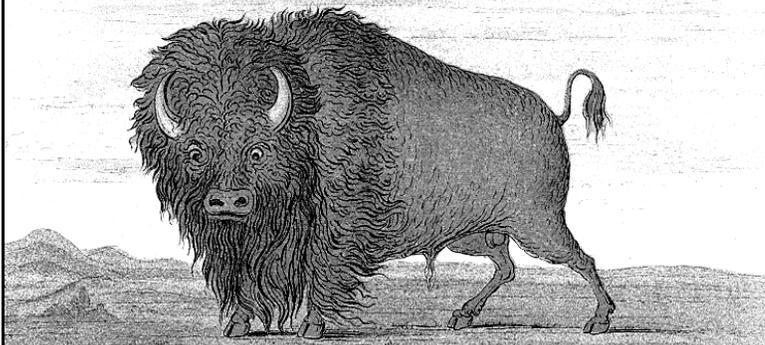


The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films with Diane Christian and Bruce Jackson

March 5, 2002 (V:8)



ROBERT ROSSEN (16 March 1908, New York, New York – 18 February 1966), the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants and grandson of a rabbi, grew up on Rivington Street, Lower East Side, a racially mixed neighborhood that gave him early lessons in “the impact of environment on character and vice versa.” He boxed to defend himself, sometimes professionally as a welterweight. He began in Hollywood as a screenwriter (he wrote *They Won't Forget* in 1937, based on the lynching of Leo Frank in Marietta, Georgia, in 1915, one of the great films on ambition, bigotry and rage). He only directed 10 films: *Lilith* (1964), *They Came to Cordura* (1959), *Island in the Sun* (1957), *Alexander the Great* (1956), *Mambo* (1954), *The Brave Bulls* (1951), *All the King's Men* (1949), *Body and Soul* (1947), and *Johnny O'Clock* (1947). He won a best picture Oscar in 1950 for *All the Kings Men*.

DEDE ALLEN (Dorothea Carothers Allen, 3 December 1925, Cleveland, Ohio) began as a messenger at Columbia pictures, became a sound editor, assistant film editor, and then one of the most important editors in Hollywood. Some of her other films are *John Q* (2002), *Wonder Boys* (2000), *Henry & June* (1990), *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Reds* (1981), *The Wiz* (1978), *Slap Shot* (1977), *The Missouri Breaks* (1976), *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), *Night Moves* (1975), *Serpico* (1973), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1972), *Little Big Man* (1970), and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)

PAUL NEWMAN (26 January 1925, Shaker Heights, Ohio) runs "Paul Newman's Own," a hugely successful company that makes salad dressing, spaghetti sauce and other food products. He gives most of the money away and spends the rest on enterprises like his The Hole In The Wall Gang Camp, a summer camp for children with cancer and other blood-related diseases (and their siblings) in Ashford, Connecticut. He finished 2nd in the 1979 Le Mans 24-hour race in a Porsche 935. According to Leonard Maltin's *Movie Encyclopedia* (1994):

