



DIRECTOR Billy Wilder
WRITING Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and D.M. Marshman Jr.
PRODUCER Charles Brackett
MUSIC Franz Waxman
CINEMATOGRAPHY John F. Seitz
EDITING Arthur P. Schmidt
ART DIRECTION Hans Dreier and John Meehan
SET DECORATION Sam Comer and Ray Moyer

The film won for Best Writing, Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, and Best Music and was nominated for Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Actress in a Leading Role, Best Actor in a Supporting Role, Best Actress in a Supporting Role, Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Film Editing, and Best Picture at the 1934 Academy Awards. In 1989, the National Film Preservation Board entered the film into the National Film Registry.

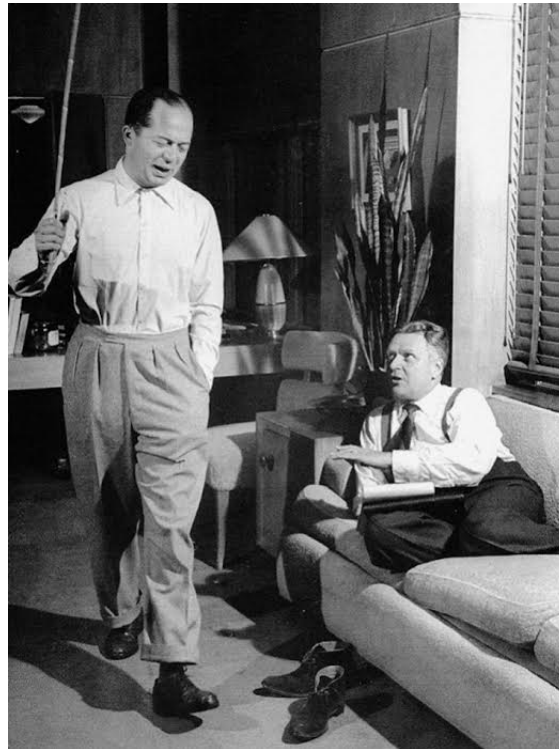
CAST

William Holden...Joe Gillis
Gloria Swanson...Norma Desmond
Erich von Stroheim...Max Von Mayerling
Nancy Olson...Betty Schaefer
Fred Clark...Sheldrake
Lloyd Gough...Morino
Jack Webb...Artie Green
Franklyn Farnum...Undertaker
Larry J. Blake...1st Finance Man (as Larry Blake)
Charles Dayton...2nd Finance Man
Cecil B. DeMille...Cecil B. DeMille
Hedda Hopper...Hedda Hopper
Buster Keaton...Buster Keaton
Anna Q. Nilsson...Anna Q. Nilsson
H.B. Warner...H. B. Warner
Ray Evans...Ray Evans
Jay Livingston ...Jay Livingston



BILLY WILDER (b. June 22, 1906 in Sucha, Galicia, AustriaHungary [now Sucha Beskidzka, Malopolskie, Poland]—d. March 27, 2002, age 95, in West Los Angeles, CA) was one of Hollywood's most versatile writer-directors (77 writing credits, 27 directing credits) known for his slashing wit and stinging social satire. Almost no other major filmmaker slipped so easily into so many genres. As a youth he was obsessed with everything American. He passed the entrance exam for the University of Vienna, but, disappointing his parents, he refused to go. Wilder became a journalist, which although poorly paid, gave him a great interviewing experience with such subjects as Richard Strauss and Sigmund Freud. In 1926 he worked as an interpreter for jazz band leader Paul Whiteman on a European tour which ended in Berlin. He remained in the city becoming a freelance journalist and becoming friendly with Marlene Dietrich, then a small part actress. A fast and prolific writer, Wilder ingratiated himself in the growing German film industry as a ghost scriptwriter for established writers who didn't have time to meet their contractual obligations. Wilder continued to write scripts for German films until Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. Immediately realizing his Jewish ancestry would cause problems, he emigrated to Paris, then the US. Although he spoke no English when he arrived in

Hollywood, Wilder was a fast learner, and thanks to contacts such as Peter Lorre (with whom he shared an apartment), he was able to break into American films. His partnership with Charles Brackett started in 1938 and the team was responsible for writing some of Hollywood's classic comedies, including *Ninotchka* (1939) and *Ball of Fire* (1941). The partnership expanded into a producer-director one in 1942, with Brackett producing, and the two turned out such classics as *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), which won Oscars for Best Picture, Director and Screenplay, and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) which won an Oscars for Best Screenplay. After this final film the partnership dissolved. [Wilder had already made one film, *Double Indemnity* (1944) without Brackett, as the latter had refused to work on a film he felt dealt with such disreputable characters.] Wilder then worked with I.A.L. Diamond. Brackett, an older man who frequently provided a strong argumentative counterpoint in the writing room in contrast to Diamond, possessed a cynical, humorous world view more in line with Wilder's. As for direction, Wilder's idol and mentor was German director Ernst Lubitsch. Wilder always kept a sign hanging in his office that asked, "How would Lubitsch do it?" The look of the film was less important than the language for Wilder. Friends also say he was as witty in person as he was on paper. Because of his rounded face and non-stop elfin energy, people often pictured him as short and wiry, but he was in fact near 6 feet tall (taller than his favorite star, Jack Lemmon). As a writer, he had odd habits. On the one hand, he hated writing alone, so he almost always used a partner, someone to be in the room with him while he worked. On the other hand, many of the partners complained that if he heard an idea he did not like, he could be cruel and insulting. Many writers quit on him because they could not take his abuse. The seed that bloomed into *Some Like It Hot* was planted by an obscure 1951 German film, *Fanfaren der Liebe* (Fanfares of Love), which was a remake of an older French comedy, *Fanfares d'Amour* (1935). Both pictures are episodic, focusing on a pair of desperate male characters doing what they can to earn a buck. One of those schemes involves dressing like women and performing in an all-female band. Wilder and Diamond both liked that particular device—and not much else. "The humor in the German movie was rather heavy-handed and



