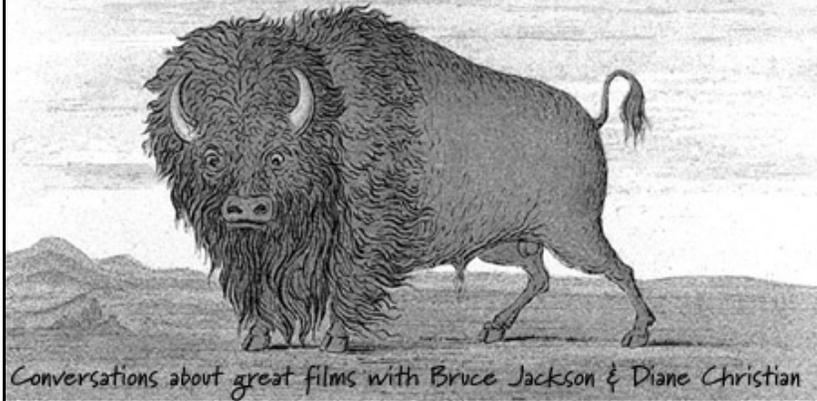


The Buffalo Film Seminars



JOHN HUSTON [John Marcellus Huston, 5 August 1906, Nevada, Missouri – 28 August 1987, Middletown, RI, emphysema] was a writer, painter, boxer, actor and, most famously, director. His first film is the classic *The Maltese Falcon* 1941. Soon after finishing it, he was in the army, making documentaries for the Department of War. One of those films – *San Pietro* 1945 – is one of the two or three best documentaries made by the US military during WW II. Another – *Let There Be Light* 1946 – so frightened military officials they kept it under lock and key for 25 years because they were convinced that if the American public saw Huston's scenes of American soldiers crying and suffering what in those days was called "shellshock" and "battle fatigue" they would have an even more difficult time getting Americans to go off and get themselves killed in future wars. One military official accused Huston of being "anti-war," to which he replied, "If I ever make a pro-war film I hope they take me out and shoot me." During his long career he made a number of real dogs e.g. *Annie* 1982, *Victory* 1981, *Phobia* 1980, and *The Macintosh Man* 1973, part of the price of being a director in the studio system. He also made films that regularly turn up on all major critics' lists of classics. Probably no director anywhere made so many films of major works of literature. Some of his fine films are *The Dead* 1987 based on James Joyce's short story, *Prizzi's Honor* 1985, *Under the Volcano* 1984, *Wise Blood* 1979, *The Man Who Would Be King* 1975, *The Misfits* 1961, *Moby Dick* 1956, *Moulin Rouge* 1952, *The African Queen* 1951, *The Red Badge of Courage* 1951, *The Asphalt Jungle* 1950, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* 1948 and *The Maltese Falcon* 1941. Huston directed both his father and his daughter to Academy Awards: Walter for *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and Angelica for *The Dead*. Huston was nominated for 14 Academy Awards: best director for *Prizzi's Honor*, *Moulin Rouge* 1952, *The African Queen*, *The Asphalt Jungle*; best screenplay for *The Man Who Would Be King*, *Heaven Knows*, *Mr. Allison* 1957, *The African Queen*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Sergeant York* 1941, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* 1940, best supporting actor for *The Cardinal*, 1963. He won Oscars for best director and best screenplay for *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. He was given the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award in 1983. He also won the Razzie for Worst Director for *Annie*.

STERLING HAYDEN (Sterling Relyea Walter, 26 March 1916, Upper Montclair, New Jersey – 23 May 1986, Sausalito, California, cancer) acted in war, gangster and adventure movies – and hated it. He was a real-life war hero and adventurer – and loved it. He got the "Hayden" after his father died and his mother remarried. His bio from IMDB: "Grew up in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., and Maine. Though very poor, attended prep school at Wassookeag School in Dexter, Maine. Ran away

March 2, 2004 (VIII:8)