Newman debuted on Broadway in 1953 in William Inge's "Picnic," and almost instantly turned heads at the Hollywood studios; after a false start with his debut in the ludicrous Biblical saga *The Silver Chalice* (1954), Newman scored as tough, star-crossed boxer Rocky Graziano in *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956) and his film career was off and running. Newman and second wife Joanne Woodward were paired in a number of films – *The Long Hot Summer*, *From the Terrace*, *Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys!*, *Paris Blues*, *A New Kind of Love* – that only boosted his appeal. He hit his stride with an Oscar-nominated performance as Brick in 1958's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and achieved further career milestones (and two more Oscar nods) as pool shark Eddie Felson in *The Hustler* (1961) and as an ambitious heel in *Hud* (1963). He was outstanding as the chain-gang prisoner in 1967's *Cool Hand Luke* (another Academy Award-nominated portrayal) and, of course, as a likable outlaw in the classic *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969; he was also one of the film's executive producers) in which he first teamed with Robert Redford. In 1969 he got to combine his avid, real-life interest in auto racing with a film assignment in *Winning* (which costarred Woodward). He turned to directing with 1968's *Rachel, Rachel*, the first of several first-rate films he would make with his wife as star. In the 1970s he alternated between quirky Robert Altman films and brash Hollywood disaster epics, but scored solidly, reteamed with Redford, in the delightful con-artist comedy *The Sting* (1973). In the 1980s, with traces of world-weariness etched in his still-handsome face and a hint of raspiness in his voice, Newman left the matinee-idol persona behind for good. He was effective as an unfairly maligned businessman in *Absence of Malice* (1981) and startlingly powerful as a whiskey-soaked lawyer in *The Verdict* (1982); he was Oscar-nominated for both roles (nominations five and six, respectively). Never having won an Oscar, Newman was finally presented with an honorary award for the body of his work in 1985 (and for his "personal integrity and dedication to his craft"). Ironically, he won a bona fide Academy Award the very next year, when he reprised the role of pool hustler Eddie Felson – brilliantly-in Martin Scorsese's *The Color of Money* (1986). No contemporary screen idol has ever aged more gracefully, but Newman refused to fall back on his looks, or his "persona," and continued to seek out challenges both as actor and director. In the latter guise he directed Woodward in a 1980 TV movie of the Broadway play "The Shadow Box," and 1987 remake of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and costarred with her in James Ivory's ironic *Mr.*

THE HUSTLER (1961), 134 minutes

Produced and directed by Robert Rossen
 Written by Robert Rossen and Sidney Carroll
 Based on the novel by Walter Tevis
 Original music by Kenyon Hopkins
 Cinematography by Eugen Schufftan
 Film Editing by Dede Allen
 Willie Mosconi.... technical advisor
 Muky.... still photographer

Paul Newman.... Fast' Eddie Felson
 Jackie Gleason.... Minnesota Fats
 Piper Laurie.... Sarah Packard
 George C. Scott.... Bert Gordon
 Myron McCormick.... Charlie Burns
 Murray Hamilton.... Findley
 Michael Constantine.... Big John
 Stefan Gierasch.... Preacher
 Clifford A. Pellow.... Turk
 Jake LaMotta.... Bartender
 Gordon B. Clarke.... Cashier
 Alexander Rose.... Score Keeper
 Carolyn Coates.... Waitress
 Carl York.... Young Hustler
 Vincent Gardenia.... Bartender
 Willie Mosconi.... Willie

Academy Awards: **Won** Oscar Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Black-and-White (Gene Callahan, Harry Horner), Best Cinematography, Black-and-White Eugen Schufftan . **Nominated** Best Actor in a Leading Role (Paul Newman), Best Actor in a Supporting Role (Jackie Gleason and George C. Scott – who refused the nomination), Best Actress in a Leading Role (Piper Laurie), Best Director, Best Picture, Best Writing – Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium. Selected 1997 for the National Film Registry

& *Mrs. Bridge* (1990). He played wildly colorful, eccentric Louisiana governor Earl Long in *Blaze* (1989) and Gen. Leslie R. Groves, the military leader in charge of The Manhattan Project, in *Fat Man and Little Boy* (1989). ...In 1994 he starred for the Coen brothers in *The Hudsucker Proxy* and earned his eighth Best Actor nomination for his portrayal of an amiable small-town loser in Robert Benton's *Nobody's Fool*...."

