
DASHIELL HAMMETT [Samuel Dashiell Hammett, 27 May 1894, St. Mary’s County, Maryland—10 January 1961, New York, throat cancer] was the best of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction writers who were published in pulp magazines and then in novels from the 1920s through the 1950s. Much of his work, sometimes credited and sometimes not, was filmed, such as *No Good Deed* (2002, from a short story), *Last Man Standing* 1996 [based on Kurosawa’s *Yojimbo* which was based on Hammett’s *Red Harvest*], *Miller’s Crossing* (1990 [uncredited, based on the novels *Red Harvest* and *Glass Key*]), *The Wizard of Malta* 1981 [based on *The Maltese Falcon*], "The Dain Curse" (1978 [tv miniseries, based on his novel], *Yojimbo* 1961 [based on *Red Harvest*, uncredited], *The Glass Key* 1942 [based on the novel], *The Thin Man* 1943 [based on the novel], *The Maltese Falcon* 1941 [based on
The Great Lie won a Best Actress in a Supporting Role Oscar for her work in PETER LORRE 1931, Their Boots On SYDNEY GREENSTREET 1938.

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.macconsult.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 America’s most famous snarly 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 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 coiff 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 roles were in The Harder They Fall 1956, The Desperate Hours 1955, The Barefoot Contessa 1954, In a Lonely Place 1950, 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.


PETER LORRE [László Löwenstein, 26 June 1904, Rózsahely, Austria-Hungary, now Ruzomberok, Slovakia—23 March 1964, Los Angeles, California, stroke] had only one uncredited screen-role before his star-turning performance in M 1931—as a dentist’s patient in Die Verschwundene Frau 1929. He is probably best known these days for his performances as Ugarte in Casablanca 1942 and Joel Cairo in The Maltese SYDNEY GREENSTREET [27 Dec. 1879, Sandwich, Kent, England—8 Jan 1954, Hollywood, diabetes and nephritis] had a long and distinguished stage career in England and the US before he made his screen debut as Kaspar Gutman in The Maltese Falcon when he was 62. He appeared in 24 films, 5 with Bogart and 8 with Lorre. Some of his other roles were in Malaya 1949, Flamingo Road 1949, The Huksters 1947, The Mask of Dimitrios 1944, Passage to Marseille 1944, Casablanca 1942, Across the Pacific 1942, They Died with Their Boots On 1941.


ARTHUR EDESON [24 October 1891, New York, New York—14 February 1970, Agoura Hills, California] got his first cinematographer credit with The Dollar Mark 1914 and his last

**Tim Dirks on film noir**

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, manipulative and desperate women. Film noir films...show the dark and inhuman 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.


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 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](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/10/lonely.html)


Why has Huston’s artistic personality gone more or less unremarked for so long? Briefly, his neglect seems to be a consequence partly of the history of taste and fashion among critics and academics in film studies, and partly of a stylistic finish so smooth and self-efficacat that it conceals its remarkable art; its straightforward, generic story-telling (if such a thing exists). Huston’s art looks to us, I suspect, as Shakespeare’s did to his contemporaries: like nature itself.

James Agee, in his enormously influential 1950 *Life* magazine portrait established this understanding: “Each of Huston’s pictures has a visual tone and style of its own, dictated to his camera by the story’s essential content and spirit.”

James Naremore characterizes Huston’s method by contrasting it with Dashiell Hammett’s: “Hammett’s art is minimalist and deadpan, but Huston, contrary to his reputation, is a highly energetic and expressive storyteller who like to make comments through his images.”

To my knowledge, at least thirty-four of Huston’s thirty-seven features films derive directly from novels, stories, or plays.

Huston began in the movies as a writer of screenplays....He has spoken of the intimate connection between writing and directing: “There’s really no difference between them, it’s an extension: one from the other. Ideally I think the writer should go on and direct the picture. I think of the director as an extension of the writer.”

Implicit in early works like *The Maltese Falcon*, In *This Our Life*, and *Key Largo* (*’48), themes of identity continue to dominate at the end of Huston’s career in *Prizzi’s Honor* and *The Dead*.

In a 1981 interview, Huston spoke of his first film as “a dramatization of myself, how I felt about things.”

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[Huston] I came well to my very first directorial assignment. *The Maltese Falcon* was a very carefully tailored screenplay, not only scene by scene, but set-up by set-up. I made a sketch of each set-up. If it was to be a pan or dolly shot, I’d indicate it. I didn’t want ever to be at a loss before the actors or the camera crew. I went over the sketches with Willy Wyler. He had a few suggestions to make, but on the whole, approved what he saw. I also showed the sketches to my producer, Henry Blanke. All Blanke said was, “John, just remember that each scene as you shoot it, is the most important scene in the picture.” That’s the best advice a young director could have. Peter Lorre was one of the finest and most subtle actors I have ever worked with. Beneath that air of innocence he used to such effect, one sensed a Faustian worldliness. I’d know he was giving a good performance as we put it on film but I wouldn’t know how good until I saw him in the rushes.

During the entire filming not one line of dialogue was changed. One short scene was dropped when I realized I could substitute a telephone call for it without loss to the story.

Blanke put me together with the composer Adolph Deutsch.
Working with the composer was a privilege afforded only to top directors. This was another example of Blanke’s confidence in me. Deutsch and I ran the picture many times, discussing where music should be used and where not. As with good cutting, the audience is not as a rule supposed to be conscious of the music. Ideally, it speaks directly to our emotions without our awareness of it, although, of course, there are moments when music should take over and dominate the action.

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“Flitcraft, Spade, and The Maltese Falcon: John Huston’s Adaptation” Stephen Cooper

While it has been remarked that The Maltese Falcon (both novel and film) consists largely of dialogue, but it has not sufficiently been emphasized how much of that dialogue consists of characters’ telling stories.

“John Huston and Film Noir” Keith Cohen

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 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.

The noir idiom can be used in a variety of contexts without necessarily leaving its entire ideological baggage intact.

Join us next week, Tuesday, October 8 for

Roberto Rossellini, Open City, 1945

Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani star in this seminal work of Italian neorealism, written by Rossellini, Federico Fellini and Sergio Amidei. Grand Prize, Cannes, 1946.

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