
A HISTORY OF

AMERICAN MOVIES

A FILM-BY-FILM LOOK AT THE ART,
CRAFT, AND BUSINESS OF CINEMA



HOLLYWOOD

Paul Monaco

A History of American Movies

A Film-by-Film Look at the
Art, Craft, and Business of Cinema

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To my mother, Birdena O'Melia Monaco,
who was born in 1916, and who, like the
Hollywood movies, has grown since then
and continues to flourish.

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Preface

This book is for the reader who wants to understand one of the most important cultural institutions of the twentieth century: the American cinema. It is a history, but it is also a story. And telling any story requires selectively choosing what to put in and what to leave out. *A History of American Movies* chronicles an institution that had taken on its fundamental characteristics by the year 1927, when the introduction of synchronous sound in film put an abrupt end to the silent movies. This story is about a professional community with its own ways of doing things, as well as a story about the relationships between the many talented people belonging to that community.

Cinema is simultaneously an art, a craft, and a business. *Art* is best defined as a human-produced object, text, or performance with limited practical utility but with added dimensions of meaning and value open to interpretation. A sunset may be beautiful and engage the viewer's emotions, but it is not art. Like a sculpture, a coat rack may be a standing form made of wood and metal—but it is not a sculpture, and is not considered art. How art is regarded critically, and valued, is subject to complex development through cultural and social institutions, education, and the opinions of various experts.

Motion pictures are made by various people who specialize in each of the crafts that go into moviemaking, but always work collaboratively. Among the major motion picture crafts are producing, screenwriting, directing, production management, cinematography, lighting, acting, production design, sound recording, sound mixing, and editing. Hollywood professionals typically specialize in a single craft, although there is sometimes crossover of an individual from one craft to another. Just how the collaboration of these various elements functions in the making of any particular movie is elusive. It is widely recognized that making feature-length movies is collaborative. Just how this

collaboration works, however, usually is ignored or glossed over in thinking and writing about what movies are and where they come from.

Finally, movies are a business, produced, distributed, and exhibited with the intention of covering the costs of the materials and personnel needed to make any individual movie, and with an eye to profitability. That profitability is the margin that permits moviemaking and movie watching to continue.

A History of American Movies is a story told in recognition of the complexity of movies as an art, craft, and business. It is written, first of all, for people who love movies and who would like to make them, especially for those younger men and women who see themselves as the filmmakers of the future. At the same time, it is a book written for readers of any age who want to know what the American cinema is and truly has been, and how those strands of art, craft, and business were woven together complexly throughout Hollywood's history.

The value of any Hollywood history depends on which movies are written about, with an explanation of how they were selected as being significant. Mentioning the titles of a great many movies in encyclopedic fashion has value, but it is not the best way to tell the story of Hollywood. Instead, this book focuses its attention on a select set of movies. The movies selected are *not* choices of the author, however, nor of any other film critic or film scholar. Instead, this history is based on the premise that the essence of Hollywood is best revealed through those movies whose titles are found on three lists that have been created primarily by professionals actually working in the movie industry.

The cinema of the United States has two "official" organizations. The first is the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, founded in 1927 by the leading motion picture production and distribution companies to promote film as an art and a science. Very early in its history, the Academy instituted awards of merit to recognize accomplishment in a wide range of artistic and technical fields; the recipients of these awards receive statuettes known as "Oscars."

Forty years later, in 1967, the other official body, the American Film Institute (AFI), was founded with the specific goal of training filmmakers and preserving America's film heritage. With initial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), and the Ford Foundation, AFI's broad mission is to enrich and nurture the art of film in America. In addition to providing advanced graduate education in film production, AFI has created various forms of recognition to honor specific filmmakers and films.

Combined, the Academy and AFI provide us three lists of films recognized as exceptional.

BEST PICTURE ACADEMY AWARDS

The first of these lists consists of the movies selected for the Best Picture award by the Academy. The Academy *is* the Hollywood establishment; its membership consists of people working in the motion picture industry above the line (studio executives, producers, screenwriters, actors) and craftspeople (production designers, actors, cinematographers, editors, sound recordists, sound mixers, art directors, etc.), as well as other creative, performing, and business personnel. Since its earliest years in the late 1920s, when the Academy's membership comprised just over four hundred, it has eventually grown into an organization with roughly six thousand voting members. The Academy's Best Picture Oscar winners for each year, beginning in 1927/28, have been selected by a cross-section of professionals actually engaged in finding, developing, and funding movie ideas, bringing them to the screen, and disseminating them to the public. The Best Picture Academy Awards for each year are contemporary awards of distinction based exclusively on the evaluation and judgment of movie industry peers.

The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences has selected a Best Picture for each year by vote since 1927/28. The awardee normally is selected from a list of five, or more, nominated films. The winners through 2008 are:

1927/28: <i>Wings</i>	1948: <i>Hamlet</i>
1928/29: <i>The Broadway Melody</i>	1949: <i>All the King's Men</i>
1929/30: <i>Cimarron</i>	1950: <i>All About Eve</i>
1931/32: <i>Grand Hotel</i>	1951: <i>An American in Paris</i>
1932/33: <i>Cavalcade</i>	1952: <i>The Greatest Show on Earth</i>
1934: <i>It Happened One Night</i>	1953: <i>From Here to Eternity</i>
1935: <i>Mutiny on the Bounty</i>	1954: <i>On the Waterfront</i>
1936: <i>The Great Ziegfeld</i>	1955: <i>Marty</i>
1937: <i>The Life of Emile Zola</i>	1956: <i>Around the World in Eighty Days</i>
1938: <i>You Can't Take It with You</i>	1957: <i>The Bridge on the River Kwai</i>
1939: <i>Gone with the Wind</i>	1958: <i>Gigi</i>
1940: <i>Rebecca</i>	1959: <i>Ben-Hur</i>
1941: <i>How Green Was My Valley</i>	1960: <i>The Apartment</i>
1942: <i>Mrs. Miniver</i>	1961: <i>West Side Story</i>
1943: <i>Casablanca</i>	1962: <i>Lawrence of Arabia</i>
1944: <i>Going My Way</i>	1963: <i>Tom Jones</i>
1945: <i>The Lost Weekend</i>	1964: <i>My Fair Lady</i>
1946: <i>The Best Years of Our Lives</i>	1965: <i>The Sound of Music</i>
1947: <i>Gentleman's Agreement</i>	1966: <i>A Man for All Seasons</i>

1967: <i>In the Heat of the Night</i>	1989: <i>Driving Miss Daisy</i>
1968: <i>Oliver!</i>	1990: <i>Dances with Wolves</i>
1969: <i>Midnight Cowboy</i>	1991: <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i>
1970: <i>Patton</i>	1992: <i>Unforgiven</i>
1971: <i>The French Connection</i>	1993: <i>Schindler's List</i>
1972: <i>The Godfather</i>	1994: <i>Forrest Gump</i>
1973: <i>The Sting</i>	1995: <i>Braveheart</i>
1974: <i>The Godfather, Part II</i>	1996: <i>The English Patient</i>
1975: <i>One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>	1997: <i>Titanic</i>
1976: <i>Rocky</i>	1998: <i>Shakespeare in Love</i>
1977: <i>Annie Hall</i>	1999: <i>American Beauty</i>
1978: <i>The Deer Hunter</i>	2000: <i>Gladiator</i>
1979: <i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i>	2001: <i>A Beautiful Mind</i>
1980: <i>Ordinary People</i>	2002: <i>Chicago</i>
1981: <i>Chariots of Fire</i>	2003: <i>The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King</i>
1982: <i>Gandhi</i>	2004: <i>Million Dollar Baby</i>
1983: <i>Terms of Endearment</i>	2005: <i>Crash</i>
1984: <i>Amadeus</i>	2006: <i>The Departed</i>
1985: <i>Out of Africa</i>	2007: <i>No Country for Old Men</i>
1986: <i>Platoon</i>	2008: <i>Slumdog Millionaire</i>
1987: <i>The Last Emperor</i>	
1988: <i>Rain Man</i>	

100 GREATEST AMERICAN FILMS (1996)

The second list of movie titles is the “100 Greatest American Films,” assembled by the American Film Institute for all movies made between 1896 and 1996 from the votes of working professionals in the cinema of the United States. The 100 selected films were:

1. *Citizen Kane* (1941)
2. *Casablanca* (1943)
3. *The Godfather* (1972)
4. *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
5. *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)
6. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)
7. *The Graduate* (1967)
8. *On the Waterfront* (1954)
9. *Schindler's List* (1993)
10. *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)
11. *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)
12. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)
13. *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957)
14. *Some Like It Hot* (1959)
15. *Star Wars* (1977)
16. *All About Eve* (1950)
17. *The African Queen* (1951)

18. *Psycho* (1960)
19. *Chinatown* (1974)
20. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975)
21. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940)
22. *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
23. *The Maltese Falcon* (1941)
24. *Raging Bull* (1980)
25. *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982)
26. *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)
27. *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)
28. *Apocalypse Now* (1979)
29. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939)
30. *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948)
31. *Annie Hall* (1977)
32. *The Godfather, Part II* (1974)
33. *High Noon* (1952)
34. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962)
35. *It Happened One Night* (1934)
36. *Midnight Cowboy* (1969)
37. *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)
38. *Double Indemnity* (1944)
39. *Doctor Zhivago* (1965)
40. *North by Northwest* (1959)
41. *West Side Story* (1961)
42. *Rear Window* (1954)
43. *King Kong* (1933)
44. *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)
45. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)
46. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971)
47. *Taxi Driver* (1976)
48. *Jaws* (1975)
49. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)
50. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969)
51. *The Philadelphia Story* (1940)
52. *From Here to Eternity* (1953)
53. *Amadeus* (1984)
54. *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930)
55. *The Sound of Music* (1965)
56. *M*A*S*H* (1970)
57. *The Third Man* (1949)
58. *Fantasia* (1940)
59. *Rebel without a Cause* (1955)
60. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)
61. *Vertigo* (1958)
62. *Tootsie* (1982)
63. *Stagecoach* (1939)
64. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)
65. *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)
66. *Network* (1976)
67. *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962)
68. *An American in Paris* (1951)
69. *Shane* (1953)
70. *The French Connection* (1971)
71. *Forrest Gump* (1994)
72. *Ben-Hur* (1959)
73. *Wuthering Heights* (1939)
74. *The Gold Rush* (1925)
75. *Dances with Wolves* (1990)
76. *City Lights* (1931)
77. *American Graffiti* (1973)
78. *Rocky* (1976)
79. *The Deer Hunter* (1978)
80. *The Wild Bunch* (1969)
81. *Modern Times* (1936)
82. *Giant* (1956)
83. *Platoon* (1986)
84. *Fargo* (1996)
85. *Duck Soup* (1933)
86. *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935)
87. *Frankenstein* (1931)
88. *Easy Rider* (1969)
89. *Patton* (1970)
90. *The Jazz Singer* (1927)
91. *My Fair Lady* (1964)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 92. <i>A Place in the Sun</i> (1951) | 97. <i>Bringing Up Baby</i> (1938) |
| 93. <i>The Apartment</i> (1960) | 98. <i>Unforgiven</i> (1992) |
| 94. <i>GoodFellas</i> (1990) | 99. <i>Guess Who's Coming to Dinner</i>
(1967) |
| 95. <i>Pulp Fiction</i> (1994) | |
| 96. <i>The Searchers</i> (1956) | 100. <i>Yankee Doodle Dandy</i> (1942) |

AFI invited more than 1,500 leaders from across the U.S. film community—primarily screenwriters, directors, actors, cinematographers, producers, editors, and studio executives—to choose the hundred greatest movies from a list of four hundred nominated films.

Thirty-four of the movies on this American Film Institute list duplicate the titles of the Oscar-winning Best Picture selections. To create this list, AFI distributed ballots to a jury of 1,500 motion picture industry leaders, consisting of film artists, including directors, screenwriters, actors, editors, cinematographers, production designers, sound technicians, and others, as well as to a limited number of select film critics and film historians. AFI's guidelines permitted write-in votes, thereby allowing jurors to nominate films not already on the list.

AFI asked its 1,500 jurors to use the following criteria in making their selections:

- Feature-length fiction films only (narrative format typically over sixty minutes in length)
- American films only (English language film with significant creative and/or financial production elements from the United States)
- Critical commendation (formal commendation in print, including awards from organizations in the film community and major film festivals)
- Major award winner (recognition from competitive events, including awards from organizations in the film community and major film festivals)
- Popularity over time (including figures for box office adjusted for inflation, television broadcasts and syndication, and home video sales and rentals)
- Historical significance (a film's mark on the history of the moving image through technical innovation, visionary narrative devices, or other groundbreaking achievements)
- Cultural impact (a film's mark on American society in matters of style and substance)
- Legacy (also enjoyed apart from the movie and evoking the memory of its film source, thus ensuring and enlivening both the music and the movie's historical legacy)

100 YEARS . . . 100 MOVIES:
THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

In 2006, the American Film Institute conducted a follow-up survey to celebrate the tenth anniversary of its original list of 100 Greatest American Films. This voting, again, was based on the ballots of 1,500 motion picture industry professionals. One major reason for this “updating” of the list was for the voters to consider feature films released since 1996. In all, forty-three films released between 1996 and 2006 were nominated for consideration, but only four of them—*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2000), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Titanic* (1997), and *The Sixth Sense* (1999)—made the list. A second reason was to allow for an expansion of the list of the original one hundred titles produced by AFI and published in 1997. Twenty-three new film titles appear for the first time on this second AFI list, which was published in 2007. In *A History of American Movies*, the two AFI lists are treated as being of equal value and importance.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941) | 25. <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1962) |
| 2. <i>The Godfather</i> (1972) | 26. <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (1939) |
| 3. <i>Casablanca</i> (1942) | 27. <i>High Noon</i> (1952) |
| 4. <i>Raging Bull</i> (1980) | 28. <i>All About Eve</i> (1950) |
| 5. <i>Singin' in the Rain</i> (1952) | 29. <i>Double Indemnity</i> (1944) |
| 6. <i>Gone with the Wind</i> (1939) | 30. <i>Apocalypse Now</i> (1979) |
| 7. <i>Lawrence of Arabia</i> (1962) | 31. <i>The Maltese Falcon</i> (1941) |
| 8. <i>Schindler's List</i> (1993) | 32. <i>The Godfather, Part II</i> (1974) |
| 9. <i>Vertigo</i> (1958) | 33. <i>One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> (1975) |
| 10. <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> (1939) | 34. <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i> (1937) |
| 11. <i>City Lights</i> (1931) | 35. <i>Annie Hall</i> (1977) |
| 12. <i>The Searchers</i> (1956) | 36. <i>The Bridge on the River Kwai</i> (1957) |
| 13. <i>Star Wars</i> (1977) | 37. <i>The Best Years of Our Lives</i> (1946) |
| 14. <i>Psycho</i> (1960) | 38. <i>The Treasure of the Sierra Madre</i> (1948) |
| 15. <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> (1968) | 39. <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> (1964) |
| 16. <i>Sunset Boulevard</i> (1950) | 40. <i>The Sound of Music</i> (1965) |
| 17. <i>The Graduate</i> (1967) | 41. <i>King Kong</i> (1933) |
| 18. <i>The General</i> (1927) | 42. <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i> (1967) |
| 19. <i>On the Waterfront</i> (1954) | |
| 20. <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i> (1946) | |
| 21. <i>Chinatown</i> (1974) | |
| 22. <i>Some Like It Hot</i> (1959) | |
| 23. <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (1940) | |
| 24. <i>E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial</i> (1982) | |

43. *Midnight Cowboy* (1969)
44. *The Philadelphia Story* (1940)
45. *Shane* (1953)
46. *It Happened One Night* (1934)
47. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)
48. *Rear Window* (1954)
49. *Intolerance* (1916)
50. *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001)
51. *West Side Story* (1961)
52. *Taxi Driver* (1976)
53. *The Deer Hunter* (1978)
54. *M*A*S*H* (1970)
55. *North by Northwest* (1959)
56. *Jaws* (1975)
57. *Rocky* (1976)
58. *The Gold Rush* (1925)
59. *Nashville* (1976)
60. *Duck Soup* (1933)
61. *Sullivan's Travels* (1941)
62. *American Graffiti* (1973)
63. *Cabaret* (1972)
64. *Network* (1976)
65. *The African Queen* (1951)
66. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)
67. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966)
68. *Unforgiven* (1992)
69. *Tootsie* (1982)
70. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971)
71. *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)
72. *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)
73. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969)
74. *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)
75. *In the Heat of the Night* (1967)
76. *Forrest Gump* (1994)
77. *All the President's Men* (1976)
78. *Modern Times* (1936)
79. *The Wild Bunch* (1969)
80. *The Apartment* (1960)
81. *Spartacus* (1960)
82. *Sunrise* (1927)
83. *Titanic* (1997)
84. *Easy Rider* (1969)
85. *A Night at the Opera* (1935)
86. *Platoon* (1989)
87. *Twelve Angry Men* (1957)
88. *Bringing Up Baby* (1938)
89. *The Sixth Sense* (1999)
90. *Swing Time* (1936)
91. *Sophie's Choice* (1982)
92. *GoodFellas* (1990)
93. *The French Connection* (1971)
94. *Pulp Fiction* (1994)
95. *The Last Picture Show* (1971)
96. *Do the Right Thing* (1989)
97. *Blade Runner* (1982)
98. *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942)
99. *Toy Story* (1995)
100. *Ben-Hur* (1959)

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THREE LISTS

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science's list of Best Pictures reflects immediacy, and the opinions and biases of a particular point in time. The American Film Institute's lists reflect hindsight, taking into account how movies have held up over time and how influential they have been. There are many other lists of favorite films or greatest films, as voted on by the public or

selected by critics or assembled by organizations interested in promoting film. None of these other lists, however, is based primarily on the votes of working professionals in the motion picture industry, with representation of the creative talent in all of the crafts that contribute to filmmaking. These working professionals understand and appreciate the art, the craft, and the business of the movies better than anyone else, and this history of the Hollywood feature film recognizes that fact.

This essential history of Hollywood is based on close attention to the 180 movies found on one or more of these three lists. Other movies may be alluded to or mentioned, but this is a story told through the fewer than two hundred films that the Academy and AFI have designated as having particular significance.

Being about movies, this book is also largely about the people who make movies: the creative impulses they feel, how they work, with whom they collaborate, and how they adapt to the complicated circumstances surrounding the making of Hollywood movies. The other group of people who figure in this history are the viewers who make up the audience for movies. Who it is that makes up the audience—and when and how the audience changes—has great influence on which movies are actually made and released.

At the same time, *A History of American Movies* is also about structures and practices within the workings of the American cinema. For nearly five decades, from the 1920s through the 1960s, movies were strongly identified with the studios that produced them. During Hollywood's Classic Era, nearly any movie could be thought of as being from a particular studio—a typical Warner Bros. production, for example, or a lavish film produced in characteristic MGM style. Since the 1960s, movies have been increasingly identified with the names of their individual directors. Either sort of identification may be helpful, but it is never sufficient to account consistently for the imaginative spark and dominant influence that resulted in a specific motion picture.

The question of who the dominating force is on any particular movie must always be treated as an open one. A producer, a director, a screenwriter, an actor, a director of photography, an editor, or even a production code administrator, a production designer, or someone else working on the movie or deciding on its distribution and exhibition may be the most important single figure for that particular movie. There are theories that seek to ascribe responsibility for the effectiveness of movies in general: for example, the *auteur* theory, which asserts that the movie's director is always the most dominant figure in the making of a movie, or the *Schreiber* theory, which holds that the most important figure is the writer of the screenplay on which any movie is based. What is missed by these theories of attribution is that the cinema is a collaborative art, and that the story of any particular movie is in how the

specifics of the collaboration have played out for that particular film and how we can assess who played what role most successfully in that movie's effectiveness. Even when the Hollywood studio system was at its height, the movies produced at a particular studio could not necessarily be reliably attributed to the studio rather than to the particular creative personnel or actors involved in their making.

Often, the market for movies is interpreted by critics as demonstrating only how popular taste undermines artistic intention and integrity. If we acknowledge, however, that any market functions as a system of communication from which we gain insight into audience expectation and its relationship to creativity, the role of popular taste in cinema is seen far differently. Moreover, Hollywood's blend of art and commerce is hardly unique. For centuries in the western world, art, everywhere and in every era, has had to exist within a system of valuation and exchange that justifies its continuation.

Getting the record straight is the biggest challenge in telling this story. Nonetheless, what happened and how it happened always remains an easier part of history than explaining *why* something happened. Drawing inferences about what particular movies might mean in terms of bigger issues in society and culture often is great fun, but doing so is highly problematic. For that reason, indulging in such speculation has been dampened here. In the long run, there is much more value and genuine pleasure in understanding the authentic history of Hollywood movies as it actually happened.

There are no photographs in this book. Still photographs are common in books about movies, but they do little to convey what motion pictures are about. The operative word here, of course, is *motion*. Movies are about motion, not frozen still images.

Nearly every movie mentioned in these pages may be purchased or rented on DVD. A goal of this book is to encourage its readers to expand their knowledge of Hollywood film and its history by seeing some of the movies they have heard about but have not yet seen. Keep in mind, however, that at the end of the day, much of the experience of movies still is about the aesthetic of power created by the large screen, and the dynamic of reception that is part of the excitement of watching a movie in a theater with strangers. Newer technologies are fabulous for spreading film literacy, but the experience of moviegoing as it has existed through most of Hollywood's history still has to be imagined.

Quotes from contemporary criticism published in newspapers, magazines, and trade journals—written at the time a movie was first released—are cited throughout *A History of American Movies* to provide a sense of how a particular movie was perceived and appreciated at the time of its original release to the public. The content and tone of comments from contemporary critics provide

an insight into how a movie was being thought about at the time of its first release. The emphasis is on reviews published in major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, the national weekly news magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*, and the major motion picture industry trade journals, including *Variety*, the *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Boxoffice*. Writing by academics, historians, or critics attempting to frame an understanding of a movie for later generations is quoted less frequently.

Unless otherwise indicated, all the quotations and notes cited in documenting the production and reception histories of the movies written about in this book are found in the extensive file holdings under each movie's specific title at the Douglas Fairbanks Center for the Study of Motion Pictures/Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, located at La Cienega and Olympic boulevards in Beverly Hills, California.

Finally, I thank three people who have kindly reviewed this book and contributed their corrections to it: my teaching colleague, Bill Neff; my friend, cinematographer Andrew Laszlo, ASC; and my dear wife, Victoria O'Donnell, who is a widely published scholar in communication and the media.

Part I

CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD, 1927–1948

Establishing Hollywood

One year splits the history of Hollywood in two. There are movies made through 1927, and those made since. That divide is marked by the absence of acceptable synchronous sound production in motion pictures until nearly the end of 1927, and the pervasive domination of it from 1928 onward.

From their first projection in 1895, movies existed for more than thirty years as silent cinema. That is, the movies were produced without synchronous sound—not that audiences watched them in silence: Live musical accompaniment, ranging from a single piano player to a full orchestra, was the norm for movie exhibition throughout the “silent” era of cinema. During the decade and a half before 1927, Hollywood was established in its basic business structures, and the word *Hollywood* itself became synonymous with the American cinema.

D. W. (David Wark) Griffith, a former actor who had left the stage to make movies in northern New Jersey—for a company owned by inventor Thomas Edison—arrived in Los Angeles early in 1914. Within a year, he had completed and released the first movie perceived to mark a genuine turning point in the American cinema, *The Birth of a Nation*. Full of technical innovations and creating a truly epic feeling, this three-hour-long feature may be considered the beginning of Hollywood movies as we know them. Unfortunately, its content remains controversial and disturbing.

THE FOUNDING OF HOLLYWOOD

Hollywood, incorporated as a village in the Los Angeles basin in 1903, became a place for making movies when Col. William Selig relocated his production

company, Polyscope, there from Chicago in 1909. Early motion picture production in the United States had been concentrated in New York City and its environs. Even the early “westerns” were filmed in northern New Jersey. There was some activity around Chicago and other places, as well, but in Southern California, Selig found a locale that afforded cheap land; a mild year-round climate especially favorable to exterior filming; a variety of settings, from sandy ocean beaches to nearby mountains; and a region filled with a variety of vegetation and flora. Soon, many other barely established and would-be filmmakers were following his trail to the Los Angeles area.

It is also said speculatively that Southern California appealed to early moviemakers because it was so distant from Edison’s Motion Picture Patents Company on the East Coast. The inventor Edison held one of the earliest patents for a motion picture apparatus that he called the “kinetoscope.” In 1908, on the basis of this and other patents that he held, Edison had joined with the makers of motion picture equipment and film stock manufacturers to establish a trust in order to exert a monopoly over motion pictures in the United States. Ever the creative inventor and wily entrepreneur, Edison believed that he could dominate motion pictures in the United States by controlling the technology, film stock, and equipment for making and showing movies.

Edison was incorrect. By the time a federal court ruled in 1915 that his Motion Picture Patents Company was in violation of federal antitrust acts, the earliest Hollywood companies had already begun taking a different path toward their global domination of cinema that would be challenged only rarely throughout the entire twentieth century.

While fleeing the legal grasp of Edison’s trust was a possible motive for filmmakers relocating to Los Angeles, a more general factor was that Southern California was a long way from the centers of the East Coast establishment’s perceived political, economic, social, and cultural domination of American society.

From numerous early movie companies, there emerged several major ones. In 1913, movie producer, screenwriter, and director Cecil B. DeMille joined vaudeville musician Jesse Lasky and Lasky’s brother-in-law, Samuel Goldfish (who later changed his name to Samuel Goldwyn), to found a company that would become Paramount Pictures. Paramount was the earliest of the major Hollywood companies that survived into the twenty-first century, producing and distributing movies, and, at times, exhibiting them as well.

In its origins, its business practices, and the system it constructed for making and distributing movies, Paramount was typical of the six other major Hollywood studios with similar origins and long histories of sustained success: Warner Bros., Fox, Universal, Columbia, United Artists, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). Each of these studios was different, and each one

contributed to the formation of a system that made the feature-length motion picture released for theatrical distribution the continuing core of the American cinema throughout the twentieth century. These major Hollywood studios all had their business offices in New York City, even though their factories and their personnel for actually making movies were in Los Angeles.

Unlike the scientific genius and inventor Edison, the founders of Hollywood predominantly came from backgrounds as showmen and salesmen. From its inception, Hollywood was geared by these men to the idea of finding out what audiences wanted and giving it to them. Doing so proved to be a continuing challenge that required the constant refining of perceptions of what audiences wanted to see, continually rethinking what would keep patrons coming back to movie theaters. Instead of competing directly with Edison's idea of monopolizing cinema by controlling the patents, technologies, film stocks, and the actual equipment for making and showing movies, the major Hollywood studios crafted a system based on movies whose production, distribution, and exhibition could be relatively standardized and would reliably attract audiences. The Hollywood solution to the challenge of building a sustainable cinema was to control costs, to turn out movies with a consistently high level of technical polish, and to tell screen stories that reliably appealed to mass audiences.

The motion picture business is extremely risky. It is difficult to overestimate the determination and will of those ambitious, creative, and sometimes obsessive personalities in the major Hollywood companies who took on those risks. The story of the American cinema, however, is also as much about caution and control as it is about risk-taking and ambitions. The risk takers make for the more colorful portraits and anecdotes. The people who sought to make Hollywood function by restraining the impulses toward creative excess, and by seeking to control moviemaking as a sustainable business, were just as important. Hollywood needed both, and the success of the American feature film into the twenty-first century relies on that combination.

The original cobbling together of the company that came to be called Paramount represented one side of the fundamental equation of Hollywood. It reflected the business model within which the craft of the art form was to be nurtured.

The debut of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 marks the origin of Hollywood from the other side. That movie's appearance was a turning point in American cinema history. It confronted viewers with an array of the basics: an epic structure using all the known techniques of filming, melodramatic screen performances, and an engaging story that mixed the personal tales of family and romantic love with the broad sweeps of history, the tragedy of war, and its aftermath. Better than any film of its time, *The Birth of a Nation*

brought to the screen two of the major elements that define Hollywood entertainment throughout its subsequent history: sentiment and spectacle.

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

Based on a novel entitled *The Clansman* by the Reverend Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Birth of a Nation* is three hours of pathbreaking cinematic ingenuity and creativity that rarely strays from its glorification of the Ku Klux Klan and the related themes that inspired Dixon's book. Dixon's published novel bore the subtitle: "An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan," and he asserted that one reason he supported its adaptation to the screen was "to help prevent the mixing of White and Negro blood by intermarriage." The movie depicts opposition to race-mixing and portrays the recently freed slaves of the South in negative and racist caricatures.

As the movie's director, D. W. Griffith utilized a full range of long, medium, and close shots to tell his story visually, as based on the written scenario (often called a "photoplay" in the early silent era) by Frank Wood. The movie's cinematographer, W. G. "Billy" Bitzer, with whom Griffith had been working regularly on shorter films since 1908, supplied much of the "look" to *The Birth of a Nation*. In fact, with regard to the focal length of the shots (long, medium, or close), as well as the visual composition of shots within the frame, it is nearly impossible for us to distinguish which creative choices were director Griffith's and which came from the movie's director of photography, Bitzer. Bitzer, like so many craftspeople in the American cinema, especially in its early decades, loved to tinker with equipment and was the inventor of various tools to assist in camera operations and gadgets used to create special shots. Many such shots are found in *The Birth of a Nation*.

In hindsight, we can recognize how new and influential *The Birth of a Nation's* buildup of visual storytelling devices through close-ups, fades, iris shots, backlighting, and dolly shots really is. The elements of what is so often called the "language" of cinema consisted of the fundamental variables of any moviemaking. A shot may be long, medium, or close, depending on the focal length of the camera lens from the subject and how the subject is framed. The camera's angle to the subject may be high (from above) or low (from below). The camera may be stationary or in motion (such as being mounted on a dolly to move in and out on a subject, or moving laterally with action in the movie as in a "tracking shot"). Such choices are basic to the cinema's approach to visual storytelling. The entire range of shots, camera angles, stationary setups, and moving camera action were all to be found in *The Birth of a Nation*.

Equally as important, the process of editing in motion pictures permits the effective manipulation of time and space, and the manipulation embodies much of the specific artistic power of the medium. The editor on *The Birth of a Nation* was James Smith, and the film is frequently cited as an early example of the analytical approach to editing. These shots, moreover, come together in the movie to form a clear example of what is called *analytical editing*, which consists of alternating perspectives according to the “shot/countershot” technique. Analytical editing allows the editor of a movie to stage a scene within a particular space by cutting from one camera angle to another in order to indicate the visual points of view of different characters in the same scene. Stage directors stage scenes by “blocking” them; movie directors use blocking and camera setups to stage scenes; and movie editors stage scenes by arranging shots.

Nationwide, contemporary critics in 1915 hailed *The Birth of a Nation* as superior to any movie made before it. Right after its first screenings, the movie critic for *Motion Picture World*, W. Stephen Bush, wrote that “nothing more impressive has ever been seen on the screen.” Writing in the movie industry trade magazine *Variety*, Mark Vance cited the movie as “launching a great epoch in picture making . . . great for the pictures and great for the name and fame of David Wark Griffith.” Subsequent generations of film historians and critics have concurred that there is little argument about the significance of *The Birth of a Nation* as a breakthrough in filmmaking. In terms of both spectacle and sentiment, the work of Griffith, Bitzer, and Smith had combined to craft a work that unleashed the promises of the medium.

The success of *The Birth of a Nation* as a seminal artistic event, and as the beginning of the mainstream American feature film, is marred by controversy, however. Debate over the movie’s contents began even before it was released publicly. As its praises were being sung for its newness of scope and style and its pathbreaking artistic triumph, critics weighed in on the offensiveness of the movie’s subject matter. The review in the large-circulation *New York Globe* read: “To present the members of a race as women chasers and foul fiends is a cruel distortion of history. To make a few dollars men are willing to pander to depraved tastes and to foment race antipathy.” Just as harshly, critic Francis Hackett wrote in the *New Republic*:

My objection to this drama is based partly on the tendency of the pictures but mainly on the animus of the printed lines [in the movie’s inter titles]. . . . Reinforced by quotations from Woodrow Wilson and representative assurances of impartiality and good will, [they serve] to arouse in the audience a strong sense of the evil possibilities of the Negro and the extreme propriety and sanctity of the Ku Klux Klan.

Beginning right after the announcement in 1914 that the book would be developed as a movie, Griffith's production of *The Birth of a Nation* became the target of protests, sponsored primarily by the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League. These protests intensified after the movie was released.

However active the protestors were, though, and no matter how passionately held their objections to the movie were, many of the ideas and biases in Griffith's film were nonetheless widely held by the general population of the United States in 1915. The quotes from Wilson's writings were highly selective, cited for emotional effect, and played up in the movie's printed titles, but the words still came from a serious historical book written by the respected former Princeton professor and university president, who was now the president of the United States. Many of the racist biases of the movie's depictions apparently meshed with racist stereotypes held by much of the American populace at the time.

Such views appeared to be more common among whites in the former states of the Confederacy, where, for example, Ward Green wrote in the *Atlanta Journal* in his review of the movie:

There has been nothing to equal it—nothing. Not as a motion picture, nor as a play, nor a book . . . Race prejudice? Injustice? Suppression? You would not think of those things had you seen *The Birth of a Nation*. For no one but a man with a spirit too picayunish and warped for words would pick such flaws in a spectacle so great and wholehearted as this.

These attitudes, moreover, spread widely beyond the South. In 1915, there was widespread sympathy in many quarters for the suffering of the Southern states after the Civil War. Jim Crow laws and segregationist statutes in Southern and border states were largely taken for granted and had been upheld as constitutional under a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1896. In the early 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan would grow rapidly in membership—most notably in northern states such as Ohio and Indiana.

The Birth of a Nation did well at movie theater box offices, but while its profits likely mean that most viewers did not find it offensive, those profits do not necessarily mean that everyone who saw the movie adhered to racist stereotypes of Negroes. For his part, Griffith claimed publicly that he was surprised at the negative criticism of his movie, and in the following year he made a movie entitled *Intolerance* that many regarded as his attempt to atone for feelings outraged by *The Birth of a Nation*.

INTOLERANCE

Biographically, it is often held that D. W. Griffith felt that he had to outdo himself with his next production in order to answer the charges of bigotry leveled at him for *The Birth of a Nation*. The veracity of this claim, however, is difficult to establish. Since the evidence indicates that Griffith had never regarded *The Birth of a Nation* as anything but a faithful depiction of the Civil War and its aftermath, the idea that he considered *Intolerance* to be his atonement is problematic. Furthermore, we know that Griffith took as his inspiration for *Intolerance* a story of industrial and social exploitation that he had begun writing in 1914—before he started making *The Birth of a Nation*.

The premier of the \$2 million production of *Intolerance* was on September 5, 1916, at the Liberty Theater, one of the famed early movie palaces in New York City. The film's structure intercuts four different stories of intolerance from four different eras, linked together by the image of a mother (Lilian Gish) rocking a cradle. Judea, Babylon, Paris, and an American city in the west (contemporary to the film's release) are featured. It was originally released in prints with color tinting that played up the scenery and stage design elements reminiscent of the nineteenth-century theater tradition out of which Griffith had come. In addition to Gish, the film starred Mae Marsh as the "Little Dear One." Billy Bitzer was again the cinematographer; James Andrew Smith edited and Griffith's own company produced the movie.

Intolerance, which was released with the subtitle "Love's Struggles throughout the Ages," failed commercially, and this failure alone more than devoured entirely the substantial profits Griffith had made with *The Birth of a Nation*. Some observers attribute the failure of *Intolerance* at the box office to what they thought was its pacifist message on the eve of U.S. entry into World War I. Yet, the more probable explanation for the unpopularity of *Intolerance* with audiences had more to do with the film's style.

Griffith was seeking to develop a new blueprint for film narrative with *Intolerance* by rejecting unity and order (and arguably creating the first "modernist" film). In fact, the segment entitled "The Mother and the Law," which was the contemporary story, and the section called "The Fall of Babylon" were both considered suitable for separate exhibition as stand-alone movies. *Intolerance* failed financially most likely because of its confusing story structure. It tried to tell four different stories from four different places and four different historical periods, going back and forth between them, which many viewers found confusing.

After its 1916 premiere, Griffith repeatedly cut and recut the movie, seeking each time to better address the challenge of interweaving the four different stories in order “to trace a universal theme through various periods of the [human] race’s history.” That ambition was, perhaps, best summed up by critic Pauline Kael—writing several decades later—who called *Intolerance* “perhaps the greatest movie ever made and the greatest folly in movie history.” She continued, “In spite of its weaknesses, and its lack of success at the box office, *Intolerance* still managed to explore ideas about associative editing that would influence moviemaking from Soviet montage classics of the 1920s to American experimental film of the 1960s.” In 1989, a reconstructed print of *Intolerance* was shown in conjunction with the New York Film Festival; as renowned film historian Russell Merritt noted:

Part morality play and part three-ring circus, the movie was part of a new eclectic aesthetic that had all but buried the ideal of organic synthesis. Along with Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha* and Charles Ives’s *Third Symphony* it remains one of the period’s great hybrids.

SOLIDIFYING THE HOLLYWOOD SYSTEM

Both *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* were made in Southern California, but their maker, D. W. Griffith, had been an independent. His personal vision infused his movie entirely, and his ambitious work was not produced under the aegis of a major Hollywood studio. As a system, studio Hollywood emerged between 1915 and 1920 in a manner that sought to harness the ambitions and excesses of such personal filmmaking. As the Hollywood studio system took on its fundamental characteristics and grew during the early 1920s, the commitment of its production choices turned toward subjects less controversial than the material of *The Birth of a Nation* and less challenging to narrative convention than *Intolerance*.

A perception of what subjects to avoid, or at least how to deal with controversial subjects for the tastes of mass audiences, developed early in Hollywood history. By 1920, the Hollywood studios understood well that their audience was broad and diverse. Therefore, it was commercially farsighted to avoid movies that would appear to be so slanted in their view of historical, political, or social issues as to risk offending significant portions of the potential audience. This led to a relatively clear pattern for the studios to follow in taming possibly controversial subjects and themes to broad tastes: the principle of portraying characters and situations with some degree of ambiguity that invited audience members to reach different inferences and interpretations.

The strong biases of the screen adaptation of Dixon's novel for *The Birth of a Nation* and trying to tell the complex four-part story of *Intolerance* were instances of a director having free rein over his material because he was also the movie's producer. It was a situation that could not be permitted to prevail as the Hollywood system was being put together.

Hollywood as a system could succeed only to the extent that the interests of studios and their staff producers prevailed over the willfulness and self-indulgence of directors. In spite of his enormous talents, his understanding of cinema as emotional communication, and his leadership in establishing the modern feature film in the United States as based on sentiment and spectacle, after *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith could never sustain a truly successful Hollywood career. Both were landmark movies, but they were not typical ones for Hollywood.

Nonetheless, early Hollywood still provided enough latitude for the work of another early genius of the screen who was also both a producer and director, as well as being a star performer in his own movies. Produced, written, and directed by Charlie Chaplin, *The Gold Rush*, a silent film from 1925, has proven to be arguably the most enduring of his life's work. Self-financed, it was released and distributed by United Artists, the Hollywood company that Chaplin had cofounded with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and D. W. Griffith in 1919. From its inception, United Artists specialized in distributing movies, rather being responsible for their entire funding and production. Hence, it became an outlet for movies that were produced by independents, and while United Artists was considered one of the major Hollywood studios, its business practices and functions remained quite different from the other major studios.

The Gold Rush is based on Chaplin's signature character of the "Little Tramp." Its story is about the Tramp's two central relationships—a friendship with the prospector Big Jim (Mack Swain) and an attempted romance with a dance hall girl, Georgia (Georgia Hale)—set in Alaska during the 1890s. Through the years, critics have come to especially appreciate Chaplin's weaving together of comic bits and melodrama in *The Gold Rush* for two major reasons.

First, the story of the movie builds on what is called a social metaphor based on the premise of becoming rich and then finding love. The Little Tramp pursues the affections of the dance hall girl through much of the movie, resulting in only rejection and disappointment. He then meets her again on a freighter traveling back from Alaska after he has shared Big Jim's great gold strike and become a millionaire, and their love blossoms.

The second element that distinguishes *The Gold Rush* is the visual inventiveness of so many of the scenes. These include the scene in which the

starving Big Jim imagines the Tramp has been transformed into a chicken, as well as the Thanksgiving dinner in their cabin for which the Tramp boils his shoe and eats it, picking out the nails as if they were chicken bones, twirling the laces as if they were spaghetti, and slicing the shoe leather as if it were slices from a roast.

Chaplin subtitled his movie “A Dramatic Comedy,” and it is well documented that his idea for *The Gold Rush* originated from looking at actual photographs of lines of men tramping through the snowy Chilkoot Pass en route to the Alaskan goldfields, which he happened to view at a friend’s home. Chaplin’s passion for the project was inspired by his sense of the hardships and deprivations endured by people hoping to strike it rich that he had discovered in these photographs from that period. This idea was carried out so well on the screen because the movie is structured as a series of clever visual vignettes about hardship and deprivation, each of which makes viewers laugh.

By 1925, Charlie Chaplin himself had struck it rich by Hollywood standards. He was a producer-writer-director in the mold of Griffith, a virtuoso screen performer, and an artistic genius of immense proportions. He had his own studio space and a staff that was essentially his, including the services of art director Charles D. “Danny” Hall, who built elaborate sets for *The Gold Rush*, created artificial ice and snowfields, and manufactured fierce blizzards for the movie. Only the opening of *The Gold Rush*, with lines of men trudging through the pass, and a brief scene of the Tramp sliding down the side of the hill in the snow, were actually filmed on location. In general, Chaplin did not like filming on location, where he thought there were too many distractions. The aesthetic of production on the studio lot appealed to him, as it did to most Hollywood filmmakers well into the late 1940s.

One of the most successful visual bits in *The Gold Rush* is the scene of the prospector’s cabin being blown across the snowy fields in a blizzard until it stops, teetering on the edge of a precipice. The entire design and execution of this scene was the work of Hall, who built a full-size log cabin, outfitted it with hinged walls, placed a crew strategically off-camera, and then led them himself in rocking and swaying the cabin to give the impression of the fierce storm raging outside.

This sequence depended heavily on the camera positions and angles selected by *The Gold Rush*’s director of photography, Rolland “Rollie” Totheroth, who worked steadily with Chaplin. Totheroth was as creative as he was reliable. The shots of the Tramp leaping from the cabin to safety, for example, had to be achieved by double-exposing the negative film in the camera, the same technique used in the sequence in which Big Jim imagines that the Tramp has turned into a chicken. Such double exposures were an established Hollywood device, and Totheroth was a master of the process. By

1925, when they made *The Gold Rush*, Totheroth already had been working with Chaplin for more than a decade, and their collaboration would continue through 1947.

Chaplin himself was the equivalent of an entire studio. He produced *The Gold Rush* by raising some money and borrowing the rest, coming up with the \$923,000 needed for the movie's production costs. He wrote the photoplay on which the movie was based, directed it, and starred in it. He stands for the kind of figure admired in a long-standing tradition of evaluating the movies: Chaplin was an artistic genius whose personality and creative energy permeated a film with the undeniable personal presence. He was also a shrewd businessman. *The Gold Rush* ultimately had gross earnings from its initial theatrical release in excess of \$6 million. It was widely acclaimed by critics at the time, as well as by subsequent generations of commentators.

The Gold Rush was a grand combination of individual artistry, collaboration with inventive craftsmen, and a dazzling example of creating entertainment for financial profit. Chaplin himself once said that *The Gold Rush* was the one film that he wanted to be remembered for. While the body of his life's work was vast and influential, it is likely that his 1925 feature will long remain his most memorable movie.

THE GENERAL

Among the earliest Hollywood accomplishments were silent era comedies. Alongside the pioneering successes of Charlie Chaplin was the work of Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton. Lloyd usually portrayed an ambitious middle-class man bent on success, who inevitably wound up as a bumbling striver who failed. Keaton, in many ways more like Chaplin, portrayed a character who was bewildered by the world around him but who still proved capable of dealing with it ingeniously.

Keaton's most recognized comedy was a 1926 film. Directed by Clyde Bruckman and "Buster" (Joseph Frank) Keaton, and presumed to be based on a real-life incident, *The General* was adapted as a silent film scenario from a novel entitled *The Great Locomotive Chase* by William Pittenger. Keaton, along with Bruckman, Al Boasburg, and Charles Smith, wrote the photoplay for the movie.

Early in the Civil War, Keaton's character is declared unfit for uniform because of a recruitment office foul-up. Working as a locomotive engineer, he becomes admired by soldiers in the Confederate Army, but still he is spurned by his would-be girlfriend Annabelle Lee (played by Marian Mack).

However, when Union spies steal his beloved locomotive—which is called *The General*—Buster rises to the occasion and single-handedly pursues them to demonstrate his worth.

The film was distinguished by exceptional production design evoking the Civil War period and has frequently been cited as one of the most accomplished comedies ever made for the screen, but it failed at the box office initially. Later, it became revered by critics as a model of pure, visual storytelling, deadpan comedy, and a mastery of spectacle, with cinematography by Dev Jennings. Keaton's performance infuses into his character a certain humanity that transcends the contemporary dismissal of the film as predictable, typical farce.

Like *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*, the Civil War provides the background for the landmark film that *The General* has become. And, in this case, although it is a comedy, *The General* is still regarded and discussed as a film that is about war. According to notes for the Toronto Film Society's screening of the film in 1989, Keaton is the silent-era comedian who appealed most to late twentieth-century tastes because he is so cool, as opposed to Chaplin's sentimentality, and because he displays a "mulish imperturbability [*sic*] under the wildest of circumstances." *The General* is Keaton's most accomplished film.

Buster Keaton wrote, directed, edited, and starred in ten feature-length films and nineteen short comedies. According to his widow, Eleanor, he always considered *The General* to be "his baby." Its reputation among film scholars has continually grown in stature. No stuntmen were utilized in those days, and no rear projection was available to facilitate the faking of action against backgrounds that had been filmed previously. Hence, Keaton is widely considered a painstaking filmmaker. *The General* often is praised as having a look that is reminiscent of Matthew Brady's pathbreaking still photography from the Civil War.

The General was produced by Joseph M. Schenk for United Artists release (the same company that distributed Chaplin's films). Schenk demanded a tight \$400,000 budget for the production and found a small railroad in the heart of Oregon lumbering country to use in the production. Still, *The General* became one of early Hollywood's "runaway productions," and its final cost was over a million dollars.

THE GENIUS OF THE BUSINESS

Chaplin was born in England, and the son of music hall entertainers. By the early 1920s, he was known worldwide as a distinctive screen character and a

comedic genius. Keaton grew up with his parents in vaudeville and medicine shows, and at age twenty-one, left their show in 1917 to start his own Hollywood career, playing first alongside Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle.

In contrast to these two producer-performer-writer-director talents—Chaplin and Keaton—a young man from New York City who entered the movie business right after his graduation from high school, Irving Thalberg, stood at the opposite end of the Hollywood equation. No one ever saw Thalberg on screen, and his extensive work on dozens of movies was rarely even listed in the credits. His signature contribution to the American cinema was the supervisory system for production that he built over a decade and a half, first at Universal, then more famously at MGM between 1924 and his early death at the age of thirty-seven in 1936. The goal of Thalberg’s system was for the studio to treat each motion picture as a new unit, in order to control the costs of productions, to rein in the excesses of spendthrift filmmakers, and to use careful calculations to make practical and wise decisions to complete a movie from the nascent stages of its early development to its final release to the public. It became the backbone for how Hollywood produced all its features.

Thalberg’s system was based on the studio’s tight control over two of the three stages of professional moviemaking. The first of these was the *preproduction stage*, meaning the selection of the idea or the property—such as a short story, novel, or play on which the movie was to be based—as well as the actual scripting, casting, budgeting, assigning of a crew, and scheduling. Up front, the studio needed control of how the project was developed and scripted, how it was budgeted, and on what schedule it would be made for what specific cost. As for the actual *production stage*, so long as it kept to schedule and within budget, Thalberg’s system normally did not interfere directly with the filming process and directorial decisions on the set. According to Thalberg, the studio needed next to weigh back in on the project with strict control only in the *postproduction stage*. This meant overseeing the editing and, after 1927, the music scoring and the sound mix, as well as closely controlling the final form in which the movie would be released to the public.

A central component of the successful Hollywood studio system was to harness the ambitions of the creative people making films to the demands of entertainment that satisfied audience taste. Even before sound was introduced in 1927, one of Thalberg’s major accomplishments was to demonstrate how brilliantly he could use the responses of preview audiences to help the studio evaluate a near-final version of a movie and decide what final and definitive changes were needed before its release to the broad public. In many cases, the changes decided upon would be editing cuts, which nearly always were intended to tighten the movie and make its visual storytelling more efficient. The creative personnel who make movies normally do not like to see cuts

made in their films. In nearly all phases of production, there is a tendency to want to hold on to the material for its own sake. Cuts were usually the order of the day after screenings of a movie to test audiences. In some cases, however, the responses of the test audiences led studio producers to *add* material to a film, sometimes even at additional cost to the production budget.

The idea of using preview audience responses, or the responses of audiences to a movie during an initial limited engagement, before finalizing the movie for general release was widespread in Hollywood from very early on. Every major studio followed the practice, and independent moviemakers did as well. Chaplin, for example, although a genius of the early cinema coming at it from the opposite direction of studio boss Thalberg, relied just as much on test audiences before a final decision on the version of the movie to release to the broad public. With *The Gold Rush*, for example, Chaplin used responses to an initial premiere booking at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood as justification for extensive cuts to shorten the movie for its general release nationwide.

THE STUDIOS GAIN CONTROL

Frequently, historians and commentators have remarked on Hollywood movies as being produced on an assembly-line model like the manufacturing of automobiles. Early on, Hollywood studios did establish a division of labor between the crafts and treated production schedules like an assembly line. But making movies is *not* mass production. Automobiles in a company's series or line must be all the same; by contrast, each new movie is a new unit that must be at least a little bit different from the last. Enhancing any movie as a product, and shaping popular taste in movies, is much more complicated than it sounds at first. From its inception, the central problem faced by the movie industry was how to find and nurture potential audiences who would keep coming back to see movies. No matter how used to them we have become, movies, after all, are not a necessity of life.

Hollywood explored and followed two avenues to build and hold audiences. The first strategy of the major studios was for a company to simultaneously control the production, the distribution, and the exhibition of movies. The second strategy was to standardize movies enough to help keep bringing back audiences predictably to theaters to see them.

The first goal was achieved by *vertical integration*, meaning that the same company that produced and distributed movies also owned many of the first-run theaters in which they were shown. The five most successful studios in

the Hollywood business during its Classic Era were all vertically integrated companies: Paramount, Fox, Warner Bros., MGM, and RKO. They made movies; then they rented the movies they made—as well as others that they acquired—to movie theaters nationwide, including their own chains of movie theaters where they showcased the movies they produced.

The business approach of vertical integration meshed hand-in-glove with the tightly controlled approach to unit production pioneered by Irving Thalberg. Making, distributing, and showing movies to the public in their own theaters, as a complete package, was at the heart of Hollywood's success throughout its Classic Era. Still, the challenge to each of these vertically integrated studios was how to attract viewers back to the movie theaters week after week. At the heart of doing that was seeing to it that the Hollywood system of movie production was based on a division of labor to assure the professional quality of production through specialization and expertise: directors directed, writers wrote photoplays, cinematographers did camera and lighting, editors edited, and so forth. Crafts personnel were in great demand, worked on long-term contracts, and were well paid.

The major Hollywood studios built large factories in Southern California where they physically made movies, yet these factories did not really mass-produce their product. Instead, they efficiently produced each new movie as a distinct product that could be imitated but not reproduced. Unlike mass-produced refrigerators, each new film had to be different! The challenge of what is called *genre filmmaking*—“genre” being one way of bringing a measure of standardization to cinema—is to reliably create small differences within the particulars of each movie, even while it remains generally within the standard genre model.

Genre is a way of approaching moviemaking by type, but genres themselves change over time, and the audiences for movies demand that shifts occur in genres. Alongside seeing MGM's 1925 movie *The Big Parade* as the prototype of the “war movie,” or classifying *The Gold Rush* as a melodramatic comedy, substantial numbers of moviegoers were thought to reliably pay to see less distinctive westerns, romances, suspense movies, or slapstick comedies. Nonetheless, for the entire history of Hollywood, the influence of movie genre on audience taste and moviegoing may be overemphasized. Genre is much more clearly defined by later generations of historians and critics than by a movie's makers or the audience for it at the time it first appeared. Feature filmmaking succeeds to the extent that nearly every movie so carefully treads the fine line between originality and familiarity.

Besides making movies by genre or type, early on, the Hollywood studios also recognized the business value of screen talent. The studio moguls and their production chiefs knew that a great deal of a movie's success depended

on the perceived effectiveness and popularity of a player's screen performance. This recognition took the business of making movies into uncharted waters.

Screen chemistry was not exactly stage performance, and theatrical stage talent was not necessarily transferable to screen. Talent might move back and forth from stage to screen, especially in the earliest years of moviemaking, but by the early 1920s the Hollywood studios had a talent system in place based upon "contract players." Each studio hired and developed talent, nurturing the looks and acting abilities of young actors and actresses, developing some toward stardom, others toward supporting or character roles. The contract player system in Hollywood was based on seven-year contracts that assured a great deal of continuity in the cast of players available and provided the studios with a reliable pool of talent.

Stardom was a concept that built followings for certain actors and actresses, and stardom translated into a stabilizing element in terms of prospective audiences. Many people went to a movie primarily to see a known star. Stardom was like genre, however. The concept of stardom depended on the nuances of slight and subtle changes from role to role and from screen performance to screen performance. Audience taste in stars was perceived to be highly subject to change as well.

THE EMERGING HOLLYWOOD ESTABLISHMENT

In spite of reservations about just how far the term applies, the idea of genre still is valuable in talking about a great many movies. The first film to be recognized for its achievement by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as Best Picture was a war movie, *Wings*. It was more distinguishable by its adherence to type than by any characteristics of its individual distinctiveness. Honored for 1927/28, immediately after the Academy was founded, this Paramount production used both black-and-white and color footage and was released in select first-run theaters in several large cities in "Magnascope," a widescreen process that required the print to pass through an enlarging lens and be shown simultaneously utilizing two projectors. As impressive as this screening process was, it nonetheless could be seen in only a handful of movie theaters around the country. *Wings* also utilized a soundtrack that contained music, and an impressive array of recorded sound effects to accompany the air battle sequences, but no voice dialogue.

The U.S. secretary of war and the War Department permitted extensive filming of *Wings* at Army facilities in Texas. Trenches and a simulated no-man's-land were even constructed for the movie by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. During production, a major motion picture trade paper, *Film*

Daily, reported that the zealous cooperation of military officials in this production was calculated to produce good publicity from the movie in the hope of earning congressional support for establishing an Air Corps distinct from the Army. In hindsight, it was recognized that *Wings* helped the Department of War politically with its success in that campaign.

The movie itself was set entirely during World War I and featured the exploits of wartime aviators. Much of the photoplay was based on the actual experiences of two aviators during the war: the movie's director, William Wellman, and the author of the story on which the screenplay was based, John Monk Saunders. The screenplay was by Hope Loring and Louis D. Lighton, and the spectacular visual effects were created and coordinated by Roy Pomeroy. In the review of *Wings* in *Moving Picture World*, Epes W. Sergeant asserted: "With a better story *Wings* could have been one of the great pictures of all time." The critic's review in *Film Daily* echoed that sentiment: "This is a big aviation spectacle that is outstanding. The story is weak, but the punch is there. A sure-fire money maker."

The excitement of the aerial footage of World War I-era dogfights on-screen brought audiences to a level of excitement that still was unusual in the movies. As of 1927, when *Wings* premiered, movies were still being shown as part of an evening's program that included live vaudeville acts, stand-up comics, and live music. The ambitious aerial spectacle of *Wings* was notable for distinguishing the movie from the rest of the evening's fare. Besides the ambitious technical advances of Magnascope and the studio's choice to present different sequences either in black-and-white or color, *Wings* presented viewers with a dazzling array of aerial cinematography by Lucien Hubbard that held together this wartime tale of patriotic duty, comradeship-in-arms, and romance.

Clara Bow played an ambulance driver who volunteers for military service in order to follow her love interest, Buddy Rogers, to France, where she also happens to catch the eye of his Army buddy, played by Richard Arlen. These two friends become rivals for her affection. Gary Cooper made one of his earliest screen appearances in *Wings* in a supporting role, playing an enlistee who bunks with Rogers and Arlen, and Hedda Hopper, who later became one of Hollywood's most successful gossip columnists, appeared in the supporting role of Mrs. Powell.

SUNRISE: THE APEX OF THE SILENT CINEMA

Hollywood perceived the major competition to its global domination of feature film production during the silent era as coming from Germany. In

response, one Hollywood studio boss, William Fox, hired one of the leading German movie directors, F. W. (Friedrich Wilhelm) Murnau, to come to Southern California to work for him. Having given Murnau a green light to choose any project he liked as his first feature at Fox, the studio also let him bring along from Germany a team that included the scenario writer, Carl Mayer, and veteran art director Rochus Gliese. This team's first Hollywood film, *Sunrise*, was subtitled a "Song of Two Humans" and was based on a 1917 story written in German by Hermann Sudermann, entitled "The Trip to Tilsit." The two lead roles in *Sunrise* were played by George O'Brien and Janet Gaynor, with primary filming taking place at Lake Arrowhead in the mountains east of Los Angeles.

In this melodrama, a rural couple finds their world rocked by the man's infatuation and dalliance with a jazz-age "it girl" (Margaret Livingston) on holiday, who urges him to drown his wife and come to live with her in the city. He is tempted by this idea, and his infatuation with the city girl is powerful, but in the end, he cannot carry out the deed. The danger to their relationship, however, allows the husband and wife to discover the true depth of their feelings for each other—and allows Murnau to orchestrate visuals conveying their passionate reengagement with life. They go to the city and end up renewing their wedding vows. Fox allowed the studio's new recruit from Germany latitude to create a symphony of pace and movement as a roving camera glides through sets filled with people, trolley buses, neon lights, and so on.

Sunrise is widely praised as a movie that deftly exploits the potential of the visual medium, and the timeliness of its capacity to do so is applauded because it appeared at a moment when the arrival of synchronous sound in motion picture production was altering motion pictures extensively and pushing them toward new conventions dominated by screenplay and dialogue. Released by Fox just days before Warner Bros.'s release of Hollywood's first "talkie," *The Jazz Singer*, *Sunrise* was shown with a synchronized original music score by Hugo Riesenfeld, who was experienced in writing music for silent films to be performed by orchestras at major New York City theaters. Riesenfeld summarized his approach to this task:

In feature films it is important to synchronize music and action without becoming too punctuated. I synchronize only the most important moments or to emphasize humor. I don't synchronize all the film so as not to disrupt the melodic line.

Critics early on recognized *Sunrise* for its unusually effective camerawork and lighting, as in the review by Laurence Reid in *Motion Picture News* that appeared just after the film premiered: "The German director's first American

picture furnishes proof positive that real thought can be translated for the silver screen . . . novel camera effects, the marvelous lighting, and the manner in which the players are handled. . . Murnau is a real storyteller.” Fox gave Murnau a five-year contract shortly after the film’s premiere (less than four years later, he died in an auto accident at the age of forty-two). In an interview he granted shortly after the movie premiere, Murnau noted:

They say I have a passion for camera angles, but I do not take trick scenes from unusual positions just to get startling effects. To me the camera represents the eye of a person, through whose mind is watching the vents on the screen.

Sunrise won the accolade “Best Picture, for Unique and Artistic Production” for 1927 at the first Academy Awards. This was a distinct and separate category from Best Picture. In 1957, the prestigious French journal *Cahiers du Cinema* declared *Sunrise* “the single greatest masterwork in the history of cinema.” In hindsight, *Sunrise* may be regarded as the apex of silent filmmaking in Hollywood, a grand farewell by a masterful director with an international reputation to the medium of silent film itself that was destined to abruptly disappear. However, critical praise did not turn into box office success in 1927 for what turned out to be the last—and the most expensive—silent film that Fox ever produced.

SUMMARY

In 1895, the earliest films were shown, first in Europe and soon afterward in the United States. Movies as we know them, however, did not come into existence until the period between 1910 and 1915. Understanding motion pictures appreciates that there is more to movies than just making them. A complete system of cinema consists of production, distribution, and exhibition. Between 1915 and 1920, Hollywood was built on this understanding, and it was built quickly. The most successful of the Hollywood companies simultaneously produced and distributed movies and owned their own chains of theaters in which movies were shown. These studios were vertically integrated. Vertical integration would last until 1948.

From early on, tension existed between the artistic aspirations of moviemakers and the financial realities of the motion picture industry. Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton on the one hand, and Irving Thalberg on the other, personified this tension. Chaplin and Keaton were creative geniuses and accomplished screen performers and storytellers. Both excelled as writers,

directors, and screen comedians. In addition, Chaplin and Keaton were both wise businessmen (although Chaplin was savvier and more successful) who recognized that audiences wanted movies that told engaging stories through sympathetic characters. Thalberg, meanwhile, created a system treating the production of each movie as a unit. As a businessman, Thalberg had an uncanny ability to recognize talent in all the production crafts, to encourage artistic excellence, and to recognize when a story worked on-screen and when it did not.

By 1927, the movie industry in the United States was fully established. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded, and it soon began honoring achievement in moviemaking by awarding its first Oscars.

Early Synchronous Sound

Although it was the advent of the “talkies” in 1927 that marked the true beginning of the Classic Hollywood, silent movies were already a decided success in terms of audience enthusiasm by the mid-1920s. Weekly attendance at the movies in the United States exceeded sixty-five million, and the silent movies being shown to these audiences covered a broad range of drama and comedy. By 1925, the silent motion picture appeared to be a fully accomplished form, capable of a wide array of expressive creativity and sophisticated communication.

The silent cinema worked for all kinds of dramatic and comedic purposes, and the creative personnel and technicians who made movies everywhere honed their skills to a stellar level of mature artistic accomplishment. Nowhere were critics complaining about silent movies. Audiences were flocking to silent movies at growing numbers of theaters. There is no evidence that directors, photoplay writers, cinematographers, or editors were rebelling against silent movies. Nor did the actors and actresses whose careers had been made by mastering its techniques chafe at the bit to make movies more like performing a play on-stage by introducing speech. Although the “talkies” depended on the advancement of technologies for recording and amplifying sound, this major turning point in cinema history was not *caused* by technology.

The “coming of sound”—meaning recorded music, effects, and voice dialogue played back in sync with the picture when a movie was projected in a theater—is attributed to Warner Bros., the studio that, along with Fox, was the most dedicated to advancing the technology of synchronous sound film production. Although it turned out that Fox had developed the more useful technology—its Movietone system for “sound on film”—Warner’s Vitaphone system of “sound on disc” was used on the first truly successful talkie released.

Despite its synchronous sound technology that ultimately proved inferior, what advantaged Warner Bros. in its competition with Fox was that Warner had a stronger commitment to finding a movie it could produce as a successful vehicle for synchronous sound. That lucky project turned out to be based on a sentimental stage play, with themes of generational conflict.

THE JAZZ SINGER AND SYNCHRONOUS SOUND

The first significant synchronous sound film with spoken lines, *The Jazz Singer*, is about a son's estrangement from his father because the young man becomes Americanized, breaks from the Old World and religious traditions of his parents, leaves home, and pursues a career as an entertainer. At first, Warner Bros. hoped to use the same vaudeville veteran who had played the lead in the play on Broadway, George Jessel, in the movie. The studio, however, eventually cast Al Jolson instead. Casting Jolson was not so much a stroke of genius by Warner Bros. as it was a matter of good fortune. Jessel reportedly turned down the lead in this story about a Jewish cantor and his son because the director selected by Warner Bros., Alan Crosland, was not Jewish. Jolson—who, like Jessel, was Jewish—was not concerned about that, however. He took the lead that Jessel had turned down, and, to the extent that Jolson's performance marks much of the movie's success, it was fortunate that he did. His role in *The Jazz Singer* occurred at an ideal point in Jolson's professional career just as he was emerging as a stage singer on Broadway and becoming widely recognized as one of the country's earliest and most popular recording artists.

Hollywood legend long held that Warner Bros. was in desperate financial shape in 1927 and that the company produced *The Jazz Singer* as a last-ditch move to save the studio. The reality was far less dramatic. Warner Bros. was not on the brink of collapse in 1927. One sector of the studio's vertical integration was ailing, however, because Warner's own chain of theaters was inferior to the theater chains owned by the competition. At the time, Paramount, Fox, and MGM owned the grandest movie palaces in the best prime locations in America's largest cities. So, Warner Bros.'s strategy behind producing *The Jazz Singer* was to take a major singing talent—whose reputation as a live performer was stellar and who was becoming even better known nationwide because audiences could hear him on radio or buy his recordings—and harness his popularity to the advent of the synchronous sound movie. The studio's decision was driven by the goal of improving Warner Bros.'s position in the exhibition sector.

Company records document this thinking through interoffice letters among the four brothers who owned the studio. Since their studio did not own the biggest and best movie theaters in the largest cities where first-run live performers mixed with screen presentations, if synchronous sound succeeded, it would mean that moviegoers in Peoria, Dubuque, or Boise could be seeing and *hearing* the biggest-name performers on-screen just as audiences in New York City or Chicago might have the opportunity to see and hear them live.

The Jazz Singer had its premiere on October 6, 1927. Audiences were treated to seeing and hearing Al Jolson perform several popular songs in sync, but what really captured their imagination was the naturalness of the movie's story as underscored by the content and tone of the brief dialogue scenes—the lines for which Jolson improvised. In a recollection published in the *Saturday Evening Post* nearly twenty years later, Jolson acknowledged:

The Jazz Singer appealed to me more than any other role because it was a story of my own experiences. I was reliving part of my own life—my early environment and upbringing, my refusal to follow in my father's footsteps and become a Rabbi, my unbreakable preoccupation with singing and acting. As I started making the picture in 1927, I was thrilled by the fact that it was to be the first picture to have singing in it, but I didn't dream that it would also introduce dialogue to the screen. The speaking was accidental. When I sat down to the piano as we began work on a singing scene, I adlibbed: "Wait till you hear this, mamma! If I'm a big hit, I'm gonna take you to Coney Island and I'll buy you a black silk dress that'll make a noise when you walk!" The Warners decided the words might be effective, so several takes were made—and the moving pictures had begun to talk.

In 1927, Jolson was at the peak of his success as a stage entertainer with his own distinct style, but the mechanical devices of electrical engineering threatened all the legitimate theaters and vaudeville houses. The possibility of dumping Jolson and thousands of other live performers onto the ash heap of history was quite real. Nonetheless, Jolson survived to be celebrated in a commemorative article published in 1940 in *Variety* as "the conspicuous personality who has coped successfully with the impacts of machinery on the traditional age in the theatre."