JACKIE GLEASON (Herbert John Gleason, 26 February 1916, Brooklyn –24 June 1987, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, colon and liver cancer), "The Great One," famously said, "Drinking removes warts and pimples. Not from me. But from those I look at" and "I'm no alcoholic. I'm a drunkard. There's a difference. A drunkard doesn't like to go to meetings." His trademark line was "How sweet it is." Biography from Leonard Maltin's *Movie Encyclopedia*: The man who would help define TV comedy in the 1950s toiled without distinction in Hollywood a decade earlier. Minor roles in films with major stars like Bogart and Grable (*All Through the Night*, *Springtime in the Rockies* both 1942) led nowhere, and the comedy lead in a 1942 B picture called *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* was likewise a dead end. Only after his tremendous success on TV, with his own variety show and the immortal "Honeymooners" skits and half-hour series, did Gleason return to the big screen—not in comedy roles, for the most part, but in dramatic characterizations that showed another facet of his great talent. His big-screen peak, reached in the early 1960s, included an Oscar-nominated supporting performance as billiard king Minnesota Fats in *The Hustler* (1961), and skillful starring turns in *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, *Gigot* (both 1962 the latter a Chaplinesque vehicle which he also cowrote), *Papa's Delicate Condition* and *Soldier in the Rain* (both 1963). He also appeared in *Skidoo* (1965), *Don't Drink the Water* (based on a Woody Allen play), and *How to Commit Marriage* (both 1969; in the latter teamed with Bob Hope). Considerably slimmed down, he made a screen comeback in the late 1970s, scoring a commercial smash in *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977), as a caricatured redneck sheriff; he also appeared in the 1980 and 1983 sequels. Other late credits include *Mr. Billion* (1977), *The Sting II*, *The Toy* (both 1982), and *Nothing in Common* (1986), which gave him one of his all-time best roles, as Tom Hanks' aging and irascible father. He and "Honeymooners" costar Art Carney were reunited in the made-for-TV movie *Izzy and Moe* (1985).

PIPER LAURIE (Rosetta Jacobs, 22 January 1932, Detroit, Michigan) had two great movie parts— Sarah in *The Hustler* and the mother in *Carrie*—and one great tv part – the villainess in David Lynch's "Twin Peaks" (1990-1991). Most of her earlier roles were, in Leonard Maltin's terms, as a "pert, pretty, generally appealing ingenue who, under contract to Universal in the 1950s, appeared in innumerable swashbucklers, costume dramas, and sword-and-sandal epics, often costarred with Tony Curtis."

GEORGE C. SCOTT (18 October 1927, Wise, Virginia – 22 September 1999, Westlake Village, California, ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm) was the first actor ever to refuse an Academy Award (1970 – for Patton). "The (Academy Awards) ceremonies," he said, "are a two-hour meat parade, a public display with contrived suspense for economic reasons." His biography from Leonard Maltin's *Movie Encyclopedia*: An actor's actor, George C. Scott has carved a solid reputation as a

charismatic screen performer, although the body of his work is not nearly as imposing as memory would have us believe. Coming to the theater after service in the Marines, Scott became a familiar figure on stage and TV in New York in the late 1950s. His first film was *The Hanging Tree* (1959), a Gary Cooper Western, in which he showed promise as a supporting player. In fact, he received a Best Supporting Actor nomination for his role as the prosecuting attorney in his second picture, Otto Preminger's *Anatomy of a Murder* (also 1959). During that period Scott was riding high on Broadway in plays like "Comes a Day" and "The Andersonville Trial," and making prominent guest appearances on television as well. He earned another Oscar nomination for his supporting performance in *The Hustler* (1961), then costarred in *The List of Adrian Messenger* (1963), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964, a memorable turn as the gung ho Gen. Buck Turgidson), *The Yellow Rolls-Royce* (also 1964), *The Bible* (1966, as Abraham), and *Not With My Wife You Don't!* (also 1966). He also received critical acclaim for his starring role in the New York-based TV series "East Side, West Side," which lasted just one season, 1963-64. He starred in *The Flim Flam Man* (1967), as a roguish con artist, and *Petulia* (1968), as a recently divorced doctor, before taking on the role for which he's best remembered, the eccentric but brilliant General George S. Patton in *Patton* (1970). His galvanizing performance in this sweeping and intelligent biopic won him an Academy Award, but ever since *The Hustler* he'd openly disdained acting honors, and true to form, refused to accept the Oscar—the first actor ever to do so. Undeterred by this rebuff, Academy voters nominated him again the following year for his electrifying performance in Paddy Chayefsky's black comedy *The Hospital* (1971). That same year he played a delightfully deranged man who thinks he is Sherlock Holmes in *They Might Be Giants*. He also starred in a TV production of Arthur Miller's "The Price," for which he won an Emmy—which, naturally, he refused. This was Scott's busiest and most fruitful period. He starred in *The New Centurions* (1972), *Oklahoma Crude* (a rare and welcome chance to play comedy), *The Day of the Dolphin* (both 1973), *Bank Shot* (1974, another comedy), *The Hindenburg* (1975), *Islands in the Stream* (1977), *Crossed Swords*, the Hollywood parody *Movie Movie* (both 1978), and *The Changeling* (1979). He was particularly effective in *Hardcore* (also 1979), as a middle-aged, midwestern Calvinist drawn into the seedy world of urban decay while searching for his runaway daughter. He also directed two films in which he starred with his wife Trish Van Devere, *Rage* (1972) and *The Savage Is Loose* (1974), but neither was especially well received. Since the early 1980s, Scott has assumed roles in feature films only infrequently, with *The Formula* (1980), *Taps* (1981), *Firestarter* (1984), and *The Exorcist III* (1990) as his only significant efforts, but he has continued to be a busy TV actor in specials and long-form dramas

