

THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GREAT FILMS WITH BRUCE JACKSON & DIANE CHRISTIAN

PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO AND THE MARKET ARCADE FILM AND ARTS CENTER

FEBRUARY 5, 2002 (V:3): IN A LONELY PLACE (1950)

NICHOLAS RAY (Raymond Nicholas Kienzle, 7 August 1911, Galesville, Wisconsin—16 June 1979, lung cancer) is perhaps the only major director who made a film about coping with his own death—*Lightning Over Water* 1980, made in collaboration with his friend Wim Wenders. Ray is credited as director on 25 other films, including *55 Days at Peking* 1963, *King of Kings* 1961, *The Savage Innocents* 1959, *The True Story of Jesse James* 1957, *Rebel Without a Cause* 1955, *Johnny Guitar* 1954, *Flying Leathernecks* 1951, and *Knock on Any Door* 1949. He had an extraordinary career before directing his first film, *They Live by Night* 1949. He studied architecture and theater at the University of Chicago, then spent a year with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin and directed Wright's playhouse there. He joined John Houseman's Phoenix Theater and was a director on Broadway. In the late 1930s he traveled widely in the deep south and the west, collecting folklore for the Library of Congress. He produced a thrice-weekly radio show for CBS featuring folk singers like Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Leadbelly, and young Pete Seeger. He contributed regularly to the Communist Party paper, the *Daily Worker*. He never disowned or fully abandoned his left-wing activism, but the McCarthyite witch hunters never went after him and he was never blacklisted, probably because Howard Hughes liked him.

BURNETT GUFFEY (26 May 1905, Del Rio, Tennessee—30 May 1983, Goleta, California) began in film as an assistant cameraman in 1923, then became a camera operator (John Ford's *The Informer*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* among others) and became a director of photography in 1944. He was d.p. on nearly 90 films, and won best cinematographer Oscars for two of them—*From Here to Eternity* 1953 and *Bonnie and Clyde* 1967 and nominations for three others: *King Rat* 1965, *Birdman of Alcatraz* 1962, and *The Harder They Fall* 1956. Some of his other films are *The Steagle* 1971, *The Great White Hope* 1970, *The Learning Tree* 1969, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* 1967, *All the King's Men* 1949, *Knock on Any Door* 1949, and *Soul of a Monster* 1944.

HUMPHREY BOGART (25 December 1899, New York, New York—14 January 1957, Los Angeles, California, throat cancer) was best known for playing tough guys and hard cases, but he didn't start out that way. His father was a surgeon, his mother a magazine illustrator, and he went to Trinity School in Manhattan and Phillips Academy in Andover. It's hard to tell which "facts" about Bogart's life are true, which are folklore and which are studio hype; there's a web site devoted to the subject: <http://www.maconconsult.com/bogart/legends.html>. After several years of minor stage and film roles, he got his breakthrough part as the gangster Duke Mantee in *The Petrified Forest* (1936), a role he'd played on Broadway. The studio wanted to give the part to Edward G. Robinson, maybe American's most famous snarling gangster because of *Little Caesar* (1930), but Bogey's pal Leslie Howard, who also starred in the film, insisted that he and Bogart play the roles they'd played in on Broadway. (Bogart later named one of his children Leslie.) Lauren Bacall was 19 years old when she co-starred with Bogart in John Huston's *To Have and Have Not* 1944. Her famous line from the film was: "You know you don't have to act with me, Steve. You don't have to say anything, you don't have to do anything. Not a thing. Oh, maybe just whistle. You know how to whistle, don't you? You just put your lips together and [beat] blow." Bogie's coffin contains a small, gold whistle, which Bacall put there. You never know. His longtime friend and 7-time director John Huston said of him, "The trouble with Bogart is he thinks he's Bogart." Huston also said, "Himself, he never took too seriously - his work, most seriously. He regarded the somewhat gaudy figure of Bogart the star with amused cynicism; Bogart the actor he held in deep respect." He died in his sleep after surgery for throat cancer. His last words are supposed to have been, "I should never have switched from scotch to martinis." George Raft was as important to Bogart's film career as Leslie Howard: in two of the dumbest career moves ever, Raft turned down the role of "Mad Dog" Earle in *High Sierra* and Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*, both in 1941. Bogart won a best acting Oscar for *The African Queen* 1951 and nominations for *The Caine Mutiny* 1954 and *Casablanca* 1942. Some of his other films are *The Harder They Fall* 1956, *The Desperate Hours* 1955, *The Barefoot Contessa* 1954, *Knock on Any Door* 1949, *Key Largo* 1948, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* 1948, *Dark Passage* 1947, *The Roaring Twenties* 1939, and *Angels with Dirty Faces* 1938.

