

Four Directors

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I hope you bear with me tonight. What I thought I'd do is talk about the work of four directors of Irish descent. Actually, three of these directors are half Irish and one, John Ford, is, of course, one hundred percent Irish. I am just going to give my impressions of what some of these Irish American directors meant to me over the years. A number of people here do know something more about films, but I'm going to have to speak, in a sense, to laymen. And what I am going to do is discuss the work a bit, show a couple of clips and try to sum things up. Of course, I am not really in any position to talk about what is quintessentially Irish. I'm a Sicilian American. But what I can talk about is what I observe in the work of these four directors, what separates them and what links them. There's John Ford, Raoul Walsh, John Huston and Leo McCarey. And they are about as different as four directors can be. But there is something that they all share. It's as though they had glasses on in which the lenses were shaded differently.

I am sure many of you know the James Joyce story, "The Dead," which has a very beautiful, unique tone. It's sad, thrilling, teeming with life and also very elegiac. Joyce captured something that was very real and very Irish in that story, a special tone that hovers between sadness and exhilaration. And that tone, I believe, is shared in the work of the men I am going to be talking about tonight.

Two of these directors, John Ford and Raoul Walsh, were true film pioneers. Huston and McCarey, John Huston and Leo McCarey, they were also pioneers in their own way, but Ford and Walsh began directing in the mid-teens. I think Ford's first picture was 1917, *Straight Shooting*. He made one picture a week—a reel a week. That's a one reeler, or a Western every week. But they were among the men and women who were creating the grammar of film, who helped create the twentieth century art form.

As relatively sophisticated film viewers of 1996, we are pretty much

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jaded. We take things for granted that these men were forced to think about and work out through trial and error. I mean how do you tell a story with a succession of moving pictures, moving images? How do you get an audience to accept a series of images as one story?

It wasn't simply a matter of just going out and shooting a Western for a week. For instance, you have to think, if horses are galloping out of the frame, left, where do they come in when you cut? Do they come in the same side? It will look as if they are going against each other. And the only way they worked this out was through trial and error, trial and error. These methods were constantly being created there on the set at that time. These are like subliminal images delivered to a mass audience that's like one synthesized mind.

The desire for a story told in moving pictures, or motion images as Henri Bergson put it, is a very old and very basic one. It's really, I think, a fulfillment of a desire you can feel in the early cave paintings, as when you see a painting of a bison, and instead of four hooves, there are twenty. He's running, but the artist couldn't show him running. It's a rock, so . . . That's the idea.

Or Trajan's column in Rome, which is great. If you took it out and peeled it like an orange, you'd just see a strip, like a long comic strip, of scene after scene after scene. It's really a motion picture. Renaissance fresco is the same. Or, recently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I saw an Assyrian show and they had a stele which showed a king on the right. In the center was a man dressed exactly like the king, standing. On the left was a priest kneeling. And it took many years for archaeologists to figure out that the first two figures, the seated man and the standing man, are the same person. He's pictured as standing, getting up, in motion. And there has always been that desire, always that fascination with movement in humanity.

It reminds me of another story. Earlier this year I was in Rome, and I wanted to go to St. Clement's again. St. Clement's is this great church that contains five or six levels of different churches. We had a wonderful Irish priest, the archaeologist in charge, who took us through the excavations. He wasn't wearing a collar, so at first I didn't realize he was a priest. I was very interested in what he was saying, because what is unusual about St. Clement's is that the church is on different levels. The first church, I believe, is the one of the eleventh century or the twelfth

century which exists now. Then, below that, there was one built, I think, in the sixth century. Then, below that one from the third century and then one from the first century, and then below that the painted Temple of Mithras, the actual streets of ancient Rome which they are still excavating. The priest was very excited because he took us through the new excavations, and he showed us the cistern for baptism of the third century church, which is really fascinating. It was lodged in the wall, though, and they couldn't break in the wall because it was somebody's house on the other side. It's a big problem to break in, but they are working it out.

This priest also showed us a little panel that had just been excavated. And it turns out that on the bottom of the panel are three smaller panels. The first panel is a picture of two men pointing at something. This is from the sixth century church. And by that time you can begin to see the debasement of the art. You begin to see it's the fall of the Roman Empire. The art is crude. Above the two men is a little balloon, like a comic strip with words. In the second panel, the two men are saving someone from being hurt. In the third panel, they are carrying that person away. And they had words, like a comic strip, on each panel.

This fresco shows a part of the story of St. Clement, his rescue. But what is interesting about the words is that they are the earliest known example of written Italian vernacular in the church. And the priest translated it for me. The first panel said something like, "They are attacking Clement." And the second one said something like, "Quick! We have to help him." And the third said, "The sons of whores almost killed him." The Italians I was with were a little funny about that, but the Irish priest thought it was hilarious.

So there is always the desire for visual storytelling. The ability to tell stories through moving pictures, I think, is one of the greatest developments in human history. And, of course, everything did start with Griffith and Ford and Walsh, along with such contemporaries as Thomas Ince, Cecil B. De Mille, Dwan, King Vidor and other immigrants such as Frank Borzage, an Italian, Chaplin who was from England, Maurice Tourneur from France. They are really responsible for the development of a whole new form of communication, one that has become so powerful in this century.

