

# Werewolf of London Profile

by David Morrison

*A template for werewolf movie folklore or an obsolete relic?*

When people talk about werewolf films, they tend to credit *The Wolf Man* (1941) for setting the ground rules for all other werewolf movies to follow. But *The Wolf Man* wasn't Universal Studios' first attempt at a werewolf movie, it was their third. Universal's first foray into the werewolf genre, was an 18-minute silent film called *The Werewolf* (1913). That film is now considered "lost" and no images from the film are known to exist.



*Werewolf of London* (1935) was Universal's second werewolf movie effort and was released just three weeks after *The Bride of Frankenstein* and six years prior to Lon Chaney Jr.'s appearance in *The Wolf Man* (1941). It is difficult for us to know just what 1935 audiences would have thought about werewolves as they entered the theatre. After all, this was the first feature length werewolf film and the story was not based on a book, as was the case with *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931). To understand how much groundwork *Werewolf of London* laid in establishing today's werewolves, it is interesting to take a look at the more common werewolf conventions of the time. Whilst there were many variations, you could become a werewolf:

- if someone placed a curse on you;
- if you were being punished by the gods;
- through family genetics; or
- if you "chose" to become a werewolf, through the use of magic or a spell, usually to exact revenge on someone.

*Werewolf of London* (1935) departed from these standard conventions in many ways and set the direction for future werewolf movies. Here are some of the changes, which this oldest surviving werewolf movie introduced:

## Bite Me!

In *The Wolf Man*, Maleva the gypsy woman will tell Larry Talbot, "Whoever is bitten by a werewolf and lives, will become a werewolf himself". In *Werewolf of London* botanist Dr. Glendon (Henry Hull), searches the Tibetan mountains for a rare plant, the *Mariphasa Lupina*, which is said to receive sustenance from moonlight. Just as Glendon finds the plant, he is attacked in the dark, by a wild animal (which later turns out to be Dr. Yogami, a werewolf) and is left with a nasty bite on his arm. Glendon is now afflicted with the curse.

## "Making-Up" Is Hard To Do

Jack Pierce originally planned much hairier make-up for *Werewolf of London* but was thwarted in his attempts. It has been reported that actor Henry Hull may have objected to heavy make-up appliances but for whatever reason, a more conservative make-up approach was taken. In the movie, we only see changes to Glendon's head and hands as the rest of his body remains covered. Jack Pierce 'sat' on the make-up he wanted to use, until 35 year old Lon Chaney Jr. walked into his department one day and said he had an appointment to be made up as the Wolf Man. While the Pierce/Chaney Wolf Man collaboration is reported to have had its share of conflict, Pierce's make-up gave Chaney the iconic Wolf man look. Henry Hull? Not so much.



Pierce's original WWOL Design



WWOL Final Film Version



Pierce's Lon Chaney Wolf Man

## Walk Like A Man

Universal's classic werewolves walked on two legs. No surprise for us today, but audiences in 1935 would have been expecting a wolf on four legs, albeit more powerful, faster and stronger than the human that transformed. The upright posture connotes intelligence and makes the werewolf even more frightening. Not only did these werewolves walk like men, but they dressed like men, too. Check out the very classy [transformation scene from Werewolf of London](#). And, check out some other classic lycanthropic transformations from [The Wolf Man](#) and [Frankenstein meets The Wolf Man \(1943\)](#).



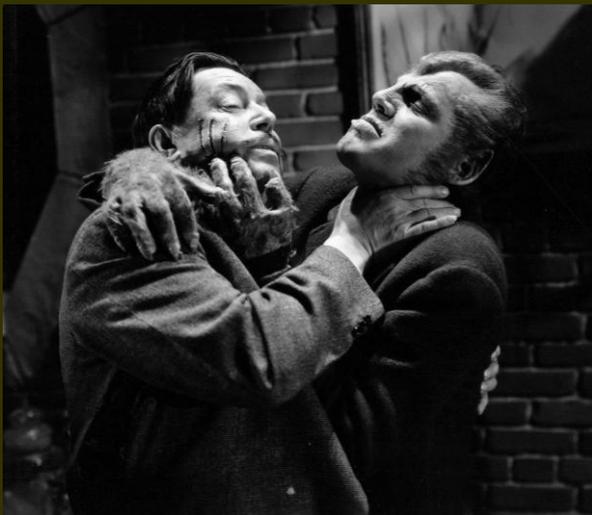
### Howling At The Moon

Back home in his laboratory, Dr. Glendon experiments on the *mariphasa* with his amazing art deco styled moonlight generator. He is visited by the strange Dr. Yogami, who tells him that the plant's essence is an antidote for lycanthrophia (sic). Some of the light from Dr. Glendon's moonlight machine falls across Glendon's hand and it immediately becomes hairy. With the full moon coming soon, Dr. Glendon takes a room at an inn where he can sequester himself away from loved ones. But without the antidote, his encounter with the full moon leaves him helpless.



### Lock me away!

Yogami warns, "...remember this, Dr. Glendon. The werewolf instinctively seeks to kill the thing it loves best." In Dr. Glendon's case, this is his young wife, Lisa, played by seventeen year old Valerie Hobson, who also played Dr Frankenstein's wife in *The Bride of Frankenstein* that same year. Dr. Glendon takes steps to lock himself away from his wife but each time, the full moon changes him and he is powerless to stop himself from killing. Fortunately, Lisa is always just out of reach. Dr. Yogami? Not so much. Yogami steals and uses the last of Dr. Glendon's *mariphasa* antidote. Dr. Glendon is now powerless against the effects of the full moon. But Dr. Yogami is now defenseless when Glendon the werewolf attacks him. Had Dr. Yogami intentionally left himself vulnerable? Or was this a lack of foresight on his part? Could Dr. Yogami, just as werewolves in other films, have decided that death was preferable to becoming a wolf even one more night?



### Thanks For The Bullet

No, not a 'silver' bullet; that would have to wait for another movie. In the closing moments of *Werewolf of London*, Glendon, the Werewolf, is shot and in his dying breaths, says "Thanks for the bullet...." He wanted to die, just as Larry Talbot would want to die in *The Wolf Man*, *Frankenstein meets The Wolf Man*, *House of Frankenstein* (1944), and *House of Dracula* (1945). That last film saw medical science relieve Wolf Man Talbot of his lycanthropy.



The Werewolf's final transformation and death

Next time you're in the mood for some classic "fur flying", pick up *Werewolf of London* and appreciate its unsung contribution to the werewolf movie genre.

Ahrooooooooooooo!