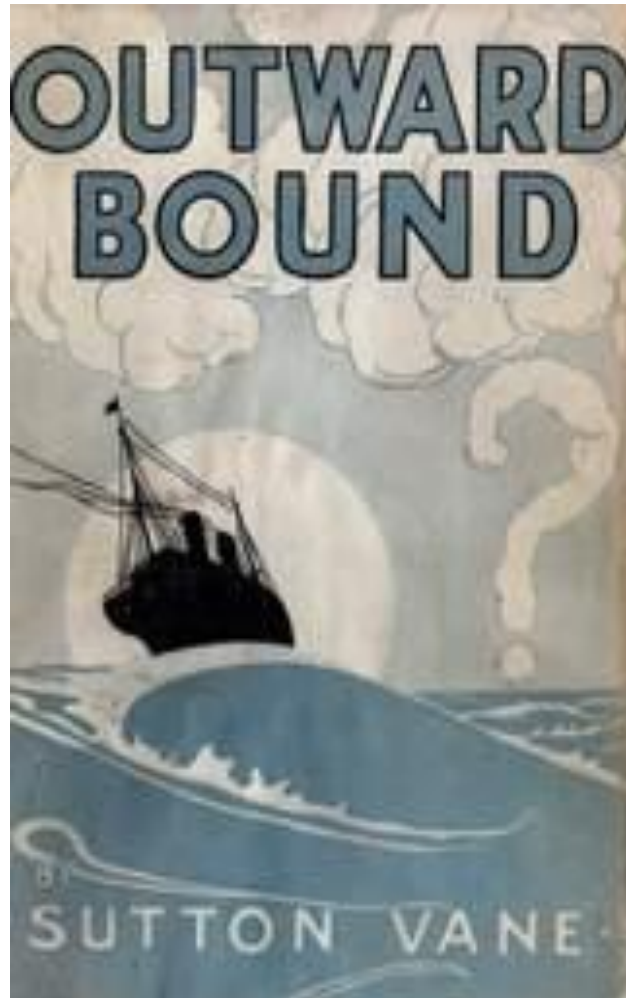


FILMS FANTASTIC 11

The Journal of the NFFF Film Bureau



This Issue
OUTWARD BOUND

Films Fantastic number 11 is published by Eric Jamborsky for the N3F Film Bureau.
mrsolo1@comcast.net

The 1920s are often remembered as The Jazz Age, for Flappers, Sheiks, and Vamps. For genre fans Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS and WOMAN IN THE MOON may come to mind. Then we have the films of Lon Chaney, the Man Of A Thousand Faces, such as PHANTOM OF THE OPERA or the now lost LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT. This was also the decade where Hugo Gernsback published the first magazine devoted to Science Fiction.

But there was another side to the decade. Following the unprecedented number of deaths in the First World War, followed by the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-1919. Of the Flu pandemic, according to the CDC, *“The 1918 influenza pandemic was the most severe pandemic in recent history. It was caused by an H1N1 virus with genes of avian origin. Although there is not universal consensus regarding where the virus originated, it spread worldwide during 1918-1919. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918. It is estimated that about 500 million people or one-third of the world’s population became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States.”*

As a result this decade witnessed the growth of Spiritualism and other doctrines by people who had undergone losses during that period. Among these was actor/playwright Sutton Vane (1888-1963). *“He [Vane] joined the British army in 1914, at age 26, and served until he was invalidated out due to malaria and shell-shock.[2] Vane was haunted by guilt over this event, and once he sufficiently recovered, he returned to the combat area as a civilian, appearing for the entertainment of troops near the front lines during the later phase of the war—he made a particular impression in performances of Bayard Veiller's 1916 hit *The Thirteenth Chair*, which he did on many stages with artillery bursting well within earshot. None of this would have been terribly important, but for the seriousness which the experience—of living on what felt like the edge of eternity—imparted to the young actor.”* (From Wikipedia)

As a result Vane wrote the play OUTWARD BOUND. This is a drama with well timed comic relief. The story involves seven passengers on an ocean liner, none of whom seem to know why they are there or where they are going. The only crew member is Scrubby, the ship's steward. At the end of act one it is revealed that the passengers are all dead and on their way to be judged. The play opened in London in 1924 and was a hit. It soon had a production on Broadway.