Now, about John Ford. What I am going to do first is to list a lot of his films in the order of the periods of American history that they cover. The

first one I'll just mention is *Drums Along the Mohawk*. That is his first color film, 1939, with Henry Fonda, Claudette Colbert. It was about the pre-Revolutionary days. Then, you move up a little further in his canon of work and you get *Young Mr. Lincoln*. That's the early nineteenth century. Then, you get *The Horse Soldiers*, the Civil War. He did a segment in *How the West Was Won* on the Civil War. Then, you move further into time, *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, which takes place just after the Civil War, the story of Doctor Mudd. Then, *Judge Priest* and its remake *The Sun Shines Bright*, which is about Reconstruction. Then *The Searchers*, about the West, *Stagecoach*, about the West, *My Darling Clementine*, about the West. The cavalry trilogy—*Fort Apache*, *Rio Grande*, and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*—are all about the development of the West. *The Iron Horse*, which Ford made as a silent film in 1925, is about the building of the railroads, leading into *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, which is about the end of the West and the beginning of industrialization. There is *Cheyenne Autumn*, which is about the horrible experience of Native Americans. Into *The Long Grey Line*, which deals with Martin Mahar, caretaker of West Point, and that's throughout the early twentieth century. *Pilgrimage*, and *What Price Glory*, about World War I. *The Wings of Eagles*, World War I through the 1930s. *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tobacco Road*, both about the Depression. *The Battle of Midway* and *They Were Expendable*, World War II. And finally *The Last Hurrah*, which takes place in the thirties, and which is about Irish politicians in Boston, with Spencer Tracy; a beautiful film. It's extraordinary when you think about it; Ford has covered virtually every part of popular American history. You can trace the history of the country through these pictures. And you can't help but think that at the end of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, when Jimmy Stewart and Vera Miles take that train, that they are running on the same rails that were laid in *The Iron Horse*.

Ford is a director who means a great deal to me personally. I studied his films quite a bit. And also I watched them without studying them. I saw them on television, and I didn't know who did them, but I knew they were good. I knew there was some sort of poetry going on there. I didn't know what kind. But the images were so beautiful and the emotions were so strong. And over the years, I find that watching these pictures I learn more and more from them. The pictures are the same; I'm the one who is doing the changing. I have no idea how that happens but I learn

more when I see *The Searchers*. I learn more when I see *The Long Grey Line*, which at first I loved, and then, when I was a film student, I thought too sentimental. Then, I saw it recently this year and it's not sentimental, it's sentiment. It's *true* sentiment. They really grow each passing year.

I can also attest that, as an Italian American, my family and I and my friends strongly related to the tribal nature of the cultures, and of the family in the Ford films as *the* unit, *the* foundation of identity and existence. The Irish and Italians, through the movies, were able to understand our common experience as immigrants and as the children of immigrants.

It reminds me of watching *How Green Was My Valley* at home as a child. You have my grandmother who doesn't speak English or even read English, wasn't a citizen, didn't want to become a citizen. My grandfather, too. They just came here to make some money. They fed their family. That was it. So they couldn't go any further. That was it. And they watched *How Green Was My Valley* on television, and they would identify with the scene where Donald Crisp stands in the living room, and his sons line up and they give him the pay from the mines. Because that's the way things should be. That's what we heard.

My father did the same thing. My brother went to work. He didn't want to finish school. My father said, "The first thing you do is bring that damn pay envelope here every week. You bring it in and you pay as long as you're living in this house."

My grandfather, my father's father—I'm just finding out some of these stories—in Sicily, he was abused by his father, my great-grandfather, when my great-grandfather remarried. The woman hid him in the attic or something. And finally his sister got him out. He ran away from the farm, and he went to work on another farm, oh, a few miles away. But even then, the pay he made on *that* farm, he sent most of it back to his father.

So there was a great deal of fellow feeling among Italian Americans when we saw these pictures of Ford's. He was quite deservedly one of the most respected American directors of that Golden Age of Hollywood, the supposed Golden Age, the studio system. He was treated as a poet during a time when most directors weren't getting that kind of respect. And one of the things that made his work so distinctive was that he filmed only what he had to film. Nothing more, nothing less. Now you

have to understand that is not the way most pictures are made. Some of you here know that. Most directors don't know exactly what they are going to shoot. They go ahead and they shoot what's called coverage. They take a shot of you, a shot of you, a shot of you, up to me talking. Then, when they run into trouble with me, they go to you watching, to you watching, to my daughter watching. Then they cut back to me and change all my lines. This is the way you build a scene.

But Ford didn't do that. He didn't do that. He knew exactly what he wanted. The late director Robert Parrish was an editor for Ford, and he died last year. He worked as an editor on *The Grapes of Wrath*, and he told a story about John Ford walking into his editing room smoking a cigar. This already is a problem. It's already a problem because in 1939 you're still using nitrate, and nitrate is flammable. A nitrate fire is very bad. You saw in *Cinema Paradiso* where the nitrate film burns. Also, *Nanook of the North*, the first documentary, directed by Robert Flaherty. There's another Irishman. The father of documentary. Apparently, he was smoking in the editing room and he blew up all the film. He had to go back and recreate everything. At any rate, that's how the story goes.

So obviously Mr. Parrish was quite nervous. Ford was standing there with a cigar. On the lot in those days, the editing rooms were real hot and claustrophobic. And the film is nitrate. Anything could happen. Now, when you cut a movie, each piece of film is identified with what they call a slate.

So Parrish told Ford, "I'm having a hard time cutting a scene on *The Grapes of Wrath*."

And Ford said, "Why? All you have to do is go to the end of the shot, cut off the slate, take the beginning of the next shot, cut off the slate, and put the two together."

One of the reasons for doing this kind of thing with the studio, especially working in the studios where the producer was the king, was practicality. There was no way for studio heads to play around with Ford's pictures because they could be assembled in only one way. They couldn't be assembled in any other way. Actually, Ford didn't take kindly to studio interference of any kind. He was shooting a Shirley Temple film he made with Victor McLaglen about the Black Watch called *Wee Willie Winkie*, at Fox again. Someone from the studio came up and told him, "Look you're five days behind." So he ripped out twenty pages of the

script and said, "OK, now we're back on schedule," meaning "Keep Away!" I'm sure that story's been told many times.

One other beautiful story. I don't know which film it was, but there is a story of John Ford watching John Wayne move in the distance. A stage-coach or a horse goes by and dust covers him, and this figure just stands there and Ford says "Beautiful, this is beautiful. I'd love to take a closeup but some son-of-a-bitch would want to use it." That was the end of that.

This annoyance with tampering relates back to what I was saying about these early directors learning how to tell stories with moving pictures. They learned through trial and error, and they knew exactly how to communicate the story. So they didn't want anybody who just came on the set or on the lot telling them what to do. They were there at the beginning.