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

Rossen could not have found a studio more sympathetic to his concerns than Warner Brothers. The most socially-conscious of the majors, taking many of its subjects from contemporary headlines, it actively supported Roosevelt's New Deal.

His first script, written in collaboration with Abem Finkel, was *Marked Woman* (1937) directed by Lloyd Bacon, and inspired by Thomas E. Dewey's successful battle against Lucky Luciano's prostitution empire. Humphrey Bogart plays the tough young prosecutor, with Bette Davis as his star witness.

A Walk in the Sun, Harry Brown's notable short novel about an American infantry platoon in Italy in World War II, was scripted by Rossen and directed for 20th Century-Fox by Lewis Milestone. This moving and humane picture is regarded by some as one of the best films to have come out of the war. Rossen then followed Milestone to Paramount for *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946), a remarkable *film noir* set in a small town. Barbara Stanwyck stars as a rich woman twisted by greed and guilt, with Van Heflin as the returned wanderer who may know her secret.

Body and Soul (1947), made for the independent Enterprise Productions,

was written not by Rossen but by Abraham Polonsky, who shared the same political convictions. John Garfield plays Charley Davis, a boxer who has fought his way out of the ghetto slums of the Lower East Side.

A critic for the National Board of Review found in this picture “the gin and tinsel, squalor and sables of the Depression era, less daring than when first revealed in *Dead End* or *Golden Boy* but more valid and mature because shown without sentiment or blur.

There was universal praise for the direction of the fight scenes, especially the climactic bout, whose “tour-de-force photography,” as Alan Casty writes “combines an immediacy and fluidity of camera work (James Wong Howe reputedly shot the scenes while on roller skates) with decisive editing (especially in the use of close-ups) and a steady rhythmic progression towards the crescendo of the final knockout.”

Alan Casty, writing in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1966-67), says that in *All the King's Men* Rossen's “techniques are similar to and probably influence by those of the Italian neorealists, and especially Roberto Rossellini; Rossen [and his photographer Burnett Guffey] shoots the film entirely on location and with available light in all kinds of weather conditions, uses many non-actors, catches his performers unawares and spontaneous, and generally employs documentary camera and cutting methods.”

The Hustler (1961) was the first film since *Alexander the Great* over which Rossen had full artistic control as director, producer, and coscenarist (with Sidney Carroll). He returned in it to his favorite theme of a young man in search of himself, but now with a richer apprehension of the kind of realism he wanted to achieve—“not a matter of a servile reproduction of reality; rather, it will be necessary to capture things as they are and modify them so as to give them a poetic significance” and to get at “this whole question of the inner life.”