The Asphalt Jungle (1950) 112 minutes

Sterling Hayden...Dix Handley
 Louis Calhern...Alonzo D. Emmerich
 Jean Hagen...Doll Conovan
 James Whitmore...Gus Minissi
 Sam Jaffe...Doc Erwin Riedenschneider
 John McIntire...Police Commissioner Hardy
 Marc Lawrence...'Cobby' Cobb
 Barry Kelley...Lt. Ditrich
 Anthony Caruso...Louis Ciavelli
 Teresa Celli...Maria Ciavelli
 Marilyn Monroe...Angela Phinlay
 William 'Wee Willie' Davis...Timmons
 Dorothy Tree...May Emmerich
 Brad Dexter...Bob Brannom
 John Maxwell...Dr. Swanson
 Directed by John Huston
 Script by Ben Maddow and John Huston, based on the novel by W.R. Burnett
 Produced by Arthur Hornblow Jr
 Original Music by Miklós Rózsa
 Cinematography by Harold Rosson

4 Academy Award nominations: Best Actor in a Supporting Role (Jaffe), Best Cinematography, Black-and-White, Best Director and Best Writing, Screenplay.

to sea at 17, first as ship's boy, then as doryman on the Grand Banks, as a seaman and fireman on numerous vessels before getting his first command at 19. He sailed around the world a number of times, becoming a well-known and highly respected ship's captain. At urging of friends, met with producer Edward H. Griffith who signs him to a Paramount contract. Fell for his first leading lady, Madeleine Carroll, and married her. Prior to Pearl Harbor, abandoned Hollywood to become a commando with the COI (later the OSS). Joined Marines under pseudonym "John Hamilton" (a name he never acts under), eventually running guns and supplies to Yugoslav partisans through the German blockade of the Adriatic, as well as parachuting into Croatia for guerilla activities. Won Silver Star and citation from Tito of Yugoslavia. Briefly flirted with Communist Party membership due to friendship with Yugoslav Communists. Returned to film work, which he despised, in order to pay for a succession of sailing vessels. As Red Scare deepens in U.S., he cooperated with the House Un-American Activities Committee, confessing his brief Communist ties. Ever after regretted this action, holding himself in enormous contempt for what he considered "ratting". Offered role of Tarzan as replacement for Lex Barker, but refused. Made headlines defying court order not to sail to Tahiti with his children following divorce decree. Published autobiography *Wanderer* in 1963, and novel *Voyage* in 1976, both to great acclaim. Cast as Quint in *Jaws* (1975) but unable to play due to tax problems. Died of cancer in 1986." Some of his other films: *Nine to Five* (1980), *Winter Kills* (1979), *King of the Gypsies* (1978), *1900* (1976), *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *The Killing* (1956), *The Last Command* (1955), *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) and *Virginia* (1941)."

SAM JAFFE (10 March 1891 NYC—24 March 1984, Beverly Hills) Bio from *Leonard Maltin's Film Encyclopedia*: "A slight, frail-looking man with wispy hair and large eyes, Jaffe didn't work all that much in Hollywood, but many of his character parts are among the most memorable in movie history. Originally a math teacher from the Bronx, he started acting in 1915 with the Washington Square Players, later moved to Broadway, and then to Hollywood, making his screen debut as the mad Grand Duke Peter in *The Scarlet Empress* (1934). He played the benevolent High Lama in *Lost Horizon* (1937), and achieved cinematic immortality as the native water boy (he was then 46), in *Gunga Din* (1939). Jaffe earned an Oscar nomination for his turn as the criminal master mind in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), and worked frequently in TV, where he was well known as Dr. Zorba on the "Ben Casey" series (1961-65).

JEAN HAGEN Bio from *Leonard Maltin's Film Encyclopedia*: "If she'd never played anyone other than squeaky-voiced Linda Lamont, the hopelessly vain silent-screen star of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952, for which she was Oscar-nominated), this attractive, talented blond actress would still rate a place in Hollywood history. A former drama major who worked as a theater usherette before getting acting jobs on radio and stage, she debuted on screen in *Adam's Rib* (1949, playing the femme fatale who disrupts Judy Holliday's marriage), and scored her first real triumph as the female lead in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). Unfortunately, neither MGM nor any of the other studios for which Hagen worked seemed able to provide her with roles and vehicles that might have made her a real star. She played Danny Thomas' wife in the 'Make Room for Daddy' TV series (1953-57)."