Up until synchronous sound, a night at the movies mixed a program of live entertainment with the screen feature. This live entertainment varied greatly, depending on where you were seeing the movie. In the first-run movie palaces in the largest cities, the live entertainment was first rate and consisted of headliners. In midsize cities, it was mediocre, while in the hinterlands, its

quality was dubious or entirely absent. Whatever assessments are made about the coming of synchronous sound to the movies, it is clear that the consistency and quality of the moviegoing experience nationwide was vastly improved. The exhibition sector for movies was changed forever.

Once established in film, synchronous sound spread like wildfire. Although some major figures in world cinema—from Charlie Chaplin to the famed Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein—lamented the coming of sound, audiences embraced sound movies wholeheartedly. Within a year of the release of *The Jazz Singer*, for all practical purposes it had become impossible to successfully produce and release a silent movie anywhere in the world.

EARLY SOUND PRODUCTION AND THE EARLY OSCAR WINNERS

On the one hand, synchronous sound changed the production of motion pictures toward a greater role for music in their artistic composition and emotional impact. On the other hand, Hollywood shifted toward producing films that were more overtly literary, based on screenplays as texts, in which an actor's success came to depend on his or her dramatic performance in the delivery of lines.

Synchronous sound production in the movies occurred just as the awarding of the Oscars began. As the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences settled into the early years of its awards for merit, its second and third selections for Best Picture, for 1928/29 and 1929/30, respectively, were *The Broadway Melody* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. As it turned out, each of these movies characterized one of two major tendencies in Hollywood films during the early years of synchronous sound production.

The 1928/29 winner was MGM's first musical in the era of synchronous sound, and it started the studio's tradition of lavish spectacles featuring singing and dancing that lasted well into the 1960s. *The Broadway Melody* was directed by Harry Beaumont, who was chosen by the studio because of his success with *Our Dancing Daughters* in 1928, one of the last of what were called "silent musical films." Accompanied by live performed music wherever they were shown, these silent musicals had no synchronous soundtrack, but always featured a grand overall production design and the popular dances of the moment such as the Charleston. Although Hollywood's leading studio called upon Beaumont to direct its first synchronous sound musical, his subsequent career as a director of "talkies" was undistinguished.

As originally released, *The Broadway Melody* included some sequences in Technicolor, which were interspersed with the main body of the movie that

was in black-and-white. In the period of early synchronous sound production, and confronted with other new technologies, Hollywood filmmakers utilized the device of mixing black-and-white and color footage in a number of feature movies. This experimentation, however, went nowhere; this device made little impact on mainstream movie production and has remained a curiosity.

All Quiet on the Western Front was an entirely different kind of movie. Its challenge was to effectively make a screen adaptation of the recently published popular novel by German author Erich Maria Remarque. The novel already was considered by many to portray antiwar sentiment in a manner that made the book a classic. A production of Universal—a studio hardly known for taking on risky production projects for the sake of art—this movie was considered an especially high risk by many Hollywood experts. As a movie about a naïve young German who marches off to World War I emboldened by idealistic enthusiasm, only to slowly realize the bleak futility of military conflict, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was hardly perceived as an assured success with American audiences.

Universal had a reputation as a tightfisted studio that specialized in churning out relatively low-budget genre movies. Nonetheless, on an impulse, the semiretired founder of the studio, Carl Laemmle, personally traveled to his native Germany to acquire the rights to this highly regarded literary work for screen adaptation. Written and published in Germany in 1927/28, the novel's English translation had sold 300,000 copies in the United States in 1929 alone. Although Universal's purchase of the rights might have reflected an elderly man's grasp at prestige, his son, Junior Laemmle, who was now running the studio, budgeted *All Quiet on the Western Front* at the handsome level of \$1.2 million. The younger Laemmle then hired veteran Lewis Milestone, who was widely respected by Hollywood peers and had already won one of the earliest Oscars given for Best Director, to direct the movie and engaged Arthur Edeson as the picture's director of photography. One of the founders of the distinguished American Society of Cinematographers in 1919, Edeson was considered by his Hollywood peers to be a genius of cinematography in the early sound era because of his work on the first synchronous sound western, a Fox production entitled *In Old Arizona*.

The challenges of exterior cinematography on location for sound production were greater than even the formidable ones facing directors of photography in a studio. On *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Milestone and Edeson combined their talents to bring to the screen a genuine breakthrough in the use of a movie's soundtrack so that voice, music, and effects truly *complemented* the visuals rather than simply relying on voiceover or dialogue to explain the pictures. Edeson was innovative in his shooting style, but he was also a master in the details of solving some basic problems of early sound cinematography.

The whirring noise of the camera gears interfered with the audio sound of the actors' voices being recorded. Studio production at the time required placement of the camera in a glass box to cut out that noise, but this also meant that camera placement and movement were severely limited. Edison decided instead to simply wrap the camera body in heavy blankets to deaden the camera noise. This act of insulating the camera body provided a solution for one of the earliest major problems of motion picture sound. Motion picture camera manufacturers were soon building casings of insulation material, called "blimps," for their cameras. Insulated camera bodies meant the end of filming from inside a glass enclosure on sets and opened up various choices for camera use in nearly any location.

All Quiet on the Western Front starred Lew Ayres, whose portrayal of the disillusioned young German soldier brought him immediate global acclaim. As Paul Bäumer, a German high school student who enlists for the front in a spurt of idealistic patriotism, Ayres's performance convincingly captured this young man's growing disenchantment as this brutal war of attrition dragged on. *All Quiet on the Western Front* is widely considered by critics and historians to have held up well over the years, with some commentators still labeling it as the best motion picture ever made in English that is set during World War I.

Both Remarque's book and the Hollywood movie adaptation long have been regarded as vintage expressions of the theme of brutality and the uselessness of war. As celebrated expressions of such antiwar sentiment, both drew harsh, negative commentary from extremes on the political left and right. Both the novel and the movie, however, weathered this criticism and are widely regarded as classics.

THE MONSTER RISING

Junior Laemmle and his Universal Studio—founded by his father Carl in 1915—might have been expected to be more comfortable with a movie that was simpler genre fare rather than with director James Whale's approach to *Frankenstein* in 1931. The movie's style went well beyond genre expectations in order to capture what one critic called the "gothic decay" of Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century novel on which the movie was based. Boris Karloff would be identified with the role of the monster for the rest of his career, in recognition of his compassionate portrayal of the frightening creature seeking to find his own true identity. Cinematography for the film was in the able hands of Arthur Edson. The movie is widely regarded as a high point in both Whale's and Karloff's careers.

Among its artistic accomplishments, *Frankenstein* is distinguished by its chilling use of sound: Colin Clive's distinctive voice as the young scientist Frankenstein; the sound of the shovel banging coldly on the grave; the barking of dogs echoing against the rocks. Each of these moments fully exploited just how sound on film could impact a movie viewer emotionally. At just seventy minutes, it was a decidedly short feature film in length, but still a remarkable one. As the *Reel Journal* advised its readers, most of whom owned movie theaters: "use large cut-outs of the Monster in your lobby, and spark curiosity with the slogan: 'To have seen *Frankenstein* is to wear a badge of courage.'"

Originally from Britain, director Whale chose *Frankenstein* from nearly thirty scripts proposed to him at Universal. At the time, special effects in the movies were still a function of the creative imagination and cleverness rather than technology. Universal's makeup man, Jack Pierce, modeled Karloff's bone structure into a figure based on the monster in a 1923 German silent film, *The Golem: How He Came into the World*. Every morning it took three hours just to apply Karloff's makeup and to adjust his forty-eight-pound costume (Universal's publicist embellished a bit, claiming that the costume weighed more than sixty pounds).

Whale decided to depart from what was already common Hollywood practice in order to shoot *Frankenstein* in sequence, following the chronology of the screenplay from the beginning to the end. Shooting out of sequence was the well-established approach used by all the Hollywood studios to save costs on actors and extras, who were hired for just certain days when they were in scenes and then not again. In spite of violating this standard Hollywood practice, Whale still managed to keep the production costs within the \$262,000 that Universal had allocated.

Whale's style of coverage was to cut from a medium shot to a close-up, and then to an extreme close-up. When his footage was turned over to the movie's editors, Maurice Pivar and Clarence Kloster, the resulting pace of *Frankenstein* was termed "breathless" by several contemporary critics. There is little argument that the decision *not* to compose and record music for the film was an effective part of its artistry. The soundtrack was minimal, which heightened the presence of the sound effects and the tension created by them throughout the movie.

According to *Variety*, there were a noticeable number of audience member walkouts from the preview showings, but the Universal publicity campaign for the movie in 1931 was based on building up, rather than toning down, viewer expectations of the chilling descent into horror. The studio filmed a prologue for national distribution with Edward Van Sloan, an actor known for portraying doctors, professors, or other intellectual types, stepping out from behind a curtain to prepare the audience by warning them about

the strange and disturbing tale they were about to see. As part of its publicity campaign, Universal claimed to be meeting its public responsibility by stationing nurses at all showings at the New York City opening of the movie at the Mayfair in Times Square.

The popular success of the 1931 movie version of *Frankenstein* made it legendary. Subsequently, its iconic status translated into providing a model in movie history that led to productions by moviemakers as varied as Abbott and Costello, Andy Warhol, and Mel Brooks. Alongside Chaplin's Little Tramp and the ape King Kong, the monster from *Frankenstein* became one of the most recognizable characters of the black-and-white era of the movies. In Universal's 1935 sequel, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Karloff and Clive repeated their roles under Whale's direction. *The Bride of Frankenstein* is recognized by film critics and historians as an exception to the rule that movie sequels rarely equal or surpass the original.

THE PRODUCTION CODE

Unlike both the original novel by Shelley and the Broadway stage play based on it by Peggy Webling, the screenplay for Universal's 1931 *Frankenstein* was substantially changed because the relatively new Motion Picture Production Code Office demanded that footage be shot so that in the movie Dr. Frankenstein does not die at the end. In spite of this demand and other changes to the original story demanded by the Production Code Office, *Frankenstein* was still scary.

The Production Code was new, but its subsequent importance in all mainstream Hollywood moviemaking was to be striking. In order to avoid government censorship of movies, the Code had been agreed to in 1930 by the eight major Hollywood companies (Paramount, Fox, Warner Bros., MGM, RKO, Universal, Columbia, and United Artists). In 1915, the U.S. Supreme Court had declared motion pictures to be a business exclusively, without First Amendment protections of freedom of speech. Even more worrisome to Hollywood than the threat of censorship laws passed in Washington, D.C., was the possibility of different laws pertaining to movie content that might be enacted by various jurisdictions: different state laws, or even different county or city ordinances. The decision of the major studios to adopt the Production Code was made without governmental involvement through the motion picture industry's trade association, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA).

Throughout the 1920s, public concerns about Hollywood movies—with regard to portrayals of romance and sexuality and of violence and crime—

sporadically were perceived as urging legislators to move toward control over movie content. By 1930, the major Hollywood companies took the offensive. The Code itself was written by the Reverend Daniel J. Lord, a Jesuit priest who taught theater at the University of St. Louis, and by Martin Quigley, a prominent Roman Catholic layman, who was the publisher of a movie industry trade magazine, the *Motion Picture Herald*. By turning to two prominent Catholics to write the Production Code, the Hollywood companies hoped to placate the Roman Catholic Church, which was a major source of criticism of Hollywood movies at the time.

The MPPDA had been founded by the major Hollywood companies in 1922. It was headed by Will Hays, a former postmaster general of the United States, who was the first in a long line of MPPDA leaders chosen for their political connections in Washington, D.C. In creating the Production Code, the movie industry's strategy was to convince its critics that Hollywood itself was conscientious in monitoring what was being shown in America's movie theaters.

The critics, however, were not easily satisfied. Complaints and public agitation about movie content continued after the Code was established in 1930. As a result, in 1934 the administration of the Production Code was put into the hands of a new office established by the MPPDA and headed by Joseph Breen, an attorney who quickly became known as a rigid and zealous enforcer of strict interpretations of what the Code allowed.

Although Code enforcement relaxed some after the late 1940s, it remained in effect until 1968, when Hollywood's major companies finally eliminated the Production Code and replaced it with a rating system—designating movies G, PG, PG-13, R, or X (later changed to NC-17). Like the Code, this rating system was an attempt to assure the American public, and critics of movie content in particular, that Hollywood was acting responsibly to protect young people from inappropriate screen material. Much of the public may even have believed that the ratings had some standing in law, which was not the case. Like the Code, the ratings were an effort by the industry to impress the public that Hollywood was taking responsibility for movie content. The ratings in reality constituted only a private agreement by the major Hollywood producers and distributors to place a rating on a movie that had no standing under the law and that could be enforced only to the extent that an individual movie theater owner elected to limit admission to a particular movie for viewers under seventeen.

For most professional observers, the Hollywood Production Code and its office of administration were thought to be obsessively puritanical throughout the Classic Era. But while the Code's application often was stringent, the Code probably reflected a reasonable approximation of the average adult,

middle-class American's attitude toward the public portrayal of sexuality in the mid-1930s. As American culture changed, though, such attitudes became less of a consensus, and by the mid-1960s the Code widely was perceived to be badly out of date.

With regard to pictorial representations of violence, the Hollywood Production Code always opted toward the less brutal and less lethal dramatic solution. On-screen, crime could be portrayed, of course, but, if so, it must be punished. On at least one issue, the Production Code appears to have been well ahead of the American cultural curve: intentional negative references to race and ethnicity were taboo.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND *CITY LIGHTS*

City Lights (1931) might be called Charlie Chaplin's last silent film, for in it he avoided dialogue speech, but he nonetheless composed a musical score and used exceptionally elaborate sound effects for the movie. Being essentially a silent movie released when synchronous sound movies had become the standard expectation for audiences worldwide, Chaplin relied on the established appeal of the Little Tramp as its central character. This was a calculated gamble on Chaplin's part since the Tramp was a stock figure derived from vaudeville and music hall traditions and, therefore, was considered by many to be better-suited to the conventions of silent movie comedy. Substantial numbers of movie industry experts and movie critics thought that Chaplin would fail in bringing the Tramp into the age of synchronous sound motion pictures.

The story of *City Lights* is about the Tramp falling in love with a blind flower girl who mistakes him for a rich man. In order to secure an operation for her that can be performed only in Vienna, the Tramp takes on one menial job after another, even trying amateur boxing, to earn money. However, it's only when by chance he encounters an intoxicated millionaire, who drunkenly gives him a substantial amount of money, that the Tramp gets enough money together for the operation. This apparent success, however, is quickly reversed. The millionaire's home has been robbed at nearly the same time, and—the millionaire having forgotten his gift to the Tramp when he was drunk—the Tramp immediately becomes the prime suspect for the robbery and is sent to prison for theft.

City Lights succeeded with the public even though the movie itself was based on visual sequences much like all of Chaplin's screen triumphs of the silent era proper: the opening scene of a public statue being dedicated, in which drapery is raised to reveal the Tramp asleep in the statue's lap; the Tramp accidentally swallowing a whistle; his fighting in a boxing match; the

revelation at the end when the blind flower girl discovers the true identity of her benefactor. The actual production work on *City Lights* quickly became Hollywood legend. The directorial demands of the perfectionist Chaplin for retakes were said to break all-time records. Chaplin's relationship with his costar, Virginia Cherrill, vacillated from coolly professional to downright icy. At one point, Chaplin fired her from the production, only to hire her back three weeks later at twice the salary. He also fired Henry Clive from his role as the millionaire and replaced him with Harry Myers. In spite of this turbulent production process, *City Lights* was a solid moneymaker.

Although *City Lights* was essentially a silent film, Chaplin was at the same time clever enough to satirize recorded speech in it, beginning with the incomprehensible gibberish of the politician's dedication speech for the statue in the opening scene. In addition, while contemporary critics identified several of the scenes—the Tramp acting coquettish in hope of softening his boxing opponent, who goes behind a screen and removes his pants; the Tramp and the millionaire waking up in bed together after a night of partying—as vintage Chaplinesque comedy bits, some later academic film critics drew attention to them as homosexual subtexts.

After the movie's premiere run, Chaplin followed true to form and edited *City Lights* based on his perception and interpretation of the responses to the movie by its first audiences. He finally put the movie into general release in early 1931, distributing it himself, which was practically unheard-of in Hollywood at the time. But precisely because he did the distributing of the movie himself, rather than through one of the major Hollywood companies, Chaplin managed to earn worldwide profits in excess of \$5 million. He had done what skeptics considered impossible: completing a successful and popular silent film over three years after the demise of the silent movies. Moreover, he had succeeded at the box office in the midst of the global economic depression of the early 1930s.

City Lights demonstrated that mass audiences could respond favorably to a movie that cut against the grain of mainstream Hollywood production in 1931. Chaplin demonstrated that an independent moviemaker could still succeed at a time when the Hollywood studio system had to rely on all its business acumen, cautious fiscal strategies, and efforts to control production costs, just to survive.

RELIABLE FARE

During the first few years of the 1930s, the Best Picture Oscars were awarded by the Academy to pictures considered to be reliable studio favorites. In those

rough economic times of the Great Depression, and when Oscar choices were voted on by a membership that was dominated by employees loyal to the Hollywood big studios, big studio motion pictures with big budgets and high hopes predictably triumphed.

Cimarron, for example, the most lavish production yet undertaken by the newest of the major Hollywood companies—the vertically integrated RKO, founded by Boston financier Joseph Kennedy and RCA (Radio Corporation of America) chief executive David Sarnoff—was the Academy’s Best Picture choice for 1930/31. Even with its chain of movie theaters, including the flagship Radio City Music Hall in New York City, RKO was struggling financially. Launched only in 1928, a year before the Depression began in late 1929, RKO was hit especially hard by the abrupt downturn in the nation’s economy. Nonetheless, the relatively new studio was willing to invest what at the time was a movie industry record of \$125,000 just to obtain the rights to adapt the Edna Ferber novel *Cimarron* to the screen.

Cimarron was based on the true story of Thomas Ferguson, a pioneer politician and newspaper publisher, and was set during the late nineteenth-century land rush in the Oklahoma Territory. In a fashion typical of all of Ferber’s novels, the screenplay by Howard Estabrook followed a formula that found the main character, Yancey Cravat (Richard Dix), becoming increasingly irresponsible in his business affairs, even as he remained socially charming. As his grip on practical matters slipped, his political and journalistic responsibilities gradually fell into the conscientious hands of his wife Sabra (Irene Dunne). As a classic Ferber heroine, Sabra stood tall, ably asserting her independence just as clearly as she demonstrated her sense of effectiveness and duty as her husband’s capacities declined. Throughout her career as a novelist, Ferber revisited this theme of women who took over serious public responsibilities from the failed, aging, or infirm men in their lives.

With its production budgeted at \$1.4 million, *Cimarron* was an expensive movie for its day, but one in which the production expense paid off with audiences. The “land rush” scene at the very beginning of the movie, for example, creates just the kind of pandemonium and mass action for which Classic Hollywood screen direction became famous. Directed by Wesley Ruggles, with Edward Cronjager as its director of photography, *Cimarron* filled the screen with accomplished action scenes while still maintaining a sharply focused dramatic vision. That famous opening scene, filmed on location near Bakersfield, California, required five thousand extras, a team of twenty-eight camera operators, twenty-seven camera assistants, and six still photographers, all under Cronjager’s supervision. The sequence is a fine example of directorial virtuosity being understood as command over the geography of visual action on-screen and the pacing of the action itself.

Although, as a western, *Cimarron* may be considered a genre film, it also had the characteristics of an epic family saga. Basing a film adaptation on a popular, best-selling novel like Ferber's was considered one of the safest investments by Classic Hollywood. Nearly any such an adaptation to the screen was assumed by the studio to have excellent prospects for gaining a substantial "presold" audience of moviegoers who had read the novel and liked it.

The following year's Best Picture, for 1931/32, *Grand Hotel* was another presold property based on an international best-seller. Unlike *Cimarron*, it was not treated primarily as a genre film. MGM's famed production head, Irving Thalberg, decided to use it as a "star vehicle" for an array of major talents on contract to the studio. Under Louis B. Mayer, who held the title of first vice president and general manager, and Irving Thalberg, vice president and supervisor of production, in the early 1930s, MGM provided the leading model of glamour, professionalism, and profitability to the rest of the motion picture industry. The studio's art director, Cedric Gibbons, and its earliest sound engineer, Douglas Shearer, were typical of the accomplished craft professionals at the studio. Mayer and Thalberg followed a tough labor policy in general, and MGM rode through the worst years of the Great Depression of the early 1930s in the best financial shape of any Hollywood company.

Numerous individual movies bore Thalberg's personal imprint as a supervising producer, including *Foolish Wives*, *The Big Parade*, *Ben-Hur*, *The Crowd*, *Hallelujah*, *Annie Christie*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *A Night at the Opera*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Each of these movies could be called a "producer's film," based on the way it was conceived, nurtured, and edited for final release to the theaters by Thalberg's steady hand. So influential was Thalberg—both because of the supervisory system he had created and for the unparalleled position of power he held at MGM—that a "Thalberg film" was synonymous with an MGM film for nearly a decade and a half. Nonetheless, Thalberg rarely was credited on any of the movies he worked on, no matter how large his role. Someone watching MGM movies from the era and diligently reading the credits from them would have had no idea of Thalberg's influence and importance.

No movie from the early 1930s was more characteristically an MGM masterpiece with a "Thalbergian" touch than *Grand Hotel*. Based on a 1929 novel by German author Vicki Baum, MGM acquired the rights to this property through its representative in New York City, Robert Ruben, for a cash investment of only \$15,000. Quickly put onto Broadway in a stage play version, this property was then further developed from the stage version for the screen at the studio. As a distinctive MGM movie, *Grand Hotel* was developed to fit the studio's reputation for high-end gloss and stylish grandeur. Gibbons, the legendary MGM art director who supervised the overall production design for all of MGM's films for more than three decades and whose name appeared

in the credits of more than 1,500 movies, built a lobby and reception area for a glamorous Berlin hotel as its central set and added a couple of hotel rooms to the design. He saw to it that the space, besides looking elegant, was highly functional in service of camera placement and movement. The lobby as a set was open enough to permit a variety of overhead shots.

Directed by Edmund Goulding, with William Daniels as the movie's director of photography, the entire story of *Grand Hotel* takes place in a limited space consisting totally of interior scenes, requiring no exterior or location filming, and the movie's action occurs over a period of just twenty-four hours. The advantages for cost-efficiency and the preservation of high production values were facilitated by this production design and served especially well for the early era of synchronous sound production.

Much of the success of this movie, however, was about casting: Greta Garbo as Grusinskaya, a Russian ballerina who is aging alone and whose career is waning; John Barrymore as Baron Felix von Geigern, charming and likable, who falls in love with Grusinskaya but is pressed into thievery because he is sorely in need of money; Wallace Beery as the heavy-handed industrialist Preysing; Joan Bennett as his secretary Flaemmchen, whom he wants to make his mistress; Lionel Barrymore as Kringelein, a humble employee of Preysing who has come to Berlin to live out his last days, believing that he is dying; and Lewis Stone and Jean Hersholt in their supporting roles of Dr. Ollenschlag and Senf, respectively. The plot connects these characters as the action transpires through a day and a night in the life of a posh metropolitan hotel.

Grand Hotel was a success with audiences and critics alike. The quality of the performances and the tightly woven, interconnected stories hold up well. As critic Kevin Thomas pointed out in a 1991 essay published as notes to the Los Angeles Conservancy's "Best Remaining Seats" revival of the movie for the big screen: "There is nothing dated about these performances. *Grand Hotel* is . . . one of those happy instances when art and entertainment are one."

By contrast, the following year's Best Picture selection, a 1933 Fox production entitled *Cavalcade*, has not fared well in the eyes of subsequent generations. Featuring what was thought at the time to be an entirely British cast, the film nonetheless was made entirely in Hollywood. The sole American in a major role was young Margaret Lindsay (playing Edith Harris), who had convinced her employers at Fox that she was British, although actually she had been born in Dubuque, Iowa. With Winfield Sheehan as the movie's producer at Fox, the screenplay for *Cavalcade* was written by Reginald Berkeley, based on a successful Broadway play written by Noel Coward, and was directed by Frank Lloyd.

This saga of a British family, the Marryots, from New Year's Eve 1899 to 1932, spans the lives of the family patriarch, Robert, and his wife, Jane, who

confront the tragedies of losing their son Edward and their daughter-in-law in the sinking of the *Titanic*, followed by the death of their son Joseph in World War I. This family melodrama explores the sentiments around loss and change over the decades, and does so in a way consistent with that Anglophile appeal in American culture that celebrates the idea of British emotional reserve and steadfastness of will.

As a Fox film, *Cavalcade* was produced in that studio's pioneering sound-on-film technique, which had been accepted as the industry's standard for synchronous sound motion picture production by 1932. Yet this technical fact meant little in terms of the studio's financial health and did nothing to assure Fox's profitability in the early 1930s. After the stock market crash of October 1929, followed by Fox losing an antitrust decision to the U.S. government over the company's attempted acquisition of a chain of movie theaters from Loews, the studio was reeling financially.

When *Cavalcade* was released and won the Academy's Best Picture Oscar, Fox's business future indeed looked precarious. The studio's salvation came in 1935 through a merger with a smaller motion picture production company called Twentieth Century Pictures that had been started recently by Joseph M. Schenck, who left his position as chairman of the board at United Artists, and Darryl F. Zanuck, who quit his position as a producer at Warner Bros. With Schenck as president and Zanuck as vice president in charge of production, the newly merged Twentieth Century-Fox quickly developed a signature style of sharp, high-gloss cinematography in its black-and-white features and its musicals in color that assured the studio's return to profitability.

A HOLLYWOOD ICON

Based on a story by Edgar Wallace and Merian C. Cooper, the screenplay for *King Kong* (1933) gripped its audiences and established the ape King Kong as a Hollywood icon. With a screenplay written by James Creelan and Ruth Rose, the movie was coproduced at RKO by Cooper, who also directed it, and Ernest Schoedsack. Credit for cinematography went to the team of Edward Lindon, J. O. Taylor, and Verne Walker. Its special effects, considered daring at the time, were provided by studio supervisors Willis O'Brien and E. B. Gibson, in conjunction with the team of model builders consisting of Marcel Delgado, Fred Reefe, Orville Goldner, and Carroll L. Shepphird. *King Kong's* art direction was credited to Carroll Clark and Al Harman.

King Kong begins in New York City as film producer Carl Denham (Robert Armstrong) befriends the stunning Ann Darrow (Fay Wray), offering

her wealth, fame, and exotic travel as a movie star. Subsequently, a group of his filmmakers land on an unexplored island where they capture an enormous ape and take him to New York City. Not long after his arrival in the city, the ape escapes. What starts off as a film-within-a-film turns into a spectacle that pulls out all the stops.

The movie's many animation sequences were pioneering. Moviegoers in 1933 were simply amazed when the giant gorilla gathered up lead actress Wray into the palm of his hand and carried her away. Stop-motion photography captured the climb and subsequent fall of King Kong from the Empire State Building.

This "classic" celluloid retelling of the fable of "Beauty and the Beast" became one of the most beloved of all fantasy films. In 1933, film commentator Lloyd Arthur Ashbuck wrote of *King Kong*: "So great is its impact that I venture to predict that it will not be forgotten in 1960." It would become, he believed, "part of American folklore." Indeed, a successful remake was produced in 1977 as a high-concept blockbuster, and nearly thirty years after that, a \$300 million version of *King Kong* with advanced computerized effects and digital imaging was released in 2005.

The fledgling RKO was still ailing financially, struggling on the verge of bankruptcy, when the movie went into production at the depths of the Depression. Thus, production costs were held at \$500,000, a modest investment that paid off royally. As Sid Grauman, the owner of a famous Hollywood movie theater where the film premiered, exclaimed: "I never saw greater enthusiasm for any picture in my experience of presenting premieres . . . where applause was so frequent and spontaneous. [The] audience applauded at least twenty times." Grauman's observations of his Hollywood audiences described responses to the movie that were duplicated nationwide. From its premiere, *King Kong* was a hit everywhere.

King Kong grossed earnings of \$2 million at a time when an admission to a movie theater cost nearly seven times the price of a loaf of bread! The great ape, roaring his defiance at the attacking airplanes as he makes his final stand atop the Empire State Building, took a place right along with Paul Bunyan and Johnny Appleseed in the pantheon of American folk legends. The only other Hollywood movie of the Classic Era that equals *King Kong* as an enduring cult favorite with audiences is *Casablanca*. Turner Home Entertainment, which acquired RKO's film library, promoted its video release of *King Kong* in 1993 with a \$5 million campaign.

The original *King Kong* was released in the year by which nearly all of the early practical problems with synchronous sound production had been resolved. Unidirectional microphones, whose placement on a set had limited physical action in dialogue scenes, had been replaced. The new mi-

crophones—which recorded clear sound in different positions and from different angles—were mounted on a boom pole that permitted an operator to constantly move the boom and position the attached microphone for accurate recording. Better insulation for camera bodies deadened the noise of the gears, just as the simple decision to mount rubber wheels on camera dollies permitted greater camera movement without any extraneous noise interfering with the sound recording. Sound was important in *King Kong*, with a track consisting of sound effects by Murray Spivack and music composed by Max Steiner, whose later scores for movies included *Gone with the Wind*, *Casablanca*, *The Big Sleep*, *Key Largo*, and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

FRANK CAPRA, ROBERT RISKIN,
AND THE SCREWBALL COMEDY

For the first half-dozen years that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences selected a Best Picture annually, the choices encompassed a diversity of movie types: two war movies, a musical, a western, an ensemble chamber drama that served as a star vehicle, and a family melodrama set in Great Britain that covered three decades. To add one more movie genre to this list, Academy members selected as Best Picture for 1934 a comedy. Indeed, it was a movie that defined an entire subgenre that came to be called the “screwball comedy.”

The movie was *It Happened One Night*, directed by Frank Capra and based on a clever piece of screenwriting by Robert Riskin. The movie’s two stars, however, were reported to have neither liked nor respected the project. As was fairly common in the studio era, both Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert were “loaned” to Columbia for this production by their studio contractors, MGM and Paramount, respectively, for sizable fees. Gable was forced into accepting this assignment to play in a comedy that he was not interested in as a “punishment” by MGM’s Louis B. Mayer who was peeved with the star. By contrast, Colbert was paid double her normal Paramount salary for *It Happened One Night*, but still is on record as having said that she thought it was the worst picture she ever made. Ironically, Hollywood studio executives and insiders at the time generally agreed that it was “froth” or “trivia,” with a great many of them adding that *It Happened One Night* had no real dramatic suspense and no real heart! Nonetheless, the moviegoers of 1934 absolutely adored this low-budget comedy, and subsequent generations have consistently applauded its wit and charm, quoted its memorable lines, and cited its classic scenes.

As a newspaper reporter facing unemployment, Peter Heard (Gable) stumbles upon a supersensational story in a Miami bus station. A runaway

heirress, Ellie Andrews (Colbert), is fleeing her father, who opposes her marriage to a cad named King Wesley. In defiance of her father, she is headed north on a Greyhound bus to join Wesley in New York City. Peter boards the same bus, cleverly makes her acquaintance, and inveigles himself with her until they become traveling companions on the odyssey northward, even though they apparently dislike one another. Their trip consists of one comic incident after another, and—as they endure the tribulations of their trek—they fall in love. That love, however, isn't acknowledged by either of them until the very end of the movie, which wraps up neatly when Ellie impulsively flees her wedding to Wesley and elopes with Peter to a hasty marriage before a justice of the peace.

It Happened One Night is considered a prototype of the screwball comedy, defined as a romantic comedy in which the couple “meet cute” in some unexpected way, dislike one another at first, and are divided from one another in ways that seem irrevocable (in this case, by the chasm of money and social class), yet struggle back and forth toward between rejecting and then finally accepting their love for each other. It is a successful formula played out often in Hollywood movies from its point of origin in the mid-1930s throughout the twentieth century. Along with the earliest examples of screwball comedies from the mid- and late 1930s, for example, the genre was updated cleverly in the late 1960s for the youth-culture audiences with *The Graduate* (1968) and continued into the Internet age with *You've Got Mail* (1998).

It Happened One Night began the extraordinarily productive collaboration between screenwriter Riskin and director Capra that created *Broadway Bill* (1934), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *You Can't Take It with You* (1938), and *Meet John Doe* (1941). Such collaborations between distinctive talents—between a director and a screenwriter, or between a director and a director of photography, or between a director and a screen actor—are a repetitive occurrence throughout Hollywood history. A pairing that is as singularly successful as Riskin and Capra, however, is rare. Although moviemaking is always a collaborative art that involves scores of major production personnel, such pairings bear witness to the special dynamics between two talented creators. The Riskin-Capra success with *It Happened One Night* marked a turning point for Columbia Pictures, catapulting the studio from its inferior status as a second-rung Hollywood company into a production company roughly on a par with the other major Hollywood studios. The Riskin-Capra collaborations helped to keep Columbia in that position into the late 1940s.

For the most part, the Riskin-Capra movie collaborations were interpreted as populist in their themes, celebrating the “little man.” Their movies appeared to endorse and extol a strong strain in the ideology of a great many Middle Americans. Later, some academic film critics would label such themes naïve, even coining the term *Capra-corn* to denigrate the optimism that perme-

ated these films. Such ideological criticism remains problematic, however. At the most basic level, audiences appreciated the way screwball comedies, and other Capra-Riskin movies, provided the witty and sharp give-and-take that characterized Classic Hollywood screen dialogue, the many clever scenes that played well as set pieces, and stories in which characters with determination, who worked hard and conducted themselves honorably, prevailed.

It Happened One Night's Best Picture Oscar win was an instance of a "sleeper" film suddenly breaking into the motion picture industry's awareness and gaining recognition and endorsement from fellow professionals in the Hollywood community. This surprise was a first in Hollywood history, but 1934 would hardly be the last time an unexpected movie topped other favorites and swept away a Best Picture nod from the Academy. *It Happened One Night* was the very first movie to win five Oscars (including Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Screenplay, in addition to Best Picture). Nonetheless, comedies have been rare choices for Best Picture awards in the Academy's voting. Moreover, the number of comedies found on the American Film Institute's list of 100 Greatest Films is not large. Notably, *It Happened One Night* continued to draw recognition from industry professionals, critics, and scholars into the twenty-first century.

THE MARX BROTHERS AND SCREW-LOOSE COMEDY

In the early 1930s, Hollywood movie comedies often were derived directly from the performance traditions of live vaudeville, with a structure that moved from one set piece to another or, more simply, from one joke to the next. Just such a structure was the underpinning for the clever screenwriting of a Robert Riskin screwball comedy, much as it was part of the structure for the popular Marx Brothers comedies of the era, like the 1933 Paramount production *Duck Soup*.

While the development of *It Happened One Night* went from one comic incident to the next, while building a tightly knit formula comedy with a strong narrative progression, *Duck Soup* went from one comic skit to the next with little logical connection, creating a pacing that underscored feelings of anarchy and whimsy. The Marx Brothers features made for Paramount in the early 1930s established anarchy, whimsy, and an absurdist approach to screen comedy, in contrast to the finely crafted, story-based humor found in other film comedies. This tradition in Hollywood comic movies, for lack of a better term, may be called "screw-loose." Unlike many movies that are funny because of their scripts and dialogue and that confront sympathetic characters with dilemmas they must overcome with cleverness, screw-loose comedies are based more purely on an actor's funny performance.

Leo McCarey, who had directed the silent comedies of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy in the 1920s, directed *Duck Soup* for Paramount. His brisk approach to the movie's pacing and his steady hand with its sight gags made *Duck Soup* into an example of Marx Brothers humor at its best. Not everyone necessarily agreed, of course. At the time of its release, the reviewer for *Variety* complained that the jokes came on too fast and furiously. Moreover, audiences seemed to agree with *Variety*, for *Duck Soup* did only modest box office business in 1933, even though, of all the Marx Brothers movies, it has held the most positive critical reputation with subsequent generations. *Duck Soup's* send-ups of nearly all of the institutions of respectable society, the movie's wild and unbridled energy for the zany, and the screen antics and saucy dialogue of the Marx Brothers have held its place in cinema history with generation after generation of moviegoers.

SUMMARY

The shift from silent movies to synchronous sound production at the end of 1927 was hardly predictable. Silent movies were considered an accomplished art form by the professionals who made them, as well as by the mass audiences who were flocking to see them nationwide.

Warner Bros. approached *The Jazz Singer* with uncertainty. The best explanation for the studio's exceptional interest in advancing sound production was that it would make Warner Bros. more competitive with rival studios in the exhibition sector. Dialogue on the soundtrack in *The Jazz Singer* evidently was coincidental, but it pointed toward more complex screen stories and more complex character development.

Unlike anything else in film history, sound swept quickly and thoroughly over all movie production internationally. Synchronous sound faced technical problems that were solved by 1933 through a combination of sophisticated and relatively simple measures. Some of these solutions came from complex advances in sound equipment and recording. Literary and stage properties became more sought-after in Hollywood, and the role of screenwriters became more prominent. Genre filmmaking was enhanced, as was the Hollywood star system. As wall-to-wall dialogue in movies became common, voice and verbal performance came to define screen presence for actors and actresses in Hollywood.

In the period immediately following the introduction of synchronous sound production and following the stock market crash of 1929, Hollywood was cautious. The Academy's selections for Best Picture Oscars in this period reflected that caution, as did the writing of the Production Code in 1930 followed by the strengthening of its enforcement after 1934.

Classic Hollywood Takes Form

The Academy's Best Picture for 1935 was *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Directed by the veteran Frank Lloyd for MGM, it displayed the gloss and high technical polish of the studio's typical work, along with Cedric Gibbons's renowned art direction. Starring Charles Laughton, Clark Gable, and Franchot Tone, it is the story of the struggle between the captain of the *Bounty*, William Bligh, and the young upstart Fletcher Christian. The MGM screenplay, written by Talbot Jennings, Jules Furthman, and Carey Wilson, concentrates heavily on Laughton's portrayal of Bligh. With masterful cinematography by another veteran, Arthur Edson, providing for much of the atmosphere—most of the filming was actually done on Catalina Island just off the coast of Southern California—*Mutiny on the Bounty* simultaneously was a period piece about an aristocrat's high adventure at sea and a familiar story about the constant struggle of man with nature.

Comedies have proven to have a difficult time in competing for the recognition that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences bestows annually in choosing its Best Picture. But audiences like and appreciate comedies, and one of Hollywood's best comic teams was the Marx Brothers. One of their signature films was *A Night at the Opera*, their first picture at MGM, to which they had moved from Paramount in 1935. In addition to the brothers themselves, the movie featured Margaret Dumont and Siegfried Rumann. Written by George S. Kaufman, based in part on vaudeville sketches written by Morrie Ryskind for the Marx Brothers and in part on a story by James Kevin McGuinness, it was directed by Sam Wood. *A Night at the Opera* was the biggest box office hit for the Marx Brothers in their entire Hollywood career.

A Night at the Opera lacks the unrestrained insanity of their earlier comedies, for this film pursues a plausible plot: Groucho, business manager for

Margaret Dumont, that “definitive grand dame,” is in Milan for the opera season. Margaret, sold on the idea of backing an American opera company, is induced to sign Walter King, a well-known tenor, who wants Kitty Carlisle included in the contract. Much to the disgust of Walter, she is in love with another man, Allan Jones. Groucho meets Chico, a friend of Allan’s, and they plan to get him the job. Harpo, the valet for Walter, hates his employer, so he joins Groucho and Harpo. They arrive in New York disguised as three Russian aviators, are pursued by sleuths for impersonating the Russians, and wreck the opening night at the opera, all while keeping things in an uproar.

According to the 1935 review in *Boxoffice*, *A Night at the Opera* was the best Marx Brothers picture to date and abounded in laughs and side-splitting situations. The witty one-liners are praised by *Boxoffice*, as is Groucho’s humor, described as being sharp but never cruel. The film features such classic scenes as the jam-packed ocean liner stateroom sequence and a hilarious send-up of a scene from Giuseppe Verdi’s classic opera *Il Trovatore*. This spoof of high society and high culture holds up well.

The wild delirium and anarchy found in earlier Marx Brothers films is missing here, but this movie still is filled with memorable gags—especially the famous stateroom routine—that hold their ground against the love story and the straight musical numbers (featuring vintage MGM music and lyrics by Nacio Herb Brown, Arthur Freed, and Ned Washington) inserted at the insistence of the studio. Said costar Carlisle: “The Marx Brothers were dear to me. They didn’t play any tricks on me, and they liked me, because we became friends forever after that.”

AN MGM BIOPIC

The Academy’s Best Picture for 1936 was a “biopic,” a term Hollywood used for filmed biographies. An MGM production, *The Great Ziegfeld* starred William Powell and Myrna Loy, with Louise Rainer, Frank Moran, Fannie Brice, and Ray Bolger, and its Best Picture selection marked yet another triumph for the Classic Era’s wealthiest and most successful studio. Produced by Hunt Stromberg, it was directed by Robert Z. Leonard, with Oliver T. Marsh as director of photography. As even a relatively unenthusiastic review in the weekly magazine *Liberty* claimed: “It lacks humor and intimate appeal, but still provides a great show—it gives you your money’s worth with its fifty stars and three hundred beauties.”

Big-name talent and an aura of glamour were cornerstones of MGM’s supremacy as a studio in the 1930s. Making a movie biography of the impresario and showman Florenz Ziegfeld was an ideal project for the studio. Ziegfeld

was a brash show-business pioneer whose career as a publicity hound was a beacon for the self-promotion and dedication to the hype of celebrity. Moreover, the movie provided a dazzling emotional drama through the intrigue going on between cast members backstage while lavish musical production numbers—each worthy of that genre at its best and in its fullest bloom in the mid-1930s—were being performed out front. As the reviewer from the *Los Angeles Times* observed at its premiere:

Hollywood passed judgment on *The Great Ziegfeld* last night. The verdict, which will probably take form today, was that this spectacular musical creation of the film is one of the most beautiful, lavish, and, in certain episodes, gorgeous pictures ever produced.

The production of *Ziegfeld* actually had begun at Universal, but that financially strapped studio was forced to sell the rights to the project to MGM. Powell, on MGM contract, originally had been “loaned” to Universal for the movie and kept his leading role as the impresario of burlesque when the rights to the movie were acquired for his home studio. MGM was generous in support of the production values. Produced by Stromberg, one of Irving Thalberg’s protégés, the movie’s elaborate musical numbers were staged by Seymour Felix.

The script includes anecdotes such as Ziegfeld’s successful publicity stunt with a European beauty named Anne Held, whom he made, briefly, the talk of America by staging her famed “milk bath.” Held, who considered herself an *artiste* in the sense that her fame in Europe was based on her singing, claimed to have been humiliated by having to bathe in milk as a stunt to lure American audiences. Ziegfeld’s real-life discoveries included Audrey Dane, Fannie Brice, and the woman with whom Ziegfeld finally settled into an apparently normal and happy marriage, Billie Burke, played in the movie by Loy. But upon the heels of his stage triumphs, including launching the career of humorist Will Rogers, came the dark days of the Great Depression and an end to Ziegfeld’s fabulous shows.

While acknowledging that the screenplay generally was faithful to the facts of Florenz Ziegfeld’s life and career, some movie critics objected that this biopic/musical overglorifies Ziegfeld as a theatrical messiah, superman of the stage, great artistic genius, and idealist. These critics called for a screen portrayal of Ziegfeld closer to what many believed was the truth: that he was a flamboyant and extravagant man with an uncanny knack for glamorizing young women, and it was these eye-filling human “concoctions” that had made the *Ziegfeld Follies* a favorite entertainment for the American public for decades. Nonetheless, other contemporary critics argued that the movie’s

story line held up surprisingly well and sustained its big-screen grandeur and the portrait of the man behind it.

The production costs on *The Great Ziegfeld* were vintage Hollywood and worthy of the movie industry's richest studio. The cost for doing the single production number "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody" alone was \$220,000. The set for that number took 4,300 yards of rayon silk just for the curtains, featured 180 performers, and took several weeks to rehearse and shoot. Yet, this entire stunning sequence was done in one continuous take by Ray June, the cinematographer hired to film this one scene of the movie exclusively. Excess like this in Hollywood production was sometimes for its own sake, but, in this instance, the opulence fulfilled an aesthetic ambition and contributed to defining a distinctive MGM style.

SWING TIME FOR GINGER AND FRED

Swing Time, a 1936 RKO production—produced by Pando Berman, directed by George Stevens, with production design by Van Nest Polglase and camera by David Abel—is an accomplished movie that reflects Hollywood's mastery of the filmed musical in the 1930s. It is also an enduring example of virtuosic Hollywood performance on-screen. *Swing Time* was the sixth in a string of ten films in which Fred Astaire danced with Ginger Rogers. It is based on a light-hearted script written by Howard Lindsay and a wonderful score by Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields. Hit songs include "The Way You Look Tonight," "A Fine Romance," and "Pick Yourself Up."

Astaire was born Frederick Austerlitz in Milwaukee and danced in an act with his sister, until she quit the stage in 1932 to marry and he relocated to Hollywood. As Fred Astaire, he found entry into an expanding world of Hollywood's production of musicals surprisingly easy. His screen success was immediate, and he soon was paired with Rogers, who had arrived in Hollywood from Broadway in 1931. Their first film together was *Flying Down to Rio* at RKO in 1933, and their partnership on-screen was unusually successful until they broke up in 1939. Rogers then went on to nonmusical roles, winning an Academy Award as Best Actress for her portrayal of the working-class heroine in *Kitty Foley* (1941).

In *Swing Time*, John Garnett (Fred Astaire), nicknamed "Lucky," is engaged to Margaret Watson (Betty Furness) but her father will not let them marry until John has earned \$25,000. John meets Penny Carrol (Ginger Rogers), and they form a dance team, then fall in love. He doesn't want to disappoint Margaret, however. The resolution comes when, finally, Margaret appears and announces that she wants to marry someone else, which leaves

him free to win Penny, which he does by besting his rival Ricardo Romero (Georges Metaxa).

Disciplined simplicity is at the root of the subtle power of *Swing Time*. “Some of the most perfectly photographed, supple, and expressive moments of pantomime in any film,” wrote critic F. X. Feeney in 1997 screening notes at the Aero Theater. “A Depression-era escapism at its most fizzy and delightful.” Victor Morre plays Astaire’s loopy pal Dr. Cardetti, and Helen Broderick plays Mabel. The characters are vintage stereotypes, including the slightly daffy, but wise older couple.

In 1936, *Swing Time* got modest or mixed reviews. As observed by Frank S. Nugent in the *New York Times* at the movie’s premiere:

There was no riot outside the [Radio City] Music Hall yesterday; the populace was storming the Rockefeller’s cinema citadel for a glimpse of the screen’s nimblest song and dance team. . . . The picture is good, of course. But . . . it is a disappointment. Blame it, primarily, upon the music. Jerome Kern has shadow-boxed with swing.

At the *Herald Tribune*, reviewer Howard Barnes was far kinder and much more enthusiastic. He loved the comedy, praising Astaire’s black-face routine with three shadows especially.

The motion picture industry trade papers also liked the comedy in particular. *Motion Picture Daily* enthused:

The best of the Astaire-Rogers films to date, *Swing Time* is a golden boom at the box office. The film seems much shorter than its 100 minutes because of the featherweight quality achieved by the brilliant balance of comedy, music, dancing, and the plot, none of which is over-emphasized and none slighted.

MODERN TIMES

By the mid-1930s, screen musicals were flourishing in Hollywood and screen comedies were thriving. Charlie Chaplin once again portrayed his familiar character, the Little Tramp, struggling to survive in an industrial society in *Modern Times* (1936). This movie has been applauded by critics as one of the sharpest critiques of the effects of mass production on human beings ever to reach the screen. It’s a serious film, for woven into the typical Chaplinesque humor is a depiction of the dehumanization of the working class caused by the expansion of assembly-line manufacturing and the building of gargantuan factories. With his well-established combination of charm and bad luck, the

Tramp falls into dilemma after dilemma, executing some famous slapstick routines amidst massive machinery, appearing to accidentally end up leading a Communist Party rally, and falling in love with a street waif, played by Chaplin's real-life romantic partner at the time, Paulette Goddard.

Historians of the cinema cite *Modern Times* as yet another example of Chaplin's deft rejection of talking motion pictures in the sense that *Modern Times* uses motion picture sound in clever ways with the intention of satirizing how banal and meaningless talk can really be. Unlike Chaplin's previous formal attempt at keeping the silent film tradition alive after the advent of synchronous sound with *City Lights* (1931), in *Modern Times* Chaplin made innovative use of the movie's sound design by using voices emanating from radios and television sets and similar sound effects. The Tramp, however, is essentially played mute and maintains his silence throughout the movie, except for the gibberish song he performs as a singing waiter.

Still, there were critics who found Chaplin's approach contrived. A number of contemporary reviewers objected to the awkwardness of the written titles in the movie, which they considered extraneous, or even disorienting, to moviegoers who had not commonly seen such titles on-screen in the past eight or nine years. In spite of such quibbling, however, critics generally recognized *Modern Times* as a landmark. As one reviewer wrote: "*Modern Times* is one-hundred percent a one-man picture as is probably possible. Produced, starring, authored, composed (special music) and directed by Chaplin, the pantomimist stands or falls by his two years' work as it unreels." Some critics have applauded *Modern Times* as Chaplin's most successfully sustained burlesque of authority. Other critics, although less convincingly, have described the movie as looking forward to neorealism, a movement that appeared in the Italian cinema at the end of World War II and was committed to making movies about contemporary social issues.

The supreme gag in *Modern Times* is the "feeding machine," devouring all that comes within its grasp, presumably serving as a metaphor for the heartless appetite of unbridled capitalism. No matter how the movie's sociological meanings may be interpreted, there is no doubt that it is humorous cinematic entertainment. For many viewers, the Little Tramp's character is still at his best when he is presented repeatedly as being the innocent victim of accident and circumstance. There is fleeting use, too, of such visual devices as tilted camera angles used to photograph onrushing traffic in a way that conveys a sense of pandemonium in the modern world.

As for interpretation and formal criticism, Charlie Chaplin was applauded widely as being a comic genius *and* a social critic, a combination that has endeared him to audiences for generations. As a director, writer, and screen performer who used the motion picture medium so deftly, and with such posi-

tive popular response, the “modern times” of his movie’s title stand for many as lasting critique of the economic, political, and social conditions of the mid-1930s. Although this abiding praise for *Modern Times* has lasted for generations, there were still other critics in the 1930s who believed that *Modern Times* was a flawed work by a comedian who was trying too hard to be a serious social critic and who, in doing so, was sacrificing the essence of the entertainment value of his humor.

A COMPARISON

These three films from 1936—*Modern Times*, *Swing Time*, and *The Great Ziegfeld*—framed much of what defined moviemaking for Classic Hollywood. The former was the socially trenchant work of Charlie Chaplin, as complete a filmmaker as the American cinema has known. Blended into the movie’s comedy is a commentary about the perils of machinery, the factory age, the workforce, and the tragedies of poverty, near-starvation, and social unrest. Such “engaged” filmmaking appeals at one end of the critical spectrum naturally and reflects the artistic imagination of an individual genius who commits his art to social change. Chaplin’s later feature films rarely have been seen and talked about by serious commentators without reference to their social messages. This has made him and his movies a favorite subject of academic film criticism, as has his enviable position as a creator of movie entertainment who succeeded as an independent moviemaker alongside the major Hollywood studios.

By contrast, *Swing Time* was a movie from the newest of the Hollywood major studios, RKO, and *The Great Ziegfeld* was produced and distributed by MGM, the wealthiest of all the Hollywood studios—and shown first in MGM’s chain of superior, first-run Loew’s movie theaters in major markets across the country. There was no confounding social commentary or criticism with *The Great Ziegfeld*’s celebration of entertainment and the most lavish surface production values found on the silver screen at the time. It was a vehicle for the sort of genre-blending that was apparent in the American cinema even from its earliest years and became increasingly commonplace for Classic Hollywood by the late 1930s. What better studio to combine the individualistic story of a biopic with the genre of the musical than the leading producer of polished musicals and the dominant Hollywood studio of the decade: MGM! And what better studio to feature the virtuosity of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers than RKO, the newest of the vertically integrated major Hollywood studios, founded in 1928, just after the end of the silent picture era, when the Radio Corporation of America amalgamated with Film Booking Offices (a small production studio) and a vaudeville circuit (Keith-Orpheum).

Comparing these three films provides a microcosm for focusing on an inherent tension we recognize about movies. Motion pictures can almost always be interpreted as being about bigger issues in life and society. To the extent that movies portray characters and present situations that mimic life, such interpretation seems unavoidable. Simultaneously, movies are always about other movies; the cinema is a contained system. Movies are less about life, and fictional characters are less about real people, it may be said, than movies are always about other movies and their fictional characters are the creation of a world that no one actually lives in.

WARNER BROS. AND ITS BIOPICS

MGM, although it was the leading Hollywood studio of the mid-1930s, was not the leading studio for the production of biopics. The movie company that claimed to have originated the biopic, and the one that most successfully returned to that genre for successful projects, was Warner Bros. With its fabled tight financial control on production, as well as its successful gangster films and gritty social dramas, as well as a cycle of lively musicals, Warner Bros. had managed to survive the Great Depression. By the mid-1930s, a significant part of Warner's profits came from a string of biopics based on the lives of figures as diverse as the French chemist Louis Pasteur, the Mexican president Benito Juarez, the German bacteriologist Paul Ehrlich, and the British news baron Paul Julius Reuter.

Profitable as all of these movies had been, however, the only Warner Bros. biopic to win a Best Picture Oscar in this era was *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), directed by William Dieterle. A veteran director of the German silent cinema, Dieterle had arrived in Hollywood in 1930 and quickly became a steady and reliable director at Warner Bros. Hal B. Wallis, who had been head of production at the studio since 1933, took on the role of supervisory producer for *Zola* himself, and the movie was based on a screenplay of the novelist's life written by Norman Reilly Raine, Heinz Herald, and Geza Herczeg, who shared the 1937 Oscar for Best Screenwriting. The script treated most of Zola's life in a standard and predictable manner; the story on-screen became enlivened and engrossing only with the conflict that arose around the notorious "Dreyfus Affair," when Zola abruptly rekindled his youthful idealism and civic passion to lead the public defense of a French Army officer unjustly accused of treason because he was Jewish.

In keeping with Wallis's wishes, the movie was scheduled and filmed in reverse chronological sequence, going back from the elderly Emile Zola to the younger, so that the actor playing Zola, Paul Muni, would be able to engage

the more difficult parts of the role earlier in filming, when he presumably had more energy to do so. It also meant that the most difficult makeup work on Muni's character, supervised by Warner Bros. art director Anton Grot, was done earliest in the filming schedule. With cinematography by Tony Gaudio, editing by Warren Low, and a musical score by composer Max Steiner (who had won his first Oscar two years earlier), *The Life of Emile Zola* was emblematic of the professionalism and technical expertise of Classic Hollywood. The studio system reliably turned out polished motion pictures portraying the intense emotional engagements of their characters and, at best, celebrating, as in this case, the high-minded pursuit of integrity and justice.

On the other hand, all biopics invited a specific sort of negative criticism. Although these movies were clearly presented to the public as fictionalized, since they presented the stories of "real lives" on the screen, critics frequently held them to scrutiny for failing to adhere to the details of historical accuracy. In the case of the Warner Bros.'s *Life of Emile Zola*, however, the movie version received distinct praise on just this score. The review published in the *New York Times* at the time minced no words in its enthusiasm:

The Warners, who have achieved the reputation of being Hollywood's foremost triflers with history, paid their debt to truth with *The Life of Emile Zola*. . . . Rich, dignified, honest, and strong, it is at once the finest historical film ever made and the greatest screen biography.

In any biopic, of course, much attention and credit is given to the star, in this case Paul Muni. On contract to Warner Bros. by the late 1930s, Muni had won a Best Actor Oscar the previous year for his performance in the title role of *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (also a Warner Bros. production, and also directed by Dieterle). For his portrayal of Zola, Muni gained an acting award from the New York Film Critics, but no Oscar. The studio connected the two films directly, with Warner Bros. production head Wallis noting that everyone knew Pasteur because they had heard of pasteurized milk and that the popularity of that movie would necessarily benefit the Zola film. Warner's marketing department, moreover, was counting additionally on drawing more intellectuals and sophisticates to its audience because Zola was such a major literary figure, so that it was calculated that there would be additional viewers for this film even beyond the normal crowds who were expected to see biopics. Apparently, this value-added approach to marketing *The Life of Emile Zola* was a sound calculation. Warner Bros. more than doubled its \$700,000 production costs from the earnings on domestic rentals during the film's release to movie theaters in the United States.

In the case of the *Zola* role, Muni brought a special touch to it because he originally had performed at the Yiddish Art Theater in 1924 in a play entitled

Wolves that dealt with the Dreyfus case and Zola's heroic role in it. Muni was especially drawn to roles in these Warner Bros. biopics of the mid- and late 1930s, like *Pasteur* and *Juarez*, as well as *Zola*. He found it a challenge to move from role to role as a different prominent historical figure from one Warner biopic to another. It was this opportunity that anchored his commitment to stay with the studio through the late 1930s. Several years later, Muni severed his relationship with Warner Bros.—on good terms—because he felt the studio no longer was providing him with the other sorts of roles that he wanted. As Wallis put it: “He wanted his films to be about something.”

Hollywood studios had a great investment in their star players, whom they nurtured in their screen careers and whose private lives the studios typically treated with paternalistic caution. The Hollywood star system was based upon contract players being controlled by the studio artistically and cast by studio producers in roles that the executives thought fit for them. By the late 1930s, however, a number of individual stars had carved out niches of independence for themselves within the system. Paul Muni was one of them. Muni's individual importance to the Warner biopics translated into unusual power that accrued personally to his career. As the production of biopics declined in the early 1940s, Muni left Warner Bros. and made a stellar career for himself well into the 1950s, alternating between screen roles for various studios and stage performances in New York City theaters.

THE ANIMATED FEATURE

Yet another aspect of Classic Hollywood was the success of animated films. The earliest animated movies that warranted the attention of mainstream Hollywood came from the Walt Disney Company. Walt and his brother Roy founded their studio in 1923 with the intention of standing apart from the rest of the movie industry by producing “family-oriented” motion pictures, which meant making movies aimed primarily at children. With its emphasis on animation, Disney held a unique place in the Hollywood firmament for years. In fact, Disney was not seen as a real competitor to the other major studios until the early 1980s, when one of its subsidiaries began producing and distributing live-action films for mature audiences.

In the 1930s, Disney had a niche in Hollywood that precluded it being considered a major player in the movie industry. At first, the studio made short, animated cartoons with their familiar characters. In 1937, when it became known that Walt Disney was producing a full-length animated movie with cartoon characters, a great many film critics and motion picture industry

pundits promptly labeled the project “Disney’s Folly.” At the premiere of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in December 1937, however, an opening-night crowd of movie industry insiders could not help but express delight with the classic story of a princess, her evil stepmother, and the seven little men who protected her. This expensive and risky venture took Disney and his staff five years to produce, and by the time it was finished, *Snow White* had cost \$1,500,000—three times its original budget. Such expenses, however, are not called runaway madness when the box office earnings from a movie show substantial profits; *Snow White*’s success shifted the Disney name to a new position in the motion picture industry.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs required techniques, and the tools to make them, that no one in motion pictures had tried before. All Disney’s early short cartoons had been produced lacking depth of field, meaning that as the camera moved closer to any character, the character grew larger but so did the background. To solve this challenge, Disney and his technicians, working on *Snow White*, perfected what they called a “multi-plane camera” that could shoot several layers of animation at once in order to give the picture an illusion of depth. Disney’s animators also studied film footage of actors performing the motions they wanted their animated characters to imitate, creating a technique called “rotoscoping” that helped to develop animated characters whose motions and movements actually resembled those of living human beings. The same was done for animal characters in Disney’s animated movies; their movements were modeled on those of actual animals in nature. Disney’s original animators included Joe Grant and Frank Thomas, who were as vital as Disney himself to the production of *Snow White* and in creating this entirely new genre: the animated feature.

Walt Disney brought an acute sense of sound to his productions, as well. Once synchronous sound had come to motion pictures, Disney insisted that songs in a soundtrack always must contribute to either character or plot development, and he paid great personal attention to music and lyrics. Unlike earlier musical films, modeled on Broadway stage shows in which song-and-dance numbers occurred at regular intervals, intruding on the story rather than necessarily supporting it, each song in *Snow White* filled specific storytelling goals or contributed to character development. “Some Day My Prince Will Come,” “Heigh Ho,” and other songs from the *Snow White* score enhanced the movie’s story and, at the same time, became popular hits. Naturally, this close linking of music and lyrics found its critics. Those who objected to Disney’s technique for selecting music and lyrics—as he did for *Snow White*, which critics considered too literal—coined the term “Mickey Mousing.” From then on, “Mickey Mousing” became widely used in Hollywood as a derogatory term to refer to any use of sound in the movies that was considered

too pointedly precise, predictable, and literal. Vital to the sound design of this movie was the voice of Snow White, as performed by Adriana Caselotti.

With *Snow White*, Disney and his staff had created an original piece of work that many film historians argue has never been surpassed. In 1987, on the fiftieth anniversary of the movie's premiere, Snow White was still the only animated character with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Praise for the technical and the aesthetic achievements of the project were extensive. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences even honored Disney with a special award in 1938: a statuette Oscar and seven miniature statuettes with it.

An animated feature was considered an extraordinarily high risk in 1937, and neither the will nor the commitment needed by the Disneys to complete it can be overestimated. Successful cinema frequently has been a result of timely banking, and indeed, only a last-minute loan to Walt Disney and his business partner, his brother Roy, from the Bank of America saved the production. But in this case, the risk once taken was bountifully rewarded. The estimated gross earnings for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in the first year of its release were ten times the cost of its production. Moreover, the power of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* at the box office has been sustained over decades. The basic concept for the movie provided a model for tie-ins and spin-offs that would find some resonance in Classic Hollywood, but only later would become definitive of the modern Hollywood high-concept feature after the mid-1970s (see part III). Considered a highly risky gamble when the movie was in production in the mid-1930s, by the fiftieth anniversary of its 1937 premiere *Snow White's* earnings exceeded \$330 million.

BRINGING UP BABY AND YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

Featuring the song "I Can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby," as sung to a young leopard, the 1938 screwball comedy *Bringing Up Baby* stands as a gem of fast-paced wit and whimsy on-screen. Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn's combined display of sheer verbal velocity is emblematic of a dialogue-packed screenplay that unfolds at a breakneck pace. The movie's dialogue track could stand alone as a model of clipped, staccato speech delivery that was emblematic of Classic Hollywood diction and pacing from the mid-1930s until after World War II.

Hepburn plays an irresponsible and irrepressible heiress who manages to unearth the hitherto deeply hidden funny bone in a dour paleontologist played by Grant. Their director, Howard Hawks, has been cited repeatedly by critics for having had the capacity to bring out Grant's talent for learning how to project his feelings of absurdity through his character, creating an entire

comedic style out of those characters' feelings of silliness. Hepburn, however, claimed that it was Grant, more than Hawks, who taught her that "the more depressed I looked when I went into a pratfall, the more the audience would laugh." Hawks, on the other hand, recalled that it was actually a little-known contract comic player at the studio named Walter Catlett, cast in the role of the constable in the movie, who stood in for Hepburn in a rehearsal with Grant, that really demonstrated to her how to rein in her performance to achieve its greatest comic effect.

In this "screwiest of the screwball comedies," as one critic called it, the paleontologist's dinosaur bone is snatched by Asta, the pesky terrier of Susan Vance (Hepburn), but the "baby" of the movie's title who is the real source of tension between them is Nissa, Susan's not-so-tame pet leopard. The couple's chance meeting on a golf course leads Susan to target Dr. David Huxley (Grant) for a romantic conquest, and she persuades him to help her deliver the pet leopard to her aunt in order to get him away from the woman to whom he is engaged to be married.

An RKO production, *Bringing Up Baby* had a different preservation and survival history than many of the other movies of the studio era that are considered classics, since RKO's control over its release prints sent around to movie theaters—and sometimes even over the original negative prints of its movies—was notoriously lax. Questions still arise about the exact version of *Bringing Up Baby* that was actually released to theaters and circulated in 1938.

You Can't Take It with You, the Academy Award-winning Best Picture of 1938, was yet another Frank Capra–Robert Riskin collaboration, based on a stage play written by the well-known team of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart that was still running on Broadway when the picture opened in movie theaters. Columbia Pictures paid \$200,000 for rights to adapt the stage play, which had won a Pulitzer Prize in drama for 1936/37. Popular as the stage play was, though, many contemporary critics argued that in spite of its eccentric and engaging characters the story was still weak, and they questioned Columbia's investment for the rights to make it into a movie.

In the face of this second-guessing and the industry skepticism that the project could succeed as a movie, *You Can't Take It with You* proved to be a triumph. As the review in *Time* pointed out, Riskin's screenplay provided for a wonderfully effective translation of the material from the stage to the screen, because "the [movie's] characters are human beings drawn on a heroic scale, and [because] there is not merely plot for its own sake but rather to provide such great dramatic conflict." It was a buoyant movie meant to cheer up audiences and apparently designed to encourage viewers who took the movie to heart to draw from it a measure of encouragement to live their lives as they saw fit.

Penny Sycamore, played by Spring Byington, is an eccentric woman who writes plays because sometime long ago someone had mistakenly delivered a typewriter to the family home. Grandpa Vanderhof (Lionel Barrymore) had encouraged her in such idiosyncrasies, agreeing that playwriting was quite a logical and natural use of any typewriter. Meanwhile, the antics of the family's other daughter, Alice Sycamore, played by Jean Arthur, has driven her would-be suitor, who is also her boss, Tony Kirby (Jimmy Stewart), into a dizzying romantic swoon.

Several critics attributed the success of the movie as coming from the on-screen chemistry and comic dynamic between Arthur's Alice and Stewart's Tony. To say that there is on-screen chemistry between two characters, however, is clichéd shorthand for saying that a relationship between characters on-screen "works" dramatically or as comedy, without offering further illumination as to *how* this happens. As the contemporary review in *Time* in 1938 noted, "Wholly successful motion pictures are the consequence of a collaboration too complex for analysis." The analysis of screen performance, and the chemistry sometimes achieved by it, is especially elusive. Are we talking about likable characters, or believable ones? Or is screen chemistry found in characters with whom audiences can empathize, even if they are not necessarily so believable or likable?

In its time, the movie's themes were interpreted as populist for endorsing a freedom of expression and attacking greed and materialism. Decades later, as the American populist values of the 1930s embodied in *You Can't Take It with You* came to be fodder for cultural critics, especially after the late 1960s, such sentiments frequently were judged to be trite, preachy, and naïvely optimistic. Nonetheless, movies based on Robert Riskin screenplays, directed by Frank Capra, and produced and distributed by Columbia Pictures in the mid- and late 1930s provided one form of accomplished moviemaking that spoke to strong currents in American popular culture. These were highly crafted stories with compelling dramatic tensions that gave way to moments of resolution. The characters in these movies, although idealized, were built out of traits that much of mainstream American culture believed in and valued on the eve of World War II. These movies celebrated common notions in the culture that applauded virtues of integrity and moral fiber found in everyday Joes and Janes all across the United States, who worked hard, played fair, and held a concern for doing what they believed to be right.