Author Sutton Vane not dated)

OUTWARD BOUND goes to Hollywood.

With the coming of sound plays became a valuable commodity in Hollywood, so it is not surprising OUTWARD BOUND was purchased for filming by Warner Bros. J. Grubb Alexander wrote the screenplay and the production was directed by Robert Milton and Ray Enright. Milton had directed the original Broadway production of the play and later operated an acting school whose students included Lucille Ball and Bette Davis. Enright started as an editor for Thomas H. Ince before directing his first film, TRACKED BY THE POLICE, starring Rin-Tin-Tin, the dog who saved Warner Bros. From bankruptcy. He was active up to the early fifties having directed a total of 77 films.



Ray Enright (left) with Richard Barthelmess, Marlene Dietrich, and Harry Carey during the production of THE SPOILERS (1942).

Robert Milton



The story is set entirely on an ocean liner in the ship's lounge, although for the film some shots were on the promenade deck or long shots of the ship in the fog. Scrubby (Alec B. Francis), the ship's steward, is behind the bar. A young couple, Ann and Henry (Helen Chandler and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.) enter, asking directions to their stateroom. As they exit Tom Prior (Leslie Howard) enters. It soon becomes obvious that the young man is an alcoholic. Soon he is joined by Mrs. Clivedon-Banks (Alison Skipworth), a wealthy dowager and first class snob, the Reverend William Duke (Lyonel Watts), Mr.

Lingley (Montagu Love), a wealthy industrialist, and Mrs. Midget (Beryl Mercer) a cockney charwoman.

As everyone settles in they begin to realize this is not a normal voyage. There is no division into classes, which horrifies Clivedon-Banks. Then no one can remember where they are going, or why. Tom Prior explores the ship and discovers there is no crew other than the steward. The ship appears to be sailing on its own. Then there is the mystery of the young couple who almost seem to know more than the others. The passengers true characters start to emerge. And despite all of the drinks he has consumed, Tom Prior is the first to realize their true situation.

From the original play script:

Tom. Yes, I am right, Scrubby. I am right, aren't I?
Scrubby. Right, sir, in the head do you mean?
Tom. You know what I mean.
Scrubby. No, I don't, sir. Right about what?
Tom. You—I--all of us on this boat.
Scrubby. What about all of us on this boat, sir?
Tom. We are—now answer me truthfully—we all are *dead* aren't we?
Scrubby. Yes sir, we are all dead. Quite dead. They don't find out so soon as you have, as a rule.
Tom. Queer.
Scrubby. Not when you get used to it, sir.
Tom. How long have you been—you know—oh, you know?
Scrubby. Me, sir? Oh, I was lost young.
Tom. I don't understand.
Scrubby. No sir, you wouldn't, not yet. But you'll get to know lots of things as the voyage goes on.
Tom. Tell me—tell me one thing—*now*.
Scrubby. Anything I can, sir.
Tom. Where—where are we sailing for?
Scrubby. Heaven, sir.
Tom. And Hell too; (pause) it's the same place, you see.

Curtain

Now, isn't that a great way to end act one? Fortunately the script is the same in the movie. No sense in messing things up, is there? I will go ahead and insert a personal note. One reason I am so fond of this scene is I played Scrubby in a college production of the play back about fifty years ago. My wife of 48 years played Ann in the same production, so I may be a bit prejudiced.



As the story progresses the other characters learn of their situation and informed they will be interviewed by The Examiner to learn their fates. Clivedon-Banks and Lingley believe their earthly status will give them an advantage, but the Reverend Duke and Mrs. Midget take a more realistic outlook. All Prior wants is to receive oblivion. Ann and Henry usually stand apart, always on the outside looking in.