GLORIA GRAHAME (Gloria Hallward, 28 November 1923, Los Angeles, California—5 October 1981, New York, New York, cancer with peritonitis) was the daughter of architect Michael Hallward and stage actress Jean Grahame. Her first film was the lead in *Blonde Fever* 1944, but it was her performance as the temptress in *It's a Wonderful Life* two years later that made her a star. Two of her four marriages were in the same family: Nicholas Ray from 1948-1952, and his son from a previous marriage, Tony, 1960-1976. Leonard Maltin writes: "Sulky, seductive blond actress who was one of Hollywood's top temptresses: She played more shady women (and outright tramps) than any other female performer on-screen during the late 1940s and 1950s. Even when she portrayed good girls, Grahame often layered her characterizations with unsympathetic traits." She won a best actress Oscar for *The Bad and the Beautiful* 1952 and had a nomination for *Crossfire* 1947. Some of her other films: *Melvin and Howard* 1980, *Odds Against Tomorrow* 1959, *Oklahoma!* 1955, *Macao* 1952, and *The Greatest Show on Earth* 1952.

FRANK LOVEJOY (28 March 1914, The Bronx, New York—2 October 1962, New York, New York, heart attack) was, according to Leonard Maltin, a "roughhewn, taciturn supporting player and occasional leading man who came to the screen in the late 1940s after acting on the stage and in dramatic radio for many years. A dependable player singularly lacking in charisma, Lovejoy was effective in Everyman roles and played his share of unlucky slobs caught up in intrigues not of his own making. He also played several dogface soldiers in WW2 stories. Lovejoy, a good private-eye type, played detectives in the TV series "Man Against Crime" (1956) and "Meet McGraw" (1957-58)." He was in about 40 films, but he's probably best known for *I Was a Communist for the FBI* 1951.

Philip Kemp from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Ed. Andrew Sarris, Visible Ink Press, 1998.

Godard's magisterial statement, "the cinema is Nicholas Ray," has come in for a good deal of ridicule, not by any means entirely undeserved. Yet it contains a core of truth, especially if taken in reverse. Nicholas Ray is cinema in the sense that his films work entirely (and perhaps only) as *movies*, arrangements of space and movement charged with dramatic tension. Few directors demonstrate more clearly that a film is something beyond the sum of its parts. Consider only the more literary components—dialogue, plot, characterisation—and a film like *Party Girl* is patently

trash. But on the screen the visual turbulence of Ray's shooting style, the fractured intensity of his editing, fuse the elements into a valid emotional whole. The flaws are still apparent, but they have

IN A LONELY PLACE (1950, 94 min)

Directed by Nicholas Ray
Adapted by Edmund H. North from the novel by Dorothy B. Hughes
Script by Andrew Solt
Produced by Robert Lord
Original music by George Antheil
Cinematography by Burnett Guffey
Film Editing by Viola Lawrence

Humphrey Bogart.... Dixon Steele
Gloria Grahame.... Laurel Gray
Frank Lovejoy.... Police Sergeant Brub Nicolai
Carl Benton Reid.... Police Captain Lochner
Art Smith ... Mel Lippman
Jeff Donnell.... Sylvia Nicolai
Martha Stewart.... Mildred Atkinson
Robert Warwick ... Charlie Waterman
Morris Ankrum.... Lloyd Barnes
William Ching.... Ted Barton
Steven Geray.... Paul Hadda Brooks.... Singer
Robert Lowell.... Airline Clerk
Michael Romano.... Himself
Cosmo Sardo.... Bartender

become incidental.