Teutonic," Diamond said. "There was a lot of shaving of chests and trying on wigs." Wilder officially retired in 1981, though for a decade after he was known for itching to want to return. He showed particular interest in directing *Schindler's List* (1993), saying it would have become his most personal film. He collaborated closely with Steven Spielberg on the script and was one of several directors considered to direct it (Roman Polanski and Martin Scorsese both turned down the project). Wilder was also famous for the modern-art collection which he put together over his lifetime (he sold only a portion of it in 1989 for \$32.6 million). These are some of the other films he directed: *Mauvaise graine* (1934), *The Major and the Minor* (1942), *Death Mills* (1945), *The Emperor Waltz* (1948), *A Foreign Affair* (1948), *Ace in the Hole* (1951), *Stalag 17* (1953), *Sabrina* (1954), *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1957), *Love in the Afternoon* (1957), *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957), *The Apartment* (1960), *One, Two, Three* (1961), *Irma la Douce* (1963), *Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964), *The Fortune Cookie* (1966), *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970), *Avanti!* (1972), *The Front Page* (1974), *Fedora* (1978), and *Buddy Buddy* (1981).

CHARLES BRACKETT (b. 26 November 1892, Saratoga Springs, New York—d. 9 March 1969) produced (27 credits) and cowrote (48 credits) several classic films, many of them for and with Billy Wilder. He was, for example, producer and one of the writers of *Titanic* (1953), *Niagara* (1953), *A Foreign Affair* (1948), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), and *Ninotchka* (1939). He won an Honorary Academy Award in 1958, and a screenwriting Oscar for *Titanic*. He also shared Oscars with Wilder for the scripts of *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Lost Weekend*, and nominations for *A Foreign Affair*, *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941), and *Ninotchka*.

D.M. MARSHMAN JR. (b. December 21, 1922, Cleveland, Ohio—d. September 17, 2015 (aged 92) Darien, Connecticut) was an American screenwriter (5 credits) known mainly for his contribution to the film script for *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). He chose to return to the East Coast in 1953, where he pursued a career in advertising for

Young & Rubicam and other agencies, including one he started himself.



JOHN F. SEITZ (b. John Francis Seitz, June 23, 1892 in Chicago, Illinois—d. February 27, 1979, Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, California) John F. Seitz was the cinematographer on 163 titles, including *The Quagmire* (1916, short), *The Ranger of Lonesome* (1916, short), *Gulch* (1916), *Whose Wife?* (1917), *The Bride's Silence* (1917), *A Game of Wits* (1917), *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1922), *Where the Pavement Ends* (1923), *The Magician* (1926), *Kismet* (1930), *Misbehaving Ladies* (1931), *Dangerously Yours* (1933), *Redheads on Parade* (1935), *Between Two Women* (1937), *Young Dr. Kildare* (1938), *A Christmas Carol* (1938), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1939), *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), *This Gun for Hire* (1942), *The Moon and Sixpence* (1942), *Star Spangled Rhythm* (1942), *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943), *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Going My Way* (1944), *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), *Casanova Brown* (1944), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), *The Big Clock* (1948), *Saigon* (1948), *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948), *The Great Gatsby* (1949), *Captain Carey, U.S.A.* (1950), *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), *When Worlds Collide* (1951), *Detective Story* (1951), *The San Francisco Story* (1952), *Thunder in the East* (1952), *Botany Bay* (1953), *Saskatchewan* (1954), *Many Rivers to Cross* (1955), *The McConnell Story* (1955), *Hell on Frisco Bay* (1955), *The Badlanders* (1958), *Island of Lost Women* (1959), and *Guns of the Timberland* (1960).

WILLIAM HOLDEN (b. William Franklin Beedle Jr., 17 April 1918, O'Fallon, Illinois—d. 16 November 1981, Santa Monica, California) appeared in nearly 80 films, beginning as a convict in *Prison Farm* (1938) and ending as a crusty, ironic, decent guy in another movie about Hollywood, Blake Edwards's *S.O.B.* (1981). Some of his other notable films were *Network* (1976), *The Towering*

Inferno (1974), *The Blue Knight* (1973) a network made-for-tv movie, yeah, but sometimes even they got it right, *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955), *Picnic* (1955), *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1954), *Stalag 17* (1953), *The Moon Is Blue* (1953), *Born Yesterday* (1950), *Our Town* (1940) and *Golden Boy* (1939). He won a best actor Oscar for *Stalag 17*, and was nominated for *Network* and *Sunset Boulevard*.

