



Good Morning, Boys!

Director: Marcel Varnel

Production Company: Gainsborough Pictures

Producer: Edward Black *

Original story: Anthony Kimmins

Screenplay and dialogue: Val Guest,

Leslie Arliss, Marriot Edgar

Photography: Arthur Crabtree

Editors: R.E. Dearing, Alfred Roome

Art Director: Vetchinsky

Music: Jack Beaver *

Music Director: Louis Levy

Sound: W. Salter

Studio: Gainsborough Studios

Cast:

Will Hay (*Dr Benjamin Twist*)

Martita Hunt (*Lady Bagshott*)

Peter Gawthorne (*Colonel Willoughby-Gore*)

Graham Moffatt (*Albert*)

Fewlass Llewellyn (*The Dean*)

Mark Daly (*'Arty' Jones*)

Peter Godfrey (*Cliquot*)

C. Denier Warren

(*Henri Duval, the Minister of Education*)

Lilli Palmer (*Yvette*)

Charles Hawtrey (*Septimus*) *

Will Hay Jr. (*Clarence*) *

Basil Mcgrail (*Watson*) *

Clive Dunn *

UK 1937

78 mins

35mm

* Uncredited

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Big Screen Classics

Good Morning, Boys!

Good Morning, Boys! was the first comedy Will Hay made with director Marcel Varnel and what was later to become his stock company of technicians and writers: Guest, Edgar, Crabtree, Vetchinsky and the rest. The contrast between this film and, say, *Windbag the Sailor* is marked. The style is now rich, full-blooded, confident. This was in part due to the director, Varnel.

Marcel Varnel was French born but educated at Charterhouse. He had worked in Hollywood and gained a considerable reputation as a stage director before going to Gainsborough.

In contrast to [William] Beaudine, who favoured a more loose system of shooting – he sometimes covered the action on three cameras at once – Varnel rigidly pre-planned his films. Every angle was worked out beforehand. Comedy was too serious a business to leave anything to chance.

Varnel and Hay worked closely with their scriptwriters. Marriott Edgar was under contract for Gainsborough, but Val Guest was brought in for *Good Morning, Boys!* He was working at the time, as a film critic for the *Hollywood Reporter*. Reviewing one of Varnel's films, he wrote 'If I can't do better than this with one hand tied behind my back, then I give up.' Varnel was in America at the time and cabled to Guest, 'All right. Write my next picture.' So without any previous experience in screenwriting, Guest threw up his job, came over to England, was put under contract to Gainsborough and helped to write Varnel's next film: *Good Morning, Boys!*

Although his name does not appear on the credits, Frank Launder was head of the script department at Gainsborough during the thirties and had a big hand in the majority of the Hay films.

To read these scripts is an education in the art of screen comedy. The writers knew exactly what the comedian wanted and they wrote specifically for him. The style is fast, hard-hitting and visual.

Good Morning, Boys! is firmly based on Hay's music hall sketch 'The Fourth Form of St. Michael's'. Here we find Dr Benjamin Twist in his natural surroundings – the schoolroom – trying to teach 'the sons of gentlemen' a rudimentary education. A classic example of the blind leading the blind.

Dr Twist represents everything we are taught to abhor; ignorant, sly, deceitful, cowardly, lecherous, yet by his determination to survive in a hostile, efficient world, Dr Twist gains our sympathy. We are with him in his perpetual rearguard action against the forces of authority.

Like all real comedy, *Good Morning, Boys!* goes deep. Besides the savage mocking of our Public School system – the bulwark of our civilisation – the film takes a shrewd swipe at our cherished sense of honour, 'playing the game' and all that. The hilarious examination scene, with all the pupils cheating like mad soon puts paid to that outdated code of honour. Dr Twist is a man who definitely does not play the game; he can't afford to, he is too busy trying to survive.

One of the central themes in Hay's humour is 'failure to communicate'. Standing up in front of a class, speaking authoritatively on a subject he hardly knows anything about, Dr Twist becomes a symbolic figure. Words no longer

Big Screen Classics

A Silent Voice Koe no Katachi

Mon 1 Sep 18:00; Sat 13 Sep 20:30; Fri 3 Oct 20:30

Être et avoir

Mon 1 Sep 18:10; Thu 11 Sep 20:30

Rebel without a Cause

Tue 2 Sep 20:50; Sun 14 Sep 12:30; Wed 17 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by Sarah Cleary, curator of Funeral Parade presents); Sun 5 Oct 12:30

Girlhood Bande de filles

Wed 3 Sep 18:10 (+ intro); Fri 3 Oct 20:45

Fame

Thu 4 Sep 18:00; Fri 26 Sep 20:25;

Wed 8 Oct 20:25

To Sir, With Love

Fri 5 Sep 18:15; Mon 15 Sep 20:50

Good Morning, Boys!