Ray's grounding in architecture (he studied at Taliesin with Frank Lloyd Wright) reveals itself in an exceptionally acute sense of space, often deployed as an extension of states of mind. In his films the geometry of locations, and especially interiors, serves as a psychological terrain. Conflict can be played out, and tensions expressed, in terms of spatial areas (upstairs and downstairs, for example, or the courtyards and levels of an apartment complex) pitted against each other. Ray also credited Wright with instilling in him "a love of the horizontal line"—and hence of the CinemaScope screen, for which he felt an intuitive affinity. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who found it awkward and inhibiting, Ray avidly explores the format's potential, sometimes combining it with lateral tracking shots to convey lyrical movement, at other times angling his camera to create urgent diagonals, suggesting characters straining at the constrictions of the frame.

Nearly all Ray's finest films were made in the 1950s, their agonized romanticism cutting across the grain of that decade's brittle optimism. "The poet of American

Philip Kemp in *World Film Directors*, V.II 1945-1985. Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co NY 1988:

The second of his two Santana [Bogart's company] movies was another matter altogether, one of the darkest of all Hollywood-on-Hollywood films, unrelieved even by the romantic cynicism of *Sunset Boulevard*. In *A Lonely Place* (1950) casts Bogart as an alcoholic screenwriter, quivering with barely suppressed violence, who comes under suspicion of murder. The evidence of his neighbor (Gloria Grahame) clears him, and they start an affair. But as his psychotic nature shows through, she begins to doubt his innocence. By the time the real killer is found, the tension between them has destroyed their relationship, and with it his hope of redemption.

The 1950s were certainly Ray's finest period, in which his films were suffused with a personal sense of anguish, a sense of conflict and moral ambiguity wholly alien to the prevailing complacency of the decade. In *A Lonely Place*, the first of them, set the subsequent pattern. David Thomson considered it "the most personal of Ray's films and one that looks more austere as years pass, and less and less like a Hollywood picture." He also detected "a confessional melancholy" (Ray's own relation with Gloria Grahame was disintegrating at the time of shooting), noting the psychological deployment of space between and around the protagonists: "Ray's use of the courtyard, the rooms and the stairways as a grid on which the lovers fail one another is more tragically felt than any of Fritz Lang's geometric enclosures." Ray drew from both Bogart and Grahame performances of exceptional depth and conviction; Victor Perkins remarked how "the film inflects Bogart's 'tough-guy' persona in a way that is recognizably Ray's, emphasizing inwardness, solitude and vulnerability, and making violence the index of the character's weakness rather than strength."

In *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), Ray, then in his mid-forties, focused the frustrations and yearnings of a whole generation of confused, resentful adolescents and introduced in James Dean one of the most enduring of teen icons. He also helped establish a cinematic genre; few subsequent teenage movies, from *Rock Around the Clock* to *Rumblefish*, can avoid a debt to *Rebel*.

Rebel's lasting impact, though, derives not from its attempts at social analysis but from its mythic and emotional resonance. "If the film is still affecting," Jean-Pierre Coursodon wrote, "it is...for the flavor of its poetic paraphernalia, momentous

FROM FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE, ED. BY ALAIN SILVER & ELIZABETH WARD:

With the Western, film noir shares the distinction of being an indigenous American form. Unlike Westerns, noir films have no precise antecedents either in terms of a well-defined literary genre or a period in American history. As a result, what might be termed the noir cycle has a singular position in the brief history of American motion pictures: a body of films that not only presents a cohesive vision of America but that does so in a manner transcending the influences of *auteurism* or genre. Film noir is grounded neither in personal creation nor in translation of another tradition into film terms. Rather it is a self-contained reflection of American cultural preoccupations in film form. In short, it is the unique example of a wholly American film style.

