

[Vimeo link for this week's film and ALL of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the virtual BFS](#)

[Zoom link for all SPRING 2022 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions](#)

**Directed by** John Huston  
**Based on the novel by** Dashiell Hammett  
**Screenplay by** John Huston  
**Original Music by** Adolph Deutsch  
**Cinematography by** Arthur Edeson  
**Film Editing by** Thomas Richards  
**Meta Carpenter....**script supervisor

Humphrey Bogart...Sam Spade  
Mary Astor...Brigid O'Shaughnessy  
Gladys George...Iva Archer  
Peter Lorre...Joel Cairo  
Barton MacLane...Det. Lt. Dundy  
Lee Patrick...Effie Perine  
Sydney Greenstreet...Kasper Gutman  
Ward Bond...Det. Tom Polhaus  
Jerome Cowan...Miles Archer  
Elisha Cook Jr....Wilmer Cook  
James Burke...Luke  
Murray Alper...Frank Richman  
John Hamilton...District Attorney Bryan  
Walter Huston...Capt. Jacobi

The film was elected for the National Film Registry in 1989 and received 3 Oscar nominations in 1942: best picture, best screenplay, best supporting actor.

**John Huston** (John Marcellus Huston, 5 August 1906, Nevada, Missouri – 28 August 1987) “got to write and direct his first feature: Dashiell Hammett’s



1930 detective novel, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941),” earning distinction from “the French” as “starting a new genre called film noir [...]. James Agee and Pauline Kael would continue to praise it as ‘The best private-eye melodrama ever made’ and ‘The most high-style thriller ever made in America’” Grobel qtd. in Jackson). He won two Oscars in 1949 for Best Director and Best Writing, Screenplay for *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948)§. He was frequently nominated for Oscars for his writing, directing, production, and, even, acting: Best Writing, Original Screenplay for *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (1940)\* and *Sergeant York* (1941);\* Best Writing, Screenplay for *The Maltese Falcon* (1941),\* *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950),\*\*\*\*\* *The African Queen* (1951, with James Agee);\* Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium for *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957)\* and for *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975);\* for Best Director for *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950),\*\*\*\*\* *The African Queen* (1951),\* *Moulin Rouge* (1952),\*\*\*\*\* and for *Prizzi's Honor* (1985); Best Picture for *Moulin Rouge* (1952)\*\*\*\*\* and Best Actor in a Supporting Role for

*The Cardinal* (1963). He was also nominated for the distinguished Palme d'Or for *Under the Volcano* (1984) at Cannes. His frequent recognition for writing may be reflected in his recurring film adaptation of literary classics: Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951)§, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1956),\*\*\*\*\* Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1957, uncredited), Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1979, as Jhon Huston),\*\* and, his final film, a haunting adaptation of James Joyce's *The Dead* (1987). He directed 47 films. These are some of his other films: *In This Our Life* (1942), *Winning Your Wings* (1942 Short), *Across the Pacific* (1942), *Report from the Aleutians* (1943 Documentary),\* *San Pietro* (1945 Documentary short),\*\*\*\*\* *Let There Be Light* (1946 Documentary),\* *Key Largo* (1948),\* *We Were Strangers* (1948)§, *Beat the Devil* (1953),\*\*\*\*\* *The Barbarian and the Geisha* (1958), *The Roots of Heaven* (1958), *The Unforgiven* (1960), *The Misfits* (1961),\*\*\*\* *Freud* (1962),\*\* *The List of Adrian Messenger* (1963),\*\* *The Night of the Iguana* (1964),\* *The Bible: In the Beginning...* (1966),\*\* *Casino Royale* (scenes at Sir James Bond's house and castle in Scotland scenes) (1967),\*\* *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967),\*\*\* *Sinful Davey* (1969),\*\*\* *A Walk with Love and Death* (1969),\*\*\*\*\* *The Kremlin Letter* (1970),\*\*\*\*\* *Fat City* (1972),\*\*\* *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (1972),\*\* *The MacKintosh Man* (1973),\*\*\* *Phobia* (1980), *Victory* (1981), and *Annie* (1982).\*\* He wrote for 40 films, including films he did not direct, including: *Wuthering Heights* (1939 contributing writer - uncredited), *The Storm* (1930 dialogue), *Law and Order* (1932 adaptation), *Jezebel* (1938 screen play), *Juarez* (1939 screen play), *High Sierra* (1941 screen play), *Three Strangers* (1946 original screenplay), *The Stranger* (1946 uncredited), and *The Killers* (1946 uncredited). He acted in 54 films, including the films noted above and, among others: *The Shakedown* (1929), *Hell's Heroes* (1929), *The List of Adrian Messenger* (1963), *The Cardinal* (1963), *Candy* (1968), *De Sade* (1968), *Myra Breckinridge* (1970), *The Devil's Backbone* (1971), *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (1972), *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (1973), *Chinatown* (1974), *The Wind and the Lion* (1975), *Sherlock Holmes in New York* (1976 TV Movie), *The Rhinemann Exchange* (1977 TV Mini-Series), *The Hobbit* (1977 TV Movie), *Winter Kills* (1979), and *Cannery Row* (1982). He also produced 15 films, including those noted above.

\*Wrote

\*\*Acted in

§Wrote and acted in

\*\*\*Produced

\*\*\*\*Produced and acted in

\*\*\*\*\*Produced and wrote

\*\*\*\*\*Wrote, produced, acted in

**Dashiell Hammett** (Samuel Dashiell Hammett, 27 May 1894, St. Mary's County, Maryland—10 January 1961, New York) 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 (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 novel), *Satan Met a Lady* 1936 (based on *The Maltese Falcon*), *The Glass Key* (1935, based on the novel, seven *Thin Man* films, *Roadhouse Nights* 1930 (based on *Red Harvest*), and more.



**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 with *The Fighting O'Flynn* 1949. There were more than 130 other films between the two, many of them truly memorable. He did *My Wild Irish Rose* 1947, *The Mask of Dimitrios* 1944, *Casablanca* 1942, *Across the Pacific* 1942, *They Drive by Night* 1940, *Each Dawn I Die* 1939, *They Won't Forget* 1937, *Gold Diggers of 1937* 1936, *Satan Met a Lady* 1936 (the previous film version of TMF), *Mutiny on the Bounty* 1935, *The Invisible Man*

1933, *Frankenstein* 1931, *Doctors' Wives* 1931, *All Quiet on the Western Front* 1930, *Stella Dallas* 1925, *The Thief of Bagdad* 1924, *Robin Hood* 1922, and *The Three Musketeers* 1921. He was nominated for three best cinematographer Oscars: *Casablanca* 1942, *All Quiet on the Western Front* 1930 and *In Old Arizona* 1929.

**Humphrey Bogart** (25 December 1899, New York, New York—14 January 1957, Los Angeles, California) 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. 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 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 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, *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.

**Mary Astor** (Lucile Vasconcellos Langhanke, 3 May 1906, Quincy, Illinois—25 September 1987, Woodland Hills, CA) first appeared in film in *The Scarecrow* 1920. She worked again the next year in *Sentimental Tommy* 1921, but her scenes were all deleted. Her last screen job was in the 1980 TV miniseries "Hollywood." Along the way she was in *Hush... Hush*, *Sweet Charlotte* 1964, *Return to Peyton Place* 1961, *Any Number Can Play* 1949, *Little Women* 1949, *Meet Me in St. Louis* 1944, *Across the Pacific* 1942, *The Prisoner of Zenda* 1937, *Dodsworth* 1936, *Trapped by Television* 1936, *Red Dust* 1932, *The Lost Squadron* 1932, *Other Men's Women* 1931, *Ladies Love Brutes* 1930, *Dry Martini* 1928, *The Rough Riders* 1927, *Don Juan* 1926, *Bullets or Ballots* 1921. She won a Best Actress in a Supporting Role Oscar for her work in *The Great Lie* 1941.