SUMMARY

In the late 1930s, the supremacy of MGM as Hollywood's leading studio was unchallenged. The unit production management system crafted by Irving

Thalberg facilitated the studio's effective transition of prime properties into profitable movies. The studio's boss, Arthur B. Mayer, demanded a conservative approach to business practices and promoted MGM as having Hollywood's most glamorous screen stars and most lavish productions.

Despite these qualities that defined MGM, other studios still were able to make their distinctive marks on Hollywood. Warner Bros. mastered the genre of biopics, tackling complex and inspiring stories of individuals who influenced science, politics, and culture. Walt and Roy Disney's company took its place alongside the other Hollywood majors by establishing the animated feature film as a distinct art form. Charlie Chaplin continued to forge a unique position for his screen comedies, which, by the late 1930s, were more direct in their social commentary than ever before. RKO stabilized its position in the motion picture industry during the period, while the talents of the director Frank Capra and the screenwriter Robert Riskin were enough to place Columbia Pictures right alongside the other major studios. In the late 1930s, Classic Hollywood was coming together as a diverse and distinctive entertainment center.

Banner Years

For Columbia Pictures' 1939 movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, director Frank Capra sought to present on screen a measure of visual authenticity by taking his cast and crew to Washington, D.C., to film the scenes in which Jimmy Stewart's character, Jefferson Smith, discovers the nation's capital through its landmarks. Later, Stewart himself referred to these sequences as "absolute realism." Stewart's aesthetic judgment was based on the fact that these sequences of his character riding on a bus through the city were shot on location in Washington, D.C., rather than the typical Hollywood practice, which would have placed a stationary bus on a soundstage in front of projected footage of Washington, D.C. *Realism*, however, is one of the more slippery words in aesthetic usage, easily confused with the word *reality*. Whereas the aesthetic of realism is an artistic contrivance, reality is any observable phenomenon of life. As the dramatic theorist Richard Scheckner reminds us, thinking about a character in a movie as if he or she were a real person is like trying to have a picnic on a landscape painting.

Indeed, many of the contemporary responses to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* seemed confused about the occasional elements of aesthetic realism in the movie and the reality of representative institutions in the nation's capital. In the movie, when a U.S. senator from a western state dies, that state's governor—ostensibly influenced by his own children—appoints an eager Boy Scout leader, filled with patriotic passion, to fill the remainder of the deceased senator's term. Jean Arthur plays a seasoned secretary and Washington insider who, like much of D.C., is at first baffled by the idealistic Jefferson Smith. In time, she falls in love with him as he filibusters against a scheme to designate land in his state for a dam project. He wants that land reserved for a summer

camp where boys from all across America would learn about the Constitution of the United States and American government.

While movie critics generally liked the film, apparently most members of the U.S. Senate did not. Democratic Senate leader (later, U.S. vice president) Alben Barkley, who had long been considered a legislative friend of the motion picture industry, was described in newspaper accounts as getting furious on the floor of the Senate chamber about the movie, arguing that “people in Podunk and Squeedunk don’t realize the Senate isn’t like that.” The movie’s portrayal of the legislative body depicts longtime Senate members as cynical and corrupted by special interests, but Capra defended himself by saying that the film was intended to “idealize American democracy, not to attack it.” Nonetheless, some of Capra’s most bitter critics argued that enemies of the United States, from Berlin (Nazi Germany) to Rome (Fascist Italy) and on to Moscow (Soviet Russia), would surely take delight in the negative caricatures of the upper house of the national legislature and its members. Given all this uproar around a fiction film, one columnist at the *New York Times* fired off a commentary saying that American democracy seemed most endangered by the prospect of losing its sense of humor.

In 1939, the American Communist Party’s newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, published a very positive review of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* written by Howard Rushmore, who took the movie seriously and found it thoroughly praiseworthy. He concluded his article by elaborating on the view that a Hollywood movie industry that could produce mainstream hits like the Warner Bros. biopic *Juarez* as well as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* reflected a cultural institution in which someone on the far left politically should not lose faith. Later, during the early years of the Cold War, an article in *Variety* in 1950 reported that *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* was being exploited in Moscow screenings by the Soviet regime as anti-American propaganda. As recently as 2003, debate over *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* filled the pages of the *Los Angeles Business Journal*, with columnist Andrew Ferguson complaining that, while Capra saw the film as a hymn to the ideas of democracy, “in reality it is no such thing. Like nearly all depictions of Washington in feature films, *Mr. Smith* actually seethes with impatience and contempt for the raw material of democracy: debate, deal-making, log-rolling, and compromise.”

Such readings of any movie take a fictional work and extrapolate from it by drawing broad inferences about what it stands for and means. No fiction movie goes beyond oblique references to reality. We can document that American moviegoers at the end of the 1930s responded well to the movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* at the box office, but we cannot say just how each of those thousands of moviegoers interpreted this fictional story of the power of one person to make a difference in society. Without documentation that

demonstrates clear links between a movie and changes in politics or political behavior, we always are left to speculate on how audience members connected such motion picture depictions to political reality, if at all. Still, although the movie was controversial at the time because of its depictions of Washington politics, in 1939 the industry trade journal *Boxoffice* reported that not a single exhibitor in the United States canceled an order for the movie.

MONUMENT VALLEY TO YORKSHIRE'S MOORS

Another movie from 1939 that has been recognized for its significant achievements is *Stagecoach*.

With the Apaches on the warpath, the stage from Tonto, New Mexico, sets out on the perilous trek west to Lordsburg, Arizona, carrying a curious mixture of passengers: Doc Boone (Thomas Mitchell), a drunkard long ago ousted from the medical profession; Dallas (Claire Trevor), a woman of ill repute; the Ringo Kid (John Wayne); Mrs. Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt), a blossom of the Old South who is nine months pregnant and en route to meet her husband, who is a cavalry officer; Hatfield, a gambler (John Carradine); a jittery whiskey salesman named Mr. Samuel Peacock (Donald Meek); and Henry Gatewood (Berton Churchill), a local banker who nervously clutches a small, black valise. This collection of characters, under the direction of John Ford, is often cited for beginning the “modern movie western.”

The ingredients for the modern western are a group of misfits set into a location where there is a constant struggle between the law, chaos, and intolerance. *Stagecoach* utilizes standard story lines and situations of the Hollywood western, such as the impending threat of an Indian attack. Moreover, its array of characters became standard types, often found on-screen in westerns made after it: the outlaw hero, the honest officer of the law, the crooked banker, the good-hearted prostitute. As critic Pauline Kael, writing in the *New Republic* in the summer of 1967, observed: “Just about every good Western made since 1939 has imitated *Stagecoach* or has learned something from it.”

Arizona’s Monument Valley provides much of the backdrop, and the movie’s director of photography, Bert Glennon, made the most of it. His cinematography celebrates the landscape and vistas superbly. Famed Hollywood stuntman Yakima Canutt was featured in a rip-roaring chase scene, and under the supervision of Boris Morros, the musical score for *Stagecoach* was assembled from the “found music” of seventeen American folk songs. Cobbled together as it was with so many of the elements of Americana, *Stagecoach* may be considered the classic John Ford ensemble piece, the pinnacle of his career as a

director, and the definitive work of the western as a movie genre. Produced independently by Walter Wanger and distributed by United Artists, it is a movie with hardly a false step or a single moment wasted. The final contribution of *Stagecoach* to Hollywood history was that it firmly established John Wayne as a star.

Yet another movie of 1939, of an entirely different kind that has been widely recognized as distinctive is *Wuthering Heights*, for which Gregg Toland won an Oscar for his stunning black-and-white cinematography. A Samuel Goldwyn production, directed by William Wyler, with James Basevi as the film's art director, it was released through United Artists. A 1939 article in *Variety*, aimed at exhibitors and other motion picture industry insiders, commented: "*Wuthering Heights* will have to depend on class audiences. Its general somberness and psychological tragedy is too heavy for general audiences." Wyler's direction was slow and ostensibly targeted women, who were thought by Hollywood producers to be more naturally drawn to this kind of melodrama.

Heathcliff (Laurence Olivier), a homeless gypsy boy, is taken from the streets of Liverpool and into a proper English home, where he grows up. The daughter of the household, Cathy (Merle Oberon), develops an infatuation for him. As she grows older, however, Cathy desires the fine life of gaiety and expensive clothes and realizes that someone of Heathcliff's social background is unlikely to ever provide such a life for her. Edgar Linton (David Niven), who has money and position, falls in love with Cathy, and they marry. In the meantime, Heathcliff goes to America, returns with a fortune, and with his wealth buys the prestigious country estate of Wuthering Heights. Linton's younger sister, Isabella (Geraldine Fitzgerald), falls in love with Heathcliff, who marries her to spite Cathy and to show his contempt toward her over her marriage to Linton. On her deathbed, Cathy tells Heathcliff that she has always loved him, thus bringing this relentless story of unfulfilled love and irony to its sad close.

At the time of *Wuthering Heights*' release, the *New York Post*'s critic Archer Winsten applauded its "deeply imaginative atmospheric power." He maintained that the screen adaptation actually sharpened the focus of the story and was superior to the Emily Brontë novel on which the movie was based. "To those who object that it has been simplified," he wrote of the screenplay by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, "the gain in power can be cited." As the *New York Times* reviewer wrote: "Goldwyn at his best, and better still, Emily Brontë at hers, draws the viewer immediately into a romantic, haunted vision of the Yorkshire moors." There was wide critical praise for the cinematic telling of this grim story. "This version captures the melancholia of the novel on which it is based," wrote Howard Barnes in the *New York Herald Tribune*, pointing out that the movie was remarkably successful in conjuring up the

bleak English countryside of a century ago, and that it seldom faltered emotionally because of the fine performances of the actors. At the time of its first showing on television in 1966, an article in *Variety* noted that it remained a classic romantic drama that had not aged.

Like so many of the great creative talents of the Hollywood studio era, the director of *Wuthering Heights*, William Wyler, had worked his way up at one studio. Arriving at Universal in 1922 as a young man of nineteen, Wyler began working at the studio on a swing gang and sweeping the sets at night. By the age of twenty-three, he had directed his first silent western, and he went on to direct thirty-two more silent movies before entering sound production. In all, Wyler-directed movies won 38 Oscars out of 127 nominations in various categories.

Wuthering Heights was pure Classic Hollywood, being the collaborative work of a producer with a strong professional sense of showmanship and a seasoned and versatile director who knew the system and had risen through the ranks by demonstrating his abilities to handle all types of film, using material adapted from a venerated British novel. This movie was not a studio project, however. Although the Goldwyn name officially remained a part of MGM, Samuel Goldwyn had never been part of the business merger that formed the great studio in 1924. Going it alone as a moviemaker, Goldwyn developed a reputation for being able to bring talented artists and craftsmen together. He worked especially well with director Wyler, not only on *Wuthering Heights* but also on another highly successful collaboration in 1946, *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

SLOW-BURNING AND LONG-BURNING METEORS

In Hollywood, 1939 was a bumper year for significant screen achievements, and the successful productions of that year were varied. These movies represented a range of genres and came from a wide variety of producers. Several of them were productions from Hollywood's small but distinguished coterie of independent producers, such as Walter Wanger (*Stagecoach*) and Samuel Goldwyn (*Wuthering Heights*). One of them, by contrast, came from the wealthiest and most prominent company of the studio era, MGM. It brought to the screen a superlative example of a fantasy film for audiences of all ages.

The Wizard of Oz was produced for the studio by Mervyn LeRoy and directed by Victor Fleming (who earned the final director's credit on the movie only after several other directors had labored on it). *The Wizard of Oz* was based on the popular novels of L. Frank Baum from the early 1900s. Baum,

in fact, had come up with the original idea to adapt to the screen several of the Oz stories (there were fourteen volumes in the series), actually forming his own movie production company in 1914. However, Baum's company produced no actual movies, and it was left to the ingenious Hollywood independent producer Goldwyn—who acquired the rights to the Oz books as movie properties in 1932 for \$40,000—to actually initiate development of the project for the screen. However, the staggering costs of production would eventually force him to sell his rights to a screen adaptation of the material to MGM.

After several others had failed before him, director Fleming succeeded in finally bringing the Oz project together, arranging and arraying the talents available to him in order to finish a feature movie in which forty of its one hundred minutes are devoted to songs. The casting is the strongest, and most memorable, single element of the movie: Frank Morgan as the Wizard and Jack Haley as the Tin Man were superlative choices. So were Bert Lahr for the Cowardly Lion and Ray Bolger as the Scarecrow. As Dorothy, Judy Garland turned out to be wistful and spunky, but always warmhearted and convincing even though she bore scant physical resemblance to the character drawn by illustrator W. W. Denslow in the original books. The ways in which Dorothy's relationships with her three companions play out on the screen make them genuinely tender rather than overly romanticized or maudlin.

When MGM finished the movie and released it, contemporary critical reception was mixed. Only later did *The Wizard of Oz* become a venerated title in cinema history. While there was nearly universal praise for the movie's production values in 1939, many critics maintained that the only person really convinced of the fantasy in the movie is the main character Dorothy herself. The 1939 review published in the *New Yorker* summed up the most negative of critiques at the time: "No imagination, or good taste, or ingenuity, a real 'stinkeroo.'" The movie earned just two Oscars from the Hollywood establishment: Best Musical Score for Herbert Stothard and Best Song for "Over the Rainbow."

First shown on television in the United States in 1976, however, *The Wizard of Oz* subsequently emerged from the shadows of film history. By the end of the twentieth century, few vintage films were perceived to have aged as gracefully as *The Wizard of Oz*. Likely the most famous of musical fantasies for the screen, it practically defines that genre, and its popularity continues from generation to generation with both children and adults alike. By a number of estimates, through the end of the twentieth century *The Wizard of Oz* was the most watched movie in history.

Although *The Wizard of Oz* actually cost MGM more than \$4 million to produce, the studio listed its production cost at just under \$3 million. Still, it was not until after its re-release in 1948 that the picture actually appeared

on the studio's ledgers as turning a profit on the basis of even a \$3 million investment. MGM, by the way, was not paying for production costs that were inflated by expenditures for pioneering visual effects: the plot-triggering tornado, for example, was achieved by photographing a wet white sock twirling over a toy farmhouse. The special effects were relatively primitive, but that probably helped make them seem whimsical rather than frightening. If it was not expensive visual effects that account for *The Wizard of Oz's* later critical acclaim, it must have been the screenplay by Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf that worked so well. As critic Eddie Cockrell wrote in the late 1990s in the American Film Institute's notes to the movie: "*The Wizard of Oz* is like the animated features that Disney does; it'll never be dated."

Although it was "rediscovered" by critics and audiences in the late 1970s and the original movie became stunningly popular, it did not prove successful as a remake. A sequel with an all-black cast, *The Wiz*, was based on a hit 1978 Broadway stage production, but in spite of its \$34 million production budget and a popular singer, thirty-four-year-old Diana Ross, as the teenage Dorothy, it failed entirely at movie theater box offices.

The Academy's choice for Best Picture of the year 1939, however, was none of the great films already mentioned. The award went to *Gone with the Wind*, which might have been called a "mega-blockbuster" had the term existed in 1939. It was very much a producer's film, with a quirky love story that many dismissed as implausible. At three hours and forty minutes, it was the longest feature film released by Hollywood up until that time. Its length seemed to underscore the complex and lumbering process of the movie's actual production. *Gone with the Wind* used the talents of five directors, with Victor Fleming earning the final credit; eighteen screenwriters, with Sydney Howard recognized as primary; a cast of fifty-nine major characters; and more than 2,400 extras. With a budget of \$4 million, this was a lavish and polished production that was financed outside the major Hollywood studios by independent producer David O. Selznick.

Selznick's father had been an early motion picture magnate, his brother was a Hollywood producer and talent agent, and his father-in-law was a vice president at MGM. Selznick himself had held important positions at both RKO and MGM before he established his own company in 1936. *Gone with the Wind* was a massive undertaking that reflected the collaborative nature of the art at its finest. It displayed producer Selznick as a genius, not only for finding suitable properties for adaptation to the screen and steering their making but also, in this case, for rewriting much of the final script and even directing some of the scenes himself.

Margaret Mitchell's novel, on which the movie was based, had won a Pulitzer Prize, and the book had asserted its claim on the popular imagination

of American readers, selling 50,000 copies on the first day of its publication in 1936. It was the stuff of which successful Hollywood movies of the first rank are made. Nonetheless, successful adaptation of such material to the screen is never guaranteed.

From the moment of its initial release, however, the movie's popularity was clear. In the first year of its theatrical run, *Gone with the Wind* grossed rental earnings in excess of \$14 million. For the next two decades, the film was re-released every seven years, and audiences poured into movie theaters to see it each time. Eventually, however, film critics and historians began to concentrate more on the movie's "ideological" weaknesses, in part because it was perceived as sexist (Scarlett O'Hara's submissive smile after she is essentially raped by her husband), as romanticizing the Old South (pushing the Civil War into a backdrop and emphasizing the graceful, elegant, and supposedly honorable Southern culture), and as racist (for its depiction of African Americans and race relations).

It is with regard to portrayals of race and race relations that *Gone with the Wind* is most difficult to analyze beyond the time of its release. Mitchell, author of the novel, personally provided funding for a great number of African Americans to study for professions at Atlanta's Morehouse University. The Hollywood establishment honored African-American actress Hattie McDaniel with a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her role as "Mammy," although she had to sit in the back of the auditorium during the awards ceremony. The movie was indicative of the ambivalence and complexity of race and race relations in the United States. Selznick himself trimmed the script's references to the Ku Klux Klan. In a private memo written at the time to a business associate named John Wharton, Selznick articulated: "I like to think of myself as being a liberal." *Gone with the Wind* reflected the period when it was made more than influenced it, which is the case with nearly all fiction movies.

Often depicted as obsessively narrow and puritanical, it was Joseph Breen's Production Code Administration Office that demanded the deletion of all racial epithets or negative terms for blacks in *Gone with the Wind*. Even on this demand, the Production Code Office finally compromised. The final screenplay used for filming omitted the word *nigger*, although *darkie* and *inferior* were allowed. As film historian Thomas Cripps has pointed out, neither African-American groups nor individuals have ever spoken in unison with regard to their impressions of *Gone with the Wind*. Walter White, the secretary of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) provided a letter of endorsement of the movie to Selznick International in 1939 for its use in publicizing the movie. Reflecting attitudes and race relations in the South at the time, the choir of the famed Ebenezer Baptist Church, which later provided a pulpit for civil rights leader Rev. Martin

Luther King in the late 1950s and early 1960s, performed at the whites-only Junior League Ball for the movie's 1939 premiere in Atlanta.

Fictional portrayals provide suggestions for our understanding of them, but it is an oblique and unrewarding challenge to attempt to draw direct information from them as historical evidence of actual situations or attitudes. A great many fiction films evoke lively speculation as to their social significance, influence, or political importance, but most of them defy clear documentation in that regard. What is direct in any movie is what is on the screen, so that in *Gone with the Wind* the viewer always has the high-gloss Technicolor cinematography of Ernest Heller, Ray Rennahan, and Wilfrid M. Cline and the sets and designs of William Cameron Menzies—whose ambitious work and massive undertaking so impressed Selznick that for the first time in Hollywood history Menzies was given the screen credit of “production designer.” The editing by Hal C. Kern and James E. Newcom followed guidelines for cutting a feature in Classic Hollywood style, emphasizing continuity in the storytelling and meriting high regard because the final version of the movie had to hold to its coherence for nearly four hours. The production process was unusual, to say the least. As we know from memoirs such as actress Olivia DeHaviland's, on some shooting days, scenes were sometimes directed by Sam Wood in the morning, while in the afternoon the director might be George Cukor or Victor Fleming or even David O. Selznick himself. The editors' challenge was significant.

HITCHCOCK ARRIVES IN HOLLYWOOD

The director of the Academy's selection as Best Picture for 1940, *Rebecca*, Alfred Hitchcock had come to Los Angeles recently from his native England at the invitation of David O. Selznick. Like any number of established filmmakers from abroad who immigrated to Hollywood, Hitchcock made an immediate success of his first opportunity to direct.

Hitchcock's first project for the American screen was the adaptation of *Rebecca*, a well-known novel by Daphne du Maurier, which contained decidedly elusive quirks and themes that did not necessarily predict the movie's box office success. It was again a project of Selznick International, meaning that for two years in a row during the nearly absolute prominence of the major studios in the American cinema, the motion picture industry's establishment picked a Best Picture that was not produced by one of the major studios.

There was a fundamental problem that confronted anyone who tried to adapt this particular novel to the screen. The 1940 movie version of *Rebecca*,

after all, challenges the visual medium of the motion picture at its very core, since the movie must be filled with the presence of its title character who never physically appears. Rebecca is the deceased wife of the brooding and mysterious Max de Winter (Laurence Olivier). His second wife (Joan Fontaine), the young former paid companion to the awesomely snobbish Florence Bates, finds her marriage to Max—and her life at the de Winter family’s ancestral estate—dominated by the continuing pervasive presence of the late Rebecca.

Rebecca is a superbly crafted movie with cinematography by George Barnes that has been called “stunningly sinister.” It is structured so that what begins as a ghost story evolves into a murder mystery and finally transforms itself into a psychological thriller. Olivier’s character, Max, has a growing love-hate relationship with his dead wife, to whom both he and Rebecca’s former maid, Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson), have become obsessively attached.

This popular novel was arrestingly effective in its literary form, telling an eerie, chilling story. Hitchcock, whose triumphs in Britain included two powerful mystery films, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes*, was working in the same genre with *Rebecca*. But with *Rebecca*, the director started his legendary Hollywood career by establishing himself as a particularly ingenious and meticulous master who paid attention to influencing the details of his movies, even while working in the midst of the studio system. Hitchcock instructed cinematographer Barnes to light nearly all the incisive scenes in the movie so as to throw dark shadows over all the characters and the sets. The collaboration between Hitchcock and Barnes produced a distinctive “look” for *Rebecca* that was sustained throughout the movie, and that look contributed effectively to the film’s sense of social strife, marital tension, betrayal, and humiliation. The dark shadows functioned here in ways that were both visual and thematic.

In order to get the performance that he wanted from the twenty-two-year-old Fontaine (who had just returned from her honeymoon with husband Brian Aherne to start the filming), Hitchcock repeatedly undermined her emotionally throughout the production. Hitchcock’s ostensible reason for this was to help her underscore the emotional fragility of her character and her feelings of inadequacy as de Winter’s second wife. Fontaine has claimed in her book *No Bed of Roses* that Hitchcock “would constantly tell me that no one thought I was any good except myself and that nobody really liked me. . . . He seemed to relish the cast not liking one another, actor for actor, by the end of the film.” It is an anecdote that contributes to the director’s legend as a grueling taskmaster who would resort even to psychological intimidation to get the performance he wanted from an actor, especially from one of his female leads.

While motion picture production is always collaborative, it is incorrect to assume that agreeable personal relationships between the collaborators are

necessary for a successful film. Although cinema history provides evidence of many wonderful friendships that grew out of working together on movies, sometimes lasting a lifetime, there are also many instances in Hollywood history of close creative collaboration between people who brought great work to the screen but did not like each other. On *Rebecca*, producer Selznick and director Hitchcock proved none too fond of each other.

Selznick had invited Hitchcock to the United States, but nonetheless characterized him as “not a man to go camping with.” Thirty years after *Rebecca* was made, Hitchcock peevishly mentioned a memo from Selznick that Hitchcock claimed he was still reading, snidely referencing Selznick’s famed reputation for writing long and rambling notes with suggestions to the production team during filming. It was widely reported that, during production on *Rebecca*, Hitchcock actually closed the set to Selznick. Nevertheless, years later, Selznick maintained that Hitchcock was the only director he would trust wholeheartedly with a movie. When Hitchcock was told of that comment, he remarked that *Rebecca* “was not a Hitchcock picture. It was a Selznick picture.”

Rebecca was Hitchcock’s first American movie, and the only one of the nearly thirty features that he directed in the United States ever to earn him a Best Picture Oscar. It was also his only work for Selznick.

Even though Selznick was an independent producer, the experience provided Hitchcock a full exposure to the Hollywood system. Since the movie was released to theaters through one of the major Hollywood companies, United Artists, it required a seal of approval from the Production Code Administration. To get it, the script that Hitchcock worked on with the screenwriters, Robert E. Sherwood and Joan Harrison, had to be altered to change the ending because the Production Code Administration’s chief, Joseph Breen, argued that the novel’s conclusion condoned murder. Selznick didn’t necessarily agree personally with the changes that wound up in the script, and he later charged that Hitchcock had “vulgarized” the novel in this movie version by scrapping the more thorough development of characters for the sake of wit. In addition, the cast was quite different from what Selznick originally had projected; he had conceived of the movie as an ideal vehicle for Carole Lombard and Ronald Colman in the leading roles.

UPPER-CRUST FARCE MEETS SCREWBALL COMEDY

In contrast to *Rebecca*, *The Philadelphia Story*, also released in 1940, plays on-screen as one of the most unabashedly enjoyable high-society frolics in cinema history. By all accounts, the creative work on it was a sheer delight. A careful

viewing of the movie is difficult to align with the quasi-sociological interpretation that Hollywood's upper-crust farces merely provided less-affluent audience members with a chance to transport themselves into a glossy world of leisure. Originally, both the play on which it was based and the movie itself were conceived as projects to rehabilitate Katharine Hepburn's image, which was widely considered "haughty and snooty." Hepburn had been turned down the year before for the lead role in *Gone with the Wind* because the producer, David O. Selznick, said that he didn't think she was capable of exuding the sexuality needed for the role of Scarlett O'Hara. Not long thereafter, a column appearing in the industry's leading trade journal, *Variety*, labeled Hepburn "box office poison." Nonetheless, Hepburn was able to take a play that was written for her specifically and sell the screen rights to it, along with her acting services, to MGM for a quarter of a million dollars.

As Tracy Lord, Hepburn is a decidedly virtuous and sympathetic rich girl who has divorced her heavy-drinking husband, C. K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant), and plans to marry a proper captain of industry, George Kittredge (John Howard). Jimmy Stewart plays a reporter for a tabloid scandal sheet who convinces her to loosen up, accept human imperfections, and switch her romantic allegiance back to Dexter. The movie's director was veteran studio pro George Cukor, and the screenplay was written by Donald Ogden Stewart based on the stage play by Philip Barry.

As Stewart's character in the movie, Macauley Connor, observes through an early morning haze of champagne: "The prettiest sight in this fine pretty world is the privileged class enjoying its privileges." In Classic Hollywood comedy style, the film is a talkfest through which Cukor ably directs his charges. The shenanigans in *The Philadelphia Story* are paced in a lively way, and the understated delivery of Grant shines throughout. Although the stage play was intended to revive Hepburn's career, it was Stewart's performance that actually stood out. He won the only Best Actor Oscar of his distinguished career for a performance that transcended all expectations of him. Moreover, the script that Hepburn originally had brought to the studio to boost her career came to be considered by the studio as a highly valuable property; just over a decade and a half later, in 1956, MGM remade *The Philadelphia Story* as a musical entitled *High Society*, starring Grace Kelly, Bing Crosby, and Frank Sinatra.

SOCIAL CRITICISM ON-SCREEN

A serious drama with a strong sense of social conscience that graced America's movie screens in 1940 was an adaptation from a John Steinbeck novel. Directed by John Ford, *The Grapes of Wrath* was a pet project for Darryl F.

Zanuck, then the production chief at Twentieth Century-Fox. Just three months after Steinbeck's novel was published in 1939, Zanuck had purchased the movie rights to it for \$75,000 and commissioned Hollywood writer-producer Nunnally Johnson (whose screen credits included *Kid Millions*, *Jesse James*, and *The Road to Glory*) to write the screenplay. Zanuck then recruited Henry Fonda to play the lead role of Tom Joad. Production began at the end of September 1939, with the legendary cinematographer Gregg Toland "borrowed" from his regular employer, independent producer Sam Goldwyn, as the movie's director of photography. *The Grapes of Wrath* had a solid, though hardly lavish, production budget of \$750,000.

Unlike the vast number of Hollywood screenwriters for whom collaboration on a script had become commonplace, Johnson wrote most of his scripts alone, and he held to that working pattern on *The Grapes of Wrath*. Taking Steinbeck's story of the migration of families from the Dust Bowl of Oklahoma to California during the early years of the Great Depression, the screenplay found its strongest emotions in portraying the struggles of the relocated "Okies" to deal with the hostility of the locals toward them. *The Grapes of Wrath* is a movie about plain folk who are down on their luck and their efforts to scratch their way back toward dignity. The movie's material was powerful in the sense of being socially charged and portraying struggles against prejudice and injustice.

Even more than the riveting performances by Fonda, John Carradine, and Jane Darwell, the simplicity and plainness of the Okies, and their struggles to survive, were captured lyrically by Toland's cinematography. Toland, who died of a heart attack in 1948 at the age of forty-four, distinguished himself with his work on *The Grapes of Wrath*. His complex compositions and masterful deep focus techniques for this film drew attention to the movie's cinematography, much as Toland's work on *Citizen Kane* the following year would gain similar recognition and praise.

Still, *The Grapes of Wrath* is very much a producer's movie in the best sense of the term, right down to the decision by Zanuck for the script to focus the movie on Tom Joad's transformation into a Christ-like hero. Played by Fonda, Joad holds the screen alone for several minutes as this comes to pass, speaking quietly, getting inside himself, in a close-up so powerful that it alone perhaps explains why so many critics consider John Ford to be their favorite American director. The screen direction exploits the riveting qualities of Fonda's performance as well, so credit goes to Ford and Fonda for that. The concept behind this scene, however, and its place in the movie came from Darryl Zanuck, the producer.

When *The Grapes of Wrath* was released, critics praised it widely. It was the sort of movie that even reviewers for ultrasophisticated magazines like

the *New Yorker*—whose writers frequently took Hollywood movies as grist for their cultural axes—rhapsodized about: “With a majesty never before so constantly sustained on any screen, the film never for an instant falters.” Frank Nugent, the movie critic at the *New York Times*, wrote:

In the vast library where the celluloid literature of the screen is stored, there is one small, uncrowded shelf devoted to the cinema’s masterpieces, to those films which by dignity of theme and excellence of treatment seem to be of enduring artistry. To that shelf of screen classics Twentieth Century-Fox yesterday added its version of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Critic Otis Ferguson called it “the most mature motion picture that has ever been made, in feeling, in purpose, and in the use of the medium.”

Such East Coast critics, and the journals for which they wrote, were considered unabashedly liberal. Negative criticism of *The Grapes of Wrath* was reserved for conservative voices that faulted its bleakness and its mood. Martin Quigley, the publisher of the motion picture industry trade journal *Motion Picture Herald*, a prominent Roman Catholic layman who had coauthored the Hollywood Production Code in 1930, offered his assessment of *The Grapes of Wrath* as “a stark, drab depiction of a group of incidents in human misery told against a chaotic jumble of philosophical and sociological incidents.” Quigley predicted that “the movie’s graphic depiction of poverty would serve to embarrass the United States in the eyes of the world.”

AN EXCITING ADVENTURE

Fantasia, the film that Walt Disney called his “most exciting adventure,” was ostensibly created for all types and all ages of viewers “by appealing to their imagination, sensitivities, and love of beauty.” It was a glorious experiment with color, sound, motion, and alternative approaches to storytelling. When Disney was finishing *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937, the concept came to him of the unlimited possibilities of matching animation to the “great music of all time.” By chance, about that time Disney met Leopold Stokowski, the conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, at a Beverly Hills restaurant. Stokowski eagerly engaged Disney’s idea and eventually came up with the movie’s title. Disney then came up with his choice of the character, to whom he believed everyone could relate, for the lead role in *Fantasia*: Mickey Mouse as the Sorcerer’s Apprentice.

Despite the fact that *Fantasia*’s movie soundtrack was the first to use stereophonic technology in motion pictures, music purists attacked the film for

what they called the “Leopold Stowkowski-ization” of Bach, Beethoven, and the six other classical composers. Many lovers of serious music were simply outraged at the fundamental idea of visualizing classical music. Stokowski was considered by many high-brow critics of the era to be a popularizer of the classics, and that alone made his name an anathema to them.

When it was released, movie critics gave *Fantasia* mixed reviews, calling the movie everything from “a new artistic experience of great beauty” to “a promising monstrosity.” At the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther wrote of its premiere in New York City: “Motion picture history was made last night”; the music critic at the same newspaper, Virgil Thompson, retorted that in spite of the cultural catastrophe that had occurred on the screen, “Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral Symphony’ will no doubt survive its Walt Disney accompaniment . . . [and] attractive ‘centaurettes’ in flowered brassieres.” In the *New York Herald Tribune*, columnist Dorothy Thompson wrote: “The illustrations of Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral’ are sufficient to raise an army, if there is enough blood left in culture to defend itself.” Ironically, while *Fantasia* was a target of purist music critics, many movie theater owners objected to the “highbrow” content of the music selected for the episodic sequences. *Look* magazine’s review, however, called it a “masterpiece,” declaring, “Disney revolutionizes movies again.”

Over sixty animators labored on *Fantasia*, which was in production for more than four years. The musical portions are standard classical fare: Johann Sebastian Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D minor, “The Nutcracker Suite” by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Paul Dukas’s “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” Igor Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring,” Ludwig van Beethoven’s “Pastoral” Symphony no. 6, Amilcare Ponchielli’s “Dance of the Hours,” “Night on Bald Mountain” composed by Modeste Moussorgsky, and Franz Schubert’s “Ave Maria.” In 1942, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences presented Disney with a special award for “outstanding contribution to the advancement of the use of sound in motion pictures through the production of *Fantasia*.”

Disney’s supervising directors for the visuals were Joe Grant and Dick Huemer. Ollie Johnston and Kendall O’Connor were the lead artists on the film. For *Fantasia*, a new technical process, developed by animator Ward Kimball and his “Mickey Expert” assistant Fred Moore, helped Mickey gain “real pupil” eyes over his past “shoe button” eyes. In itself, these new eyes gave the mouse a wider range of emotion and expression than had ever been possible before. Even famed abstract artist Oskar Fischinger, having fled Nazi Germany, did work on one sequence for Disney, although the collaboration was not extensive nor were the results considered entirely satisfactory. Disney, ever at the technological edge and ever the innovator, talked for a while about turning *Fantasia* into a kind of 3-D production process—and

had even done the research for a possible “smell-o-vision” presentation in selected theaters so that perfume might waft through the theater during “The Nutcracker” or gunpowder might be smelled by the audience during the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” number.

The movie itself was well ahead of its time. In the process of production, nine separate tracks were recorded at the orchestra’s acoustically superb performance space in the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. The cost of installing the specialized “Fantasound” equipment for showings, however, was prohibitive for most movie theater owners. Disney wound up having to rent himself—or “four-wall,” as the practice was called in the industry—most of the fourteen theaters in which the movie was shown during its initial release.

In its initial run, *Fantasia* showed no profit. When RKO took over the movie’s distribution in 1942, one of the studio’s terms for doing so required cutting most of Dennis Taylor’s narration as well as the three Toccata and Fugue sequences, although these were later reinstated in subsequent versions. Cut down from its original 124-minute running time to 81 minutes, its box office attendance soared. The production of *Fantasia* wound up costing \$2.8 million (six times the cost of the average Hollywood feature film at the time), and the movie was no immediate success. Walt Disney, however, appeared unruffled: “I expect *Fantasia* to run for years—perhaps even after I’m gone.” Twenty-five years after Disney’s death, in 1991, nine and a half million units of *Fantasia* sold out on the first day of its release for home video.

THE REDEMPTION OF PRESTON STURGES

One of the most prominent creative figures in studio-era Hollywood in the 1930s and early 1940s was producer, writer, and director Preston Sturges. The first American Film Institute list of greatest American films, voted on in 1996, did not include any of his movies, but the second list a decade later did, with *Sullivan’s Travels*, a 1941 satire of Hollywood itself that was produced at Paramount. In his memoirs, *Preston Sturges by Preston Sturges*, the filmmaker explained that he made *Sullivan’s Travels* in order “to satisfy an urge to tell them [other filmmakers] they were getting too deep-dish; to leave the preaching to the preachers.” His intention, he argued, was to counter the penchant of his colleagues to make “message films.” While Sturges objected to filmmakers proselytizing, he was widely admired by critics for never writing down to his audiences and for enjoying honest sentimentality, as well as human weaknesses and blunders. *Sullivan’s Travels* was edited by Stuart Gilmore, with cinematography by John Seitz, music by Leo Shuken and Charles Bradshaw, art direction

by Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick, and costumes by Paramount's legendary wardrobe chief, Edith Head.

The film's protagonist is John L. Sullivan (Joel McCrea), who, like Sturges himself, makes commercially successful, funny motion pictures. Then, Sullivan stuns his studio by announcing that his next film will catalogue human suffering. He wants to do no more entertaining fluff, so he sets out to make a serious film. He undertakes to see the real America, dressed as a hobo and with just ten cents in his pocket. In deciding that his movie will be based on a novel by Sinclair Beckstein, with a weighty title so pompous—*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*—Sturges turned out to be providing fodder for later Hollywood filmmakers. (The Coen brothers took that same title for their satirical comic feature made in 2000 that was rife with references to movie history.)

Early on in the movie, Sullivan's intentions are compromised by the constant presence of the publicity van sent by the studio to trail him. In essence, *Sullivan's Travels* chronicles the saga of a well-intentioned director who eventually learns he can't overcome either himself or the artistic medium in which he has chosen to work. Try as he does, Sullivan can't ignore his instincts and his craft—he gets the girl, learns a Big Lesson, encounters cinematic vistas, and winds up with a happy ending.

Sturges wanted newcomer Veronica Lake to play opposite McCrea, but the studio wanted Lucille Ball, Claire Trevor, or Ida Lupino. Paramount finally agreed to cast Lake, but in doing so limited the movie's budget to \$600,000 and its shooting schedule to forty-five days. (As with many Hollywood films made by directors at the peak of their careers who had won a measure of independence and clout with the studio, Sturges actually spent \$676,687 and took an extra nine days in completing principal photography on *Sullivan's Travels*.)

The movie's reputation in the Hollywood community is legendary, and Sturges and his movies have been taken more seriously by generations of academics and critics. It is not entirely coincidental that *Sullivan's Travels* was released in the same year, 1941, as *Citizen Kane*, the film that most clearly stands as a director's artistic triumph over the Hollywood system at the height of the studio era.

THE BOY WONDER AND THE PERENNIAL NUMBER-ONE FILM

The movie that ranks number one on both of the American Film Institute's lists, published in 1997 and 2007, is *Citizen Kane*, which was released belatedly

by RKO early in 1941. It is a movie that has repeatedly been at the top of lists of best or greatest films, as selected not only in the United States but elsewhere as well. Certainly, it was neither the movie's box office success nor its profitability that has accounted for its fame and recognition. In its initial release, *Citizen Kane* earned rentals that fell roughly \$150,000 short of its production costs. Among critics, scholars, and subsequent generations of motion picture professionals, however, *Citizen Kane* has achieved legendary status largely because it is seen as the work of an artistic genius who successfully held up the integrity of his film against the worst tendencies and demands of the Hollywood studio system. In that sense, *Citizen Kane* stands as a movie emblematic of the genius of its director, Orson Welles, who also is credited for cowriting the screenplay and who additionally played the title role in it. For decades, *Citizen Kane* has been celebrated as the quintessential masterwork of an artistic genius as its *auteur*.

The *auteur* theory, which holds that the greatest films are those marked by the permeating creative force of an individual whose presence in the movie is like that of an author of a novel, was formulated in the 1950s in France. It was introduced to the United States only in 1963, where it subsequently became prominent in academic film studies and serious movie criticism during the 1970s. The idea itself is problematic in a medium so definitively collaborative and where the process of production is so complex. Nonetheless, the core idea of the director of a movie being its "author" has proven highly appealing to both critics and audiences. Welles is a figure in the history of the Hollywood cinema who represents the *auteur* concept nicely because, subsequent to his early promising career, his fate in Hollywood appears to reflect the victimization of an artistic genius at the hands of mercurial producers.

When Welles was first hired by RKO on a contract for a multifilm directing stint, he was inexperienced as a movie director and was best known for the notorious 1938 incident involving the radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* (adapted from an H. G. Wells novel) by his Mercury Players Theater Group. The broadcast's descriptions of invading aliens were so convincing that many radio listeners who tuned in after the beginning of the show believed that they were actually hearing news reports of an event that was occurring. Welles's only prior film experience amounted to directing a forty-minute-long effort with other Mercury players that had not yet been exhibited in movie theaters. His arrival at RKO was hardly the immediate success that the studio had anticipated when it contracted the "boy wonder," who was expected to come up with a string of successful feature films. The first couple of projects that Welles put into development at RKO were never produced. Subsequently, he worked on several screenplays and actually made his initial mark at the studio with his talents as a voiceover narrator.

Even when it came to *Citizen Kane*, there was controversy about the project and to whom its origination as a movie idea correctly should be attributed. Although Welles initially claimed credit for the idea and the writing of the screenplay for *Citizen Kane*, film historians have established that Herman J. Mankiewicz proposed the core idea for a story modeled loosely on the life and career of famed press magnate William Randolph Hearst. The record indeed has been corrected, and Mankiewicz subsequently gained credit as first writer on the screenplay, with Welles credited as coauthor. The question of the screenplay credit for *Citizen Kane* suggests the complexities of trying to fully understand just where any major movie comes from, and points to just one of the difficulties in asserting auteur status for Welles.

Citizen Kane is widely recognized for its cinematography and its overall visual style and design. Much of the credit for that impressive look belongs to the movie's director of photography, Gregg Toland. Toland had blazed an unusual and successful career as an independent cinematographer during Hollywood's studio era. As a Hollywood veteran, but also an innovator at the cutting edge of cinematographic techniques, Toland was a master of new approaches. Toland already had been working for years *alongside* the studio system, since he had built his own cinematography team, working frequently on movie-to-movie contracts with the major studios and also often on projects for the independent producer Samuel Goldwyn.

Toland is reputed to have said of the prospect of working with the young and inexperienced Welles: "The only way to learn anything is from somebody who doesn't know anything." Not all Hollywood veterans, however, would necessarily have shared Toland's enthusiasm for working with a novice. Carole Lombard, the actress Welles wanted as the female lead in *Citizen Kane*, reportedly turned the Hollywood newcomer down because she felt that if the film were a success, he would get all the credit, but if it were considered any sort of a failure, she would get all the blame. Welles's second choice was RKO contract player Lucille Ball, but studio bosses didn't think she was a strong enough actress to carry the role. The part of Susan Alexander in the movie was finally given to Dorothy Comingore, who played in only three other movies afterward.

Nearly all comments on the visual design of *Citizen Kane* cite the adventuresome nature of it. The visual elements of deep-focus cinematography, high-contrast lighting with deep shadows, low-angle shots that unusually required ceilings for nearly all the sets, and the many long takes with extensive camera movement combine to give *Citizen Kane* an unusual, distinctive, and sustained look. No single visual element of the movie was original to this production, but the combination of them in such a sustained way was significant. Moreover, the creative process was evidently enjoyably collaborative as well

as adventuresome. Ruth Warrick, whom Welles recruited to play Kane's first wife, recalled:

One of my most vivid memories is of Gregg [Toland] and Orson [Welles] themselves, not somebody on the crew, cutting out a piece of wooden floor and digging out like kids in a sand pile, laughing with glee, digging out dirt so that they could put the camera really at floor level.

RKO's veteran art director, Van Nest Polglase, carefully coordinated with Toland and Welles to create the sets, which were constructed to permit the distinctive camera angles vital to the film's distinctive look. The look of *Citizen Kane* can be accounted for, to some extent, because recent technical developments of faster film speeds in 1940 permitted Toland to shoot the film the way he did. Technology, however, is valuable aesthetically only in the hands of a creative artist and craft personnel who figure out how to use it well.

The most truly groundbreaking work in *Citizen Kane*, however, was the visual layering of characters in deep focus and the matching of the movie's sound recording to that visual layering. The movie's sound recordists, Bailey Fesler and James G. Stewart, both acknowledged that, because Welles was so experienced in the process of producing plays for radio, he helped them to create different sound levels for spatial distinctions between the voices of different characters. The editing of the movie by Robert Wise, too, seemed unusual in style, but matched and meshed perfectly to building the story of Kane's life as one long flashback, recounted from the several perspectives of different witnesses to aspects of that life, and delivered with a pacing that makes the character's decline and ultimate tragedy all the more compelling.

Citizen Kane was finished and ready for release nationwide in January 1941, but when Hollywood gossip columnist Louella Parsons, who wrote for the Hearst chain of newspapers, went to a preview screening of the film, she left before seeing the movie in its entirety because she was so shocked at seeing what she interpreted as a close representation of William Randolph Hearst's life. She embarked immediately on an effort to keep *Citizen Kane* from release, and employees of the Hearst media empire began a campaign against RKO. Interestingly, the information about the studio that most damagingly resonated with the American public seemed to be the Hearst newspapers' claim that RKO was hiring European filmmakers fleeing fascism and the war in Europe rather than hiring unemployed American movie industry professionals.

Soon, the question of whether or not RKO should actually release *Citizen Kane* became a point of conflict across Hollywood. Reportedly, Nicholas Schenck, then the head of the movie theater chain Loew's, which owned

a controlling interest in MGM, offered the chief of RKO \$842,000 for the film's negative with the intent of destroying it. RKO's costs for the production up to that point were said to be just over \$823,000, so the studio would have been able to consider the project a \$19,000 profit had it never been released. RKO boss George Schaefer didn't accept the offer, however, and he soon set up a series of screenings for industry insiders, the success of which created a rising demand for the movie to be released as intended.

Much of the subsequent appreciation for *Citizen Kane* has to do with its place in what might best be called the "structural history" of Hollywood. The movie can be seen as the creative work of a true film artist whose target in the movie is a powerful media mogul who resorted to repressive means to try to stop this significant film from ever being shown to the public and wanted it destroyed.

When the movie finally was released in May 1941, critical response to it was enthusiastic. In its original theatrical run, however, *Citizen Kane* did not do well enough at the box office to earn back its production costs; the best estimates calculate a loss of \$150,000 on the movie's original release earnings against its production costs. As a commercial calculation, RKO still had hopes for a very strong showing by *Citizen Kane* at the Academy Awards—perhaps even a coveted Best Picture win—which would have almost certainly insured a post-Oscar re-release with substantial earnings. *Citizen Kane* garnered a heady nine nominations: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Welles), Best Cinematography, Best Interior Decoration, Best Sound Recording, Best Score, and Best Film Editing, but it won only for Best Original Screenwriting. Although it had a comparatively successful "road show" release, attracting audiences to upscale, first-run movie theaters in major cities where viewers paid unusually high prices for reserved seats, it did poor business in neighborhood movie houses and small-town theaters nationwide. *Citizen Kane* was perceived as a film appealing to a more "sophisticated" audience even in its initial run.

After World War II, *Citizen Kane* was rediscovered, first by audiences in liberated Western Europe and then, more importantly, by the highly influential French critic André Bazin, along with his younger colleagues François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, who later became famed movie directors themselves and started the "French New Wave." Since the 1950s, throughout the entire second half of the twentieth century, the place of *Citizen Kane* in the pantheon of great films has remained solid.

Among subsequent generations of academic and other serious critics, only a few have raised significant challenges to the claims of greatness for *Citizen Kane*. The most prominent such revisionist was Pauline Kael, who called the movie a "shallow masterpiece" and pointed out that even the story itself can be considered a flawed piece of Freudian psychology, combined

with a contrived reference that serves as the “clue” to Kane’s personality that depends entirely upon his enigmatic dying word “Rosebud.” Indeed, the entire structure of the screenplay can be seen as being dependent on this contrivance. Even Kael, however, finally acknowledged that *Citizen Kane* is an important film.

What exactly the source of that importance and significance is, however, may continue to be debated. There is little doubt that *Citizen Kane* was a film that paid attention to its formal elements—cinematography, sound, and editing—in ways considered unusually creative. The real triumph in its production, however, most likely was found in the collaboration of Welles with Mankiewicz, Toland, Fesler, Stewart, and Wise. The auteur theory aside, much of the genius of any film director may be attributed to the serendipity of an especially fruitful collaboration he or she has with others working on a feature film.

In addition, it needs to be recognized that the tone of *Citizen Kane*, and the portrayal of its main character, is more representative of modern, not Classic, Hollywood. The flaws of its main character are more like the flaws of the title character of the 1970 Best Picture, *Patton*, than they are the flaws and tribulations of characters more typical to Hollywood’s Classic Era. *Citizen Kane* is a movie about a tragic figure whose tribulations and eventual demise result from his defects of character rather than from external hardships that impinge upon his life. In both its style and its content, *Citizen Kane* is easily seen as a movie well ahead of its time, more modern than classical.

Whatever else might be said about *Citizen Kane*, over time it did establish Welles himself as a tragic figure of the American cinema who never again lived up to—or perhaps was never allowed by the studio system to live up to—the brilliant promise of his first film.

SUMMARY

From nearly any perspective on film art and creativity, the years 1939, 1940, and 1941 were extraordinary for Hollywood. In these years, the most prominent studio of the era, MGM, was at the top of its game. The other studios had survived America’s severe economic depression of the 1930s, and their fortunes were on the upswing. The town’s most prominent independent producer, David O. Selznick, was at his best. The classic craft of feature filmmaking in the United States reached its pinnacle.

Landmark movies in several genres, including the western, the romantic epic, the animated feature, the film of social criticism, the musical, and the

screwball comedy, were brought to the screen. A Hollywood newcomer, director Alfred Hitchcock, made an immediate splash. Director John Ford may have been doing his best work, as well, and the same could be said for the writing/directing team of Robert Riskin and Frank Capra. Walt Disney pushed his talents and his company's unique position to their furthest limits. Preston Sturges left a celluloid monument of his own creation to his legendary career.

These were giddy years of accomplishment for Hollywood. And so, it is fitting that in 1941 the movie that for so long has been regarded as the greatest American film by so many people was made: *Citizen Kane*.

Red, White, Blue, and Noir

*A*lthough World War II had begun in late 1939 with the German invasion of Poland, the United States would not enter the war until December 1941. After the nation's entry into war, the financial fortunes of the Hollywood film industry soared. The profits of the major Hollywood companies grew at an unprecedented rate through 1946. Attendance at the movies grew, theaters were filled, and the enormous popularity of movies with the American public would last through 1947. In addition to record profits in all sectors of the movie industry, movies took on an unprecedented place in the culture of wartime America. Neither before, nor since, have movies been so clearly in line with the mood of the country as they were during this period of public solidarity and support for the Second World War. Just what huge movie industry profits, the broad consensus on the war, and the popularity and cultural centrality of the movies *meant* was another matter that is not so simple to unravel.

Patriotism was at a high pitch, but so was sacrifice. American stories and themes, as they were called, were celebrated on the screen, while at the same time Hollywood welcomed waves of writers, film directors, and movie-crafts personnel from Europe who came to America fleeing the Nazis and fascism in Europe. For still others, some movie stories and themes from both prior to the war and after it would be viewed with suspicion; after all, from the end of 1941 through the summer of 1945, the government of the United States and the Communist regime in the Soviet Union were wartime allies.

ORIGINS OF FILM NOIR

John Huston, who eventually became one of Hollywood's most renowned directors, released his first feature in 1941. An adaptation of the Dashiell

Hammett novel *The Maltese Falcon*, it starred Humphrey Bogart as the detective Sam Spade and Mary Astor as the seductive and conniving Brigid O'Shaughnessy. It was the third screen version of essentially the same story produced by Warner Bros. in a decade. The studio had purchased rights to *The Maltese Falcon* in 1930 for \$8,500 and budgeted a modest \$380,000 for its production in 1941. Huston and his studio producer, Henry Blanke, actually managed to complete the production for just over \$330,000. The subsequent public approval, and the industry's response to the movie, elevated Bogart to the top rung of screen actors and stimulated Hollywood's interest in the hard-boiled detective character. More generally, Hollywood appeared to rediscover the mystery thriller with *The Maltese Falcon*.

As Spade, Bogart played a man whose idealism, although battered and tarnished, has not been completely lost. He falls in love with the villainous seductress O'Shaughnessy, but finally turns her over to the police for the murder of his partner Archer (Jerome Cowan). The movie's title refers to the stone statue of a falcon, the continuous pursuit of which holds the movie's story together.

Years later, *The Maltese Falcon* came to be recognized by many film historians and critics as the first identifiable *film noir* of the Hollywood cinema. In 1941, however, no one would have recognized that term. Literally translated from the French as "black film," the term did not appear until after World War II, when it was first used by French movie critics attempting to define certain films depicting crime, set in a sordid and marginalized milieu, that appeared to share commonalities of characterization and plot. The term hearkened back to the so-called black novels (*romans noirs*) of the nineteenth century, set in the underworld of the crime-ridden cities like Paris that were growing rapidly because of industrialization. These novels depicted characters driven to desperation and crime by myriad external forces and their own internal weaknesses, hence creating the genesis of modern pulp fiction. The French film critics began to discover similar material in Hollywood crime movies of the 1930s, and even more complex and elaborate evocations of film noir in a number of Hollywood movies produced in the early 1940s.

Film noir was identifiable as a genre because such movies were essentially about revealing their characters, rather than being more basically stories about crime and crime solving. In addition to the common visual look to these movies, they nearly always featured a seductive and villainous female lead. In addition, they frequently relied on some sort of narrative voice or commentary that permitted a fragmentation of the story that was not typical of the way Classic Hollywood movies were structured. However, many of these characteristics were found in other films of the 1940s that were not considered noir. As a genre, the concept of film noir has always been slippery and elusive.

Certainly, *The Maltese Falcon* displays some of the elements of noir, if not necessarily all of its characteristics. For contemporary critics in the early 1940s, writing before the term *film noir* was coined, the movie did have a whirlwind pace that tended to neglect some of the details that hold the story together. That pacing could also be interpreted as compromising the claustrophobic visual feel created by the movie's dependence on interior shots. Yet, as critic Bosley Crowther, writing in the *New York Times* in 1941, offered:

Much of the quality of the picture lies in its excellent revelation of character. Mr. Bogart is a shrewd, tough detective with a mind that cuts like a blade, a temperament that sometimes betrays him, and a code of morals that is coolly cynical. Mary Astor is well-nigh perfect as the beautiful woman whose cupidity is forever to be suspect. . . . It's the slickest exercise in cerebration that has hit the screen in many months, and it is also one of the most compelling nervous-laughter provokers yet.

THE OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION

Not long after the United States entered World War II, the government set up the Office of War Information (OWI) in 1942 to assist in coordinating Hollywood's production with the nation's war effort. Much of that coordination had to do with the production of informational and documentary films contracted by government agencies, as well as monitoring the content of the weekly newsreels produced by the studios and by independent production companies like Time, Inc.'s monthly magazine series for the screen, *The March of Time*. With its officers assigned to every Hollywood production studio, the OWI also took an interest in seeing to it that fiction films did not inadvertently suggest defeatist themes or reference the war effort in any way that could be interpreted as negative or derogatory.

Such caution and supervision toward Hollywood production, however, was most likely unnecessary. The war effort had quickly won and maintained nearly universal support among Americans. This situation was an exception to the history of the wars that the United States has entered. During World War II, the country avoided the protests and impassioned debates that have accompanied the conduct of every other war in the nation's history. There is scant reason to believe that Hollywood would have misread its audience. Even without the coordinating efforts and encouragement of the OWI, Hollywood feature production would have taken up patriotic themes and combat movies on its own. The coordination offered by the OWI did no harm, of course, and the agency greatly facilitated the working relationships for filmmakers with the

military for the use of equipment and facilities for productions. Even before the United States entered the war, Warner Bros. had gotten well ahead of the other Hollywood studios in releasing features that contained anti-Nazi messages and themes. The other major studios, however, were not far behind.

Even the Academy Award-winning best pictures for 1941 and 1942, respectively, could be interpreted as Hollywood efforts at movies that were intended to encourage viewer sympathy toward Great Britain. The 1941 Best Picture, *How Green Was My Valley*, was produced by Darryl F. Zanuck and directed by John Ford. Although Ford was best known in Hollywood as an outdoor director with a special affinity for the vast landscapes of the American West, this 1941 film was set in a gritty, sooty mining village in Wales (the village, of course, was built on the back lot of Warner Bros. in Burbank). With a screenplay written by Philip Dunne, based on Richard Llewellyn's recollections of his Welsh childhood, it provided Ford with material for which he had an affinity. Here the director's sense of history, as expressed through the theme of respect for struggles of the common man, was given full vent. Starring Walter Pidgeon, Maureen O'Hara, and Roddy McDowall, the movie portrays the arduous and painful disintegration of a traditional way of life that finally gives way to the only sliver of hope for the future being leaving for the United States.

How Green Was My Valley was an elegant film, distinguished stylistically by the use of off-screen voice narration. It was made in a Hollywood where opinion sympathized greatly with Great Britain, which was holding off Nazi Germany, even though the United States had not yet actually entered the war.

The 1942 Best Picture, made after the U.S. declaration of war at the end of 1941, was a tribute to the valor of the British home front, represented by an average British couple living in a small town. Directed by William Wyler, who himself was soon to enter the military and serve on the European front, *Mrs. Miniver* was woven from the stuff of melodrama and Hollywood's stereotypical ways of treating British culture. The couple's penchant for reserve, propriety, and understatement is constant. Mrs. Miniver herself, for example, captures an errant German parachutist, disarms him, and hides his gun in her cupboard behind the teacups. While carrying on his husbandly chores and enjoying the annual local flower show that continues bravely as the Germans bomb Britain, Mr. Miniver demonstrates his courage and his resolve. In time, he is off to help with the evacuation at Dunkirk.

RED, WHITE, AND BROADWAY

Typical of a very different kind of production that became popular in the era of the Second World War was the feature directed by Michael Curtiz

for Warner Bros. in 1942, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. It was based on a screenplay by Robert Buckner and Edmund Joseph and taken from an original story by Buckner. James Cagney starred in the role of Broadway music master George M. Cohan. Hal B. Wallis was the house producer for the movie at Warner Bros., and James Wong Howe was the film's director of photography. Cohan himself, in granting the rights for the story to Warner Bros., indicated that his preference was for Cagney to play him. Cohan also demanded the right to final approval of the shooting script.

As a house director at the Warner studio who had taken on sundry projects and different types of movies with equal success, Curtiz had just finished directing Cagney in a \$2 million wartime feature about the Royal Canadian Air Force entitled *Captains of the Clouds*. Also in the cast were Joan Leslie and Cagney's sister, Jean. The star's brother, William Cagney, was named an associate producer on the project. Walter Huston played Cohan's father. The sets had to represent forty years of changing styles in stage architecture in the United States. Warner Bros. actually arranged for the choreographer and dance director LeRoy Prinz to receive a short deferment from reporting for active military duty in order to stage the big patriotic numbers in this flag-waving feature. Based on the long Broadway career of George M. Cohan, the film used his own lyrics and music, as arranged by Leo Forbstein and orchestrated by Ray Heindorf.

On the home front, distribution of *Yankee Doodle Dandy* was coupled directly to the war effort. The only way to purchase seats to the movie's premiere in New York City was by buying war bonds. Comedian and singer Eddie Cantor put down \$25,000 for bonds in exchange for two seats. The total contribution committed for the movie's first night came to \$5.8 million in war bonds, and a similar premiere was run for the movie in Great Britain. As movie critic Sidney Skolsky wrote in the *Hollywood Citizen-News*: "The war continues to have a direct bearing and influence on the pictures being made in Hollywood. Even the escapist films." The *Motion Picture Herald* called the movie "a wartime inspiration. The pace is maintained for two hours, which is no easy task with a biography that yields no surprises."

Positive praise was nearly universal from contemporary critics. The *Motion Picture Herald* review continued: "It has been correctly calculated to play not only upon every normal emotion, but also to rouse the patriotic fervor of any American," citing "Grand Old Flag" and "Over There" as the songs that were real showstoppers. Nearly every contemporary critic recognized that, although the movie's story was more fantasy than biography, Cagney's performance had so much energy that he managed to be all over the stage and to mug, sing, and dance with a verve and style that carried the movie beyond all its flaws of biographical inaccuracy. *Yankee Doodle Dandy* is one of the most successful patriotic films ever made in the United States.

PLAY IT, SAM

Michael Curtiz's next directing effort at Warner Bros. was on a movie that had been taken over in development by producer Hal B. Wallis just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had provoked American entry into World War II in December 1941. This picture was a screen adaptation of a moderately successful New York stage play entitled *Everybody Comes to Rick's*. Over the next year, Wallis nurtured it from its inception as a movie into the triumph that became a classic of the American screen: *Casablanca*.

Casablanca was named the Best Picture for 1943 by the Academy. In 1983, the British Film Institute cited it as the best film ever made. In 1986, researchers at Siena University in Loudonville, New York, conducted a survey of film critics and historians teaching in American universities and found that they ranked *Casablanca* with *Citizen Kane* and *Gone with the Wind* as America's three best-liked movies. In 2002, a public opinion poll published in *Newsweek* found it to be number one among the most beloved American movies. *Casablanca's* odyssey from being a standard studio offering to becoming one of the most highly regarded movies of all time was a story reflecting the ins and outs of making a movie, along with some lucky choices, that reflects how the collaborative genius of Hollywood often crafted its success.

The original play, written by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison, was much more cynical than the film version, and the character of Ilse (played in the movie by Ingrid Bergman) had to be extensively reworked for the movie in order to accommodate the strictures of the industry's Production Code. In the play, Ilse was an American woman named Lois who had gone through a number of romances, including one with Rick in Paris that had caused his divorce. Moreover, in the play, Lois arrived in Casablanca on the arm of anti-Nazi crusader Victor Laszlo not as his wife, but as his mistress. Reconstructing the character of the sexually promiscuous Lois of the stage play for the respectability required by the Motion Picture Production Code was only the first of many challenges for the screenwriters assigned to the project by Wallis.

Howard Koch wrote one complete version of the script, while the famed twins who worked at Warner Bros., Julius and Philip Epstein, wrote another. Wallis cobbled the two screenplays together, while relying on the talents of still other writers at the studio to fill in material for certain characters, for lines of dialogue, or for the development of different plot points. The character of the corrupt prefect of police, Louis Renault (Claude Rains), for example, was lightened and given comic touches to poke fun at his corruption, cheating at the illegal gambling going on at Rick's and womanizing that included demanding sexual favors in exchange for permissions granted to desperate refugees to flee Casablanca for safety.

Even at that, however, when actual filming began in June 1942, the script was not yet finalized. Several different endings for the movie were still possible right up to the actual filming of the final scene. As the filming progressed, Bergman kept asking both director Curtiz and producer Wallis what her character's fate was: did she stay in Casablanca with Rick with whom she had rekindled her love, or did she depart for the United States with her husband, the Nazi fighter Laszlo? When each told her that he didn't know, she thought that she was being deceived by them. They were not being dishonest with her, though; neither of them knew, because the ending had not yet been decided!

The actual ending—in which Rick delivers a speech that rises to the level of heroism, puts Ilse and Laszlo on the plane (and hence honors the institution of marriage, and more than satisfies the movie industry's Production Code guidelines in this regard), shoots the Nazi Major Strasser who has arrived at the airport, and finally disappears into the fog with his buddy Louis to the strains of the “Marseillaise”—draws the movie tightly together in a manner that may be called implausible. It does so, however, in a way that audiences have found dramatically satisfying ever since the movie's premiere in 1943. As the program notes for a screening of *Casablanca* at the UCLA Film Archives in 1990 pointed out:

Casablanca is justly criticized for its stock characters, contrived situations (including a wildly improbable ending), and lines like Ilse's to Rick, “Was that cannon fire or my heart pounding?” as the Germans entered Paris . . . yet *Casablanca* combines so many elements of popular mythology so adroitly that it rests secure on a peak where criticism is reduced to mere carping.

By the end of 1943, *Casablanca* had earned \$3.7 million for Warner Bros. In that improbable, but ennobling, final scene Louis had managed to deftly suggest that he and Rick should head for a Free French garrison located in the Congo at Brazzaville, where they could take up the fight against the Nazis. Producer Hal Wallis was thinking of that wording in the dialogue in a commercially farsighted way. Not long after *Casablanca* was released in movie theaters, Warner Bros. announced a coming feature entitled *Brazzaville*, intended as a sequel, in which Louis (Raines) and Rick (Bogart) would fight against the German troops under General Rommel in North Africa. Actual military history, however, outpaced Warner Bros.'s plans; the Allied forces quickly drove the Germans out of North Africa. So with the premise for the story of Rick and Louis in combat side by side against the Nazis in North Africa gone, *Brazzaville* was dropped from Warner's production schedule and never made.

THE LOOK OF NOIR AND ITS DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY

As an industry during World War II, Hollywood understood its patriotic role while continuing to see its primary duty to American audiences as providing high-quality screen entertainment. Nonetheless, *Double Indemnity*, released in the autumn of 1944, reflected a deep and brooding pessimism. The movie was a production for Paramount Pictures, which its director and co-screenwriter, Billy Wilder, shepherded through development. Wilder was an Austrian-born Jew who had worked in the German film industry in Berlin, but fled, first to France and then to Hollywood via Mexico in 1933. For the next decade, Wilder found work as a screenwriter on a number of Hollywood movies and, after 1942, increasingly as a director.

Nearing the age of forty, Wilder conceived of *Double Indemnity* as his great opportunity for a breakthrough film that would establish him solidly as one of Hollywood's prominent directors. He convinced Paramount to now act on the rights to *Double Indemnity*, which it had held for a number of years. *Double Indemnity* was a novel by James M. Cain, who was best known as the author of hard-boiled detective fiction, set primarily in Southern California. Wilder's clout with the studio was evident in this acquisition, since the original novella had been published in serialized version in the mid-1930s, and each time a film adaptation of it had been proposed, the Production Code Office and its chief administrator, Joseph Breen, had opposed it. Although Wilder had been collaborating at the studio for years with the reserved and sophisticated Charles Brackett, who came from a wealthy and prominent New England family, Wilder decided to team instead with Raymond Chandler on the screenwriting for *Double Indemnity*.

The story of a bachelor insurance salesman who is seduced by a housewife into a scheme to murder her husband and make it look like he was the victim of a train accident—meaning that the life insurance company would pay double because of the nature of his death—needed substantial restructuring. In Cain's novel, the wife, Phyllis Dietrichson (played in the movie by Barbara Stanwyck), eventually is discovered to be a sociopath and serial killer, whose string of murders included her present husband's first wife, to whom Dietrichson had been a nurse. Wilder and Chandler's version kept only one part of that backstory intact: In their screenplay, she was revealed as having killed Dietrichson's first wife, but the script eliminated entirely the complicated and depraved story of all her prior murders and her vast array of victims. This helped bring the movie version toward better conformity with the Hollywood Production Code.

Even more importantly, these changes from the novel permitted the movie version to more fully develop the character of Barton Keyes (Edward G. Robin-

son), the diligent claims investigator at the insurance company who relentlessly pursues the truth behind the case of Mr. Dietrichson's "accidental" death by falling from a slow-moving train. The more prominent role of Keyes, as someone whose actions are motivated solely by his pursuit of the truth, counterbalances Phyllis's conniving and plotting. More fully developed, Keyes also balances Phyllis with the kind of buddy relationship that he has with Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray). The movie goes back and forth between Neff's relationship with Phyllis and his friendship with Keyes. Their friendship is grounded in Neff's respect for the older man's hard work, and it provides the rationale for Neff's confessional explanation of the crime that frames the movie.