Ford was much more than just an iconoclast, although he certainly was that. He was something of a political conservative, I think. I can't quite tell. For instance, he stood up to Cecil B. De Mille when De Mille tried to have Joe Mankiewicz removed as President of the Directors Guild of America because of his alleged leftist leanings. And De Mille, a director that I do like also—not that I think he's as accomplished an artist as Ford—was red-baiting at that time. I read this in Kazan's book. He began reading off the names of the leftist directors with a Jewish accent, Wyler, Zinneman, Mankiewicz. And I know Delmer Daves got up and spoke very emotionally. Wyler, too, got angry and wanted to hit somebody. William Wellman got very annoyed. And finally, at the climax of the meeting, which took seven hours—this was during the blacklisting period or right at the beginning of it—Ford stood up to challenge DeMille by announcing, "My name's John Ford. I make Westerns." And he made a speech and actually turned the tide with his natural sense of authority. He was there from before the beginning. What are you going to do? From a sense of authority and his innate decency.

The way I look at Ford is as a poet, to me he is a poet of elegy. Even when he was boisterous and trying to be funny, even when he does innumerable scenes with Victor McLaglen drunk and getting into all sorts of hijinks in the calvary trilogy Westerns, there is always a feeling of elegy, of a past moment that's been captured. The sense of aching beauty that you find in "The Dead," the short story, of the past haunting the present. This is John Ford.

In his film *The Last Hurrah*, which is about Irish politicians in Boston during the 1930s, there is this extraordinary sense of farewell, of the passing of an era. And done very simply: no fancy camera tricks, just the passing of time, done with beautiful reserve. It has to do with the way people carry themselves in the frame. The way they moved in the frame, Spencer Tracy and all the character actors, John Carradine, all these people. Even Jeffrey Hunter who played Tracy's nephew; Jimmy Galisa, all these great character actors. The movement is ritualized and the actors are respectful of one another in a way that's subtle but very striking at the same time.

Ford also had an extraordinary eye for composition. Spielberg actually got to meet him. He went to a building in Hollywood one time—he had just come out of film school—and he saw, in the office across the way, John Ford working on a film. He was in there chewing his handkerchief, and Spielberg said, "Do you mind if I come in?" He walked in and said, "I'm a great fan of yours, I'm an admirer and I want to make movies."

"You want to make movies, huh?" Ford said. "Study Remington." Frederic Remington. And he said, also, "Watch where you put the horizon line. Don't put it in the middle. Always on the top or at the bottom. Never in the middle."

But study the composition. This is a key thing in Ford's work. And as you will see in this clip, his storytelling was very clear, very visual, and his images had a real weight, a density. In this scene from *My Darling Clementine*, which—I guess this and *The Searchers* are the two great Westerns, arguably. Everybody knows *Stagecoach*, but *My Darling Clementine* has a special quality. I just saw it again a few weeks ago. You can see in it all of these aspects of Ford as well as his beautiful sense of chivalry. Now, Ford and Henry Fonda's vision of Wyatt Earp is a little cleaned up. It's idealized, but it's valid because of it's humanity. See, it didn't matter if the real Wyatt Earp was in charge of a saloon which had call girls in there. It's the way Fonda's positioned in the frame and it's his innate sense of being a human being that Ford brings out so beautifully.

In this scene, Wyatt Earp accompanies Clementine, who is Doc Holliday's girlfriend, played by Kathy Downs. He accompanies her to a dance at a church being built in the town. And you can see just in the building of the church that civilization is coming to this town, and Doc

Holliday and Earp and all the brothers and the Clantons, they're all on their way out. Also, you can see what's so beautiful about Wyatt Earp's awkwardness with Clementine. She's his friend's girl. She's very proper; he's very rough, and he's trying to be chivalrous. And you'll see that the way Ford frames it, and the dignity of the way these two people behave with one another, that these two things are inseparable, and they are inseparable from the scene's visual composition and beauty.



That will give you an idea. But there's so much more to be said about Ford than has been, I think. There are a lot of good books on him, too, on his work, on his life.

With this, I would like to move on to Raoul Walsh. In the case of Walsh, the boisterousness outweighed the elegiac, to say the least. There are a lot of directors who try for Walsh's sense of life and rollicking energy, but most of them fall flat. Walsh was purportedly as rowdy in his real life as some of the characters he loved to build his films around. He actually experienced the Gay Nineties, a decade that he made several films on, including a wonderful film called *The Bowery*, with George Raft and Wallace Beery. And the extraordinary movie, *The Strawberry Blonde*, which I always liked, with Jimmy Cagney and Rita Hayworth.

He was born in 1887. As a kid he met the real Jim Corbett, as well as Buffalo Bill, Caruso, Mark Twain. He was a great storyteller, a great raconteur, and many of his stories may be slightly embellished, but honestly they are quite hilarious. In fact, a lot of directors from that generation had a collection of stories that they would constantly tell.

By far the most colorful story he ever told, which may or may not have happened, was about stealing John Barrymore's body from a funeral parlor and bringing it to Errol Flynn's house as a joke. And when he

brought it back, after the joke that he played on Flynn, the undertaker asked him where he had taken the body, and Walsh told him, "I took it to Errol Flynn's house."

And he said, "Gee, you should have told me you were taking him to Errol Flynn's house, I would have put a nicer suit on him." If it's a tall tale, it's very much like one of his movies. Not many people get away with doing that sort of thing on film, either.

Walsh was also one of the most prolific directors in Hollywood. He made many films. He made his first film in 1914, his last one in 1964. I'm not saying every one of these were masterpieces. He did a lot of potboilers and a lot of musicals, too. *Every Night at Eight*, with George Raft, at Fox. He was really a genre film director who, therefore, I think was not taken as seriously as Ford and the others. He made many films at 20th Century Fox in the 1930s. He did, I feel, make many great films, including his first film *Regeneration*, which was made in 1916. It was a feature; his first feature, I should say. In a sense, he practically invented the gangster film except, of course, for *Musketeers of Pig Alley*, a short that D. W. Griffith directed, which was the first official gangster film. Actually, Walsh worked as an assistant for Griffith. In fact, he played John Wilkes Booth in *Birth of a Nation*.

