BY CANDIELIGHT. (Universal, 1932; released 1934) Directed by James Whale. Screenplay by Mae Krely, P. Hugh Herbert, Karen De Wolf and Ruth Cummings from a play by Sigfried Giedion (later revised to a musical comedy by P.C. Wodehouse); Camera, John Mascally; Art Direction, Charles D. Hall; Music by Frank Harling; 69 mins. NY premiere: Roxy Theatre.

With: Elissa Landi (Mildred); Paul Lukas (Josef); Mils Aster (Prince Alfred von Rommer); Esther Ralston (The Baroness); Dorothy Revier (Countess von Rischheimen); Lawrence Grant (Count von Rischheimen); Warburton Gamble (von Fallin); Lois Janey (Ann)

We normally repeat only films after an approximately 15 year gap; faulty memory or the lack of a complete script caused me to forget that we had repeated this film some five years ago. But since realism came too late to effect a change, and it never seems to be shown outside of New School environs, we are letting it stand. Incidentally, a slightly ambiguous note in the above credits needs expanding: the original English-language translation was by Wodehouse, and that version served as the basis for the later musical revision.

Despite the fact that his most celebrated films - "The Old Dark House", "The Bride of Frankenstein" and "Show Boat" come from earlier or later years, there is a good argument for claiming 1931-34 as the peak years of James Whale's short but distinguished career. Over those two years he directed "The Invisible Man", "The Kiss Before the Mirror", "By Candlelight", "The Moreno Mystery" - a remarkable quartet of stylish, literate, tasteful and thoroughly cinematic works.

Lubitsch's "Trouble in Paradise" (1932) certainly marked the notion of elegant sophistication on the screen, but "By Candlelight" is a film very much in the same tradition if even more frothy and artificial. Cinderella tales like this were a dime a dozen in the depression years, and it does lack the ultimate smoothness of a Herbert Marshall or a Maurice Chevalier, but for the most part it works well. Initiation Lubitsch in content (and most of all in its opening), it nevertheless employs methods that are wholly Whale's. The virtually nonstop musical score, everdine perhaps, nevertheless is a constant reminder that this is not a real show, not to be taken seriously. Whale also includes some musical jokes, including the use of a familiar horror film actor's name (Roger Livesey) in a comic sequence, backed up by low-key lighting of an undistinguished (rather than horrifying) protagonist. Even Paul Lukas' stiffness is put to use for the film's good in a running gag wherein he, with well-timed mise en scène, repeats imperfectly the lines uttered earlier by the more experienced Asther, and aimed as calculated seduction. The film is as a whole perhaps more an exercise in applied directorial style than a classic comedy in its own right, but it's civilized, gentlemanly and sophisticated, all in less than seventy elegant minutes, so why be greedy and ask for more than that?

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

COTTAGE TO LET (Gainsborough-General Film Distributors, 1941) Directed by Anthony Asquith; Produced by Edward Black; Screenplay by Anatole de Grunwald and J. O. C. Ottom from the play by Geoffrey Kerr; Camera, Jack Cox. US release (unreviewed and virtually unacknowledged) by Monogram under the title "Bomboisle Stolen", 90 mins.

With: Leslie Banks (John Barrington); Alastair Sim (Charles Dimble); John Mills (Lt. George Perrey); Michael Wilding (Alan Trentley); Jeanne de Casalis (Mrs Barrington); Carla Lehmann (Nella Barrington); George Cole (Ronald Mitsgy); Frank Cellier (John Forrest); Wally Patch (Evans); Muriel Alist (Miss Perrey); Muriel George (Mrs Dimble); Ray Patrice (Mrs Truscott); Catherine Conroy (Mrs Dicks)

Although Britain was certainly making serious war films in early to mid-1941, the greater emphasis was on comedies, musicals, translations of wartime radio programs and light thrillers, with a wartime background. "Cottage to Let", based on a very popular London stage play, fitted exactly into this category (though director Asquith gave it some chilling moments) and was one half of one of the best double-trills released that year on the big Gaumont British circuit, the other half being "Hit the Roof", entirely on-scene screwball comedy "Road Show". "Cottage to Let" is the kind of property that would probably have been handed to Hitchcock if he were still with Gainsborough, though probably he would have removed much of the topical wartime comedy (evacuated children descending on rural homes) to concentrate on the suspense/mystery theme.

Asquith, as always, maintains the values that made it a theatrical hit, but also keeps it thoroughly cinematic ... the climactic disposal of the German spy is a moment of sudden, unexpected near-horror in a basically light film. The cast, mainly composed of people on the way up, is unusually strong, and it was this film that permanently lifted Alastair Sim from the ranks of stooge-comics and into a higher echelon of dramatic comedians. Here he's often typically droll, but is also surprisingly convincing when masquerading (or is he?) as a top German spy. Americans may be a little too much of Jeanne de Casalis as Leslie Banks' wife (she's an odd mixture of Millicent Dykes and Gracie Allen) it's because she had achieved (on radio) a huge new popularity as "Mrs Feather", a scatterbrained housewife. She had of course made other films, including "Nell Gwyn". She was also at one time the wife of Colin Clive - surely one of the oddest matrimonial matches in history. "Cottage to Let" is a bit stagey with some of its artificial sets and theatrical characters, but it comes to a strong (and convincing) melodramatic climax as it approaches its climax. Despite being such a huge commercial hit in its day, it was not especially well reviewed and is all but forgotten. It was also George Cole's first film, and the launching of his life-time association with Sim. --- William K. Everson

Program ends 10:30. Discussion period follows.

PS to "By CANDIELIGHT": I should have noted that the 1938 musical version (Cole Porter songs, with Clifton Webb and Lupe Velez) was titled "You Never Know", and also had a brief revival in the 60's. ---