GLORIA SWANSON (b. 27 March 1899, Chicago—d. 4 April 1983, New York) was one of the great and beautiful stars of the silent era. Like a lot of old-time stars, she took to playing herself grown old in her last few films, e.g. *Airport 1975* (1974). Her first screen appearance was in *The Fable of Elvira and Farina and the Meal Ticket* (1915), about which nobody seems to know anything. Her most recent screen role, before *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) gave her a second career playing faded old-time actresses (see the quotation from her below), was in *Father Takes a Wife* (1941), and her role before that was a full decade earlier in *Indiscreet* (1931). Some of her other 70 screen roles: *What a Widow!* (1930), *Sadie Thompson* (1928), *Wages of Virtue* (1924), *Manhandled* (1924), *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1923), *Don't Tell Everything* (1921), *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920), *For Better, for Worse* (1919), *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919), and *The Romance of an American Duchess* (1915). She received Oscar nominations: for *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Trespasser* (1928), and *Sadie Thompson* (1928).

ERICH VON STROHEIM (b. Erich Oswald Stroheim, 22 September 1885, Vienna, Austria—d. 12 May 1957, Paris) was the son of a Jewish hatter in Vienna and didn't pick up the "von" until shortly after he left Europe in his early 20's. He directed 12 films, including the most famous film no one ever saw, the 7-hour-long *Greed* (1925), based on Frank Norris's novel *McTeague*. Under great pressure from Irving Thalberg, he cut it down to 4 hours; the studio cut another hour before the film was released. For years it was available only in a 2:20 version, but there's a 4-hour videotape available now. In the original black and white release prints, everything yellow was tinted by hand: gold coins, a brass bed, tooth fillings, even the canary. Von Stroheim took his directing very seriously, which is probably why they didn't let him do it very often. He acted in more than 70 films, beginning with an uncredited role as a man shot from the roof in *Birth of a Nation* (1915) (a stunt in which he broke two ribs), and including his superb performance in tonight's film as Max von Mayerling, a former director turned Norma Desmond's driver. His most famous screen role was as the German prison camp commandant, Captain von Rauffenstein, in Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937). The Nazis hated that film

because one of the central characters was a non-caricatured Jew played by a Jewish actor— Rosenthal played by Marcel Dalio—and because the primary vision of the German military was as jailors. They surely would have hated it more had they known that the senior German officer in the film was also played by a Jew, albeit one who made his career mimicking monocled Prussians.

NANCY OLSON (b. July 14, 1928 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA) was nominated for an Oscar for her supporting role in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), one of her first roles. She first appeared in *Portrait of Jennie* (1948) in an uncredited part, and her first credited role was in *Canadian Pacific* (1949). Her most recent role in in 2014's *Dumbbells*. She has acted in 44 films and television series, such as: *Big Love* (TV Series, 2010), *Flubber* (1997), *Paper Dolls* (TV Series, 1984), *Airport 1975* (1974), *Son of Flubber* (1963), *Pollyanna* (1960), *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (TV Series, 1959), *Ford Star Jubilee* (TV Series, 1956), *Battle Cry* (1955), *The Best of Broadway* (TV Series, 1954), *Lux Video Theatre* (TV Series, 1954), *The Boy from Oklahoma* (1954), *The Ford Television Theatre* (TV Series, 1954), *Medallion Theatre* (TV Series, 1954), *So Big* (1953), *Big Jim McLain* (1952), *Force of Arms* (1951), *Mr. Music* (1950), and *Union Station* (1950).



CECIL B. DEMILLE (b. August 12, 1881 in Ashfield, Massachusetts—d. January 21, 1959 (age 77) in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California) was an American filmmaker. Between 1914 and 1958, he made a total of 70 features, both silent and sound films. He is acknowledged as a founding father of the American cinema and the most commercially successful producer-director in film history. His films were distinguished by their epic scale and by his cinematic showmanship. DeMille's first film, *The Squaw Man* (1914), was also the first feature film shot in Hollywood. His first biblical epic, *The Ten Commandments* (1923), was both a critical and

commercial success; it held the Paramount revenue record for twenty-five years. DeMille directed *The King of Kings* (1927), a biography of Jesus, which gained approval for its sensitivity and reached more than 800 million viewers. *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) is said to be the first sound film to integrate all aspects of cinematic technique. *Cleopatra* (1934) was his first film to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture. After more than thirty years in film production, DeMille reached a pinnacle in his career with *Samson and Delilah* (1949), a biblical epic which became the highest-grossing film of 1950.

HEDDA HOPPER (b. May 2, 1885 in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania—d. February 1, 1966 (age 80) in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California) was a fixture of the screen (151 film and television credits) from the early days of silent film in the 1910s to her many guest spots playing herself in 1950s and 1960s television and film. Part of Hopper's public image was her fondness for wearing extravagant hats, for which the Internal Revenue Service gave her a \$5,000 annual tax credit as a work expense. During the Second World War, the Nazis used photographs of Hopper in her extravagant hats for propaganda, as a symbol of "American decadence". After her film career began to wane in the 1930s, she took up entertainment gossip writing for the *Los Angeles Times*. Hopper was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Hollywood blacklist, using her 35 million strong readership to destroy the careers of those in the entertainment industry whom she suspected of being Communists or having Communist sympathies. These are some of the films and television series she appeared in: *Alice in Wonderland or What's a Nice Kid Like You Doing in a Place Like This?* (TV Movie) (1966), *The Beverly Hillbillies* (TV Series) (1964), *I Love Lucy* (TV Series) (1955), *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), *Breakfast in Hollywood* (1946), *Queen of the Mob* (1940), *Tarzan's Revenge* (1938), *Topper* (1937), *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *Lady Tubbs* (1935), *Bombay Mail* (1934), *Downstairs* (1932), *Good Sport* (1931), *The Mystery Train* (1931), *The Prodigal* (1931), *War Nurse* (1930), *Let Us Be Gay* (1930), *Murder Will Out* (1930), *Girls Gone Wild* (1929), *Runaway Girls* (1928), *The Port of Missing Girls* (1928), *The Drop Kick* (1927), *Adam and Evil* (1927), *Matinee Ladies* (1927), *Venus of Venice* (1927), *Don Juan* (1926), *Lew Tyler's Wives* (1926), *The Caveman* (1926), *The Teaser* (1925), *The Snob* (1924), *Happiness* (1924), *Why Men Leave Home* (1924), *Gambling Wives* (1924), *Sherlock Holmes* (1922), *Conceit* (1921), *The Isle of Conquest* (1919), *The Third Degree* (1919), *The Beloved Traitor* (1918), and *The Battle of Hearts* (1916).