Regeneration is an interesting picture. It's only been rediscovered recently. I have a print of it. It's about an hour long, and it's shot here in New York with actors but also mixed with real people from the streets. You actually get a sense of the early New York of the turn of the century. It's quite strong. A very strong movie, uncomprising.

Another one of my favorites—later on, of course, I think it was 1941—is *High Sierra*. *High Sierra* is a very sad, very delicate gangster film. I know that may sound like a contradiction in terms, but it really describes the picture. Walsh remade it another time as a Western a few years later. *Colorado Territory* it's called, with Joel McCrea and Virginia Mayo. And it works, I think, even better there. But I think *High Sierra* is one of the most sensitive films of Humphrey Bogart's career. He plays an aging hoodlum who really just wants to go to straight but doesn't know how to. Prison has made him such an outsider from society that he can't seem to fit anywhere. Walsh was very understanding of these outsiders and outcasts.

Another personal favorite film of mine that Walsh did was called *The*

Man I Love, in the late forties. It's a forgotten musical drama with Ida Lupino and Robert Alda, that actually inspired a lot of my film *New York, New York*, a musical I tried to make back in the mid-seventies that dealt with the style of the films of the forties and with career romances. But this film is very dark, *The Man I Love*. It has a real sense of post-war weariness, of the dullness of the lives of ordinary lower middle class people who are really down on their luck. In a sense, it's what you could call a *film noir* musical. It's really one of a kind. It's on television sometimes, but it's rare to see these days.

A lot of what Walsh did in his films was to tell what you might call tall tales. He made a wonderful picture called *Gentleman Jim* about Jim Corbett, who, as I said, he actually met. Corbett is played by Errol Flynn as a handsome, loudmouthed, supremely confident, arrogant guy, and that's the way he begins the picture and that's the way he ends it. He doesn't change. That's the exact opposite of what you learn in film school or what the critics tell you. The guy has to go through it all and come out changed. There's no change in this picture. I think about this in making my own films. Like when you have to say of a character, this I know to be true, that he didn't change. And maybe the film has to be about characters losing their souls, that sort of thing. But it was very interesting to see in a genre film about boxers in the 1870s or whatever that *Gentleman Jim* Corbett did not change. The characters, as they say in Hollywood, are supposed to undergo a profound change at the end of the picture, but it didn't happen here. And the whole movie is a celebration of rowdiness, of movement and of bluster. And what makes it more unusual is the wistful way that it acknowledges that the glory days always come to an end.

There is a beautiful scene where Corbett beats John L. Sullivan—played by Ward Bond, who was part of John Ford's family of actors and who played in a lot of Walsh pictures, too. Corbett comes to congratulate Sullivan. It's a very poignant moment because Sullivan knows his time in the spotlight is over and Corbett's is here, and he's sad but he accepts the truth with grace. Normally, this type of scene will come at the very end of the picture. The bragging hero will learn a lesson in humility, but that doesn't happen. Flynn feels sorry for Sullivan, but it doesn't violently shake him up. He just goes on. This is different from the way Ford looks at life. This particular moment in Walsh's film is much more

geared to the glory of the present moment and much less to the sense of time passing away. Ford comes across as a stoic gentleman who is mourning the past, while Walsh comes across as a sort of *bon vivant* who lives for the moment. That sense of beauty, of overflowing life that's found in the Joyce story really is in Walsh's work. But it's not adorned. It's unadorned, and it's in the moment. There's something I would call lived-in about Walsh's work, something that you feel familiar with or comfortable with.

Walsh also made a beautiful picture called *The Strawberry Blonde* set in New York in the 1890s, and it's just as full of Irish slapstick humor as Ford's films, but here it's much more physically energized. It's integrated into the general flow of things. This is something that's very important in Walsh's work. For example, Jimmy Cagney dying on the steps of a church at the end of *The Roaring Twenties*, one of the greatest gangster films made. It's a famous scene that's often wrongly portrayed as over-the-top and silly. I mean, it *is* in a way. It's over the top. The guy's a gangster shot by the police. He runs to the church. He dies on the church steps. A policeman comes over. His girlfriend holds him, and the cop says, "Can you tell me who he is?" And his girlfriend looks up and she says, "He used to be a big shot." That is one of the great last lines. It works because it is so beautiful to watch, if you watch the tracking shot, for instance. It's balletic. It's brimming with physical grace and energy.

Walsh and Cagney—another great Irishman—created many beautiful sequences like this together. There's an extraordinary scene in *White Heat*—that's a very unusual gangster film that they made in 1949. You've got to understand Walsh had made quite a few gangster pictures. *Regeneration* essentially was his first picture, and that was a gangster film. So by the time he got to *The Roaring Twenties*, he capped the genre in a beautiful version of what the gangster film should be like. By the time the war was over, it got to be time to make another gangster film, Cagney and him, and they looked at each other. "What could we make different?" 1949, the war is gone. And Cagney and Walsh looked at each other, and they said, "Let's make him a real loony. Let's make this guy completely psychotic."

It was after the war. The mood in the country was different, and they responded to their own challenge by creating this terrifying figure. Cagney plays a psychotic gangster who is doing a stretch in the Big

House. He has a mother on the outside that he's completely devoted to. He loves this mother in this film. Walsh is the only guy who got away with a scene with Jimmy Cagney sitting on his mother's lap. She would cure his headaches—Cody Jarrett was his name in the film. And he was having these terrible headaches. He was kind of mean in the film, and devoted to his mother. His mother keeps him on the line, "Be a good criminal," that sort of thing, all the way through.



There's a wonderful scene where he goes to the mess hall in prison, and he sees a new guy who's just arrived. They sit down. The fellow is sitting at the far end of the table. There's maybe four guys between them. And Cagney says, "Ask him how Mom's doing." And the camera tracks to the next guy, "How's Mom doing?" and so on down the line. Well, I'll show you that scene. You'll see what happens in the scene, but also the way Walsh constructed the movement, the physical movement in the scene. It's very simple. It's almost seamless, but it's very, very intricate really. And I'll show you also a clip from *Gentleman Jim*, the one I mentioned to you about Corbett congratulating Sullivan. It will give you a sense of what's so wonderful about Raoul Walsh in general: his earthiness, his feeling for gesture of movement, and really simply his beautiful storytelling. So let's take a look at these two scenes.