The film begins with Neff arriving, shot and bleeding, in the wee hours of the morning, at the insurance company's offices. It ends when Keyes arrives as Neff is finishing his tape recording that recounts all that has happened. Keyes then watches the bleeding Neff stagger toward the doorway, collapse from loss of blood, and die.

Wilder said that he was drawn to the story of *Double Indemnity* because he found the material to be so "photographable." In fact, the movie evokes a great sense of Los Angeles as a place: the Dietrichson home, which is a typical whitewashed stucco in Spanish style; the surrounding neighborhood streets; a grocery store; a bowling alley; a drive-in diner; and Neff's apartment, with its transient look. The movie's director of photography, John Seitz, provided cinematography that conveyed a sense of menace with the use of dark and light, shadows, and many night sequences. Even inside the Dietrichson's Spanish-style home, Seitz filled the air with finely ground aluminum shavings to reflect the sharp beams of sunlight from the windows when the drapes were partially drawn.

At the time of its release, Bosley Crowther, the prominent film critic at the *New York Times*, called the film's look "French Realism," although he did not define just what he thought that was. In later years, any number of other film critics and historians thought that *Double Indemnity*'s look was imitating "German Expressionism," a style that influenced a select number of productions in Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s when Wilder was living and working in Berlin, suggesting that the visual design and look of *Double Indemnity* was consciously being influenced by the director's recollections. There were problems with either attribution, however, which begin with a failure to recognize that the "look" of *Double Indemnity* might best be understood as the unique vision of Seitz and his Paramount studio camera department in solving the visual problems of a particular film and its specific locations and sets.

When *Double Indemnity* was released in 1944, it did modest business at the box office, making a marginal profit, and received several Academy Award nominations, but won none. Nevertheless, the movie did make Billy

Wilder more respected and recognizable within Hollywood, so *Double Indemnity* served his personal agenda. Wilder's stock as a director rose, and that ascendancy was cemented by his Best Director selection by the Academy the following year for *The Lost Weekend*. Over time, moreover, the reputation and recognized significance of *Double Indemnity* has grown. Serious consideration of film noir really did not enter into academic circles or become common among serious film critics in the United States until the 1970s, and it was one of the leading film critics of that era, Andrew Sarris, who labeled *Double Indemnity* "the juiciest and most adult of *noir* movie classics."

Since then, *Double Indemnity* has been widely categorized as a noir classic for its look, its inept leading male character who is seduced by a villainous woman into crime, and its bleak and cynical portrayals of both these characters. Some movie critics have maintained that film noir appeared in Hollywood as an expression of the worldview of the movie directors who had fled from Central Europe to Hollywood in the 1930s to escape Nazism and fascism, and who brought with them an understandably cynical perspective on humanity and its weaknesses. Such speculation, however, is difficult to document convincingly. There are contradictory indications that the personal experiences of several significant directors do not so clearly determine the choice of subject and style for their movies, especially since the Hollywood studio system still was so strong in the early 1940s.

Even more speculative is the claim that the female villains of these film noirs in the early 1940s were created as a reflection of a national subconscious that feared women in the American workforce at the time. Many women during the war had taken jobs in the industrial sector typically held by men, but the idea that resentment against this came to be reflected in the representation of female leads in a relatively small number of the Hollywood movies of the era that are categorized as film noirs is problematic. Any genuine explanation of just how this particular representation of the villainous female made its way into some movies from a basis in an interpretation of the sociology and economic history of the later years of World War II is lacking. Moreover, even if such representation were there, this particular interpretation of its presence runs contrary to the historical record in the sense that support for the war effort was nearly universal in the United States. Since the value of women's industrial labor to that effort was widely acknowledged and appreciated, to whom in the audience was the negative representation of female characters in early Hollywood film noir appealing? Additionally, with so many younger men in uniform and overseas in combat from the end of 1941 through 1945, the percentage of moviegoers in the United States who were women was at an all-time high between 1942 and 1946.

SINGING OUR WAY TO AN OSCAR

The Academy Award-winning best picture for 1944 came from the same studio as *Double Indemnity*, Paramount, but it was about as different a movie as one could imagine. *Going My Way* was light and sentimental, starring Bing Crosby as a crooning parish priest in New York City named Father Charles Francis Patrick O'Malley. He likes a drink or two and loves playing golf, and his personal charm is full of whimsy. He can turn around the lives of wayward juvenile gang members with a few stanzas of lilting melody, and with his gift for gab, he can persuade the mortgage holder on the church property to forgive his parish's indebtedness. *Going My Way* was written and directed by the veteran Leo McCarey, who was well known for his work with screen comics including Laurel and Hardy and the Marx Brothers. He was on loan to Paramount from RKO, where he was under contract. McCarey won Oscars for Best Screenplay and Best Director that year.

Going My Way is often paired with *The Bells of Saint Mary's*, also directed by McCarey and also starring Crosby, with its similar themes and sentiments, which was an RKO release in 1945. The latter picture is often mistakenly identified as a sequel to *Going My Way*, when actually production on *The Bells of St. Mary's* was completed earlier.

BILLY WILDER TRIUMPHANT

Over time, *Double Indemnity* found a place in cinema history because of its significance as film noir. With his next movie, *The Lost Weekend*, winner of the 1945 Academy Award for Best Picture, Billy Wilder found peer recognition for his work in collaboration with the director of photography, John Seitz. For this feature, Wilder returned to collaboration on the screenplay with the man who had been his guardian angel and collaborator at the studio for almost a decade and a half, Charles Brackett. Brackett also served as the picture's producer at the studio.

The Lost Weekend is about a writer named Don Birnam (Ray Milland), a heavy drinker who is working on a novel entitled *The Bottle* that tells how he first met and courted his fiancée, Helen St. James (Jane Wyman). He plans a weekend in the country with his brother Nick (Philip Terry), ostensibly as a time to help him get off his heavy and habitual drinking and to sober up for good. Instead, he winds up in a steady descent into drunkenness and desperation. He steals from a money jar meant for the maid, and by the next day finds

himself in a state of panic as he careens through the city in a drunken search for an open pawn shop so that he can get more cash for booze.

Seitz's camerawork gives the entire urban milieu everything but a Classic Hollywood treatment. The cityscape of this movie is grimy and gritty and creates an urban world that is brutal and without redemption. Birnam suffers delirium tremens, fantasizing about becoming a helpless mouse attacked by bats, and is taken in a stupor to Manhattan's famed psychiatric hospital Bellevue, where a male nurse belittles and taunts him. His nightmarish slide into the depths of his alcoholic haze is terrifying, and this sequence in the motion picture is frequently recognized as a seminal work of American cinematic "realism."

As an aesthetic convention, realism in American film has been characterized by attention to the bleak and psychologically distorted situations of characters brought on either by their own doing or the hostility and indifference of others. In Hollywood, this aesthetic tended toward portraying pathologies, but such movies almost always resulted in developing viewer empathy for such suffering souls. That *The Lost Weekend* captured the Best Picture Oscar for 1945 marked an acceptance of screen realism by the Hollywood establishment.

This was clearly not the same realist aesthetic to be found in the neorealism of Italian movies that had been identified the previous year (1944) with the release of *Rome, Open City*, directed by Roberto Rossellini. Neorealism, which would be evident as a movement in Italian cinema for the next decade, and which proved highly influential on post-World War II cinema globally, was of a very different nature. Its political and social orientations were entirely distinct from what Wilder and Seitz had put on the screen in Hollywood's Best Picture of 1945.

Nonetheless, *The Lost Weekend* was the kind of Hollywood studio film that pushed American screen realism in new directions. For the next three decades, this screen realism would gradually take its place alongside more traditional approaches to studio production. While Hollywood cinema was never so monolithic, nor its movies so standardized as products of a dream factory as many critics have suggested, the Brackett-Wilder-Seitz collaboration on *The Lost Weekend* did provide a different kind of film from most productions of Hollywood's Classic Era. Not in the least, this was because the production utilized location shooting, with much of the footage shot on New York City's Third Avenue and at the actual Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan.

It is well documented that Paramount executives, after a preview screening of the movie, seriously considered shelving it. It was a bleak and terrifying story of a man's addiction, of the sort that Classic Hollywood normally had avoided. Nonetheless, the screen story had been reworked from the original screenplay in the process of filming, so that the movie did reach a (somewhat forced) resolution of recovery and love when Don reconciles with his fiancée.

This was most likely the main reason that *The Lost Weekend* could earn a seal of approval from Joseph Breen's Production Code Office.

Still, *The Lost Weekend* was a provocative movie for its day. There was even a Hollywood rumor that a consortium of whiskey distillers pressured Paramount to shelve the movie, although the truth of this assertion is not well documented. There was enough that was unsettling about the film and its aesthetic to give ample pause to the studio's leadership, but Paramount did release the picture on time, and it won high critical praise as well as the winner of the Hollywood establishment's Best Picture Oscar.

SUMMARY

During the U.S. participation in World War II, from 1941 to 1945, the wealth and potential cultural influence of Hollywood increased enormously. In these years, the growth in movie attendance was phenomenal. With so many young men in uniform and serving overseas, women became the most significant and growing statistic of those who went to the movies. Movies provided popular entertainment for the home front, and going to a movie theater was the only place to see actual newsreel coverage from the war zones. Hollywood shifted significant resources to weekly newsreel production and to the production of documentaries. Even without the government's Office of War Information—the duties of which included coordinating motion picture production with the nation's war effort—the evidence is overwhelming that Hollywood would have produced patriotic movies, combat movies, and feature films indirectly celebrating the values and cultures of America and her allies and denigrating her enemies. Of course, Hollywood also went on making movies having little or nothing at all to do with the war. Among these were movies whose style and content would later be described as film noir.

Postwar Triumphs and Reversals

Beginning with 1939, which had been a bumper crop year for significant Hollywood motion pictures, right through the last year of World War II, 1945, the fortunes of America's motion picture makers and exhibitors had soared. The eight major studios (Fox, MGM, RKO, Paramount, Warner Bros., Columbia, Universal, and United Artists) saw their net profits increase roughly sixfold between 1940 and 1946. The nation at war had found common consensus and exhibited an unusually strong cultural cohesiveness, which was widely expressed in the popular cinema of the war years. By 1946, after so many young men returned home from both Europe and the Pacific, the average number of weekly admissions to movie theaters in the country per week reached an all-time high, in excess of ninety million. Movies were pervasive. As entertainment, but also as sources of wartime information, their place in American life and culture would never be greater than during the years of the Second World War.

TWO POSTWAR DRAMAS

The Academy Award winner for Best Picture for 1946, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, was a project that began when independent producer Samuel Goldwyn's wife Frances, a former stage actress, read a 1944 article on GIs returning home from the war. In addition to its recognition from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as the Best Picture of 1946, the movie also gathered five additional Oscars: Best Director to William Wyler, Best Actor to Fredric March, Best Supporting Actor to Harold Russell, Best Editing to Daniel Mandel, and Best Screenplay to Robert E. Sherwood.

After World War I, Hollywood had waited seven years before a major feature film dealt with the war and its effect on the men who fought it. Much the same would be true half a century later, with regard to the first major Hollywood movie set among returning veterans from the Vietnam War. Not so with World War II. Almost immediately after the war ended, Goldwyn commissioned a screenplay to be written about veterans returning from the war and hired novelist MacKinlay Kantor for the job. Goldwyn wound up with a massive manuscript, four hundred pages of blank verse, that the producer promptly deemed unusable. William Wyler, a veteran himself whose time in uniform included making a famed documentary on Allied bombing missions over Germany, *The Memphis Belle*, had already signed on to direct for Goldwyn, and he suggested to the producer that he offer the writing responsibilities to the playwright and screenwriter Robert Sherwood.

From the outset of development on the project, Wyler kept insisting that he wanted an “honest portrait” of returning veterans. To capture that goal, Sherwood wrote a screenplay that came out on the screen with a running time of nearly three hours. The production on *The Best Years of Our Lives* meshed with the emerging postwar aesthetic of motion picture realism. The production design called for costumes bought off the rack from department stores, as well as the minimal use of makeup for all the roles.

Most of the cast members were Hollywood names: Myrna Loy, Frederic March, Dana Andrews, Teresa Wright, Virginia Mayo, and Cathy O’Donnell. Harold Russell, however, who had no experience as an actor, but had lost both his hands in a training accident at his military base in North Carolina in 1944, was cast as Homer Parrish. Russell won a Supporting Actor Oscar for the role and also received a special award from the Academy “for bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans.” Russell later sold his Oscar statuette for \$55,000, which was more than five times what he had been paid for his performance in the movie. The cinematography for *The Best Years of Our Lives* was under the able direction of that veteran Hollywood genius, Gregg Toland. Program notes published by the UCLA Film Archive for a screening of a print of *The Best Years of Our Lives* assert that Wyler’s concept for the movie, as well as the look that he and Toland collaborated on for it, was influenced by Italian neorealism long before most Americans—even those knowledgeable about film—had even heard of that movement.

The movie’s story focused on three veterans, Al Stephenson (March), Fred Derry (Andrews), and Homer Parrish (Russell), who return home from war to the fictional Boone City. They spend a fair amount of time hanging out together at Butch’s Place, whose owner is played by bandleader, songwriter, and sometime actor Hoagy Carmichael. Fred looks unsuccessfully for a job. Al returns to his job at the bank, where he is soon made a vice president, but finds

himself discontented. Homer, who lost both his hands in military service and now wears prosthetic hooks, is warmly welcomed by his kid sister Luella and his sweetheart Wilma (O'Donnell), but is still too self-conscious and skeptical to accept their love and support.

Al invites his wife Milly (Loy) and daughter Peggy (Wright) for a night on the town. The movie's story really begins when Fred and Homer also arrive at Butch's that evening, reuniting the trio of veterans who had met coincidentally while waiting for a military airplane to fly them back to Boone City. Each of them is now discovering the cracks in the façade of what appears to be bucolic postwar small-town life. Fred has been out looking through the town for his wife, who had moved away from his parents while Fred was in combat. He is unable to find her and winds up spending the night at the Stephenson's, where the next morning he and Peggy Stephenson begin a flirtation.

Fred has returned from service only to learn from his drunken father and stepmother that his wife Marie (Mayo) has moved away during the war and taken a job in a nightclub. Eventually, he finds her. Somewhat tentatively, they reunite. Marie had never thought that Fred's job as a counterman in a drugstore coffee shop was sufficient to support the way of life she craved, but it is the only job he can find. The drugstore has been bought out from its local owner and is now a part of a chain. He even loses that job, however, when he jumps in between an abrasive and obnoxious customer and Homer and knocks out the fellow who was making negative comments about America's role in the war. After that, Fred returns to their apartment only to find Marie entertaining a strange man and realizes that she has been unfaithful to him. He tells her to get a divorce and leaves.

Al's situation is the best of the trio's. He has a job waiting for him at the bank where he worked before he went into military service. Indeed, he is even given a promotion and is placed in charge of approving bank loans for veterans to purchase property. This gets him into trouble at the bank when he is perceived as being too lenient about granting a loan to a veteran who the bank considers a poor risk. Eventually, however, that situation is resolved with the bank officers, and although he is still uncomfortable with some attitudes toward veterans, he is reconciled with his position.

Ever since his return, Homer has been tortured by the idea that Wilma only pities him, rather than truly loves him. His self-doubt becomes more and more a burden to him than the actual loss of his hands. In the end, however, Homer gets beyond these feelings and finally sees that Wilma's love for him is genuine. At their wedding, Fred is his best man and the Stephenson family is there. Al has become guardedly reconciled to the idea of Fred and Peggy's romance, while Milly is fully accepting of it. Butch plays the wedding march, and, as Homer slips the ring on his bride's finger, Fred's glance

catches Peggy's, indicating that she is welcoming him back into her life. Still jobless, Fred wanders the streets and eventually finds himself at an airport full of discarded B-17 "Flying Fortress" bombers. He climbs into one, takes the bombardier's seat, and relives in memory one of the battle scenes in which he had risked his life during the war. When he comes back to the present, he finds that materials from the planes are to be salvaged and used to build houses, and he is offered a job in their construction.

Sketched in brief, *The Best Years of Our Lives* is melodrama lifted as screen entertainment to a higher plane of cinematic achievement because of Hollywood craftsmanship. Each of the acting performances is exceptionally strong, and Toland's camerawork, in particular his selective use of deep focus, is masterful. Perhaps the review published at the time of its release in 1946 by *Life* magazine best summed up the assessment that has caused the movie to survive so long as a highly regarded one:

The Best Years of Our Lives . . . has, of course, certain flaws: there is hoakum stirred up with its drama; its 172 minutes are considerably overlong; its finale is miraculously happy. But it is an honest, adult, and absorbing film.

Bosley Crowther's review in the *New York Times* recognized the movie as the stuff of cinematic greatness, as he enthused:

It is seldom that there comes a motion picture which can be wholly and enthusiastically endorsed not only as superlative entertainment but as food for quiet and harmonizing thought. Yet such a one is Samuel Goldwyn's *The Best Years Of Our Lives*.

The review in *Boxoffice*, a trade journal aimed at movie theater owners, proclaimed:

It's priceless—one of those pictures every producer hopes to make. It's close to the everyday lives of millions of men at present—their postwar adjustment problems: it's as human as your next door neighbor.

At the time, Robert Warshow was practically the only major American critic who didn't like it, denouncing it for "its denial of the reality of politics," by which he meant that he thought it reduced society's postwar problems to issues of individual psychology that could be solved by the application of old-fashioned American virtues such as hard work, patience, and cheerfulness. Later criticism, however, turned out to be more negative. Ten years later, writing in *Commentary*, Manny Farber dismissed *The Best Years of Our Lives* as "a horse-drawn truckload of liberal schmalz." Soon after, critic Andrew Sarris labeled it "a work of humanitarian blackmail."

The other film of that year that has been highly regarded by Hollywood professionals is *It's a Wonderful Life*. Beginning with its title, which some people might confuse with *The Best Years of Our Lives*, this movie directed by Frank Capra is sometimes thought of as being complementary to it. Capra's film, released through RKO, received five Oscar nominations—Best Picture, Best Actor (for Jimmy Stewart), Best Director, Best Film Editing, and Best Sound Recording—but won none. The other parallel included the fact that Capra himself, like Wyler, had spent much of the Second World War in uniform.

The protagonist of *It's a Wonderful Life*, played by Jimmy Stewart, is George Bailey. George has grown up in, and never left, his hometown of Bedford Falls. He has taken over his father's building-and-loan business and married his high school sweetheart Mary (Donna Reed), and they have four children. But George's aspirations and expectations clash harshly with the far duller and limited reality in which he sees himself mired. Bailey believes himself to have been a complete failure at life. He questions all the sacrifices he has made and descends into a state of mind in which he contemplates suicide. George has a good heart, but he has been living a life burdened by civic responsibilities and haunted by an enemy named Henry Potter (Lionel Barrymore), a greedy banker-investor who threatens to destroy George.

During a routine bank audit, George forthrightly discovers that his own dear but bumbling uncle Billy (Thomas Mitchell), who is as unreliable as he is incompetent, has evidently misplaced \$8,000 and that financial ruin faces George. Seeing his opportunity, Potter swears out a warrant (falsely) accusing George of malfeasance and demanding that he be removed from his office.

Potter is more than just a nasty curmudgeon. He personifies the absolute rejection of traditional notions of high-mindedness, idealism, honesty, and civic responsibility. "Most people hate me . . . but I don't like them either," he intones. And he consistently ridicules "idealists," who are dangerous in their constant appeal to the better side of the human heart: "What does that get us?" asks Potter rhetorically. "A discontented lazy rabble instead of a thrifty working class. And all because a few starry-eyed dreamers like Bailey stir 'em up and fill their heads with a lot of impossible ideas."

Wishing that he had never been born, George plunges into a nightmarish fantasy of what Bedford Falls would have been like had he never lived. In his imagination, he finds himself wandering through the desolate town of "Pottersville," with all its warped and empty values personified by the greedy Mr. Potter.

This odyssey of George's imagination is in search of someone who can confirm his past identity and help him resurrect the families, homes, and businesses of his beloved Bedford Falls that now appear to have been obliterated.

This situation eventually drives the highly moralistic George to desperation, until, on a snowy night at the town bridge, he is saved from suicide by a remarkable angel named Clarence Oddbody (Henry Travers), who is on earthly assignment—it so happens—to earn back his wings. George’s nightmare about Pottersville is erased in an ending that many critics have critiqued as naïve, but it is an ending that still holds up dramatically.

It’s a Wonderful Life was essentially rediscovered in the mid-1970s, lending itself to many interpretations about the movie’s vision of post-World War II America: the country’s loss of innocence, the nature of a changing society, and explanations of the movie as an anticorporate parable exposing the falsehoods behind many American institutions. This was the first film for Capra and Stewart after both had just completed their military service in the Second World War with distinction. Indeed, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Capra’s first movie after the war was to be one in which the director announced that he intended “to tell us just why ‘life is wonderful,’ no matter how futile it may seem superficially.” The movie’s abiding point of view is made clearest when George’s brother Harry, briefly home on leave from war duty, raises a toast to George, surrounded by his wife and four children. “To my brother George,” he says, “the richest man in town.”

The screenplay by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett was based loosely on a seasonal Christmas book by Philip Van Doren Stern entitled *The Greatest Gift*. RKO already held the rights to the book, so Capra’s affiliation with the studio smoothed the way for his company using the book as a basis for the screenplay. Writing about Capra’s first Hollywood feature after the war, the *New York Times’s* Crowther noted:

Any film made by Mr. Capra is as richly characteristic as they come. It is also a concrete expression of his own intellectual attitude, since he works closely with his writers. . . . Though the movie might have been a sticky, sentimental sermon, and the hero might have seemed like a disillusioned Boy Scout, it didn’t turn out that way with Capra in charge. Against a gentle background of small-town portraits, the ace director has fashioned a full score of winning, tender scenes.

As a later article by critic Michael Sragow in 1979 asserted:

For a film that places a premium on simplicity, its technique is exceedingly busy. . . . This probably won’t surprise anyone who has slogged through Capra’s autobiography *The Name above the Title*, where we learn that the thread running through his professional life isn’t a vision of America or some personal code of behavior at all, but, rather, his own technical curiosity, ebullience, and drive. Despite his famous Horatio Alger approach

to story-telling, these are the qualities that really distinguish all his movies, even this more heartfelt one.

As Capra had written in that autobiography: “With my accelerator pushed to the firewall, all that I was and all that I knew went into making *It’s a Wonderful Life*. The pace was that of a four-month non-stop orgasm.”

Interestingly, of these two movies of 1946, the one made in the more realist aesthetic, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, did much better at the box office. *It’s a Wonderful Life* was perceived to hearken back to the established escapism of Classic Hollywood. Both movies were produced in a quasi-independent way, outside the major studios proper, but both were distributed by RKO. Wyler’s *The Best Years of Our Lives* was a huge money earner, with over \$10 million in North American rental revenues. By contrast, Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* barely earned \$3.3 million, falling half a million dollars short of its production costs of nearly \$3.8 million. Right after World War II, Capra had cofounded the company that produced it, Liberty Films, with Wyler, George Stevens, and Samuel J. Briskin. In 1947, the company had to declare bankruptcy. In its day, *It’s a Wonderful Life* was a significant failure.

In an eventual but improbable quirk of fate, and with a turn toward redemption worthy of any of the most hopeful scripts Frank Capra had ever brought to the screen, *It’s a Wonderful Life* became a Christmastime favorite on television in the United States when in 1973 the broadcast networks discovered that its copyright had lapsed and that the movie could be exhibited in any format for free. During the last three decades of the twentieth century, the movie earned its way into the hearts of Americans of all ages.

In the movie industry, the fictional small town of Bedford Falls has become a modern codeword for the best values of community. For many movie professionals, *It’s a Wonderful Life*’s value is iconic. In the 1990s, director Ed Zwick and producer Marshall Herskovitz named their film production company “Bedford Falls.” Steven Spielberg once told an interviewer that he always took a copy of the movie with him on his film locations: “I show it to the cast and crew, and I tell them, ‘This is the kind of picture I hope we can make.’”

A SOCIAL ISSUE MOVIE

Some Hollywood observers found it ironic that it was producer Darryl F. Zanuck—practically the only major Hollywood studio executive, producer, or mogul at the time who wasn’t Jewish—who chose Laura Z. Hobson’s novel *Gentleman’s Agreement*, with its theme about anti-Semitism, for adaptation to

the screen. The voters of the Academy nonetheless were willing to award the Best Picture Oscar for 1947 to Zanuck's *Gentleman's Agreement*. Starring Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire, John Garfield, Celeste Holm, and Anne Revere, the film was directed by Elia Kazan as a Twentieth Century-Fox release.

In a 1947 interview in *Cosmopolitan*, the novel's author offered:

What did I do with the book? I think a woman who wrote to me put it in two wonderful sentences. She says: "Villains aren't really frightening. It is the millions of nice people who do, and allow, villainous things." I think that is the gist of what I was trying to say.

According to Kazan, several studio bosses tried to convince Zanuck, through the screenplay writer for the movie, Moss Hart, not to even make the film. His own agent advised Peck against taking a role in the movie, but Peck did so in spite of the warning. Dialogue in the film referred specifically to the bigotry of both a U.S. senator and a congressman from Mississippi by name, as well as to the leader of the Christian Nationalist Crusade. Zanuck checked with attorneys before the movie was released, assayed the likelihood of lawsuits against it, and proceeded. He figured that these men wouldn't dare sue, and that no court was likely to uphold their cases even if they did. The Crusade leader, after losing on a request for a restraining order to keep the movie from being shown in his hometown, did sue, but as expected, the case was dismissed.

Still, some industry observers saw risk in the production and for those who were associated with it. That in 1951 Kazan, Garfield, and Revere were all called before the House Un-American Activities Committee for testimony about the Communist Party affiliations of some of their friends and acquaintances in the motion picture industry left some observers believing that they were called primarily because of their association with *Gentleman's Agreement* at the request of the two prominent politicians who are mentioned in the movie's script.

This, too, was very much a producer's film, in this case being the pet project of Darryl F. Zanuck, who throughout most of his career had considered himself to be a Hollywood producer of a different breed. The Hollywood establishment itself was disinclined to talk about Zanuck in the same sentence with the acknowledged greats of the producing profession like Irving Thalberg, Samuel Goldwyn, or David O. Selznick. Zanuck had grown up in Wahoo, Nebraska, and Selznick once said of Zanuck that he resembled "an ear of corn that only a maniac would eat." Selznick's wife, Irene, who was MGM mogul Louis B. Mayer's daughter, was even more blunt: "Thank God, he's a Gentile," she said, "otherwise he'd give Jews a bad name." In an era in

which a sense of ethnic and religious identity was still evident and powerful throughout the United States, the Hollywood community showed that it was hardly different from most of the country.

Zanuck stood out for several reasons, but, even more importantly, he stood out because, dating back to the earliest movies he produced, so many of them were characterized by the boldness of his signature. His tabloid-inspired films, such as *The Public Enemy* (1931) and *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), and his later serious fare, like the movie version of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), were considered hard-edged social criticism by Hollywood's elite.

Gentleman's Agreement took on what was considered to be a tough topic for the period, but the movie's sentiments seemed oddly cloaked and stifled. The movie's story is about a journalist who investigates anti-Semitism by posing as a Jew. Doing so, he discovers deep-seated discrimination. It was an edgy film about a serious topic, but Hollywood screenwriter Ring Lardner Jr. sarcastically interpreted its underlying theme as: "You should never be mean to a Jew, because he might turn out to be a Gentile." Peck's character does write an article, entitled "I Was a Jew for Six Months," hence presenting the movie's viewers with a tongue-in-cheek irony about anti-Semitism.

Gentleman's Agreement may be seen as a significant movie, honored in its time by the motion picture establishment, but it must also be recognized as a movie that has not aged well, perhaps because its equivocations were so typical of the common attitudes toward race, ethnicity, and religion in the era. The movie's timidity toward its subject, after all, was like the Hollywood movie industry's own historic social contract of the Classic Era: that controversial subjects should be avoided or glossed over in order to satisfy the higher goal of serving the mass public.

Most of the Jewish producers and moguls in Hollywood at the time would have preferred that Zanuck's project had not been made at all. They feared an angry movie about this topic would result in some kind of backlash from non-Jewish audiences. After all, Warner Bros. had turned to Zanuck in his early career at the studio to be their producer on *The Jazz Singer*, the 1927 movie about a Jewish cantor's son who performs minstrel numbers on stage in blackface, even though the Warner brothers themselves were important figures in the Los Angeles Jewish community and the primary financial backers in the building of the Wilshire Boulevard Synagogue. Yet they entrusted *The Jazz Singer* to the production hands of a lapsed Methodist from Nebraska. An observer of Hollywood might conclude that the movie industry was able to provide a mainstream popular movie about anti-Semitism to American audiences right after World War II only because a non-Jewish producer insisted on doing it.

1948

Variety's review of John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* in 1948 read:

Humphrey Bogart at his best in a Hard-Bitten, Straight-Shooting Portrayal. . . . An oldtime prospector outwits and outlives two hardy young adventurers . . . [but] the lure of gold again proves man's undoing.

For an exhibitor's campaign, the trade journal recommended:

Concentrate the selling campaign on Humphrey Bogart, who plays a dirty, unshaven character, and Walter Huston whose garrulous characterization is outstanding. Play down the absence of love interest, but use photos of Tim Holt and Bruce Bennett, both young and romantic looking.

An adaptation from a novel, with the screenplay by Robert Rossen, this Warner Bros. film was under the production supervision of veteran Henry Blanke.

Contemporary critic James Agee called *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* "one of the most visually alive and beautiful movies I have ever seen. [It] is one of the best things Hollywood has done since it learned to talk." Agee, who was writing regularly for *Life* at the time, thought that composer Max Steiner's score was abysmally inappropriate to the movie. That claim was perceived as unfounded by the reviewing critic for the *Hollywood Quarterly*, however, who retorted that Agee's critique of the movie's music was entirely lacking in specifics.

John Huston won Oscars for the screenplay and as Best Director, while his father, Walter Huston, earned an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor for his role in the movie. John Huston credited producer Blanke as his "champion and mentor." Blanke had produced Huston's first feature as a director, *The Maltese Falcon*, and had encouraged Huston's career as a screenwriter at Warner Bros. and his elevation to directing.

The Academy Award for Best Picture of 1948 went to a screen version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that was produced in England by one of the stalwarts of British cinema, Arthur Rank, for his Two Cities Production Company. Rank's American partner was Universal, working through its subsidiary Universal-International, and it was Universal that actually provided the majority of funding for the film. Paying attention to Universal's investment were the movie's associate producer, Phil C. Samuel, and Anthony Bushnell, who earned the credit of assistant producer. *Hamlet* starred Laurence Olivier, who also directed the film.

The project was indicative of new factors in postwar Hollywood filmmaking that would take on increasing importance over the next several decades. The first element that was new was a Hollywood studio investing in a movie actually produced outside the United States. This was a practice that occurred sporadically through the 1950s, becoming far more prominent toward the end of that decade, to the point that it became known as “run-away production” when by the late 1950s and 1960s the practice seemed so common that it was perceived to endanger Hollywood to its very core. The matter, however, was more complex. The interest in funding films that were produced outside the United States marked the beginning of an economic trend that eventually came to characterize doing global business in many areas of investment, manufacturing, and enterprise. Over time, this practice would come to be known as “outsourcing.”

In the aftermath of World War II, many business factors favored Hollywood investments overseas. Hollywood’s exportation of movies and its development of subsidiaries abroad for the distribution and exhibition of its movies grew rapidly in non-Communist countries. Around the globe, as earnings from their foreign subsidiaries increased, Hollywood companies shifted their business strategies. Factors such as currency exchange rates, protective tariffs, and taxes made it wise for these companies to invest their earnings from the distribution and exhibition abroad into actual motion picture production where those monies had been earned. Western Europe’s postwar recovery was shaky, and a great number of talented screen artists and film production crew members were available to hire cheaply. As an aesthetic of screen realism took hold in Hollywood following the war, the settings of movies, especially if they were historic, lent themselves to filming on location in Great Britain, northern Europe, or the Mediterranean countries. Labor costs were considerably less expensive in Europe than in Southern California.

Interestingly, although the aesthetic of movie realism was spreading in Hollywood, filming in color, rather than in black-and-white, was making only modest gains. *Hamlet* was filmed in black-and-white. Olivier insisted it be in black-and-white to permit its director of photography, Desmond Dickenson, to use deep-focus techniques to achieve “a more majestic, more poetic image, in keeping with the verse.” The art direction was by Roger K. Furse, with sets by Carmen Dillon, and their achievements were recognized with an Oscar. Furse also claimed an Oscar for Costume Design.

In the immediate postwar period, there was a certain perceived cultural cachet to utilizing talented European actors and craftspeople that was justified on the basis of perception and image rather than the bottom line. Hollywood understood marketability well. The most widely read weekly family magazine in the United States at the time, *Life*, devoted its cover and its lead feature

story to *Hamlet's* star and director, Sir Laurence Olivier. The article began by emphasizing that for three hundred years scholars had been arguing over the correct interpretation of the true character of Hamlet, and that in him Shakespeare had created the greatest part for an actor ever written. Universal's nationwide press kit for movie theater owners emphasized that the difference between a run of *Hamlet* that did well at the box office and a run that did extraordinary or record business was how well the movie was marketed to high school and college audiences. In many places, movie theaters arranged with school administrators to schedule special morning or early afternoon screenings of *Hamlet* so that entire classes (sometimes, entire schools) could go together to see the movie with their teachers.

Universal's marketing of this prestige movie version of *Hamlet* in 1948 actually marked an exceptional push by the distributor to exploit the tie-ins to the film, through promotions for hardcover books, paperback books, a *Hamlet* record album consisting entirely of a reading of the lines of Olivier and his fellow cast made available by RCA-Victor record company, and evenings at local movies theaters as a social event, so specialty shops and department stores could promote dresses for women going to an evening of *Hamlet*. Universal was marketing the idea that Olivier's screen version of *Hamlet* was a screen classic well before the movie actually premiered.

The play, which in its original staging was four hours long, was cut to two and a half hours by Olivier's reworking of it for the movie script. The movie premiered in London, and British critics and audiences were enthusiastic. In the United States, the same was the case. The movie reviewer for the *New Yorker* not only lavished praise on the film but also noted conspicuously his thanks to Olivier for cutting out from his script entirely "such nuisances as Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern and the second gravedigger." *Time's* review of the movie, in an edition that featured a cover photo of eighteen-year-old Jean Simmons, who played Ophelia, began:

The question used to be: Can Shakespeare's plays be made into successful movies? With his film production of *Henry V*, Sir Laurence Olivier settled that question once and for all. But *Henry* raised another question that it could not answer: Can the screen cope with Shakespeare at his best? Olivier undertook to answer that one, too. U.S. audiences now will see the result. The answer is yes.

During its run in the United States, critics repeatedly described the cast of *Hamlet* as superb. Writing in the *Saturday Review*, critic John Mason Brown was absolutely ecstatic about what he labeled as a movie produced "at Denham-near-London for Hollywood-on-the-Pacific" as the best picture ever made. At the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther's review hailed *Hamlet*

as “a hit, a very palpable hit,” while the tabloid *New York Daily News* reviewer ranked it as superb with the elusive and coveted designation of four stars. Still, a few critics described the film as being essentially a “photographed play,” including Mary McCarthy, writing in the *Partisan Review*, who nevertheless immediately pointed out that there was nothing inferior or less entertaining about the movie because of that fact.

In its release in the United States alone, *Hamlet*, which had cost \$2 million to produce, earned in excess of \$3 million in revenue. It was acclaimed outside the English-speaking world, as well. *Hamlet* won the grand prize for 1948 at the first of the great International Film Festivals in Venice, Italy. Classic tragedy could work on-screen for Hollywood, with a stellar British cast, and a prestige design team. American critics liked the movie, as did American audiences, and Hollywood’s film establishment recognized those results by bestowing its highest award of merit, the Best Picture for 1948, to this movie.

THE END OF CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD

The year 1948 can be taken as the point at which the true era of Classic Hollywood ended. What marked that end was not a particular movie, but rather a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that year. The Court’s verdict came in a case that the Justice Department had initiated against the vertically integrated Hollywood companies in the late 1930s. While the case was against all five major Hollywood studios that were vertically integrated, the government attorneys filing the brief had named Paramount first, so the 1948 Supreme Court ruling is commonly known as the “*Paramount* Decision.” The other defendants in the case were Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Bros., MGM, and RKO.

The historic structure that had begun in the early 1920s, with one movie company simultaneously making, distributing, and showing movies in its own theaters, had provided the economic foundation on which Classic Hollywood was built. The Supreme Court’s decision mandated that all these companies divest themselves of the movie theaters they owned, so that they would no longer be active in the exhibition sector of the movie business.

The Court also outlawed two common practices of the vertically integrated Hollywood system: *block booking* and *blind booking*. Since the five vertically integrated companies all were distributors of movies for rent to theaters across the country that were owned by others, they commonly required movie theater owners and independent theater chains to rent the movies they were distributing in a block. This meant that in order to get a highly desired movie title from a major Hollywood company, the renter would have to pay for lesser titles along with it as an entire package or not be able to rent the movie

at all. This was “block booking,” and it was ruled illegal. Sometimes, a major Hollywood distributor would not even specifically name all the titles that a theater owner would have to rent to complete a package, but would simply describe movies in general terms so that the distributor could later select a specific title. This was called “blind booking,” and it, too, was banned by the *Paramount Decision*.

In selling off their movie theaters, the major Hollywood companies complied with the Court’s order in differing ways and to varying degrees. Several major Hollywood studios resisted selling off their theaters for as long as possible. Others sold their theaters quickly. The bottom line, however, was that, after 1948, the business foundation of the Classic Hollywood studio system had been altered permanently.

A HOME APPLIANCE BECOMES COMPETITION

The other factor facing Hollywood movies by 1948 was not connected to an event like a court decision. Although still in its infancy in 1948, broadcast television in the United States existed from coast to coast and soon would be pervasive. Its spread had an enormous impact on the decline of the audience for motion pictures and on the major Hollywood studios. The most immediate effect would be on the exhibition sector of the movie business, but over time it would impact the sorts of movies Hollywood made and for what audience they made them.

Classic Hollywood had made, distributed, and exhibited movies to appeal to a very broad American audience. Classic Hollywood regarded “anyone from eight to eighty” as its audience. In the Classic Era, Hollywood largely tried to make movies that every generation admired simultaneously for their surface polish and professionalism. The Production Code that governed the content of Hollywood movies from the early 1930s onward was intended to make an outing to the movies reliably comfortable for grandparents, parents, and children alike.

Beginning in 1948, Classic Hollywood started to unravel. For the next two and a half decades, the motion picture industry in the United States was in transition. All of the major studios survived through the second half of the twentieth century, with the sole exception of RKO, which went out of business in 1958. What a major studio was and how it operated, however, changed. Independent production took on a new importance, and the meaning of “independent” in the movie world would go through many changes.

In this prolonged period of transition, Hollywood had to reinvent itself. As with all such reinvention, there were plenty of problems. Between the end

of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1970s, what changed most dramatically was the audience for movies, which meant that the movies made to appeal most reliably to that audience would have to change as well. Hollywood movies would be made with different stories, in different styles, and addressed to the different tastes of new audiences.

Simultaneously, many vestiges of Classic Hollywood survived intact and influences of Classic Hollywood persisted in every aspect of moviemaking. The long shadow of Classic Hollywood would cast itself over movies made in the United States throughout the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Even with the arrival of a “new Hollywood,” which is dated to 1975, Classic Hollywood would never be forgotten.

SUMMARY

With the war over and soldiers returning to the United States from their service overseas, 1946 marked the peak year for weekly attendance at movies in the United States. Hollywood production shifted from many of its wartime stories and themes toward producing more movies that dealt with veterans returning from war, as well as with social problems in a more realist aesthetic. For several reasons, economic cooperation and the coproduction of movies with Great Britain was favorable for Hollywood. The most important factors for Hollywood soon after World War II, however, had little to do with the actual making of movies.

Strictly speaking, the most important events for Hollywood came in 1948. The first was a decision by the Supreme Court that declared the vertical integration of the five most prominent Hollywood companies to be monopolistic and in violation of the law. The second was the appearance of network broadcast television as a consumer commodity. The end of vertical integration meant the demise of the business core of Classic Hollywood. From 1948 on, the major Hollywood studios faced an uncertain future that would eventually force them to reinvent themselves. The advent of nationwide broadcast television soon would mean that the mass audiences that jammed movie theaters in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s would be finding similar entertainment far less expensively on the small screen at home.

Part II

HOLLYWOOD IN
TRANSITION, 1949–1974

Postwar Unravelings

The year 1948 was a turning point for Hollywood because the Supreme Court's *Paramount* Decision declared illegal the vertical integration of the five most prosperous and stable of the major Hollywood companies. That ruling was important because it meant the end of the economic structure on which Hollywood's financial success had been based for nearly three decades. The Court's decision that Hollywood's business practices were monopolistic meant the demise of a structure that had ensured high-quality screen entertainment for America's mass audiences since the 1920s.

A year earlier, in 1947, the federal government had appeared to intervene in Hollywood in yet a different manner that many in Hollywood feared threatened basic rights of free speech and artistic expression. During autumn of that year, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) of the U.S. House of Representatives held hearings to investigate Communist Party infiltration in the motion picture industry. Although many other people in the movie industry thought that this was primarily a political sideshow devised to draw attention to governmental vigilance against the global Communist menace and to earn publicity for the congressmen who were members of the committee, others took the investigations seriously indeed.

On one side were those who thought that the activities of Communists in Hollywood were threatening to the industry, tended to aid and abet a global enemy of the United States, and might influence the production of movies with pro-Communist and anti-American content. On the other side were those who believed that Congress had no business conducting such investigations and that the political beliefs and affiliations of any American—including those involved in making movies—was a matter of personal conscience and a right protected by the Constitution of the United States. Although these

hearings—and the subsequent convictions for contempt of Congress of ten Hollywood figures, primarily screenwriters—are often said to be the result of “McCarthyism,” in actuality Joseph McCarthy, the U.S. senator from Wisconsin who later conducted investigations into Communist infiltration of the U.S. State Department and the Department of the Army, had nothing to do with hearings on Communists in the entertainment industry. A bipartisan panel from the House of Representatives conducted these Hollywood hearings, not the U.S. Senate.

The HUAC hearings featured a number of friendly witnesses, including one of the Warner brothers, Jack, along with Louis B. Mayer and actors Robert Montgomery, Robert Taylor, Adolphe Menjou, Gary Cooper, and Ronald Reagan. In addition, Walt Disney and the veteran director at Paramount and MGM Leo McCarey were cofounders of the Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals in 1944, and both of them testified as well. All of these figures provided general support to the hearings, along with specific testimony about movie industry personnel whom they considered suspicious.

At the time, much of the impetus to “name names” and testify against the activities of Communist Party members, extreme leftists, and Stalinists working in the movie industry came from the tensions in a number of the movie industry’s unions and guilds. These conflicts were often within unions in battles for influence and control, such as the Screen Actors Guild, the Conference of Studio Unions, and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees. Most of the friendly witnesses took the position that indeed there were Communists in the industry, a number of whom were especially active in union agitation, but that, on the whole, they had been thwarted in their attempts to take over the industry.

In 1947, eleven witnesses who were suspected Communists were called to testify. One of them, Bertolt Brecht, told HUAC he had never been a Communist—which was a lie—and then promptly left the United States for his native Europe. The other ten refused to answer questions, asserted their unwillingness to cooperate, and engaged in tirades against the committee that the congressmen called obstructive. All ten were subsequently cited for contempt of Congress. They were screenwriters Alvah Bessie, Lester Cole, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, and Dalton Trumbo, directors Herbert Biberman and Edward Dmytryk, and producer Adrian Scott. When they were indicted for contempt of Congress, the major studios, acting through the industry’s trade organization, the Motion Picture Producers Association, issued a joint declaration that they would not knowingly employ Communists. The Screen Actors Guild, to the chagrin of several other industry unions, endorsed the producers’ position.

Eventually, the ten were convicted, and six served jail time. To clarify, they were not imprisoned for being Communist Party members, nor for any ideas they held, but rather for belligerently refusing to cooperate and answer the questions posed to them by an investigative committee legally created by an act of Congress, so that their violation of the law was “contempt of Congress.”

Closer to the actual events, realistic interpretations of the motives and facts underlying these congressional investigations and the creation of the “blacklist” appear to have prevailed. After the late 1960s, as far-reaching cultural changes occurred in the United States, there was a shift, especially in Hollywood itself, toward seeing the “Hollywood Ten” as victims. They were subsequently lionized in articles, books, and documentary films, as well as in a number of sympathetic feature films set in the era. It is difficult to know whether the ten were maligned heroes defending the principles of free speech and assembly or naïve intellectuals and artists drawn to the ideas of the radical left.

The motives of the movie companies that created the blacklist, as well as the motives of the friendly witnesses who testified—often about the past activities of old friends—were complex. Was such testimony a payback for personal antagonism, perhaps exacerbated by conflicts within the guilds and unions, or was it testimony by people who held a genuine fear of Stalin’s Soviet Union, its murderous record of denying human rights, and its expansion into Eastern Europe? How deeply did the friendly witnesses believe that some professionals working within Hollywood were blind devotees of Stalinist ideology, and that the American Communist Party was largely funded from Moscow, so that their loyalty to the United States should be questioned in an era of global conflict? For the next several years, HUAC hearings, the divisions in Hollywood over them, the existence of the blacklist, and the debate over ideas, ideologies, and political activities and their relationship to moviemaking held some prominence in Hollywood’s culture.

Moviemaking in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, like everything else in America, continued alongside the Cold War. Did many movies allude to that prolonged conflict, either directly or indirectly? Later generations of movie critics and historians sometimes would assert that trends in the American cinema of the 1950s, such as the appearance of science-fiction movies in the period, were emblematic of the fear of atomic weapons and the challenge that existed over such weapons between the United States and the Soviet Union. Other commentators would caution that science-fiction movies had their best audiences among teenagers, who are the least likely group in society to be interested in politics. Did the investigative hearings of HUAC and the blacklist cast a cloud of intimidation over Hollywood that discouraged producers, screenwriters, and directors from tackling movies that dealt with

social injustice or that suggested solutions which were too clearly identified as being on the political left? None of these questions is easily answered.

The general tendency of Hollywood after 1948 was to try to bring back the old audiences of pre-1948 to the movie theaters. Mostly, this was done by reworking established stories, formulas, and the themes of Classic Hollywood, but with added new approaches bringing the aesthetics of realism and naturalism on the screen. Were those tendencies shifted toward the avoidance of more politically and socially engaged movies because of governmental pressures on suspected Communists in the early years of the Cold War? Perhaps, but it is difficult to document such a link convincingly.

INTERNATIONAL CREDITS AND A COLD WAR BACKDROP

The Cold War and the U.S.-Soviet conflict, of course, could serve as the background for many a spy movie, a thriller, or even a comedy during the era of Hollywood's transition from 1949 to 1974. In the case of *The Third Man*, the setting and the suspense were provided by immediate postwar Vienna and underscored by the emerging Cold War tensions. Strictly speaking, the screen adaptation of Graham Greene's thriller might be classified as a British movie, because the movie's producer, Alexander Korda, and its director, Sir Carol Reed, were British, but the fact that *The Third Man* film required American financing, and that its two male stars were American, sufficed to qualify it as an American movie.

In the movie, a writer of pulp novels named Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) is on the trail of his old friend Harry Lime (Orson Welles) in postwar Vienna, ruled by the victorious World War II allies—the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, and France. Lime has become a black marketer, peddling diluted penicillin, which, when used, proved deadly. Martins arrives in Vienna only to find his friend Lime assumed dead, and a trail of corruption spiraling all across the four occupation zones of Vienna with Lime's signature on it. Broke, confused, and alone, Martins is forced to confront his idealism and innocence about Lime and to explore the boundaries of an old friendship. Martins's odyssey in search of the truth eventually destroys his oldest friend, the woman they both love, and Martin himself.

Director Reed and his cinematographer Robert Krasker created unusual combinations of lighting and camera angles that convey the confusion and escalating panic of Martins as he tries to track down Lime. According to the assistant director on the project, Guy Hamilton (who later directed several of the early and classic James Bond movies in the 1960s), the distinctive ways

in which shadows of Lime's figure are used was a discovery born of unusual circumstance: While waiting for Orson Welles to work out the finances of his deal and to actually arrive in Vienna to begin filming, Hamilton himself was sent down streets dressed in a big hat and a topcoat, while Reed and Krasker simply observed. Out of their observations came the decision to try to capture on film the look of the shadow projected by Welles's Lime, which became the visual signature of *The Third Man*.

Working through the British producer Korda, a deal was set up with Hollywood's premier independent producer, David O. Selznick, for financing the movie. Selznick, naturally, got the film he wanted. In fact, he cut eleven minutes from the version Reed delivered to him in order to get to the length of the print released into distribution in the United States. There was Cold War intrigue behind the film's plot as well as in the screenplay. It was credibly speculated that the writer Greene, who had served in the British Intelligence unit MI6 during World War II, had based the Lime character on Greene's own suspicions about his wartime boss in British intelligence, Kim Philby. Philby, as it turned out later, actually was a double agent, working the Soviet KGB.

Along with Welles and his longtime friend and colleague, Joseph Cotten, the British actors Alida Valli and Trevor Howard joined an array of Central European talent cast in the minor roles. There are several distinctive and memorable elements to this movie: the haunting zither music that provides the score; the skewed camera angles and use of shadows; and postwar Vienna itself as a backdrop, bombed out and divided politically into zones of occupation. There is remarkable life in this movie, which often is cited as a perfect marriage of word and image, as well as sound and symbol. The distinctive musical score for *The Third Man* was performed on the zither by Anton (Toni) Karas and became an international hit. The Austrian Oswald Hafenrichter adroitly edited the movie.

There are notable visual moments in this movie. A train's departure is indicated by the light patterns of its windows projected across a cloud of steam. A cat is photographed brushing its whiskers against the outline of a human figure obscured by the shadows. The finale that climaxes Martins's pursuit of Lime constitutes a chase through the labyrinthine sewers of the city. The ending of *The Third Man*, too, gained attention. Anna, as she leaves Lime's funeral, walks not into Martins's arms in the conventional final embrace of a resolution expected by most viewers, but instead passes right by him staring ahead impassively. We know that the director Reed held out for this ending.

Selznick did not release *The Third Man* in the United States until February 1950, presumably because he feared that American audiences might not be ready to accept a theme of unmistakable Central European cynicism of the

sort not normally found in Hollywood movies up to that time. As a tie-in to the movie, a written version of *The Third Man* was published in the United States in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, promoted as “the story from which the famous movie was made.” Still, respected critics liked *The Third Man*. Bosley Crowther’s review in the *New York Times* on the occasion of the movie’s release offered this opinion:

Top credit must go to Mr. Reed for molding all possible elements into a thriller of super-consequence. And especially must he be credited with the brilliant and triumphant device of using the music of a zither as the sole musical background in this film. This eerie and mesmerizing music, which is rhythmic and passionate and sad, becomes, indeed, the commentator—the genius loci—of the Viennese scene.

THE ACADEMY’S BEST PICTURE FOR 1949

Produced, written, and directed by Robert Rossen, *All the King's Men* (1949) was based on Robert Penn Warren’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name, published three years earlier. The movie chronicles the rise and fall of a Southern political demagogue, Willie Stark, played by Broderick Crawford. From an early record of support for civic improvement, Stark’s public career eventually is turned to ashes by a corrupting and insatiable greed for power, and ends with his assassination. Stark is modeled closely on a former governor of Louisiana and powerful U.S. senator, Huey Long. Although Stark starts out in the movie with a burning sense of purpose and a defiant honesty and integrity, the darker complexity of his true nature is never far from the surface. In the film, Stark’s darker side is revealed in comments made to his press agent (played by John Ireland) who serves as the movie’s narrator.

The visual style of the movie was marked by Burnett Guffey’s crisp black-and-white cinematography. Edited by Robert Parrish and Al Clark, *All the King's Men* displayed notable staccato cutting in several scenes, reminiscent of impressionism in a number of German silent movies from the 1920s. A Columbia production, the movie earned a Best Picture Oscar, but not Best Director. Many years after Rossen’s death in 1966, his widow claimed the he had been denied the vote in the Academy because of McCarthyism; this claim, like many others concerning this period, is difficult to assess.

Rossen, who had moved to Hollywood in 1936 from New York City to work as a contract screenwriter at Warner Bros., had joined a Communist Party cell for a period of time, as did a great many idealists, university students, and others who were frustrated and disillusioned by the continuing economic

depression that began after the stock market collapse of October 1929. In 1947, Rossen was subpoenaed to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, chaired by Rep. J. Parnell Thomas, but after the conviction of the Hollywood Ten for contempt of Congress, the HUAC hearings were suspended before Rossen—who had severed his ties with the Communist Party two years earlier—was called.

Rossen notably continued to work in Hollywood during the following years. He cowrote *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, produced *The Undercover Man*, and directed *Johnny O'Clock*, *Body and Soul*, and *The Brave Bulls*, as well as *All the King's Men* in the late 1940s. Given the anonymity and secrecy of Academy voting, the historical record will never reveal why Rossen did not win Best Director, although the person directing the Best Picture clearly has no guarantee of being voted Best Director because of it.

In 1951, Rossen testified at new HUAC hearings, saying that he was not presently involved with the Communist Party, but he refused to talk about the past and declined to name others in the movie industry with whom he had associated during his affiliation with the Communist Party. He was then blacklisted by the industry, but two years later he requested a special hearing from HUAC, at which he named some fifty past associates in the Communist Party, presumably so that he could work again. Not long after, he left Southern California and moved back to New York City, where he continued his career directing feature films until his death.

BROADWAY AND *SUNSET BOULEVARD*

The Best Picture of 1950 was *All About Eve*, produced for Twentieth Century-Fox by Darryl F. Zanuck and written and directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. It was based on a short story entitled “The Wisdom of Eve” by Mary Orr, rights to which had been purchased by Zanuck (originally intended as a vehicle for actress Susan Hayward) when a version of it was produced and aired as an NBC radio drama. Set in the Broadway theater world in New York City, *All About Eve* was filmed entirely at the Fox studios in Los Angeles, with doubles used for the cast with a “B” camera unit to film additional footage for the movie on the streets of the actual Broadway theater district in New York City. Nominated for a record fourteen Oscars, *All About Eve* won six.

The original short story by Orr, which had been published in *Cosmopolitan*, was reputedly based on the real-life experiences of actress Elizabeth Bergner when she and her husband, Paul Czinner, had taken a zealous and self-promoting young actress under their wing. *All About Eve* is a melodrama, but it also is a rich satire of show business. Some movie industry insiders even

took the skullduggery of the screenplay as emblematic of the kind of betrayal and backstabbing that sometimes went on in moviemaking. Promoted with the tagline “Fasten your seatbelts,” *All About Eve* promised its audiences a nasty and catty conflict between two ambitious women.

Anne Baxter plays Eve Harrington, a conniving and unscrupulous ingenue who wins something called the “Siddons Award” and a place at the top of the theater world by betraying an older, insecure mentor named Margo Channing (Bette Davis) who fears that she is aging too quickly. This melodrama is surrounded by a Broadway stage world filled with both public and private intrigues. There are flashbacks from various points of view indicating that Eve probably didn’t deserve the Siddons Award.

Over time, *All About Eve* came to be considered a Hollywood classic of the first order. Its witty script, and especially its catty dialogue, however, caused the movie later to become widely regarded as Hollywood “camp.” The movie later would become a favorite of academic feminist film critics because, like the genre of melodrama itself, *All About Eve* lends itself nicely to being interpreted as a fictional exploration of gender roles and the nature of families.

Besides Baxter and Davis, Celeste Holm and George Sanders had major roles. Marilyn Monroe made an early screen career appearance in a minor role, in which she makes a stairway entrance causing the theater critic played by Sanders to introduce her character as “a graduate of the Copacabana school of acting.” The movie also provided good examples of the Production Code Administration under Joseph Breen still laboring to keep Hollywood movies as sanitized as possible, even in the changing social and cultural environment of the post–World War II period—in this instance, demanding the deletion of the line: “I’ll never forget the blizzard the night we played Cheyenne—first time I ever saw a brassiere break like a piece of matzo.” Although there were warnings that Davis would try to rewrite the dialogue on the set, she evidently didn’t, because Mankiewicz never gave her a chance to.

That same year, Gloria Swanson starred as Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*, a film meant to make even movie industry insiders believe that it was about people actually involved in the art and business of moviemaking. William Holden was cast as Joe Gillis, the antihero screenwriter with an acerbic wit, a gigolo who tells the freshly face-lifted Desmond, “There’s nothing tragic about being fifty.”

It is sometimes said that the Hollywood establishment is drawn to movies about itself, even if they are unflattering. It is probably safer to say that the Hollywood establishment pays attention to such movies, but that opinion within the establishment is greatly divided about them. Compared to *All About Eve*, *Sunset Boulevard*, directed by Billy Wilder, portrays the contradiction between stardom and aging far more bitterly. Humorous in parts, it is nonethe-

less a dark film in its mood and tone. It was praised for Hollywood examining a relic of its own past with surprising objectivity.

Written by Charles Brackett, D. M. Marshman, and Wilder, this dark tale of a demented silent-picture star who murders her young screenwriter lover was considered a knockout when first released and has grown in stature since then. *Sunset Boulevard* had cameo appearances for legendary directors Erich von Stroheim and Cecil B. DeMille. This was a Paramount movie, in which academic critics frequently detect what they call the “baroqueness” of influences from 1920s German silent movies on its style.

Due to its visual style and its look, *Sunset Boulevard* is often cited as an example of film noir. Its director of photography, John Seitz, noted in an article in the *American Cinematographer* that *Sunset Boulevard*

depends upon photographic mood for much of its dramatic effect. Thus, the more interesting scenes are played in low-key lighting, faithfully motivated by the time of day as well as the locale. The restrained lighting in these sequences led the audience to focus its attention sharply on the action in such a way that the performances could be kept effectively restrained.

New Yorker film critic Philip Hamburger called it “a pretentious piece of Roquefort,” but nearly everyone else among the major movie critics greeted it as a work of genius. Bosley Crowther cited “the manifest brilliance of this sharp and corrosive film.” Box office receipts nationwide were strong. Louis B. Mayer of MGM, however, was sour on *Sunset Boulevard*, commenting that director Wilder had brought disgrace upon the motion picture industry. Mayer thought it desecrated Hollywood’s past, as well as its present, image.

SMALL-TOWN AMERICA TO PARIS TO AFRICA

Elizabeth Taylor, Shelley Winters, and Montgomery Clift starred in the 1951 feature *A Place in the Sun*, a Paramount production ranked at number 92 on the American Film Institute’s 1996 list. George Stevens, the movie’s director, also served as the producer on the project. Adapted from a Theodore Dreiser story, *A Place in the Sun* is a tale about George Eastman (Clift), the personable but poor son of Skid Row missionaries, who wrangles a job in his wealthy uncle’s knitting mill. He has a romantic affair with a fellow worker at the mill, the naïve and unsophisticated Alice Tripp (Winters), but he later meets and falls in love with a wealthy socialite named Angela Vickers (Taylor). Alice, however, learns that she is pregnant and demands marriage. When Alice and George visit a lonely lake, the boat they are in overturns and she drowns.

George, who wanted to make for himself “a comfortable place in the sun,” is accused of her murder and convicted.

A Place in the Sun is full of close-ups and poignant uses of what by now was considered standard Hollywood film language, for example, the shot of a sleeping neighborhood through a bedroom window after a night of illicit romance, or the glitter of the moon upon a lake’s surface that appears strangely malevolent. In his role as George, Clift personifies the moody, inner-directed young man whose personal wanderlust and indecisiveness are further betrayed by his raging libido. Clift was a proponent and early master of method acting for the screen whose melancholy demeanor and haunted sense of selfhood put him alongside Marlon Brando and James Dean in this era. For Hollywood movies in the first half of the 1950s, this trio of actors became emblematic of the outwardly rugged male lead whose inward sensitivity is hidden behind a mask. *A Place in the Sun* is finally not about social class, but rather about youthful male trauma. It is Clift’s performance as George that lifts the movie from the stranglehold of author Dreiser’s social determinism to a much more complex level that entails a deep psychological exploration of George’s identity and sense of self.

The 1951 Best Picture was *An American in Paris*, a musical in the best traditions of MGM’s productions of the 1930s that were definitive of the genre; it was sweeping, elegant, and riveting. The film was produced for the studio by Arthur Freed, originally a lyricist hired by Irving Thalberg at MGM in 1929, who, starting with *Babes in Arms* (1939) became synonymous with the surface glamour and high quality of the MGM musical. Freed was largely responsible for the development in Hollywood of what became known as the “integrated musical”—a seamless combination of music, dance, narrative, art, direction, and camera movement assembled according to the highest standards of “production value,” hence creating a glossy, colorful, and engaging spectacle. *An American in Paris* became the first musical since 1929 to win a Best Picture Oscar and also took Oscars in seven other categories.

With rights purchased from legendary composer George Gershwin (the younger brother of lyricist Ira Gershwin), *An American in Paris* is a story about an American expatriate named Jerry Mulligan (Gene Kelly) living in Paris in the years immediately following the Second World War, although it might also be called an all-Gershwin songfest. Mulligan is pursuing his artistic freedom diligently. In order to do so, since he has no job and is not working, he is being “kept”—a concept dealt with none too directly by the script in keeping with the cultural norms of early 1950s America and Hollywood’s Production Code—by a wealthy older American woman named Milo Roberts (Nina Foch). Oscar Levant plays a neighbor in the same apartment building who describes himself as “the world’s oldest child

prodigy.” Soon enough, Mulligan becomes infatuated with a young French woman named Lise, played by Leslie Caron in her screen debut, but eventually decides to give up the romance so that she can return to the arms of a French singer (Georges Guetary).

The story, by Alan Jay Lerner, however, becomes almost peripheral to this movie, which really consists of performance numbers imaginatively designed and choreographed: Kelly’s jazz eruption as Toulouse-Lautrec’s “Chocolat,” his *pas-de-deux* with Caron on the riverbank, Kelly’s solo dance to “It’s Wonderful,” the “I Got Rhythm Number,” and the grand finale of the movie, “The ‘American in Paris’ Ballet,” which is set against backgrounds created from glimpses of famed Impressionist painters famous for capturing on canvas scenes of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Paris: Renoir, Dufy, Utrillo, Rousseau, Van Gogh, Manet, and Toulouse-Lautrec.

The movie also frequently challenges visual conventions of Hollywood: for example, the elaborate costumes and sets for the “Artists’ Ball” sequence are entirely in black-and-white, even though the rest of *An American in Paris* is in color. There also is artistic abstraction in the segment after Lise leaves the grand ball. As Mulligan is daydreaming, the seventeen-minute-long sequence that expresses his dream interweaves his quest to find himself as an artist and his romantic pursuit of her. For the film, the director Vincente Minnelli wanted painterly sets throughout, merging form with content for an overall “look” that is sustained as colorful, invigorating, and ambitious throughout. Indeed, perhaps the only telling criticism of *An American in Paris* as a musical film is that, in hindsight, it appears to have opened the way for Hollywood to churn out a whole slew of second-rate bombastic musical spectacles in the 1950s that were inspired by it, none of which equaled its accomplishments.

Another notable film released in 1951, *The African Queen*, was coproduced by the British company Romulus Film (run by Sir John Woolf) and Sam Spiegel’s independent Hollywood company Horizon Pictures. Production costs were kept between \$400,000 and \$500,000, and the movie was distributed by United Artists. The screenplay for *The African Queen* was by the seasoned writer and well-known movie critic James Agee, based on a novel by C. S. Forester. The supervisory producer for the project was credited as S. P. Eagle (a pseudonym that Sam Spiegel frequently used for himself). *The African Queen* was directed by John Huston and was acclaimed by critics and audiences alike. It starred what at the time was considered the unlikely pairing of Katharine Hepburn, as the spinster sister of a missionary to Africa, and Humphrey Bogart, as a tough, gin-swilling, and profane skipper of a rickety riverboat. These two strong-willed characters share dangerous, and sometimes hilarious, adventures as they conspire and struggle to blow up a German gunship in East Africa during World War I.

The upright lady of God and the hard-drinking rowdy team up to provide what amounts to a buddy film. Hepburn later published a “diary” on the making of the movie, a process that she claimed was uneventful except in the sense that making any film is more of an adventure than a day of laying linoleum or working as a teller in a bank. Although most of the movie was shot on location in the Belgian Congo, because of the parasites in the actual waters in Africa, underwater shots were done in London in a tank. Hepburn was noted for her capacity to play an unassuming woman in a way that conveyed an aggressive gentility that was irresistible.

The Bogart–Hepburn pairing for the movie’s leads was the idea of the producer Spiegel. No matter what screen chemistry was expected from these two, each was considered a good box office draw at the time. Bogart had just finished *In a Lonely Place*, directed by Nicholas Ray, and Hepburn had triumphed at the box office in the hit comedy *Adam’s Rib* opposite Spencer Tracy. Bogart called conditions on the set in Africa “rougher than a stucco bathtub.” Nonetheless, the fifty-two-year-old Bogart and the forty-four-year-old Hepburn created something on-screen that had not been found that often in Hollywood movies: a decidedly middle-aged love story. Bogart won the movie’s sole Academy Award as Best Actor.

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

As *Los Angeles Times* film critic Kenneth Turan wrote, “Of the great American films—and make no mistake, it belongs in that group—*A Streetcar Named Desire* remains one of the most misunderstood, underappreciated, and surprisingly one of the most forgotten of American movies.” Turan’s judgment, however, does not mesh with the movie’s inclusion on both lists published by the American Film Institute (at number 45 and 47). One of the movie’s enduring strengths was the fairly unusual fact that nearly every major role in it was played by the actor who had performed the Broadway stage version, under the same director as the movie, Elia Kazan. The sole exception was Vivien Leigh, who replaced Jessica Tandy because the project’s supervisory producer at Warner Bros., Charles K. Feldman, believed the cast absolutely needed at least one established screen star.

Leigh plays a faded, neurotic schoolteacher named Blanche DuBois who takes a New Orleans streetcar, marked with its end terminus “Desire,” to the home of her sister Stella (Kim Hunter). The trolley journey is a metaphorical odyssey; Blanche’s one chance to marry is ruined by Stella’s husband, Stanley Kowalski, played by Marlon Brando, who indulges in cruel revelations about Blanche’s past. Stanley returns home drunk and rapes Blanche, but the screen-

play, unlike the stage play, suggests that Blanche has gone mad and, perhaps, his assault was only delusional. Moreover, Stella still desires her brutish, and often drunken, husband even though he has assaulted her sister. It was *Streetcar* that stamped Brando in the American public's mind and launched him on his rising trajectory to Hollywood success and celebrity.

The screenplay still posed problems with the Production Code Office, whose head Joseph Breen originally wanted the rape, the dramatic turning point in the stage play, to be cut entirely from the movie version. The rape itself was handled deftly in its direction and editing, however, thus permitting it to stay in the story and still meet the guidelines of the Production Code. More significantly, to satisfy Hollywood's Code, the playwright, Tennessee Williams, wrote a new ending in which Stanley's wife Stella, after the rape, goes to her new baby and proclaims in a monologue: "We're not going back there. Not this time. We're never going back."