**Peter Lorre** (László Löwenstein, 26 June 1904, Rózsahegy, Austria-Hungary, now Ruzomberok, Slovakia—23 March 1964, Los Angeles, California) 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 Falcon* 1941. His last film was *The Patsy* 1964. In the 1930s he starred in nine films about a detective named Mr. Moto. Some of his other 87 films were *The Raven* 1963, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* 1961, *Silk Stockings* 1957, *Around the World in Eighty Days* 1956, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*



1954, *Beat the Devil* 1953, *The Chase* 1946, *Arsenic and Old Lace* 1944, *The Mask of Dimitrios* 1944, *Crime and Punishment* 1935, and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* 1934. The Nazis used footage of him in *M* in what is probably their most famous antisemitic propaganda film, *Der Ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*, 1940).

**Barton MacLane** (25 December 1902, Columbia, South Carolina—1 January 1969, Santa Monica, California) was in nearly 180 films and tv series, most of them westerns or cop films. Among them were: *Law of the Lawless* 1964, *Best of the Badmen* 1951, *Tarzan and the Huntress* 1947, *San Quentin* 1946, *Tarzan and the Amazons* 1945, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* 1941, *Western Union* 1941, *High Sierra* 1941, *San Quentin* 1937, *Bullets or Ballots* 1936, *'G' Men* 1935, *The Cocoanuts* 1929, and *The Quarterback* 1926.

**Sydney Greenstreet** (27 Dec. 1879, Sandwich, Kent, England—8 Jan 1954, Hollywood) 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 Hucksters* 1947, *The Mask of Dimitrios* 1944, *Passage to Marseille* 1944, *Casablanca* 1942, *Across the Pacific* 1942, *They Died with Their Boots On* 1941,

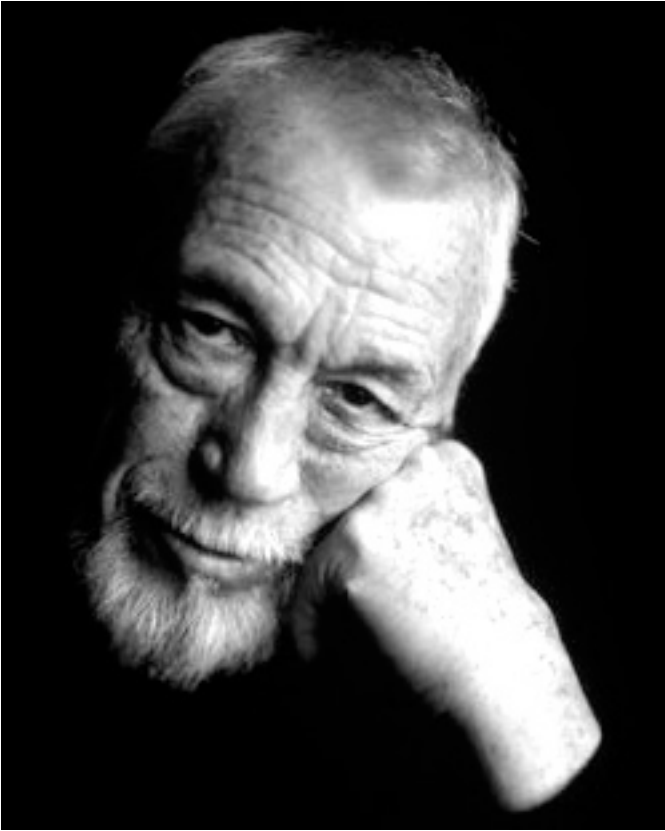
**Elisha Cook, Jr.** (26 December 1903, San Francisco—18 May 1995, Big Pine, California) outlasted everybody else in the *Falcon* cast. He was sometimes described as "the screen's lightest heavy." He did a lot of TV work in the '60s, '70s and '80s, often appearing as a semi-regular in such series as "Baretta" and "Magnum, P.I." He appeared in over 200 theatrical and made-for-tv films and tv series, among them *Hammett* 1982, *Tom Horn* 1980, *The Black Bird* 1975, *Electra Glide in Blue* 1973, *The Emperor of the North Pole* 1973, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* 1973, *The Great Northfield, Minnesota Raid* 1972, *Rosemary's Baby* 1968, *Baby Face Nelson* 1957, *I, the Jury* 1953, and, perhaps his most famous role after *The Maltese Falcon*, *Shane* 1953.

**Ward Bond** (9 April 1903, Benkelman, Nebraska—5 November 1960, Dallas, Texas) was a favorite of John Ford, who used him in 20 films: *The Wings of Eagles* 1957, *The Searchers* 1956, *The Long Gray Line* 1955, *Hondo* 1953, *Mister Roberts* 1953, *The Quiet Man* 1952, *Wagon Master* 1950, *Fort Apache* 1948, *3 Godfathers* 1948, *The Fugitive* 1947, *My Darling Clementine* 1946, *They Were Expendable* 1945, *Tobacco Road* 1941, *The Long Voyage Home* 1940, *The Grapes of Wrath* 1940, *Young Mr. Lincoln* 1939, *Drums Along the Mohawk* 1939, *Submarine Patrol* 1938, *The Adventures of Marco Polo* 1938, *Air Mail* 1932, *Arrowsmith* 1931, and *Up the River* 1930. Bond also appeared in about 250 other films, tv programs and tv series, some of which were "Wagon



Train" (132 episodes, 1957-1961), *Rio Bravo* 1959, *Johnny Guitar* 1954, *Joan of Arc* 1948, *It's a Wonderful Life* 1946, *They Were Expendable* 1945, *The Sullivans* 1944, *Swamp Water* 1941, *Sergeant York* 1941, *Santa Fe Trail* 1940, *Gone with the Wind* 1939, *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse* 1938, *Bringing Up Baby* 1938, *Topper* 1937, *Pride of the Marines* 1936, *It Happened One Night* 1934, *A Connecticut Yankee* 1931 and *Words and Music* 1929.

**Jerome Cowan** (6 October 1897, New York City, New York—24 January 1972, Encino, California) was, in the 1950s through the early 1970s, ubiquitous on American television: he appeared (usually just once) on all the major and minor drama and comedy series in those years. He also appeared in over 100 (mostly forgotten) films, a few of which were *Visit to a Small Planet* 1960, *Dallas* 1950, *The West Point Story* 1950, *Young Man with a Horn* 1950, *Joe Palooka Meets Humphrey* 1950, *The Fountainhead* 1949, *Miracle on 34th Street* 1947, *The Song of Bernadette* 1943, *The Maltese Falcon* 1941, *High Sierra* 1941, *Vogues of 1938* 1937, *New Faces of 1937* 1937, *You Only Live Once* 1937, and *Beloved Enemy* 1936. He was best known in film for his eight appearances in a film series based on a comic strip, *Blondie*.



**From *World Film Directors, Vol I*. Edited by John Wakeman. H. W. Wilson Co., NY, 1987, entry by Philip Kemp**

John (Marcellus) Huston, American director, scenarist, actor, and producer, was born in the town of Nevada, Missouri, where the Water and Power Company—or, according to some accounts, the entire town—had been won by his maternal grandfather, John Gore, in a poker game. Huston's father, Walter, was at that time a small-time actor whose itinerant troupe had just gone bust in Arizona; John Gore therefore installed him as head of Nevada's public utilities. Totally without engineering training, he proved spectacularly unsuited for this post, and when a fire broke out he mishandled a valve, cutting off the water supply. Half of Nevada burned to the ground, and Walter, with his wife and infant son John, went back on the road.

Huston's parents' marriage—contracted at the St. Louis World's Fair was never a great success, and in 1909 they separated, divorcing four years later. Huston spent his boyhood shuttling between them, spending most of the time with his mother, who became a journalist under her own name of Rhea Gore. With her he traveled the Midwest, picking up her taste for literature, horses, plush hotels, and gambling. He remained somewhat in awe of her,

though, feeling that she despised him as a romantic fantasist. "Nothing I ever did pleased my mother," he later remarked.