As I said, it's very important that Corbett's character doesn't really change in the film. After that moment, he just keeps going on enjoying himself, very rowdy. Also, I should mention, too, some of the other famous Raoul Walsh films in the silent period, *The Thief of Baghdad* with Douglas Fairbanks, *What Price Glory*, a silent, quite an extraordinary film, and *Sadie Thompson*, the silent version of *Rain* that Joan Crawford did and then later on Rita Hayworth did in 3D. There is also *Sadie Thompson*, with Gloria Swanson, in which Walsh plays one of the key marines, the lead actually.

So from there, we move on to the last two. John Huston and Leo McCarey. Huston, as I said, came later in a way. Very much, in a way. Many critics and film lovers feel he's sort of a brooding fatalist, also an intellectual. And he was the son of the great Walter Huston, the wonderful actor who did that extraordinary role in *Dodsworth* and so many other films. Practically everything. In fact, Walter Huston won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor in his son's film *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which is probably one of his greatest films, definitely one of his greatest films.

John Huston had a variety of jobs and professions until he started writing scripts. And he was, in fact, one of the first writer/directors, along with Preston Sturges and Billy Wilder, to start working as a direc-

tor, a writer turned director. *The Maltese Falcon* was his first film, which was quite a debut. His father does a little walk-on there as the ship's captain who's dying and is holding the maltese falcon in a bag and delivers it to him in his office.

Huston was known for being a gambler, both literally and figuratively. He was also known for playing pretty cruel jokes on people, kind of like Hitchcock did. He actually went to great lengths to play a joke. I'll just tell you one. He made a very striking film in the early sixties. *The Unforgiven*, with Burt Lancaster, Audrey Hepburn, an extraordinary role by Audie Murphy with a moustache, a number of people in the film, quite beautiful, wide screen, beautiful music. It's a Western. Not to be confused, of course, with Clint Eastwood's picture *Unforgiven*. And from what we understand—I don't know exactly what the details are—the shooting was a miserable experience for everybody. Terrible. And, of course, the funny thing is that sometimes very striking films come from absolutely miserable experiences. Some really wonderful films come from that.

Huston apparently detested Burt Lancaster. He was the lead. That's a problem. But as the director you've got to be there every day. You've got to talk to the actors. You've got to get them out of the trailer. It's very hard if you really don't like them. In a sense, I always find that if you have a problem with a person, the director becomes really the best actor on the set. "Let's get out there," you find yourself saying, cheerfully. Anything to get the stuff shot. But apparently Huston wasn't into it that way. He detested Lancaster, and he also hated golf, Huston. Lancaster loved golf. Lancaster had a golf tournament, and Huston and a friend of his played a very elaborate joke. They actually bought 1,000 ping pong balls and wrote dirty sayings all over them. He rented a helicopter and they spread them all over the course. Right in the middle of the match. I'm not a golf player, but I understand it would be a problem to continue the game, and the game had to be postponed. Nobody could find the ball. This shows the lengths he would go to.

In the sixties and seventies, something happened in Huston's work. It seemed that he just kind of went through the paces for a while. Kind of uninspired, some of the films. At that time, people said that maybe his greatest talent was for living. He had some wonderful books written about him and, of course, he spent a lot of his time at a house he had

in Ireland, a big mansion there. He loved horses. Don't forget that in the early to late forties his films were quite extraordinary. In the early fifties, *The African Queen*, *Moulin Rouge*, and pictures like that. Every now and then in the sixties, he tried. He pushed it through. He did a very interesting film called *Freud* with Montgomery Clift. *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. But even there, I once heard Brando say that he lost interest half way through, Huston, for some reason and just let everybody fend for themselves. And this happened a number of times during the sixties and seventies.

Huston also did a beautiful film in the fifties, a film I think beautiful. It's not successful, but who could be with Herman Melville: *Moby Dick*. And what he did in *Moby Dick* is fascinating. He worked with Oswald Morris, an English cameraman—Director of Photography I should say—who also photographed *Moulin Rouge*. In *Moulin Rouge*, they had tried to recapture the sense of the color of Toulouse-Lautrec's posters. It's a complicated issue, but they had Technicolor, and they did it in Technicolor. And you can separate the colors in Technicolor in three strips. And in so doing what he did with the three strips was to fuse black-and-white with color. And you had almost the sense of the posters coming to life. You really had the color of the posters and the paintings of Lautrec.

Then, in *Moby Dick*, they went further, and they fused the color even further out, so that you had a sense of old whaling etchings from the nineteenth century with only certain colors' tone. Like a toning rather than full color. I was lucky enough to see that version of the film at the Criterion Theater in New York. And it struck me so much, because later when the film was released on a wide run, people complained it wasn't in color. It wasn't colorful enough, so they printed out straight Technicolor.

I tried to use that process myself; I wanted to do *Taxi Driver* that way, the whole way, but it was too expensive because we don't have three-strip Technicolor any more. It would have been an optical process. Each shot would have had to be done that way, and it would have cost a fortune. Finally what I did was just the ending of *Taxi Driver*, the shootout. I fused out the color in each scene, each shot I should say. So that one shot of Travis in the hallway would be seventy percent color, thirty percent black-and-white. The next cut would be fifty percent color, fifty percent black-and-white. The next cut would be twenty percent black-and-

white, eighty percent color. Shot by shot, it was very expensive. It was a way also of dealing with the MPAA, the censorship at that time, because of the violence of that part of the film. They thought that toning it—I suggested toning the color down—would take away from some of the violence in the picture. But apparently it didn't. It still was pretty strong because it reminded me of those photos in the old Daily News. It's the way I grew up. The only literature in my house was the Daily News and the Daily Mirror. My mother and father were garment workers and they never read anything. That's what I knew, those images from those papers.