Thus, fairly typically, did the Production Code Office try to negotiate the changing postwar American culture and the perception of the pressures for movies to handle more mature material naturalistically. As critic Murray Schumach wrote in his book *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor*, summarizing the compromises and equivocations of Hollywood moviemaking in this era: "Thus the 12-year-olds could believe Stella was leaving her husband. But the rest of the audience would realize it was just an emotional outburst of the moment." The Breen office seemed content with the rape being treated as director Kazan staged it for the camera, and the Production Code Office further was satisfied that the ending carried the moral lesson that Stanley was being punished by losing his wife and child.

In spite of these compromises brought to the screenplay by the strictures of the Production Code, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was pivotal in Hollywood's slow shift toward more adult themes, which were considered bold and controversial at the time. *Time's* review labeled the movie "a grown-up, gloves-off drama of real human beings." In the *New York Daily Mirror*, critic Frank Quinn wrote: "One of the year's best! Raw, rough, gripping, emotional drama for its full 122 minutes." The review in the motion picture industry trade journal *Boxoffice*, by contrast, acknowledged the power of the movie, but also provided caution to its readers who were theater owners and managers:

This faithful picturization of Tennessee Williams' grim and depressing drama of Southern decadence will shock many regular picture goers, just as it will be widely praised and discussed by sophisticated patrons. Because of the realism of its squalid way of life, the earthy quality and utter delusion of its chic characters and its frankness in dwelling on sex, it is strictly adult fare.

One way or another, all of these reviews were acknowledging a preference for an increased aesthetic of realism in a significant number of Hollywood films by 1951.

EARNING THE OSCAR UNDER THE BIG TOP

At the twenty-fifth Academy Awards ceremony, the first to be telecast, the movie honored as Best Picture for the preceding year of 1952 was *The Greatest Show on Earth*, produced and directed by Cecil B. DeMille. DeMille had been working in Hollywood since 1912, and, with Jesse Lasky and Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn), had founded the company that became Paramount Pictures. A consummate showman, a great storyteller, and still an active producer/director forty years later, DeMille read in the *Hollywood Reporter* that independent producer David O. Selznick had given up his rights to develop with John Ringling North a motion picture based on the life of the circus. Acquiring the rights that Selznick had decided not to pursue, DeMille hired Frederic M. Frank, Barry Lyndon, and Theodore St. John to write the screenplay, although reliable historical accounts indicate that the film actually was based on a two-page story summary reviewed and approved by DeMille's grandson, Jody.

Brad (Charlton Heston, in his first starring role) is boss of the Big Top, leading his troupe and menagerie across the country. Typical of the complexities of the nomadic life of these modern-day minstrels of the circus is the competition that develops between the trapeze artists, Holly (Betty Hutton) and Sebastian (Cornel Wilde), whom Brad repeatedly cautions not to challenge each other. Foolishly they continue their daring challenges, and Sebastian falls and permanently injures himself. Riddled with guilt, Holly stifles her love for Brad in order to devote her time to consoling and caring for Sebastian. In the meantime, the alluring elephant girl, Angel (Dorothy Lamour) pursues Brad romantically, but her jealous former boyfriend, Klaus (Lyle Bettger), becomes so jealous that he tries to kill Angel during her elephant act and, failing, later causes a spectacular crash of the entire circus train.

Critic Harrison Carroll, writing in the *Los Angeles Herald Express*, summed it up: "Corny, but corny in a way that audiences love." *The Greatest Show on Earth* is a potent reminder that, even when some Hollywood movies were stretching toward a more realist aesthetic, Hollywood still remained at its core about sentiment and spectacle. *The Greatest Show on Earth* consisted of ample and enticing doses of both, with some circus sawdust sprinkled in. At a time when television rapidly was spreading into middle-class American households, *The Greatest Show on Earth* was the kind of film with family appeal, with sentimentality, and with production values that could still reach the mass

audience even as moviegoing was in decline nationwide and movie theaters were closing. It earned \$12.8 million in North American rentals, which placed it number two for movie earnings for the decade of the 1950s, surpassed only by DeMille's 1956 biblical epic, *The Ten Commandments*, which recorded rental earnings in excess of \$34 million.

TWO WESTERNS STRETCHING BEYOND THE GENRE

The 1952 production of *High Noon* was directed by Fred Zinneman, using a screenplay by Carl Foreman based on a story entitled "The Tin Star" by John W. Cunningham. Floyd Crosby's cinematography on the movie is well crafted, but hardly predictable, since there is not a single scenic landscape shot of the kind normally found in westerns in *High Noon*. The western frontier town of Hadleyville is as grimy and unattractive as its citizens, resulting in *High Noon* being called the first "suspense western."

High Noon was an independent production by Stanley Kramer, who took advantage of the eroding studio system to work with a select group of collaborators. Between 1948 and 1954, Kramer was responsible for seventeen feature films made at the Motion Picture Center in Los Angeles, a hotbed of independent production. The center was one of the institutions that had been founded to support independent producers as challengers to the major Hollywood studios soon after the Supreme Court's 1948 decision that put an end to vertical integration. The screenwriter for *High Noon*, Foreman, was one of Kramer's closest and most reliable collaborators in this period. He wrote a total of five feature screenplays for Kramer, two of which, *Champion* (1949) and *The Men* (1950), won Foreman Oscars for Screenwriting.

In the autumn of 1951, however, in the midst of production on *High Noon*, Foreman was subpoenaed before a House Un-American Activities Committee panel and asked whether he had ever been a member of the American Communist Party. He had in fact joined the Communist Party in 1938 and remained a member until at least 1942. However, Foreman refused to answer the question, marking him as an unfriendly witness in the eyes of HUAC. Thus, his old friend, producer Stanley Kramer, had Foreman barred from the set, fearing reprisals toward the project. He also kept Foreman from being listed as a coproducer on *High Noon* even though Foreman previously had been promised that credit. One leading anti-Communist voice in Hollywood, John Wayne, wanted to see Foreman's name removed as the screenwriter as well, but it wasn't. Wayne's anger toward *High Noon* was strong and lasting. The 1958 movie *Rio Bravo*, produced and directed by Howard Hawks and starring Wayne, was considered by many within the movie industry to

be a deliberate “anti-*High Noon*.” Twenty years after *High Noon* was released, Wayne still was telling interviewers that he considered *High Noon* to be “the most un-American thing I’ve seen in my whole life.” Shortly after his encounter with HUAC in 1951, Foreman left the United States and moved to Great Britain. There, he had a successful career in movies that lasted until he returned to the United States in the mid-1970s.

Although *High Noon*’s story appears to be a nearly classic tale in westerns of a man standing alone against a gang of outlaws, the movie nonetheless may be read several different ways because of the political context of the period in which it was made and released. *High Noon* portrays a town without pity, where the best people lack any conviction, while the worst are backstabbers full of vengeance. The interpretation is frequently made that Foreman was drawn to the story because of his own reactions to the first Hollywood blacklisting in the late 1940s. One theme in *High Noon* is about how it feels to be deserted by friends and left alone to face enemies.

Academic critics and commentators have seen *High Noon* as an intended allegory of “Red Scare” paranoia, compounded by cowardice and betrayal. Kramer, an Austrian Jew who lost both his parents in the Holocaust, has said, however, that he saw the movie as being less a parable of the immediate era—the HUAC hearings and the Hollywood blacklist—than being about the enormous question of how we collectively attempt to save our civilization. Indeed, nearly forty years after its original release, in 1989, *High Noon* was being utilized for anti-Communist campaigning by the Solidarity Party in Poland, which summoned voters to the polls with a poster bearing the picture of Gary Cooper in his role as Sheriff Kane, striding the main street of Hadleyville to a showdown.

High Noon benefits from Gary Cooper’s performance. As Will Kane, he is older and more stooped and conveys an air of resignation that he didn’t yet have when he first started his Hollywood career in *The Virginian* in 1929. Lloyd Bridges and Katy Jurado, as supporting players, also deliver exceptionally strong performances. The musical score was by Dimitri Tiomkin. “Do Not Forsake Me,” sung by Tex Ritter, became the movie’s signature song and set a trend in Hollywood from the early 1950s onward for the use of original theme songs to accompany feature films.

The editing work on *High Noon* by Elmo Williams is celebrated, especially for the vintage assembly of character and setting shots that hold the tale in taut suspense just before the fatal hour of noon. Editing a film, as cannot be too often repeated, essentially serves a function similar to staging. In the sense of its editing, *High Noon* resembles a great many well-edited movies, but still it is distinctive because of an unusual structural innovation: the entire movie is presented as if being filmed to take place in real time. To

sustain this story in real time, Williams carved the film down to the most simple, and pure, of forms.

When released, *High Noon* was a low-budget sleeper, distributed by Columbia Pictures, even though Columbia's executives had little faith that the European Kramer understood the western genre and believed that Gary Cooper was well beyond his prime and washed up as a screen talent. Industry insiders questioned the casting of Grace Kelly, as well, as Amy Foster, the Quaker woman who is engaged to marry Kane. Amy frequently seems to be mouthing pacifist platitudes, but Kelly's performance has her character doing so while maintaining a cool and reserved dignity that is quite believable. Amy's moral rectitude and inner strength transcends the platitudes. Moreover, Amy's character is not entirely predictable. Helen Ramirez, played by Jurado, is Kane's former mistress, and while viewers expect a smoldering battle between her and Amy, to the contrary, these two women develop a friendship.

Another renowned western, *Shane*, was directed by George Stevens in 1953. A Paramount release, Stevens also served as the movie's producer. It starred Alan Ladd, Van Heflin, Jean Arthur, Jack Palance, and Brandon De Wilde. A. B. Guthrie Jr. wrote the screenplay for *Shane* as an adaptation of a novel by Jack Schaefer. Guthrie had not written a screenplay before, but as a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist for *The Way West*, he was considered by Hollywood to be a good candidate for success. It was the director's son, George Stevens Jr.—who went on to become a screenwriter and movie director himself, as well as being the founding director of the American Film Institute—who had discovered Schaefer's novel and told his father about it.

On its surface, the plot of *Shane* is simple. An earnest family of well-intentioned homesteaders struggle against a band of greedy and evil ranchers. Finally, the homesteaders are defended and saved by a lone gunfighter who wanders into town. The gunslinger-farmhand named Shane (Alan Ladd) is mythologized in a compelling way because of the decision of Stevens and Guthrie to tell the story largely from the point of view of a young boy, Joey (De Wilde). By placing Joey as an "ideal spectator" within the story and having him tell the story from a child's perspective strongly influence how the viewer sees the movie. The choice means that the idealistic themes of grace, humanity, fate, and sacrifice become more believable and compelling, because they are filtered through the perceptions of a child.

At heart, *Shane* is about each of its main characters being compelled to face facts about himself that he had not confronted before. The story of the lone rider helping a group of homesteaders stand up to a greedy cattle baron is standard material for a movie western, of course, and Paramount only expected *Shane* to do modest box office business at best, while a number of the studio's executives feared that it might fail entirely. Stevens had pitched the

project to the studio as an “American take on the King Arthur tradition,” and Montgomery Clift was first envisioned by Stevens to play the title role. He selected Joe De Yong, who had grown up in Wyoming, as a technical adviser, in order to assure authenticity in the look of the movie. The film’s nearly \$2 million budget was based on a projected forty-two shooting days.

Stevens, who once was quoted as saying that he made movies “for a truck driver in Indiana,” understood what pleased the audience, and *Shane* certainly exhibited those qualities. However, *Shane* is also a movie well appreciated by critics that has withstood the test of time. The Starrett family hires Shane as a ranch hand, but in the end Shane leaves, riding off into the mountains, even though the deeper social theme in the movie is that there is really no place left for gunslingers like him on an American frontier that is abandoning its rugged individualist traditions.

WALKING ON THE DARKER SIDE

Although much historical interpretation of Hollywood in the early 1950s portrays the entire motion picture industry as running scared because of the threat of McCarthyism, viewed in hindsight this characterization appears exaggerated. American politics of the early years of the Cold War impacted how Hollywood was changing less than did the vast sociological changes of the postwar era and the rapid rise of competition to the movies from television. The urban populations of the nation were moving to the suburbs, and streams of young families were relocating from the Midwest to California.

The great movie palaces built in the 1920s were in downtown locations everywhere, but potential audiences for movies were moving away from downtown. From the early 1950s to the late 1960s, suburbanization would cause a great many downtown and inner-city areas to deteriorate. Cities across the United States experienced the decline or outright closure of all sorts of retail stores and service businesses. Their downtown areas frequently became business centers that were essentially abandoned after the workday was over and were surrounded by increasingly impoverished, high-crime inner-city neighborhoods. Additionally, the typical lifestyle of American suburbia was hostile to the interests of the movies. Young families, paying new home mortgages and frequently owning two cars, found a night at the movies increasingly expensive, preferring instead to enjoy the numerous diversions the suburbs provided for family socializing and recreation or turning to the at-home entertainment center of their television set, which provided entertainment for the entire family free of charge.

As television sets came to be found in nearly every home and apartment by the mid-1950s and television programming expanded, the medium’s hold

over the loyalties of the nation's mass audience solidified. Television became the standard entertainment staple of middle-aged, middle-class Americans. Nonetheless, a great many movies continued with themes, characters, and stories typical of Classic Hollywood even as it became apparent that TV satisfied middle-brow tastes just as well and far more cheaply. Much of Hollywood production held on doggedly to what had worked in the past. Other movies, however, began to lean toward exploring harsher portrayals of cinematic realism, confronting more complex social problems, and increasingly focusing on the underside of urban life and America's respected social and public institutions.

From Here to Eternity, directed by Fred Zinneman for Columbia Pictures, is as dark in its mood as it is cinematographically, portraying risky love affairs and, more importantly, a corrupt and brutish U.S. military on the eve of World War II. As one critic expressed it: "Filming a book so openly scathing about the peacetime army was regarded by many as foolhardy, if not downright subversive." Nonetheless, *From Here to Eternity* was adapted from a best-selling novel by James Jones that enjoyed mass readership in the period immediately following the war. Its popularity as both a book and then a movie suggests that the decade following World War II was not so conventional or conservative as some portraits of the period might lead us to believe.

The Hollywood Production Code Office predictably exercised its censorial edicts over the character of Captain Holmes's wife, played by Deborah Kerr. In the novel, she had an eight-year-old son, who was cut from the movie's screenplay. As one pundit put it, by 1953 the Production Code was able to accept that a wife might be an adulteress, but not that an adulteress could be a mother! The Code also demanded that the movie turn the book's raunchy brothel into a serviceman's social club where soldiers drank, danced, flirted with girls, and held their hands, but nothing else.

The *Life* "Movie of the Week" article about *From Here to Eternity* pointed out that Jones's novel seemed to violate every Hollywood taboo. For the screen adaptation, not only were all of the direct references to prostitution eliminated but all of the novel's references to homosexuality as well. Still, considering the era, the movie was quite a steamy melodrama, brought to life on the screen by Burnett Guffey's crisp black-and-white cinematography and the taut screenplay written by Daniel Taradash. Kerr's romantic writhing on the beach with her lover, First Sgt. Milton Warden (Burt Lancaster), when captured as a still photo, became an iconic representation of passion and lust for the early 1950s.

While the novel's references to prostitution and homosexuality were deleted, much of the brutality of the military described in the novel was portrayed in the movie; for example, Maggio (Frank Sinatra) dies in the arms of Warden (Lancaster) in a moving scene, after being tortured by the sadistic

noncommissioned officer named Fatso (Ernest Borgnine). Producer Buddy Adler and screenwriter Taradash also agreed to an unusual rollup in the credits to placate critics in the military; it read: “These conditions *can not* and *do not* exist today.” Still, the U.S. Navy banned *From Here to Eternity* from being shown at its bases or on its ships. The movie, however, was just as critical of the U.S. Army, which had cooperated in its production, and the Department of the Army permitted the film to be shown at all its installations. Although surrounded by an exotic island locale of Hawaii, the characters and their story exist entirely within the closed environment of the U.S. military.

From Here to Eternity was an actors’ movie, distinguished largely by its cast and their performances. Ernest Borgnine was absolutely convincing as the vicious brig captain, and both he and Montgomery Clift, as Pvt. Robert E. Lee Prewitt, who transfers into the unit and defies authority as often as he can, delivered stellar performances. For decades, legend has surrounded the casting of Frank Sinatra for the role of Maggio, for which he won an Oscar as Best Supporting Actor. That legend was perpetuated in Francis Ford Coppola’s movie *The Godfather* (1972), which many interpreted as representing an incident supposedly drawn from Hollywood history whereby mob friends of Sinatra’s won him the role in *Eternity* by threatening a studio boss, decapitating his prize racehorse, and placing the horse’s severed head in his bedroom. What can be verified historically, however, is far less chilling and closer to how Hollywood normally worked. According to Columbia Pictures studio executive Martin Jurow, Sinatra, desperate to get back into making movies as his singing voice began to age, agreed to be paid only \$10,000 for the role of Maggio, and Columbia Pictures readily accepted the opportunity to obtain the services of such a well-known talent at such a low price.

From Here to Eternity won the Academy’s Best Picture Oscar for 1953, beating out the other four nominees—*Julius Caesar*, *Roman Holiday*, *Shane*, and *The Robe*. This was a movie that justly could be called cynical and that was very critical of institutions deeply respected in mainstream American culture at the time; yet it was embraced by the mass audiences of the early Cold War era as well as by the business establishment of the motion picture industry.

REAR WINDOW

Alfred Hitchcock’s 1954 *Rear Window* was produced at Universal. The director was quoted as saying: “If you do not experience delicious terror when you see *Rear Window*, then pinch yourself—you are most probably dead.” The screenplay was by John Michael Hayes, based on a short story by Cornell Woolrich entitled “It Had to Be Murder.” Robert Burks, A.S.C., was the director of photography. One of Hitchcock’s favorite themes was at play here:

how much people are driven to know their neighbors' business, and how assuredly that desire leads to trouble.

The movie opens with the camera traveling slowly past photographer Jeff Jefferies's (Jimmy Stewart) perspiring face to reveal that he is in a wheelchair, as the camera continues to move to take in a temperature reading on the thermometer, travels down Jefferies's leg cast, observes a stack of magazines and a smashed camera, and then pans to the wall to focus on a moment-of-impact crash photograph taken at the Indianapolis Speedway. These shots establish him as a daring photographer who had suffered a broken leg while taking those very photographs that are now hanging on his wall. This elaborate opening sets up a movie that is dedicated to exploring voyeurism, especially by the disabled Jefferies, who is confined to his Greenwich Village apartment and has fallen into the habit of spying on his neighbors.

Rear Window is a Hitchcock thriller with no on-screen violence and never an on-screen corpse. Instead, it is a movie about a compulsive love-infatuation, structured by dream logic. Jefferies's position in the film, of course, interests those who see in the movie a situation that duplicates any movie audience in a theater, since all movie watchers may be considered voyeurs who sit immobilized in their chairs gazing through a rectangular "window" created by the screen. Nonetheless, the Stewart character—like the movie viewer—doesn't just simply observe; he projects into the lives of his neighbors his own imagined plots and narratives, and eventually he begins to suspect that he is seeing the evidence of a murder.

In addition to Stewart, *Rear Window* also starred Grace Kelly, Thelma Ritter, Raymond Burr, and Wendell Corey. Hitchcock considered this his most "cinematic" movie, an interesting observation for someone who had once said that any movie functioned as a mechanical apparatus that evoked conditioned responses in its viewers. It was one of his most successful movies at the box office, too, almost universally applauded and appreciated at the time of its release. *Rear Window* was one of five films Hitchcock made for Paramount between 1954 and 1960, each of which was a solid commercial success. *Rear Window*, for example, produced for \$1 million, earned well over \$5 million in its North American distribution.

LOCATION FILMING, METHOD ACTING, AND NATURALISM

An Elia Kazan production, produced by Sam Spiegel for Columbia Pictures, *On the Waterfront* captured the Academy's Best Picture vote for 1954. As directed by Kazan, using a screenplay written by Budd Shulberg, the movie featured an accomplished cast with Marlon Brando as Terry Malloy, Eva Marie Saint as Edie Doyle, Rod Steiger as Malloy's older brother "Charley

the Gent,” Lee J. Cobb as the mob boss of the docks, and Karl Malden as a crusading parish priest. The story is about the ex-boxer Terry Malloy, who is a hanger-on, through his brother’s connections, to the mob that controls the docks and the longshoremen who toil on them. With Boris Kaufman as the director of photography and Richard Day as the movie’s art director, *On the Waterfront* was filmed on location in Hoboken, New Jersey, at the docks and in the immediate areas adjacent to them. Utilizing the bleak light of a Northeastern winter for atmosphere, the “look” of this film creates a pervasive and agonizing tale of intimidation and fear.

This muted visual naturalism underscores part of the movie’s claim on realism, and the method performances—especially Brando’s—gives further support to that claim. Method acting was based on the theories of Konstantin Stanislavski, and a school where it was prominent, the Actors Studio, was founded in 1947 by Kazan and two others and became a main center for training talent for both stage and screen in the United States. The premise behind method acting—although originally intended primarily to help keep stage actors in touch with their characters and fresh in their approach to performance through many weeks of rehearsals and subsequent performances of plays—proved most appropriate for guiding performance in front of the camera and for the American screen. Method acting, indeed, became definitive of the approach to screen acting in the United States from the mid- to late 1950s and showed its endurance as an idea throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. The approach, whereby an actor does process work to dig deep into his or her past experiences to discover moments of emotional connection with the character’s situation, has been reinforced through generations. In one form or another, a version of it is found across the second half of the twentieth century in a range of screen talents: James Dean, Dustin Hoffman, Gene Hackman, Clint Eastwood, Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, Jane Fonda, Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, and many more.

At various turns, Brando’s performance in *On the Waterfront* is memorable, beginning with his famous dialogue in the backseat of a taxicab with his brother Charley, whom he accuses of having been in collusion with the mob when Terry was talked into taking a dive in a prizefight that, had he won, would have qualified him to challenge the champion in that division: “I coulda been a contender.” Nearly as famous is the bit of “stage business” that Brando invented when picking up Edie’s glove, as they first walk together through a park and playground, then sitting on a child’s swing and carefully pulling the glove over his own masculine hand while he chats with her. In the screen role that a number of critics have called his most effective, Brando’s Terry is rebellious but insecure, lacking conviction but somehow finally finding courage and honor.

As Terry Malloy, Brando provided a model for the American working-class male character in feature films for nearly the entire second half of the twentieth century. This performance is a benchmark. Behind it, of course, lay both the actor's and Kazan's interpretation of the movie as *not* being a social documentary, but rather being Terry's personal story, a subjective account of a personal journey toward redemption and dignity. The rest of the cast surrounded Brando with stellar performances of their own, which underscored Kazan's approach to the material. Saint as the angelic, but still believable, Edie won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar, and Cobb, Malden, and Steiger all were nominees for Best Supporting Actor for the 1954 Academy Awards.

For decades, a great many movie critics and academic commentators have chosen to interpret *On the Waterfront* as a metaphor justifying informers, since Terry finally gives investigative prosecutors what they want and testifies in court against the mobsters. He does so, however, after they have murdered his brother (and further humiliated the body by hanging him up on a meat hook). This connects nicely to historical interpretations of the Cold War blacklist period in Hollywood and the notion that the moviemaking community was obsessive about the conflicts over the House Un-American Activities Committee's investigatory hearings at the time. However, while often asserted, the idea that *On the Waterfront's* main story line serves as a parable for testifying to investigators about Hollywood colleagues with past links to the Communist Party remains unproven.

Although both Kazan and Shulberg were prominent figures at the HUAC hearings and both had named names of past Communists to the HUAC investigators, Shulberg insisted that his screenplay was, after all, based on a well-known set of Pulitzer Prize-winning articles on union corruption and mob infiltration of the longshoremen, written in 1949 for the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain. He argued that the comparison of their cooperative testimony to HUAC and the plot of the movie was entirely fanciful. Although a good deal of the controversy over Communist infiltration of labor unions and guilds in the motion picture industry may have inspired friendly testimony to HUAC, the lasting value of *On the Waterfront* transcended any possible political references and is found in the stunning performances of the cast members who made their characters so riveting.

SINGIN' IN THE RAIN

MGM had been the wealthiest and most prestigious studio of Classic Hollywood. During the 1950s, MGM held on to its preeminence in one specific

genre of production by making the most lavish and accomplished of screen musicals. Arguably the greatest of these was *Singin' in the Rain*, produced by the master of the screen musical, Arthur Freed, and codirected by Stanley Donen and the movie's star, Gene Kelly.

Singin' in the Rain attempted to put together the same basic ingredients as MGM's 1951 hit *An American in Paris*, which had won the Best Picture Oscar that year. Those ingredients consisted of a smash hit song ("Singin' in the Rain," with lyrics by Freed himself and Nacio Herb Brown), along with a large dose of nostalgia, prompted by Freed and executed by longtime MGM art director Cedric Gibbons and set decorator Edwin B. Willis, to serve a script set in the earliest years of synchronous sound movie production in Hollywood. The screenplay, written by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, structures *Singin' in the Rain* as a film-within-a-film and was intended from its inception as a celebration of Hollywood and a showpiece demonstrating how successful the surface gloss of Classic Hollywood filmmaking could still be. Requisite for any screen musical of the early 1950s, the movie was produced in Technicolor, with Harold Rossen as its director of photography. For one of the movie's most renowned production numbers, the camera department mixed milk with water to enhance the visual quality and effect of the glistening "rain."

The movie's stars were Gene Kelly and Donald O'Connor playing two pals, Don Lockwood and Cosmo Brown, respectively, who come to Hollywood from vaudeville seeking fame and fortune. Don gets a job as a stuntman on a western and rises to silent-movie stardom, eventually ending up playing opposite the beautiful Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen), just as *The Jazz Singer* is being released and silent movies are coming to an abrupt end! Lina falls for Don and decides on her own that they are to be married, but his heart is soon taken by Kathy Selden, played by Hollywood newcomer Debbie Reynolds. In addition, the cast included dancers Cyd Charisse and Rita Moreno.

For MGM, it might have seemed a risk to cast the novice Reynolds with the established veteran Kelly, but the Hollywood contract player system was still intact. Studios like MGM still recruited talent like hers with the goal of nurturing that talent while reserving its handsome paychecks for more established stars. Although her role was prominent in *Singin' in the Rain*, Reynolds was paid just \$300 a week for it.

Although an homage to Classic Hollywood, *Singin' in the Rain* is an entirely lighthearted tribute that satirizes the trials and tribulations of early synchronous sound film production. A box office success and an audience favorite, it also has registered positively with subsequent generations of film historians and academic film critics, and not in the least because of its many references to movies, their history, and the process of making them. Unlike

a great many movie musicals, this is a very funny movie, indeed, with the humor sparked by the performance of O'Connor, who was on loan to MGM from his home studio, Universal.

SUMMARY

In 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee of the U.S. Congress began investigations into Communists and communist influences in Hollywood. These hearings continued for half a dozen years, divided Hollywood between professionals friendly to HUAC and those vehemently opposed to it, and resulted in a blacklist of ten men who refused to cooperate with HUAC and were found to be in contempt of Congress. However, it is difficult to document the actual impact of these investigations on Hollywood moviemaking in the period.

At the end of the 1940s and during the first half of the 1950s, Hollywood faced eroding business prospects caused by the quickly declining popularity of movies with mass audiences. Much of Hollywood's leadership, however, held to making familiar movies and treating the period as if little had changed from the era of Classic Hollywood. Some movies from the early 1950s did shift toward harsher themes, however, and the aesthetic of realism made distinct advances during the period.

For a brief time, there was an unusually close relationship between the Broadway stage and Hollywood movies. The resulting crossover of actors between stage and screen work is a source for the inception of a distinct acting style in movies that appeared in this era and is known as "the method."

These were troubling years for Hollywood. Beneath the surface of the movie industry's façade, some filmmakers were turning inward to make movies about filmmaking and Hollywood; for example, although very different films, *Sunset Boulevard* and *Singin' in the Rain* were both self-consciously movies about making movies.

Declining Audiences and Initial Responses

By the mid-1950s, Hollywood appeared to be in a state of free fall, primarily due to the declining audience for movies. What had been a weekly attendance of roughly ninety million at movie theaters in the United States in 1946 plummeted to barely forty million by 1960. Even though the population of the nation was growing, in less than a decade and a half, the movie theater audience in the United States experienced a decline of more than 50 percent. The official rhetoric of Hollywood and its establishment was that movies were better than ever, and that television was a vastly inferior mode of entertainment. In reality, Hollywood's responses to the declining audience and the rise of television were more complex.

By the mid-1950s, the overt choice of the movie industry's production sector was to utilize technology—a variety of widescreen formats, for example, and, briefly, even the production and exhibition of movies in 3-D—to differentiate the experience of watching a movie in a theater more fully from watching television. The exhibition sector of the industry, however, could hardly react at all. Movie theaters were closing at a steady rate, and the only kind of exhibition that was actually increasing was the decidedly inferior, and limited, business of outdoor drive-in theaters, whose numbers were increasing. As for distribution, with the domestic market for movies declining, the overseas sale of American movies in non-Communist countries was becoming an increasingly important part of Hollywood's business.

With little public fanfare, the studios were cutting back their production staffs in all departments, eliminating long-term player contracts, and beginning to look to outside sources for music while eliminating their own studio orchestras. Hollywood motion picture production was well on its way to becoming predominately freelance. With no fanfare at all, but rather in covert

ways visible primarily to industry insiders, by 1955 the major Hollywood companies, in varying degrees, had begun to cooperate with the broadcast television industry and to become increasingly involved in production for TV alongside the making of movies for the big screen.

JAMES DEAN

On the one hand, Hollywood was looking to widescreen production, churning out musicals for the screen, and attempting to launch epic movies. On the other hand, Hollywood producers had begun looking for new kinds of stories for the screen and for new stars to play the main characters in those stories. In the early 1950s, Hollywood movies had deepened their connections with the Broadway stage and especially with some of the powerful social dramas being produced for it. In addition, an increasing number of the dramatic movies produced in Hollywood were seeking a more naturalistic look, and shooting on location was becoming commonplace.

The movies of the early and mid-1950s that were recognized as significant had a penchant for darker themes than those of Classic Hollywood, and for more realistic portrayals of characters and stories set in more challenging social circumstances. In this vein, *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) was a “problem picture” that hearkened back to similar themes in some Warner Bros. movies of the 1930s and the principles of what was called “social conscience” drama. The screenplay by Stewart Stern, as French critic and filmmaker Eric Rohmer wrote in the prestigious journal *Cahiers du Cinema*, identifiably fell neatly into the five acts of classical dramatic structure. The initial exposition of the movie sets up three teenage children, Jim (James Dean), Judy (Natalie Wood), and Plato (Sal Mineo), each in conflict with their families. In act 2, Jim befriends the lonely Plato and is taunted by Buzz. This is followed by the third act, which has the “chicken race” with its fatal climax; act 4, where Jim and Judy discover their love and Plato shares in that discovery, and the final tragic act in which Plato is shot by the police and dies. Nonetheless, in spite of the classical dramatic structure that Rohmer found in the movie, the ambiance of suburban Americana and troubled adolescence gave *Rebel without a Cause* a distinct feeling for contemporary society.

Although it was a color film, rather than black-and-white, Nicholas Ray and the director of photography, Ernest Haller, managed to achieve a documentary feel to it, in part by using subjective point-of-view shots and unusual camera angles to draw the viewer into the characters’ subjective sense of their experiences more fully. In the early 1950s, Hollywood saw a decided increase in the number of features produced in color, beyond the traditional

use of color for musicals and comedies, but there was no industry-wide shift over from black-and-white production to color. Color production of dramatic features was not yet common and was certainly not dominant. Because *Rebel without a Cause* was a social problem film about adolescents, the decision at Warner Bros. to do it in color was far from a given; many in the movie industry would have argued that black-and-white was still a more reasonable choice for this serious material.

Additionally, Warner Bros. produced and released the movie in wide-screen aspect ratio (1.66:1), typical of the growing inclination in Hollywood to produce nearly any feature film in this format, rather than the traditional Academy aspect ratio of 1.33:1. Widescreen was an agreed-upon strategy as the studios sought to further distinguish the experience of seeing a movie in a theater from that of watching something at home on television, even though many filmmakers believed widescreen was appropriate to the material of only some movies, not to all.

The Warner producer for *Rebel without a Cause* was David Weisbart, William Ziegler was the editor, and Leonard Rossman composed the music. Beyond the more formal dramatic values of the screenplay, the approach of the director, cinematographer, and editor to the movie's style was to facilitate the identification of teenage viewers with the characters' feelings of alienation and loneliness.

Rebel without a Cause was released in the United States at a time of changing attitudes about youth, adolescence, parental authority, and social problems. Warner Bros. had purchased the rights to Dr. Robert Linderer's case notes about a teenage psychopath in the late 1940s, and studio executives had been discussing a possible movie based on those notes since then. Then in 1955, studio executives decided that the time was right for such subject matter. It was Ray who suggested to the studio that Stern, a young writer from television, would have just the right sensibility to develop the script for *Rebel without a Cause* from Linderer's notes.

Why did Warner Bros. think that the time was right for this movie? This decision was based on the perception that audiences for movies were not just decreasing in size but also changing considerably in their composition. By the mid-1950s, television had triumphed with the middle classes and the middle aged, increasingly leaving moviegoing as a regular habit to adolescents and young adults. The audience for movies was becoming demonstrably younger, consisting of markedly more people who were single than married, and noticeably beginning to shift toward a composition that had more males than females. For moviemakers, these audience patterns were important. Their meaning for Hollywood was contradicted, of course, by the big-budget road show movies of the period that could still appeal to family audiences.

To recognize patterns in moviegoing and shifts in the composition of audiences was one thing; trying to figure out what movies to make to appeal to the changing audiences was another issue entirely. It was thought that the contemporary ambiance of suburban Americana and troubled adolescence gave *Rebel without a Cause* a distinct feel for contemporary society that would simultaneously interest teenagers as well as older audience members concerned with social change. Surely, too, James Dean's sudden tragic death in an auto accident just before the release of the movie added to its interest and appeal for adolescent and young adult moviegoers. Teenage and young adult audiences for *Rebel without a Cause* found self-identification and sociological realism as reasons to enjoy the movie, in addition to its dramatic strengths.

The trade industry magazine *Boxoffice*, in its review of the movie, raised the concerns of those movie theater owners who still perceived their audience as older and more traditional:

Just how the average ticket buyer will receive the picture probably will depend upon individual conceptions of just what causes and constitutes the current, much publicized confusion and lawlessness that reportedly plagues the teenage generation. To those who think that the problem incorporates heavy psychiatric connotations and is so hydra-headed that the run-o'-mill layman and parents have no conception of underlying motivations, doubts, and influences, the film may make sense. Others, and presumably they will be the vast majority, may be prone to opine that the story has few, if any, believable characters, situations, or passages of dialogue. Thus handicapped by the script's utter implausibility, which is alleviated not one whit by the strained direction of Nicholas Ray, Dean's delineation is far below the arrestingly high standards set in *East of Eden*. His supporting cast, both its juvenile and adult components, are projected with even less effectiveness.

Rebel without a Cause was a touchstone for Hollywood's debate over the composition of its audience and what movies to make for that audience. It was a question that would confront the motion picture industry in the United States for the next fifteen years.

THE BRIEF STARDOM OF JAMES DEAN ENDS

Dean's other role, in *Giant*, a 1956 release in which he played opposite Elizabeth Taylor under the direction of George Stevens, made him a Hollywood legend posthumously. *Giant* was a more popular movie with general audiences, drawing attendance well beyond the late adolescent and young adult

crowd that had patronized *Rebel without a Cause*. *Giant* became Warner Bros.'s largest grossing release up to that time.

Cinema history, however, has not been particularly kind to *Giant*. At three hours and eighteen minutes, it is deemed by most critics to be far too long, and further, it is burdened under its own weight of struggling to say something meaningful about the vast topics of racism, greed, and vulgarity in America. The ugliness of such traits are encompassed visually in the great Victorian mansion that Texas oil baron Bick Benedict (Rock Hudson) shares with his wife, an exuberant and high-spirited girl from the East named Leslie (Elizabeth Taylor), who after a fashion does manage to domesticate her husband by at least partially civilizing this extraordinarily rich and uncouth master of the Texas plains. Their son (Dennis Hopper) has become a doctor and is married to a Mexican woman (Elsa Cardenas). A high point of the film is the scene at Sarge's Roadhouse, when Bick rises to defend his daughter-in-law and grandson from the bigotry of Sarge, who doesn't want them in his place. Bick loses the fistfight, but gains the viewer's respect and marks himself as a man who has grown and matured emotionally in spite of his obvious limitations.

Giant was an adaptation from a novel by Edna Ferber, an author who had a string of box office successes from adaptations of her novels into movies, including *Show Boat*, *Saratoga Trunk*, *So Big*, and *Dinner at Eight*. Savvy about Hollywood and experienced in the movie business, Ferber partnered with Stevens and Henry Ginsberg (who formerly was head of production at Paramount) to form a company called Giant Productions, which sold the film's rights to Warner Bros. for a percentage of the movie's eventual profits. Such an arrangement was emblematic of the changing conditions of Hollywood production in the post-1948 period of transition. Financing and ownership of projects was undergoing a shift, and the large studios were downsizing their staffs, laying off actors and technical specialists who started becoming freelancers, and increasingly renting their production facilities to others in addition to continuing to use those facilities for the declining number of actual studio movies that were wholly financed and owned by the studios.

Even following his success in *Rebel without a Cause*, the young actor James Dean was paid only \$21,000 for his role in *Giant* as oil driller Jett Rink, a sum that was less than that paid to character actor Chill Wills for his supporting performance in the same movie. When Dean was killed in an automobile accident before the film was completed, Stevens had already consumed 114 days in production to shoot an astronomical 875,000 feet of film. Stevens won the Best Director Oscar for his efforts, and the film received a total of ten Oscar nominations, including Best Picture.

Critical accolades for *Giant* filled the press in 1955, from the *New York Times* to the American Communist Party's *Daily Worker*. The *Hollywood Reporter*

was lavish in its praise for the movie: “Giant in size, giant in ambition, giant in the human emotions that are generated by the massive forces of nature and human development . . . this picture readily takes its place with the handful of screen epics.” Several critics praised the screenplay by Fred Guiol and Ivan Moffat as being better than the original Ferber novel on which it was based. The popularity of this epic kept it as Warner Bros.’s top-grossing film for over two decades, until 1978’s high-concept hit *Superman*.

NATURALISM AND SENTIMENT

The Academy’s Best Picture selection for 1955 was a sentimental story about a modest butcher from the Bronx, filmed in black-and-white, and was a direct contrast to *Giant*. *Marty* was based on a successful play originally written for television by Paddy Chayefsky, and it was produced at a time when establishment Hollywood was continuing its rhetoric of demeaning television even while beginning to shift some of the resources of the big Hollywood companies toward production for television. Directed by Delbert Mann, whose greatest recognition had come from his role as a director of teleplays for broadcast television, *Marty* was a production of a company headed by actor Burt Lancaster, who partnered with Hollywood veteran Harold Hecht and completed the movie for theatrical distribution by United Artists. *Marty* was filmed in eighteen days on a budget of \$350,000, at a time when the entire feature film industry appeared to be pitting its redirection and recovery on widescreen spectacles and even more extreme visual techniques such as 3-D. Initially, United Artists hesitated to even release *Marty* into movie theaters. In spite of this caution and the industry concerns on which that caution was based, *Marty* was a solid commercial success. As film historian Peter Lev points out, appearing as it did in the midst of a Hollywood movie industry committed to distinguishing itself from television, *Marty* stands out as a glaring example of what is called “counterprogramming.”

Screenwriter Chayefsky found his dramatic subject in the lives of ordinary, working-class people. The protagonist is a homely butcher, a thirty-four-year-old bachelor who lives with his mother. The movie’s famous and quotable exchange between him and his friends—“What do you feel like doin’ tonight?” “I don’t know, what do you feel like doin’ tonight?”—is supposed to evoke identification from nearly anyone in the audience who has ever spent a lonely and dull evening.

Not only did *Marty* capture the Best Picture Oscar from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, but it also won the coveted grand prize at the 1955 Cannes Film Festival in France, which was gaining international

attention and acclaim. In the original *Playhouse 90* version of *Marty* for television, the title role was clearly a Jewish character. The screenplay for the feature film altered this to a character intended to be Italian-American, a role that Ernest Borgnine carried off as a thwarted, but likable, working-class hero.

Feeling that he's probably too ugly to find a future wife, it takes Marty some effort and resolve to decide to dance at a ballroom frequented by singles with a decidedly plain schoolteacher named Clara (Betsy Blair). Like the cinematic tradition of Italian neorealism, rather than attaining clear narrative closure, *Marty* ends with a simple and small decision by the protagonist to phone the schoolteacher he met at the dance hall. Such simplicity, falling far short of the emphatic story resolutions often found in Classic Hollywood movies, gave rise to praise from many serious critics of cinema.

Marty brought a veneer of unembellished naturalism to the screen, celebrated the lives and loves of plain people, and captured a certain simple charm. Its greatest strength may have been in its decided dissimilarity to the spectacular visuals, epic themes, and casts of thousands that seemed ever more common in Hollywood features of the mid-1950s. More subtly, the lead role, and Borgnine's performance in it, portrayed Marty's troubled concerns over what his buddies might think of this romance, as well as his mother's emerging jealousy toward her potential future daughter-in-law, even though Marty's mother had long been harping on him to find a girl and marry. *Marty* conveyed the kind of psychological nuance as a character study, and the sort of naturalism in its production design, that would eventually take hold in certain currents of what is called modern American independent film later in the twentieth century.

THE SEARCHERS

More than a few movie critics have argued that *The Searchers* (1956) is the greatest of Hollywood westerns, while noting that it also inspired movies in a variety of genres, from *Taxi Driver* to *Star Wars* to *Hardcore*. Peter Fonda, for example, has said that it was an inspiration for the 1969 feature *Easy Rider*, which he coproduced, cowrote, and costarred in. A 1979 article by Stuart Byron in *New York* magazine observed that *The Searchers* had become so revered by critics and directors that it might be called "the cult movie of the New Hollywood."

John Wayne plays a Civil War veteran who returns briefly to his family, who are brutally murdered by the Comanche. He sets out in earnest in search of his niece who has been abducted by the Comanche. In outline, the film tells a grim tale, periodically punctuated by director John Ford's

broadly comic moments. With Winton C. Hoch as cinematographer, *The Searchers* starred Jeffrey Hunter, Vera Miles, and Ward Bond, as well as a young Natalie Wood.

In 1956, Wayne was a screen presence seesawing precariously between being the favorite Hollywood whipping boy of many critics and a box office phenomenon. Contemporary critics treated *The Searchers* with notices that hardly crowned it as a definite masterpiece. *Boxoffice* cited “the top-lining performance by John Wayne [as] the unquestioned best of his long and impressive career,” but steered clear of abundant praise for the entire movie. The review in the *New York Times* dismissively called it: “A rip-snorthing Western, brashly entertaining as they come.” The emergent grand journal of serious movie criticism, *Cahiers du cinéma*, was content to give its release a taut, three-line, unsigned notice. Pauline Kael, often a contrarian voice among respected and widely read movie critics of the period, dealt with it fairly harshly: “A peculiarly formal and stilted movie. . . . You can read a lot into it, but it isn’t very enjoyable.”

Moreover, from its debut, the movie’s unflinching depiction of vengeful violence did not necessarily sit well in some quarters. Ethan Edwards’s (Wayne’s character) meandering, obsessive, five-year quest to find his niece and bring her back from captivity among the Indians is engaging, but also disturbing. The famous opening and closing shots of the movie, with Ethan in the doorway at beginning and end, signify that he is and always will be an outsider. Monument Valley, photographed in Technicolor in all its splendor, is also used visually as a metaphor to portray Ethan’s internal self—contradictory, disturbed, paranoid.

Ethan’s mission, accompanied by his nephew (Jeffrey Hunter), is to take revenge on the Comanche for brutally killing his brother, his brother’s wife, and one of their daughters, but it also seems that his intention is to kill his tainted niece (Natalie Wood) who has lived with the Indians for years, becoming one of them. When he finally gets her, there is a moment in which the viewer thinks he will kill her, but instead he picks her up and carries her back home. This act of forgiveness frees her, but it is unclear that he has gained grace.

WIDE, EXTRAVAGANT, EXOTIC

Mike Todd—movie producer, promoter, and showman—played a major role in the Hollywood embrace of widescreen production during the 1950s. An original partner in the Cinerama Corporation, Todd formed the Magna Corporation with industry veteran Joseph M. Schenk in 1953 to exploit a 65mm

widescreen process that he had developed and named “Todd-A-O.” The company’s first movie production, a screen version of the musical *Oklahoma* (1955), was swiftly overshadowed by its next, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, which took the Best Picture award from the Academy for 1956.

Around the World in Eighty Days was a producer’s movie with a vengeance: a large, brash, and jolly improvisation, loosely adapted from a Jules Verne novel, with a cast finally said to number seven thousand. As the review in *Newsweek* wrote, it was a work that reflected Todd’s “wholehearted, playful, almost unadult enthusiasm.” The trade journal *Hollywood Reporter* waxed in similar vein, with even greater detail and even more hyperbole:

one of the greatest shows ever seen on screen . . . a combination of a three-ring circus, a vaudeville show with all headline acts, and a trip on a magic carpet to the most exotic and novel places all over the world.

Todd anchored the movie’s cast of thousands with headliners David Niven in the role of Phileas Fogg and the Mexican comedian Cantinflas as Passepartout. The story follows an adventurer around the globe, interspersed with diverse cameo appearances by established film stars, including Marlene Dietrich, Frank Sinatra, and Buster Keaton. The movie’s \$7 million budget, which Todd had quickly raised, provided for filming in Paris, the Middle East, Pakistan, Siam, Hong Kong, and Japan. Based on a Verne’s story of a trip around the world to claim a large prize offered by the Reform Club of London in 1872, the movie was a three-hour widescreen blend of Keystone Cops comedy, travelogue, and the lampooning of Victorian manners. Highly successful at the box office as a Warner Bros. release, it was clearly a Mike Todd film—so much so that Todd’s personality and reputation eclipsed Michael Anderson, the director.

A FORERUNNER OF THE BRITISH INVASION

In 1957, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, number 13 on the American Film Institute’s first list of greatest American movies, won the Academy’s Oscar for Best Picture for 1957. It was filmed in Ceylon, was directed by David Lean, and starred William Holden, Alec Guinness, and Sessue Hayakawa. The film was released to the world as “The Big Movie with Meaning.” Its “meaning,” however, proved to be controversial.

The story is about of a group of British POWs in the Pacific Theater during World War II whose morale is restored when their officer-in-charge (Guinness) leads them in their forced labor of building a railroad bridge. The

movie drew much negative attention in the press. The first bone of contention raised by critics was that this plot appears based on an assumption, which some found to be racist, that the Japanese were incapable of building the bridge themselves, so that the ostensibly superior Brits had to undertake the project. The bridge, once completed, would aid the Japanese militarily, which invited criticism of the movie from another perspective—namely, that it celebrated as its hero a man who was a collaborator and served the interests of the Japanese military. The story was apparently based on actual events, and Guinness's character on Sir Philip Toosey, a British colonel who was accused of aiding the Japanese in the torture of men under his command.

The majority of the cast for *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was British, and the same was true for the production crew. The production funds, however, came from a subsidiary of Columbia Pictures, and the producer was a Hollywood veteran, Sam Spiegel. The screenplay was written by two Americans, Carl Foreman and Michael Wilson, both of whom were blacklisted in Hollywood at the time and living in England; it was nearly thirty years before the Writers Guild of America formally corrected the credits in the records, having originally attributed the screenplay incorrectly to Pierre Boulle, who had actually only written the novel on which the screenplay was based.

Like Carol Reed, who had directed *The Third Man* in 1949, Lean was a master at movie work combining cast and technical talent from Britain and the United States. In the case of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, the movie marked the practice of Hollywood studios financing what might be most accurately considered British productions that would be common for the next decade. The distributor for *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Columbia Pictures, became the most prominent Hollywood studio to engage in, and benefit from, such production deals with British filmmaking entities, putting up the finances and handling North American distribution, while utilizing actual studio facilities and production personnel from the United Kingdom. During the 1960s, this connection to British production resources would function fabulously for Columbia, producing solid earnings at the box office and gathering Oscar awards and favorable commentary from critics, as well.

TWELVE ANGRY MEN

Produced by Henry Fonda and Reginald Rose and associate producer George Justin, *Twelve Angry Men* (1957) was the first undertaking of Fonda's new production company, Orion. As moviegoing had declined throughout the 1950s and the major studios struggled, the Hollywood industry opened itself more to

films being produced by independents and to actors starting production companies. With a story and screenplay by Rose, director Sidney Lumet teamed with Boris Kaufman as director of photography, art director Robert Markell, editor Carl Lerner, and sound engineer James A. Gleason. An Orion-Nova production (Nova was Rose's company), the film was released through United Artists. *Twelve Angry Men* stars Henry Fonda, with Lee J. Cobb, Ed Begley, E. G. Marshall, Jack Warden, and Martin Balsam. The film was shot in just twenty days. Originally, the project had been conceived as a fifty-minute play intended for live telecast on CBS-TV.

Virtually the entire film was shot in the confines of a jury room in a New York courthouse. The ninety-five minutes the movie runs is the actual length of time it takes the twelve angry men—the jury—to reach a verdict; there are no flashbacks and no scenes outside the room of deliberation. As the review in *Variety* explained:

The twelve angry men in this Henry Fonda–Reginald Rose production are a jury, a body of peers chosen to decide the guilt or innocence of a teenager accused of murdering his father, locked in a jury room faced with the responsibility of condemning or freeing the defendant. What will they do?

The jurors begin with eleven votes for a guilty verdict and one for not guilty; the trial ends with all twelve voting not guilty.

Even though *Twelve Angry Men* had not done well at the box office, it was critically acclaimed and nominated for a Best Picture Oscar. Lumet's book *Making Movies* listed its production cost at only \$350,000, and at that cost, making a profit on the production was relatively easy. In theatrical distribution, the movie fared much better abroad than it did in North America, and, on that basis, was reported by the *Hollywood Reporter* to have earned a slight profit. Its popularity overseas, especially in Western Europe, is notable. It even won the grand prize for 1957 at the Berlin Film Festival. Nonetheless, the characters could be considered quintessentially American types, with Fonda playing an architect, Warden a dedicated baseball fan, and Cobb a bigoted, youth-hating brute, while Marshall thinks of himself as the infallible man and Joseph Sweeney's character is older and blessed with patient wisdom.

The review in the *New Yorker* pointed out that *Twelve Angry Men* reflected an increasingly popular area of public concern in the United States in the late 1950s—juvenile delinquency—and that Rose's screenplay presented a version of an increasingly commonplace theory of the late 1950s, attributing juvenile delinquency to a young person's maladjusted home life and upbringing.

A. H. Weller in the *New York Times* offered that it was "difficult to recall a more incisively revealing drama." The *Hollywood Reporter* review by James

Powers was positive, faulting only what Powers found to be the occasional extraneous sociology that impinged sometimes on the drama:

12 Angry Men is a very satisfying picture and except for the unnecessary and unhelpful discussions of sociology that have no pertinence and no value, it will stack up along with the year's best as a pure suspense picture, exceptionally well done by Fonda, Lumet, and Rose and their talented associates.

TWO BY HITCHCOCK

Toward the end of the decade of the 1950s, two films directed by Alfred Hitchcock stood out and warranted special attention. The first of these was *Vertigo* (1958), in which Jimmy Stewart plays Scottie Ferguson, a retired detective from the San Francisco Police Department who is hired by an old chum to track his wife Madeleine (Kim Novak). Based on a French novel, *From Among the Dead*, with a screenplay by Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor, the movie is given a treatment by Hitchcock and his director of photography, Robert Burks, that dwells upon the details of a growing human obsession and can be interpreted as deeply cynical.

Scottie does his job tracking down his subject, but soon discovers that he is falling for her romantically, only to be crushed by her suicide. Then one day, Scottie sees a woman on the street who reminds him of Madeleine, and his obsession ratchets up again full bore. Novak plays the two roles, as both the sophisticated and beautiful Madeleine, a woman of wealth and social standing, and Judy, a department store clerk whom Scottie identifies as Madeleine.

Vertigo is neither straightforward nor an easy movie to categorize. Much of its action is enigmatic, and Hitchcock and cinematographer Burks used devices such as putting their actors on a 360-degree turntable for shots intended to disorient the movie's viewers, as in the scene where Stewart and Novak kiss at a stable. Scottie's physical vertigo is further shown in shots that combine the techniques of zooming in while tracking out to create an unusual feeling of motion.

The movie ends without resolving all of its mysteries. Judy confesses to her part in the murder plot, but then either falls, or intentionally jumps, to her death. While there is a surface resolution in the form of the viewer learning what happened to Madeleine, there is no real resolution as to Scottie's role in all of this nor is there any further explanation of his relationship to the two women. The movie eerily transcends being either a suspense film, a murder

mystery, or a horror film, precisely because it was been made to examine the world of these events through Scottie's twisted and obsessive subjectivity.

Writing in the *New Yorker*, movie critic Guillermo Cabrera Infante called it "the first great surrealist film. . . . It draws its unsettling power from the lucidity with which it portrays impossible, irrational events so that the more they are presented in that way, the more clearly we see." In 1958, however, *Vertigo* barely broke even at the box office in the United States and was considered by Hollywood insiders to be too confusing for most audiences. Subsequently, it has become a favorite of film critics and historians, first in France and Great Britain and then in the United States. *Vertigo* appears to display the directorial genius and intensity of Hitchcock at its finest. It is a film that toys with Hollywood convention, scratches the surface of several genres—mystery, suspense, romance—but doesn't commit consistently to any one of them. Stewart's characterization of Scottie evokes a portrayal of the typical American male of the 1950s—on the surface, a model of propriety, but underneath privately experiencing a paranoid meltdown—so beloved by cultural critics of the era.

Hitchcock's next picture, *North by Northwest* (1959), was neither financed nor produced by one of the major studios, and its distribution was handled by one of Hollywood's newer companies, Metro. Nonetheless, this movie was described by the trade journal *Variety* as that familiar mixture that moviegoers had become used to from Hitchcock: suspense, intrigue, comedy, humor. "But seldom," the *Variety* reviewer wrote, "has the concoction been served up so delectably or in so glossy a package. It should be top box office." Part of the box office appeal was Hitchcock's decision to cast Cary Grant, playing a Madison Avenue man-about-town named Roger O. Thornhill who is mistaken by foreign agents as an agent of the U.S. intelligence services. Actually, the man he is mistaken for does not even exist, instead being a fictitious personage created by the Central Intelligence Agency so that foreign agents won't spot a real U.S. spy in their midst.

Hitchcock's macabre sense of humor and his instinct for romantic dalliance prevails throughout *North by Northwest*. He works effectively at creating a rhythm in which repeatedly the suspense is built up, then broken for relief, and then skillfully reestablished. Hitchcock's use of his cast was thought to be especially well displayed in the part he had for Eva Marie Saint, whose previous screen work had her as rather plain and convincingly sweet, but who plunges here into the role of Eve Kendall, as conniving and treacherous as she is glamorous. Hitchcock draws out her sexiness and seductiveness superbly. Grant, when coming out of a romantic interlude with her in a train compartment comments: "It's much better than flying." Still, Saint remains capable of conveying an air of innocence, even when earlier explaining how she came to be the mistress of the ominous foreign agent (James Mason).

Repeatedly mistaken for a man who doesn't exist, Grant's character seems trapped in a kind of hallucination. The bad guys assume he is a political assassin. Everybody wants to kill him. The only time he's safe happens to be the one moment when his mother is standing next to him: "You men don't really want to hurt my son, do you?" The almighty men in Washington, led by Leo G. Carroll, are photographed against marble pillars like gods on Mount Olympus. They seduce him into becoming a version of the man the whole world thinks he is, and, in doing so, he surrenders to the weirdness. As such, he finds love in the beautiful form of Eve and finds himself, literally and metaphorically, hanging from the brow of an immense stone face in South Dakota's Mount Rushmore. Next, he kisses the girl and the train thrusts into the tunnel. Movie critic F. X. Feeney concluded: "*North by Northwest* is a slapstick epic of self-search that eludes every label you might try to tack onto it."

Burks, the director of photography, shot the film in Technicolor VistaVision (a process patented by Paramount for which Hitchcock had developed a strong affection). A. Arnold Gillespie and Lee LeBlanc provided the visual special effects. VistaVision was known as being exhibitor friendly, meaning that it was simpler to project than other widescreen formats and required less expensive projection equipment. Bernard Herrmann's score was tingling, especially in the Mount Rushmore scenes, and Hitchcock's working partner, George Tomasini, was the movie's editor. The script by Ernest Lehman is intended to tease out the similarities between spying and acting. The *New York Times* review said in summation what most reviewers did: "Suspenseful, delightful . . . witty, and sophisticated."

EDUCATING GIGI AND EARNING THE OSCAR

The Academy's Best Picture Oscars for 1954 through 1957 were awarded to movies that technically could be considered independent, rather than studio, productions: *On the Waterfront*, *Marty*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The Best Picture selection for 1958, *Gigi*, however, was a standard, big-budget MGM musical with high-gloss production values, directed by Vincente Minnelli and produced by the legendary Arthur Freed. By 1958, however, Freed, who for decades had been a stalwart at MGM, was also called an independent producer. By then, "independent producer" could mean almost anything in Hollywood, covering the idea in this case that Freed worked with his own production unit within the large tent of the studio, even though the work he was producing constituted what, just a few years earlier, would have been called a classic MGM musical.

Gigi placed the *Pygmalion* story—an older, sophisticated man educates and molds an unsophisticated young girl—in a Parisian setting, based loosely on a short novel by the nineteenth-century French writer Colette. Starring Leslie Caron, whom Gene Kelly had discovered for his leading lady in *An American in Paris* in 1951, the movie’s cast included Maurice Chevalier, Louis Jourdan, and Hermione Gingold. Alan Jay Lerner’s collaboration with Frederick Loewe for the title song “Gigi” captured an Oscar, and Chevalier’s version of “Thank Heaven for Little Girls” topped the pop charts in 1958/59. André Previn supervised the music for *Gigi* and captured an Oscar for Best Musical Score.

Gigi’s “education” is entrusted by her family to her Aunt Alicia (Isabel Jeans). Alicia earnestly schools her young protégé in the wiles of charming and pleasing men. Chevalier’s character, Honoré Lachaille, however, has a young nephew, Gaston (Jourdan), who is apparently prepared to follow soon in his uncle’s footsteps as a casanova. *Gigi*, however, falls in love with Gaston, and he with she. She commits herself to him, becoming the first in a line of her family’s women who let romantic love triumph and to marry.

The movie reviewer at the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther, deemed it “charming entertainment,” noting the movie’s similarities to the story and characters from the stage musical *My Fair Lady*, which was in the third year of a successful run on Broadway. The trade journal *Film Daily* wrote that: “*Gigi* will be remembered by all who see it with warmth and affection.”

The original story, although it refers to *Gigi* as a courtesan, was veiled to satisfy the Production Code. Director Minnelli, along with Cecil Beaton (production design and costumes), embraced their project unabashedly. As an article in *Variety* noted, when *Gigi* won its Best Picture Academy Award, the film had barely earned back its production costs. It stood a chance to go into the black financially only because the Best Picture Oscar was projected to translate into an additional \$1.5 million to \$2 million in rental earnings from new box office revenue generated entirely by the favorable publicity and public interest created by an Oscar win.

EPIC HOLLYWOOD

The \$15 million biblical epic, *Ben-Hur*, directed by the veteran William Wyler, who was the highest-paid director in Hollywood at the time, won the Best Picture Oscar for 1959. It was three and a half hours long and was the type of production that Hollywood turned to periodically and which the big studios were willing to gamble on, usually at a profit. MGM had produced a silent version of this story in 1926 entitled *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, directed by Fred Niblo, on which Wyler, just beginning his work in Hollywood, was a

production assistant. The 1959 version of the movie was the “biggest of the big” in an era in which much of mainstream American cinema was defined by widescreen scope processes, and bringing grand epics to the screen was perceived as one of the few ways left to bring mass audiences of all ages into the movie theaters. Filmed in Rome, its more than three hundred sets covered more than 340 acres, and altogether over fifty thousand people worked on the production.

The project had begun in 1953 when Nicholas Schenck, the president of Loew’s (MGM’s parent firm), MGM production head Dore Schary, the studio’s production manager E. J. Mannix, and producer Sam Zimbalist met to consider doing a film version of the highly successful Broadway play *A Tale of the Christ*. The play had been written by Gen. Lew Wallace and was adapted for the screen at MGM by staff writer Karl Tunberg, whose screenplay one critic described as being “like a four-hour Sunday school lesson.” The accomplished veteran cinematographer Robert Surtees, A.S.C., served as the director of photography, and Ralph Winters and John D. Dunning were the editors. The score, orchestrated in classic Hollywood symphonic style, was by Miklos Rozsa.

Crowther, writing in the *New York Times*, pointed out that at three hours and thirty-two minutes, *not* counting the intermission, “it is simply too much of a good thing.” The “good thing” that Crowther found on-screen was “the most stirring and respectable of the bible-fiction pictures ever made.” The reviewer for the *New York Post* echoed this opinion, calling *Ben-Hur* “the most realistic, literal rendering of Roman, Judean, and Christian history that can be imagined.” Wyler didn’t want a clash of various accents, and so the voices were simplified by casting British actors for the speaking parts of Romans, and, for the most part, Americans as the Hebrews. In general, this proved highly effective, except for the negative appraisal offered by the critic John McCarten, writing in the *New Yorker*, that Charlton Heston as Judah Ben-Hur “speaks English as if he had learned it from records.”

In American movie history, *Ben-Hur* could be appraised as hearkening back to the triumphs of *Gone with the Wind* (1939). It received a record eleven Oscars. The chariot race stands as an accomplished action sequence, and the sea battle is as vast and sweeping a sequence as any previously seen on-screen and one instance in which the widescreen format was used to its full advantage. *Ben-Hur* was screened in both CinemaScope and standard 35mm formats and did well at the box office. In 1965, *Variety* reported *Ben-Hur*’s gross earnings at \$38 million, which it compared to *Gone with the Wind*’s \$41.2 million take and to Paramount’s *The Ten Commandments* earnings of \$60 million. Moreover, *Ben-Hur* was the sort of movie that could continue earning money long after its original release date. By 1968, *Variety* was able to

report that *Ben-Hur* had grossed a total of \$66 million in earnings for its North American theater rentals.

THE IRREPRESSIBLE BILLY WILDER

Hollywood regarded Billy Wilder as a cynic, a man-hater, and a woman-scorner. He once said of his profession: "A director must be a policeman, a midwife, a psychoanalyst, a sycophant, and a bastard." Time and again he shows us movies in which human beings are behaving badly, using one another as props or pawns, and racing into follies from which there is no escape.

Wilder wrote the script for *Some Like It Hot* with I. A. L. Diamond, and their 1959 movie is number 14 on the American Film Institute's 1996 list of greatest films. It was produced through a packaging that put its financing together through the efforts of the legendary Hollywood team that formed in the late 1950s to provide production services and contacts to distributors, the Mirisch Brothers Company, and was released by United Artists. Mirisch provided one of the early examples of how movies could be financed and produced, not only outside the traditional studio system but outside any established production company as well. Their business approached moviemaking as a one-by-one enterprise in which the production of each new film is based on the creation of a new production company to make it.

The Mirisch business model was highly successful, and *Some Like It Hot* was a box office hit and was popular with critics. "A winner with a zing!" wrote *Variety*. "Hilarious. . . . Probably the funniest picture of recent memory. Starts off like a firecracker and keeps on throwing off lively sparks to the end." *Film Daily* offered: "Could any showman ask for more? A bright comedy that sparkles like vintage wine." The *Hollywood Reporter* called it "a supersonic, breakneck, belly-laugh comedy that should be a block-busting bonanza. Billy Wilder was on the front burner all the way."

The main characters, played by Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis, in order to escape Chicago mobsters, pose as musicians in an all-girl band, finding romance with Marilyn Monroe along the way. The *Time* reviewer applauded Wilder's daring in making popular leading men Lemmon and Curtis into female impersonators, but summed up Monroe's role dismissively: "She's been trimmer, slimmer, and sexier in earlier movies." George Raft and Pat O'Brien also had small parts in it. Moreover, the wearing of women's clothes by Lemmon and Curtis is handled deftly. It isn't the cross-dressing of men who want to get under the skin of women, nor is it the clowning of heterosexual men putting on ill-fitting clothing so the audience will know they don't like it. Instead, it's the silly abandon of two performers having the time of their lives,

seeming completely comfortable in their roles. Their success in pulling this off on-screen, however, was far from guaranteed.

Since early in Hollywood history, showing a movie to preview audiences had been standard industry practice, often leading to extensive cuts to a movie before it was released to the general public or to reshooting that often was considered necessary to save a movie. The first preview audience for *Some Like It Hot* was a group of eight hundred, many of them working in the movie and television industries, who were invited to a screening of it at a theater in Pacific Palisades, California; a great many of them walked out. Comedian and television personality Steve Allen was noticeable as nearly the only one in this large audience who was constantly laughing. After that screening, the producer David O. Selznick told Wilder, “You can’t mix blood and laughs.” Selznick frowned on the murders in the comedy, and figured that many other viewers did as well. Additionally, it was clear that many in the preview audience took exception to the two leads being in drag. A week later, however, with nary an edit—even though United Artists’ executives had wanted fifteen minutes to be cut from the movie before showing it again—the laughter was nonstop at a showing of the movie in nearby Westwood Village to a preview audience that likely represented a more reliable cross-section of the American moviegoing public.

As a woman, Curtis is haughty and pseudo-refined. That’s how Lemmon starts out, too, but soon he throws all caution to the wind and becomes a good-time gal. Monroe, as Sugar Kane, coos and woos, falling for several different saxophone players, and eventually Lemmon gets engaged to an aging millionaire played by Joe E. Brown. It was a box office hit and received six Oscar nominations. For Wilder—who had started his Hollywood career as a screenwriter and had become a director primarily to protect his own scripts from being purchased by a studio and then being assigned to another director—it was a particular kind of personal triumph. In the eyes of later generations of movie critics and historians, Wilder’s success with *Some Like It Hot* was appreciated as his thumbing his nose at all the assumed Hollywood rules, mixing slapstick and screwball comedy, gangster film and musical, into a hybrid farce complete with two guys in drag.

SUMMARY

Throughout the 1950s, the combined impact of competition from television and a changing American society that was characterized by massive migration to the suburbs seriously threatened Hollywood. The only recourse for the mo-

tion picture industry was to seek to cooperate on production for television and to scale back its own workforce. Even as the major Hollywood studios were publicly proclaiming that movies were better than ever, resources and investment was being shifted to production for television after 1955.