Eddie Felson (Paul Newman) in *The Hustler* is an itinerant young pool shark, who lures amateurs into games by pretending

incompetence, then takes them for the money they greedily bet against him. Fast Eddie has real talent and, as the film begins, takes on the champion, the immaculate Minnesota Fats (Jackie Gleason), in a thirty-six-hour game. Fats wins, not because he is a better player but because he has a stronger will. The brash and overconfident Eddie is a loser—the quintessential Rossen hero with great ability but no self-knowledge.

The Hustler was nominated for Academy Awards in every major category but received only one, for Eugen Schufftan's moody black-and-white photography. André Fieschi has suggested that the film's “ultraclassical” skill in the ordering of spectacle and suspense “often masked the real originality of the thesis that . . . [it] supported, that developed as if underground a fragile network of hauntings and obsessions.”

Lilith is a remarkable attempt to dig a little deeper in an almost untilled field, and to throw some light on that mystery of mysteries—the relationship between madness and the creative imagination.” (Tom Milne)

Part of the reason for *Lilith*'s initial harsh reception was its apparent remoteness from Rossen's usual realistic concerns. In fact, Alan Casty suggests, it is not a complete departure from Rossen's earlier work, nor a fashionable imitation of French models (as some critics suggested), “but an extension of his own developing concern for film realism” in which he achieves “a more complex and ambiguous sense of motive, character, and existence. . . . Why we do what we do as we seek to define ourselves is left an awful mystery.”

For André Fieschi, *Lilith* was Rossen's “incontestable masterpiece—which serves as well to wipe out past errors (*An Island in the Sun*, *Mambo*) as to relegate successes (*All the King's Men*, *The Hustler*) to the second rank. This man, said to be rough, grumpy, gauche, and preoccupied with pounding first truths without much nuance, came, against all expectation and thanks to a single film, to confuse the more or less vague ideas that critics maintained about him. . . . nothing could let us suppose that Rossen carried in him a diamond as brilliant and as cutting as *Lilith*. Yet one masterpiece is enough to change the face of man.”

Doug Tomlinson in *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Ed. Andrew Sarris. Visible Ink Press, 1998 NY

As a contract writer for Warner Bros. in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Rossen worked on many excellent scripts which showed a strong sympathy for individuals destroyed by or battling “the system.” His first produced screenplay, *Marked Woman*, a little-known and highly underrated Bette Davis vehicle, deserves serious study for its study of prostitution racketeering and its empowerment of women to overthrow corruption.

While his early scripts occasionally displayed an idealism which bordered on naiveté, Rossen deserves credit for his commitment to the depiction of economic and social injustice.

Rossen's final films *The Hustler* and *Lilith*, show a return to form, due in great part to the atmospheric cinematography of Eugene Schufftan. Rossen, firmly entrenched in the theatrical values of content through script and performance, had previously worked with strong cinematographers (especially James Wong Howe and Burnett Guffey), but had worked from the conviction that content was the prime area of concern. As he told *Cahiers du Cinéma*, “Technique is nothing compared to content.” In *The Hustler*, a moody film about winners and losers set in the world of professional pool-playing, the studied script was strongly enhanced by Schufftan's predominantly claustrophobic framings. Schufftan, long a respected European cameraman (best known for his work on Lang's *Metropolis* and Carné's *Quai des Brumes*), had been enthusiastically recommended to Rossen by Jack Garfein, who had brought Schufftan back to America for his *Something Wild*.