JACK WEBB (b. April 2, 1920 in Santa Monica, California—d. December 23, 1982 (age 62) in West Hollywood, Los Angeles, California) was the creative force writing, directing, and acting in the iconic television series *Dragnet* (1951-1959, 1967-70). He acted in 30 films and television series, including: *Project U.F.O.* (TV Series, 1978-1979), *Adam-12* (TV Series, 1970-73), *O'Hara, U.S. Treasury* (TV Series, 1971), *The Last Time I Saw Archie* (1961), *The D.I.* (1957), *Pete Kelly's Blues* (1955), *You're in the Navy Now* (1951), *Dark City* (1950), *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), *The Men* (1950), *Appointment with Danger* (1950), *Hollow Triumph* (1948), and *Three on a Match* (1932).



BUSTER KEATON (b. Joseph Frank Keaton VI on October 4, 1895 in Piqua, Kansas—d. February 1, 1966 in Los Angeles, CA) was born in a boarding house where his parents, Joseph Hallie Keaton and Myra Cutler Keaton, were touring with a medicine show. He made his debut at the age of nine months when he crawled out of the dressing room onto the stage, and he became part of the act when he was three. The young Keaton got his nickname within the first two years of his life when he fell down a flight of stairs and landed unhurt and unfazed. Legend has it that it was Harry Houdini who picked him up in wonderment and commented, "That's some buster you took." The famous magician, along with W.C. Fields and Al Jolson shared headlines with "The Three Keatons": Buster, his father Joe Keaton and mother Myra Keaton. Their act, one of the most dangerous in vaudeville, was about how to discipline a prankster child. Buster was thrown all over the stage and even into the audience. No matter what the stunt, he was poker-faced. Buster learned to sing, dance, and get by with a guitar or ukulele. He also learned magic and juggling, and was the Buff in a team called Buff & Bogany, the Lunatic Jugglers. By the time he turned 21, however, his father was such a severe alcoholic that the stunts became too dangerous to perform and the act dissolved. Keaton then went on to serving in the Army,

where after returning he completed his first full-length feature, *The Saphead* (1920). The film was such a success that by the next following year Keaton formed his own production company, where he wrote, directed and starred in many of his own films. *The General* was to be the most expensive of Keaton's features, originally budgeted at half a million dollars. The cost of the film escalated when July 1926 gave Cottage Grove a record heat wave. Sparks from the engines set haystacks alight and caused massive fires, filling the skies with smoke, and Keaton himself led the fire-fighting forces, who consisted largely of the Oregon State Guard. The governor awarded Keaton an honorary captaincy for his efforts. In 1928 he reluctantly signed with MGM after his contract expired. MGM quickly began to enforce its rigid, mechanized style of filmmaking on Keaton, swamping him with gag writers and scripts. He often surrounded himself with tall and heavy-set actors in his films, typically as his antagonist, to make his character seem to be at as much of a physical disadvantage as possible. The similarly diminutive Charlie Chaplin) also did this. With his creativity becoming increasingly stifled he began to drink excessively, despondent at having to perform material that was beneath him. Ironically, his films around 1930 were his most successful to date in terms of box-office receipts, which confirmed to MGM that its formula was right. His drinking led to a disregard for schedules and erratic behavior on the MGM lot, and a disastrous confrontation with Louis B. Mayer resulted in him being fired. Unlike many silent movie stars, Buster was eager to go into sound considering he had a fine baritone voice with no speech impediments and years of stage experience, so dialogue was not a problem. In 1935, he entered a mental hospital. MGM rehired him in 1937 as a \$100-a-week gag writer (his salary ten years before was more than ten times this amount). The occasional film was a boost to this steady income. In 1950, he had a scene-stealing cameo in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) playing cards with Norma Desmond's other fellow washed-up silent film friends. This led to other projects including appearing with Charlie Chaplin in *Limelight* (1952), *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963) and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966), which premiered seven months after his death. In the 1950s the Museum of Modern Art began showing *The Navigator* and *The General*, which were then thought to be the only surviving Keaton silents, and a new generation discovered Keaton and proclaimed him a genius. In 1965 he won a standing ovation at the Venice Film Festival. He was in tears. "This is the first time I've been invited to a film festival, but I hope it won't be the last." A heavy smoker for most of his life, Keaton was diagnosed with lung cancer during the first week of January 1966 after a month-long coughing bout, but he was never told that he was terminally ill or that he had cancer, as his doctors feared that the news would be detrimental to

his health. Keaton thought that he was recovering from a severe case of bronchitis. Despite his failing health, he was active and walking about almost until the day he died. Keaton died in his sleep after playing cards with his wife the night before. Some of his additional films are *One Week* (1920), *Cops* (1922), *Paleface* (1922), *Our Hospitality* (1923), *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924), *Seven Chances* (1925), *Battling Butler* (1926), *College* (1927), *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), *What! No Beer?* (1933), *Palooka from Paducah* (1935), *Pardon My Berth Marks* (1940), *Pajama Party* (1964), *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965), *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965). He won an honorary Academy Award in 1960.