In any event, pictures that Huston made in the sixties and seventies—films like *The List of Adrian Messenger*, (which for some reason I saw again Saturday; a friend of mine likes it so I showed it to her. Beautiful print, beautifully shot in Ireland) and *The Kremlin Letter*. Pictures like that were like follies in a way. Wonderful follies that they had a lot of fun doing, and you really didn't have to do that much. But Huston's great pictures—*The Maltese Falcon*, *The Sierra Madre*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, or *Fat City* that was made in the seventies and which I think is extraordinary. *The Man Who Would Be King* which he made in the seventies and which I saw again this week, too, because my new movie is supposed to be taking place in Tibet, but we can't get into India to shoot it, so we are going to go to Morocco instead. So we double-checked *The Man Who Would Be King* because it is supposed to take place in India and Afghanistan, and they shot it in Morocco. We saw it on the big screen and they had a beautiful scene with mountaintops and snow. I said, "Great! They have that in Morocco." Of course, we looked at the end credits—it's the French Alps. We're still going to have to find a place for the mountains. I'm not a location director. I'm more like a city director. But I'm going to go, I'm going to go Saturday.

All these great, really great Huston pictures, including other ones, like some of the ones I mentioned, *The Unforgiven*, for instance, are filled with paranoia, greed, failure, and a great deal of self-delusion. It's ironic that he was the director who finally made a film version of James Joyce's *The Dead*—(he directed it from a wheelchair, mind you, dying of emphysema)—because it's not the kind of material he's normally attracted to. In fact, I think it's a beautiful movie, but it is James Joyce as seen through Huston's eyes. You have to remember that. There is a soulfulness in Huston's pictures, but it's pretty despairing and dark.

He also made a very interesting film that I'll briefly tell you about called *We Were Strangers*, with Jennifer Jones and John Garfield, 1949. It takes place in the Cuban Revolution, 1933. I think I saw it when I was eight years old, and I was struck by the power of it at the age of eight. Huston detested the film. There were a lot of problems with it, but it has some extraordinary moments.

It's a story about a group of revolutionaries who get together to kill the worst men in the Cuban Cabinet, to begin the revolution. They try to figure out ways to get them all together in one place, and they decide to kill someone in the government who is on their side. Someone everyone loves. Kill him and all the other guys will show up at the funeral, then kill them all at the funeral. Garfield is very, very powerful. And as you're watching it, you begin to understand. One character says, "Wouldn't this be wrong to do?" And you begin to realize, no, the greater evil will be taken care of by killing all the evil men. And then you realize, this is the thinking by the Baader-Meinhof, the terrorist gangs of the sixties, the Red Brigade in Italy. And you begin to see these are the heroes in the film, these are the heroes. Of course, you know what happens. Three-quarters of the way—they're digging tunnels into the graveyard to come up under the tomb, and they'll put a bomb there and blow it up killing the guy—the funeral plans are changed. The wife of the man who was killed says that only the family will be allowed at the funeral. And everybody is blown up at the same time the revolution erupts, and they all get killed.

It is such a despairing movie for that time in Hollywood. Its dramatic structure, too, is extremely unusual. It was a very powerful picture. But Huston wasn't afraid to tackle subjects like that. It actually gets you into the mind of the characters that you're supposed to be following. And they're really terrorists. It's terrorist thinking. And it's extraordinary.

There is also a film Huston made during the war. He made a series of documentaries. One of them was so beautiful, it's called *The Battle of San Pietro*, and it was just put on the National Registry as a national treasure. And then another one which is extraordinary called *Let There Be Light*, which is about Army veterans who were having psychological problems. That was put under wraps by the Army for years, apparently, because they wanted to keep the illusion alive that everybody who came back from the war was pretty well adjusted. This was a film that was

banned for a long time. It's obvious that Huston's war experience affected him, and you can really feel the post-war disenchantment and malaise that gripped the country in the films he made during those years.

There's a picture he made called *Key Largo*, with Bogart and Lauren Bacall and Edward G. Robinson. Bogart is a disillusioned vet who goes to the Florida keys to visit his buddy's wife and her father. And the hotel is overrun by a gangster, Edward G. Robinson, and his henchmen. And Bogart can't fight. He feels, what's the use of fighting. This is the kind of character he played in *Casablanca*, of course, and the formula worked there, but here it's very stark. It's unadorned. The images are deceptively simple oddly simple, almost a documentary effect, black-and-white. Very disturbing.

Huston had none of the buoyancy of Walsh, none of the sweet gallantry of Ford. He was much more modern in that sense. I think he was strongly pessimistic, to say the least, at a very deep level. But his films are so original and so unique. Especially the last series of films he made: *Wise Blood*, *Under the Volcano* and, of course, *The Dead* which was quite something, I thought. Something happened towards the end of Huston's career that's so wonderful. It was just a natural progression. I remember Bertrand Tavernier, the French director, telling me, "Have you seen *Wise Blood*? It's wonderful." He said, "Huston is old. He puts the camera in one position, and says if you don't like it, don't look at it." That's it. Just like how Buñuel, towards the end of his life, somehow flourished and made his films simpler. Long takes. I think it took Buñuel three days to edit his films because he just took the slates off and everything was done in one take. It was just *the way* to do it. If you spare down. That's what you find in *Wise Blood*, I think, and certainly in *The Dead*. He just knew at the end. He rallied at the end and made these wonderful pictures. With all that wisdom behind them.

The clip I'll show you, you might know. It's from the great film *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. I remember Kazan saying a couple of years ago, "Isn't it great to be in the same business that made *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*? Isn't it just wonderful to go work and know you're in the same business."

It's one of his best known films, and it gives a vivid picture of the paranoia and bitterness that I was talking about which is so strong in his work. Let's look at that one section.