Publicly, Hollywood was seeking to bring back audiences by distinguishing the experience of watching a movie in a theater more clearly from watching television. Widescreen formats were introduced, but with an overall lack of success. The most radical attempt in this regard, 3-D, proved a disaster.

Production that was independent of the major studios increased, but the stories and stars in movies seemed traditional. Epics and musicals gained favor with the major studios, and both these genres favored production in color rather than black-and-white.

In the exhibition sector, a scheme for making going to the movies more like going to the legitimate theater, called “road-showing,” in which reserved seat tickets were sold in advance for select film showings, led to some profits but did not reverse the trend in audience decline. Nationwide, movie theaters were closing, and the decidedly inferior venue for watching movies, the drive-ins, were on the rise. Still, by 1960, weekly attendance at movie theaters in the United States had fallen to forty million. Even so, an overall shift toward recognition of a “new” audience for movies and toward making movies that were greatly different from Hollywood’s past in either look or content did not occur.

Hollywood on the Ropes

In 1960, the Academy, which had given its Best Picture nod to the epic extravaganza *Ben-Hur* in 1959, selected as Best Picture a dark, biting comedy entitled *The Apartment*. *The Apartment* was by the same writing and directing team that had made *Some Like It Hot* in 1959: Billy Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond. This movie, too, had been nurtured through its stages of development and production as a package put together by the Mirisch Brothers for release by United Artists. The protagonist in *The Apartment*, C. C. “Bud” Baxter, is played by Jack Lemmon, with Baxter being a man who can get along at the office by loaning out his apartment for romantic liaisons to several of his superiors at work who are carrying on adulterous affairs. Shirley MacLaine plays an elevator operator in Baxter’s office building, and Fred MacMurray took the role as the most obnoxious of Baxter’s bosses.

In many ways, *The Apartment* plays like a vintage Hollywood comedy: wordy, witty, fast-paced, and highly polished. On the other hand, it was perceived as updated and daringly hip. As British film critic Derek Monsey wrote: “Some people may find *The Apartment* sordid and immoral. It’s meant to be. It’s also funny and pathetic and the funniest soursweet comedy Hollywood has made in years.” That assessment summed it up well, pointing out that the 1960 Oscar winner had a certain edge of satire and criticism of the corporate establishment and middle-aged hypocrisy that could be interpreted as appealing to younger audiences. It was rare for any comedy to take a Best Picture Oscar. *The Apartment*, moreover, enjoyed the distinction of being the last feature film produced in black-and-white to claim a Best Picture award from the Academy until Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* in 1993.

ANNOUNCING THE CINEMA OF SENSATION

Compared to Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*, *The Apartment* could be considered a more conventional movie. The film of 1960 that marked the greatest departure from past Hollywood movie practice was *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. At a time when lesser directors were asserting themselves in the role of producer and taking over their own films from an increasingly enfeebled studio system, Hitchcock likewise did so in *Psycho* in a manner that pointed toward major changes in the aesthetics of the American feature film. Ranked at number 14 on the American Film Institute's 2006 list, it could be argued that the importance of the movie for modern American film was groundbreaking. *Psycho* has been called "the movie that cut movie history in half," and the precise moment at which that division occurs is the shower scene in the Bates Motel when Janet Leigh's character, Marion Crane, is stabbed to death.

A Paramount release, *Psycho* displayed Hitchcock's bent to go against Hollywood conventions. The shower sequence, although filmed so as to show only her back and not reveal any frontal nudity, challenged the Production Code by presenting a naked female figure on-screen and, at the same time, cut against the grain of Hollywood assumptions about story and actors by killing off the movie's star about a third of the way into the film. These issues were considered daring and were written about at the time.

The more telling matter for movie history, however, was the way in which the shower scene was conceived of by Hitchcock, photographed by cinematographer John L. Russell, and edited by the veteran who had collaborated with Hitchcock on several previous films, George Tomasini. Hitchcock carefully storyboarded all his films, but the shower scene in *Psycho* displayed an unusually adroit collaboration between the director, photographer, and editor. Moreover, it announced the arrival of sensation on the Hollywood screen as a major aesthetic component of the American feature film.

Historically, since the time of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Hollywood movies had relied upon salient elements of sentiment and spectacle at the core of their appeal to audiences. With the shower scene in *Psycho*, sensation was added to sentiment and spectacle as the fundamental ways in which movies appeal to viewers as art. The importance of that addition did not take hold immediately, but by the end of the decade of the 1960s, powerful, visceral sequences in feature films that drew the viewer in emotionally with graphic depictions—often of violence—were established as an important aesthetic in Hollywood movies.

SPARTACUS

Stanley Kubrick's awesome epic *Spartacus* is over three hours in length. For it, Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten on the blacklist, brilliantly adapted a privately published, stream-of-consciousness novel by another blacklisted writer, Howard Fast. In reality, Trumbo had already been rescued from the blacklist, having written *The Brave One* (1956, directed by Irving Rapper), for which he won a screenwriting Oscar under his pseudonym, Robert Rich. Still, Trumbo's hiring under his own name by producer Kirk Douglas is considered to have effectively shattered the Hollywood blacklist.

In *Spartacus*, Douglas stars as the gladiator who leads his fellow slaves in a revolt against Rome. His costars are Laurence Olivier, Tony Curtis, Jean Simmons, Peter Ustinov, John Gavin, and Nina Foch. The cost of the production, \$12 million, was actually more than the producing studio was worth at the time (MCA bought Universal Pictures for \$11.25 million that year). Russell Metty, A.S.C., was the director of photography for *Spartacus*, the production designer was Alexander Golitzen, and it was edited by Robert Lawrence.

Bosley Crowther's *New York Times* reviews expressed his disdain for sprawling biblical epics like *Ben-Hur* and *The Ten Commandments*, and he called *Spartacus* "heroic humbug—a vast, panoramic display of synthetic Rome and Romans." For many years, the film enjoyed a certain camp reputation (the line "I am Spartacus" has echoed across generations of American teenagers).

Spartacus was a Bryna production, with Edward Lewis as the line producer for Douglas's company. Lewis served as the torpedo who hired Kubrick to direct after Anthony Mann was fired, in part because Kubrick was much younger and considered more malleable. Kubrick had also directed Douglas in *Paths of Glory* (1957).

Touted at the time by the AFL-CIO as the most expensive movie ever made "under Union conditions of employment," *Spartacus* has survived into the early twenty-first century with a reputation that places the movie squarely in the midst of the ensuing culture wars that have separated the liberal left from the conservative right in the United States since the end of the 1960s. When the American Film Institute restored a print of *Spartacus* in 1991, critic Henry Sheehan wrote in an article for the *Los Angeles Times*:

Spartacus, re-released in a new print this week with additional footage, is less a depiction of those historical events [the slave revolt against Rome a century before Christ] than a formal and political broadside concerned with the state of the world and the blather of Hollywood around 1960. Despite

serious failures of rhetoric, it marks a significant transition in which the old Hollywood Left, beaten to a bloody pulp and left for dead by the studio blacklist [of the 1950s], arose for one more gallant charge and passed its banner into younger hands. . . . [Now] *Spartacus* returns at another moment of resurgent liberalism.

In a 1991 review in *New York* magazine, David Denby called *Spartacus*

more a perverse joke than a great movie. . . . Julius Caesar (John Gavin) looks down at Crassus in the baths and asks, "Is it me you want or the garrison at Rome?" . . . The movie is hip; it openly embraces what other pagan epics treat sanctimoniously. The pre-Christian Rome is a sensual society, fleshy and bloody, in which people's bodies are pressed upon one another and available for sex or murder.

A WELL-WORN STRATEGY: BROADWAY TO BIG SCREEN

The arrival of the cinema of sensation with *Psycho* hardly registered with Hollywood in 1960; its impact was delayed until later in the decade. *The Apartment* was widely viewed as a disappointment that was not equal to director Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* from a year earlier. *Spartacus* was pigeonholed as an epic and was not yet recognized by anyone for its possible place in a larger shift for Hollywood.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the studios were rattled and recognized the need for new directions, but they were still in the hands of a management that believed in the old traditions. The 1961 Oscar-winning Best Picture, *West Side Story*, for example, was developed in a manner that coincided with the methods of Classic Hollywood by adapting a successful Broadway stage musical for the screen. As a dominant force in Hollywood, and with the best track record in the business for packaging successful movies in the early 1960s, Mirisch Brothers was behind *West Side Story* and, once more, had partnered with United Artists for its distribution. With its book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, the musical was based on *Romeo and Juliet*, yet set among rival teenage gangs battling for turf on the west side of midtown Manhattan. This gave it a contemporary feel and provided ample room for oblique social commentary.

Jerome Robbins had directed the Broadway stage version successfully and was enlisted to direct the movie, but he was dismissed several weeks into production at the insistence of executives at United Artists, who objected to the slow pace of his work, his excessive perfectionism, and the fact that the movie

production so quickly had fallen behind schedule. Robbins was replaced with the Hollywood veteran Robert Wise, who was granted broad artistic control over the project and also was credited as a producer on *West Side Story*.

In spite of a cast that many industry insiders considered weak—the movie starred Natalie Wood, who was not known for her singing voice, along with Richard Beymer, Russ Tamblyn, and George Chakiris, who were hardly top-rung stars—*West Side Story* won ample praise from critics and was an enormous box office success. It was so popular that in 1966 NBC offered Mirisch Brothers \$3 million for the rights to a single national telecast of it. So confident was Mirisch that it could demand more, that it promptly turned NBC's offer down.

Moreover, the success of *West Side Story* was not limited to the domestic North American market. Wise had insisted that the songs in the movie not be translated into other languages or sung in other versions by other artists, but rather that they be left in the original and shown in the movie with written subtitles in other countries. It worked. Foreign audiences loved *West Side Story*; it broke attendance records at many movie theaters around the globe, including one cinema in Paris, where it showed daily for 219 weeks (just over four years!). For years, it had been common wisdom in Hollywood that musicals, no matter how successful on Broadway or as movies with American audiences, could not draw much box office in international distribution. *West Side Story* was the exception, and that exception turned Hollywood toward extensive production of big-budget musicals for the next half-dozen years.

LIBERAL SENTIMENTS

In July 1960, the first—and only—novel by an unknown author named Harper Lee, who had grown up in Alabama, appeared in bookstores. It described a small Southern town in the 1930s through the eyes of two children. By the time Hollywood adapted it to the screen two years later, the book had sold more than six million copies in the United States. *To Kill a Mockingbird* seemed to be the kind of popular fiction that Hollywood traditionally regarded as promising property for adaptation to the screen, and, two individuals who were among the emerging legions of Hollywood professionals turning their hand to producing—Alan J. Pakula and stage and screen director Robert Mulligan—purchased the rights to it. They hired Horton Foote to write a screenplay and then produced the movie based on that screenplay with additional financial backing from Universal, the studio that distributed it. Mulligan garnered an Oscar nomination as Best Director for his work, with Russell Harlan, A.S.C., as his director of photography.

Set in the town of Macomb, Alabama, in 1932, the only well-known star in the movie, Gregory Peck, plays a local attorney named Atticus Finch, a widower with a six-year-old daughter named Scout (Mary Badham) and a ten-year-old son named Jem (Phillip Alford). Their father's defense of a black man wrongly accused of raping a white woman becomes the center of the movie's story, but to a large extent the essence of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is to give a view of the town and its characters through the eyes of the two children, Scout and Jem, whose vision is clear and innocent.

When a white farmer named Robert E. Lee Ewell, who's a drunkard, accuses a hardworking and honest Negro, Tom Robinson (Brock Peters), of raping his nineteen-year-old daughter Mayella, the local judge (Paul Fix) appoints Atticus Finch to be Tom's defense attorney. The defense is clear-cut and the evidence supports it, but the lengthy courtroom scene plays out with all the bigotry of racial tensions in the rural South never far removed. The all-white jury finds Tom guilty, in spite of the evidence that indicates that Mayella's own alcoholic father is the actual rapist. The sentence is handed down as guilty, and when Tom attempts to escape being sent to prison, he is shot and killed by a deputy sheriff. The drunken Ewell seeks vengeance against Atticus, stalking his children as they return from a party at their school one evening. Boo Radley, a young schizophrenic who is regarded as the town loony, intervenes. Boo kills Ewell in protecting the children, but Radley's act is ruled justifiable homicide by the local sheriff.

Critics like James Power, writing in the *Hollywood Reporter*, praised *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a fine film and one that was certain to be well loved by its audiences. In particular, Harlan's low-key camera work was cited for creating a look and feel to the film that made it all the more believable to audiences, and the performances of the child actors were highlighted as unusually natural and convincing. As Powers summarized it, "The rest of the cast is also fine, playing with a realism that simulates life without distorting it." Elmer Bernstein's gentle score, using the piano for nostalgic effect, although it provides a soft background, sometimes covers their lines and makes them sometimes difficult to understand. This is because they were speaking in a Southern dialect, and they were doing so without the strength of vocal projection found in adults, especially in the early parts of the movie. Sticking to his central theme, Powers emphasizes that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is "a product of American realism, and it is a rare and worthy treasure."

As a beleaguered mainstream Hollywood film industry tried to recover its ever-dwindling audience, which had been declining steadily since the late 1940s, the appeal of an aesthetic of "realism" was one of the hopes that critics advanced and executives throughout the motion picture industry embraced. Yet another idea that slowly but surely came into vogue among critics was that

Hollywood movies needed to turn away from their rather predictable practice of casting well-known stars in grand spectacles and epics. Hence, well-known critic Arthur Knight could write in his *Saturday Review* article on *To Kill a Mockingbird* that its small excellences and verisimilitude were such “that it requires the somewhat solid presence of Gregory Peck to remind us that it was made in Hollywood at all.”

Yet, the Southern town where the movie was filmed was a re-creation, built on fifteen acres of Universal’s back lot under the supervision of Alexander Golitzen and Henry Bumstead. The realism that movie critics were talking about may have come partially from the look of the “town” created by the movie’s art directors, but more likely came from the range of characters who were assumed to be accurate depictions of a cross-section of small-town Southern life.

The movie was a nominee, and considered a top contender, for a Best Picture Oscar, but it lost that year to *Lawrence of Arabia*. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was the official entry of the United States at the Cannes Film Festival, and it won Mexico’s equivalent of the Academy Award, the Onix, as Best Foreign Picture. The realism that many Hollywood professionals and critics found in *To Kill a Mockingbird* surely had less to do with the movie’s naturalist aesthetic, which was marginal, than with the fact of when it was released. Because of its story and its themes and because it was released in the midst of the civil rights struggles for racial equality in the early 1960s, when national attention was focused on segregation in the Deep South, the movie was then—and has remained—a favorite of audiences, Hollywood professionals, and critics.

Not long before his death, Peck noted that if he was remembered at all, Atticus Finch would be the only role he would be remembered for. Through the end of the twentieth century, school classes in the United States were still watching the movie and using it as a springboard to discuss equality, justice, and race, even though critics had emerged who focused on its flaws of viewing racism essentially through the majority perspective of whites.

LAWRENCE OF THE WIDESCREEN

The team of Sam Spiegel as producer and David Lean as coproducer and director teamed to make the Academy Award-winning Best Picture for 1962, *Lawrence of Arabia*. Much as they had with their 1958 success, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Siegel and Lean joined with Columbia Pictures to package the production, and the Hollywood studio held release and distribution rights for the movie in North America. The production company of record was listed

as Horizon Pictures of Great Britain. The screenplay was renowned British playwright Robert Bolt's first movie script. *Lawrence of Arabia* is one of the films from this era that is considered American despite the fact that some of its financing and most of its production talent was actually British.

Mainstream critical reviews of *Lawrence of Arabia* at the time of its release in the United States were mixed. The *New York Times*, for example, disparaged this three-and-a-half-hour portrait of the British desert fighter T. E. Lawrence, played by Peter O'Toole, calling Lawrence's crises of confidence and identity, against a backdrop of nationalistic revolution in the Middle East, a "camel opera." A later *New York Times* review, published at Oscar time the next spring, was kinder. So, too, have been the assessments of the movie by subsequent generations of critics and historians.

The cinematography of Frederick (Freddie) Young is frequently cited as one of the best examples of utilizing widescreen effectively, in order to convey the vastness, harshness, and beautiful subtlety of the desert that is central to the viewer's perception and understanding of this movie. In addition to Young's mastery of visual composition, the editing by Anne Coates is frequently credited with creating a pacing and point of view that take the viewer into Lawrence's state of mind as he encounters the heat, harshness, and loneliness of the movie's locale. Aside from critics and historians, prominent filmmakers of a later generation, notably Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg, have cited their discovery of *Lawrence of Arabia* as young adults or adolescents as inspiring to their own later work.

THE BRITISH AT THE OSCAR PODIUM

Although *Lawrence of Arabia* correctly might be thought of as a British production, it was listed as American, making 1963 the first time in a decade and a half that a movie not classified as American had won the Best Picture Oscar. Produced by Woodfall Pictures in England, *Tom Jones* was picked up by United Artists for North American release. Based on an eighteenth-century novel by Henry Fielding, with the screenplay written by John Osborne, *Tom Jones*, as adapted to the screen under the direction of Tony Richardson, proved to be a lusty and rollicking celebration of the various pleasures of the senses, from excessive eating to uninhibited sex. Even with a cast that included Albert Finney, Susannah York, Hugh Griffith, Diane Cilento, and Joyce Redman, *Tom Jones* still was produced for under a million dollars.

Its box office success and its Best Picture triumph at the Academy Awards further stimulated interest for Hollywood investment in pictures made abroad, especially in Great Britain, even though it proved to be Richardson's only hit as

a director. In 1963, however, its innovations were considered notable. Some of his techniques drew such positive attention in the United States in 1963 because, although Richardson had drawn them from the French “New Wave” directors, American audiences were not acquainted with them. Over time, however, *Tom Jones* has come to be regarded less for its cinematic style and innovations and more as an icon reflecting changing attitudes toward sex and sexuality.

HOLLYWOOD AT ITS LOW POINT

The Academy’s Best Picture award went to the quasi-British *Lawrence of Arabia* for 1962 and the fully British *Tom Jones* for 1963. These Academy Awards might have been considered emblematic of the era for Hollywood, but in reality they hardly touched on the crisis that confronted Hollywood in 1963. In addition to the many successful British screen productions playing in the United States, movies of the French New Wave were reaching the United States and making waves of a cultural sort among American college-age audiences and on the screens of the increasing number of “art cinemas” in American cities. Attention was also being given to the movies of Italian directors like Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini. For the first time since the 1920s, Hollywood’s position in the world of cinema was shaky.

How shaky the Hollywood movie industry was in the early 1960s, however, could best be seen in the runaway catastrophe of *Cleopatra*, produced and released with an initial loss for its studio, Twentieth Century-Fox, of \$30 million. One of the great studio names in the Hollywood, Twentieth Century-Fox survived this calamitous loss only by selling off its vast real estate holdings between Beverly Hills and Westwood for development as a commercial, residential, and business community known as Century City. And the troubles at Twentieth Century-Fox were only the tip of the iceberg for the American movie industry. A modern-day record low number of Hollywood-produced feature films was set in 1963 at 143 (sometimes the figure is calculated at closer to 160, but even that would be a post-silent era low). Compare that figure to the roughly four hundred to five hundred features produced and released annually in Hollywood during the Classic Era of the 1930s and 1940s, and the depths to which the American movie business had fallen becomes clear.

SATIRIZING THE COLD WAR

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and Hollywood reached its lowest point in production output and cultural importance since 1920. In

cinema history, two significant movies that challenged commonly held beliefs about the Cold War bracketed 1963. They were *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). The former is about an American prisoner of war programmed by Communist interrogators in Korea to return to the United States and assassinate the American president. The latter was a biting satirical comedy, a spoof of military and political leadership, and a send-up of the entire Cold War mentality.

The Manchurian Candidate was based on a novel by Richard Condon and was coproduced by Frank Sinatra, who also starred in the picture in the role of a Korean War veteran named Maj. Ben Marco. After returning home, Marco is tortured by nightmares that a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Raymond Shaw (played by Laurence Harvey), has been brainwashed and programmed to kill his fellow platoon members and to eventually assassinate the president of the United States. Shaw's father-in-law is a ranting McCarthyite senator (James Gregory), and his mother is a political meddler (Angela Lansbury); both these ties help Shaw to gain access to the inner circles of Washington power. The director, John Frankenheimer, recruited from New York City after directing a number of dramatic successes for television, deftly balanced the elements of a searing political satire with a nail-biting thriller.

Ironically, United Artists was so concerned about the script that Sinatra had to call upon his personal friendship with President Kennedy, of whom Sinatra was a supporter, to enlist the president's approval for the studio to support the project in development. Once made, the movie evoked ire on both the political right and left and eventually came to be considered hauntingly inappropriate for exhibition following the actual assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

By then, however, Sinatra and his partner George Axelrod were already wrangling with United Artists. The Hollywood environment after the studio system proper had disintegrated was fraught with arguments, accusations, and litigation between the various movie producers and producing companies on the one side, and the distributors on the other. In this atmosphere, a new branch of entertainment law practice flourished, as did conflicts over a movie's earnings. Sinatra exercised his ownership rights over *The Manchurian Candidate* and withdrew the movie from circulation at the end of 1963. It was not shown again for twenty-five years, but when it was, in 1988, it was lavishly praised and celebrated as an accomplished and courageous feature, a delicious black comedy mixing melodrama and satire that was well ahead of its time. Although it was out of circulation for so long, *The Manchurian Candidate* had had its impact on Hollywood. It was a commercial failure in 1962–1963, but many in the motion picture industry were able to recognize that the movie

indicated that the standards of what moviegoing audiences would accept on-screen were changing.

Dr. Strangelove was a more popular and commercially successful film. A satirical comedy that ridiculed the Cold War mentality, it was directed by Stanley Kubrick, an expatriate American who had been living in the United Kingdom for a number of years, and starred British actor Peter Sellers (performing several roles), so it was another of those movies from this era that might have been considered British rather than American. Still, it was financed and produced from Hollywood, and its American pedigree has been upheld. When the U.S. Library of Congress appointed a board in 1989 to preserve the most important American movies, the first feature film from the 1960s that was chosen was *Dr. Strangelove*.

A finely crafted film dealing with a deadly serious topic, global nuclear war, the movie was a side-splitting and irreverent comedy that found enthusiastic audiences, especially among college-age moviegoers. The venerated critic at the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther, called *Dr. Strangelove* “the most shattering sick joke I’ve ever come across.” He meant this in an entirely negative way, but in hindsight his complaints about the movie ring out as testimony to the generation gap that was emerging in American culture during the mid-1960s. In its spoof of American political leadership and the military, *Dr. Strangelove* found a young adult audience and catered to adolescent humor with character names like Jack D. Ripper, Merkin Muffley, and Dimitri Kissoff.

For a floundering Hollywood, *Dr. Strangelove* might have been a beacon pointing to where much of the audience for movies now was. However, the lure of appealing to broader generational tastes still remained stronger, and the identification of an emerging moviegoing audience dominated by late adolescents and young adults had not yet become clear.

TURNING TO THE RELIABLE

The Hollywood of 1963 was battered but not beaten. While the major studios had been in decline for almost a decade and a half, the studio bosses, many of them quite elderly, were still wedded to a concept of screen entertainment that seemed classic. It was Jack Warner, a mogul who had survived the movie business for nearly four decades, who okayed Warner Bros.’s \$17 million investment in 1964’s Best Picture, *My Fair Lady*. The movie’s star, Audrey Hepburn, earned a million dollars for this single performance, even though Marni Nixon actually performed all her songs in the movie while Hepburn lip-synced them. Not that it really mattered for audiences. Jack Warner’s decision to feature Hepburn in this musical appeared to be a stroke of genius. By

the end of its first year of distribution, *My Fair Lady* had earned more than \$46 million worldwide. The movie was popular with audiences of all ages. In contrast to a common image of the sixties, it's worth noting that the film's opening in Hollywood at the Egyptian Theater was greeted by screaming crowds of teenagers, estimated at fifteen thousand by the Los Angeles Police Department. This was at the very same time that the Beatles' tour of the United States was changing the culture of American popular music forever, but tastes in the United States, even among adolescents, still supported very conventional entertainment like *My Fair Lady*.

The movie was directed by Hollywood veteran George Cukor, whose directing career had begun in 1930 and whose work won him the Oscar for Best Director for *My Fair Lady*. The following year, another veteran, Robert Wise, coproduced *The Sound of Music* for a company called Argyle Enterprises in conjunction with Twentieth Century-Fox and also directed the cast, led by Julie Andrews. Not long after its release in movie theaters, the studio was touting it as the most popular movie ever made, and, indeed, during its first year, *The Sound of Music* substantially surpassed the previous year's earnings of *My Fair Lady*; furthermore, it held the rank of the most profitable motion picture of all time until the mid-1970s.

My Fair Lady had received generally acceptable reviews from most critics nationwide, but the response to *The Sound of Music* was more diverse. Two of the nation's better-known critics, Bosley Crowther and Judith Crist, liked Wise's version of the tale of the singing Von Trapp family of Austria, giving their highest marks to Andrews for her acting and singing. By contrast, another major national critic of the period, Stanley Kauffmann, writing in the *New Republic*, pleaded that he deserved a special award "for sitting through this Rodgers and Hammerstein atrocity, so studiously saccharine that one feels that one has fallen into the hold of a tanker bringing molasses from the Caribbean." In his review of *The Sound of Music* for the National Catholic Film Office, John E. Fitzgerald concluded: "While the story is as joyous and as wholesome as anyone could want, the plot of this Austrian torte is as full of holes as a Swiss cheese."

EPIC LOVE STORY

The epic love story *Doctor Zhivago* won five Academy Awards and had been nominated for an additional five. Produced by the Italian Carlo Ponti for MGM and directed by David Lean, it was nominated for Best Picture. Its Oscar wins were in the categories of Art Direction-Color (John Box, Terry

Marsh, Daro Simoni); Cinematography–Color (Freddie Young); Costume Design–Color (Phyllis Dalton); Music (Maurice Jarre); and Screenwriting, from Another Medium (Robert Bolt). This version of Boris Pasternak’s novel starred Omar Sharif (an Egyptian who had starred for Lean in *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962) and Julie Christie; also featured were Geraldine Chaplin, Tom Courtenay, Alec Guinness, Siobhan McKenna, Ralph Richardson, Rod Steiger, and Rita Tushingham. Preproduction on *Doctor Zhivago* lasted more than a year, and the movie subsequently took another full year for filming. *Doctor Zhivago* was yet another example of a major movie of this era produced with funding and North American distribution from a major Hollywood studio that had an international cast and crew and was shot outside the United States—in this case, in Spain and at locations in Finland.

A British citizen, Lean had earned the Academy’s recognition as Best Director for films about a Japanese POW camp in World War II (*The Bridge on the River Kwai*) and the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire (*Lawrence of Arabia*). Both these movies had won Best Picture Oscars as well. Nonetheless, of all Lean’s films, *Doctor Zhivago* is the most ambitious and overwhelming, for its spectacular visual beauty, its complex storytelling, and the exemplary performances of so many in its cast. It was a massive production project with a shooting script that came in at 258 pages.

Take, for example, the complex sequence when Zhivago is watching the lawyer-pragmatist Komarovsky (Steiger) and his latest romantic conquest Lara (Christie), who is the teenage daughter of Komarovsky’s current mistress. After examining the darkened dressmaking rooms where Lara is doing her homework, Zhivago watches through a partition as Komarovsky tells Lara that her mother, who has attempted suicide, will survive. The scene represents a recurring theme of the movie, identifying Zhivago as a witness to moments of both intense beauty and ugliness. As Zhivago watches Lara exclaim in relief and cling to Komarovsky in pantomime of schoolgirl seductiveness reminiscent of silent cinema, the soundtrack is dominated by the sound of a passing train.

Pasternak’s monumental best-selling novel on which the movie was based had been avidly read by millions of Americans, and *Boxoffice* in May 1966 urged exhibitors to work on a tie-in with local bookstores to push the book and the film version of it in tandem. The novel was viewed, at the height of Cold War tensions, as spectacular in terms of fire, blood, and treachery, alongside its moving love story. It was seen as the first true picture of how ordinary men and women endured the cataclysm of hope and horror that was the Russian Revolution and the Communist victory in Russia. The cinematic gold that producer Ponti mined had come his way because Pasternak, who lived in the Soviet Union under communism, had sold the rights for publication of his novel in all the non-Communist nations of the world to an Italian

publisher. Throughout the non-Communist world, Pasternak was a symbol of Soviet repression; Communist authorities had convinced him—through threats to his lover—to decline the Nobel Prize for Literature that he was awarded in 1958.

Doctor Zhivago is set in Russia during the tumultuous years between 1905 and 1935 and tells the story of an orphan son of an impoverished Russian nobleman who is raised by a gentle, aristocratic family and matures into a sensitive poet and a physician. His emotions also turn toward the family's daughter Tonya (Geraldine Chaplin), and he ultimately marries her. Their lives appear to be blessed by love, cultural refinement, and professional stability—until they are torn apart both by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and by Zhivago's love for Lara, with whom he runs away.

The review in the *Hollywood Reporter* enthused: "Despite the grim and brooding background, *Zhivago* has a surging buoyant spirit that is unquenchable. It's far more than a masterful motion picture; it is a life experience." The movie was shot in 35mm with the use of an anamorphic lens system developed by a company called Panavision, then blown up to a 70mm release print for roadshow distribution in North America.

Doctor Zhivago did excellent, but not spectacular, box office business. As a reflection of the growing cultural importance of popular music in the United States, however, recordings of Jarre's soundtrack sold over 600,000 units. Produced at a cost of \$12 million, the film's theatrical release grossed \$16 million.

A TALE OF INTELLECT AND INTEGRITY

The following year's Academy Award winner for Best Picture, *A Man for All Seasons*, was the product of yet another Hollywood company, Columbia Pictures, partnering with a British producer, Highland Productions. With a screenplay by Robert Bolt, who won the 1966 Oscar for Best Screenplay for his work, this movie was based on the life of Sir Thomas More, the devout Catholic who resigned from the service of King Henry VIII of England rather than assist the king's violation of Church authority when he desired to marry Anne Boleyn.

Produced for a budget just under \$2 million, *A Man for All Seasons* had none of the swashbuckling action, none of the adventuresome heroes, nor any of the romantic intrigues common to Hollywood's historical epics of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was a serious and subtle drama that might even have been labeled intellectual in its content.

The movie starred British stage actor Paul Scofield in his first screen performance, for which he won a Best Actor Oscar. Because it was such a serious

drama, and because its cast lacked any Hollywood “name” performers, *A Man for All Seasons* likely benefited as much at the box office from its Best Picture selection by the Academy as did any similar Oscar winner in the modern era. Nonetheless, even after its Oscar victory, the movie did only modest business with American audiences.

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

The adaptation of a very different kind of stage production to the silver screen was marked with the filming of Edward Albee's successful Broadway play with the highly literate title of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* for a 1966 release. Warner Bros. selected Mike Nichols, an experienced stage director, to try his hand as a first-time director for a feature film and supported him with screenwriter/producer Ernest Lehman. Haskell Wexler, an emerging cinematography virtuoso of the 1960s, was the director of photography, and music for *Virginia Woolf* was composed by the veteran Alex North. Albee's stage play had opened on Broadway on October 13, 1962, ran for 664 performances, and won five Tonys (Broadway theater's equivalent to the Oscars).

Warner Bros. paid \$500,000 for the film rights to the play, which is about two couples spending a drunken and acerbic night together in a New England college town. George (played by Richard Burton) is a beaten-down history professor, and his wife Martha (Elizabeth Taylor) is the daughter of the college president. The other couple is a young biologist (George Segal) recently hired by the college and his mousey wife (Sandy Dennis). Nichols reportedly wanted Robert Redford for Segal's part, but Redford turned him down.

Even though the screenwriter worked to rein in the cursing in *Virginia Woolf*, it opened up a controversy with the Hollywood Production Code. The Production Code Review Board, chaired by Geoffrey Shurlock, eventually granted a special exemption based on the exceptional quality of the film (by a close vote of only eleven members of the twenty-one-member panel). Albee's international artistic reputation as a playwright surely helped getting the vicious dialogue and salty language to the screen. Recognized as the writing of an artistically serious author, even the Catholic Office for Motion Pictures—still an influential body in the United States in 1966—rated *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* an approving A-4.

Still, the language of the film was considered shocking to many in the national audience of 1966 and was thought to be exceptionally daring by much of the Hollywood community. The movie's dialogue contained eleven “god-damns,” seven “bastards,” a “screw you,” a “hump the hostess,” “up yours,” and a reference to “monkey nipples.” Given Hollywood Code's history of

suppressing such language since 1934, these words were new terrain indeed, but many observers believed they represented simply a belated catching up of Hollywood dialogue to a changing culture and its norms. Warner Bros. took the voluntary action of imposing its own limitation on attendance: “No one under 18 will be admitted unless accompanied by his parent.”

The Academy establishment recognized the movie with a Best Picture nomination, and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* won wide critical praise across the United States from a variety of newspapers representing a cross-section of the country: “It lives up to every expectation. An exhausting, draining, two-hour Saint Walpurgis Night of excellence” (*Atlanta Constitution*). “The effect is not soul-searing or explosive, but overwhelming” (*Detroit Free Press*). “Elizabeth Taylor? You wouldn’t believe it if we told you how great she is” (*Miami Herald*). “*Virginia Woolf* is a clear success. Indeed, fueled with brilliance, it soars and blazes with artistic energy” (*Kansas City Star*). “It is literate in all its dark descents, valid in the kind of characterization it employs by invoking the claim of a sizable victory for its troubled people, the interpretations of actors at their finest heights of frenzy” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*).

Time magazine predicted that *Virginia Woolf* would be rewarded at the box office for its dirty words:

Albee, America’s current master of American theatrical invective, uses it here for potshots and heavy artillery in a marital Armageddon. . . . As George, the caustic, cynical master of revels, Burton is superb, shrewdly measuring out his powerhouse talent in a part written for a far less heroic actor. . . . Broadway director Mike Nichols, in his first movie job, can claim a sizable victory for the performance he has wrung from Elizabeth Taylor. Looking fat and fortyish under a smear of makeup, with her voice pitched well below the belt, Liz as Martha is loud, sexy, vulgar, pungent, and yet achieves moments of astonishing tenderness.

Variety reported Taylor’s salary at \$1 million, editorializing that she had earned every penny of it. The trade magazine also applauded Wexler’s black-and-white cinematography for its exploration of dramatic hues, rarely pursued so fully, and praised the studio’s decision to limit audiences under eighteen from seeing it to protect from the salty language. James Powers, writing in the *Hollywood Reporter*, summarized the contemporary criticism well: “The screen has never held a more shattering and ravaging and incredible drama than *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*”

SUMMARY

The early 1960s were troubling for Hollywood. In 1963, the number of feature films produced in the United States reached its lowest point in half a century.

The financial catastrophe of *Cleopatra* all but destroyed one of the major Hollywood companies. All the major Hollywood studios were in advanced stages of retrenchment. In every production department, crafts personnel had been fired or were not replaced when they retired. A pillar of classic Hollywood, the contract player system, was being phased out, as long-term actor contracts were not renewed and new talent was not being recruited. Studio orchestras had been disbanded. Hollywood was becoming an industry of freelance crafts personnel and screen talent.

Doubts about the global supremacy of Hollywood movies and their stars increased. In the so-called art house movie theaters, college-age moviegoers found foreign feature films that were more sophisticated and mature than mainstream Hollywood fare. British movies were popular and did exceptionally well in competing for the Oscars. The aging heads of the studios seemed unable to comprehend the industry's situation.

The brightest spots for Hollywood in this period could be identified only in hindsight. In 1960, Alfred Hitchcock introduced his audiences to the elements of a cinema of sensation with the daring shower sequence in *Psycho*, even though that aesthetic of sensation would take on true importance in the American cinema only after 1967. Stanley Kubrick brought to the screen a searing satire of the Cold War and its mentality with *Dr. Strangelove*, even if he had to make the movie in Great Britain. Youth audiences loved it. And Mike Nichols's direction of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* may be seen as modestly shifting Hollywood toward more mature material for the screen and pointing toward the end of the Production Code.

Indications of Revival

The Academy's choice for Best Picture of 1967 was *In the Heat of the Night*, a Walter Mirisch production that was directed by Norman Jewison. The movie was about an African-American detective (Sidney Poitier) from Philadelphia who winds up solving a murder in a Mississippi town by working with the local white sheriff (Rod Steiger). With a screenplay by Stirling Silliphant, who won the screenwriting Oscar with his effort, and a haunting theme song performed by Ray Charles, *In the Heat of the Night* could be seen as a throwback to Classic Hollywood. It was a movie that revealed, through dialogue and classic character development, a human relationship that strained plausibility because these two people did not want to be involved with each other. *In the Heat of the Night* beat out two movies that year, each of which had shown enormous appeal to the youth audiences, *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. Each of these two movies marked a Hollywood turning point and pointed toward Hollywood's future, not its past.

THE TURNING POINT YEAR, 1967

The Graduate (1967) was about a recent graduate from college, Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman), who moves into his parents' home in Los Angeles and begins a sexual affair with a bored middle-aged woman (Anne Bancroft) who is married to one of his father's business partners. Subsequently, Benjamin falls in love with her daughter Elaine (Katherine Ross). Although Elaine rejects him, Benjamin obsessively follows her to Berkeley, California, and, in the final sequence, disrupts her wedding to a medical student. In the melee, he saves her from the dull conventionality of an upper-middle-class existence, first barring

the doors of the church with a giant wooden cross, and then fleeing with her from the scene by boarding a city bus that happens to be passing by.

Although the screenplay for *The Graduate* was an adaptation of a novel written by Charles Webb in the 1950s, much of America's burgeoning youth culture in the late 1960s appeared willing to accept the story as a vehicle that expressed the shared resentment of many of them toward the affluent upper-middle-class lifestyle in which they had grown up in suburbia. In its mixing of sentimentality and satire, and its identification with two sympathetic characters who are college-age, *The Graduate* came to be considered a "key alienation film" for the college-age generation of the late 1960s. Moreover, the soundtrack to the movie, at the insistence of the director Mike Nichols, consisted of songs and lyrics by the young duo of Art Garfunkel and Paul Simon. Their sound was new and very different from traditional Hollywood movie scoring. Some critics pointed out that the lyrics matched the characters and that, in the end, the music was used to advance the story. Actually, such a narrative function for movie music had been Hollywood convention since the coming of synchronous sound. The movie's sexual frankness was provocative, but clearly did not disturb the college-age audiences who flocked to the film.

Since *The Graduate* was produced and distributed by Avco-Embassy, a company founded by Joseph E. Levine, a New Yorker who had made his money as an importer and distributor of foreign movies and the owner of a chain of art-house cinemas, the movie was not subject to the waning strictures of the Motion Picture Production Code. Some critics praised the new style of *The Graduate*, celebrating the ways in which Benjamin's subjective point of view was conveyed through camera positioning and movement, overlapping sound that began at the end of one scene and carried over to the next, and Sam O'Steen's radical editing choices (for example, Benjamin rises from the water in a pool to land on a floating air mattress but lands instead in bed on top of his lover, Mrs. Robinson).

At the time, only one major critic argued strongly against interpretations emphasizing the newness of *The Graduate*. Andrew Sarris wrote that there was really nothing new in the movie "except Dustin Hoffman's face." In other words, *The Graduate* was simply an updated and hip version of a well-seasoned Hollywood genre, the screwball comedy. With *The Graduate*, Hollywood established that movies could do good business by taking the conventions of past movie successes and updating those conventions to fit a perception of being up-to-date and embracing a changing culture.

Even more important as a turning-point movie in 1967 was *Bonnie and Clyde*. This movie managed not only to capture the shifting values and attitudes of a substantial number of young adults who were its core audience but

also to establish more forcefully than any previous film its distinct aesthetic principles and production values. *Bonnie and Clyde* was a pet project of young actor Warren Beatty, which he undertook with Warner Bros. financing as both the movie's producer and male lead. Beatty had wanted to recruit one of the veteran directors of the French New Wave, either Francois Truffaut or Jean-Luc Godard, but when neither was available, he turned to a renowned director from television, Arthur Penn.

Based on a first screenplay by two magazine writers, Robert Benton and David Newman, and with the relatively inexperienced producer Beatty at the helm, Warner Bros. had generally written off the movie as a "popcorn circuit" feature, meaning that it would make money only in smaller markets where there was nothing else to do on a weekend except go to see whatever movie was playing locally. Initially, it appeared that the studio's projections were correct. *Bonnie and Clyde* was reviewed savagely in the *New York Times*, and then *Time* dismissed it as "sheer, tasteless aimlessness." With reviews like this, sophisticated audiences would stay away, and the only business left for such a movie would indeed come from the popcorn circuit.

But a strange thing happened on the way to dumping *Bonnie and Clyde* onto the ash heap of cinema history. All around the country, late adolescents and young adults began lining up to see the movie. Especially for college-age moviegoers, and most assuredly with the hippest moviegoers among them, its popularity was spreading like wildfire, apparently by word of mouth. Hollywood had experienced sleeper hits in the past, but the sudden box office popularity of *Bonnie and Clyde* was unprecedented.

What the critics said clearly did not matter at the box office. Moreover, *Time's* Stefan Kanter retracted his earlier criticism, and, in a rare second review, declared *Bonnie and Clyde* not only the best movie of the year but also the sleeper of the decade. In similar fashion, a contrite Joseph Morgenstern at *Newsweek* acknowledged that his initial, negative review of the movie had been "grossly unfair."

Negative reviews had been the norm initially. *Bonnie and Clyde* was disliked, and evidently misunderstood, by nearly all the major movie critics nationwide. From the beginning, the notable exception had been Pauline Kael. At the time, she was the ascendant champion of sociological criticism of the movies, guiding her readers toward understanding popular films as parables of contemporary social and political issues. It was Kael's discovery of an ideological message in *Bonnie and Clyde* that explained for her its extraordinary appeal to young adults. "In 1967," she wrote, "the moviemakers know that the audience wants to believe, maybe even prefers to believe, that Bonnie and Clyde were guilty of crime, all right, but that they were innocent in general; that is, naïve and ignorant compared with us." Writing in the *Village Voice* a

number of months later at the end of 1967, Charles Marowitz summed up this line of thinking:

A good deal of the picture's financial success was the fact that the late 1960s' audiences related to the rootless alienation of the film's milieu. Bonnie and Clyde are rebels without a cause . . . characters which the so-called youth movement of the late 1960s turned into campy pop culture heroes.

Bonnie and Clyde was set during the years of the Depression, but in the movie's oblique references to injustice and repression, and in its more direct portrayal of its protagonists as victims, *Bonnie and Clyde* appeared to entirely reverse the historic social role of Hollywood movies.

Nonetheless, the greatest impact of *Bonnie and Clyde* was on Hollywood aesthetics. The movie was revolutionary, and the essence of what was so new about it was in the craft of its editing. The person most responsible for the reverberations that spread like wildfire through Hollywood was the editor on *Bonnie and Clyde*, DeDe Allen. Encouraged by producer Beatty and director Penn, who shot inordinate amounts of footage, Allen later recalled that on *Bonnie and Clyde*: "I broke all my own rigid cutting rules about story, character, and how a scene plays."

A staple of prior Hollywood film editing, "establishing shots" were ignored throughout *Bonnie and Clyde* in favor of entering scenes with angle shots and close-ups. The central tenets of continuity editing that had defined visual storytelling for Classic Hollywood were abandoned. These editing rules had already been broken in the movies of the French New Wave at the end of the 1950s. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, however, they were being broken wholeheartedly and in full keeping with the aesthetic of sensation that had been introduced in the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

Bonnie and Clyde was one of Hollywood's most successful movies of the decade, a \$40 million earner at the box office, with its radical editing style combined with the visceral sensation of an extraordinarily violent and bloody crime spree in the early 1930s. Veteran Hollywood film editors called the movie badly cut, and during postproduction the elderly Jack Warner at the studio urged Beatty to fire Allen because he was worried that her editing choices would cause the movie's audiences to "mistake the bad guys for the good guys." Allen's revolution in editing and style, however, was essential to Beatty's concept of the film and to Penn's directorial vision for it. Their collaboration facilitated a breakthrough for American filmmaking.

Although Allen's tendency toward fast cutting was widely copied immediately, in most instances such cutting was done without the artistic intent and purpose that had been sustained throughout *Bonnie and Clyde*. Imitators took

from her example only the notion of stunningly short shots put together at a frenetic pace, whereas Allen definitively linked these shots and their pace to shifting the viewer toward identifying emotionally with Bonnie and Clyde's point of view in every action sequence in the movie.

A THROWBACK CHOSEN AS BEST PICTURE

In 1967, both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* rearranged the conventions of genre and challenged many established practices for making successful Hollywood narratives—whether it was with regard to their editing or innovations in their use of sound and music—which made that year a turning point for Hollywood. The Academy's Best Picture selection for the year 1967, however, was neither of these movies, although both were nominated in this category. Instead, the Hollywood establishment voted the Best Picture Oscar to *In the Heat of the Night*.

Produced by Walter Mirisch, and directed by Norman Jewison, *In the Heat of the Night* was adapted from a novel by John Ball published in 1965 and adapted for the screen by the accomplished Stirling Silliphant. Ball had written a series of novels about an expert homicide detective named Virgil Tibbs, two others of which also later were adapted into movies: *They Call Me MISTER Tibbs!* and *The Organization*. Mirisch had purchased the rights to the book *In the Heat of the Night* in the summer of 1966.

Set in Sparta, Mississippi, the production of *In the Heat of the Night* was actually filmed in Sparta, Illinois, which was considered a more agreeable location for filming the story of an African American who is trapped by circumstances and has to work alongside a bigoted Mississippi sheriff to solve the murder of a man who is supposed to be setting up a manufacturing plant in a small cotton town. Sidney Poitier was cast in the lead role as Tibbs, a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, homicide detective who is caught by circumstances in a small Mississippi town while changing trains and forced to work with the local white sheriff, played by Rod Steiger. *In the Heat of the Night* was a conventional detective story, a suspenseful whodunit, set in a place where its antiracist theme could be played well.

Poitier was a Hollywood oddity who infiltrated his way into the highest ranks of Hollywood acting. Born of Jamaican parents who immigrated to Miami, his very slight West Indian accent had caused him to fail the standard Hollywood "Negro actors" audition that studio era Hollywood required of black actors. As a result, he was not considered suitable for stereotypical screen roles for blacks. Instead, he was cast alongside Tony Curtis in *The Defiant*

Ones (1958, directed by Stanley Kramer) as one of two escaped fugitives, and by the 1960s was taking leading roles in many features, including *Lilies of the Field*, for which he was awarded an Oscar as Best Actor in 1963. By 1968, he was selected the most popular film star in the United States in a popular vote conducted by the *Motion Picture Herald*. All of Poitier's roles were exemplary and unblemished characters. The heroic stature of the characters that Poitier played was like a caricature of perfection of studio-era Hollywood stars.

Bill Desowitz, writing in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1998 on the occasion of MGM's restoration of a print of the 1967 film *In the Heat of the Night*, observed:

While not as chic as *The Graduate*, or as subversive as *Bobbie and Clyde*, or as preachy as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the industry saw *In the Heat of the Night* as a movie with subtle social significance, espousing racial equality not as a heavy-handed message but wrapped in a murder mystery set in the South—just a few years removed from when segregationist Jim Crow laws were being enforced there.

A very admirable team of filmmakers worked on it: producer Walter Mirisch; screenwriter Stirling Silliphant; director Norman Jewison; cinematographer Haskell Wexler; editor Hal Ashby; and the distinguished cast of Sidney Poitier, Rod Steiger, Lee Grant (Mrs. Leslie Colbert), and Warren Oates (Officer Sam Wood). Michael Friend, the archivist (at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences) who restored the print in 1998, commented: "Seeing it again, you realize what a passionate, lucid ensemble work it is, perfectly capturing the ideology of American liberalism before Chicago '68." The film displays a number of moments of reflection when the characters are considering the consequences of their actions. Quincy Jones scored the film.

It was with a certain irony that *In the Heat of the Night* won the Best Picture Oscar at the only Academy Awards ceremony ever postponed—by the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968.

A LIBERAL DOSE OF LIBERAL HOLLYWOOD

Stanley Kramer produced and directed a film that same year that might be called "vintage liberal": *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, a comedy-drama love story that was critical of racism, again starring Poitier. Also starring Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn, and Katharine Houghton (Hepburn's niece in

her screen debut), it told the story of a highly enlightened and liberal couple whose daughter's engagement to a black man upsets them. William Rose, the movie's screenwriter, had credits including *Genevieve* and *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*. The soundtrack featured a hit song, "Glory of Love," written by Billy Hill and sung by Jacqueline Fontaine.

Arthur Knight, writing in the *Saturday Review*, observed that *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was the first big picture from a major studio (Columbia) to give serious attention to the question of interracial marriage or to permit a black man to enthusiastically kiss a white woman. By putting the ideas of this movie into the mouths of the most attractive and agreeable players he could find, said Knight, Kramer created a gambit that works both for and against the film. Certainly these stars were assumed to be able to draw audiences to the film who might not have gone to earlier movies, such as *Shadows* (1959) or *One Potato, Two Potato* (1964), that featured romance between an African-American and a Caucasian character. Knight objected to what he called Kramer's "stagelike pairings for little set pieces of dialogue played against cardboard cutouts of San Francisco."

Speaking at numerous college campuses in 1967 and 1968, Kramer concluded that college students didn't want more romantic love scenes between Poitier and Houghton; instead, they wanted them in bed, period! Many students were saying, to paraphrase Kramer, why make a movie about interracial couples when that's not a problem with us anymore. But in an article he wrote in April/May 1968 for a magazine called *Ach'ou*, he pointed out that it was still a problem for their parents, their relatives, and their neighborhoods. The movie offers a vision of what becomes a middle-class nightmare in which an ingenuous and idealistic daughter brings home her fiancé to meet her parents, and he turns out to be an African American. At first, the parents can't believe their eyes; then they accept him; then dad rejects him; then *his* father rejects the *girl*; and finally after an interminable, uplifting speech—which, as movie critic Richard Schickel said in *Life*, only Spencer Tracy could make without everyone in the audience fleeing the theater in search of a barf bag—a tolerant resolution is reached.

Even in 1967, it was an unusual enough movie, coming from a major Hollywood studio, to give pause to many reviewers as to just how to evaluate it. The review in the *New Yorker*, for example, allowed that although it played more like a drawing room comedy better suited to the stage than to film, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was still charming enough to have audiences, and a great many critics, overlook its defects. Tracy died just ten days after filming ended and was ill through quite a bit of the production. *Variety* observed: "A landmark in its tasteful introduction of sensitive material to the

screen, the Columbia release can look to torrid box office response throughout a long-legged theatrical release.” *Cue* magazine said:

The film becomes weakest when the crisis is deepest. Poitier’s doubting parents come to dinner, a Monsignor Ryan adds his two cents, the Negro maid has her running comments, husbands battle wives, and it is all too-too. But no matter how much it is contrived, the film’s joyful heart is in the right place.

Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* delighted in the performances of Tracy, Hepburn, and Poitier and pleaded for critics not “to disturb the euphoria and likely enjoyment of this witty and glistening film.” The journal *Films and Filming* lauded the screenplay, ranking it “as one of the best of all time.”

A studio public relations release from Columbia Pictures asserted that only a hundred or so critical letters about the film had been received and added that in many cities in the South, theater attendance was setting records, citing Atlanta, Augusta, and Macon, Georgia; Newport News, Virginia; Knoxville, Tennessee; Greensboro, North Carolina; Austin, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and El Paso, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; and Miami, Florida. In the *Commonweal*, Philip Hartung summed up the broad consensus about *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*:

However you may feel about Stanley Kramer’s films, you have to admit that this producer often rushes in with timely themes where other angels fear to tread. . . . Yet, this film does succeed in pushing the audience into thinking and manages to be entertaining about it . . . perhaps we should be grateful for *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, which only scratches the surface of the whole problem but is bound to win audiences with its lively scratching.

In what many observers took at the time to be evidence of the Academy’s complete detachment from the culture changing around it, *Rachel, Rachel* was the sole film to even receive a nomination as Best Picture for 1968. The Best Picture Oscar for 1968 was awarded instead to a British musical, *Oliver!* There was a good deal of public disagreement with this choice. Although *Oliver!* was based on a renowned Charles Dickens novel of the mid-nineteenth century, many critics judged the movie to be subpar. In particular, it was thought that the director, Carol Reed, was performing far below the standard he had set for himself twenty years earlier with *The Third Man*.

THE MPAA’S RATING SYSTEM

Soon after Jack Valenti, a special assistant to President Lyndon B. Johnson, became the head of the motion picture industry’s trade association, the Mo-

tion Picture Association of America (MPAA), in 1966, he began lining up support from the National Association of Theater Owners for Hollywood to abandon its Production Code in favor of a ratings system. The support of the people who owned movie theaters would be crucial, because any ratings system would shift the burden of enforcement from the producers of motion pictures to the owners and managers of movie theaters.

Ever since the mid-1950s, when European art films had begun to be shown in the United States, Hollywood producers and their audiences became aware of the comparative maturity and openness with which these films from abroad treated topics having to do with romance, sexuality, and other adult themes. Mainstream Hollywood could not change quickly or easily, however. The Production Code Office continued to review and approve movies that were produced or distributed by the major studios as it had since 1934. Even as the 1960s arrived and cultural attitudes began to change in the United States, however, there was only a minor and marginal loosening of the standards. By 1966 and 1967, it had become apparent to most people connected with the movies that times had changed and that an end to the Production Code and its administration was in order.

Officially announced on October 7, 1968, the MPAA's motion picture ratings system took effect on November 1 of that year. The MPAA's new ratings were modeled on a system that had been in place in Great Britain for years. Henceforth, all films produced or distributed by MPAA member companies were to carry a rating of suitability: "G" (for general audiences); "M" (for mature audiences, later changed to PG" for parental guidance and eventually further refined with an additional designation "PG-13"); "R" (for movies restricted for minors unless accompanied by an adult); "X" (no one under age seventeen admitted, renamed as "NC-17" nearly three decades later). Unlike the Production Code, the ratings system did not create production guidelines or prohibit a producer or production company from making any particular film.

Across the United States, movie theater owners recognized that such a system could be useful for them as well. The ratings system was voluntary, not a matter of statute or law, which meant that individual theater owners could judge how rigorously to enforce the rating mandates depending on their perception of their audiences and the communities in which their theaters were located. With the ratings system it adopted in 1968, the MPAA had found a way to adjust to a rapidly changing culture, the sexual revolution of the 1960s, and the shifting demographics of Hollywood's audiences. By the time it was replaced, the Production Code was exhausted. With the ratings system, Hollywood showed its resilience and accommodation to change. Not all producers liked the ratings, nor did all cultural critics, who lamented what could now be seen on the screens of America's theaters. On the whole, however, the

ratings system proved to be an effective scheme for relieving pressure on the American motion picture industry and giving the appearance that Hollywood was meeting its responsibilities to the general public.

A SPACE ODYSSEY

For much of the older generation of Americans, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, was a “head-scratcher.” The motion picture industry trade journal *Hollywood Reporter* complained about the movie’s lack of dialogue. That criticism was typical of those who could not find a coherent story at the core of this movie. Indeed, what was written about *2001* in mainstream newspapers and magazines in 1968 consistently criticized the “elliptical nature” of the movie, which either infuriated or bewildered most critics.

An onslaught of 1968 reviews faulted *2001* for its weak plot and scant character development. On this question, the generation gap was apparent. As film historian Ethan Mordden has written: “Not everyone attended *2001*, but just about everyone under thirty did, solemnizing the development of a youthful audience as the decisive element in a film’s success.” The *New York Times*, in an attempt to fathom how the critics could all be missing whatever young moviegoers were digging about *2001*, dispatched a reporter from London in a quest to find out. Assigned to this chore, John Russell Taylor of the London *Times* concluded that adolescent males were able to enjoy the “mechanical side” of the movie and embrace its entirety as “a succession of thrilling experiences.”

Kubrick had been able to convince MGM to more than double the planned production budget for *2001* from \$4.5 million to roughly \$10 million. Since *2001: A Space Odyssey* was filmed in an extreme widescreen format called Super Panavision 70mm, the use of traditional Hollywood methods of either blue screen or traveling matte techniques could not be employed for its special effects. Instead, Kubrick placed actors in front of a screen made of highly reflective material, with both a camera filming them and a projector projecting pictures to create a background for them.

Visual effects were central to *2001*. As least one contemporary critic seriously offered the opinion that the late adolescent and young adult viewers flocking to see *2001* were less interested in its masterful cinematography and front-projection experiments than they were in the question of what drugs to ingest to maximize their viewing experience of it. The character Dave’s space journey during the last half hour of *2001* is blended into the abstract psychedelic and surrealistic imagery of the “Stargate Corridor” that was thought to simultaneously blow the minds of pot smokers in the audience and to make

movie special-effects history. Indeed, French New Wave director Jean-Luc Godard enthused in 1968 that *2001* liberated the American cinema from the formulaic scripting and “melodramatic machinations” of Hollywood’s Classic Era entirely. Hollywood took notice, of course, but *2001: A Space Odyssey* struck most in the major studios as too unusual and “one-of-a-kind” to copy in the short run.

1969

By the final year of the decade of the sixties, new directions were apparent in Hollywood. A decade that had seen the civil rights movement triumph in bringing an end to racial segregation in the Deep South, a sexual revolution sweep across the culture, and a vast protest movement build against American foreign policy in the Vietnam War could not but help impacting American movies. At least among adolescents and young adults, American culture was changing rapidly: rock and roll had surged to new prominence in the nation’s popular music, universities were liberalizing their curricula and inflating grades, and the use of controlled substances was increasing into what some described as a massive recreational drug culture. There was urban blight just as there were urban riots and rapidly rising crime statistics. Less clearly demonstrated, American culture appeared to erode in the direction of an abiding pessimism.

Two movies of that year, *Midnight Cowboy* (the Academy’s Best Picture for 1969) and *Easy Rider*, appeared to come closest in their screen stories and characters to the nation’s contemporary cultural situation. Set on the grim margins of life in New York City, *Midnight Cowboy* had been rejected for production at United Artists earlier in the decade because a studio reader’s report concluded that “its action goes steadily downhill.” By the final year of the 1960s, however, producers Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin could convince the studio that the movie was worth producing because it was aimed at an audience receptive to its negative portrayal of disintegrating urban life and to the abject alienation of the movie’s two main characters. John Schlesinger, who had directed the saucy and successful *Darling* with Julie Christie in Great Britain in 1965, was tapped to direct.

In *Midnight Cowboy*, Joe Buck (Jon Voight) travels from Texas to New York believing that he will find women ready and willing to pay him for his sexual services. There he meets a street character named Ratso Rizzo (Dustin Hoffman), who strikes up an acquaintanceship with Joe and promptly tries to con him. The two eventually become friends, however, and the remainder of the movie explores their unlikely relationship, until Ratso becomes so ill that Joe must steal money to take Ratso on an escapist bus trip to Florida.

Branded with the scarlet letter “X” in the MPAA’s new ratings system, *Midnight Cowboy* nonetheless encountered absolutely no disadvantages at the box office. (Interestingly, the “X” was downgraded to “R” in 1971 without a single frame of the movie being altered.) The rating had nothing to do with audience perceptions of the film. By 1969, the movie’s “downer” story, gritty New York City milieu, and raw attitudes toward sex were easily accepted by movie critics and moviegoers alike. Writing in the *New York Post*, critic Arthur Winsten summarized mainstream response to the movie: “*Midnight Cowboy* is the kind of solid work that stays superbly in one piece, a statement about our time and people that doesn’t have to stand back and orate.”

The Academy’s selection of *Midnight Cowboy* as Best Picture was one clear form of endorsement by establishment Hollywood. Moreover, despite its “X” rating, the MPAA, the industry’s official trade organization, selected *Midnight Cowboy* as the official entry of the United States to the Berlin Film Festival for that year. Perhaps most clearly demonstrating how much film culture had changed, the International Catholic Film Office granted *Midnight Cowboy* its imprimatur by calling it the screen’s “best articulation of man’s problem from a Christian viewpoint” for that year.

Traditional movie genres were also ripe for realignment in 1969. Since its earliest years, a staple of Hollywood had been the western. Of all the movie genres, the western had been most consistent and formulaic. The most commercially successful movie of the decade that played off these conventions was *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Directed by George Roy Hill, this movie made extensive manipulation to its formal visual elements. Stills and freeze frames, along with the mixture of black-and-white with color footage, produced a studied romanticism throughout the entire movie. The director of photography on the film, Conrad Hall, overexposed his camera negative and then had the film printed “down” in the laboratory in order to reduce the color density and saturation so as to make the color footage in the movie more sepia-tone rather than the luminous brightness of conventional Hollywood color. Hall’s willingness to manipulate both how the camera film was shot and its processing in the laboratory was an indication of increasing attempts to create new visual aesthetics in Hollywood.

Hollywood production, after all, had shifted from black-and-white to color for nearly all its feature films only after the major television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) had announced toward the end of 1963 that they would begin telecasting in color. Until 1964, Hollywood feature films were divided roughly equally between black-and-white and color releases. In 1964, however, the studios, as well as independent companies and producers, decided that black-and-white features must be replaced entirely by color production. Hall’s initiatives on *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* could be perceived

as an example of a young master of visual design rethinking his craft, which had changed so radically in the mid-1960s.

Unlike *Bonnie and Clyde*, in which criminals were represented as doomed victims of their own nature, the title characters in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* were transformed by the screenplay from legendary renegades into a pair of fun heroes. Starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* helped define the male buddy movie as a distinct Hollywood subgenre; it ranked at number 50 on the American Film Institute's 1996 list. Much of the movie's appeal could be accounted for by its two stars, Newman and Redford, each of whom was handsome and photogenic in the tradition of Hollywood leading men. The movie itself, moreover, played with the myth of the American West that Hollywood had perpetuated for decades, and did so in a decidedly gentle way. A send-up of Hollywood western formulas, it indulged in an escapism that few, if any, westerns made in Hollywood's Classic Era had ever attained. The tone of this movie was so light as to be almost ethereal.

Quite the opposite was true for *The Wild Bunch*, directed by Sam Peckinpah that year, which carried the stylization of graphic violence further than any Hollywood movie had done before. *The Wild Bunch* occupies a spot in motion picture history as one of the most thorough examples of the aesthetics of sensation on-screen. At the time, critic Joel Reisner, writing in *Coast* magazine, exclaimed: "Directorially, *The Wild Bunch* is comparable to nothing. . . . It is as hair-splitting as it is hair-raising."

The movie presented a frantic embrace of the emerging cinema of visceral screen effects. Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, Peckinpah's movie made extensive use of the innovation of explosive squibs, essentially thin plastic bags filled with red dye that were set off by a small charge to simulate bullets striking their victims. Going further than Arthur Penn had on *Bonnie and Clyde*, Peckinpah filmed the bloody shootouts simultaneously with six different cameras, each one of them running at a slightly different speed. Then, in collaboration with the editor on *The Wild Bunch*, Louis Lombardo, Peckinpah used slow motion, as well as other footage in varying speeds, to stylize the graphic and bloody impact of his movie when it was seen on-screen. Lombardo broke one of the few remaining rules of editing that had survived DeDe Allen's editing work on *Bonnie and Clyde* by cutting directly into slow-motion shots, and he also set a record for the number of separate shots in a feature film at 3,624. Lombardo pushed the revolution in Hollywood editing further than anyone else, and *The Wild Bunch* was established at the end of the 1960s as the epitome for fast-paced editing in a narrative film.

The cinema of sensation was a matter of aesthetics, but much of the controversy surrounding *The Wild Bunch* in 1969 dealt with the single issue of

the movie's graphic representation of violence and social responsibility. Critic Arthur Knight, writing in the *Saturday Review*, said he believed that Peckinpah was sincere in his attempt to make a movie "so strong and stomach-churning and so detailed in its catalogue of horrors that all the attraction of violence for its own sake would disappear." By contrast, movie critic Joseph Morgenstern editorialized in *Newsweek* that Peckinpah was not to be excused for the excessive violence in this movie on the grounds of the director's possible "metaphorical" intentions. Morgenstern argued that Peckinpah was proceeding on a flawed premise if he thought that violence could be stylized artistically to the point that it became capable of commenting on itself. Diana Trilling, a literary critic, writing in the *New Republic*, called the movie "devious," while other critics justified the gore as part of the parable they found in *The Wild Bunch* by interpreting the movie's story about the intrusion of the U.S. cavalry in the Mexican Civil War as a commentary on U.S. military intervention taking place in Vietnam. The controversy was unresolved, but the movie remains a landmark of the era for holding up a mirror to Hollywood's perpetuation of its myth of the west. There is little doubt that the movie forced some members of its audience to confront their own voyeuristic ambivalence toward its graphic horrors.

With production costs just under \$300,000 through principal photography, *Easy Rider* became both a critical and commercial success in 1969 and stands as another landmark movie of the era. Its combination of the alienation theme and outsider characters, its music soundtrack of rock music including a number of classic rock songs, and its series of visual vignettes that occur on a road trip across the United States place it prominently in American cinema history as a motion picture that points toward the future. Produced by Peter Fonda (the son of legendary actor Henry Fonda and brother of prominent actress Jane Fonda) in conjunction with Bert Schneider (the son of longtime Columbia Pictures board chairman Abe Schneider), the movie could be seen as a collaboration by these children of the Hollywood establishment that challenged the establishment's traditional concept of how to make a successful movie. Applauded at the Cannes Film Festival in France, where *Easy Rider's* director (and costar), Dennis Hopper, was honored as best director of a "first film," the movie earned more than \$60 million internationally in its initial theatrical release.

Fonda and Hopper play two hippies who make a drug deal in Los Angeles, take their money, climb onto motorcycles, and head east on an odyssey. Along the way, they land in jail in a small town in New Mexico for "parading without a permit" and persuade a young attorney who is sobering up there (Jack Nicholson) to accompany them on to Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

Fonda, who shared screenwriting credits with Terry Southern, later claimed that in his own mind, when the idea for the project came to him, he was thinking of the 1955 John Ford movie *The Searchers*. However, Fonda saw his characters' quest differently from John Wayne's obsessive search in the earlier film for his niece who had been kidnapped by Indians, because "they're not looking for Natalie Wood [who played Wayne's character's niece], they're looking for America and they're on choppers." The trio is on a road trip that *Time* movie critic Richard Schickel called "a desperate flight from the system by essentially innocent individuals." Nicholson's character is murdered in the darkness of night by attackers in Louisiana. Billy (Hopper) meets his end just east of New Orleans, shot from a pickup truck by a couple of rednecks who pass them on the highway, as does Captain America (Fonda).

Easy Rider had lots of fallout for Hollywood. It challenged a traditional Hollywood model of filmmaking with its low production budget and small cast, and it was the first hit feature to truly integrate the "found" music of popular rock and roll with its storyline. Nicholson's comparatively brief on-screen appearance in the movie saved his career and headed him on the road to stardom.

The movie's stunning box office success sent the Hollywood motion picture industry scrambling to duplicate its appeal. Most of the movies put into production on this basis failed, but the industry did open itself to new and younger talent and the possibility of many unconventional projects. *Easy Rider* was a compelling model for finding movie success, with a picture that could truly excite the core moviegoing audience that was now composed overwhelmingly of late adolescents and young adults.