HENRY WARNER (26 October 1876 – 21 December 1958) was an English film (136 credits) and theatre actor. H. B. Warner began his film career in silent films in 1914, when he debuted in *The Lost Paradise*. He played lead roles in the silent era and also appeared in numerous Broadway plays. His greatest success was the role of Jesus Christ in Cecil B. DeMille's silent film epic *The King of Kings* in 1927. He received good reviews for this role, but with the advent of sound era, he turned towards supporting roles, mostly because of his age. He usually was cast in dignified roles in numerous films of the 1930s and 1940s. He played in the 1930 version of *Liliom* (as the Heavenly Magistrate), in *Five Star Final* (1931, as Michael Townsend), in *Grand Canary* (1934, as Dr. Ismay), and the 1935 version of *A Tale of Two Cities* as Gabelle. He also portrayed the strict judge in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) with Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur. He appeared in the original 1937 version of *Lost Horizon* as Chang, for which he was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. Among his later films were *You Can't Take It With You* (1938), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Rains Came* (1939), and *The Corsican Brothers*. In *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) he played what was for him an atypical role, as the drunken druggist. Occasionally, Warner was seen in sinister roles, as in the 1941 film version of *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, in which he played the ghost of John Hathorne. Also that year he played the villainous role of Mr. Carrington in *Topper Returns*. He also appeared in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) in which he played himself, playing cards with some other former silent film stars including Buster Keaton and Anna Q Nilsson. His last film role was an uncredited cameo in *Darby's Rangers* (1958).

RAY EVANS (February 4, 1915 – February 15, 2007) was an American songwriter. He was a partner in a composing and songwriting duo with Jay Livingston, known for the songs they composed for films. Evans wrote the lyrics and Livingston the music for the songs. Livingston and Evans, both members of ASCAP, won three Academy Awards, in

1948 for the song "Buttons and Bows", written for the movie *The Paleface*; in 1950 for the song "Mona Lisa", written for the movie *Captain Carey, U.S.A.*; and in 1956 for the song "Que Sera Sera", featured in the Alfred Hitchcock movie *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and sung by Doris Day. Another popular song that he and Livingston wrote for a film was the song "Tammy", written for the 1957 movie *Tammy and the Bachelor*. The song was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Song. Livingston and Evans also wrote popular TV themes for shows including *Bonanza* and *Mr. Ed*. Their Christmas song "Silver Bells" intended for the 1951 Bob Hope film *The Lemon Drop Kid*, has become a Christmas standard. Evans appeared as himself with Livingston in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) in the New Year's Eve party scene.



From Jeffrey Meyers, introduction to the script of *Sunset Boulevard* U. Cal Press 1999

During his fifty-year career Wilder has shown astonishing versatility—and real genius—as both coauthor and director (beginning in 1943) of films about war, murder, alcoholism, Hollywood, sensational journalism, prison camps, trials and aviation, as well as of dazzling romantic comedies...and bittersweet love stories....

Explaining his need for a coauthor, Wilder said: "I started the idea of collaborating when I first arrived in

America, because I could not speak the language. I needed somebody who was responsible who had some idea of how a picture is constructed. Then I found out that it's *nice* to have a collaborator—you're not writing into a vacuum, especially if he's sensitive and ambitious to create a product of some value." After several years of screenwriting hackwork his career took off in 1938 when he began a long and fruitful collaboration with Charles Brackett. They began with witty and intelligent movies like *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, *Ninotchka* and *Ball of Fire* and ended with their greatest film, *Sunset Boulevard*....

Born in 1892, fourteen years before Wilder, Brackett graduated from Williams College and Harvard Law School, was a vice-consul in France and a lieutenant in World War I. He practiced law, wrote two novels, and was the drama critic for the *New Yorker* before coming to Hollywood, two years before Wilder. The sophisticated Easterner helped the young émigré master his new language and refine his skills as a screenwriter. Wilder later recalled what he learned from Brackett: "He spoke excellent English. He was a very classy guy, a couple of pegs above the ordinary Hollywood writer. He was very patient with me but he also insisted on my English becoming less ridiculous than it was then. I went to a good school—it lifted my English a few pegs." Wilder, with the energy of a hyperactive child, would pace the room and walk out, disappear from the office, and suddenly stroll back in. He was brash and rebellious, cynical and sardonic. Brackett—silver haired, courtly, and reserved—was well known for his patrician manners and refined conversation, his elegant style, well-turned epigrams, and conservative suits.

