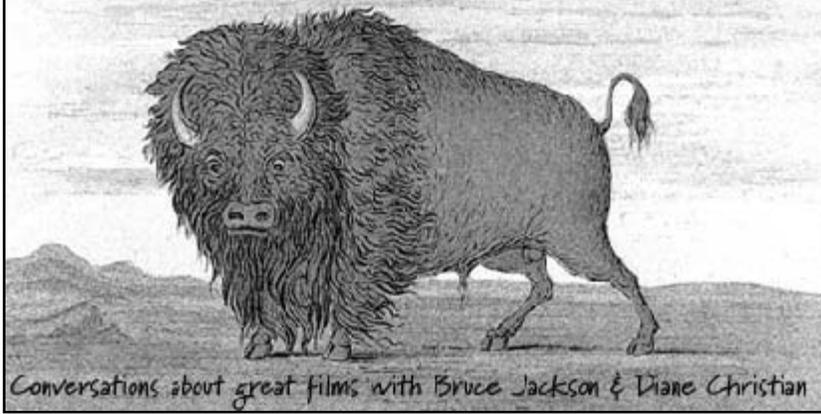


The Buffalo Film Seminars



JACQUES TOURNEUR (12 November 1904, Paris—19 December, 1977, Bergerac, France). Bio from IMDB.Com: “

Tourneur went to Hollywood with his father, director Maurice Tourneur around 1913. He started out as a script clerk and editor for his father, then graduated to such jobs as directing shorts (often with the pseudonym Jack Turner), both in France and America. He was hired to run the second unit for David O. Selznick's 1935 *A Tale of Two Cities* where he first met Val Lewton. In 1942, when Lewton was named to head the new horror unit at RKO, he asked Tourneur to be his first director. The result was the highly artistic (and commercially successful) *Cat People*. Tourneur went on to direct masterpieces in many different genres, all showing a great command of mood and atmosphere.” In the 1950s and 60s he also did a lot of tv work on such series as “The Barbara Stanwyk Show,” “The Twilight Zone,” and “Bonanza.” Some of Tourneur’s other films are *Wichita* (1955), *Berlin Express* (1948), *Days of Glory* (1944) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943).

DANIEL MAINWARING (27 February 1902, Oakland, California—31 January 1977, Los Angeles) is a novelist who also scripted about 45 Hollywood films, among them *The George Raft Story* (1961), *Space Master X-7* (1958, aka *Blood Ruse* and *Mutiny in Outer Space*), *Cole Younger*, *Gunfighter* (1958), *Baby Face Nelson* (1957), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *The Phenix City Story* (1955), *This Woman Is Dangerous* (1952), *They Made Me a Killer* (1946), *Tokyo Rose* (1946) and *Secrets of the Underground* (1942).

JAMES M. CAIN (1 July 1892, Annapolis, MD—27 October 1977, University Park, MD) was a prolific novelist whose work was frequently made into major films, for example, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Double Indemnity*, and *Mildred Pierce*.

NICHOLAS MUSURACA (25 October 1892, Italy—3 September 1985, Los Angeles) was cinematographer or d.p. on about 175 films, among them *A Girl in Every Port*, (1952), *I Married a Communist* (1950), *I Remember Mama* (1948), *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer* (1947), *Bedlam* (1946), *The Spiral Staircase* (1946), *Back to Bataan* (1945), *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944), *Bombardier* (1943), *Cat People* (1942), *Lady Scarface* (1941), *Golden Boy* (1939), and *On the Banks of the Wabash* (1923)

ROBERT MITCHUM (6 August 1917, Bridgeport, CT—1 July 1977, Santa Barbara, CA, lung cancer). Bio from IMDB.COM: “Underrated American leading man of enormous ability who sublimes his talents beneath an air of disinterest. Born to a railroad worker who died in a train accident when Robert was two, Mitchum and his siblings (including brother John Mitchum, later also an actor) were raised by his mother and step-father (a British army major) in Connecticut, New York, and Delaware. An early contempt for authority led to discipline problems, and Mitchum spent good portions of his teen years adventuring on the open road. On one of these trips, at the age of 14, he was charged with vagrancy and sentenced to a Georgia chain gang, from which he escaped. Working a wide variety of jobs (including ghostwriter for astrologist Carroll Righter), Mitchum discovered acting in a Long