SUMMARY

The year 1967 marked a turning point for Hollywood. *Bonnie and Clyde* showed that sensation now took its place right alongside the traditional sentiment and spectacle of Hollywood filmmaking. *The Graduate* demonstrated that screwball comedy, a tried-and-true genre, worked like a charm for youth audience of the late 1960s if mixed with the theme of alienation and challenges to convention. By the second half of the 1960s, the overwhelming majority of the regular audience for movies was late adolescents and young adults. Much of that audience liked outsider characters, themes of alienation, unusual music scoring, fast-paced editing, new stylistics, and sensation on-screen. Hollywood began scrambling to satisfy those tastes. Peter Fonda coproduced, cowrote, and

costarred in *Easy Rider*, a 1969 hit that appeared to point toward independent features of the future. That same year, *Midnight Cowboy* captured the Academy's Best Picture Oscar, signifying the Hollywood establishment's acceptance and endorsement of its pessimistic themes and its portrayal of American urban decay. A battered Hollywood had found new life and displayed the signs of its revival, although the motion picture industry had not yet cleared away all its problems of the 1960s.

Conglomerate Control, Movie Brats, and Creativity

*D*uring the 1960s, Hollywood bent but did not break. From a low of just over 140 feature films produced in 1963, that number climbed back to 230 by 1969. During the same time, a measure of economic stability had been brought to the high-risk business of making movies. Between 1966 and 1970, giant conglomerate corporations bought and took over five out of Hollywood's seven major companies. Only Twentieth Century-Fox and Columbia Pictures were not acquired in this period. These conglomerates ranged from Gulf and Western, which had historically specialized in manufacturing automobile parts and electronics, to the insurance and financial services company TransAmerica to Kinney National Services Corporation, which manufactured and sold shoes and managed car rental agencies, parking lots, and funeral homes. No matter how these conglomerates had made their money in the past, they each looked at the acquisition of a major Hollywood studio as positioning them to profit in what was considered a major economic growth sector for the future: leisure.

The notion of leisure as a future growth commodity was based on several projections. The first assumption was that, beginning with the industrial nations, the world was getting wealthier and more affluent. Second, demographics (the study of populations) predicted growing numbers of people and longer life expectancy worldwide. Combined, these trends meant there would be more adolescents and young adults living in increasingly affluent economies, who would spend much of their disposable income on movies, recorded music, clothing and fashion, fast food, bars and clubs, and other recreation. How better to position a corporation to share in the future profits to be earned on leisure than with a foothold in that market associated with the well-established name of a major Hollywood company?

Many professionals in Hollywood were dismayed by these acquisitions. While there were grounds for holding romantic notions about the moguls of Hollywood's past and how they made movies, however, the conglomerates knew how to run a business. In the short run, Hollywood's fortunes were still shaky, but over time the conglomerates restored financial stability to the industry. By the mid-1970s, the number of feature films produced in the United States annually had climbed back to exceed three hundred.

The graduates from prestigious business schools whom the conglomerates placed in charge of the Hollywood subsidiaries knew business, not movies. Hollywood's success, since its inception, however, had been about prevailing in this particular business. That meant nurturing and rewarding creative talent who could take promising properties and ideas and craft them into successful movies. While horror stories came out of Hollywood in the early 1970s about the blindness of the "suits" (studio executives) the conglomerates had assigned to their studio holdings, the reality was complex. At heart, corporate America and conglomerate takeovers at the Hollywood studios provided the motion picture industry with the financial resources and the business knowledge for a successful recovery. Surprisingly, the period of the early 1970s, when conglomerate control was solidifying, became known as an era of exceptional creativity and the emergence of new talent among filmmakers.

PATTON

The Academy's choice for the Best Picture of 1970 was *Patton*, directed by Franklin Schaffner and based on a screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola and Edmund H. North that deftly and deeply explored the biography of World War II American general George S. Patton and his willingness to sacrifice almost everything to his expansive and raging ego. Patton, as portrayed by George C. Scott, was a brilliant military tactician, but a rigid and ruthless disciplinarian. Karl Malden plays Patton's foil, Gen. Omar Bradley, who brings a certain kind of humanitarianism to his role as a military leader. Produced by Frank McCarthy at Twentieth Century-Fox, *Patton* was filmed in five countries: Spain, Morocco, Italy, Greece, and England. Scott, in keeping with the ostensibly rebellious times of 1970, declined the Best Actor Oscar, which he called demeaning; McCarthy accepted on his behalf and then returned the statuette to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences the next day.

The idea of a Patton film had had its genesis at Twentieth Century-Fox nearly a decade earlier and was finally identified as a serious project by the studio in 1966. Coppola, who had recently earned his M.F.A. (master of fine arts) in film at UCLA, was contracted by the studio for scriptwriting duties, so

impressed were the executives with Coppola's screenplay for *Is Paris Burning?* The latter movie was an account of the Allied liberation of Paris from German occupation in World War II, but while studio bosses liked it, the public did not and it performed poorly at the box office. By the time *Patton* was released in 1970, its reception could not be disentangled from the controversies over the continuing U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia and the raging opposition to the war in Vietnam that was so especially evident on college campuses. Coppola's screenplay reflected just those qualities that Hollywood had typically sought for its mainstream movies about controversial figures and issues.

As the review of *Patton* published in *Cue* concluded: "Super-patriots may find their hero here, while anti-war viewers can point to generals as vain glory seekers." Contemporary critics found the opening of the film—Patton delivering a monologue with a huge American flag entirely filling the screen as his backdrop—compelling. It was considered an especially appropriate expositional opening to this movie, focused as it was so exclusively upon the title character, with absolutely no development in the script of a love interest or any other side story.

While many reviewers could not resist connecting *Patton* and its box office success to interpretations of how a wide spectrum of viewers could connect it to their differing views on the Vietnam War, critic Vincent Canby pointed out in his article about *Patton* in the *New York Times* that this was a film that bore many similarities to the Hollywood productions in the Classic Era. There had been steady support for the project from its inception by Darryl F. Zanuck, who had become chairman and chief executive officer of Twentieth Century-Fox after a long record as the studio's chief of production and subsequently as an independent producer who collaborated on various films with the studio—perhaps the most successful of which had been a spectacular, star-studded portrayal of the Allied invasion at Normandy, *The Longest Day* (1962). Added to that was McCarthy's nearly ten-year commitment to *Patton* as its producer, as well as Twentieth Century-Fox's long-standing working association with the U.S. military, which greatly facilitated the production. For Canby, this was the case of a movie that looked and *felt* very much like it was a producer's movie of the traditional sort.

FROM A SETTING IN WORLD WAR II TO THE KOREAN CONFLICT

Far less conventional a movie was *M*A*S*H*, released the same year as *Patton* in 1970 and taken to be much more iconoclastic and disjointed, so much so that fifteen Hollywood directors turned down making it because they felt the

screenplay lacked the necessary coherence to give the movie clear and strong narrative momentum. The person who did take on the challenge, Robert Altman, demonstrated a knack for unleashing *M*A*S*H*'s carnival-like energy and stringing a number of vignettes into a comedic whole. For Altman, it was a turning point in his directing career and marked him as an iconoclastic figure in Hollywood whose strength was just this kind of film.

Ring Lardner Jr. won an Academy Award for his witty, satirical screenplay of this irreverent comedy-drama, *M*A*S*H*. Set in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit during the Korean War, the movie was widely considered a response to the Vietnam War and a satire of the military in general. Though the movie never shows any combat, over and over again it shows its bloody results. The film's soft-key antiwar sentiment is cloaked in a side-splitting comedy that disguised its ideology and, in so doing, spawned a highly successful prime-time TV sitcom. The movie is structured episodically, largely in set pieces: the collapsing shower scene reveals whether "Hot Lips" is really a blonde; the last supper before the dentist's "suicide"; the hilarious football game. Each of these scenes is considered to be a Hollywood movie comedy classic.

A big hit when it was released, *M*A*S*H* nonetheless sparked controversy between the director, Altman, and the screenwriter, Lardner. The latter was reported to claim that the way Altman directed the movie had ruined his script by including so much whimsy and giving itself over so much to the improvisations of individual performers. Altman was known at the time in the industry as a brash and loud-mouthed liberal who voiced a strong contempt for authority. His improvisational style became legendary, but was not always appreciated; on *M*A*S*H*, even the inexperienced actors Elliott Gould and Donald Sutherland were reported to have complained about it. Lardner reportedly had a fit, screaming at Altman that not one of his words ever made it to the movie the way it was written, although Lardner didn't turn down the Oscar statuette that he received for Best Screenplay.

In a period of counterculture initiatives, alternative lifestyles, and sociopolitical protest, the hubbub seemed a fitting way to make a Hollywood movie and connect it to larger issues. As critic Kenneth Geist wrote: "Young misfits more at war with military regimentation than the prescribed enemy is the staple genre of film comedy, currently pertinent to a youth audience dreading the draft and protesting the war."

MATURE MOVIES OF SENSATION

Director Stanley Kubrick had built his Hollywood track record during the 1960s working as an expatriate in the United Kingdom. His 1971 feature *A*

Clockwork Orange was another success. So impressed was Kubrick with actor Malcolm McDowell's debut in the British film *If* (directed by Lindsay Anderson) in 1968 that Kubrick pledged not to begin filming this savagely brutal, futuristic satire until he could be assured of McDowell's participation. John Beck's exceptional wardrobe choices and supervision and the dazzling art direction of Russell Hagg and Peter Shields provide memorable pictures of functional urban apartments, discotheques, and lavish record shops. The overall atmosphere of the movie is predominately erotic.

A Clockwork Orange moves from scenes of individual crime, with McDowell's young delinquent character Alex and his "Droogs" on a brutal, orgiastic spree, through traditional detention, experimental mediation, and political manipulation to the increasing effacement of Alex's personality and identity by the coercive imperatives of the state. Unable to deal with real people, Alex may be merely a woolly cartoonish degenerate, but the film contrasts his aggression with civilized society's attempt to repress his antisocial behavior.

In many sequences, the effect was greatly heightened by use of music contrasting wildly with the visual content. There is a gang rape, but it is performed like a ballet to the tune of Rossini's "Thieving Magpie," and a sex act is accelerated in comic tempo by the "William Tell Overture." Said one critic:

The styles put a prophylactic distance between viewer and violater, but, less tongue-in-cheek, it is a highly stylized film. Underscoring the eighteen sequences of the cruelty seems to be unarguable. . . . Like all of Kubrick's films, it's a captivating chockablock with studied compositions, anti-Christian buffoonery . . . and "artful" penis objects.

In many quarters, *A Clockwork Orange* was pilloried for the bad treatment of women and more generally as a provocation that could end up influencing heightened adolescent violence in real life. Actress, producer, and director Barbara Streisand took a stand, on the grounds of her ideological opposition to the movie, of declining to be a presenter at that year's Academy Awards because she might have to give an Oscar to someone from *A Clockwork Orange*, which had received four nominations in four categories. Kubrick actually withdrew the film from circulation in Great Britain in 1974, although the real reasons for that decision are not entirely clear; the distribution problems of *A Clockwork Orange* in the United Kingdom became legend and lasted for nearly twenty years. Nevertheless, the film rose steadily and easily to the category of a "cult classic" in North America and much of Western Europe. The movie could be seen as the culmination of nearly two decades of Hollywood movies about juvenile delinquency. As reviewer Michael Atkinson wrote in 2000: "Kubrick made the first punk tragicomedy, a chain-whipped cartoon meditation

on good, evil, and free will that is as seductive as it is tasteless. That Kubrick misjudged the distance between comedy and cruelty seems unarguable.”

Like *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971's *The French Connection*, directed by William Friedkin, was a mature and sophisticated work in the cinema of sensation. It won the Academy Award for Best Picture for 1971. The film's car chase in pursuit of a killer trying to escape on an elevated train careening on tracks above the street underscored the shock editing that built suspense throughout much of the movie. Such techniques marked the maturation of an aesthetic developed over time during the 1960s that now found broad endorsement among filmmakers in the United States and their audiences. By the early 1970s, movie audiences were on average younger than past moviegoers, consisting of late adolescents and young adults primarily, and skewed as a demographic toward being predominately male and disproportionately single.

Generically, *The French Connection* was an urban crime thriller with little uniqueness about either its characters or its plot. Its hard-nosed protagonist, Popeye Doyle (Gene Hackman), was adept at bucking authority and using any means he could to track down a narcotics ring, even if his superiors didn't approve of his methods. The aesthetics of sensation in the violence of the movie and the pace of its editing, the edgy environment set in the deteriorating urban underbelly, and a certain rebelliousness blended into the personality of an otherwise lovable hero who used vigilante methods were signs of an emerging new formula for putting together a mass-appeal feature film that generated a great deal of positive attention from audiences, critics, and professionals within the industry.

Produced for the studio by Philip D'Antoni, *The French Connection* was a Twentieth Century-Fox release based on a best-selling book by Robin Moore, at least putatively laying claim to being nonfictional, which inspired a stylistic approach to the movie that the director Friedkin described as “induced documentary.” Friedkin himself had extensive experience as an award-winning maker of television documentaries before becoming a director of feature motion pictures, but that likely had less to do with the creative choices for *The French Connection* than the perceived notion in the movie industry at the time that a great many movies would appeal to audiences on the basis of an unrelenting commitment to a gritty urban realism. The movie was shot on location in New York City during the winter. The screen presentation of this kind of look to an urban environment dated back to the mid-1950s, with the most notable forerunner of the style being Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954), but it was now being presented as an even grainier and more sordid evocation of the city in color cinematography than had been seen in *Midnight Cowboy* just two years earlier.

Friedkin's last feature completed before *The French Connection* had been *The Boys in the Band*, a 1970 love story about several homosexuals. It failed badly at the box office, and, as Friedkin told an interviewer for the *Hollywood Reporter*, that failure made him realize that he was no longer interested in proselytizing on the screen. Instead, for *The French Connection* he explained, "Before we had a script, we laid down a format that had a violent killing in the first two minutes, followed by an attempt to kill a cop, followed by another fifteen minutes of plot, followed by a surprise and an ambiguous twist. That's getting back to basics." The basics to which Friedkin referred consisted of clearly connecting a film to its direct, emotional points of reference for the viewer. In this instance, these connections entailed the aesthetic of sensation, the character types, and the milieu and story elements that were taken together by some observers to constitute a new approach to Hollywood moviemaking. For a number of motion picture industry observers, the fact that *The French Connection* won the Academy's Best Picture Oscar and that Friedkin was named Best Director by both the Academy and the Directors Guild of America verified that a fundamentally new kind of filmmaking was now being accepted at the very heart of the movie industry's establishment.

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

The Last Picture Show (1971), directed by Peter Bogdanovich with a screenplay by Bogdanovich and Larry McMurtry, explored another dimension of sophistication for Hollywood. At a time when feature films were no longer made in black-and-white, this one was. The review of it in the *Hollywood Reporter* called it "delicate, but monumental." Applauding the decision to do the film in black-and-white, William Wolf, writing in *Cue*, called Bogdanovich "a major American filmmaker," applauding his "in-depth exploration of people and the environment." The *New Yorker* trumpeted: "*The Last Picture Show* arrives just when it seemed time to announce that movies as pop culture were dead."

The film is a standard-bearer of a faded age, a real nostalgia piece. It was also crafted in the manner of homage to some of Bogdanovich's favorite film directors in recognition of a Hollywood past. Bogdanovich had spent much of the prior decade writing monographs on film directors for the Museum of Modern Art, and then moved into filmmaking by working with legendary producer/director Roger Corman on his film *The Wild Angels*. Cinematography on *The Last Picture Show* was by Robert Surtees, a veteran master of black-and-white studio photography; the editor was Donn Cambern, and production design was by Polly Platt with art direction by Walter Scott Herndon. The

film was produced by BBS Productions/Columbia Pictures, with the executive producer for Columbia being Bert Schneider, who had been instrumental in the production of *Easy Rider* in 1969.

For several members of the cast, the film marked career breakthroughs. Jeff Bridges (Duane Jackson), Cybill Shepherd (Jacy Farrow, the high school beauty), Timothy Bottoms (Sonny Crawford), and Cloris Leachman (Ruth Popper, the wife of the high school sports coach who has fallen in love with Sonny) are each entirely convincing in a production designed to achieve great accuracy in its depiction of time and place. In many ways, the film has elements of sexual intrigue and the disillusionment of growing, along with the portrayal of boredom and the peccadilloes of the local population, that became formulaic for depicting small-town America in film and on television during the final third of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the authenticity of this portrayal works especially well in Bogdanovich's movie.

Jacy persuades Sonny to marry her, coaxing him away from his affair with the older Ruth but making sure her parents discover the young couple's plans in time to pack her off to college before she and Sonny can go through with them. Duane joins the Army and spends his last night in the town before embarking for Korea, where he and Sonny are together at the last motion picture showing in town at the local movie theater (Howard Hawks's *Red River*) just before the theater closes for good. Sonny, now running the local pool hall that had been willed to him, is at it when he sees the sympathetic Billy (Sam Bottoms) killed by a passing truck. Sonny, in his loneliness, goes back to Ruth for consolation, where the film ends with them sitting mute, holding hands in her kitchen.

The Last Picture Show was filmed on location in Archer City, Texas. The movie employed no original music, taking songs from the lists of 1951 and 1952 country-western and pop music charts found in *Billboard* and *Cashbox* instead. As an artistic choice, this was an effective approach, and the soundtrack lent itself well to the movie, but as a business decision, it was more problematic. The video release of *The Last Picture Show* was delayed until 1991 because the music rights had been cleared for theatrical screenings in 1972 but not for broadcast or ancillary video distribution.

Stephen Kanter wrote in *Time* that Bogdanovich had made ennui fascinating, calling him "the most exciting new director in America today." Judith Crist, in *New York* magazine, anointed it the best picture of the year, introducing a large group of young, new talent to the screen. Of the major national movie critics, only Stanley Kauffmann, writing in the *New Republic*, was unkind: "It all seems true enough, but almost every scene reminds us vaguely of something we've seen before and generally have seen better." Winfred Blevins of the *Los Angeles Times* called it "stunning, vivid," while in the

New York Times, critic Vincent Canby declared the movie “lovely.” Stephen Farber, however, writing in the *New York Times* at the beginning of the following year, called it overrated.

The Last Picture Show garnered eight Academy Award nominations and won two Oscars. Ben Johnson (for his role as Sam the Lion) won for Best Supporting Actor, and Leachman for Best Supporting Actress. Columbia Pictures subsequently produced a sequel to *The Last Picture Show* in 1990 called *Texasville*, an \$18 million project that failed at the box office; according to Bogdanovich, this failure was caused by the film’s inappropriately wide release.

COPPOLA’S JEWEL

Prior to his publication of *The Godfather*, Mario Puzo had written two other novels, *Dark Arena* (1955) and *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1964), both of which were considered more “literary” than his best-seller success that sold 500,000 in hardcover and over 10 million copies in paperback. Paramount had negotiated rights for a film adaptation of *The Godfather* in 1967 even before Puzo began to write it. Its release as a film, then, came swiftly after its release as a book.

The studio is said to have considered several different possibilities for its direction. Industry insiders believe that Otto Preminger was first asked to direct it, but declined, ostensibly because Frank Sinatra could not be secured for a leading role. As the legendary producer Robert Evans, who had risen to a position of creative power as the executive vice president of Paramount in 1969, is reported to have decided, however, the film needed an Italian-American as its director. The selection of Francis Ford Coppola for that role, however, was a gamble, because his track record did not necessarily establish him as a proven candidate to undertake the direction of such an ambitious project with a large cast and complex art direction. Well established as a screenwriter and having won a screenwriting Oscar for *Patton*, Coppola’s directing credentials were far less impressive: *You’re a Big Boy Now* (1967) was a modest success, while *Finian’s Rainbow* (1968) and *The Rain People* (1969) were box office failures. Additionally, the Hollywood rumor mill had it that Coppola himself was reluctant to direct *The Godfather* because he considered Puzo’s popular novel to be an inferior piece of writing.

For a considerable period of its development, then, *The Godfather* appears to have been a movie that practically no one in Hollywood really wanted to make. And, even after Coppola was signed on to direct it, Paramount executives appeared to be jittery and were reported to want to

dismiss the thirty-two-year-old as director in favor of the legendary and seasoned Elia Kazan just as filming was to begin. Even once into production, the movie was far from a guaranteed winner at the box office. In addition to the comparative youth and unproven directorial record of Coppola, Marlon Brando was considered by many observers to be a has-been who was well past his prime, and Al Pacino, who, as Michael Corleone, truly emerges as the primary figure in the film, was an unknown to screen audiences. Moreover, up until 1972, movies about the Mafia or organized crime had not achieved any particular success for Hollywood at the box office.

The accomplishments of the completed film, of course, promptly threw whatever concerns had haunted its development out the window. *The Godfather* reinvented the gangster film as a genre, and, in so doing, was a roaring commercial success, becoming the first movie ever to earn more than \$100 million in its initial release. Puzo and Coppola collaborated on the screenplay, which probably benefited from the fact that neither of them actually knew very much about the Mafia. So, while a number of the incidents in the movie appear to be based on well-known struggles within the New York City mob during the two decades following World War II, the script focuses instead on family dynamics and on character. It was this emphasis that induced veteran movie critic Charles Champlin to call it “the fastest three-hour movie in history.”

Throughout the movie, *The Godfather* goes back and forth between its action sequences and its family saga. Nowhere is this more striking than in the cross-cutting sequence between Michael Corleone standing as godfather to his sister’s baby at its baptism while his henchmen annihilate his enemies from the other Mafia families. This memorable sequence, delivered so engagingly through the device of parallel editing—cutting back and forth between different scenes to portray action appearing to occur at the same time—encapsulates the essence of what makes *The Godfather* such a compelling movie.

From the beginning, critical response to *The Godfather* was positive, with much of the commentary recognizing that it would claim an important place in cinema history even at the time of its initial release. One of the very few negative voices came from A. D. Murphy’s review in the industry’s leading trade journal, *Variety*. Noting only “flashes of excitement,” Murphy called *The Godfather* overlong and occasionally confusing. He wrote, “While never so placid as to be boring, it is never so gripping as to be superior screen drama.” By contrast, Vincent Canby in the *New York Times* called the movie “the year’s first really satisfying big commercial American film.” *Time* and *Newsweek* both agreed, and each recognized its mainstream importance by devoting laudatory multipage spreads to it upon its initial release. Pauline Kael’s review in the *New Yorker* praised it as a shining example of the premise that the best

movies come from some merger of commerce and art, with *The Godfather* being a stellar example of this hypothesis.

Produced by Albert S. Ruddy, *The Godfather* displayed stellar cinematography by its director of photography Gordon Willis. Nearly 90 percent of the film was shot at locations in New York City or its immediate environs. This was one instance in which the viewer could clearly see the significance of the Hollywood production values and the polished overall look of the movie. Its reputation has persevered. On the American Film Institute's 2006 list of the hundred greatest American films, it stands at second only behind *Citizen Kane*.

MONEY MAKES THE WORLD— AND HOLLYWOOD—GO 'ROUND

Beaten out for the Academy's Best Picture Oscar in 1972 by *The Godfather*, the musical *Cabaret* nonetheless captured eight Oscars that year: Bob Fosse for Best Director; Joel Gray, Best Supporting Actor; Liza Minnelli, Best Actress; Rolf Zehetbauer and Jurgen Kiebach for Art Direction; Herbert Strabel for Set Direction; Geoffrey Unsworth for Cinematography; David Bretherton for editing; Ralph Burns for Music Scoring, Adaptation, and Original Song Score; Robert Knudson and David Hildyard for Sound.

Originally based on British author Christopher Isherwood's 1939 memoir *Goodbye to Berlin*, the material had been adapted into a stage play in 1951 entitled *I Am a Camera*, with a subsequent feature film version (produced in Great Britain in 1955) by the same name. In 1966, the property opened on Broadway as a stage musical with the title *Cabaret*. Subsequently, Allied Artists bought the film rights to the stage musical and developed the property as a movie, with ABC Pictures as a producing partner. Producer Cy Feuer eventually put together Jay Presson Allen as the screenwriter, the legendary Fosse as director, and star Minnelli (the daughter of the director of famed musical films at MGM Vincente Minnelli and the celebrated screen star Judy Garland).

At the very outset, Feuer and Fosse agreed that all the songs in the production should be sung in a natural context, which meant that characters would not simply break out abruptly into song as had become standard in many movie musicals. This seemingly simple decision marked a turning point for the motion picture musical, marking a distinct change in style for future film musicals as compared to Hollywood's traditional ones. Hence, nearly all the songs in *Cabaret* act as political, social, or sexual metaphors for the characters and their dangerous—and decidedly decadent—milieu.

The aesthetic of the entire movie is meant to blend with this basic idea. Bretherton's editing serves so well, for example, by cross-cutting from the

songs being sung inside the club to images outside—a man being beaten to death by Nazi street thugs, leading character Sally Bowles's (Liza Minnelli) postcoital bliss in the splendor of her boudoir, and so on. To many commentators, it was this editing that gave the film its strong satirical bite and enabled *Cabaret* to use of its music so effectively as ironic commentary on Berlin shortly before Hitler's rise to power.

Even before the movie went into production, it was known in Hollywood circles that Hugh Wheeler had done extensive rewrites on the screenplay and added new scenes. Nevertheless, Allen retained full credit as the sole author of the screenplay; Wheeler is credited on *Cabaret* only as a research consultant. In the adaptation for the screen, several songs from the Broadway version of the musical were dropped entirely. Fred Ebb wrote the lyrics for three new songs, each of which may be considered among the film's most memorable: "Mein Herr," "Money, Money," and "Maybe This Time."

For authenticity, Fosse had the cabaret's "Kit Kat" dancers gain weight and allow the hair to grow under their arms. The interiors for the movie were filmed at the Bavaria Studios in Munich, the exteriors on the streets of West Berlin. Feuer called the picture's \$3 million budget "a tight collar." Fosse wanted a look from his cinematographer, Unsworth, that was reminiscent of German Expressionist paintings of the 1920s and early 1930s. It is reported that Vincente Minnelli attended the first screening of the film in Los Angeles and, after it, walked up to Fosse and said, "I have just seen the perfect movie."

COPPOLA AS PRODUCER

The success of *The Godfather* both at the box office and with critics catapulted Francis Ford Coppola onto the Hollywood A-list of directors. Coppola, however, had greater ambitions, and his role in the American cinema immediately became much larger. For one thing, he was the first of the "movie brats"—young men who graduated with M.F.A. degrees in film in the mid- to late 1960s—to achieve prominence as a director. A graduate of UCLA, Coppola came to the Hollywood movie industry on the basis of an advanced education in the craft of filmmaking, as well as a background in the formal study of film history and criticism.

Two other movie brats of this generation were George Lucas, a graduate of the University of Southern California, and Martin Scorsese, who earned his M.F.A. in film from New York University. Taken together, these three were something new for the movie industry. In previous generations, personnel drawn to Hollywood had nearly always found some kind of entry-level position at a studio and then worked their way up to positions of creative and craft

responsibility. Instead, the movie brats were educated at major universities for their filmmaking careers. Older professionals in the movie industry who had worked their way up in traditional ways might consider them “brats,” a term that was intended to point out not only their youth but also their presumed arrogance, but few could deny the thoroughness of their preparation and their commitment to moviemaking as a calling. Each of these three was to have a significant impact on Hollywood in the last third of the twentieth century, although each would make his impact in a different way.

Coppola envisioned himself as a producer as well as a director. He founded his own studio, Omni Zoetrope, and took on a series of movies that he personally marshaled through from development to the screen. The first of these, *American Graffiti* (1973), produced by Coppola and written and directed by Lucas, became one of the most successful films of the era. It was a low-budget movie with personal points of reference that seemed autobiographical, and it featured a cast of newcomers: Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard, Paul LeMat, Charles Martin Smith, Cindy Williams, Candy Clark, Mackenzie Phillips, and Harrison Ford. Lucas had grown up in Modesto, California, and *American Graffiti* was set in 1962 in a similar place. *Variety* called it an “outstanding evocation of ’50s teenagers, told with humor and heart. Strong outlook.” It continued: “Of all the youth-themed nostalgia films in the past couple of years, George Lucas’ *American Graffiti* is among the very best.”

Lucas wrote the screenplay in collaboration with Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck and set it against a chrome and neon of one long summer night in the lives of four high school friends. Shooting was scheduled for twenty-seven days in Petaluma, California. Karin Green served as music coordinator for the film, as Walter Murch’s soundtrack uses roughly forty rock-and-roll hits from the period. The budget for the film was \$750,000, and the music synchronization rights needed for the use of classic copyrighted rock-and-roll songs in the soundtrack alone roughly equaled the costs of the production itself. Studio executives were cautious about its release, but Universal did a number of “pickup” test screenings of *American Graffiti*, and word soon filtered back to the executives at Universal that these test audiences loved the movie.

AN INDUSTRY ADJUSTS

American Graffiti was a very significant movie because it showed the Hollywood studios that films connecting closely to the stories of typical teenagers, even without known stars but buttressed by music that was popular with adolescents and young adults, could be *very* successful at the box office. The movie sent a message to the studios, namely, that this was one kind of film that could

appeal to a changing audience for movies that the motion picture industry did not yet fully understand. Nonetheless, that message was received in the midst of a complex and changing cultural environment. Who the audience was and what movies to make for that audience had been the key questions at the heart of Hollywood's existence since World War I. Hollywood was now confronted with the perceived social changes of the late 1960s, the sense that there was now a distinct youth culture that had not existed before, and the attempt to grasp just how widespread and important the counterculture was. The era was a tumultuous one for American movies, but also, in the view of many observers, an especially rich and creative era.

By 1971, each of the major Hollywood studios had been bought and taken over by a different conglomerate corporation except Columbia Pictures. But conglomerate control did not mean the same thing in every case. Warner Bros. seemed to be at one end of the spectrum, with conglomerate control meaning tight management and a bottom-line approach to movie projects from an aloof business perspective. By contrast, at Paramount, Gulf and Western's CEO, Harry Bluhdorn, had chosen the young Robert Evans as head of production, and Evans was like an old Hollywood mogul of the early Classic Era: he had a strong sense of cinema art, he sought out and nurtured unconventional talent for major creative projects, and he produced comparatively edgy movies that were considered high risk, from *Rosemary's Baby* to *The Godfather* to *Chinatown*.

A period of tumult in the movie industry saw unusual and unexpected movies reach the theaters. There was a turnover in craft talent, especially among directors, giving a chance to many newcomers who likely would not have gotten opportunities to work on feature films in earlier eras. Right alongside this environment, the revisiting of tried-and-true Hollywood methods and formulas continued, as well.

A FORMULA FILM

Increasingly, the Hollywood business welcomed new entrepreneurs who put together funding and packaged new feature-film productions in different ways. Frequently, such movies received funding from many different sources, some of them traditional and some not—from bank loans or other credit, as well as from people in nearly all walks of life who were seeking tax shelters and an opportunity to brush up against celebrities and a glamorous industry. The conversion into movie-producing often was led by agents, a profession that knew the talent, the craftspeople, executives at the studios, or the founders of new distribution companies.

In 1973, Universal backed a movie produced by Tony Bill; Michael Phillips, a former actor; and his wife, Julia Phillips, who had been an editor at *Ladies' Home Journal*. They teamed to package a film entitled *The Sting*, with a cast that mirrored the 1969 hit *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford and directed by George Roy Hill, it was similar to *Butch Cassidy* in that it was about a couple of likable con men and their capers. There is little doubt that bringing Newman, Redford, and Hill together produced a combination that establishment Hollywood, still floundering to recover its equilibrium in the changing culture, liked. Bankrolled by Universal, the movie enlisted one of the great veterans of Hollywood cinematography, Robert Surtees, as its director of photography and hired the legendary Henry Bumstead as its art director. Among its successful elements, the movie, set in Chicago during the 1930s, reintroduced to the broad American public the ragtime music of Scott Joplin, with the adapted score from his music earning one of the movie's seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture for 1973.

In *The Sting*, an elderly con man named Luther Coleman (Robert Earl Jones) and his younger buddy Johnny Hooker (Redford) pull off a successful con, giving the pair enough money to convince Coleman it's enough to retire on, while stimulating the insatiable Hooker to hurry on to his next con job, which will be even bigger. But before either Coleman or Hooker can move on, reality intervenes. It turns out that their mark for the last con was a numbers runner for an underworld organization run by gangster Doyle Lonnegan (played, perhaps a bit improbably, by the distinguished British actor Robert Shaw), who orders Coleman's murder.

Hooker, wanting to find Coleman's killer, seeks out an older friend of Coleman's, Henry Gondorff (Newman), whom he discovers in a dissipated state hiding out in a bordello run by a tough madam named Billie (Eileen Brennan). So their partnership begins, and a complicated array of ins and outs follows, as they set up a "store" for off-track betting and Hooker repeatedly eludes the killers who have killed off Coleman and are now after him. Before they can find him, however, Hooker gets to Lonnegan and convinces him to place a huge bet of half a million dollars with Gondorff at their store. But even though they are pals, Gondorff worries that his friend Hooker won't keep his wits about him and won't be able to pull off the "sting" successfully.

The movie fared much better with the Hollywood establishment and with audiences than it did with the critics. The trade journal *Hollywood Reporter* concluded its mixed review of *The Sting* by saying that the movie looked a lot better than it felt. In spite of the stylized cinematographic affectations—dissolves, fades, wipes, the use of glass shots, and even titles—that were so impressive, something essential seemed missing in it. The script, which won a Best

Screenplay Oscar for its author David S. Ward, nonetheless was perceived by many critics as being too complicated structurally and too heavy with dialogue. Writing in the *New York Times*, Vincent Canby said the movie reminded him of a musical comedy with the songs removed! Jay Cocks, reviewing *The Sting* in *Time*, offered that it was essentially an elaborate gimmick film that “ends with a lot of expensive sets and a screen full of blue eyes.”

FORGET IT, JAKE

An entirely different critical response awaited Paramount’s 1974 production of *Chinatown*. The producer, Robert Evans, teamed with screenwriter Robert Towne (who won an Oscar for the screenplay) on this notably edgy and stylized addition to the genre of modern film noir. *Chinatown* starred Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, with John Huston, John Hillerman, Darrell Zwerling, Diane Ladd, and Perry Lopez and was directed by Roman Polanski. Art direction was the creation of Richard Sylbert and W. Stewart Campbell with sets by Ruby Levitt and costumes by Anthea Sylbert. The director of photography was John A. Alonzo.

As Evelyn Mulwray, who asks private detective J. J. Gittes (Nicholson) to find her husband’s murderer, Dunaway delivers a vintage noir performance, complemented by Alonzo’s dark, muted cinematography and Jerry Goldsmith’s lush romantic score. Towne originally wanted to direct the movie himself, but he was broke at the time and cut a deal with Evans on a thirty-day option on his screenplay at Paramount; Evans promptly hired Polanski to direct.

Polanski, Alonzo, and the art director collaborated to create a Los Angeles of the 1930s that consists of a dry, parched landscape covering a sordid pool of corruption, vice, and incest. One neighborhood of the city, Chinatown, where the movie’s plot finally ends and a villain triumphs, becomes a metaphor for a moral climate of such Byzantine corruption that no man can fathom it. What seems a simple case of a husband having a romantic affair abruptly explodes into murder and scandal, and, by the minute, the story becomes more mysterious, complex, and downright kinky. Gittes is a private eye whose sleepy gaze unravels, in Chinese-box fashion, layers of private depravity behind a public-works scam involving gentleman farmer Noah Cross (John Huston) and his skittish daughter Evelyn Mulwray.

Critic Jerry Hiller wrote in 1974:

A film about Los Angeles in the thirties by a Polish director looking through a CinemaScope lens in 1974 seems an anachronistic mixture. But on its visual terms alone, *Chinatown* displays one of the most stylistically

cohesive uses of the 'Scope format to date. It might be seen as the artistic vindication of CinemaScope. The superb camerawork, and, more surprisingly, the editing [by Sam O'Steen]—a feature which is considered incompatible with the large screen—combine so powerfully that one wonders if CinemaScope didn't die too soon.

Time's critic Jay Cocks gave it a mixed review, concluding:

Chinatown as a whole shares something of Dunaway's problem. Get too close to it and the careful illusion breaks down. Polanski and Towne turned out a smart and elegant creation. But the script also raises moral questions and political implications that are never plumbed at greater than paper-cup depth.

Seen by many as being as searing and as resonant a story as the movies have ever told about the making of modern America, *New York Times* critic Jim Shepard called it "jolting *noir* with a shot of nihilism" in a 1999 article on the movie and its interpretation.

A SEQUEL TO DIE FOR

The Godfather, Part II holds the distinction of being the only sequel honored on both of the American Film Institute's lists of the 100 greatest films. The original *Godfather* in 1972 won the Best Picture Oscar and two other Academy Awards—Best Director for Francis Ford Coppola and Best Actor for Marlon Brando—and was the all-time box office hit for Hollywood until 1978. The 1974 sequel won twice as many Oscars: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Supporting Actor (Robert De Niro), Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Dramatic Music Score, and Best Art Direction and Set Direction. Critics, as well as the Hollywood establishment, were impressed by the accomplishments of this sequel, the success of which remains unrivaled in American cinema history.

Coppola's undertaking for this follow-up to the enormously popular first *Godfather* film expands the saga of the Corleone family in a screenplay that interweaves almost three generations of births, deaths, marriages, baptisms, communions, deep friendships, and betrayals. In research for the screenplay, Coppola enlisted Debbie Fine, a photographic and story researcher at Paramount Studios, to annotate, verify, investigate, and structure the credible lineage of the family and its story. With this ambitious work, Coppola anchored his Hollywood reputation as a stickler for details and Al Pacino established himself as an A-list movie actor. Pacino, who had studied at the

Actors Studio, recommended Lee Strasberg, one of its founders, to Coppola for the role of Hyman Roth.

Given the success of *The Godfather*, Coppola was in the driver's seat for this sequel. Ambitious and visionary, Coppola got his own company to be listed with Paramount as a coproducer of the film. As a director, he came with an original idea to build the sequel around a story line and characters so that the two movies eventually could be shown together. The changing Hollywood was reflected by the movie taking eight months for production and its budget soaring from an initial \$6 million to more than \$11 million. By the time of its release, however, Paramount already had recorded advance bookings worth more than \$26 million in earnings from just the first 340 theaters where the movie opened at Christmastime in 1974.

With a plot constantly shifting from Sicily to Ellis Island to Las Vegas to Lake Tahoe to Havana, and across periods, *The Godfather, Part II* is not really a gangster film, but rather a family saga played out against a backdrop of a considerable swath of American history from early in the twentieth century into the 1960s.

A review in the magazine *Time Out* from London described much of the shared wisdom about *The Godfather, Part II*:

Where the film really constitutes an advance is in its analysis of crime, violence, and control. . . . As a result, the film is not only more psychologically complex than the original, but is far more critical of Mafia methods, and is considered far more politically astute as a reflection on the economic and moral development of twentieth-century America. It's also, of course, about loyalty and betrayal, hope and disenchantment, time and memory.

Wrote fellow "movie brat" director Martin Scorsese in deep admiration of *The Godfather, Part II*:

I admire the ambition of the project, its Shakespearean breadth, its tragic melancholy in its portrayal of the dissolution of the American dream. I admire its use of parallel editing to accentuate the paradoxes of the historical analysis, Gordon Willis's dark-hued photography, the actors' performances, the accuracy of its period reconstructions. . . . Michael Corleone rules his empire from his fortress-like Lake Tahoe estate. . . . Unlike the gangsters of the Hollywood movies of the thirties, he doesn't die but lives on—which seems to be an even greater punishment.

The movie was long in length, coming in at three hours and twenty minutes. The screen time, however, never seems to drag. This is a function of the screenwriting and the editing, but also of the acting performances. Robert De Niro, who almost played Don Corleone's turncoat chauffeur in *The Godfather*, was chosen to play the don as a young man struggling for survival on the

Lower East Side of New York City early in the twentieth century. De Niro took a Best Actor Oscar for his haunting portrayal of the young Vito Corleone. The supporting roles all seemed as strong: Diane Keaton as Michael's wife, John Cazale as his brother Fredo, and Talia Shire (director Coppola's sister) as his sister Connie, and even the role of Frank Pentangeli ("Frankie Five-Angels"), which was taken by Michael V. Gazzo, a playwright; Senator Geary was played by G. D. Spradlin, a former lawyer and oilman who had once run for mayor of Oklahoma City.

Although *The Godfather, Part II* was far less successful commercially than *The Godfather* two years earlier, earning about \$31 million (roughly half the earnings of the 1972 movie), against a \$13 million investment in production costs, it marked the pinnacle of Coppola's success and influence in Hollywood. The 1974 movie was widely applauded by critics for its ambition, complexity, and vast accomplishment and was readily acknowledged by professionals within the industry. After *The Godfather, Part II*, Coppola's career and presence in Hollywood would be more tempestuous and problematic.

Of the other two original movie brats, George Lucas was now poised to conquer Hollywood with *Star Wars*, which he turned into its own franchise, before going on to launch Industrial Light and Magic. Scorsese, who would maintain a certain distance from the Hollywood establishment, was still, by the twentieth century's end, considered to have survived to become the most wide-ranging and accomplished director of the trio.

SUMMARY

The conglomerate takeovers of major Hollywood studios in the late 1960s provided the basis for the motion picture industry's future financial stability. During the early 1970s, Hollywood moviemaking elaborated on the new directions of the late 1960s. The cinema of sensation matured. New talents found opportunity in Hollywood. The first of the "movie brats," graduates of M.F.A. programs in film, made their mark in Hollywood. The most prominent person in this first wave of movie brats was Francis Ford Coppola, who became a dominant Hollywood figure in the period. As the screenwriter for *Patton*, the cowriter and director of *The Godfather* and *The Godfather, Part II*, and producer of *American Graffiti*, Coppola excelled in influencing an entire industry. His *Godfather II* holds a special spot in cinema history as an admirable and critically acclaimed sequel. Producer Robert Evans, screenwriter Robert Towne, and director Roman Polanski joined forces on *Chinatown* in 1974. The film's accomplishments pointed toward many of the challenges to genre conventions that would characterize Hollywood during the final quarter of the twentieth century.

Part III

NEW HOLLYWOOD, 1975–2009

Origins of Hollywood Divided

By the mid-1970s, the production side of Hollywood's business was dominated by agents and the agencies where they worked, independent producers with connections to the traditional studio system, and a range of entrepreneurs from various backgrounds. Movies were being financed and made on a one-by-one basis, as if starting a new business over again each time. Distribution was still in the hands of the major studios and, interestingly, was the safest and most profitable sector of the movie industry. The major studio names still carried a great deal of weight in the motion picture industry, and frequently a major studio had some financial investment in a movie production, but rarely *all* the investment. The exhibition sector was seeing the rise of new ownership chains, based on building and owning multiplex cinemas, frequently in shopping centers and nearly always in suburban locations. Audiences saw movies in these movie theaters or, occasionally, on network television, which was limited to ABC, CBS, and NBC. The technologies of videotape, DVD, and even cable and satellite television did not yet exist.

JAWS AND HOLLYWOOD HIGH CONCEPT

For the last quarter of the twentieth century, Hollywood continued to make a great many movies that were like its traditional ones. Alongside these movies, however, two distinct film types emerged that marked the founding of a "New" Hollywood. The production and release of *Jaws* in 1975 marks one of these. It began a form of Hollywood production that has lasted into the twenty-first century: the "high-concept film," which is more familiar to the general public as the "big-budget blockbuster."

In 1973, two independent producers, Richard Zanuck (the son of Darryl F. Zanuck, who was one of the most prominent producers of Hollywood's studio era) and David Brown, purchased the rights to adapt Peter Benchley's novel *Jaws* to film for \$150,000 before it had even been put into print. Steven Spielberg directed *Jaws*, which took the world of cinema by storm in the summer of 1975, grossed half a billion dollars worldwide, and was the number-one Hollywood box office champ of all time until two years later when George Lucas's *Star Wars* surpassed it.

As critic Molly Haskell admitted in her review for the *Village Voice*, *Jaws*

will no doubt get people off the beaches and into movie theaters. . . . Steven Spielberg, the obviously talented director of *Sugarland Express*, has put together a scare machine that works with computer-like precision. . . . But, perhaps I am making too much of too little. *Jaws* is only meant to raise the hair on your forearm, not disturb your summer with thoughts.

Judith Crist wrote in her *New York* review: "Everyone involved in *Jaws* deserves the highest praise for an exhilarating adventure entertainment of the highest order. . . . Spielberg has chosen complexity of character." And Vincent Canby, writing in the *New York Times*, said:

It's a noisy, busy movie that has less on its mind than any child on the beach might have. It has been cleverly directed by Steven Spielberg for maximum shock impact. *Jaws* is, at heart, the old standby, a science-fiction film. It opens according to time-honored tradition with a happy-go-lucky innocent being suddenly ravaged by the mad monster, which in *Jaws* comes from the depths of innerspace—the sea as well as man's nightmares. Thereafter, *Jaws* follows the formula with fidelity.

Bill Butler was the director of photography for the film. Butler sought to create a brightly lit and summery look for *Jaws*, which was a far cry from his cinematography on Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974). *Jaws* was edited by Verna Fields. Many years later, Richard Dreyfuss, who played one of the movie's leads, said he thought the film was stupid and idiotic and wouldn't see the light of day. Dreyfuss later admitted that at the time he made those comments he didn't understand filmmaking. The film finally cost more than \$9 million to make, and Spielberg presumably lived in constant fear of being fired before the movie was completed.

Stanley Kauffmann wrote in the *New Republic*:

The ads show a gaping shark's mouth. If sharks can yawn, that's presumably what this one is doing. It's certainly what I was doing all through this

picture, even in those moments when I was frightened. There's no great trick to frightening a person. . . . The direction is by Steven Spielberg who did the unbearable *Sugarland Express*. At least here he has shucked most of his arty mannerisms and has progressed almost to the level of a stock director of the 1930s.

In sum, the mechanical shark didn't work as expected, and Spielberg was thrown back to simpler film conventions to tell his story. Fate forced him to discover earlier than he otherwise might have what the essence of making movies is about.

With *Jaws*, Hollywood discovered something deeper and more important, however, and that was the high-concept film, of which *Jaws* was definitive. Film scholar Justin Wyatt provides a summary of the essential elements of high concept:

1. An easily marketed story, idea, or image. This was best understood by reference to the promotional poster for *Jaws*, a striking image of a shark with gaping open mouth and sharp teeth rising through the blue water toward the surface on which a young female figure is swimming.
2. The New Hollywood practice of *saturation booking*, meaning that a movie opened on a set date, like an event, on hundreds or thousands of screens across the United States and Canada. *Jaws* pioneered this practice, which was in direct contrast to distribution by Classic Hollywood, whereby movies opened in New York City, Chicago, and a few other large markets, only sometime later to be disseminated across the United States.
3. A massive marketing campaign to promote the movie to potential viewers, focusing on television advertising and television talk shows. Such marketing quickly became commonplace, but until the mid-1970s, Hollywood had relied extensively on print advertising in local newspapers, lobby displays in movie theaters, and the coming attractions to promote movies.
4. The creation, solely from the movie, of its own merchandising industry, with control over franchising. Hence, *Jaws* beach towels (with over 100,000 sold), thermos bottles, plastic tumblers for cool summer drinks (over two million sold), and picnic baskets for the beach, along with *Jaws* lunch boxes and three-ring binders for kids returning to school after the summer, were all marketed from the movie. The *Jaws* T-shirt sold 500,000 units in eight weeks. *The Jaws Log* by Carl Gottlieb, the cowriter on the screenplay, sold a million copies and joined Benchley's original novel (nine million copies sold) on the best-seller

list. Recordings of the *Jaws* soundtrack, composed by John Williams, flew off the shelves at record stores nationwide. Previously, Hollywood had dabbled in tie-ins, and it was understood that a style worn by a star in a movie might become popular in department stores and women's apparel shops. It was also common since the early 1960s to produce recordings of songs from movies and their soundtracks, but *Jaws* transformed these marginal enterprises of the past into central business tenets of big-budget movies and their marketing for Hollywood's high-concept future.

AN EDGY ADAPTATION

The other side of the New Hollywood equation that became apparent in 1975 was an edgy, alternative feature. The movie was based on a novel published in 1962 by Ken Kesey that had become an exceptionally popular book with the American counterculture during the late 1960s—*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Milos Forman, a European art film director who had fled Communist Czechoslovakia, directed this screen adaptation. It won the Hollywood establishment's endorsement by receiving the 1975 Oscar for Best Picture.

Actor Kirk Douglas, who had played McMurphy in the 1963 Broadway stage version of *Cuckoo's Nest*, had purchased the rights for a screen adaptation with the intention of producing the movie and starring in it himself. By the early 1970s, however, he decided that he was too old for the lead role, so he turned this property over to his son, actor Michael Douglas, who then teamed with producer Saul Zaentz to package and produce *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, coming up with the movie's \$4.4 million budget. Credited as a Fantasy Films Production in United Artists release, it was Michael Douglas's first attempt at producing and Zaentz's second (after *Payday*). *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* became United Artists' most profitable release ever up until that time. The worldwide grosses for the movie were reported at \$320 million. (In 1987, the Internal Revenue Service implicated Zaentz in a scheme that diverted \$38 million in *Cuckoo* profits offshore in order to avoid taxes in the United States.) Its box office returns in North America were well beyond expectation, and it was an international hit as well. For example, the movie played for a record 573 consecutive weeks at one movie theater in Stockholm.

Forman, who had made *Love of a Blond* and *Fireman's Ball* in Czechoslovakia before emigrating to the United States in 1969, had a reputation for allowing his actors to improvise in scenes, which brought him into conflict with his director of cinematography, Haskell Wexler, who, although he had considerable experience as a documentary filmmaker, approached this

dramatic project in a more traditional manner. The disagreements between Forman and Wexler led to the cinematographer being fired and replaced by Bill Butler. Thus, as it turns out, Butler was the director of photography on the year's most edgy counterculture movie and on the first high-concept film, *Jaws*. *Cuckoo's Nest* was shot in an empty wing of the Oregon State Hospital in Salem, which had been built in 1883. Nearly all of the film's action occurs in a single room, and much of the filming was done with a handheld camera.

Cuckoo's Nest won all five Oscars for 1975 in the top categories: Best Director for Forman, Best Actor for Jack Nicholson (as Randle Patrick McMurphy), Best Actress for Louise Fletcher (as Nurse Ratched), Best Screenplay for Larry Hauben, and Best Cinematography for Bo Goldman. Forman had made his fame in Czechoslovakia directing his own original scripts, but in *Cuckoo's Nest*, he was working from an adaptation of a popular novel about a rebellious individual who is in a mental institution because he resists authority and not because he is crazy. The editing team of Richard Chew, Lynee Klingman, and Sheldon Kahn achieved a pacing that was vital to the kind of frenetic look and feel that Forman wanted in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Marlon Brando, Gene Hackman, and even Burt Reynolds were considered for the role of McMurphy before it went to Nicholson. As for Nurse Ratched, the part was turned down by five better-known actresses (Anne Bancroft, Colleen Dewhurst, Geraldine Page, Ellen Burstyn, and Angela Lansbury) before Fletcher took it. The cast included Danny DeVito, playing Martini, and this screen veteran was joined by newcomers Christopher Lloyd ("Taber"), Will Sampson ("Chief"), and Brad Dourif ("Billy Bibbit"), each of whom was making his screen debut in a feature film.

Since the 1950s, the theme of nonconformity had been popular enough in Hollywood film, from *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) to *A Thousand Clowns* (1965) to *Easy Rider* (1969). Nonetheless, a number of critics attributed the popular response to *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* to its timely release soon after the military defeat of the United States in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, whose cover-up led to President Richard Nixon's resignation. On the other hand, the review in the industry trade journal *Variety* questioned whether audiences would perceive the movie version of the 1962 novel as topical and current:

Kesey, a major intellectual catalyst of the Beatnik era, is virtually an elder statesman of the *avant-garde*. . . . Sadly, the ideas herein are today as earth-shattering as the [birth control] pill, as revolutionary as pot, and as relevant as the Cold War. Gladly, however, their transfer to the screen is potent, contemporary, compelling. And so, the young in head like the young in age can be drawn equally to this film. . . . Then, too, there is the idea, at least prominent in modern fiction, that mental institutions are ideal as metaphors

for the world outside. The notion is clear—the real crazies are those of us who have adjusted to and learned to live with a world full of poverty, injustice, racism and hatred, hunger, war, and even genocide.

“They’re telling me I’m crazy,” McMurphy announces, “because I don’t sit there like a goddam vegetable. If that’s what being crazy is, then I’m senseless, out-of-it, gone down the road, wacko, but no more or less.”

Nearly all of the mainstream print critics praised the power of the material and celebrated Forman’s approach to it. A modest objection was raised by David Denby, then writing for the *New York Times*, whose review focused on the work itself as reflecting a stereotypical adolescent male fantasy and thus being emblematic of the limitations of the Beatnik literary tradition of the late 1950s and early 1960s from which it had come. Denby also chided the director: “I find something offensive in Forman’s turning freaks into ‘good theatre.’”

Forman’s approach accentuates the comic, giving full play to incidents that McMurphy organizes or instigates: a crazy basketball game, prompting a loud protest over a World Series game, and a seemingly innocent afternoon’s outing on a fishing boat. Around McMurphy, however, is an ensemble that Forman was given much credit for molding by a great number of critics. The movie builds to a rousing escape party that ends unexpectedly in tragedy.

Many years later, in 1990, after seeing his film with a group of students in his native Czechoslovakia after the fall of communism, Forman offered the view that when the Native American, Chief Bromden, dramatically leaps through a window to his freedom, with the applause of the other heartened inmates of the mental institution behind him, that moment on-screen “will live *always* as political allegory . . . a political allegory always for things that are and will be happening in the world.”

NASHVILLE

Writing in the *New Yorker* in 1975, the critic Pauline Kael called *Nashville*, which was produced, written, and directed by Robert Altman, “an orgy for moviegoers” and “the funniest epic vision of America ever to reach the screen.” Joan Tewksbury, who collaborated on the script with Altman, did her research by visiting Nashville and going to food joints, visiting churches, and listening to fellow riders on the municipal buses. All this background contributed to a kaleidoscopic portrait of a city where the music never stops. Tewksbury developed eighteen characters, to which Altman himself added seven more, plus a presidential candidate, Hal Philip Walker.

Altman shopped his *Nashville* script to United Artists, which had been involved in two of his previous pictures, *The Long Goodbye* and *Thieves Like Us*, but the studio rejected his new project as being too much of a “downer” film. All the other major Hollywood studios passed on the film as well. Finally, however, Altman talked Jerry Weintraub into partnering with him—at a party that Weintraub had hosted—and Weintraub was able to convince the ABC television network to back *Nashville* for \$2.7 million.

At the time, ABC was interested in the project primarily because it owned a music company, and ABC expected the movie to be filled with music. Subsequently, however, there was disappointment on that point when Altman insisted that each actor write his or her own songs, especially since the agreement on casting did not require that any of the cast necessarily have a background in music. For example, Henry Gibson, who knew nothing about country music, got the role of Haven Hamilton. (Robert Duvall, an aficionado of country music, had desperately wanted a role in *Nashville* and was considered for the role of Haven, but the salary was too low for him to take it.) Gibson hired a local performer, David Peel, to help him with the role and write his songs; Peel wound up being hired to play the role of Haven’s son in the movie. Ronee Blakley, a songwriter with absolutely no prior experience acting in film, was cast in the role of Barbara Jean, Nashville’s prima donna.

Altman also insisted that each of his cast develop their own dialogue and be responsible for their own wardrobe. Shelley Duvall, who played a groupie, had nothing written for her in the script except for the stage direction, “L. A. Joan enters.”

Then through an unusual and convoluted process of showing it to friends, Altman whittled his initial version of *Nashville* down to three hours. Subsequently, the editing equipment was moved to Lion’s Gate and Altman’s own offices in West Los Angeles, where nearly anyone Altman knew and trusted in the movie industry was given a chance to do some editing on the film. Altman finally put together a version for release that was two hours and thirty-nine minutes long.

Nashville was nominated for five Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Supporting Actress (for both Blakley and Lily Tomlin), and Best Song (won by the actor Keith Carradine for “I’m Easy”). The entire film had been recorded in an eight-track sound system that facilitated the overlapping of conversations and room ambiance so that both could be heard clearly. In the history of motion picture sound, this stood out as conveying a sense of auditory reality that had not been possible previously.

Popular criticism, as well as the subsequent interpretations of academic critics, hardly missed a beat in relating *Nashville* to the nation’s well-publicized turmoil of the early and mid-1970s—the Watergate investigations, President

Nixon's resignation, the U.S. military retreat from Vietnam, and so forth. Frank Rich's review in the *New York Times* described *Nashville* as "one of the best cinematic descriptions of American democracy ever made." With its twenty-four characters woven tightly into the few hectic days leading up to a major political convention, many problems could be anticipated for the production. But as Kevin Thomas wrote in his review of *Nashville* for the *Los Angeles Times*: "It is amazing how Altman manages to blend often hilarious satire with depth, poignancy, and intimacy—and a flawless sense of nuance and gesture." In the *Washington Post*, critic Gary Arnold offered: "This stunning new movie is a politically haunted work of art, full of echoes and reverberations from the major public tragedies, failures, and scandals of the past dozen years, from the assassination of President Kennedy, through Vietnam, through Watergate." Vincent Canby, in the *New York Times*, exuded even more ambitiously: "Robert Altman's *Nashville* is the movie sensation that all other American movies will be measured against." Two months later, however, a different voice spoke from the pages of the *New York Times*, when critic John Malme wrote that *Nashville* was "Altman's colorful, self-indulgent, overblown and vastly overpraised opus."

A THROWBACK SLEEPER

The Academy Award-winning Best Picture of 1976, *Rocky*, directed by John Avildsen and written by and starring Sylvester Stallone, was widely perceived as a "throwback" to an earlier, more traditional type of Hollywood movie. Avildsen himself described the film as "classic Capra-type." Frank Capra himself, then seventy-nine years old, added his personal imprimatur to the project: "Boy, that's a picture I wish I had made." As critic Richard Corliss wrote in his review of *Rocky*, "The ending is like coming out of the *Bijou* in 1937, so naïve." Other critics struck similar notes, but inevitably found themselves forgiving: William Way, writing in the magazine *Cue* said: "The plot is too glib and predictable, but ruggedness and boundless energy make *Rocky* a picture to take seriously." Judith Crist, in the *Saturday Review* called it "a delightfully human comedy that will undoubtedly wind up as the sleeper movie of the year." John Simon added, "*Rocky* was considered old-fashioned because of its storyline and theme." At a time when "serious" American cinema was expected by many critics to reveal more about the darker side of society, human instinct, and the values of society, the movie seemed contrary to that mainstream kind of critical thinking.

The preproduction process on *Rocky* was every bit as idealistic and challenging of credulity as the film's screenplay itself. Stallone had not yet made

his way into a motion picture career when he started writing a screenplay based on the actual prizefight he had seen between the legendary heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali and a seriously overmatched, but game, challenger named Chuck Wepner. Wepner was known by the nickname “The Bayonne Bleeder,” but he fought a gallant, complete fifteen rounds against Ali. Stallone later wrote, about seeing the Ali-Wepner prizefight: “That night I went home and I had the beginning of my character.” It was also the beginning of Stallone’s own unlikely story and his arrival in Hollywood.

When Stallone, an out-of-work and hungry actor whose only screen appearances had been brief ones in *Lords of Flatbush* and *Death Race 2000* and a fleeting few moments as a mugger in Woody Allen’s *Bananas*, jobbed his screenplay around Hollywood, he was offered \$150,000 for it clear. The offer amounted to guaranteed dollars that most struggling actors and fledgling filmmakers on the edges of the movie industry would have promptly accepted with joy. Stallone was broke and his wife was pregnant, but he nonetheless refused to sell the script, digging in his heels and saying that he would let go of the screenplay only to a production company in exchange for being cast to play the lead. Holding out eventually succeeded.

Two producers, Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff, got behind the *Rocky* project and endorsed the idea of Stallone playing the lead. At the time, Winkler and Chartoff had an agreement with United Artists, where Michael Medavoy was the head of production, that permitted them to make any feature they wanted, so long as it had a production budget under \$1.5 million. On this basis, they went forward with the project, but United Artists insisted that it was a \$2 million picture and wanted to cast either Ryan O’Neal or Burt Reynolds in the lead. In response, Winkler and Chartoff told the studio that they could do the film for \$1 million, and that the two producers were willing to back up their proposition by covering any overages themselves. To do so, Winkler and Chartoff had to risk everything they had financially, taking out second mortgages on their homes; Winkler later recalled that for years they never even told their wives that they had put both their family’s homes at risk in order to do the movie by meeting Stallone’s terms. The package was simple: The twenty-nine-year-old Stallone was paid \$25,000 to play the lead, Rocky Balboa. Carl Weathers, a former professional football player, was cast as the heavyweight champion, Apollo Creed. And it was stipulated that the film had to be shot in twenty-eight days.

The original 1976 *Rocky* grossed \$171 million worldwide, and its international appeal proved especially surprising. Combined with four subsequent sequels to it in 1979, 1982, 1985, and 1990, the franchise grossed more than \$1 billion in rental revenues. In sum, that fifteen-year string of Rocky movies earned as much as the megahit of the late 1990s, *Titanic*. And a fifth sequel,

Rocky Balboa, was released in 2006. Such are the elements out of which a modern Hollywood legend is made.

There were critics, of course, who thought that the movie was such a throwback to earlier sensibilities and values that, by the mid-1970s, it would widely be considered to be socially and culturally irrelevant. But from the writings of the contemporary critics in 1976, any reader still gets the sense of a certain respect and awe, if for no other reason than because such an ostensibly dated and retrograde movie still found so much appeal. Janet Maslin, writing in *Newsweek*, finally concluded that she couldn't talk about *Rocky* as being about sports, because "it works on the visceral level of a good sports event, generating blissfully uncomplicated excitement." Other commentary, such as that of Charles Champlin writing in the *Los Angeles Times* called *Rocky* part *Marty* (the 1955 film with Ernest Borgnine as a shy working-class butcher) and part Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*: "a once-in-a-lifetime coming together of man and material. [Stallone] makes Rocky colorful, not too bright . . . and altogether heroic and engrossing." As the *Hollywood Reporter* commented: "It's a fantasy, but not entirely outside the realm of possibility."

Rocky earned the Best Picture Oscar against competitors that struck many observers as deeper projects that were decidedly more "reflective of the times": *Network*, *All the President's Men*, *Taxi Driver*, and *Bound for Glory*. Stallone's own comment, "I want to be remembered as a man of raging optimism, who believes in the American Dream," was surely not to be well received by pessimists and anti-Americans, but most moviegoers probably don't arrive at the box office with much formal ideological baggage influencing their moviegoing choices.

URBAN, CORPORATE, AND GOVERNMENTAL UNDERBELLIES

Rocky was the Best Picture selection for 1976, but three other nominees from that year—*Taxi Driver*, *Network*, and *All the President's Men*—also are recognized as distinguished and significant. According to critic Joe Batake, Martin Scorsese's 1976 *Taxi Driver* was among a number of American movies made in the 1970s that were remarkable for their tentative moods and feelings of dread. In it, a Vietnam veteran, loner, and cab driver named Travis Bickle becomes obsessed first with Betsy (Cybill Shepard as a cool sophisticate working on a political campaign) and then with a teenage prostitute (as played by twelve-year-old Jodie Foster). Bickle's response, like John Wayne's obsession in *The Searchers*, is to pursue these women to save them. He does so by going after the father figure in each woman's life: the presidential candidate for whom

Betsy is campaigning, and the young prostitute's pimp. The movie begins with Travis's cab seeming to rise out of the damp, smoky city, accompanied by Bernard Hermann's music and Robert De Niro's voiceover narration of Travis's thoughts: "Someday a big rain will come and clean all the filth from the streets."

Screenwriter Paul Schrader, inspired by French writer Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism and the diaries of Gov. George Wallace's would-be assassin, Arthur Bremer, gives us the story of an isolated man, living out of his own car, whose craving for love pushes him into a half-saintly, half-satanic crusade to make some sort of difference in the sordid world he sees around him. Bickle is an alienated war veteran who is unable to establish normal relationships, so he transforms himself into a loner and a wanderer and assigns himself the mission of rescuing an innocent young girl from a life that offends his prejudices. The screenplay was cowritten by Mardik Martin, and the film was a Bill-Phillips production for Columbia release.

With *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese delivered to the screen a movie about a psychopathic loner that is a touchstone for what has been called the cinema of loneliness. With the haunting pictures of Bickle drawing a revolver and speaking into a mirror, repeating, "You talking to me? Hey, I'm the only one here," it creates an incomparable image of paranoid disassociation.

Scorsese, perhaps the most cinema-literate of the film school graduates of the 1960s and 1970s who actually became a feature film director, reportedly was greatly influenced by the French writer-director Robert Bresson's films that were made right after World War II. Bresson's characters are less brutal than Scorsese's antiheroes, but both directors' characters are flawed human beings who sin their way to grace. As *New York Times* critic Janet Maslin wrote: "For all its invective against urban decay, *Taxi Driver* is also brilliantly acted and rhapsodically beautiful, which accounts for Mr. Scorsese's vision of a shimmering, neon-lighted purgatory, thanks also to the power of Bernard Hermann's score." The composer, whose credits included *Citizen Kane* and *Psycho*, died the day after he finished conducting the work for *Taxi Driver*, and Scorsese dedicated the film to him.

The movie was nominated for four Oscars, including Best Picture, and won the Golden Palm at Cannes. With cinematography by Michael Chapman, who made the New York of *Taxi Driver* look, in Maslin's words, "both seductive and terrible," Scorsese collaborated to deliver the city atmosphere as simultaneously hyper-realistic and surreal. Shot in black-and-white, the climactic sequence of *Taxi Driver* was printed in the laboratory following a processing method normally used to desaturate color film stock, in order to make the scene's depictions of violence more abstractly artistic and avoid an "X" rating from the MPPA.

“Scorsese and crew have an excellent film here which has a real gut appeal to both discriminating audiences as well as the popcorn trade,” said *Variety*. Critic Pauline Kael wrote: “No other film even dramatized urban indifference so powerfully. . . . The violence in the movie is so threatening, precisely because it’s so cathartic for Travis.” On the other hand, writing in the *New York Times*, Vincent Canby claimed: “Though it is much more flamboyant and much more elaborate technically than *Mean Streets*, it is a smaller film.” *Mean Streets* was Scorsese’s 1973 independent, low-budget (\$100,000) feature, set in New York City’s Little Italy. It is about two friends, played by De Niro and Harvey Keitel, living on the fringes of mob life, but essentially portraying a very authentic feeling portrayal of life in Little Italy.