Wilder also explained how they worked—and often quarreled—together and how they complemented each other's personalities: "Two collaborators who think exactly alike is a waste of time. Dialogue or whatever comes from: 'Not quite, but you are close to it. Let's find something that we both like. This is a little bit too cheap, this is too easy. This character is not developed. I am a Roosevelt man and you are a Republican.' Unless there are sparks that fly, it is totally unnecessary to have a collaborator." Brackett disliked some of Wilder's essential qualities—his wildness, misanthropy, cruelty, and sense of the macabre. They had great battles, yelling and screaming at each other. The third screenwriter who

collaborated on *Sunset Boulevard*, D.M. Marshman, Jr., a *Life* magazine reporter and film critic, was invited to join the team when he suggested that the aging silent screen actress have an affair with a young Midwestern screenwriter. viii-ix)

Brackett said of their idea of the film: "Wilder, Marshman and I were acutely conscious of the fact that we lived in a town which had been swept by a social change as profound as that brought about in the Old South by the Civil War. Overnight, the coming of sound brushed gods and goddesses into obscurity. We had an idea of a young man stumbling into a great house where one of these ex-goddesses survived. At first we saw her as kind of a horror woman...an embodiment of vanity and selfishness. But as we went along, our sympathies became deeply involved with the woman who had been given the brush by 30 million fans." (ix-x)



For the hero, Joe Gillis, Wilder tried for Montgomery Clift, who refused to make love to an older woman on screen; Fred MacMurray, who had given a fine performance in Wilder's *Double Indemnity*; and even Gene Kelly, before turning to William Holden. When Holden seemed uncertain of how to play his role and told Wilder, "I'm having trouble getting a bead on Joe Gillis," the director replied: "That's easy. Do you know Bill Holden?Then you know Joe Gillis." (Meyers, x)

Wilder linked silent and sound pictures, Norma's real past and her imaginary present, by using silent-era actors for her bridge party with the "wax works" figures: Buster Keaton; H.B. Warner, who played Christ in DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927); and Anna Q. Nilsson, a Swedish-born star. DeMille, who had directed Swanson in silent movies, appears as himself—for a fee of \$10,000—when Norma visits him at Paramount (her old studio) while he directs *Samson and Delilah*—a variant of the *Salome* script she is writing with Gillis. Kind and sympathetic, the only man Norma defers to, DeMille is completely convincing in the part and, under Wilder's direction, gives a more subtle performance by far than any actor ever did in one of DeMille's own pictures." (Meyers xi.)

MGM head Louis B. Mayer said of the film: "We should horsewhip this Wilder! We should throw him out

of this town! He has dirtied the nest! He has brought disgrace on the town that is feeding him!” (Quoted in Meyers, xv)

In her autobiography Swanson ruefully recorded the effect of the role on her career; “I had played the part too well. I may not have got an Academy Award for it, but I had somehow convinced the world once again of that corniest of all theatrical clichés—that on very rare artistic occasions the actor actually becomes the part...Swanson *is* Norma Desmond. Most of the scripts [I was] offered since finishing *Sunset Boulevard* dealt with aging, eccentric actresses.” (Meyers xvi)



From Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films*, U. Chicago Press, 1984

The 1950s were the last great period in which films dealt thematically with acting. The change might be indicated by two films directed by Billy Wilder, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964). Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* and Dean Martin in *Kiss Me, Stupid* play different versions of their film selves. They both have two faces aesthetically, in a way typical of film and no other form: each faces into the film as a fictional character—Norma Desmond and Dino—and each faces out as a star. Each as they appear in the film is a caricature of the way they might be, save for the self-consciousness involved in taking such a role and the detachment toward the screen self playing the role implies. (William Holden, who narrates *Sunset Boulevard*, even though his character is dead at the beginning of the film, similarly faces inward and outward at the same time, and we accept what would otherwise be a morbid film joke because of its relevance to such doubleness in the rest of the picture.) Swanson, however, plays a role that is a meditation on her screen image and the relation

between the old world of silent films and the new world of the 1950s Hollywood. Within the film, only her former director, Cecil B. DeMille, is still working. The actors who were her contemporaries (Buster Keaton, H.B. Warner, Anna Q. Nilsson) are embalmed with her in the past, playing an eternal bridge game. *Sunset Boulevard* thereby documents the way film stars belong to particular eras and disappear, losing their power, when their personalities are no longer relevant to the needs of their audience. (208-209)

From Brandon French, *On the Verge of Revolt: Women in American Films of the Fifties* (Ungar, 1978)

Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*...characterizes ambition as deadly, the scarlet "A" of our twentieth century puritan conscience. And like other *film noir* movies, *Sunset Boulevard* depicts a woman who is more ambitious than the man she covets, calling up the biblical image of a fallen Eve seducing Adam into sin.

However, Norma Desmond, the middle-aged has-been movie queen who seduces and ultimately kills a luckless screenwriter, is not a typically enigmatic "just plain rotten" *film noir* villainess. Nor is Betty Schaefer, with whom the screenwriter falls in love, simply a sweet young contrast to Norma. And Joe Gillis, the object of both women's desires, is not merely an innocent victim.

In shooting Joe, Norma—like Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens *Great Expectations*, to whom she is obliquely compared in Joe's narration—strikes out against the defection of her lover, not merely Joe but what Joe symbolizes to her: the audience who has ceased to love her and thereby robs her of her only creative outlet. She also gives vent to a thinly disguised fury against all men. For the central irony of Norma's existence as a woman is that she is dependent on men, while at the same time she is the powerhouse that supports them.

Not only does Norma keep Max, whom we learn was at one time her director and her first husband, but also Joe. And as the star of twelve DeMille pictures, "his biggest successes," she asserts her claim to a portion of his maintenance as well. Nonetheless, she is dependent upon Max to protect her from the reality of her abandonment by the outside world, dependent upon Joe to rewrite her script for her and to love her, and dependent upon DeMille to restore her career in the movies. . . .

DeMille represents both the power of the individual and of the institution. As such, he is the most culpable character in *Sunset Boulevard*, and yet he is the least blamed. Or so it seems. In fact, Wilder assaults DeMille

in a series of sly and implicit ways.