Schufftan's working posture was one of giving the director what he asked for, and production notes from the set of *The Hustler* indicate he gave Rossen what he wanted while also achieving results that one feels were beyond Rossen's vision. There was no denying Schufftan's influence in the film's success (it won him an Oscar), and Rossen wisely invited him to work on his next film.

from Alan Casty, *The Films of Robert Rossen*. Museum of Modern Art, NY 1969

Rossen worked almost entirely within the conventions of socially oriented realism, established by the social-problem and gangster films and plays of the thirties. Nonetheless his work, both in terms of technique and content, helped extend the boundaries of this traditional social realism. At the same time, his talent, business acumen, and personal force enabled him to develop his career with a degree of independence unusual in the American industry. Early in the postwar period, he was among the first to set up an

independent production organization, using the major studios as sources of capital and distribution only. Among these independents, Rossen remained one of the very few able to exert relatively complete control over his work, although this was offset by commercial considerations and his own business drive. Later both this independence and his business interests were jeopardized for several years by the political blacklisting of the fifties. Still, despite his conventional approach, despite his commercial



success, despite the blacklist, Rossen produced a body of work that reflected a consistent, deepening, and developing point of view, and a close interrelationship with his life that was unique among American film directors.

Typically, Rossen's searcher is a young man—often rootless or socially dispossessed—with a certain natural inner force, someone who cannot fully identify or control this energy, this source of grace and power. Under the shaping pressures of a corrupt society, his élan turns aggressive, perverse, destructive. “The element common to many of my films,” Rossen wrote in 1962, “is the desire for success, ambition, which is an important element in American life. It is an important element, and has become increasingly more important in what is known as Western Civilization. . . . Modern industrial society creates certain highly competitive things, which are often emotional and tends I think to keep reducing the stature and dignity of the individual more and more. It presses him, if he is trying to maintain that dignity, to strike out against society and to get on top of that society.”

Just two months before his death, in the last major interview he granted, Rossen was still analyzing the complexities of this will to power: “. . . the drive toward power never permits itself to be naked and always needs a rationale, whether it's the rationale of a schizophrenic or the rationale of a Willie Stark.” And yet: “Power is such a complex kind of subject, because you see there are certain things in power that are very human and very right and very neat—the power, let's say, of a girl singer to get on the stage and hold an audience by sheer force of her personality or voice. That's power at a given moment and a given time, but that power is good power, that power is a creative power, that power is an expression of human personality which is what we are all after and don't have now—and why we are so buggered up.”

In Hollywood, in 1937, his idealism led him to the Communist party. Rossen was to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1953 that he had thought about the intellectual atmosphere of the twenties when he grew up, and that “it was a period of great cynicism, disillusionment; it was a period when I think most young men who were interested in ideas accepted the premise that the system of government. . . that we had grown up under had failed. . . there weren't any more horizons; there weren't any more promises; we had pretty much reached the apex of a pretty materialistic society. . . . We felt that we were looking—I felt that I was looking—for new horizons, a new kind of society, something I could believe in and become a part of. . . . You felt that. . . the Communist party was the medium through which this could be effected. . . it offered every possible kind of thing to you at that time which could fulfill your sense of idealism. . . anything that tends toward the realization of the inner man.”

They Won't Forget, Rossen's favorite among his Warner screenplays, was one of the most outspoken attacks on entrenched injustice of the period. *Time* saw it as “the most devastating study of mob violence and sectional hatred the screen has yet dared to present.” Otis Ferguson in *The New Republic* praised it as one of the best of “the pictures with social teeth in them.” It was based on a true case, the lynching of Leo Frank for the rape and murder of a fourteen-year-old girl in Atlanta in 1913 (the girl was played by Lana Turner in her first “sweater girl” role), and it had many of the hard, cynical touches that were to be the hallmark of Rossen films.

He cited being affected by “the bankruptcy of Communist Party thinking,” and “the deep cynicism of the Communist Party” when, in 1945, the famous Duclos letter produced a complete reversal of the party position on peaceful coexistence and caused the sudden denunciation and removal of formerly venerated leaders such as Earl Browder. And so he began to realize, he said, that “the same reasons why you go into the party are the same reasons which make you go out, which is ultimately the discovery that the idealism that you were looking for, the fighting for the ideas that you want, are just not in the Communist Party.”