He was far more at ease with his father, who when not acting in New York would take him on the vaudeville circuit, staying in hotels that were anything but plush. Huston thoroughly relished the contrast, and was enthralled by the theatrical low-life he encountered. But at twelve he was found to be suffering from Bright's disease and an "enlarged heart." The boy was placed in a sanatorium in Phoenix, Arizona, and told he must henceforth live as a cautious invalid. Rebelling, he took up secret midnight swimming in a nearby river. After some months, this pastime was discovered, and it was decided that he must have made a fortunate recovery.

His mother, who had remarried, moved to Los Angeles, where Huston attended Lincoln High School. As if making up for lost time, he plunged into a multitude of interests: abstract painting, ballet, English and French literature, opera, horseback riding, and boxing. At fifteen he dropped out of high school, becoming one of the state's top-ranking amateur lightweights (with a permanently flattened nose) while studying at the Art Students League in Los Angeles. He was also "infatuated" with the cinema, though as yet only as a spectator. "Charlie Chaplin was a god, and William S. Hart. I remember the enormous impact the UFA films had on me, those of Emil Jannings and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. I saw this many times."

Walter Huston had moved over from vaudeville to the legitimate theatre, and in 1924 achieved fame on Broadway with the lead in O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*. Watching his father's rehearsals, Huston was deeply impressed by O'Neill's work and fascinated by the mechanism of acting: "What I learned there, during those weeks of rehearsal, would serve me for the rest of my life." He himself acted briefly with the Provincetown Players in 1924. The following year, recovering from a mastoid operation, he took a long vacation in Mexico, where among other adventures he rode as an honorary member of the Mexican cavalry. On his return, Huston married a friend from high school, Dorothy Harvey. The marriage lasted barely a year.

He had begun to write short stories, one of which was published by H.L. Mencken in the *American Mercury*. Further pieces, clearly influenced by Hemingway, appeared in *Esquire*, the *New York Times*, and other journals. He also wrote *Frankie and Johnny*, "a puppet play with music (the music being

by Sam Jaffe). This was produced in Greenwich Village by Ruth Squires and published in book form. Through his mother, Huston was given a job on the *New York Graphic*. “I had no talent as a journalist whatever and I was fired oftener than any reporter ever has been within such a limited time. There was a kind-hearted city editor who kept hiring me back.”

When even that man’s patience ran out, Huston headed for Hollywood, where his father had moved with the coming of talkies.

Huston was hired as a scenarist by Goldwyn Studios, spent six months there with no assignments, and then moved to his father’s studio, Universal, where he collaborated on four scripts, two of them for films starring his father: *A House Divided* and *Law and Order*. His colleagues had no doubt of his talent, but one of them described him at this time as “just a drunken boy, hopelessly immature.” After a lethal automobile accident in which he was the driver, he “wanted nothing so much as to get away” and left Universal for a job at Gaumont-British in London. Unhappy there, he quit again and lived rough for a while, before bumming his way to Paris and eventually back to New York. After a brief stint as a journalist there and a few months with the WPA Theatre in Chicago, he returned to Hollywood in 1937 and went to work as a writer for Warner Brothers.

Newly married to Leslie Black, Huston now seemed ready to settle to a serious career as a screenwriter. His first credit was for William Wyler’s *Jezebel* (1937); this was followed by *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse* (1938), and two of Warner’s prestigious biopics, *Juarez* (1939) and *Dr. Ehrlich’s Magic Bullet* (1940). *Dr. Ehrlich* won Huston an Academy Award nomination. As did his next script, for Howard Hawks’ *Sergeant York* (1941). He was now successful enough to persuade the studio that, if his next script was a hit, he should be allowed a chance to direct. “They indulged me rather. They liked my work as a writer and they wanted to keep me on. If I wanted to direct, why, they’d give me a shot at it, and if it didn’t come off all that well, they wouldn’t be too disappointed as it was to be a very small picture.”

Huston’s next script was for *High Sierra* (1941). Directed by Raoul Walsh, it gave Humphrey

Bogart, as a gunman on the run, his breakthrough to stardom, and provided Huston with the hit he wanted. Warners kept their word and offered him his choice of subject. He chose Dashiell Hammett’s thriller, *The Maltese Falcon*, which had already been adapted twice by Warners, both times badly. Wisely, Huston stuck closely to the original, taking over much of

Hammett’s dialogue unchanged, and filming with a clean, uncluttered style that provided a cinematic equivalent to the novel’s fast, laconic narrative. He also benefited from a superb cast. George Raft was offered the role of the private eye Sam Spade but turned it down (as he had previously with the lead in *High Sierra*). Bogart, who liked Huston, was happy to take over, supported by Mary Astor, Peter Lorre, Sydney Greenstreet (in his first film role), Elisha Cook, Jr. and—in



Ernest Hemingway and John Huston

a walk-on part “for luck”—Walter Huston.

*The Maltese Falcon* (1941) was made on a small, B-picture budget, and put out by Warners with minimal publicity. They were taken aback by the enthusiastic response of public and critics. The latter immediately hailed the film as a classic, and it has since been claimed as the best detective melodrama ever made. “It is hard to say,” wrote Harold Barnes in the *Herald Tribune*, “whether Huston the adapter, or Huston the fledgling director, is more responsible for this triumph.” Already, in his directorial debut, many of Huston’s characteristic preoccupations appear. The plot is a web of deceptive appearances; characters and even objects (including the coveted falcon itself) are duplicitous and untrustworthy, and the hero himself is not what he seems. Spade, outwardly a cynical opportunist, proves to be driven by a scrupulous personal code. “When a man’s partner is killed,” he says, turning the woman he wants over to justice, “he’s supposed to do something about it.”

...A few days before shooting was complete on *Across the Pacific*, Huston received his army induction papers....Appositely, his first assignment as a documentary filmmaker for the Signal Corps was across the Pacific—in the Aleutian islands off Alaska. The resulting film, *Report From the Aleutians* (1943) was described in the *New York Times* as “one of the war’s outstanding records of what our men are doing. It is furthermore an honest record.” Promoted to

captain, Huston was sent to Italy to make *The Battle of San Pietro* (1944) regarded as one of the finest combat documentaries ever filmed. “No war film I have seen,” wrote James Agee in *The Nation*, “has been quite so attentive to the heaviness of casualties, and to the number of yards gained or lost, in such an action.”...Huston’s ironic realism disconcerted the War Department. One general accused him of having made “a film against war,” eliciting the response: “Well, sir, when I make a picture that’s *for* war—why I hope you take me out and shoot me.” Despite this, he was promoted to major and awarded the Legion of Merit.

His last film for the army was *Let There Be Light* (1945), on the rehabilitation of soldiers suffering from combat neuroses. The overtly optimistic message was constantly undercut by the compassionate objectivity of the filming, which for Huston was “practically a religious experience.” The War Department shelved the picture, but it was finally given general release in 1980. Noting “its voice-over narration [provided by Walter Huston], its use of wipes and dissolves, and its full-orchestra soundtrack music,” Vincent Canby called it “an amazingly elegant movie.”

Discharged from the Army in 1945, Huston returned to Hollywood, where he was divorced from his second wife. After a brief, spectacular affair with Olivia de Havilland, he married the actress Evelyn Keyes in 1946....

At this period Huston had a reputation—which he did little to discourage—as one of the wild men of Hollywood. Along with such friends as Bogart and William Wyler, he indulged in frequent and well-publicized bouts of drinking, gambling, and general horseplay. ...Jack Warner, though autocratic, was ready to tolerate a lot in return for talent and box-office success. He even let himself be persuaded—though with considerable misgivings—to allow Huston to shoot his next film almost entirely on location, and in Mexico. At the time, this was a radical move.