MARILYN MONROE (Norma Jean Mortensen, 1 June 1926, Los Angeles—5 August 1962, Los Angeles, drug overdose) is an icon. There have been other movie stars who have achieved iconic status (e.g. Garbo, Eastwood, Cooper), but Monroe transcends them all. She had her first of seven bit parts in *Dangerous Years* 1947. The seventh was in *Asphalt Jungle*, and that led to a key supporting role in *All About Eve* later the same year. She got good press for those two films, but they were followed by 11 more minor parts in minor films. In 1949, she had posed nude for a calendar; that photograph surfaced in 1953 as Hugh Hefner's first *Playboy* centerfold. That year was also the beginning of an eight-year period in which she would make ten films, seven of them good and five of them classics: *Niagara*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, all in 1953; *There's No Business Like Show Business* 1954; *The Seven Year Itch* 1955; *Bus Stop* 1956, *The Prince and the Showgirl* 1957, *Some Like it Hot* 1959, *Let's Make Love* 1960 and *The Misfits* 1961. In that decade she married and divorced baseball legend Joe DiMaggio (who wanted her to quit work and be a good wife) and playwright Arthur Miller (who wrote *The Misfits* for her). She offered to convert to Catholicism when she married DiMaggio but was turned down because she was divorced; instead, DiMaggio got excommunicated for marrying her, an action that was reversed by the 1962 Ecumenical Council. She converted to Judaism when she married Miller. She left 75% of her \$1.6 million estate to her acting coach, Lee Strasberg, and the rest to her psychiatrist. The licensing of Marilyn's name and likeness, handled world-wide reportedly nets the Monroe estate about \$2 million a year. Hugh Hefner bought the burial vault next to hers. The platinum blonde, like the name, was a Hollywood construct: she was born a brunette, and had her name legally changed to Marilyn Monroe in New York in February 1956.

W.R. BURNETT (25 November 1899, Springfield, Ohio—25 April 1982, Santa Monica, Ca) had a knack of writing novels that became classic films: *Little Caesar* 1931, *Law and Order* 1932, 1940, 1953 (the novel was *Saint Johnson*), and *High Sierra* 1941 (he wrote the novel and the screenplay). He also wrote dozens of other screenplays, many based on his own novels.

Contemporary review *NYTimes*: "From the very first shot, in which the camera picks up a prowling thug, sliding along between buildings to avoid a police car in the gray and liquid dawn, there is a ruthless authority to this picture, the hardness and clarity of steel, and remarkably subtle suggestion that conveys a whole involvement of distorted personality and inveterate crime. Mr. Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*, which brought him to the fore as a sure and incisive director, had nothing in the way of toughness on this film."

The Asphalt Jungle is essentially a reworking of elements already found in Burnett's *High Sierra*. In both book and film, Doc Riedenschneider, a criminal mastermind recently released from prison, determines to make one last, big score, then retire to a quiet life of wealth and obscurity....

In *The Asphalt Jungle*, Huston corrected all the problems that had so seriously marred his earlier—and quite similar—*We Were Strangers*. The film's lengthy, almost wordless robbery sequence set a new standard for suspense that has been copied, but seldom duplicated by virtually every caper film made since. Beyond this, however, once the heist has been pulled off and the thieves begin to fall out, *The Asphalt Jungle*, unlike *We Were Strangers*, takes off even more, becoming more suspenseful and more intriguing as we watch and wait for the cast of characters to do themselves and each other in. This too set a new standard, which has been matched, in my view, only once—by Jules Dassin in his French thriller, *Rififi*, which followed the Huston film four years later.