That may seem a substantial claim to make for a group of films whose plots frequently turn on deadly violence or sexual obsession, whose catalogue of characters includes numbers of down-and-out private eyes, desperate women, and petty criminals. Nor does the visceral unease felt by a viewer who watches a shadowy form move across a lonely street or who hears the sound of car tires creeping over wet asphalt automatically translate into sociological assertions about paranoia or postwar guilt. At the same time, it is clear that the emergence of film noir coincides with these and other popular sentiments at large in America. "Film noir" is literally "black film," not just in the sense of being full of physically dark images, nor of reflecting a dark mood in American society, but equally, almost empirically, as a black slate on which the culture could inscribe its ills and in the process produce a catharsis to help relieve them.

Tim Dirks on film noir (<http://www.filmsite.org/filmnoir.html>):

The primary moods of classic film noir are melancholy, alienation, bleakness, disillusionment, disenchantment, pessimism, ambiguity, moral corruption, evil, guilt and paranoia. Heroes (or anti-heroes), corrupt characters and villains include down-and-out, hard-boiled detectives or private eyes, cops, gangsters, government agents, crooks, war veterans, petty criminals, and murderers. These protagonists are often low lifes from the dark and gloomy underworld of violent crime and corruption. Distinctively, they are cynical, tarnished, obsessive (sexual or otherwise), brooding, menacing, sinister, sardonic, disillusioned, frightened and insecure loners, struggling to survive and ultimately losing.... The females in film noir are either of two types - dutiful, reliable, trustworthy and loving women; or *femmes fatales* - duplicitous, double-crossing, gorgeous, unloving, predatory, tough-sweet, unreliable, irresponsible,

disenchantment" (in David Thomson's phrase), Ray viewed social conventions as a trap, from which violence or madness may be the only escape. . . . In *A Lonely Place* subverts Bogart's tough-guy persona, revealing the anguish and insecurity that underlie it and, as V.S. Perkins puts it, making "violence the index of the character's weakness rather than strength."

"I'm a stranger here myself." Ray often quoted Sterling Hayden's line from *Johnny Guitar* as his personal motto. His career, as he himself was well aware, disconcertingly mirrored the fate of his own, riven, alienated heroes. Unappreciated (or so he felt) in America, he nonetheless produced all his best work there. In Europe, where he was hailed as one of the world's greatest directors, his craft deserted him: after two ill-starred epics, the last sixteen years of his life trickled away in a mess of incoherent footage and abortive projects. Victim of his own legend, Ray finally took self-identification with his protagonists to its ultimate conclusion—collaborating in *Lightning Over Water*, in the filming of his own disintegration and death.

cosmic symbols, and hysterical outbursts. Its real greatness lies in the operatic quality that accounts for moments of contrived but irresistible beauty." Or as David Thomson remarked: "In hindsight, no one would praise [it] for realism. Melodrama throbs in it, as it does in adolescent anguish. It is a film about rage, yearning and reconciliation. . . . Ray's visual imagination never mocks, or forsakes, a vein of teenage opera. But that is proper, for the film is true to adolescent experience—perhaps especially the experience of an adolescent brought up on movies."

Much of the film's visual power rests on Ray's mastery of the CinemaScope screen. It was his first picture in wide screen (and would have been the first ever in monochrome, had the CinemaScope company not objected), a ratio that he welcomed for its expressive potential and used in almost all his subsequent films. "What Welles was to deep focus, Ray was to CinemaScope," maintained Robin Wood.

Ray: "I never think of any film as a message film. I never think of a film as doing anything except providing a heightened sense of being."

In 1969 Ray returned to the United States and began work on a film about the Chicago Conspiracy trial, to feature the defendants as themselves, with Groucho Marx as Judge Julius Hoffman. . . . After some 30,000 feet had been shot, the backers (who included Hugh Hefner) pulled out, and Ray suffered an embolism which destroyed his right eye.