Now, the last director I would like to talk about is Leo McCarey. Jean Renoir, the great French director, said that Leo McCarey understood people better than anyone in Hollywood. I think what he meant was that McCarey understood the little ways that people deceive themselves. His best films, some would say others, are, I think, *Ruggles of Red Gap*, *The Awful Truth*, *Make Way for Tomorrow* certainly, and *Love Affair*, the first one, with Charles Boyer and Irene Dunne. They are generally embellished with beautiful bits of business in them.

McCarey actually started as a lawyer, but his heart wasn't really in it. He never won a case. He was fond of telling a story about a client who got so mad at him and so angry that he chased him out of the courtroom and across the street. A friend of his saw him and yelled, "Leo, what are you doing?"

And McCarey shot back, "I'm practicing law."

This is reminiscent of the kind of films he made, too. McCarey worked his way into Hollywood the way a lot of people did in those days, right from the bottom up. That's something that you really can't do any more. I guess you could get a job as an assistant editor, but where do you really learn the whole trade. You may become stuck there. Because there is no one studio. But in McCarey's day, if you went to Warner Brothers you could build your way up on the lot, the way Don Siegel did as a montage director. You know those old montages with the calendar leaves

going? He would direct those things and edit those, and he somehow became a dialogue director—the way Sam Peckinpah was a dialogue director—and then he became a director. Writers like Sturges, as I said before, and, of course, John Huston did the same thing. It's something that's very difficult to do these days. But all these guys did just that. They learned from the bottom up. They learned film as a trade.

They really learned it as a trade. It's a mechanical trade. When you ever get to shoot a film, even though there is all this new equipment, it's still like moving a dinosaur. As we come to the end of the twentieth century, there is still something that's almost impossible to do—to move the camera the way your head moves or the way you see something. At least the way *my* head moves. I move a little faster sometimes and so they keep saying cameras go too fast. Or when you use a crane. It's like a piece of antique equipment which is very difficult to maneuver. If you've got a big budget film, you've got to imagine the difficulties. There was a picture shooting here recently on Fifth Avenue. They had to create rain, and they had all these trailers. Sometimes a lower budget is easier because you have less trucks, less trailers. Because if you change your mind, you have to move all those trailers. And you know what that means in New York. You just can't. There's no place for them, you have to know before going to location where the trucks are going to be. So if you get stuck in the middle of the day and change your mind, you're in big trouble. Because you *could* move the trucks. But it's going to take you a long time. You lose half a day shooting, that's \$50,000 to \$60,000. So it's that kind of thing that these directors learned. They knew.

Who knew that film was art in that sense? They didn't say they were artists, and yet whether they liked it or not, they made art. They were artists. As I said before, John Huston came a little later. He broke in as a writer during the early talkie period. But the rest of them worked their way through many departments at the studios. So they all knew about filmmaking as a craft. McCarey started working as a script girl for Todd Browning, who was one of your stranger directors. He did what in the thirties became horror films and, of course, in the forties and fifties with Hammer from England. He worked a great deal with Lon Chaney, and he did, at Universal, the original *Dracula*. He also did *Freaks*, a very strange film which was banned for a while. Now, it's

back—it's on television, but they show it at three in the morning. I don't know how good an idea that is. Because I can't watch it. It's a very disturbing movie. But McCarey also went to work as a gag writer in Hal Roach Studios. And then, as a supervisor, supervising hundreds of films that they made, comedies, one reelers, two reelers. He did every job imaginable in this capacity.

It's hard to imagine how exciting that experience must have been for McCarey and other men who started that same way. Everything was brand new. Famous comedians were trying out different gags every day. And you had to interpret the gags through images. Sometimes, as I learned from Howard Hawks's pictures, the wider the frame for comedy, the better. So you can see the body language. It's very interesting. If you look at a comedy these days, people are cutting back and forth to close-ups; unless it's funny dialogue, you've got to see the body language. Watch *Real Broad*, watch *Hatari*, the film that Howard Hawks made in Africa with John Wayne and Red Buttons. You'll see in the body movement, how it all plays off each other. Or *Who's on First?*, with Abbott & Costello. A medium shot, a two-shot. Two guys standing in the frame. It's one of the funniest things you want to hear. And see. You see the whole bodies—you see their relationship to each other. You see the body movements, and you see the reactions immediately on their faces. You don't need to cut; you see.

They were learning all of this. McCarey started with an extraordinary comedian called Charlie Chase. A great sound comedian, he isn't much remembered these days. He was my father's favorite comedian. And then Laurel & Hardy, of course. He was a close collaborator of Laurel & Hardy, and really one of the people who made them what they were. With Laurel & Hardy he learned how to structure a gag: the timing, the buildup, the length, the pacing, the nuances. This training was absolutely essential to what made McCarey a special director. That's the way his mind worked. He thought conceptually.

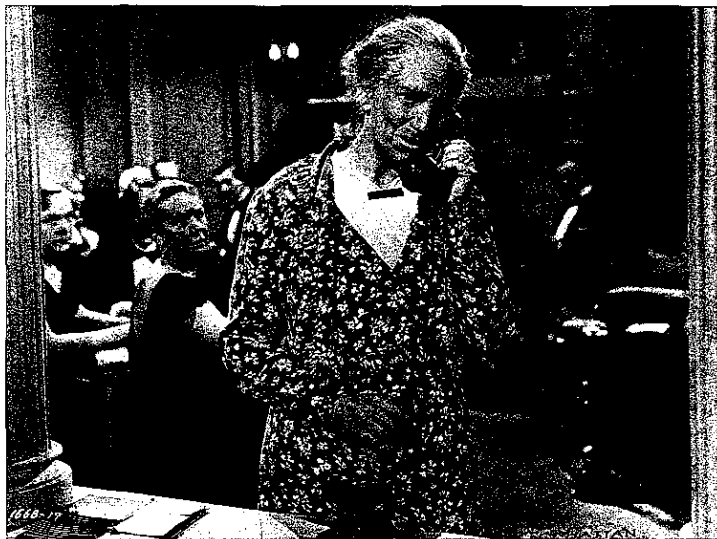
McCarey certainly had a special genius with comedians, because he made *Duck Soup*, which most people consider the Marx Brothers best picture. He was very simple in what he did. He cut out everything that gets in the way in most Marx Brothers films. He cut the musical numbers and the romantic subplot. And it became, if not their best film, one of their best.