In addition to a tight script, tough direction—Huston's best since *Sierra Madre*—and Harold Rossen's stark and atmospheric photography (the film remains a classic *film noir*), *The Asphalt Jungle* benefits strongly from the fine ensemble work of its cast, which included Marilyn Monroe in her brief, but eye-popping, film debut as Emmerich's kittenish mistress. Sterling Hayden, who like John Garfield, was also having troubles with HUAC around this time, registers solidly as the alcoholic Dix, the quintessential Huston loser, as does Jean Hagen as his luckless girlfriend, Doll. Sam Jaffe received an Oscar nomination for his performance as Doc, but lost to George Sanders in *All About Eve*. Huston received nominations for his screenplay and direction, but lost in both categories to *All About Eve* as well.

Though the film's bold and meticulous portrait of criminals and their 'left-handed form of human endeavor' seemed to run counter to a number of tenets in the Motion Picture Code of the 1950s, Huston had little difficulty getting his script passed by Hollywood's self-censoring body, the Breen Office, except for one scene: Emmerich's suicide. As originally written by Huston and Ben Maddow, Emmerich calmly sits down and writes a note to his wife, then with equal calmness proceeds to blow his brains out. The Breen Office rejected the scene, however, because it implied that Emmerich was in full command of his faculties when he killed himself, a Code no-no. Huston countered that no one completely in his right mind opts for suicide, but his argument was rejected and he was forced to rewrite the scene. In the finished film, Emmerich attempts to write the

note, but becomes increasingly agitated by what he is about to do and kills himself without completing it. "It turned out to be a better scene for the change," Huston said later. "But I wouldn't recommend trying to outfox the motion picture code as a way to achieve storytelling success."

from Film Notes. Scott Hamen. J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville Ky 1979 "The Asphalt Jungle"

That the film was tremendously influential on the subsequent course of the gangster film genre is evidenced by the almost outright duplication of many of its elements in countless later films. In fact, it is arguable that the overall shift from Westerns to crime and police drama as the most popular subject of both movie and television entertainment in America can, to some degree, be credited to the effect of this single film.

from John Huston Interviews. Ed. Robert Ernest Lang. U of Miss Press, Jackson 2001, "John Huston: At 74 No Formulas" Bernard Drew/1979

"Perhaps there were some things wrong with the old studio system, but on the whole," Huston goes on, "I think its death has been a great loss. Its troubles began with the antimonopoly ruling and subsequent divorce of its theaters from the companies that owned them. Now, theoretically, I was all for that, but as it happened, it was responsible for the end of the studios."

"While we were under contract," he recalls, "our daily and future lives were assured, so we could afford to strive for quality. Nowadays, writers just want to finish their assignment and get on with the next one—it's all part of the package deal. But before, writers were under contract at so much a week, and with each success their aspirations rose and so did their economic status. Virtue was more amply rewarded, which it isn't today. There is no way I could have made any of the movies I made through *The Asphalt Jungle* except under the studio system."

Huston still speaks of that period [the McCarthy years] with passionate indignation. "The McCarthy years," he says, "weren't just a matter of censorship. Suddenly people were made into circus performers. If they didn't jump through hoops, they were disgraced, ruined, and destroyed. I had a great sense of shame at that time. Phil Dunne and I started the Committee for the First Amendment. Willie Tyler was in it, the Epstein brothers, and many others who flew to Washington to attend the hearings. None of us were Communists.

"The only one on that flight who was, as it later turned out, was Sterling Hayden. After that, we were all branded, though McCarthy hadn't reached his height yet. I went on to make *We Were Strangers*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and then I left the country because I could not abide what McCarthy was doing to America. That had a lot to do with my not coming back here. Except for three or four pictures I made in the United States over the last thirty years, I've remained abroad. I did not want to come back into an atmosphere that was permeated with the stench of that dreadful man. In some ways, I trace the Nixon

years with its disgrace to the McCarthy period.”

I asked Huston what ever made him cast Sterling Hayden in the lead of *The Asphalt Jungle*, when Hayden was then simply known as the hunk of man who had married Madeleine Carroll. Huston laughs and replies, “I always found Sterling a very interesting man. I used him way before he began to blossom. He was known then for his physique rather than his talent. But physically, he looked the part of what they call a gorilla, the strong man in a robbery. In recent years, Sterling’s personality has become richer. There is a kind of kingliness or priestliness about him now. I can see him conducting a pagan rite, his beard blowing in all directions.” I ask him what he had seen in Bogart when he picked him to play Sam Spade. “I saw in him what audiences today see in him,” he says. “He was not a man of great stature physically, but the camera saw something in him that we, and even he, didn’t.”