At last the ship arrives at its destination and the Reverend Frank Thompson (Dudley Digges) comes aboard. Thompson (nicknamed Old Grease Spot) and Duke are friends, or were in their earthly lives. Duke is assigned to help the Examiner interrogate the others. Lingley and Clivedon-Banks are easily exposed as cruel, corrupt people and will face appropriate fates in this strange afterlife. Ann and Henry enter but are told as they are half-ways, they will not be interviewed. Prior admits he has lived a wasted life and is consigned to “the slums”. Mrs. Midget, destined for her Heaven in a cottage with a garden begs to be sent with Prior so she may help him finally reach his Heaven.

As she starts to follow Tom Reverend Thompson says, “You're a good mother, Mrs. Prior.”

Mrs. Midget. Blast you! How did you find out? Blast you! You'll never tell him, will you? Promise you'll never let him know.

Thompson. I promise.

Mrs. Midget. And you too, sir?

Rev Duke. I promise, of course.

Mrs. Midget. Thank you both You see, he mustn't even guess. Oh sirs, ain't it wonderful? He doesn't know me, and I've got him to look after at last. Without any fear of me disgracing him. It's 'Eaven, that's what it is. It's 'Eaven.

But what of Ann and Henry? Why are they left behind? Here we learn their story. They were unmarried and facing disgrace, so they committed suicide. Henry was trapped into a marriage, unable to escape. They learn half-ways are “the people who ought to have had more courage...to face life.” Now, like Scrubby, they are destined to sail back and forth for eternity.

Now we come to the question. Shall I give away the ending, the ultimate spoiler? **OUTWARD BOUND** is not available on DVD although there are some good quality home brewed discs out there. It does get occasional showings on TCM, for those fortunate to have it. So, daring all, here is the ending. Spoilers ahead!



Henry is pacing back and forth on the deck. Every time he passes the door into the salon the trip takes longer, until he no longer passes. He has been saved, but Ann is left behind on the ship. She calls pleadingly for him until he hurries in. Their pet dog broke the window allowing the gas to dissipate. Ann and Henry are alive, given a rare second chance. They hurry from the salon, returning to the world.

Of course a description is unable to capture the beauty of the story. The film did shorten the play somewhat, and as an early talkie the acting can be a bit stiff. Still it does a very good job overall and is worth seeking out.

Leslie Howard played Henry in London and on Broadway. Beryl Mercer, Dudley Digges, and Lyonel Watts played their roles in the Broadway production. Helen Chandler would soon be threatened by Bela Lugosi in **DRACULA** (1931).



Warner Bros. Remade **OUTWARD BOUND** in 1944 as **BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**. This film, unfortunately, was bloated and overblown, adding more characters and enough glitz to look like it had escaped from MGM. Henry is now a mature concert pianist, played by Paul Henreid, coming off a bit like Victor Laszlo from **CASABLANCA**. Ann was played by Eleanor Parker. Tom Prior is now Warners bad boy John Garfield, an actor who never turned in a bad performance. Scrubby is Edmund Gwenn, and the Examiner is Sydney Greenstreet. No problems with the cast, it is just overdone. It is still an entertaining film and is especially worth seeing for the magnificent score by Erich Wolfgang Korngold.



OUTWARD BOUND and **BETWEEN TWO WORLDS** have an interesting link with **THE MALTESE FALCON**. In the original 1931 film, later retitled **DANGEROUS FEMALE**, Dudley Digges played Casper Gutman, the Fat Man. In the 1936 remake, **SATAN MET A LADY**, Allison Skipworth played Madam Barabbas, the Fat Woman. (Let's face it, Warners never let a good property go to waste.) And in the 1941 version **THE MALTESE FALCON** (this is the famous one), Sydney Greenstreet, in his first film, played Kasper Gutman, the Fat Man.

In closing, let me offer my apologies for the delay in this mailing. We all have our stories of the current plague, I shall just say this was one of them. So, until next time, happy movie viewing.