"It was never all in the script. If it were, why make the movie?" Ray's oft-quoted comment holds good for any worthwhile film, but perhaps applies with special relevance to his own work. Dull scripts. Routine plots, inept casting could—sometimes, if not always—be transmuted, through "the extraordinary resonances which a director can provoke by his use of actors, decor, movement, colour, shape, of all that can be seen and heard" (Victor Perkins), into richly vivid segments of his own restless exploratory cinema. Ray has been both overpraised and overdenigrated. His output is uneven, and none of his films is without flaws; but the dramatic urgency and dynamic visual flair of his best work transcends all imperfections.

manipulative and desperate women.... *Film noir* films...show the dark and inhumane side of human nature with cynicism and doomed love, and they emphasize the brutal, unhealthy, seamy, shadowy, dark and sadistic sides of the human experience. Film noir is marked by expressionistic lighting ... disorienting visual schemes, circling cigarette smoke, existential sensibilities, and unbalanced compositions. Settings are often interiors with low-key lighting, Venetian-blinded windows, and dark and gloomy appearances. Exteriors are often night scenes with deep shadows, wet asphalt, rain-slicked or mean streets, flashing neon lights, and low key lighting....Story locations are often in murky and dark streets, dimly-lit apartments and hotel rooms of big cities....An atmosphere of menace, pessimism, anxiety, suspicion that anything can go wrong, dingy realism, fatalism, defeat and entrapment are stylized characteristics of *film noir*. Narratives are frequently complex and convoluted, typically with flashbacks (or a series of flashbacks) and/or reflective voice-over narration.

Some other FsNs: *Murder, My Sweet* 1944, *The Big Sleep* 1946 *Lady in the Lake* 1946 *Farewell, My Lovely* 1945 & 1975, *The Long Goodbye* 1973, *Scarlet Street* 1945, *D.O.A.* 1950, *The House on 92nd Street* 1945, *Call Northside 777* 1948, *The Naked City* 1948, *The Wrong Man* 1956, *Double Indemnity* 1944, *Mildred Pierce* 1945, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* 1946, *The Lady From Shanghai* 1948, *Gilda* 1946, *You Only Live Once* 1937, *They Live By Night* 1948, *Citizen Kane* 1941, *Gaslight* 1944, *Laura* 1944, *Sorry, Wrong Number* 1948, *In A Lonely Place* 1950, *Rebecca* 1940, *Suspicion* 1941, *Shadow of a Doubt* 1943, *Spellbound* 1945, *Notorious* 1946, *The Woman in the Window* 1944, *Leave Her to Heaven* 1945, *The Night of the Hunter* 1955, *The Asphalt Jungle* 1950, *The Big Heat* 1953, *Kiss Me Deadly* 1955, *The Killing* 1956, *Sweet Smell of Success* 1957, *They Drive By Night* 1940, *Key Largo* 1948, *White Heat* 1949, *Chinatown* 1974, *Body Heat* 1981, *Blade Runner* 1982, *Blood Simple* 1984, *L.A. Confidential* 1997.

The basic *film noir* reference book is Alan Silver and Elizabeth Ward, eds., *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*, 3rd ed., 1992. And there are a bunch of good essays in Alan Silver and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader* 5th ed., & *Film Noir Reader 2*, both Limelight, NY 1999. Fiona A. Viella, editor of the excellent online film journal *Senses of Cinema*, has a very smart piece about *In a Lonely Place* online at <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/10/lonely.html>

Join us next week for another superb movie: the film that gave postmodernism its single compelling idea, Toshiro Mifune in Akira Kurosawa's classic *Rashomon*.

And, should you want to get out of the house in the interim, which you should, the place to go in Buffalo is the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, where there's an exhibit of photos from the New York Times and more, including a Harley-Davidson and some comic books that will make your head swim....for more info on all that's going on there visit <http://csac.buffalo.edu/theffifties>. Robert Creeley is giving a poetry reading at the Gallery Wednesday night at 7:30 with a book signing afterwards, and then there's a series of five Thursday night films hosted by Bruce Jackson:

Feb 14 Fred McLeod Wilcox, *Forbidden Planet* 1956,

Feb 21 Elia Kazan, *A Streetcar Named Desire* 1951

Feb 28 Stanley Kubrick, *The Killing* 1956

March 7 Emile de Antonio, *Point of Order* 1964

March 14, Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952

(Free admission; parking \$2. All hi-res DVD projection except *Point of Order*, which is available only in video. The Garden Restaurant will be open for dinner on screening nights. Call 716.270.8233 for information and reservations)

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