“I’m always surprised that so many good actors are like the characters they portray on the screen.”

from *Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments*. James Agee. McDowell Obolensky NY 1958, “Undirectable Director” [1950]

Most of the really good popular art produced anywhere comes from Hollywood, and much of it bears Huston’s name. To put it conservatively, there is nobody under fifty at work in movies, here or abroad, who can excel Huston in talent, inventiveness, intransigence, achievement or promise. Yet it is a fair bet that neither money, nor acclaim, nor a sense of dedication to the greatest art medium of his century have much to do with Huston staying at his job: he stays at it because there is nothing else he enjoys so much. It is this tireless enjoyment that gives his work a unique vitality and make every foot of film he works on unmistakably his.

Huston is swiftly stirred by anything which appeals to his sense of justice, magnanimity or courage; he was among the first men to stand up for Lew Ayres as a conscientious objector, he flew to the Washington hearings on Hollywood (which he refers to as “an obscenity”) and sponsored Henry Wallace (though he voted for Harry Truman) in the 1948 campaign. Some people think of him, accordingly, as a fellow traveler. Actually he is a political man chiefly in the emotional sense: “I’m against *anybody*,” he says, “who tries to tell anybody else what to do.” The mere sight or thought of a cop can get him sore. He is in short rather less of a Communist than the most ultramontane Republican, for like perhaps five out of seven good artists who ever lived he is—to lapse into technical jargon—a natural-born anti-authoritarian individualistic libertarian anarchist, without portfolio.

Much that is best in Huston’s work comes of his sense of what is natural to the eye and his delicate, simple feeling for space relationships: his camera huddles close to those who huddle to talk, leans back a proportionate distance, relaxing,

if they talk casually. He loathes camera rhetoric and the shot-for-shot’s-sake; but because he takes each moment catch-as-catch-can and is so deeply absorbed in doing the best possible thing with it he has made any number of unforgettable shots. He can make an unexpected close-up reverberate like a gong.

Sometimes the shot is just a spark—a brief glint of extra imagination and perception. During the robbery sequence in *Asphalt Jungle* there is a quick glimpse of the downtown midnight street at the moment when people have just begun to hear the burglar alarms. Unsure, still, where the trouble is, the people merely hesitate a trifle in their ways of walking, and it is like the first stirrings of metal filings before the magnet beneath the paper pulls them into pattern. Very often the fine shot comes because Huston, working to please himself without fear of his audience, sharply condenses his storytelling.

from *Perspectives of John Huston*. Ed. Stephen Cooper. G.K. Hall & Co., NY 1994, “John Huston and Film Noir” Keith Cohen

Auteur logic might lead us to expect that, as a major director of the 1940s in Hollywood, John Huston developed a recognizable set of stylistic traits during this period. In fact, he dabbles freely with various styles. While he has been credited with one of the earliest examples of *film noir*, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), he also directed classics of action and adventure (*Key Largo* [1948], *The African Queen* [1951] as well as westerns (*Treasure of the Sierra Madre* [1948])). *Film noir*, in particular, a category that has been applied both in exclusively stylistic terms and in thematic or historical terms, represents a film type that Huston will return to intermittently during his career. Using *The Maltese Falcon*, the documentary *Let There Be Light* (1946), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), and *Freud* (1962), I will argue that Huston uses a *noir* style and a *noir* frame of reference somewhat differently in each context, but always as a means of treating his subject matter with expressive depth.

It has been established with considerable force that *film noir* can be seen as a response to the growing ambivalence about national prosperity, employment, and masculinity in a country that is watching its male population first march off to fight a war it was more or less pressured into, then to return to a nation whose work force has been significantly feminized. Stylistically rooted in German expressionist films and ideologically derivative of American “hard-boiled detective fiction, *film noir* creates a distinct, fairly easily identifiable, set of films during one of Hollywood’s periods of greatest flourishing.