Throughout the scene in which Norma visits DeMille's set, we watch DeMille (in jodhpurs and boots) giving orders. His dulcet tones camouflage his control in a grandfatherly benevolence, but everyone around him proceeds in a flurry of humble obedience.

The most telling instance of the nature and scope of this awesome power occurs during a scene with an electrician named Hogeye. DeMille leaves the set momentarily, advising Norma to observe how differently films are being made. In his absence Hogeye recognizes Norma and turns a spotlight on her. Suddenly, members of the cast who formerly worked with her or who remember her films gather around; she is a celebrity again. But when DeMille returns, he sternly commands Hogeye to "turn that light back where it belongs." Clearly, DeMille decides where the spotlight belongs, and he decides that it does not belong on Norma, although he acts as if he has no power to salvage her career.

DeMille's "helplessness" is further belied in an implicit way by Wilder's casting of Gloria Swanson (as well as Erich von Stroheim and Buster Keaton) in *Sunset Boulevard*. In an act of protest against Hollywood's institutional policy of human discard, Wilder put the spotlight on Swanson, and she became a star once again.

But blaming DeMille for destroying Norma is as misleading as lionizing Wilder for saving Swanson; it mirrors the distinction between the good plantation master and the bad one—a distinction which ignores the slavery that both masters preserve.

Norma, Joe and Betty are drawn together because they are alike. The behavior of each is dictated by the savage, competitive, impersonal world they inhabit, a world in which mutual exploitation is the rule. This spirit of Hollywood is slyly indicted in a subtitle from a fragment of one of Norma's silent films: "Cast out this wicked dream which has seized my heart." A heart seized by a wicked dream—the dream of success—is not free to love, except insofar as "love" advances the fulfillment of the dream. Wilder pursues this idea by sabotaging the romance between Betty and Joe Hollywood, not Norma, dooms Betty and Joe's romance.

From Mick LaSalle, *Complicated Women: Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood* (St. Martin's, 2000)

Gish and Pickford had emerged before America's entry into World War I. Gloria Swanson broke out as a major star in the aftermath of the Armistice, and in 1920 represented the new breed. A transitional figure, Swanson arrived on the scene just in time to be caught between Victorian purity and modern openness. She

made sex comedies and sex dramas with no sex, yet sex was on everyone's mind. She played the glamorous woman who could—if she so chose, but she never chose, but could if she wanted to, but she never wanted to—behave with the same license as a man.

The Swanson formula, an elaborate tease, made her the most popular actress of the first half of the twenties. . . . Swanson would have loved to have gone further. Late in life, she lamented "all the puritanical hypocrisy of the early and mid-1920s and grieved that it had persuaded her to have an abortion in 1925 to avoid the scandal of unwed motherhood. Off-screen, she was a woman of many affairs, but on-screen, Swanson didn't get to play a normal woman with a sex life until *Tonight or Never* (1931), as a singer who finds that her voice improves when she takes a lover.



From Jeanine Basinger, *Silent Stars* (Knopf, 1999)

The disappearance of *Queen Kelly* and *Sadie Thompson* for many years, so that modern viewers didn't get to see them even in the rare instances when silent classics were revived, diminished Swanson's reputation as an actress. ("I was a star at twenty-one," said Swanson, "and a has-been at thirty-three.") Although she is known as one of the four "fabulous faces" of American movies—along with Garbo, Crawford and Dietrich—hers is often thought to be the least beautiful, least interesting face of the group. Seeing her animated, alive and moving, and watching her magnificently expressive face at work reveals quite a different story.

There has always been much speculation as to just whom Norma Desmond was modeled on, but it was probably no one actress. She's most likely a combination of the ego of Negri (who always knew what she was doing) and the genuinely crazy Mae Murray (who apparently *never* knew what she was

doing). Having Swanson play the part verifies the character, and, in fact, gives the entire story a credibility it might not otherwise have. She's magnificent. Who could know better than she did how to play an exotic diva from the era? Everything about her, from her leopard trim, her cigarette holders, her bangle bracelets, to her bed shaped like a golden swan and her outré open-air automobile seems completely authentic—because it is. And when Norma goes on the lot, to Swanson's old studio Paramount Pictures, and meets her old director Cecil B. DeMille playing himself, everything rings true. For many people in the audience, it was an extraordinary blurring of fact and fiction, since for them it had been less than twenty-five years since it had all been real. Swanson herself was just past fifty years old, yet she and the world of the movie seemed to come from a time and place so remote that few could remember it. When Norma's bridge group meets, and the other players include Anna Q. Nilsson, Buster Keaton, and H.B. Warner, older people in the audience gasped.

And, of course, being able to use clips from the never-released *Queen Kelly* not only gave viewers Norma as she authentically was as a younger woman, but also convinced them it could have been Norma, not Swanson, in the part, because they themselves had never seen it as a Swanson film. This was heady stuff, and when you add in Swanson's imitation of Charlie Chaplin, the superb writing and directing, the other members of a fine cast, the art direction and music, the moody cinematography—you have a masterpiece. Few actresses ever find a role like Norma Desmond. In truth, only one did, and she more than met the challenge. When Swanson rises up in the flickering light coming down from the screen, and with genuine passion—and considerable nuttiness—cries out, "We didn't need dialogue! We had faces!"—her profile stops any arguments.