The results justified it. *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) is generally agreed to be one of Huston’s finest films. ...*Treasure* has often been cited as the archetypal Huston movie, though the director himself denies the presence of any authorial unity in his films.” I fail to see any continuity in my work from picture to picture—what’s remarkable is how different the pictures are, one from another. In fact,

though Huston’s cinematic style varies according to the nature of his subject matter, clear thematic preoccupations can be seen to recur throughout his work. The classic “Huston movie” concerns a quest, often a parody of one of society’s sanctioned forms of endeavor—the pursuit of wealth, power, religious knowledge, imperial sovereignty—which is destined, after initial success, to end in failure and futility.

(This kind of denouement became known in the trade as “the Huston ending.”)...

The art, technique, and moral implications of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (as of *The Maltese Falcon*) have since been discussed in great detail by many critics. ...Warners were less circumspect over Huston’s next film, his fourth with Bogart. *Key Largo* (1948) was adapted from a prewar play by Maxwell Anderson, originally written in blank verse.

Huston and his co-scriptwriter Richard

Brooks, junked the verse and updated the plot....To Huston’s annoyance, the studio cut several scenes from the final release. Not long before this, Huston had been refused permission, under the terms of his contract, to direct a play by his idol Eugene O’Neill for the Broadway stage. Angered by these incidents, Huston left Warners when his contract expired.

Together with Sam Spiegel and Jules Buck, Huston founded Horizon Films. The new company’s first feature was a courageous failure. Huston had been among the strongest opponents of HUAC and the Hollywood blacklist, and when John Garfield came under pressure, Huston offered him the lead on *We Were Strangers* (1949) as a deliberate gesture of defiance—the more so since the prophetic plot concerned a revolution in Cuba against a corrupt dictatorship. It was attacked on release by both left and right. It was also a box-office disaster, and Huston admitted that “it didn’t turn out to be a very good picture.” Needing funds, he signed a short-term contract with MGM.

Having refused *Quo Vadis*—despite an amazing episode when Louis B. Mayer (according to Huston) “crawled across the floor and took my hands and kissed them” in order to persuade him to reconsider—Huston took on a far more congenial subject in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). Based on a novel by W.R. Burnett (author of *Little Caesar* and *High Sierra*), this was the progenitor of a long cycle of “caper movies,” in which a crime (here a million-





dollar jewel theft) is successfully carried out by sympathetically depicted criminals, only to fail through subsequent ill-chance or internal dissension. Huston was breaking new ground in presenting crime as an occupation like any other, “a left-handed form of human endeavor” carried out by ordinary people motivated not by the megalomaniac will to power of the 1930s movie gangsters, but simply by the desire to feed their families or realize some small private ambition....That same

year, 1950, Huston was amicably divorced from Evelyn Keyes; one day later he married Enrica Soma. In August, while *Asphalt Jungle* was still filming, his father died of a heart attack. Huston’s second picture for MGM was...*The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), taken from Stephen Crane’s novel of the Civil War....Huston left for Africa to make a film for Sam Spiegel, his partner in Horizon Films.

The script of *The African Queen* (1951) was taken from C.S. Forester’s novel and written by Huston in collaboration with his greatest critical supporter, James Agee.... Filming, on location in the Congo and Uganda, took place under appalling conditions: not only extreme heat and humidity, but dysentery, malaria, mosquitoes, crocodiles and safari ants beset actors and crew. Everybody became ill except Bogart, Lauren Bacall (who came to keep Bogart company), and Huston, who all ascribed their immunity to copious quantities of Scotch....The film was huge popular success, and won Bogart the only Oscar of his career.

Through some financial sleight-of-hand, little of the profits from *The African Queen* ever reached Huston, who consequently pulled out of Horizon Films. For his next three films he acted as his own producer....Meanwhile, disgusted by the HUAC “witch-hunt” and the “moral rot” it had induced in the entertainment industry, Huston had moved to Ireland. He had bought a house in Galway, St. Clerans, and moved there in 1952 with his wife Enrica and their children Anthony and Angelica. Twelve years later he took Irish citizenship....

After two financially unsuccessful picture [Beat the Devil and Moby Dick]...deep in debt...he



accepted a three-picture contract with 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox...*Heaven Knows, Mr Allison* (1957), teaming Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr as a marine and a nun stranded on a Japanese-held island during World War II, struck many reviewers as an attempt to repeat *The African Queen*. Huston coscripted, and enjoyed working with Mitchum, whom he considers “one of the really fine actors of my time.”

...A retrospective atmosphere of doom hangs over the *Misfits* (1961). Clark Gable died shortly after shooting was finished. Marilyn Monroe never completed another film. Montgomery Clift and Thelma Ritter were dead within a few years....Huston had conceived the idea of making a film about Freud while working on *Let There Be Light*. He now invited Jean-Paul Sartre to prepare a script. Sartre did so—four hundred pages of it. Huston tactfully suggested that cut might be necessary, and he and Sartre

went over the script together. Sartre returned to Paris, and in due course submitted his revised script—of six hundred pages. With the help of Charles Kaufman, who had coscripted *Let There Be Light*, the scenario was pruned to a manageable hundred and fifty pages, although Sartre disowned it.

*Freud: The Secret Passion* (1962) is not a conventional biopic, but rather an intellectual detective story, in which Freud is shown tracking down, in himself as much as in others, the psychosexual source of the guilt which torments them....By way of relaxation, Huston turned to a spoof murder mystery, *The List of Adrian Messenger* (1963), in which the villain, played by Kirk Douglas, appears in numerous elaborate disguises. As an additional gimmick, the film features various guest stars, also heavily disguised. Response was mainly puzzled....

“The Huston ending” wherein all human activities culminate in ironic futility and disaster was notably absent from *The Night of the Iguana* (1964). Huston and his co-scriptwriter, Anthony Veiller, took a characteristically overheated and doom-laden play by Tennessee Williams and transformed it into a melodramatic farce with a happy ending. Amazingly, Williams went along with their changes and even helped with the script....



While *Iguana* was doing well at the box office, Huston was visited in Ireland by Dino de Laurentiis, who planned to film *The Bible*. He envisaged a multiplicity of episodes, each with its own eminent director. Eventually, the producer modestly limited himself to half the Book of Genesis, with Huston as sole director. Huston also played Noah and the voice of God....The film finally cost eighteen million—by far the most expensive of Huston's career—and received atrocious notices....

Huston had long cherished an ambition to film Kipling's story *The Man Who Would Be King*. Originally he planned it with Gable and Bogart; then with Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton. It finally reached the screen with Sean Connery and Michael Caine in the leading roles as the two British soldiers who set up a private kingdom in the wild mountains of Afghanistan. For once, delay proved beneficial. As Huston remarked, his modern actors brought "a reality to it that the old stars could not do. Today they would seem synthetic, so in a way I'm glad I didn't make the picture with them." Certainly it would be hard to imagine the film done better. There is a sweep and grandeur, a legendary resonance to the narrative for which the misused term "epic" is for once wholly appropriate....For the first time in a decade, Huston achieved success at the box office as well as with the critics, and he and Gladys Hill were nominated for an Academy Award for their screenplay. After *The Man Who Would Be King*, Huston underwent heart surgery and as a result produced no feature films for four years. Any speculation, though, that his career as a director might be over was answered by *Wise Blood* (1979). ...