Out of the Past, 1947, 97 minutes
Entered into the National Film Registry in 1991

Robert Mitchum.... Jeff Bailey, aka Jeff Markham
Jane Greer....Kathie Moffat
Kirk Douglas....Whit Sterling
Rhonda Fleming....Meta Carson
Richard Webb....Jim 'Jimmy'
Steve Brodie....Jack Fisher
Virginia Huston....Ann Miller
Paul Valentine....Joe Stephanos
Dickie Moore....The Kid
Ken Niles....Leonard Eels

Directed by Jacques Tourneur
Writing credits Daniel Mainwaring (novel *Build My Gallows High*), as Geoffrey Homes, Frank Fenton uncredited and James M. Cain uncredited
Produced by Warren Duff
Original Music by Roy Webb
Cinematography by Nicholas Musuraca
Film Editing by Samuel E. Beetley
Art Direction by Albert S. D'Agostino, Jack Okey
Set Decoration by Darrell Silvera
RKO Radio Pictures Inc., 97 min

Beach, California amateur theatre company. He worked at Lockheed Aircraft, where job stress caused him to suffer temporary blindness. About this time, he began to obtain small roles in films, appearing in dozens within a very brief time. In 1945, he was cast as Lt. Walker in *The Story of G.I. Joe*, and received an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actor. His star ascended rapidly, and he became an icon of Forties film noir, though equally adept at Westerns and romantic dramas. His apparently lazy style and seen-it-all demeanor proved highly attractive to men and women, and by the 1950s he was a true superstar. This despite a brief prison term for marijuana usage in 1949, which seemed to enhance rather than diminish his "bad boy" appeal. Though seemingly dismissive of "art", he worked in tremendously artistically thoughtful projects such as Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter*, and even co-wrote and composed an oratorio produced at the Hollywood Bowl by Orson Welles. A master of accents and seemingly unconcerned about his star image, he played in both forgettable and unforgettable films with unswerving nonchalance, leading many to overlook the prodigious talent he can bring to a project which he finds compelling. He moved into television in the Eighties as his film opportunities diminished, winning new fans with "The Winds of War" and "War and Remembrance". Some of his 130 films: *Dead Man* (1995), *Cape Fear* (1991), *That Championship Season* (1982), *The Big Sleep* (1978), *The Last Tycoon* (1976), *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973), *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), *The Longest Day* (1962), *Cape Fear* (1962), *Thunder Road* (1958), *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957), *Not as a Stranger* (1955), *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), *Track of the Cat* (1954), *River of No Return* (1954), *The Lusty Men* (1952), *The Red Pony* (1949), *Rachel and the Stranger* (1948), *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944) and *Hoppy Serves a Writ* (1943). He produced and wrote *Thunder Road* 1958, and wrote the film's song, "Wippoorwill," which became a hit record.

JANE (BETTEJANE) GREER (9 September 1924, Washington, D.C.—20 August 2001, Los Angeles, cancer). "If she'd never made another movie," wrote Leonard Maltin, "this angelic brunette would rate an entry in this book for her portrayal of the icy, manipulative temptress who makes chumps of both Robert Mitchum and Kirk Douglas in the film noir classic *Out of the Past*." She did about 20 other movies, among them *Perfect Mate* (1996), *Against All Odds* (1984), *Man of a Thousand Faces* (1957), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1952), and *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947). She also did a lot of TV series work—"Quincy," *Murder, She Wrote*," "Bonanza," and, perhaps most notably, four episodes of "Twin Peaks" in 1990.