Over the years, she received many accolades, among them a tribute at the Eastman House in Rochester, New York, where at her retrospective in 1966 she proved herself still a colorful quote machine, saying after the films were shown, "I must say I got fed up looking at this face of mine. First it was a pudding, then it was an old dumpling. Talk about the face that launched a thousand ships—this was a thousand faces that launched I don't know what—a career I guess." She also showed

her serious side by saying, "Failure is never easy to deal with. Success is impossible unless you've had the experience. I like making movies better than anything else."



To the end of her life, Gloria Swanson knew how to play her part. No Norma Desmond, she was nevertheless always ready for her close-up. When she was eighty, she was still walking around grandly, carrying a single red rose and demanding that her theme song "Love, Your Magic Spell is Everywhere," be played. ("Her greed for fame is amazing," wrote James Robert Parish.) And yet she never became one of those aging movie stars for whom there is no life, no laughter, no honest human contact. Somewhere deep inside her there still seemed to live that little clown from her Keystone years.

"I hated comedy, because I thought it was ruining my chance for dramatic parts. I didn't realize that comedy is the highest expression of the theatrical art and the best training in the world for other roles. The mark of an accomplished actor is timing, and it can be acquired only in comedy. Comedy makes you think faster, and after Keystone I was a human lightning conductor." (Swanson, quoted in Basinger)

From Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style* (Overlook Press)

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

That may seem a substantial claim to make for a group of films whose plots frequently turn on deadly violence or sexual obsession, whose catalogue of characters includes numbers of down-and-out private eyes, desperate women, and petty criminals. Nor does the visceral unease felt by a viewer who watches a

shadowy form move across a lonely street or who hears the sound of car tires creeping over wet asphalt automatically translate into sociological assertions about paranoia or postwar guilt. At the same time, it is clear that the emergence of film noir coincides with these and other popular sentiments at large in America. "Film noir" is literally "black film," not just in the sense of being full of physically dark images, nor of reflecting a dark mood in American society, but equally, almost empirically, as a black slate on which the culture could inscribe its ills and in the process produce a catharsis to help relieve them.



"Film Noir" (Wikipedia)

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

The term *film noir*, French for "black film" (literal) or "dark film" (closer meaning),^[1] 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.^[2] Cinema historians and critics defined the category retrospectively. Before the notion was widely adopted in the 1970s, many of the classic film noir^[a] were referred to as "[melodramas](#)". Whether film noir qualifies as a distinct [genre](#) 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 film noirs 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.

from James Linville, "Billy Wilder, The Art of Screenwriting No. 1" (Paris Review, 1996)

INTERVIEWER: *Sunset Boulevard*?

WILDER: For a long time I wanted to do a comedy about Hollywood. God forgive me, I wanted to have Mae West and Marlon Brando. Look what became of that idea! Instead it became a tragedy of a silent-picture actress, still rich, but fallen down into the abyss after talkies. "I am big. It's the pictures that got small." I had that line early on. Someplace else I had the idea for a writer who is down on his luck. It didn't quite fall into place until we got Gloria Swanson.

We had gone to Pola Negri first. We called her on the phone, and there was too much Polish accent. You see why some of these people didn't make the transition to sound. We went to Pickfair and visited Mary Pickford. Brackett began to tell her the story, because he was the more serious one. I stopped him: No, don't do it. I waved him off. She was going to be insulted if we told her she was to play a woman who begins a love affair with a man half her age. I said to her, We're very sorry, but it's no use. The story gets very vulgar.

Gloria Swanson had been a big star, in command of an entire studio. She worked with DeMille. Once she was dressed, her hair done to perfection, they placed her on a sedan and two strong men would carry her onto the set so no curl would be displaced. But later she did a couple of sound pictures that were terrible. When I gave her the script, she said, *I must* do this, and she turned out to be an absolute angel.

I used stars wherever I could in *Sunset Boulevard*. I used Cecil B. DeMille to play the big important studio director. I used Erich von Stroheim to play the director who directed the first pictures with Swanson, which he in fact did. I thought, Now, if there is a bridge game at the house of a silent star, and if I am to show that our hero, the writer, has been degraded to being the butler who cleans ashtrays, who would be there? I got Harry B. Warner, who played Jesus in DeMille's biblical pictures, Anna Q. Nilsson, and Buster Keaton, who was an excellent bridge player, a tournament player. The picture industry was only fifty or sixty years

old, so some of the original people were still around. Because old Hollywood was dead, these people weren't exactly busy. They had the time, got some money, a little recognition. They were delighted to do it.

'Sunset Boulevard': Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett's Sobering Exposure of the Dark Side of Hollywood (*Cinephilia & Beyond*).

A compilation of great text, location photos, the original draft, pages from the shooting script, a 63-minute video interview with Wilder, and more.

<https://cinephiliabeyond.org/sunset-boulevard-billy-wilder-charles-bracketts-sobering-exposure-dark-side-hollywood/>

BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS SPRING 2020, SERIES 40

Feb 25 Henri-Georges Clouzot *Wages of Fear* 1953

Mar 3 Luchino Visconti, *The Leopard* 1963

Mar 10 Masaki Kobayashi *Kwaidan* 1965

Mar 24 John Schlesinger *Midnight Cowboy* 1969

Mar 31 Alan Pakula *Klute* 1971

Apr 7 Robert Altman *McCabe and Mrs Miller* 1971

Apr 14 Martin Scorsese *King of Comedy* 1983

Apr 21 Wim Wenders *Land of Plenty* 2004

Apr 28 Wes Anderson *Isle of Dogs* 2018

May 5 Pedro Almodóvar *Pain and Glory* 2019

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