All of McCarey's films are composed of scenes in which you see a gag structure. They have a kind of physical detail and suspense, and that goes also for that extraordinary film he made called *Make Way for Tomorrow*. It's not a comedy. It's a very personal film about the loneliness of old age, it's a film that McCarey staked everything on. He really fought for the project at the studio, and he worked on it without a salary. This is the movie—along with *Love Affair*, the first version of *An Affair to Remember*, and the Warren Beatty picture, *The Love Affair*—which exemplifies the delicacy reminiscent of the subtle blending of tones that you'll find in Joyce's story, *The Dead*.

Many of the films McCarey made after *Love Affair* seem now kind of sentimental, like the two Bing Crosby priest films he made, *Going My Way* and *Bells of St. Mary's*, which seem sentimental now, but still have a certain charm and even an extraordinary power in terms of Crosby. But after *Love Affair*, he did also *An Affair to Remember* in the fifties, in wide screen and color, with Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr. It's a word-for-word remake of the original script of *Love Affair*. Even though the films may have been retreading the same ground, they still had a great delicacy.

There's a film he made in the early fifties, called *My Son John*, which was a red-baiting drama that isn't shown at all now. Robert Walker is in it, and Dean Jagger. Walker died during the shooting of it, and it caused quite a series of problems to finish the film. I saw it recently on an old tape. Yes, it's an anticommunist tirade, and many people think it is. That's the surface of the story, but, at least half of the time, the story is really a portrait of two rather ordinary parents—sweet, decent people—with an overly sophisticated son. It's very interesting to see the family struggle in that picture. McCarey really believes it. He really believes what he's saying in this film, which gives it an authentic quality and a humanity that, even though you may disagree with the politics of it, is very strong. The film is marred, of course, by his having had to finish the picture by overlapping lines of dialogue on somebody else's shoulder, pretending that it's Robert Walker because he died halfway through the picture. McCarey even took a scene, a shot from *Strangers on a Train*, and blew it up. The character supposedly dies in a car crash at the end of *My Son John* and McCarey took a shot from *Strangers on a Train*, of Robert Walker dying from the wrecked merry-go-round, and blew it up and put it in. And looped in some words, looped in some dialogue. It was a real mess in that way.

The clip I'm going to show you is from *Make Way for Tomorrow* and, as I say, at that time very few films were made about the subject matter of old age.



Well, that is such a beautiful sequence. Peter Bogdanovich was saying in LA, "You must see this film. It's a masterpiece." *Make Way for Tomorrow*. He's really something. About a year ago on American Movie Classics, they kept showing *This Is Your Life*, with Ralph Edwards. And on the Laurel & Hardy episode, McCarey came out. He was one of the guests. And it was really interesting to watch because we never see these guys. Ford I saw once at the DGA, Directors Guild of America, where they showed a series of tributes to directors in the mid-seventies. He was quite ill at the time, but he showed up. I saw him from a distance, and I was overwhelmed. Bogdanovich got to meet with him. He spent so much time with Ford. He did this beautiful film on him called *Directed by John Ford*. Orson Welles lived in Peter Bogdanovich's house for so long. We all love Welles, of course, but that may not have been the best arrangement. Bogdanovich knew all these guys, but I only saw them from afar. Raoul Walsh I saw at that same series at the DGA. One young guy got up and said, "Is it true about Errol Flynn and John Barrymore's

body?" And he refused to talk about it. He said, "Let the dead rest." With a patch—they all wore an eye-patch.

In any event, I find that what's so interesting about the four artists that I've shown you tonight is that they are all so unique. They have four very, very different ways of approaching film and telling stories through film and creating emotions through film, of communicating with an audience through film. And, of course, very different ways of looking at life. Yet there is a current of feeling that links them. It runs beneath their work. It's the same feeling that runs through Joyce's story "The Dead." A beautiful, sad, bountiful but at the same time mournfully empty feeling. I can't impress upon you enough the importance of these men in the formation of what I do—try to make movies. And here it is, as many of us feel, *the* great art form of the twentieth century. Who knows what's going to happen? Movies in the twenty-first century may be very, very different. These may be like frescoes compared to movies in the future. Who knows what they are going to be like? But I can't impress upon you enough the importance of the Irish American in developing this language, in creating great art for over sixty, seventy years. So at least this has been an introduction, I hope.

"Control was his Middle Name": Myth and Travesty in the John Ford Western

MAREK WALDORF

There's no point arguing the sense of a thing, especially if that sense has the weight of years of sentiment behind it. "The real discovery," wrote Ludwig Wittgenstein circa 1945, "is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to." Do similar discoveries end promises in art? Sadly or not too sadly, the Hollywood Western is no longer in decline: it is quite dead. That's not news exactly. Every now and again, the odd film will surface, suggesting the contrary, but not really. Those mythic or historic fallacies the Western not so much invented as mounted and preserved, for a period of some 80 years, are now themselves, safely, history. Or myth.

Safely—?

A genre's resilience need not be measured by product alone; themes, currents, paradigms, all have a tendency to stray. Wanderlust you call it in a person: Shane riding off the homestead, into the sunset. The image can be pursued outside the genre for which it is archetypal. John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956, three years after *Shane*) closes with a variation on the image: a doorway frames a view of Monument Valley; as each of the major characters disappears inside, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) turns and walks away; the door swings shut, the screen goes black. There are a number of differences in this "variant," enough to fully exercise the term's elasticity. Most obvious is that the protagonist does not recede into the horizon, pinned heroically against a reddening sky. That horizon, "both a boundary and a perspective" (Roland Barthes) provides "the comforting area of an ordered space" by which the Western, when obliging convention, seeks a finality at once literally open (perspective) and figuratively closed (boundary): expansiveness and conformity are the Janus faces which rule the aesthetics of this genre.

In the variant which *The Searchers* offers, the boundaries are more confining. The hero is boxed into an excluding frame, his departure a matter not of long-focus recession, but of reduction (the frame connoting,