KIRK DOUGLAS (Issur Danielovitch, 9 December 1916, Amsterdam, NY) was nominated for three best actor Oscars: for *Champion* (1950), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1953), and *Lust for Life* (1957), but the only one he ever got was an Honorary Award in 1996. *Bio from Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia*: "His ready grin, granite-chisled features, cleft chin, and an approach to acting that made him equally convincing in both sympathetic and unsympathetic roles made Kirk Douglas one of the brightest stars of post-WW 2 Hollywood (and, later, the international arena as well). Born into immigrant poverty, he saw an acting scholarship as his ticket out of the ghetto. He secured small roles on Broadway before entering the Navy in World War 2, and afterward resumed his stage career. His old classmate Lauren Bacall suggested that producer Hal Wallis test him, resulting in his being cast in the lead role in *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946). Douglas won excellent reviews, which encouraged him to remain in Hollywood, and in 1947 he made the classic noir *Out of the Past*, the film adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (as Peter), and the undernourished drama *I Walk Alone* (the first of several films with close friend Burt Lancaster). Douglas also had a key role in the multi-Oscared *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), then scored a knockout as the venal boxer Midge Kelly in that year's *Champion* a classic prizefighting drama that cemented his *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966), *The War Wagon* (1967), *The Brotherhood* (1968), *The Arrangement* (1969), *A Gunfight* (1971), and two that he directed: *Scalawag* (1973) and *Posse* (1975). Thereafter he concentrated on character roles in such varied fare as *Once Is Not Enough* (also 1975), *The Fury*

and earned him his first Oscar nomination as Best Actor. Now acknowledged to be a top leading man, Douglas played a thinly disguised Bix Beiderbecke in *Young Man With a Horn*, the "gentleman caller" in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (both 1950), a heartlessly ambitious reporter in *Ace in the Hole* (aka *The Big Carnival*), a two-fisted cop in *Detective Story* (both 1951), a frontiersman in *The Big Sky*, a ruthless movie producer in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (both 1952, the latter Oscar nominated), an intrepid seaman in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954, in which he sang "A Whale of a Tale"), the title role in *Ulysses* (1955), a sharp-tongued cowpoke in *Man Without a Star* (1955), artist Vincent van Gogh in *Lust for Life* (1956, again, Oscar-nominated), gambler/gunfighter Doc Holliday in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* and a war-sickened colonel in *Paths of Glory* (both 1957). Douglas infused every role with passion, and his performances were often multilayered ones; he could bring sinister traits to sympathetic characters, and vice versa. Something in his eyes, in his voice, behind that toothy grin, suggested lurking menace in some characters and suppressed mirth in others....He formed his own production company, Bryna, in 1958; its initial venture was a big-scale adventure film, *The Vikings* (1958), followed by *The Devil's Disciple* (1959), which was a coproduction with Lancaster's company, and the sexy melodrama *Strangers When We Meet* (1960). That same year also saw the release of Douglas' most ambitious film, the epic drama of Roman Empire days, *Spartacus*, as its producer, he broke a long-standing Hollywood blacklist by insisting that scripter Dalton Trumbo (a member of the "Hollywood Ten") get proper screen credit for his contribution. Douglas remained busy throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with a decided emphasis on Westerns and war films; among the more notable were *Town Without Pity*, *The Last Sunset* (both 1961), the cult "modern" Western *Lonely Are the Brave*, *Two Weeks in Another Town* (both 1962, the latter a semi-sequel to *The Bad and the Beautiful*), *The List of Adrian Messenger* (1963), *Seven Days in May* (1964), *In Harm's Way* (1965),

(1978), *Home Movies* (a hilarious turn as an egocentric star), *The Villain* (bravely mocking movie-Western villainy in a ham-fisted, cartoonish parody, both 1979), *The Final Countdown* (1980), *The Man From Snowy River* (1982, in a dual role for this Down-Under "Western"), and *Tough Guys* (1986, his last

film with Lancaster). And though he abandoned the first Rambo film, *First Blood* early in its production, he eventually worked with star Sylvester Stallone in *Oscar* (1991). More recently he was cast as Michael J. Fox's crafty uncle in *Greedy* (1994). His autobiography, *The Ragman's Son* (1988), was a best-seller, and in recent years he has expanded his literary career to writing novels as well, most notably *The Gift*.

RHONDA FLEMING (10 August 1923, Hollywood) was in about 50 films, the most recent of them *Waiting for the Wind* (1990). Some of the others were *The Nude Bomb* (1980), *The Big Circus* (1959), *Home Before Dark* (1958), *The Buster Keaton Story* (1957), *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), *The Redhead and the Cowboy* (1951), *The Great Lover* (1949), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1949), and *Spellbound* (1945).

from *World Film Directors, V.I. Ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1987.*

His father was an aesthete and a solitary, cynical and sarcastic.... If he misbehaved, his parents "would put the maid in the cupboard and she used to jiggle a bowler hat while my parents would tell me: 'That's the terrible Thunderman.'" Tourneur believed that this grotesque punishment was the root of one of his cinematic obsessions: "to suddenly introduce something inexplicable into the shot, such as, for instance, the hand on the balustrade. . . in *Curse of the Demon*; in the reverse shot the hand isn't there any more."