Film noir, then, became an important option for filmmakers during the decade of the 1940s when they wanted to highlight a highly suspenseful or existentially problematical situation. A vocabulary of stark overhead or low-angle lighting that crated high contrast shadows and exaggerated actors’ features, along with a gloomy type of deep focus, was soon stock-in-trade for the depiction of a ruthless world and protagonists overwhelmed by circumstances that worsened at an alarming rate.

"The Misfits and the Idea of John Huston's Films" Lesley Brill

I was testing for *The Asphalt Jungle* when little Johnny Hyde of the William Morris Agency called and said he had a girl just right for the part of Angela—might she read for me? Arthur Hornblow, the producer of *The Asphalt Jungle*, was with me a few days later when Johnny brought the girl [Marilyn Monroe] around. I recognized her as the girl I'd saved from the casting couch. The scene she was to read called for Angela to be stretched out on a divan; there was no divan in my office, so Marilyn said, "I'd like to do the scene on the floor."

"Of course, my dear, any way it feels right to you."

And that's the way she did it. She kicked off her shoes, lay down on the floor and read for us. When she

finished, Arthur and I looked at each other and nodded. She was Angela to a "T." I later discovered that Johnny Hyde was in love with her. Johnny was a very fine, very reliable agent, and we were friends, but Marilyn didn't get the part because of Johnny. She got it because she was damned good.

I never felt Marilyn's much-publicized sexual attraction in the flesh, but on the screen it came across forcefully. But there was much more to her than that. She was appreciated as an artist in Europe long before her acceptance as anything but a sex symbol in the United States. Jean-Paul Sartre considered Marilyn Monroe the finest actress alive. He wanted her to play the leading female role in *Freud*.

Next Monday, March 8, at the Market Arcade: Buffalo premiere of *Lost in La Mancha*,

with filmmaker Keith Fulton. Presented by Squeaky Wheel. Tickets \$7 members of Squeaky Wheel/\$8.50 non-members.

Director Terry Gilliam (*Fisher King*, *Brazil*, *Time Bandits*) spent decades planning a film adaptation of "Don Quixote". *Lost in La Mancha*, a documentary directed by Keith Fulton & Louis Pepe (2002), chronicles the tragic "un-making" of Gilliam's epic.

Squeaky Wheel presents filmmaker Keith Fulton in person at a special, one-night screening of this must-see expose of a \$32 million disaster story on Monday, March 8 at the Market Arcade. Fulton will be introduced by local film scholar Bruce Jackson and will be available for questions after.

Lost in La Mancha offers a unique, in-depth look at the harsher realities of filmmaking. Not long into production disaster strikes: flash floods destroy sets and damage camera equipment; the lead actor falls seriously ill; and on the sixth day production is brought to its knees. Uniquely, after Quixote's cameras have stopped rolling, the documentary continues to record events as they unfold: the crew waits, insurance men and bondsmen scramble with calculators and interpretations of 'force majeure' and behind it Gilliam struggles to maintain both belief and momentum in his project.

In the best tradition of documentary filmmaking, *Lost In La Mancha* captures all the drama of this story through 'fly-on-the-wall' vérité footage and on-the-spot interviews. With the camera tests of the leading actors and the rushes from the only six days of photography, *Lost In La Mancha* offers a tantalizing glimpse of the cinematic spectacle that might have been.

Lost In La Mancha is less a process piece about filmmakers at work and more a powerful drama about the inherent fragility of the creative process - a compelling study of how, even with an abundance of the best will and passion, the artistic endeavor can remain an impossible dream.

Coming up in Buffalo Film Seminars VIII:

March 9 Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952

March 23 Fred Zinnemann, *From Here to Eternity*, 1953

March 30 Akira Kurosawa, *Kumonosu jo/Throne of Blood*, 1957

April 6 Luchino Visconti, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers*, 1960

April 13 François Truffaut, *Jules et Jim/Jules and Jim*, 1961

April 20 Sergio Leone, *C'era una volta in America/Once Upon a Time in America*, 1984

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To be placed on the Buffalo Film Seminars email list: addtolist@buffalo

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