This sudden shift to affirmation and growth at the close, so typical of many of Rossen's films, probably stems from a mixture of

causes—Rossen's own idealism, the conventions of the social drama of the thirties in which he served his apprenticeship, and the commercial demands of the Hollywood film. The latter pressure was explained to the novelist Robert Penn Warren during the shooting of *All the King's Men*. Discussing several alternative endings to the film, Rossen told Warren: “Son, when you are dealing with American movies you can forget, when you get to the end, anything like what you call irony—then it's cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians.” This concern for the conventional was typical of Rossen's internal conflict between the commercial and artistic impulses within himself. This conflict, although always in mixture with other pressures, did more than influence his endings; it also influenced the casting, structure and editing of several films. For commercial purposes he opted for star values in the casting of *They Came to Cordura* and even in the choice of Warren Beatty in *Lilith*.

“I have always, since I began, attached much importance to editing,” Rossen once said. “I have spent more time in the cutting rooms than anywhere else. I always think about the editing when I shoot, for it is the second part of the writing of the film”

[Rossen was named by Jack Warner in May 1947 as one of the 16 writers he had dismissed because of Communist affiliations. By November when *Body and Soul* was released he'd been named by other witnesses.] As a result, he was among the first 19 so-called “unfriendly” witnesses to be subpoenaed by the committee. But then, without explanation, the committee interrupted its hearings after the exposure of the first ten witnesses only—those who were subsequently indicted and jailed for contempt and became known as the Hollywood Ten. After questioning these ten witnesses, and engaging in a ludicrous dialogue with Bertolt Brecht, the committee failed to call the other nine, among whom were Rossen and Lewis Milestone.

But the pressure did not subside. The work of the committee fostered and strengthened the rigorous screening practices in industry employment that became known as the blacklist. In the case of many, it was enough at this point to attest privately to one's present non-membership in the Communist party. This Rossen did, in 1948, according to the later testimony of Richard Collins, by sending a letter to Harry Cohn, the president of Columbia Pictures. Thus he was allowed to work.

And he produced his major political film, *All the King's Men*. At the very time that moral and ethical principles were being twisted and exposed like raw nerves illustrating the dilemmas of the use and misuse of political power, Rossen, with integrity and courage, dramatized the process by which the personal loss of self was made public and political—dramatized the interaction between personal corruption and the corruption of society.

This adaptation of novels was to become Rossen's chief approach to filmmaking; of his major works, only *Alexander the Great* was not based on a novel. What resulted, however, were recreations rather than adaptations. As he commented later in discussing *Lilith*, “So I tried as I do always when I adapt a book that I like, to render the spirit of it rather than the letter.”

In 1966 he commented, “when I was only still a scenarist, it seems to me that I was writing films already very close in spirit to the neo-realism that I did not yet know. . . . But of course that does not mean that, later, I was not influenced by that great Italian movement. On the contrary, *Open City*, *The Bicycle Thief*, and so on, marked me deeply, and I even thought, when I became a director, that that was the true way of making films.”

He was called to testify on June 25, 1951. He told the committee, “I should like to emphatically state that I am not a member of the Communist party. I am not sympathetic with it or its aims. . . . It opposes freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and it basically is against the dignity of the human individual.”

But he refused to testify about his past activities or about the activities or affiliations of anyone else. He was trying to steer a precarious middle way, without violating his principles or his past. As he told a

Newsweek reporter: "A man has a right to believe in something at a given time, and a right to change his beliefs. But the fact that he changes his beliefs does not necessarily mean that his original motives. . . were wrong. I won't spit on my past beliefs. . . ."

Neither the committee nor the industry was satisfied; two years of forced inactivity followed.

In 1953 Rossen wrote to the committee and requested a hearing. He appeared in New York on May 7, and this time he testified in full detail about his own party membership, his gradual and deepening disillusionment, and his final break over the period from 1945 to 1947. He also verified, from lists furnished by the committee, the names of those he knew as party members, 57 in all.