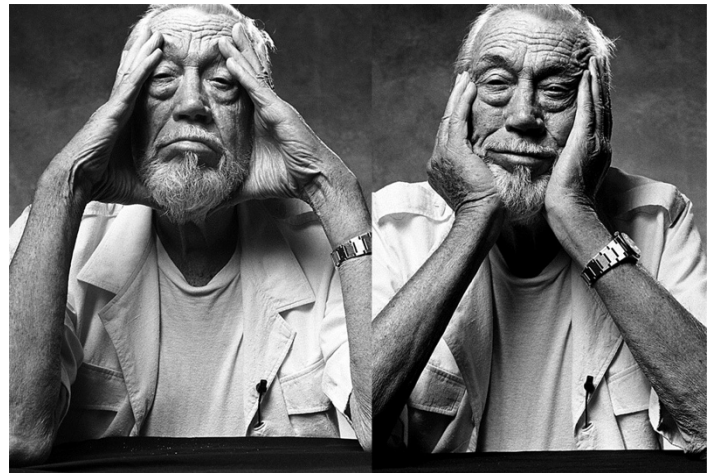
An unmixed success was *Prizzi's Honor* (1985), based on the book by Richard Condon, starring Jack Nicholson, Katherine Turner, William Hickey and Huston's daughter Anjelica (who won an Oscar for best supporting actress)....After this success, Huston set to work on an adaptation of James Joyce's story "The Dead," which he completed shortly before his death.

Robin Wood wrote of Huston in Richard Roud's *Cinema* that "the problem lies in tracing any significant unifying or developing pattern through his career as a whole....This is but one of several signs—though a crucial one—that Huston is not a major artist, though he has at different stages of his career been mistaken for one." This is the view that has dominated serious discussion of Huston's work since the rise of auteurist criticism in the 1960s. But Andrew Sarris, once one of the director's most

dismissive critics, wrote in 1980 that "what I have always tended to underestimate in Huston was how deep in his guts he could feel the universal experience of pointlessness and failure."...

Richard T. Jameson maintains that "we do encounter a cohesive world-view, not only thematically, but also stylistically; there is a Huston look," though one extremely difficult to define....

In his last years, Huston pursued a parallel career as a film actor. In 1963 he was invited by Otto Preminger to portray a Boston prelate in *The Cardinal* and virtually stole the picture. Then, besides taking key roles in several of his own films, he appeared in a wide variety of works directed by others: most notably as the sinister patriarch Noah Cross in Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), and as Teddy Roosevelt's adviser John Hay in Milius's *The Wind and the Lion* (1975). Huston evidently enjoyed acting and invariably denied that he took it at all seriously. "It's a cinch," he maintained, "and they pay you damn near as much as you make directing."



**from John Huston's Filmmaking. Lesley Brill.**  
**Cambridge U Press NY 1997**

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."

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 Houston’s career in *Prizzi’s Honor* and *The Dead*.

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

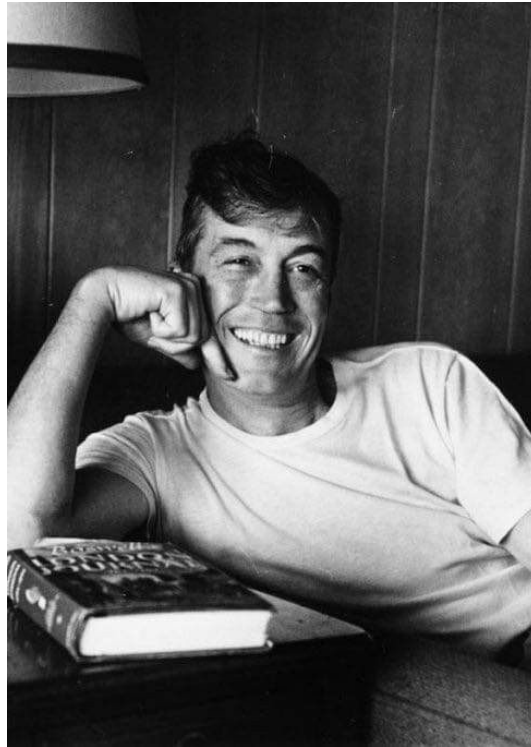
**from *An Open Book*. John Houston Knopf NY 1980**

I [Houston] 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.

**From Bruce Jackson: “John Houston” (*Senses of Cinema* 2019)**

John Houston, the American director, writer and actor, was prolific, various and uneven. As a director, he worked in just about every known film genre except animation. If one discounts the films that, through miscalculation on his part or mutilation by a studio, turned out to be mediocre, there remains a huge body of superb and enduring work.

After several years in Hollywood as a screenwriter, Houston got to write and direct his first feature: Dashiell Hammett’s 1930 detective novel, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). “In years to come,” wrote Lawrence Grobel in his definitive Houston biography, “the French would credit the movie with starting a new genre called *film noir*—dark, urban, brutal, disturbing, misogynistic stories focusing on private eyes. James Agee and Pauline Kael would continue to praise it as ‘The best private-eye melodrama ever made’ and ‘The most high-style thriller ever made in America.’”

During World War II, Houston made three significant documentaries: *Report from the Aleutians* (1942), *San Pietro* (1944), and *Let There Be Light* (1945)....

In his first four years back in Hollywood after the war, he made four films that are each regarded as classics: *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), for which he and his father received Oscars (John for best director and best screenplay; Walter for best supporting actor); the films noirs *Key Largo* (1948) and *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950); and the romantic epic *The African Queen* (1951), for which Humphrey Bogart received his only best actor Oscar.

*The Asphalt Jungle*, wrote Philip Kemp, “was the progenitor of a long cycle of ‘caper movies,’ in which a crime (here a million-dollar jewel theft) is successfully carried out by sympathetically depicted criminals, only to fail through subsequent ill-chance

or internal dissension. Huston was breaking new ground in presenting crime as an occupation as any other..." Marilyn Monroe, with whom Huston would later work on *The Misfits*, had her first important role in that film.

Late in his life, he made three superb independently financed films based on important works of 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction: *Wise Blood* (1979), *Under the Volcano* (1984) and *The Dead* (1987). Those films were made at a time when his failing health made him uninsurable, so none of the major studios was willing to risk a big budget on him. His penultimate film, the black comedy *Prizzi's Honor* (1985), starring Jack Nicholson, Kathleen Turner, and Huston's daughter Angelica, got made only because producer John Foreman (who had produced three earlier Huston films: *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*, 1972; *The Mackintosh Man*, 1973; and *The Man Who Would be King*, 1975) managed to have an insurable stand-by director.

Anjelica Huston received a best supporting actress Oscar for *Prizzi's Honor*, making John Huston the only filmmaker to direct both his father and his child in Academy Award-winning performances.

In between and along the way, were films that were terrific and films that were flops not only financially, but critically. One, even Huston, himself, loathed: *The Unforgiven* (1960), a western that even a great cast (Burt Lancaster, Audrey Hepburn, Audie Murphy, Charles Bickford and Lilian Gish) couldn't save. Huston found it "bombastic and over-inflated." Sometimes the fault was his; just as often, it was the studios making a sodden mess out of a film that might very well have worked had they just left it alone.

MGM, for example, cut Huston's two-hour *The Red Badge of Courage* to 69 minutes and added a narrator to tell the audiences everything the shortened film couldn't possibly show. Huston's final version of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* was suffused with a golden glow throughout; the color was one of the characters in the film. Warner Brothers released it in blazing Technicolour instead. And John Wayne, without Huston's consent or participation, insisted on

reshooting and reordering scenes in *The Barbarian and the Geisha* so he looked better and had far more lines....



### Literary relations

Huston's mother was a journalist who often took him on her travels; his father was in vaudeville, later in legitimate theater. When he was three, his parents separated, after which he shuttled between them. In both milieux, language, performance and art were constantly in the air. Huston names as one of his formative experiences the period in his late teens, beginning in 1924, when he was with his father when Walter was acting in the Provincetown Players' presentation of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*.

"At first I wanted to become a painter," he told interviewer Dan Ford, "but meeting O'Neill in New York, when my father was doing *Desire Under the Elms*, first drew me to the theater. I think I

learned more about films from O'Neill than anyone—what a scene consisted of and so forth. By the time I came to Hollywood as a writer I was conscious that I wanted to direct. Working with such greats as Wyler and Howard Hawks only served to reinforce it. It was not easy to jump from writer to director in those days. There was just one other man who had made the jump [Preston Sturges], and I wasn't able to do it until much later, of course."

