performance on Chaney's yet surviving the comparison. Robert Coogan, in his few scenes, wrings the heart as thoroughly as he did in "Skippy" and finally, dear old Boris Karloff is greasy and repellent in a variant of "The Mask", there is plenty of energy, but Sylvia Sidney undress through a keyhole, Hobart Bosworth by the way was a last minute replacement for Tyrone Power Sr., who died suddenly. Other than for some rather grim sound effects - bones snapping and popping as the cripple unwinds - sound and dialogue haven't really added to the overall effect, but surprisingly for such a fragile story, they haven't really harmed it either. Even though it gives away some of the story, we thought it more useful for comparison purposes to run the silent except first. Interestingly, for the Chaney biopic "Man at a Thousand Faces", the reconstruction of the miracle scene is clearly copied from the remake rather than the original - indicating that Universal were probably unaware of the existence of the excerpt.

Program ends approx. 10.20

M. K. Everson