According to Jacques Tourneur, his father "was passionately interested in scientific, medical, and philosophical research. He had an incredible library and followed all the discoveries in psychoanalysis very closely. It is through him that I discovered Freud, Jung, Adler, Havelock Ellis. I never read novels, only essays, scientific works. They are much more exciting. I was already fascinated by the cinema and my father bought story ideas from me for ten dollars apiece. At that time he was a very important filmmaker in America."

Indeed, by the end of World War I, Maurice Tourneur was head of his own production company and generally regarded as the greatest aesthete in the American cinema. In 1918 he moved his company to Hollywood, where the following year Jacques Tourneur became an American citizen. In 1922 Jacques appeared as an extra in Rex Ingram's *Scaramouche*, and in 1924, finishing high school he went to MGM as a script clerk. He worked in the same capacity for his father in 1925-1926, but in the latter year Maurice Tourneur, whose Hollywood career was in decline, returned to Europe. He left his son a hundred dollar bill and the suggestion that he try and make it to Europe himself.

Jacques Tourneur did not at first take advantage of this offer, instead finding odd jobs in Hollywood as an actor and usher. But in 1927 his father invited him to Germany to work on *Das Schiff der verlorene Menschen* (*Ship of Lost Men*), and this time he went. He served as his father's editor and assistant on this film and then on a series of talkies made in Paris for Pathé-Nathan in 1929-1934. It was during this time

that Jacques Tourneur directed his own first movies for the same company, beginning in 1931 with *Tout ça ne vaut pas l'amour* (*None of That's Worth Love*).

In 1934 Tourneur broke away from his father and returned to Hollywood.

Tourneur had worked with Val Lewton on the crowd scenes in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and in 1942 he began his seven-year association with RKO, where Lewton was then working as a producer. Their first movie grew out of a party conversation—a suggestion that "Cat People" was an oddly suggestive title from which a thriller could be derived. . . . *Cat People* has been called "the first monster film to refrain from showing us the monster."...It did immensely well at the box office. Together with Lewton's other low-budget thrillers and Hitchcock's *Suspicion*, it saved the studio, which at that time was in great financial difficulty.

Robin Wood says that "its packed, complex and suggestive" dream sequence "concisely embodies the film's sense of life itself as a shadow-world in which nothing is certain, no issue is clear-cut, nothing is what it seems." Woods calls *Cat People* "a small masterpiece—perhaps the most delicate poetic fantasy in the American cinema."

"To show that, unconsciously, we all live in fear—that is genuine horror," Tourneur wrote.

Back at RKO, Tourneur made another film which—underrated at the time—has achieved the status of "a classic B-picture," *Out of the Past* (1947).

Since then, *Out of the Past* has come to be recognized as one of the best *films noirs* of the immediate postwar years, beautifully played by Mitchum and Greer, and lit and photographed to marvelous atmospheric effect by Nicholas Musuraca, who had been Tourneur's cameraman on all three of his films with Lewton. It has been called "one of Tourneur's [visually] most elaborate works," telling its story "through a camera which never merely records but draws us implacably into a dark spider's web of conflicting emotions."

Out of the Past shares the cynicism and downbeat sophistication of such contemporary thrillers as Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (and is almost as well-written as that film). Feminist critics have condemned its portrayal of Kathie Moffat as "a personification of the bitch goddess archetype," and Stephen Farber has made the interesting suggestion that the frequency with which such anti-heroines appeared in the movies of the period "reflected the fantasies and fears of a wartime society, in which women had taken control of many of the positions customarily held by men."

"I hate the expression 'horror film,'" Jacques Tourneur said. "For me, I make films about the supernatural because I believe in it. I believe in the power of the dead, witches."

None of Tourneur's subsequent [after *Curse of the Demon*

(1957)] films were of anything like the same quality, being ruined by poor scripts or interfering producers. He recognized this himself and made his last “very bad” picture in 1965. Before and after that he worked in television, a medium he despised. His *Positif* interview with Bertrand Tavernier gives some useful insights into his working methods—his concern for realism in the way his actors spoke, moved, entered a room with which they were supposed to be familiar or unfamiliar; above all, the importance he attached to light.