Huston's autobiography, *An Open Book*, lists few actors among his close friends and visitors to his Irish Estate, St. Clerans. Rather it is e.e. cummings, Robert Capa, George Gershwin, Carson McCullers, Gene Kelly, Irwin Shaw, Art Buchwald. One Christmas, he got his friend John Steinbeck to dress up as Santa for the party at St. Clerans.

His last film, an adaptation of James Joyce's poignant story, "The Dead," at first seems to center on a jolly family Christmas dinner, but what it is really about is a marriage that on the surface is doing well enough but which, in fact, suffers an unbreachable chasm lodged in distant memory neither member of that marriage can address: one can only remember it, the other can only not be part of it. The last image of the story is the husband, who has just understood all of this, standing on a Dublin balcony watching snow fall and feeling at one with the countless dead that snow gently covers, as far as the

eye can see and beyond.

It is one of the most subtle and poignant short stories in twentieth-century English literature. It should, by all the usual markers, be unfilmable.

Huston filmed it. His daughter Angelica starred in that film, and his son Danny was in it. During the making, Huston was on oxygen because of his emphysema. He died soon after it was finished. A man with his life-long love of literature could not have been unaware of the connections between that story and his own. *The Dead* is at once a love letter to his family and his own obituary.



### Huston's primer

The six pages of chapter 35 of *An Open Book* have a tone and address different from any other chapter in the book. There are hardly any stories there. It is Huston's primer on filmmaking, his rules of the road. It is virtually unremarked in reviews of the book, but it is the clearest and most succinct statement of his practice he or anyone else ever made. He discusses camera placement, cutting, shooting, working with actors, and chance. In it, he says many of the things he says in a score of interviews, but he says them better in chapter 35, and they are grounded in a context of his, not an interviewer's choosing. The first paragraph is perhaps the most succinct challenge to auteurism by a working director:

*I read without discipline, averaging three to four books a week, and have since I was a kid, Gram used to read aloud to me books by her favorite authors: Dickens, Tolstoy, Marie Corelli. She also read speeches from Shakespeare to me, and had me repeat them to her. When I was in my early teens, we'd talk about the "style" of an author. I was puzzled over the meaning of the word. Was an author's style his way of arranging words to set himself apart from other writers. An invention, so to speak? Surely there is more to style than that! One day it came to me like a revelation people write differently because they think differently. An original idea demands a unique approach. So that style isn't simple a concoction of the writer, but simply the expression of a central idea.*

*I'm not aware of myself as a director having a*

*style. I'm told that I do, but I don't recognize it. I see no remote similarity, for example, between The Red Badge of Courage and Moulin Rouge. However observant the critic, I don't think he'd be able to tell*

*that the same director made them both. Bergman has a style that's unmistakably his. He is a prime example of the auteur approach to making pictures. I suppose it is the best approach: the director conceives the idea, writes it, puts it on film. Because he is creating out of himself, controlling all aspects of the work, his films a unity and a*

*direction. I admire directors like Bergman, Fellini, Buñuel, whose every picture is in some way connected with their private lives, but that's never been my approach. I'm eclectic. I like to draw on sources other than myself....*

*I have been speaking of style, but before there can be style, there must be grammar. There is, in fact, a grammar to picture-making. The laws are as inexorable as they are in language, and are to be found in the shots themselves. When do we fade-in or fade-out with a camera? When do we dissolve, pan, dolly, cut? The rules governing these techniques are well grounded. They must, of course, be disavowed and disobeyed from time to time, but one must be aware of their existence, for motion pictures have a great deal in common with our own physiological and psychological processes—more so than any other medium. It is almost as if there were a reel of film behind our eyes. . .as though our very thoughts were projected onto the screen.*

*Motion pictures, however, are governed by a time sense different from that of real life; different from the theater, too. The rectangle of light up there with the shadows on it demands one's whole attention. And what it furnishes must satisfy that demand. When we are sitting in a room in a house, there is no single claim on our awareness. Our attention jumps from object to object, drifts in and out of the room. We listen to sounds coming from various points; we may even smell something cooking. In a motion-picture theater, where our undivided attention is given to the screen, time actually moves more slowly, and the action has to be speeded up. Furthermore, whatever action takes place on that*



*screen must not violate our sense of the appropriate. We accomplish this by adhering to the proper grammar of film-making.*

*For example, a fade-in or a fade-out is akin to waking up or going to sleep. The dissolve indicates either a lapse of time or a change of place. Or it can, in certain instances, that things in different places are happening at the same time. In any case, the images impinge . . . the way dreams proceed, or like the faces you can see when you close your eyes. When we pan, the camera turns from right to left, or vice versa, and serves one of two purposes: it follows an individual, or it informs the viewer of the geography of the scene. You pan from one object to another in order to establish their spatial relationship; thereafter, you cut. We are forever cutting in real life. Look from one object to another across the room. Notice how you involuntarily blink. That's a cut. You know that the spatial relationship is, there's nothing to discover about the geography, so you cut with your eyelids. The dolly is when the camera doesn't simply turn on its axis but moves horizontally or backward and forward. It may move closer to intensify interest and pull away to come to a tableau, thereby putting a finish-or a period—to a scene. A more common purpose is simply to include another figure in the frame.*

After several more pages of succinct comments about film making and film form, he concludes:

*Given time and freedom, the actors will fall naturally into their places, discover when and where to move, and you will have your shot. And given all those shots, cut together, you will have your microcosm: the past on the winding reel; the present on the screen; the future on the unwinding reel...inevitable...unless the power goes off.*

*These observations are seldom remarked upon by picture-makers. They are so true, I suppose, that they are simply accepted without question as conventions. But they are conventions that have meaning—even for mavericks.*

### The Huston Touch

Andrew Sarris “dismisses Huston as ‘less than meets the eye’ because his films lack an overarching unifying vision. For Sarris, Huston is guilty of the

cardinal sin against auteurism: he ‘displayed his material without projecting his personality.’”

Sarris is right: Huston's films aren't about his personality. Putting his personality on the screen was something in which John Huston had no interest whatsoever. There is no Huston visual or even narrative style; nothing on the screen marks him as auteur, nor, as he said in that long quotation above, would he have wanted it to. If you were to see a Huston film with no foreknowledge of it and no



credits, you'd have a hard time knowing it was a film by John Huston. What Sarris missed or, rather, dismissed, is what Huston was *doing*: he wasn't making films to document himself; he was telling stories.

He was the most literary of twentieth-century filmmakers. All but three of his thirty-seven feature films are adaptations; he wrote,

co-wrote, or had a significant hand in the scripts for nearly all of them. Many films are adapted from books, short stories, plays and other sources. But no filmmaker other than Huston has selected so many works to be adapted and had a critical part in the adaption itself.

These are some of his adaptations/collaborations between his first film, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, based on the 1930 novel by Dashiell Hammett and his last (*The Dead*, based on the final story in James Joyce's *Dubliners*, 1914): *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, (1948, based on the 1927 novel by B. Traven), *Key Largo* (1948, based on the 1939 play in blank verse by Maxwell Anderson), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, based on the 1949 novel by W.R. Burnett), *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951, based in the 1894 novel by Stephen Crane), *The African Queen* (1951, based on the 1935 novel by C.S. Forester), *Moby Dick* (1956, based on the 1851 novel by Herman Melville), *The Misfits* (1961, based on an original script by Arthur Miller), *The Night of the Iguana* (based on the 1961 play by Tennessee Williams), *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967, based on the 1941 novel by Carson McCullers), *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975, based on the 1888 story by Rudyard Kipling), *Wise Blood* (1979, based on the 1952 novel by Flannery O'Connor), *Under the Volcano* (1984, based on the 1947 novel by Malcolm Lowry), and *Prizzi's Honor* (1985, based on the 1982

novel by Richard Condon).