Whatever the combination of motives, the decision and the long ordeal before and after had a lasting effect on Rossen and his work. Jean Seberg captured this perceptively in a 1966 article: "He was a very complicated man, agonized even, who continually asked himself questions about himself. Perhaps one must seek out the cause of this anguish in the great McCarthy trauma, in which his world at the time had literally toppled. . . . And I think the moral shock of this affair changed him deeply. He was led to withdraw into himself, to live a little apart with his family, to take things into consideration more, to examine the secret motivations of people. . . . His art became more and more personal; it is there perhaps that one must see the reason for commercial failure. He was more attached to symbols, to deep ideas, than to appearances."

Whatever the final effects on Rossen. The immediate result in 1953 was that he was able to work again, although he never again even visited Hollywood.

The familiarity of the materials and the preconceptions of the critics kept most from seeing Rossen's next picture, *The Hustler* for what it was: a breakthrough on Rossen's part, a film of deeper understanding and sympathy, which extended the limits of his earlier kind of social realism. At this point realism had become for him "not a matter of servile reproduction of reality. Rather it will be necessary to capture things as

they are and modify them so as to give them a poetic significance. Furthermore, it matters little whether you call it poetic or not; what matters is that in this way something situated beyond and above life be delivered, and that thus one should feel what one deeply thinks. To reach. . . through the objective become universal."

By the film's completion Rossen saw it this way: "the game represents a form of creative expression. My protagonist, Fast Eddie, wants to become a great pool player, but the film is really about the obstacles he encounters in attempting to fulfill himself as a human being. He attains self-awareness only after a terrible personal tragedy which he has caused—and then he wins the pool game." As he later said: "He [Eddie] needs to win before everything else; that is his tragedy."

In *The Hustler* Rossen not only speaks of his characters with more sympathy than ever before, but he speaks of their emotionality, their need, and their distortion of love, with greater fullness and insight. His is the emphasis he achieves with his attempts at a symbolic realism in his last two films; this is the new distinct coloration he gives his older concerns. In *The Hustler* the network of ambiguous emotions and relationships is only partly revealed by the plot; it is suggested as well by the visual images, and by the disquieting emotional aura that surround all but is never fully defined. As Claude Ollier has noted: "One has the constant impression that something else is happening that is escaping, being only briefly suggested by acting and dialogues with two meanings. . . . A sense of indecision hovers permanently over this strange film; and the final explanations are not enough to dispel it."

Even the pool games are used to reveal states of emotion, character traits, and relationships. Audaciously, Rossen shows five games in the course of the film, four at some length. Each, through its rhythms, plot, context, character byplay, suggests the stage Eddie is at, within himself and within his relationship with Bert Gordon. Relationships are also captured by the visual patterns of two-shots and three-shots, particularly in patterns of domination and submission

THIS WEEK IN THE MAFAC SUNDAY CLASSICS: March 10: the only film shown at MAFAC this year that Robert Creeley has written a fine poem about, Robert Bresson's *Lancelot of the Lake* (1975).

ONLY TWO MORE FILMS IN THE ALBRIGHT-KNOX'S "SCREENING THE FIFTIES: this Thursday, March 7, it's Emile de Antonio's McCarthy-era classic, *Point of Order* 1964, and a week later, Thursday, March 14, it's the best Hollywood musical ever made, Gene Kelly's and Stanley Donen's, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952. Intros are at 7:30, the films start a few minutes later. *Singin' in the Rain* will be hi-res DVD projection; *Point of Order* is available only in video. The Garden Restaurant will be open for dinner on screening nights. Call 716.270.8233 for information and reservations)

NEXT WEEK, MARCH 12, IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS: John Ford's *THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE*, 1962. John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Vera Miles, Andy Devine, Woody Strode and Lee Marvin in Ford's great story about law and legend in the changing American west.

BUFFALO REPORT, the region's only free and independent web journal, is now up and publishing. Articles in the first issues deal with the Kaleida-Children's War, what developer Larry Quinn did after his construction trucks shut down Michael Bennett Lane, and more. Go to buffaloreport.com.

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