Tourneur said he had one basic principle he always imposed on his cameramen: “Only use natural, logical sources of light (a window, a lamp) and you must be able to see this source in every single shot. The presence of the light must be very concrete, you should be able to feel it. Cameramen hate that kind of thing because they have to rack their brains trying to find new solutions every time” but “in this way I also obtain very heavy contrasts which often lend dignity and truth to the human relationships. . . .It also changes the acting. . . .For instance, a young woman in order to be able to read a letter, will go to the oil lamp or to the window. . . . Another actor will unconsciously lower his voice. . . .I look for a very strong visual unity by using a type of framing and camera movement that is very simple. Everything must come from inside. It mustn’t be superficial. I hate weird camera angles and distorting lenses.”

For Robin Wood, Tourneur’s camera style, “which is the most distinctive feature of his heterogeneous *oeuvre*, has two chief characteristics, movement and distance. The fluid long takes that keep the characters in long shot within the shadowy environments, branches, and foliage obtruding darkly in the foreground, greatly enhance the haunting, sinister atmosphere of the suspense sequences; they also help to preserve the objectivity with which Tourneur customarily views his characters and on which the ambiguities of the horror movies depend.”

He and his wife lived in a Hollywood duplex, furnished with “quiet but exquisite taste,” that once belonged to F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall. Chris Fujiwara. Foreword by Martin Scorsese. Johns Hopkins U Press, Baltimore.London 1998

Scorsese’s foreword:

Tourneur was an artist of atmospheres. For many directors, an atmosphere is something that is “established,” setting the stage for the action to follow. For Tourneur it is the movie, and each of his movies boasts a distinctive atmosphere, with a profound sensitivity to light and shadow, and a very unusual relationship between characters and environment—the way people move through space in Tourneur movies, the way they simply handle objects, is always special, different from other films. Bertrand Tavernier and Jean-Pierre Coursodon have noted that Tourneur tended to record dialogue at low levels, and he always encouraged his actors to underplay (which must be why he preferred to work with minimalists like Robert Mitchum, Dana If *Out of the Past* seems in some ways like a typical film noir,

Andrews, or Victor Mature) and to move at a slightly slower pace than usual. Places, objects and atmospheres are living presences in his work, while emotion and drama speak very softly, the better to show how deeply they are affected by the physical world around them—which is why I think the films have such a hypnotic quality.

And there is also a suggestion of magic at the oddest moments in Tourneur’s work. Look at the scene in *Out of the Past* where Dickie Moore saves Robert Mitchum by hooking the arm of the man who’s trying to kill him with his fishing line and yanking him to his death. Tourneur films this scene in a unique way—where any other director would have pumped music into the background and cut to close-ups of a struggle, Tourneur lets us listen to the rushing water of the river below and shoots the action mostly in long shot, giving it a strange, dreamlike inevitability.

He’s one of those directors whose work renews your enthusiasm for movies—whenever I look at one of his films on tape or on screen, I remember why I wanted to make movies in the first place. The craft, taste, and extraordinary fluid artistry of his cinema makes most other movies look bloated and synthetic.

Fujiwara:

Tourneur said in 1977, the year of his death: “I always did what I wanted. I never turned down a script.” His refusal to acknowledge a contradiction between these two propositions suggests why the division between stylists and directors with a worldview, fundamental to Andrew Sarris’s auteur system, is irrelevant to Tourneur.

The typical Tourneur narrative is full of confusion and ambiguity, signs that point in no clear direction, and messages that circle back on the sender. The director’s narrative and stylistic choices constantly underline absence and distance. Significant events take place offscreen or before the start of the film; exposition is omitted or, when needed, made empty or incomprehensible, so that the motives of characters, even the protagonists, remain mysterious to the audience. Tourneur’s films revolve around communications that are misunderstood or blocked: “The Incredible Stranger” and *Out of the Past* both feature mute characters.

Tourneur loves situations that allow him to present characters and story ambiguously.