The reason, I think auteurists like Sarris couldn't respond to Huston is his process began far earlier than they ordinarily started paying attention. They were interested in the look and feel of a film; his films came out of his responses to works of literature. Most of the time, it was years before his responses to those works got the point where he could think about translating them to film.

The vision that Huston has for each of the films were, in large part, in place before the locations are scouted or the rehearsals begin. The choices during the shooting are an extension of that. He was, in a very real way, doubly or triply involved in the realization of nearly all of his films. *Réalisateur*—one of the French terms for director—seems particularly appropriate for him.

Filmmaking is always a collaborative process. For Huston, that process extended in time and sensibility. By the time he set about writing a script, or collaborating with someone else on a script, he had been living with and imaging the original work for years. He wasn't simply translating a written work into a filmed work. He had experienced a written work; his films were a visual rendition of that experience....

Huston's shooting style is spare: he would often move on after a single take. He refused to shoot "master scenes," shots that showed the space and everyone in it; he preferred to let the camera's eye reveal the relationships in the shot." He rarely provided editors enough alternative shots to make a movie other than the one he had in mind: "I edit my pictures in the camera. I don't protect myself. I don't take other shots of the ones that I need. One is almost forced to edit a film the way I shoot it. I don't believe that pictures are made in the cutting room. They're sometimes helped, but they're not made." Studios could ruin it by inappropriate cutting (as happened to the Crane film) or by screwing up the palette (as happened with *Reflections in a Golden Eye*), or by letting a star's ego force them to shoot scenes the director would not have shot and ordered scenes in a way the director would not have accepted (as happened with *The Barbarian and the Geisha*), but other than that, his films, however much each differed from every other film he made, were what he'd read on the page and what he'd seen in his mind's eye.

For him, perhaps the most important part of his style not only his script adaptation but the film itself. was that both should be invisible "I would say that there are maybe half a dozen directors who really

know their camera—how to move their camera. It's a pity that critics often do not appreciate this. On the other hand, I think it's OK that audiences should not be aware of this. In fact, when the camera is in motion, in the best-directed scenes, the audiences should not be aware of what the camera is doing. They should be following the action and the road of the idea so closely, that they shouldn't be aware of what's going on technically.... When you become aware of *how* things are being said, you get separated from the idea. This doesn't mean that an original rendering isn't to be sought after, but that rendering must be so close to the idea itself that you aren't aware of it."



**Bruce Jackson: "The Maltese Falcon: The Flitcraft Story" from *The Story is True*, rev. ed., SUNY Press, 2022**

The narrative voice in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* belongs to an omniscient narrator who explains nothing and who, with one exception, tells us nothing that the central character, Sam Spade, doesn't see and hear. Hammett's narrator never goes inside the consciousness of Spade or any of the other characters. The novel occurs completely on the surface of Sam Spade's world, and Sam is present for everything that happens in it. The only information that could not be provided equally well by Sam are the few brief descriptions of Sam's facial expressions.

Near the end of novel, Sam tells Brigid O'Shaunessey, the woman who involved him in the search for the Falcon, that he intends to turn her over to the police for the murder of his partner Miles Archer. She asks how could he, isn't he in love with her? He says he probably is, but other factors weigh more heavily: as a professional detective he's obligated to do something about the murder of his partner; only by turning her over can he convince the

police he wasn't involved with Caspar Gutman, Joel Cairo, and Wilmer in their nefarious plots. Most important, he doesn't know when she'll decide he's no longer useful and will kill him or have him killed. She argues that love should be enough to assuage those doubts. They embrace, the police arrive, and he hands her over.

John Huston used Hammett's dialog almost verbatim for that scene, as he did for most of the movie. Huston did amend the ending. The novel ends with Sam in his office, his secretary Effie Perrine angry at him for having handed Brigid over to the police, and Miles's widow, Iva (with whom Sam had an affair before the action of the novel starts) about to come in to give him a hard time. The film ends with Brigid and Lieutenant Dundy going down in the small elevator. Sam and his detective friend Tom Polhaus stand in the corridor and watch them descend.

Tom, holding the enamel-covered lead figure of the falcon, says, "Heavy. What is it?"

"The stuff that dreams are made of," Sam says. (Huston said that Sam's Shakespearean response was Humphrey Bogart's idea).

"Huh?" Tom says, as the two begin walking down the stairs. Music up and fade out.

Huston made two other important changes. He deleted an episode involving the daughter of Casper Gutman. Her function in the novel was to send Sam on a wild goose chase, which Huston does more economically (in terms of film time) with a telephone call.

He also omitted a long story Sam tells Brigid soon after one of the many times he catches her lying to him. The story occurs about a third of the way through the novel. It is about a man named Flitcraft whom Spade encountered years earlier when he worked for a detective agency in the Northwest. Huston may have dropped it from the script because Brigid has virtually no reaction to it, and it is never mentioned or alluded to again in the novel. Even if it had figured dramatically, he very well might have dropped it because the telling takes six or seven minutes, without any pauses, an eternity in screen time, and that would have stopped the plot dead in its tracks.

(Print is different. Print permits digression. Print has parentheses, such as the pair we're within

now. Print lets you set things down for later reference. Fiction and film are both linear experiences, but they're not the same kind of linear experiences. Parentheses in film are usually disjunctive or gags, such as the famous scene in François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* when the gangster says to the kidnapped boy, "If I'm lying may my mother drop dead," whereupon there is a small insert in the upper right corner of the screen showing a motherly woman in a kitchen suddenly flopping to the floor. The experience of a film is always in real time: a two-hour movie takes two hours, though it may feel longer or shorter depending on the editing and the story and everything else. A three-hundred-page novel can take as long as you like, and you can easily go back to a whole section or a single sentence. Few of us read novels at a single sitting: real life interrupts our immersion in long fiction. Authors of fiction, and essays, can better afford digressions and explanations than directors of films.)

Sam begins the story with no introduction. His voice is level throughout, "though now and then he repeated a sentence lightly rearranged, as if it were important that each detail be related exactly as it happened."

Sam is a detective and getting the facts right is the heart of his business. At first, Brigid is hardly interested, Hammett tells us, "her curiosity more engaged with his purpose in telling the story than with the story he told." But then "it caught her more and more fully and she became still and receptive."

Flitcraft had abandoned his family, job, and house in Tacoma and had set up an almost identical life in Spokane. In Tacoma he had a real estate office, did well financially, had a wife and two young sons, played golf at four in the afternoon; in Spokane he had an automobile business, had a wife and one young son, played golf at four in the afternoon.

He tells Spade he rearranged his life because one day he was almost hit by a falling beam at a construction site and realized that what he thought was an orderly world was instead an absurd world, a world in which beams could fall at any moment. Before the beam fell, "The life he knew was a clean orderly responsible affair. Now a falling beam had shown him that life was fundamentally none of those things. He, the good citizen-husband-father, could be wiped out between office and restaurant by the accident of a falling beam. He knew then that men



died at haphazard like that, and lived only while blind chance spared them.”

Flitcraft made an inference: “Life could be ended for him at random by a falling beam: he would change his life at random by simply going away. He loved his family, he said, as much as he supposed was usual, but he knew he was leaving them adequately provided for, and his life for them was not of the sort that would make absence painful.”

Flitcraft traveled for a while, then no more beams fell, and he reconstituted his old life. He went back to being what he always had been, only in a new place—Spokane. He got married. “His second wife didn’t look like the first,” Sam tells Brigid, “but they were more alike than they were different.”

Flitcraft “wasn’t sorry for what he had done. It seemed reasonable enough to him. I don’t think he even knew he had settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma. But that’s the part of it I always liked. He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling.”