Sat 6 Sep 15:40; Tue 16 Sep 20:45

Wild Strawberries Smultronstället

Sat 6 Sep 17:20; Sat 4 Oct 12:00; Tue 7 Oct 21:00

Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom Lunana

Sun 7 Sep 12:00; Sat 4 Oct 12:40

Rushmore

Mon 8 Sep 20:45; Wed 17 Sep 20:55;

Sat 27 Sep 18:30; Wed 1 Oct 21:05

Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.

Tue 9 Sep 20:40; Mon 22 Sep 14:50;

Sun 5 Oct 18:20

The Breakfast Club

Wed 10 Sep 18:15 (+ intro); Sat 20 Sep 20:45;

Mon 29 Sep 20:50

Bad Education La Mala Educación

Fri 12 Sep 20:30; Thu 18 Sep 20:50;

Thu 2 Oct 20:45; Tue 7 Oct 18:15

I Flunked, But... Rakudai wa shitakeredo

Sun 14 Sep 15:55; Wed 1 Oct 18:30 (+ intro by

Professor Jinhee Choi, King's College London);

Tue 7 Oct 20:45

If....

Sun 14 Sep 18:15; Sun 21 Sep 11:50;

Wed 24 Sep 14:40; Mon 6 Oct 20:45

Full Metal Jacket

Fri 19 Sep 18:00; Thu 25 Sep 20:45;

Tue 30 Sep 20:45

School Daze

Wed 24 Sep 18:00 (+ intro by film critic

Kambole Campbell); Sat 4 Oct 20:35

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have any meaning. Ill-digested scraps of useless information are spewed forth. Finally trapped by his own ignorance, Dr Twist tries to bluster his way out.

In this film, the famous scene built around the question, 'What is a unit of electricity?' illustrates to the full Dr Twist's failure to communicate. He is driven mad by what he takes to be his pupils' ignorance. Though I have no wish to crowd these notes with important-sounding names, the similarity between Hay's humour and that of certain modern writers like Beckett and Ionesco is striking. The following extract from Ionesco's play *The Lesson* which also deals with a failure to communicate between pupil and teacher, illustrates this:

Professor: Listen. Here are three matches. And here is another one. That makes four. Now watch carefully. There are four of them. I take one away. How many do I have left?

Pupil: Five. If three and one make four, four and one make five.

Professor: No, that's not right. Not right at all.

The above dialogue could have come straight out of *Good Morning, Boys!* One can almost hear Hay saying 'No, that's not right' with appropriate sniffs and a screwing up of his eyes.

Hay was able to achieve this depth and subtlety of humour because, in reality, he knew precisely what he was doing and saying. Beneath all the double talk and stream of misinformation, there is a hard bedrock of fact. Will Hay, the man, was quite able to teach astronomy. Dr Twist, the comic creation, was not; he only had a few inadequate phrases to disguise his ignorance of the subject.

One of the characteristic traits of Dr Twist is that he is muddled in thought and speech. Much of the humour springs from this. Will Hay, the man, was extremely lucid. His short introduction to astronomy 'Through My Telescope' makes a complex subject clear and straightforward without in any way debasing it.

In answer to the difficult question, how do we distinguish between the various colours? Hay writes:

Supposing we are looking at a red rose. The rose is what we might call a 'wave-trap'. The pigment in the rose petals receives all the wave-lengths of the sun's rays at once, but it does not reflect them all. It arrests or absorbs all the various wave-lengths except one, i.e., the one which produces the sensation in our brain of red, and it reflects this wave-length to our eyes, with the result we see the rose by the colour produced by the wave-length. The buttercup absorbs all the wave-lengths but the one which produces yellow, and it reflects this wave-length to our eyes.

'Failure to communicate', 'satire on Public Schools', 'parody of the English honour system', these are some of the underlying themes of *Good Morning, Boys!* But though these are important and have their place, the most important question to ask of the film is, 'Is it funny?'

Yes, it is, tremendously.

Peter Barnes