Like Ford, Tourneur edited with the camera: “It’s an old editor’s habit. I always shoot so few shots that the producer can’t do anything other than what I filmed.”

this is only because Tourneur’s constant preoccupations—the

unreliability of appearances, the helplessness of people to resist their obsessions and avoid becoming the victims of an apparently impersonal fate—are also those of the genre. Tourneur places these concerns within a context marked by his realism, humanism, and love for aesthetic fascination and mystery.

The film constantly calls out attention to the ambiguity of external behavior, a strategy that causes us to perceive the characters as possessing greater depth and mystery than those of most films noirs; we sense that they have thoughts, feelings, and qualities that they hold in reserve.

Let's list the prototypically "noir" features of *Out of the Past*, without analyzing (since this task has been done exhaustively) the significance of the features to the genre or worrying whether they are rigorously described: (1) a first-person voice-over narration (for, at any rate, part of the film); (2) a sense of the inadequacy of American "normal life" and economic and social institutions to contain the threat, or compensate for the attractions, represented by the "noir" world of crime and passion; (3) a preponderance of scenes that take place at night and in cities; (4) the use of certain visual patterns, especially emphasizing the presence of dark areas in the frame; (5) a private detective as hero; (6) a femme fatale; and (7) the entrapment of the hero by a fate that finally destroys him.

Out of the Past exhibits some of these features in what might be called their classical forms but uses them for artistic purposes. Others it turns against themselves. Regarding first-person voice-over narration, *Out of the Past* preserves the convention of having the hero recount past events—which are shown in flashback accompanied by his voice-over—to another character, in this case Ann, while the two are driving from Bridgeport to Lake Tahoe. Since Ann is Jeff's girlfriend, and since the story he tells is concerned with his relation with another woman, addressing the narration to Ann has a certain shock, which the film does not mitigate, but rather consciously underlines by returning briefly to the car in the middle of the flashback, allowing us to see Ann's reaction. . . .

Some essential features of noir style, as defined by Place and Peterson, are either absent or deemphasized in *Out of the Past*. Tourneur and Musuraca never use the wide-angle lens for grotesque close-up effects, nor do they favor close-ups in general, particularly the "obtrusive and disturbing" choker close-ups often used in films noirs. Whereas many noir directors deprive the viewer of spatial orientation by avoiding establishing long shots, Tourneur (like Hawks and Walsh) almost invariably favors such shots and almost never resorts to the shock effect created by cutting between long shot and close-up. Finally, if Place and Peterson's contention that "camera movements are used sparingly in most noir films" is granted as valid, *Out of the Past* must be counted a major exception (and so must the films noirs of Preminger, Ophuls, and Welles).

This film humanizes its femme fatale (the sixth noir feature). Ann could be speaking for Tourneur when she says about Kathie: "She can't be all bad. No one is." Jeff's reply—"She comes the closest"—is charact

eristically hardboiled and at the same time revealing. Kathie approaches being "all bad." The difference that remains, however small, is the measure of what in her is still human and irreducible to formulaelike "femme fatale"; it is also the measure of Tourneur's permanent refusal to judge his characters.

Mitchum on Mitchum said—

"The only difference between me and my fellow actors is that I've spent more time in jail."

"I gave up being serious about making pictures around the time I made a film with Greer Garson and she took 125 takes to say no."

I've still got the same attitude I had when I started. I haven't changed anything but my underwear."

"Listen. I got three expressions: looking left, looking right and looking straight ahead." (on his acting talents)

"People think I have an interesting walk. Hell, I'm just trying to hold my gut in."

Directors on Mitchum—

Edward Dmytryk: "On the surface he is irresponsible and vague and yes - wacky. Underneath he knows the score as few men in Hollywood do."

Charles Laughton: "All the tough talk is a blind. He is a literate, gracious, kind man with wonderful manners and he speaks beautifully - when he wants to. He would make the best Macbeth of any actor living."

John Huston: "He is a rarity among actors, hard-working, noncomplaining, amazingly perceptive, one of the most shockingly underrated stars in business."

Fred Zinneman: "He is one of the finest instinctive actors in the business, almost in the same class as Spencer Tracy."

David Lean: "Mitchum can, simply by being there, make almost any other actor look like a hole in the screen."

Join us next week, Tuesday October 7, for Keni Misoguchi's masterpiece, *Ugetsu*

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