Brigid reacts to the story with three words—“How perfectly fascinating”—then changes subject and mood: she moves close to Sam, her eyes are open wide, and she toys with a button on his coat.

Sam says to her, “Don’t let’s confuse things. You don’t have to trust me, anyhow, as long as you can persuade me to trust you.”

Brigid should have listened more and coquetted less. The Flitcraft story undergirds Sam’s decision to hand her over to the police for murder at the end of the novel. It’s not a story about the vagaries of the world; that’s Flitcraft’s story. Sam tells it because it’s a story about the constancy of character. Flitcraft exemplifies Spade’s belief that people return to what they really are once the extraordinary recedes, and, therefore, it suggests the likelihood that Brigid will betray and possibly even murder him should it ever seem useful to her to do so. Sam tells her that in a few lines in the final chapter, but this long narrative told much earlier in the novel is his theoretical underpinning.

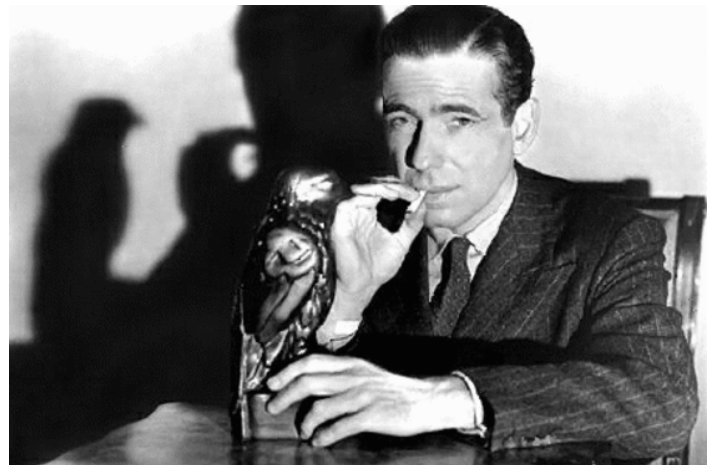
Sam’s theory for knowing what people are going to do is grounded in this narrative: he knows what people are going to do because most of the time, they do what they did last time. He’s rarely surprised in this novel, and nobody surprises him twice, including Brigid O’Shaunessey.

This is like the story Athena/Mentes tells Telemachus in book 1 of the *Odyssey* about Odysseus having gotten poison for his arrows many years

earlier. Nothing more is made of this incident in the poem—but in the great battle scene with the suitors in book 22, every arrow shot is fatal. It’s not as if Homer thought arrows were always deadly: in the *Iliad* only some arrows kill. The difference is the poison tips, about which Homer says nothing after that brief redaction by Mentes. If you remember from book 1, you know why the arrows in book 22 are so deadly; if you don’t remember book 1, then, well, they’re well-aimed arrows. The same is true of Sam’s list of reasons for turning Brigid over to the police in chapter 20 of *The Maltese Falcon*. The list makes sense on its own, but the reason Sam is impervious to Brigid’s argument about love is explained in the Flitcraft narrative, back in chapter 7. She heard the story he told, but she didn’t know what the story was saying, and that, too, is part of her character and why Sam hands her over.

Documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman is often asked if he is concerned about people acting, posing before his camera. He always says no, that if people are going to act, the characters they’ll play are just exaggerated versions of the characters they know best: themselves.

When Sam hands Brigid over it is indeed for all the reasons he spells out for her. But it is mostly because she is what she is: liar, thief, and killer. He gives us the rationale for that not in an abstract discussion, but rather in a story that he doesn’t gloss in terms of her world at all. It’s out there, not just for her to hear, but for her to respond too. She doesn’t respond to it. She doesn’t get it. She immediately plays the seductive girl and turns to her own concerns. The story is not only the rationale for his final action with her; it is also one of the tests that prove him right.



#### **“Film noir” (Wikipedia)**

....A cinematic term used primarily to describe stylish [Hollywood crime dramas](#), particularly those that



emphasize cynical attitudes and motivations. The 1940s and 1950s are generally regarded as the "classic period" of American *film noir*. Film noir of this era is associated with a [low-key, black-and-white](#) visual style that has roots in [German Expressionist cinematography](#). Many of the prototypical stories and much of the attitude of classic noir derive from the [hardboiled](#) school of [crime fiction](#) that emerged in the United States during the [Great Depression](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

The term *film noir*, French for 'black film' (literal) or 'dark film' (closer meaning),<sup>[2]</sup> was first applied to Hollywood films by French critic [Nino Frank](#) in 1946, but was unrecognized by most American film industry professionals of that era.<sup>[3]</sup> Cinema historians and critics defined the category retrospectively. Before the notion was widely adopted in the 1970s, many of the classic films noir<sup>[a]</sup> were referred to as "[melodramas](#)". Whether film noir



qualifies as a distinct [genre](#) or whether it is more of a filmmaking style is a matter of ongoing debate among scholars.

Film noir encompasses a range of plots: the central figure may be a private investigator ([The Big Sleep](#)), a [plainclothes policeman](#) ([The Big Heat](#)), an aging boxer ([The Set-Up](#)), a hapless [grifter](#) ([Night and the City](#)), a law-abiding citizen lured into a life of crime ([Gun Crazy](#)), or simply a victim of circumstance ([D.O.A.](#)). Although film noir was originally associated with American productions, the term has been used to describe films from around the world. Many films released from the 1960s onward share attributes with films noir of the classical period, and often treat its conventions [self-referentially](#). Some refer to such latter-day works as [neo-noir](#). The clichés of film noir have inspired parody since the mid-1940s.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **THE SPRING 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS #44:**

All films in the series but two (*Notorious* and *The Power of the Dog*) are available from Criterion or Netflix: **c** after a title indicates it is available on Criterion, **p**=Amazon Prime, **p\$**=Amazon Prime with an extra \$4 fee. *The Power of the Dog* is available, for now, only on Netflix. *Notorious* is available on FlixFilm (low-resolution versions are free on YouTube and Tubi.). All four subscription services let you cancel at any time, so you should have access to all 24 films for well under \$100. *The Gunfighter* is on Amazon Prime and, in low rez, free on Tubi. Nine of the films—all with "UB" after the title—are available free to anyone with a UB email account via the UB Library's Swank and Kanopy portals. Five films are available only on non-UB streaming services: *Le Corbeau*, *The Gunfighter*, *Naked*, *Salesman* and *The Power of the Dog*. (The Swank titles will be available at UB's Library for a year; the Kanopy titles for 3 years.)

- Feb 1: 1921 Victor Sjöström, *The Phantom Carriage* c UB-Kanopy
- Feb 8: 1934 Frank Capra *It Happened One Night* c p\$ UB-Swank
- Feb 15: 1941 John Huston *The Maltese Falcon* p\$ UB-Swank
- Feb 22: 1943 Henri-Georges Clouzot *Le Corbeau* c
- Mar 1: 1946 Alfred Hitchcock *Notorious* FlixFilm, YouTube, UB-Swank, Tubi (free)
- Mar 8: 1950 Henry King, *The Gunfighter* p\$, Tubi (free)
- Mar 15: 1958 Orson Welles *Touch of Evil* p\$ UB-Swank
- Mar 29: 1962 Yasujiro Ozu *An Autumn Afternoon* c p\$b UB Kanopy
- Apr 5: 1973 Federico Fellini *Amarcord* c p\$ UB Kanopy
- Apr 12: 1993 Mike Leigh *Naked* c
- Apr 19: 2002 Phillip Noyce *Rabbit-Proof Fence* p\$ UB-Kanopy
- Apr 26: 2016 Asghar Farhadi *Salesman* p
- May 3: 2021: Jane Campion *The Power of the Dog* NETFLIX
- May 10: 2011 Martin Scorsese *Hugo* p\$ UB-Kanopy

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The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the State University of New York at Buffalo