The range of contemporary criticism written about *Taxi Driver* spoke to a phenomenon about responses to American feature films that had become clear by the mid-1970s. Classic Hollywood, and even the era of Hollywood transition, had managed to avoid extremes of taste. From the early 1970s, Hollywood movies became increasingly symptomatic of a divided American culture, so that a great many movies either were loved or hated—with evidence of an eroding middle ground among critics. *Taxi Driver*’s violence, of course, sparked debate. But critic John Simon went much further; writing for *New York* magazine, Simon labeled Chapman’s urban cinematography “hammy” and faulted the script’s flaws:

Motivation is extremely fuzzy here. . . . Schrader is the product of a repressive Calvinist upbringing, aggravated by its Midwestern locale; Scorsese grew up hemmed in by Little Italy and orthodox Catholicism. . . . Matching the cheesily posturing photography is an ungainly and bombastic score by Bernard Hermann.

If life didn’t precisely imitate art, art and life at least became entangled in 1982 with the assassination attempt on the life of President Ronald Reagan by John W. Hinckley Jr., who wanted to impress Jodie Foster (by then a student at Yale University) with whom he had become infatuated when seeing her in the role of the child prostitute in *Taxi Driver*. This provided a diversion for the appreciation of the movie as a film, and a kind of distraction in the early 1980s, only to have criticism of *Taxi Driver* shift dramatically toward a positive assessment by the time of the film’s twentieth anniversary in the mid-1990s.

By comparison, *Network*, an MGM production, occupied safer ground, taking on simpler topics more easily despised by audience members—namely, television networks and large corporations. Paddy Chayefsky, who made a mature career based on his capacity for writing crude, vulgar, and commercially viable screenplays satirizing America’s crude, vulgar, and commercially

viable culture, was thought to have hit the jackpot with his 1976 *Network*, and directed by Sidney Lumet.

Peter Finch plays a veteran broadcast newscaster, about to be fired, who one night admits on the air that all of the news is “bullshit” and informs his viewers that next Tuesday, he will commit suicide on the six o’clock news. The show’s ratings soar. The suicide never takes place, but Finch is shot dead on camera because his ratings have been slipping. In the first half of the movie, the relationship is between the failed newscaster and his boss, played by William Holden, while it is the boss’s affair with Faye Dunaway’s character that dominates the second half of the movie.

Network was convincingly well acted: Finch won the Best Acting Oscar award posthumously, and Dunaway earned the Best Actress Oscar by playing the utterly amoral programming executive Diana Christensen. Holden was also nominated as Best Actor in his role as Oscar Schumacher. Chayefsky painted a withering portrait of television as a business gone mad with ratings, greed, and the injection of entertainment into what it presumably had considered its own sacrosanct world of reporting the news. The manic rant of anchorman Howard Beale, “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore!” became a popular catch phrase, especially for young American adults, for years.

As critic Stanley Kauffmann wrote in his *New Republic* review: “Heaven has blessed Paddy Chayefsky. . . . *Network* is his best original screenplay so far. . . . He began in TV over 25 years ago and knows what he’s talking about. . . . The characters may be composites but are not invented.” Chayefsky was a coproducer, along with Howard Gottfried, with the two putting together the project that MGM largely financed for a United Artists release. The movie’s director of photography was Owen Roizman, A.S.C., and the editor was Alan Heim. As the *Variety* reviewer noted: “Sidney Lumet’s direction is outstanding. The picture . . . is a professional blend of art and commerce. Philip Rosenberg’s production design, Owen Roizman’s camera, and all other key technical achievements are magnificent.”

Network justifiably is labeled a writer’s and actor’s movie. The script was its essence, and Chayefsky delivered the satiric goods, although not necessarily in a predictable way. Indeed, critic Richard Gertner, writing in *Motion Picture Production Digest* was more decisive: “Chayefsky has made it a ‘writer’s’ movie, as distinguished from a director’s film or an actor’s showcase. . . . Chayefsky projects his ideas about television and life through his four leading characters.”

A number of mainstream critics applauded the fact that *Network*, in their words, “short-circuited” TV, and there was no lack of commentary in the print media that a film was bashing its sibling medium! “Hollywood Takes on TV,” trumpeted a story in *Newsweek* about the movie. In May 1977, CBS paid

\$5 million for broadcast rights to *Network*, in spite of some CBS executives' concerns about the rough language in the movie's dialogue.

WATERGATE ON THE BIG SCREEN

Just two years after Richard M. Nixon became the first U.S. president in history to resign from the office, a feature film, *All the President's Men*, which was based on the events leading up to that resignation, was released. The producer was Walter Coblenz, associated with Robert Redford's company, Wildwood Enterprises, and it was shopped as a \$6 million project to Warner Bros. (which took it, but did not exert the strictest of controls over either the production or its budget). It was Redford who championed the idea of adapting the story into a movie and who personally oversaw pursuing the rights to the book. With those rights in hand, a production team was assembled that included Jon Boorstin as an associate producer, Alan J. Pakula as director, and George Jenkins as the production designer. The cinematographer was Gordon Willis, who lit the city of Washington as darkly as possible, in contrast to the exceptionally brightly lit newsroom of the *Washington Post*, which was recreated and constructed on a soundstage in Burbank, California.

After reports of a break-in at Democratic Party offices in a complex called the Watergate, the movie quickly turns into a tense real-life detective saga with the admonition to the reporters from the character known as "Deep Throat": "Follow the money. Just follow the money." The screenplay becomes a story of dark secrets revealed during clandestine meetings in a parking garage. It turns two reporters, Bob Woodward (Redford) and Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) into folk heroes in diligent pursuit of the truth: "We're about to accuse Haldeman, who only happens to be the second most important man in the country, of conducting a criminal conspiracy from inside the White House. It would be nice if we were right." The review in *Variety* cited the acting as exemplary and pointed out the role of Deep Throat in particular: "[Hal] Holbrook is outstanding; this actor, herein in total shadow, is as compelling as he is in virtually every role he's played."

Doggedly, Woodward and Bernstein follow an elusive trail. On the other end of their odyssey are Jason Robards, playing Ben Bradlee, the executive editor of the *Washington Post*, and Jack Warden and Martin Balsam as his assistants. However, in 1976, the movie was met by a set of critical reviews that could most accurately be described as lackluster. Stanley Kauffmann's review in the *New Republic* and the review by Jon Margolis in the *Chicago Tribune*, for example, both raised serious questions about historical accuracy and the glamorizing of Bernstein and Woodward.

SUMMARY

The genesis of “New” Hollywood dated to 1975. Two movies from that year established the poles between which most American feature films would be produced through the remainder of the twentieth century.

On the one hand, *Jaws* inaugurated Hollywood high-concept filmmaking with its enormous profitability and a veritable franchise for marketing tie-ins to the movie. High-concept movies of this sort continued to provide for the possibility of staggering earnings into the twenty-first century. Directed by Steven Spielberg, *Jaws* is the model for a prominent strain in Hollywood moviemaking for the last quarter of the twentieth century.

By contrast, the Academy’s Best Picture Oscar for 1975 was awarded to *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Like *Jaws*, *Cuckoo’s Nest* was an adaptation from a novel, but there the similarity ends. *Jaws* was based on a popular, contemporary page-turner; *Cuckoo’s Nest* came from a Beatnik novel that was celebrated by the counterculture in the late sixties. The director of *Jaws*, Steven Spielberg, had worked his way up at Universal and took on this movie at the age of twenty-five. *Cuckoo’s Nest* was directed by Milos Forman, a celebrated European art film director who had recently arrived in the United States. *Cuckoo’s Nest* was perceived as an edgy, alternative protest movie. Nonetheless, the same man, Bill Butler, was the director of photography on both these films, which indicated the prevailing continuation of a Hollywood emphasis on craft.

The following year, 1976, saw the production of five movies that made it onto the American Film Institute’s hundred greatest American films lists. *Rocky* was the Academy’s choice for Best Picture, a throwback movie that, as one critic put it, followed a story line and themes that would have fit neatly into a typical Hollywood film of the late 1930s. By contrast, *Taxi Driver* was a modern movie about an obsessive man from the margins of American urban life who murderously pursues his vengeance upon a society he considers putrid and unworthy.

In these years, Hollywood feature films straddled opposite sides of a growing cultural divide. On one side was high-concept, big-budget moviemaking; on the other side were alternative visions brought to the screen through edgy, often independently produced, movies.

Mixed Styles, Mixed Messages

By the late 1970s, two prominent movies, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Star Wars* marked the quick maturation of Hollywood high concept. Their success brought together several elements of the new Hollywood. First, their production budgets were considerably higher than films made even a couple of years earlier. Second, these two movies were directed by two relatively young men who, after these productions, would each become a major Hollywood figure of enormous stature and influence. One, Steven Spielberg, was considered a movie genius who had worked his way rapidly into a prominent position as a director ready to take on all kinds of challenges, much in the way film professionals had worked their way up in the movie industry during the era of Classic Hollywood. The other, George Lucas, was one of the original “movie brats,” who after his film-directing success in the late 1970s followed a unique career path to becoming an industry entrepreneur and a Hollywood insider whose role in movies went so far beyond directing as to become one of the great visionary innovators of motion picture technology.

SCIENCE-FICTION BREAKTHROUGHS

In 1977, Spielberg delivered to the screen a sci-fi blockbuster produced by Columbia Tri-Star. The film was *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, supposedly U.S. Air Force terminology for contact with creatures from outer space. Vilmos Zsigmond, who was the director of photography, talked about the breaking of new ground with the movie: “Before *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* there were some space movies about spaceships, but nothing really that great technically we could follow. So we had to invent.” At the time, the only way to

do this was through optical effects, which for this movie were in the capable creative hands of specialist Douglas Trumbull. Zsigmond later explained that Spielberg “came up with many of the visual effects himself. We were testing things out a year before we started to shoot.” Zsigmond won an Oscar for his cinematography on *Close Encounters*, and the Academy also recognized Frank R. Warner with a special achievement award for his sound effects editing on the film. As Bob Lardine wrote in the *New York Daily News*: “*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* may be the first movie since Al Jolson’s *The Jazz Singer* to inspire audiences to break into spontaneous applause for the sound effects.”

This movie established Spielberg as a Hollywood brand name, a recognized force in the cinema equal in magnitude to Hitchcock or Disney. *New York Times* film critic Vincent Canby enthused:

Steven Spielberg’s giant, spectacular *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is the best—the most elaborate—1950s science fiction movie ever made, a work that borrows its narrative shape and concern from those earlier films, but enhances them with what looks like the latest developments in movie and space technology.

The *Independent Film Journal* agreed:

The year’s most awaited film event arrives. Spectacular, visually stunning story of UFO sightings and their overpowering hold on people who see them. The ferocious drive of this movie is likely to exert a strong hold on the viewer. Spielberg’s big gamble should pay off handsomely.

Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic*, previously no fan of Spielberg’s directing, wrote:

I was utterly unprepared for this third kind of close encounter with Spielberg. I was particularly unprepared for the last 40 minutes of this 135 minute film, in which two things happen. First, and less important, the SF [science fiction] film reaches its pinnacle to date. Second, the movement of SF as vicarious religion and the movement of the Film Generation meet, unify, and blaze.

Spielberg is quoted as saying that Walt Disney inspired him, and that as a youth he found both *Snow White* and *Fantasia* frightening: “For me, Disney was the dean of the horror classics.” Spielberg acknowledged compromises from his original vision in the movie, many of those compromises brought on by Columbia Pictures’ nervousness at the budget exceeding \$20 million.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind, however, had much more than special effects, and a number of movie critics pointed to the strength of several per-

formances in the movie, including that of three-year-old Cary Guffey, who plays a small boy in Muncie, Indiana, who awakens in the middle of the night to discover that his electrical toys have magically sprung into action. French New Wave director Francois Truffaut makes an unexpected—some critics said it could hardly be understood or accounted for—appearance in the cast, playing a mysterious scientist.

Still, 1977 belonged even more decisively to George Lucas and to *Star Wars*. It was to become the first film in a trilogy—and much later a second trilogy and other spin-offs. These initial adventures of Luke Skywalker were a Lucasfilm production with Twentieth Century-Fox, produced for the studio by Gary Kurtz. Lucas's previous film had been *American Graffiti*, but he conceived of a space fantasy—a *Flash Gordon* type of project—as early as 1971 and began writing *Star Wars* in 1973, eight hours a day, five days a week. He had met Kurtz when they were fellow students in the M.F.A. program in film at the University of Southern California. The film was shot in locations as distant as Tunisia.

Star Wars earned ten Academy Award nominations and received Oscars for Art Direction-Set Decoration (John Barry, Norman Reynolds, Leslie Dilley, and Roger Christian); Costume Design (John Mollo); Editing (Paul Hirsch, Marcia Lucas, Richard Chew); Original Score (John Williams); Sound (Don MacDougall, Ray West, Bob Minkler, Derek Ball); and Visual Effects (John Stears, John Dykstra, Richard Edlund, Grant McCune, Robert Blalack). In the typical vein of high-concept Hollywood production, the movie's leading character, Luke Skywalker, was played by a less-than-luminous male lead, Mark Hamill. Harrison Ford, Peter Cushing, Alec Guinness, and Carrie Fisher played the other major roles.

Variety predicted: “*Star Wars* will undoubtedly emerge as one of the true classics in the genre of science fiction/fantasy films. In any event, it will be thrilling audiences of all ages for a long time to come.” The *Los Angeles Times*'s movie critic, Charles Champlin, wrote:

George Lucas has been conducting a lifelong double love affair, embracing the comic strips on the one hand and the movies on the other. Now he has united his loves in *Star Wars*, the year's most razzle-dazzling family movie, an exuberant and technically astonishing space adventure in which galactic tomorrows of *Flash Gordon* are the setting for conflicts and events that carry the suspiciously but splendidly familiar ring of yesterday's westerns, as well as yesterday's *Flash Gordon* serials.

Time celebrated it as “The Year's Best Movie” in a special feature article. Critic Stephen Farber, writing in a magazine called *New West* called it dazzling, too, but no classic.

Unlike the saturation-booking strategy that defined high concept, *Star Wars* actually opened in only forty-three theaters, but still earned nearly \$3 million in the first week's box office returns, with admission prices hiked up for the movie at most theaters. Not long after its premiere, a substantial number of commentators anticipated that *Star Wars* would quickly pass *Jaws* in profits and easily might become the most popular movie of all time. *Variety's* review summed up what many observers within the industry believed:

Star Wars is a magnificent film. George Lucas set out to make the biggest possible adventure-fantasy out of his memories of serials and older action epics, and he succeeded brilliantly. Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz assembled an enormous technical crew, drawn from the entire Hollywood production pool of talent [to achieve] "movie magic." The Twentieth Century-Fox release is also loaded with box office magic, with potent appeal across the entire audience spectrum.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* exclaimed that it was "about two hours of the best time you've had in the last four or five years." Said the *Los Angeles Times*: "A slam-bang, rip-roaring gallop." Exclaimed *Variety*, "Wow . . . boffo . . . meteoric . . . super-socko." Most critics appeared to be as enthusiastic as the manager at the Avco Center Theater Complex in Los Angeles's Westwood district: "I have never seen anything like this. They are filling the theater for every single performance. This isn't a snowball; it's an avalanche."

Roger Simon wrote an article for the *Chicago Sun-Times* not long after *Star Wars* premiered, assessing the sociology of the popular response to the movie. He began by quoting critic Pauline Kael, writing on the difference between it and other popular movies of the last few years:

Today, movies say that the system is corrupt, that the whole thing stinks. . . . When movie after movie tells audiences that they should be against themselves, it's hardly surprising that people go out of the theaters drained, numbly convinced that with so much savagery and cruelty everywhere, nothing can be done.

As Simon added interpretively:

Well, not in *Star Wars*. There the bad guys get zapped with death rays and the good guys get a kiss on the cheek and a medal. There is a tremendous amount of action but no blood. No sex. Not even a little flash of thigh. It's hard to believe people want to go see it. But they do. And you're going to hear a strange thing as the movie unfolds—the sound of people cheering.

While most critics, like Richard Gertner writing in the *Motion Picture Digest*, found it to be “smashing, escapist entertainment,” Joy Gould Boyum, in a review for the *Wall Street Journal*, found it only childish: “We enjoyed such stuff as children, but one would think there would come a time to put away childish things.” John Simon echoed this view in his review in *New York* magazine: “*Star Wars* will do very nicely for those lucky enough to be children or unlucky enough never to have grown up.” Debate ensued over the movie’s lack of “relevance,” as did ample backlash in the form of critical condemnation of the movie as an unwelcome reactionary force in the culture wars.

The success of *Star Wars* created a great career turn upward for Alan Ladd Jr., the president of the feature film division at Fox, who was made president of Twentieth Century-Fox and elected to the studio’s board of directors as the staggering financial returns on *Star Wars* began to add up. *Star Wars* was not just a motion picture with tie-ins and spin-offs and enormous potential for ancillary earnings, with all its derivative books, toys, miniature caricatures, and gimmicks; instead, it was its own franchise! Its product potential was enormous. By June 1978, the *Los Angeles Times* reported the rental earnings for *Star Wars* at \$219 million just for North America.

THE RARE BEST PICTURE OSCAR FOR A COMEDY

The Oscar winner for 1977 as Best Picture, however, was neither *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* nor *Star Wars*, but rather a comedy entitled *Annie Hall*. Most commentators regarded it as a “highly autobiographical” portrait of the real-life relationship of the movie’s director, Woody Allen (as “Alvy Singer”), with the female lead, Diane Keaton—born Diane Hall—who plays the title role. Cowritten by Allen with Marshall Brickman, the *Annie Hall* character seems even more neurotic and insecure than Alvy. The film was vintage Woody Allen, an *auteurist* adventure, with “a Geiger-counter ear for urban clichés and a hatred of Los Angeles that is appealing to all who share it,” according to Penelope Gilliat writing in the *New Yorker*. John Simon in *New York* magazine labeled *Annie Hall* “so shapeless, sprawling, repetitious, and aimless as to beg for oblivion . . . a mess of typical West Side jokes, East Side jokes, art-movie house jokes, meeting his-or-her-family jokes, or failed lovemaking jokes.”

But the movie appeared to catapult Allen from his more narrow audiences in the big cities on each coast into a wider audience demographic than his previous, and sometimes similar, screen efforts. The reviewers for the major national newsweeklies praised the movie. *Time*’s Richard Schickel called it

“Woody Allen’s breakthrough movie with all the bubbling pessimism inherent to psychoanalysis.” In *Newsweek*, Janet Maslin exuded: “For the first time, he [Allen] seems capable of inviting genuine identification from his viewers, of channeling his comic gifts into material of real substance, of exerting a palpable emotional tug.” Allen, she observed, “had progressed from simple self-representation to [an] artfully shaped self-portrait.” Indeed, *Annie Hall* contains what by then had become a stylistic commonplace in Allen’s films: the lead character’s direct address to the camera.

Allen was a veteran of television comedy writing (including a lengthy stint working for the comedian Sid Caesar on television’s *Your Show of Shows*) who broke into feature filmmaking by purchasing rights to a cheap Japanese thriller to which he added a new soundtrack that consisted of a completely new story and witty dialogue in English, which he called *What’s Up, Tiger Lily?* He emerged as an auteur filmmaker in 1969 directing, cowriting, and starring in *Take the Money and Run*. His persona in that movie served Allen extraordinarily well, as he honed a number of standard elements into his presence as a screen character and worked on the particular blend of comedy and self-absorption that typified his screenplays. In this sense, *Annie Hall* is a typical Woody Allen film, and also the best example of his mastery of that style.

For a decade, Allen had worked to develop the obvious self-conscious and self-reflexive nature of *Annie Hall* that is wrapped around the lead character’s self-awareness; for example, when they are about to make love, one image of Annie’s body lies beside Alvy while, a second later, her form gets up and walks across the room, to which Allen/Alvy remarks, “Now that’s what I call removed.” Allen called the film’s structure “subjective and random”—concepts well accepted by most critics at the time, with the notable exception of Andrew Saris who complained in the *Village Voice* that “from time to time Allen is all nuance and very little substance.”

Paired with Keaton, with whom he had a long off-screen romantic relationship, this story of a failed romance marked Allen’s greatest critical and commercial success. In addition to the Best Picture Oscar for the movie, Allen was recognized by the Academy with awards for Best Director and Best Screenwriter (shared with Marshall Brickman). Much credit for *Annie Hall* justifiably went to Gordon Willis, the director of photography, whose other triumphs in the 1970s included both *The Godfather* and *The Godfather, Part II*, as well as *All the President’s Men*. Most critics saw in his work the ability to light the film more expressively, as if it were a drama, rather than in the monotonal brightness considered typical of production for Hollywood comedies. The pacing of *Annie Hall* no doubt owed much to the editor, Ralph Rosenblum, regarded as one of the industry’s best feature-film cutters and long rumored to have saved Allen’s first effort as a director in *Take the Money and Run* (1969).

The overall success of Allen as a distinctive auteur presence in mainstream American film was the result of a long working relationship that he had with his producers, Jack Rollins and Charles H. Jaffe. *Annie Hall* scored good earnings, and its box office figures indicated that this romantic comedy about a contemporary urban neurotic played well in all major metropolitan areas, not only in North America but also in Western Europe. The film had been financed through a deal with United Artists, but at the time of its release, two small British exhibitors took on a role in its distribution when United Artists became leery of its commercial prospects, and they were handsomely rewarded for their efforts.

FROM COMEDY TO CONTROVERSY

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences selected a controversial film as Best Picture for 1978. *The Deer Hunter* was released by Universal in conjunction with the small British company EMI, with a screenplay by Deric Washburn, based on a story on which he collaborated with several others, including the director, Michael Cimino. Cimino also was a coproducer on the project, along with Barry Spikings, Michael Deeley, and John Peverall.

Four years earlier, Cimino had made his directing debut with *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, which he also scripted; it was a vehicle for Clint Eastwood that also starred Jeff Bridges and was produced by Eastwood's company Malpasco. The most compelling connection that could be made between that film and *The Deer Hunter*, however, is that both might be said to contain elements of a popular scripting device in Hollywood in the 1970s: the "buddy movie." Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken, and John Cazale portray three steelworkers from a small town in Pennsylvania who share their lives in friendship at work, at the recreation of deer hunting, and in the war in Vietnam.

Cimino generally won high praise at the time for his directorial efforts—although not from all critics—especially since this ambitious and grandly designed movie was only his second feature. To a number of critics, the film divided quite neatly into what some considered an almost classic three-act structure: a pre-Vietnam segment, a war segment, and a postwar segment.

The Deer Hunter also won accolades for its look, with art direction by Ron Hobbs and Kim Swados. To create the small town of the movie, locations in eight cities in four states were utilized. The Vietnam footage was shot in Thailand, and since the Pentagon had not supported filming projects pertaining to the Vietnam War since John Wayne's *The Green Berets* (1968), equipment and personnel had to be secured from Thai authorities and the Thai military

for filming. The visual style of the movie plays well to its locations, and the cinematography by Vilmos Zsigmond earned high marks all around.

Contemporary critics were more divided on Cimino, with strong negatives coming from Pauline Kael and David Denby. Kael's review in the *New Yorker* called Cimino to task for not really understanding how to "reveal character." Writing in *Newsweek*, Denby offered praise bracketed by misgiving:

His casting of the aristocratic-looking theater actress Meryl Streep as a sweet, not very bright, small-town beauty seems perverse and risky, but Cimino needed her radiance to basically illuminate this essentially inarticulate character. . . . He has the outline for a great film but not only doesn't he achieve Tolstoyan height, he doesn't even obtain to [Martin] Scorsesian or [Francis Ford] Coppolian levels.

The great controversy over *The Deer Hunter* in 1978 and 1979, however, had little to do with the artistic and aesthetic choices in the film's making, casting, and performances or the overall achievements of the film's dramatic ambitions. The controversy was about politics, Vietnam, and the war that had ended with the withdrawal of U.S. troops three years earlier.

With a production budget of \$3 million, *The Deer Hunter* was perceived by Universal as being "a serious film about a subject that hasn't been successful at the box office before." A movie set during a war that was so divisive for the nation, and that had ended unsuccessfully for the United States, still was considered a treacherous choice in a business sense. The release of the film, in fact, was moved up to just before the end of the year in 1978 in order to qualify for the Oscars, the New York Film Critics Awards, and the Society of Film Critics Awards, because the backers felt that this exposure was absolutely necessary to give *The Deer Hunter* any chance at financial success. While such caution may not have been entirely necessary—the movie did \$7 million at the box office on the first weekend of its release—it surely helped in placing it strategically for a possible Oscar win.

While *The Deer Hunter* was strong at the box office, adding an additional \$27 million to its rental earnings in the United States after its Best Picture Oscar win was announced in the spring of 1979, and although its earnings were healthy overseas, pressure by the Soviet Union caused it to be blocked from release throughout Eastern Europe. The official Communist rhetoric was that the movie was "racist" in the way the Vietnamese were depicted, an argument picked up and echoed by leftists everywhere, including in the United States. On Oscar night in 1979, some demonstrators held up signs reading "No Oscar for Racism" outside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in downtown Los Angeles where the Academy Award ceremonies were being held. One of the protesters, interviewed by the press, claimed that *The Deer Hunter* "was a con job, trying to convince everyone that American imperialism is the best thing in the world."

Controversy, indeed, had already been raging for four months, since the film's initial release. *New York Times* movie critic Roger Copeland summed up the essence of criticism of *The Deer Hunter's* central flaw in one short sentence: "A Viet Nam movie that does not knock America." For many, this was the movie's unforgivable offense, along with the apparent inability of a great many people to distinguish and delineate fiction from nonfiction or expecting a fictional movie to present a historically accurate summation of the war in Southeast Asia. For example, Pulitzer Prize-winning Vietnam War journalist Peter Arnett called the "Russian Roulette" scenes in the movie a "bloody lie." Documentary filmmaker John Pilger found time to comment on *The Deer Hunter* more broadly: "This is how Hollywood created the myth of the Wild West, and how the Second World War and the Korean War were absorbed into box office folklore."

Such readings of *The Deer Hunter* were taking place before the term *political correctness* came into vogue to identify the biases of academics, cultural critics, and journalists. Interestingly, it was Stanley Kauffmann, well-established as a senior voice of film criticism, who, writing in the center-left *New Republic*, pointedly mentioned that he sympathized with the politics of critics of the U.S.'s military engagement in Vietnam, but that he accepted the "Russian Roulette" scene as a metaphoric and thematic fit for the film:

It's not *about* Viet Nam, but about three steelworkers who work, drink, and hunt together, and who are captured and tortured together, who escape together and move on to their differing resolutions of that experience with their futures. The Russian Roulette was a symbolic extension of the "one-shot credo" by which these hunters had lived.

Continuing, Kauffmann explained: "Should *Slaughterhouse-Five* [1972, directed by George Roy Hill], because it showed the allied fire bombing of Dresden, *also* be expected to show the German bombing of Coventry. [*The Deer Hunter*] is really about a perennial preoccupation of American film—male friendship." Indeed, Cimino himself called the movie a celebration of the extraordinary qualities of so-called ordinary people who are facing a crisis. "The war is really incidental to the development of the characters and the story. It's part of their lives and just that, nothing more."

APOCALYPSE NOW

In the following year, 1979, Francis Ford Coppola's movie *Apocalypse Now* created an even more riveting screen image taken from the military conflict of the Vietnam War. Although it did not win the year's Best Picture Oscar,

it was perceived by many observers as a pivotal movie in the development of the American cinema in the last twenty years of the twentieth century. As the superlative editor and sound designer Walter Murch has said: “When I look back on my career, I kind of judge things whether [my films] were before or after *Apocalypse*.” Surely that may be true for others who worked on this Coppola film as well.

The arduousness—and sometimes madness—of the production has been well documented, not least by Coppola’s wife Eleanor’s documentary entitled *Hearts of Darkness*. The movie that proceeded so wildly went on to gross \$180 million and to capture eight Oscar nominations. At the height of hyperbole surrounding its release, Coppola is said to have claimed the film would become the first to win a Nobel Prize; he had to settle for the “Palme d’Or” at Cannes instead.

When the film was released, however, a great many critics panned it. But, over time, the assessment of the critical establishment has seemed to change. “When I read three years ago that Vittorio Storaro had been chosen as the cinematographer for *Apocalypse Now*,” wrote Stanley Kauffmann in the *New Republic*,

I was shocked. Storaro, the lush *Vogue*-style photographer of *Last Tango in Paris* and *The Conformist*, for a picture that was billed as the definitive epic about Vietnam! But, it turns out, the fine moments in Francis Coppola’s film depend heavily on what Storaro can do for them.

The movie’s story line is relatively simple. An Army officer, Captain Willard (Sheen), is sent to find and “terminate with extreme prejudice” the renegade Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), who has “gone insane” and set himself up in Cambodia as the warlord of an army of Montagnard headhunters. On his long trip up the Mekong River, Willard learns that in this war, man is ever at risk of becoming the thing he hates, the unknown he fears.

In spite of its point of departure—a novel by Joseph Conrad set in the late nineteenth century, entitled *The Heart of Darkness*—critic Stanley Kauffmann did not see the movie’s strength in copying the theme of how colonial conquest finally takes over and consumes its agent, but rather in delivering the *texture* of “the first freaked-out, pill-popping, rock-accompanied war.” Vincent Canby in the *New York Times* wrote:

Apocalypse Now lives up to its grand title, disclosing not only the various faces of war but also the contradictions between excitement and boredom, terror and pity, brutality and beauty. Its epiphanies would do credit to Federico Fellini, who is indirectly quoted at one point. It evokes the look and

feelings of the Viet Nam War, dealing in sense impressions for which no explanations are adequate or necessary. It's a stunning work . . . operatic.

But, he concludes, "It's an adventure yarn with delusions of grandeur, a movie that ends—in the all too familiar words of the poet Mr. Coppola drags in by the bootstraps—not with a bang, but a whimper."

Coppola's company, Coppola Cinema Seven, first put the project into development in conjunction with Samuel Goldwyn Studios. United Artists eventually released to film, into which Coppola had reportedly invested \$16 million personally, through its MGM/UA Distribution Company. It was five years in the making.

If Vietnam was the "first living-room war," Coppola and his screenwriter, John Milius, knew that their film had to take the viewer well beyond the familiarities of nightly TV-news coverage. "Politically, too," writes Kauffmann,

the film is empty, but then it doesn't have much political ambition. . . . *Apocalypse Now* ultimately reduces to the story of a special-services assassin sent to kill a grander assassin; with décor of eye-filling adventures along the way; but with nothing at the end, except that as predicted, the victim is an inflated lunatic.

Given his \$30 million budget, Coppola used it well to give the picture its orchestrated crowds, the immense vistas, and the stunning juxtapositions of images that make the movie into a compelling spectacle.

The unique sound montage for *Apocalypse Now* was designed by Murch—a figure who has been highly influential in modern Hollywood movie sound and editing—who was seeking to depart radically from the traditional use of sound in American feature films, in which sound is "married" to picture. As he put it, "Image and sound are linked together in a dance. And like some kids of dance, they do not always have to be clasping each other around the waist; they go off and dance on their own."

Unlike many films, *Apocalypse Now* was reedited and re-released in 2001 in a version entitled *Apocalypse Now Redux*, fifty-three minutes longer than the original film. At that time, critic A. O. Scott wrote in the *New York Times*:

Apocalypse Now, in spite of its limited perspective on Viet Nam, its churning, term-paperish exploration of Conrad, and the near incoherence of its ending, is a great movie. It grows richer and stranger with each viewing, and the restoration of scenes left in the cutting room two decades ago has only added to its sublimity.

A 1999 article in the *Los Angeles Times* had quoted Coppola as saying that he thought that after two decades the tastes of audiences had caught up to the sophistication of the movie, which had met mixed reviews two decades earlier. Coppola, it turns out, may have been his own most insightful critic of his 1979 movie, pointing out, of *Apocalypse Now Redux*: “In a funny way the movie is more clear at this length, it’s fuller and better developed about its theme of the kinds of hypocrisy involved in warfare.”

SUMMARY

Perhaps the single most distinctive characteristic of Hollywood production in the 1970s was the growing importance of “name” directors. Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and Francis Ford Coppola each moved to a more advanced plane of accomplishment. Michael Cimino weighed in with a directing effort on a controversial Academy Award Best Picture winner that appeared to promise him a bright future. Woody Allen’s unique Hollywood niche as its premier comic writer, actor, and performer solidified.

Auteurism was a preeminent theme for Hollywood in the late 1970s. Nationwide, movie critics embraced the notion, which had originated with French movie critics more than two decades earlier. As film studies emerged in American universities, the notion prevailed that the best way to seriously study a movie was to examine the personal artistic choices and motivations of its director, as if he or she were the author of a novel. What the auteur concept meant for Hollywood itself was more bottom-line oriented. Since the era of World War I, Hollywood had recognized that stars helped sell tickets to movies. During the late 1970s, the Hollywood industry had to acknowledge that the names of directors could do so, as well. To be waiting for the next Spielberg film, for Coppola’s next movie, or for Allen’s upcoming release became an element of moviegoing that was important to the business.

Hollywood in the 1980s

The first truly significant movie of the 1980s was another Martin Scorsese project, which turned out to be an integration of the realist aesthetic with the cinema of sensation. *Raging Bull* chronicles the true-life story of champion boxer of the 1940s and early 1950s, Jake La Motta, and the destructive demonic quirk in La Motta's nature. Ostensibly in order to triumph in the ring, Jake obsesses about his wife's virtue. Neither his wife (Cathy Moriarty) nor his brother (a warm and likable Joe Pesci) can slow down his rise to the championship and the dizzying self-destruction that follows.

Produced by the team of Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff, who were also responsible for *Rocky*, the movie was edited by Thelma Schoonmaker. Schoonmaker, who has worked with Scorsese on a regular basis, is quick to point out that her job as editor is made so much easier by the fact that when Scorsese is directing, according to Schoonmaker, "he thinks deeply as an editor." Scorsese is renowned for the amount of coverage that he shoots, as well as for his own editorial sense. A graduate of New York University's M.F.A. program in film, Scorsese had found an early career opportunity in editing Michael Wadleigh's documentary *Woodstock* in 1970.

Critic Stanley Kauffmann wrote in the *New Republic*:

Scorsese has filmed the life of the boxer Jake La Motta, his rises and falls and eventual retirement, and this time Scorsese's work is purged of heavy symbolism, of film school display, of facile portent. His directing is imaginative but controlled; egregious mannerisms have coalesced and evolved into a strong style. Some of *Raging Bull* is shocking, but all of it is irresistible. . . . What holds this picture together more than its storyline is its stylistic consistency, and style here means more than cinematic syntax, it means fire and personality.

The screenplay for *Raging Bull* was by Paul Schrader and Mardik Martin, based on La Motta's recently published autobiography, which Robert De Niro had strongly recommended to Scorsese. Their screenplay is structured on the major prizefights of La Motta's career, but this is clearly not a movie about boxing.

Raging Bull garnered eight Academy Award nominations, including Best Supporting Actor (Pesci) and Best Supporting Actress (Moriarty), as well as for cinematography, directing, editing, and sound. Schoonmaker won an Oscar in the category of editing, and De Niro was named Best Actor for his performance in *Raging Bull*. As the aging La Motta, De Niro gained over eighty pounds to transform his body from the relatively trim middleweight boxer into the retired prizefighter who owned a saloon and later became a nightclub entertainer. Scorsese took a long production hiatus of nearly four months in the late summer and fall of 1979 and resumed shooting with a much heavier De Niro in Los Angeles at the very end of 1979.

The movie's visual design is enhanced by a series of gritty, realistic details. Scorsese's director of photography, Michael Chapman, filmed much of the narrative with evocative shadows, in contrast to the shots in the boxing ring, which are all rendered in an unrelenting glare. Chapman's black-and-white cinematography is juxtaposed with a series of still black-and-white photographs. The style of the editing, especially of the fight scenes, contrasts with the more direct and simple realism in the look and pacing of the scenes of La Motta with his wife and his brother in their Bronx neighborhood. While it is believed that Scorsese chose to film in black-and-white because he had fears about the capacity of the color film stocks at the time to hold their look over the years, most critics concluded that the use of black-and-white lent a 1940s/1950s tabloid newsprint feeling to the film and that Chapman's use of the black-and-white cinematography contributed to the overall theme of the movie. Wrote Charles Champlin in the *Los Angeles Times*: "The subtlety, beauty, and the power of the black-and-white photography were overwhelming. Color would have destroyed the impact of *Raging Bull*."

Critic Michael Sragow, in his review in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, talked about the raw, relentless power of the film and how the movie squared off with brute manhood:

Scorsese arouses more identification with La Motta than the man could in his own account—and more hope for his redemption. Scorsese's Catholicism has not only given him a feeling for the hellishness of the world, but a faith in the potential salvation of every human being.

Wrote Vincent Canby in the *New York Times*: "Though it's a movie full of anger and nonstop physical violence, the effect of *Raging Bull* is lyrical."

Among major movie critics writing at the time, only a few voiced the minority opinion that the movie was ineffective. David Denby, in his review for *New York* magazine, was not convinced: “Even if we do feel for Jake La Motta, De Niro’s alternating performance and Scorsese’s harshness shut us out. . . . We never do discover why Jake is such a crumb-bum.” Faulting the Schrader-Martin script for its lack of explanatory depth, Kenneth Turan, writing in *New West* magazine, added: “*Raging Bull* is like the man it portrays—powerful and distinctive but not especially pleasant, an inspirer of awe but not affection.”

An initially good run in the early weeks of its release was followed by the conclusion on the part of many exhibitors that the movie was just too artistic for mainstream audiences, a view that was given a good deal of industry attention. *Variety* reported that the Arthur Rank Company decided not to distribute *Raging Bull* in Great Britain because it considered the movie “non-commercial.” *Raging Bull*’s Academy Award nominations opened some doors for its international distribution, but its overseas box office and rental revenues dragged behind expectations and never were considered acceptable by the movie’s distributor, United Artists.

The waves of positive critical attention to *Raging Bull*, and even its Academy Award nomination for Best Picture, weren’t enough to turn into a commercial success in 1980, but its subsequent history proved far more blessed. Charles Champlin of the *Los Angeles Times* called it

a rich, harshly honest, and mesmerizing film . . . a disciplined and important achievement that is likely to go unchallenged for a long time as a portrait not simply of La Motta, but of a particular segment of the American experience. . . . It is one of a thin handful of superior films of recent years and it seems to be Scorsese’s most perfectly shaped film.

In his *New York Times* review, Canby cited a moment in the film that stands out for him:

Jake, now over the hill, gone to flab, and possibly deranged, is thrown into a Miami jail on a morals charge. Full of self-pity and unfocused rage, he beats his head against the wall of his cell. “Why, why, why,” he bellows, and then whimpers, “I’m not an animal.” It’s a risky moment that pays off. Though there’s not one sequence in the film when he hasn’t behaved like an animal, Jake, like all the rest of us, is the kind of animal who can ask a question.

The inspiration for the color home movies was an idea that came to De Niro when he went to Florida during a break in filming to visit La Motta’s wife, Vicki, who showed him some 8mm family home movies.

As the review in *Newsweek* argued,

Raging Bull is only indirectly about boxing; the blood and brutality of the ring are an extension of the characters in the tight, relentless screenplay by Paul Schrader and Mardik Martin. . . . What Jake La Motta does in the ring is the ritualization of the nameless fury that outside the ring overwhelms and confounds him.

In an article in the *Village Voice*, movie critic J. Hoberman called it “the one possibly great Hollywood movie of the early 1980s.” In fact, in 1990 a national poll of movie critics did name it the greatest film of the 1980s. On that basis, MGM/United Artists re-released *Raging Bull* to the movie theaters that year.

ORDINARY SUBURBAN

The Academy’s Best Picture award for 1980 recognized a movie entitled *Ordinary People*. The film was based on the first book by novelist Judith Guest, which had been optioned by Robert Redford for his own production company in 1976. The movie itself marked Redford’s debut as a director.

In the suburbs of Chicago, Beth, the mother, is the envy of her friends—always in control. Calvin, the father, tries diligently to be a good husband, parent, and provider. The tranquility of this comfortable couple and their children is shattered, however, when the family’s elder son, Buck, dies in a sailing accident. Buck, a gifted student and a high school athlete, is survived by his unremarkable younger brother, Conrad. Conrad, who blames himself for his brother’s drowning, becomes suicidal.

The dramatic conflict here focuses on the psychology of authentic feelings and the perceived inability of human beings to remain in touch with them. As with a similar movie from the previous year, *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the success of *Ordinary People* apparently stemmed from viewers’ understanding of the psychology that permitted close identification with the feeling being experienced by the screen characters in presumably commonplace situations. As the critic Stuart Byron wrote:

Ordinary People succeeded with the “class” public [read “upper-middle-class” moviegoers] precisely because it pandered to the shared assumption of the East Side [New York City] and the Westwood [Los Angeles] crowd. Judd Hirsch plays the psychiatrist who frees teenage younger brother Conrad from suburban oppression. The medical identification figure reinforces “liberal” beliefs that “we” (the educated elite) can save “them” (the people out there) . . . Redford knows how to treat the “good life” rituals fairly kindly, knowing how tenuous it all is.

The casting of Donald Sutherland as the father, Calvin, Timothy Hutton as Conrad, and the enormously popular TV-sitcom star Mary Tyler Moore as Beth provided an able team of lead performers to deliver this tale of domestic disquietude in suburbia and adolescent insecurity and inner struggles.

Contemporary criticism emphasized assessments of the script and just how much realism there was in its portrayal of the trials and tribulations of suburban family life. Sometime movie reviewer Ben Stein enthused in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*: “Alvin Sargent’s script is as good as it gets; there’s not a false note in it.” By contrast, Stanley Kauffmann, writing in the *New Republic*, expressed misgivings and disappointment, calling the screenplay “a little trite wriggle.” Elaborating, he wrote:

Redford shows . . . that an intelligent actor, in the course of time, can learn enough about filmmaking to direct adequately with the help of skilled colleagues. What I don’t understand is why that same experience didn’t tell him that his material here is tired.

Yet a third critic’s opinion faulted the script, but praised one of the roles. Andrew Sarris wrote in the *Village Voice*: “Much of *Ordinary People* is glib and simplistic, but the implausibility of the alienation of Mary Tyler Moore’s mother character from Timothy Hutton’s suicidal son character is as commendably ‘anti-cliché’ as anything I have seen on the screen in years.”

With a production budget of \$6 million, *Ordinary People* was highly successful financially, grossing earnings of \$41 million on domestic rentals initially, adding another \$8.5 million to that amount after it gained six Oscar nominations, and then adding a similar amount, another \$8 million, after it won the Oscar for Best Picture. Produced by Ronald L. Schwary for Redford’s Wildwood Enterprises, *Ordinary People* was distributed by Paramount, whose president, Frank Mancuso, engineered a highly effective release of the picture, opening it around the country in four distinct stages.

Some observers suggested *Ordinary People* was a movie that merged with the content and the aesthetic of television. In some ways, its content was more suitable to the small screen than the large, and that an actress acclaimed as television sitcom star was regarded by many as its strongest performer appeared to reinforce this assessment.

THE EMERGING WORLD OF ANCILLARIES

Historically, Hollywood’s business had been about making movies that were to be shown in movie theaters. By the early 1980s, new technologies were available that would change the business entirely. Until the end of the 1970s,

the only places for the general public to see movies were movie theaters or, occasionally, network television—the latter with commercial interruptions and cuts in content to meet the standards of the Federal Communications Commission, which regulated broadcasting. That changed entirely with the advent of videotape and the appearance of cable and satellite television. The steady development of opportunities for videotape (and later, DVD) rentals and sales of movies for the future would dramatically change where movies were seen. Likewise, the proliferation of cable and satellite television networks and the booming increase in the number of subscribers to them globally would substantially alter the size and composition of the audience for movies.

At the beginning of the 1980s, movie-viewing began a steady and unrelenting course away from going to a theater to see a movie to the convenience of more individual and private consumption of movies. At the same time, the cultural idea of the movies continued to be thought of as going out to a movie theater to see them. For Hollywood production, all of this would mean expanded audiences and vastly expanded earnings in the future. Those earnings, when they did not come from distribution to movie theaters, are called *ancillary income* by the movie industry.

THE SPIELBERG ASCENDANCY

In a Hollywood where individuals, not major studios, now appeared to dominate the motion picture industry, one of the major figures in the motion picture industry in the United States for the last two decades of the twentieth century was Steven Spielberg. During those two decades, Spielberg would continue as a director, but would also become a producer, a partner in a major production and distribution company, DreamWorks, and one of several figures regarded internationally as a guru for all moviemaking. Starting as a young director at Universal in the early 1970s, Spielberg had his mark in that decade with *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. With 1981's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, ranked at number 60 on the American Film Institute's first list of the hundred greatest American films, Spielberg's true ascendancy in Hollywood began.

Directed by Spielberg, with George Lucas (*American Graffiti* and *Star Wars*) as its executive producer (officially a Paramount production, with Frank Marshall serving as its producer at the studio), *Raiders* is set in 1936. Archaeology professor Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) barely escapes from a temple full of booby traps somewhere in South America and soon thereafter is commissioned by U.S. agents to keep the Germans from discovering the lost Ark of the Covenant. The ark is said to contain the tablets of the original Ten Commandments and is buried in the deserts of Egypt, where a German team

is digging under the supervision of an especially corrupt and scurrilous French archaeologist. The assignment that Jones has undertaken is clear: to keep the ark out of Hitler's hands.

With a screenplay by Lawrence Kasdan and a music score by John Williams, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was immediately recognized as archetypal movie entertainment. The idea for the film is said to have had its genesis in 1977, when *Star Wars* was about to premiere and a nervous Lucas found himself killing time with his friend Spielberg. The pair turned to thinking of the outline for an old-fashioned Saturday-afternoon movie adventure tale with a macho hero named Indiana Jones. Out of those conversational ramblings came a delightful, inspired, and unpretentious romp that encapsulated a great many movies and succeeded brilliantly as entertainment. Based on a story by Lucas and Philip Kaufman, the Spielberg-Lucas-Kasdan trio mastered the central idea for a movie in which hardly a moment goes by when there isn't a cliffhanger. Dangers are ever-present, and all kinds of menacing devices populate the screen: stone darts, snakes, pits, mummies, corpses, and even a monkey who salutes "Heil Hitler" style.

As this race for the lost ark unfolds, it becomes increasingly apparent that *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is largely a producer's movie, in this case filled with historical references and inspiration drawn from the serials churned out for the tastes of kid audiences by Classic Hollywood. Spielberg and Lucas, of course, recognized the scintillating art of viewer engagement that these movies—dismissed by many who take film seriously—provided. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* entertains with biblical lore, exotic locales, a gutsy and beautiful heroine (Karen Allen), and the hero in a race against a darkly evil force, Hitler and the Nazis. For some, it seemed almost like a B-movie on a technically dazzling scale, shot in La Rochelle, France; Elstree Studios, England; Tunisia; and Hawaii.

Two sequels, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, were made in short order, and both were also produced in the spirit of the serial movies made during the 1930s. Both were nearly as successful as the original 1981 production at the box office. Taken together, the release of all three movies on DVD has resulted in a set that has consistently been in the top ten of all requests by DVD purchasers into the twenty-first century. Their success spawned yet another sequel, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, in 2008, with plans for more in the works.

TWO BRITISH SLEEPERS

If the relative popularity of the 1980 Best Picture, *Ordinary People*, had been understandable because the movie's premise was based on a portrayal the

seething anger beneath the comfortable façade of suburban life that many in the audience were assumed to share, explaining the success, popularity, and box office appeal of the Oscar winner for 1981, *Chariots of Fire*, was far more difficult. The film was British, historical, about athletes in a sport that did not have great crowd appeal, and had no known stars playing it, yet for many years it remained the top import hit in U.S. exhibition history, with more than \$27 million in domestic rentals in the United States.

Chariots of Fire was produced by David Puttnam, with Dodi Fayed serving as executive producer and James Crawford as associate producer. Previously, Puttnam had produced *Midnight Express*, *Bugsy Malone*, *The Duelists*, and *Stardust*. Hollywood's Twentieth Century-Fox helped finance the production, but so did a \$2 million investment from the British Broadcasting Corporation in exchange for rights to eventually televise the film. In a complex distribution deal, typical by the 1980s, the film was distributed by Warner Bros. in the United States, while Twentieth Century-Fox controlled all distribution outside North America. Produced for \$6 million, by the end of 1984 *Chariots of Fire* had earned \$30 million in global theatrical rentals and an additional \$20 million in ancillary (videotape) sales.

The screenplay was by Colin Welland (*Straw Dogs* and *Yanks*), and the movie's director was Hugh Hudson, who previously had specialized in documentaries and commercials. The cinematographer was David Watkin, and the musical score was provided by Greek composer Vangelis and gained a great deal of popularity in the world of recordings. The movie's producer, Puttnam, argued that the most important role for any producer was casting, and the review of *Chariots of Fire* in *Variety* called the movie's casting "pin-point."

Contemporary criticism, however, focused on the sense of values in the film, along with commenting on the economic and social status of its characters. In the *Film Journal*, David Schifren pronounced it "overly sentimental, a kind of Brit *Great Gatsby* (beautiful people with dough), whose hardships seem few." Vincent Canby, however, writing in the *New York Times*, answered part of Schifren's concern, describing the film as

a clear-eyed evocation of values of the old-fashioned sort that are today more easily satirized than celebrated . . . simultaneously romantic and common-sensical, lyrical and comic. Although its characters are privileged people, it is so well-balanced that it doesn't deny the realities of the lives of the less-privileged.

With faint praise, *New York's* David Denby called *Chariots of Fire* just what art-house audiences wanted at the moment: "a cautious, distinguished, slightly boring, good movie." Interestingly, however, the release of *Chariots of Fire* across the United States was not focused on art houses, but rather on

select major first-run theaters, with the intention of drawing a wide cross-section of moviegoers and speculating that positive word of mouth for the movie would be very strong, which it apparently was. The film was selected by a range of prestige newspapers and journals in the select top lists of movie titles for the year. Its Oscar win as Best Picture was the first for a British film since the 1960s.

The following year, 1982, another production that was essentially British, *Gandhi*, was awarded the Best Picture Oscar. Even the screenwriter, John Briley, had offered a negative assessment of its prospects as a commercial movie: "I was certain almost no one would want to see a film about an old man who sat on a rug in a loin-cloth and spouted words about peace and passive resistance." Nonetheless, the \$22 million production attracted investment from Goldcrest Film International, Indo-British Films, and the National Film Development Corporation of India, a government agency. While the project was not a high-concept film, *Gandhi* did have potential tie-ins, such as the publication of books on Gandhi and his career (by a subsidiary of Goldcrest), and it also promised good potential audiences globally, especially in densely populated India, as well as throughout the rest of Asia.

Even more than being a promising commercial project for those reasons, the idea of producing a movie about Gandhi had been a cause long championed by the highly respected Richard Attenborough. When Attenborough's two-decade obsession finally reached fruition, the result was an ambitious and complex final film. At the time, a number of articles and reviews echoed the opinion of one that *Gandhi* might just be "the most complex motion picture ever made."

In contemporary commentary, the highest marks appeared to have gone to Ben Kingsley's performance in the title role. Denby wrote in his *New York* magazine review: "In its physical power, its transfiguring gaiety, Kingsley's performance as Gandhi rivals [Sir Laurence] Olivier's as Henry V." In the *Los Angeles Times*, Sheila Benson applauded the film's "towering performances," and other critics congratulated Attenborough on "an old-fashioned movie," although, as Benson wrote, "here something seems to transcend fashion."

Writing in the trade journal *Hollywood Reporter*, critic Arthur Knight called the casting of Kingsley "the coup of the year." Less universally applauded was the film's "cross-casting," such as calling on Candice Bergen for the role of famed photographer Margaret Bourke-White. Writing in *Time*, Richard Schickel praised Attenborough's focus and the director's resistance to "being flashy." However, a review of *Gandhi* in the *Christian Science Monitor* faulted the movie for "being flat."

Gandhi's story, framed by scenes portraying his assassination and his massive Hindi funeral in 1948, begins with his arrival in South Africa as a young

civil servant of the British Empire and follows his life to his maturity as an aesthete committed to passive resistance against the continuation of British colonialism on the Indian subcontinent. Organized around the three pillars of Gandhi's mature politics—antiracism, anticolonialism, and nonviolence—the screenplay may be faulted for glossing over the historical and philosophical complexities of these positions, but they are not represented inaccurately and their portrayal does engage the viewer.

TOOTSIE

The production cost for *Tootsie* eventually exceeded \$20 million, with \$1.5 million of that total spent on nine screenwriters. Those writing fees did not even include the comments and input on the script by the movie's director, Sydney Pollack, and its star, Dustin Hoffman. Even after that substantial investment, no one was satisfied with the script, let alone happy. This was a project that hardly seemed blessed.

According to critic Susan Dworkin, who wrote a book about the movie's production, at the heart of the project was a fundamental conceptual conflict between the director and the star. Hoffman saw the film as the story about a struggling young actor and what he goes through in order to act. By contrast, Pollack saw the movie as a statement of a theme: a man dresses up as a woman and thereby learns to be a better man. While arguments between directors and stars in modern Hollywood are frequently rumored, this particular clash had its grounding in a conflict of artistic interpretation and approach. In fact, Stephen Farber published a thoughtful article in the *New York Times* maintaining that the agreements between Pollack and Hoffman finally appeared to result in compromises all through the film that made it a better movie. Pollack applauded Hoffman for forcing him to cast Bill Murray as Michael Dorsey's (Hoffman's character's) roommate. In addition, it was Hoffman who pressured Pollack—who had begun his show business career two decades earlier as an actor—into playing the role of Michael's agent in *Tootsie*.

Pollack's movies had always been in the commercial mainstream, for which some critics with a bias against business success faulted him. In retort, when questioned about this criticism by Farber, Pollack answered:

I think there's nothing quite as satisfying as reaching a lot of people. And rightly or wrongly, that's always been what I have defined for myself as a big part of my job. . . . Sometimes if you have a career like mine, which is so identified with Hollywood, with big studios and stars, you wonder if

maybe you shouldn't go off and do what the world thinks of as more personal films with lesser-known people. But I think I've fooled everybody. I've made personal films all along. I just made them in another form.

Pollack and Hoffman each regarded *Tootsie* as his own personal film, which fueled their disputes, but also permitted those disputes to resolve themselves in so many instances for the betterment of the movie. Indeed, collaboration in the art, craft, and business of filmmaking is often a complex and tangled web.

Tootsie is about a dedicated, but difficult, actor named Michael Dorsey who finally manages to land work by posing as a woman. As "Dorothy Michaels," he—or rather, she—becomes the outspoken and outrageous star of a daytime soap opera. In the process, Hoffman turns Dorothy into a caring woman who is someone to respect. On the set, Dorothy grapples with a slick and chauvinistic director (Dabney Coleman) and a lecherous actor (George Gaynes), who becomes so infatuated with Dorothy that he follows her home and serenades her.

A Columbia Pictures release, *Tootsie* was put together by a production company called Mirage/Punch and produced by Dick Richards, Charles Evans, and Pollack. Nonetheless, the film to large extent belonged to Hoffman. As *Variety*'s review remarked:

In what could have been just a stunt or a *La Cage Aux Folles* [a French film from 1979 about a nightclub, in which Michel Serrault played a flamboyant drag queen], Hoffman triumphs in what must stand as one of his most brilliant performances. . . . When his character says that he's been able to express more of "himself" through Dorothy than he ordinarily can in "real" life, it's a tribute to Dustin Hoffman that the full import of his statement is felt.

The end result of *Tootsie* was fine, although the bottom line on the movie may have been teased by their conflict; *Tootsie* finished a month late and \$1.5 million above its budget. First given an "R" by the MPAA's Rating Board, on appeal it was revised to "PG."

Bill Murray plays Dorsey's roommate, and Jessica Lange costars as Julie, the object of Michael's romantic interest, while Charles Durning as her father Les does a sensational slow burn that begins during a bar scene with Michael. But Les also tries to seduce Dorothy at his home, and Dorothy winds up sleeping with Julie that night. Julie thinks that Dorothy is probably a lesbian, while Michael's girlfriend Sandy (Teri Garr) thinks that he may be gay. Dorothy's real adventure, however, is in the discovery of the traits of tenderness, gentleness,

and understanding. Eventually, final on-screen credit for the script went to Larry Gelbart and Murray Schisgal (with industry rumor maintaining that the final version had much to do with the contributions of Elaine May, whose name never appeared in the credits).

The cinematographer was Owen Roizman, A.S.C., an A-list director of photography in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Tootsie* was an odds-on favorite with movie industry insiders to win that year's Best Picture Oscar, but was beaten out by *Gandhi*. Among major film critics, only Kenneth Turan suggested that the movie was less than perfect, primarily because its premise is a single joke. By contrast, Vincent Canby, writing in the *New York Times*, argued:

Unlike most such comedies, *Tootsie* has a lot more going for it than its gimmick. . . . *Tootsie* restores the original meaning to the term "situation comedy," free of the pejorative associations that have accrued over the years because of the glut of awful ones on television. . . . It's a toot, a lark, a month in the country.

While nearly all the predictions for *Tootsie* were pessimistic, veteran critic Stanley Kauffmann acknowledged in his review of the movie in the *New Republic* that, when the movie was actually completed and released, he was surprised at how good it was, and he bestowed great praise upon it. Richard Schickel, writing the review in *Time*, concluded that the line "I was a better man as a woman with a woman than I've ever been as a man with a woman"

may not be quite a moral. But it is at least a line, and a principle, that Pollack, Hoffman, and everyone else could agree on as they wobbled and squabbled along disaster's edge over the long, intemperate season they endured together. It has given meaning, and sweet humanity, to their comedy. It is what will make *Tootsie* roll straight into everyone's heart. And into everyone's mind as an unmelting movie memory.

Tootsie set new box office records for all Columbia Pictures releases, quickly becoming the studio's top-grossing picture for domestic rentals in its initial U.S. release, its more than \$147 million outpacing the previous record holder, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which had taken in \$132 million domestically. Columbia also reported exceptional business for the film in three markets—France, Australia, and Sweden—returning the biggest rental earnings ever for a Columbia picture. Coincidentally, Columbia, through its subsidiary Columbia International, was also distributing the year's Academy Award-winning Best Picture, *Gandhi*, which was running only slightly behind *Tootsie* in overseas rental earnings.

E.T.

Universal's production of the 1982 film *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, number 24 on the American Film Institute's 2006 list, was the next movie to break all-time box office records. Based on a screenplay written by Melissa Mathison, directed by Steven Spielberg, novelized (and improved) by William Kotzwinkle, and celebrated in song by Neil Diamond, *E.T.* is the story of an alien abandoned in Middle America. It stars the child actors Drew Barrymore and Henry Thomas as Gertie and Elliot, who, with their brash older brother (Robert MacNaughton), live with their divorced mother (Dee Wallace) after their father has abandoned the family and taken off to Mexico with another woman.

For the title role, Spielberg had to rely on tested and proven Hollywood gimmickry, utilizing a midget inside an E.T. suit who received his direction by a radio signal. The movie had the aura of "instant classic" when it was first released; Allen Daviau's cinematography is stunning (the cinematography from the angle of a child's point of view and the menacing lighting mesh especially well), and the musical score by John Williams is top-notch. In terms of classic movie genres, *E.T.* is a dog movie; it's about a boy meeting a dog, naming it, taming it, learning from it, and growing up. Of course, E.T. is a magic dog, part Peter Pan and part Mary Poppins.

Made for \$10.5 million, by the first week of 1983, *E.T.* had passed the earnings of the previous top-ranked Hollywood earner, *Star Wars*, by racking up nearly \$230 million in profits in the United States and Canada alone. The *New York Times* critic, Janet Maslin, noted that all the product tie-ins, which, she did not condemn in principle, reached beyond a limit, and when that limit was exceeded, the movie itself began to appear less innocently delightful. *E.T.* was produced by Spielberg with Kathleen Kennedy. The production supervisor was Frank Marshall, with Melissa Mathison as associate producer and Wallace Worsley as the unit production manager. The editor was Carol Littleton. George Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic was responsible for the special visual effects.

Looking back on the occasion of *E.T.*'s twentieth anniversary in 2002, a review in the London *Times* declared:

No reconsideration is required. This was a film nominated for plenty of Oscars and well-reviewed on its initial release. Spielberg's preoccupations and themes were already well noted then too. His love of suburban fairy tales and friendly galactic visitors had been aired in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, along with the "Oedipal disquiet" of his screen families. . . . Spielberg even structured the movie as a classic love story: boy meets

creature, boy loses creature, creature saves boy, boy saves creature. . . . Criticising *E.T.* is virtually a heresy in America, like daring to ridicule *Star Wars*. This is partly due to Spielberg's saintly status; partly due to the mystical importance fundamentalist fans ascribe to it. The film is a family classic, an ennobling family classic, end of story. Among critics this time around, there has been no exacting discussion, just the sound of snuffling adults revisiting childhood.

ANOTHER KIND OF SENTIMENT

E.T. pulled on viewers' heartstrings with its story of a boy and his "dog" and provided a grand boulevard into nostalgic sentimentality. The selection as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Best Picture for 1983, *Terms of Endearment*, also plunged into sentimentality, in this case over a relatively young woman's tragic death and her mother's discovery of a quirky romantic partner fairly late in life. *Terms of Endearment* was a bit of a surprise winner of the Academy's highest honor; it beat that year's list of other Best Picture nominees, which was considered especially strong: *The Big Chill*, *The Dresser*, *The Right Stuff*, and *Tender Mercies*.

It was a classic insider project by the standards of the New Hollywood. James L. Brooks—a highly successful television producer and writer (*Mary Tyler Moore*, *Taxi*) who also had written the screenplay for *Starting Over*—looking forward to his debut as a feature-film director had asked Paramount to option the Larry McMurry novel *Terms of Endearment* for him in 1975. The studio did so, but seven years later when the project was being prepared for filming, the studio was still holding firm to a modest production budget of just \$7.5 million, in spite of Brooks's industry reputation. As one of the studio's executives put it, in explaining such a tight rein: "It's the only film I can't compare to something else I've read."

The film ambles along amusingly, as a sharp-eyed family comedy, with Debra Winger as the adult daughter of a neurotic mother played by Shirley MacLaine, who falls into a relationship with her astronaut neighbor played by Jack Nicholson. It changes gear completely, however, when the daughter learns that she has terminal cancer, and her harrowing death follows. The story progresses chronologically from 1948 to 1972, with the sets by Polly Platt contributing to a production design that had to keep up with a quarter-century's worth of changing American décor and was among the movie's most highly regarded elements. Even more impressive is the cinematography of Andrzej Bartkowiak, who used different lenses, lighting schemes, and color palettes to

identify different periods so effectively. Location filming for *Terms of Endearment* was done entirely in Houston.

SOPHIE'S CHOICE

Produced for Universal Pictures in 1982 by Keith Barish and Alan J. Pakula (who also wrote and directed), *Sophie's Choice* was based on a novel by William Styron. Filmed in Czechoslovakia and Brooklyn by cinematographer Nestor Almendros, *Sophie's Choice* stars Meryl Streep, who prevailed in winning the role she wanted even though Pakula is reported to have maintained that he preferred to cast an Eastern European actress.

Sophie Zawistowski (Streep), a beautiful Polish immigrant, is living in Brooklyn with her lover Nathan Landau (Kevin Kline) a few years after the end of World War II. Sophie befriends a young writer from the American South, Stingo (Peter MacNicol), and so begins a romantic triangle that surrounds the complicated retelling of Sophie's story. She recounts the tale of herself and her two children in Europe before she fled to the United States. The daughter of a viciously anti-Semitic university professor, Sophie ironically is arrested by the Gestapo and transported to the death camp at Auschwitz with her two children. There she is forced by the camp commandant to make a choice: one of her children may live, while the other must die. She sacrifices her daughter Eva, and her son Jan is spared. The retelling of her past is woven into her romance with Stingo as he is talking to her about marriage and children. Instead, of committing to marry Stingo, however, she returns to her lover Nathan, and both she and Nathan commit suicide.

Writing in *Newsweek* in 1982, critic Jack Kroll commented: "It is one of the saddest movies ever made." Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker* called it "an infuriatingly bad movie," while Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* reached a more balanced assessment, calling *Sophie's Choice* "far from a flawless movie . . . [but] a unified and deeply affecting one." And critic Jennifer Selway wrote:

A more serious problem occurs in long flashback scenes as Sophie describes her ordeal in Auschwitz. The information . . . comes thrillingly, in fits and starts, with revelations following on the heels of half-truths. But one watches uneasily as the obscenity of the Holocaust is served up for our entertainment yet again and another actress with perfect cheekbones and a crew cut loses a few pounds to lend credibility to a death camp scene. By the end, the accumulated weight and lethargy of the production fails to invest Sophie's fate with the significance Styron achieves.

BLADE RUNNER

Credited as a Michael Deely–Ridley Scott production, with Deely as the producer of record and Scott as the film’s director, *Blade Runner* stars Harrison Ford as Rick Deckard, with a supporting cast of Rutger Hauer, Sean Young, Edward James Olmos, and Darryl Hannah. The movie was based on a successful novel by Philip K. Dick entitled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The screenwriters were two men new to Hollywood, Hampton Fancher and David W. Peoples.

Classified by many as a futuristic sci-fi picture, Scott himself insisted that “it is first and foremost a detective story.” Scott said that he was seeking, on the one hand, “to establish . . . a familiar atmosphere . . . a Philip Marlowe–Sam Spade environment . . . set forty years hence, but made in the style of forty years ago.” He added that he considered the movie to be “an adult comic strip.” As Scott noted:

Most films depict the future as pristine, austere, and colorless. . . . Our city is rich, colorful, noisy, gritty, full of textures, and teeming with life . . . much like a major city of today. This is a tangible future, not too exotic to be believed. It’s like today—only more so.

The production design for *Blade Runner* by Larry Paull was acclaimed, and included using two architectural landmarks of Los Angeles: the Ennis Brown house, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1924, and the Bradbury Building, built in 1893.

In the story, overpopulation has become an epidemic. Humans who haven’t departed the Earth to go to other planets now live in huge megacities characterized by garish street life, with incessant flashing neon signage, bizarre traffic jams, and streets washed by acid rain connected to garbage-filled alleys. The police attempt to control the chaos with flying cars and computers. Genetic engineering has given the population artificial animals as pets, and humans called “replicants,” who are prohibited from returning to the Earth. If replicants try to reenter the Earth’s atmosphere, the police call out the blade runners—specially trained detectives—to hunt them down and eliminate them.

Critic Kevin Crust, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, labeled *Blade Runner* “one of the most prescient, influential science-fiction films ever made.” A *New York Times* article praised it for its impact on pop culture and applauded the visual effects—created by miniature models, optics, and double exposures that were considered “amazing for their day.” The *Sunday Times* of London published an article by John Harlow that called its visual look a “super-real

version of 1940s film noir” and proclaiming: “Visually, *Blade Runner* is the most influential film of the last fifteen years.” But David Denby, writing in the *New Yorker*, argued that *Blade Runner* was “all visuals” with “no story” and was “terribly dull.” Many other critics cited the weaknesses or the insufficiencies of the story, judging the story with terms like “routine” and “unsatisfactory.”

Scott eventually chose to recut the film, eliminating the voiceover and changing the ending. His final cut was released twenty-five years later in 2007, as a silver-anniversary version with a running time just seventeen seconds shorter than the original version.

AN ART HOUSE MOVIE CONQUERS THE BOX OFFICE AND THE ACADEMY

Variety characterized Tom Hulce’s performance as the great composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in *Amadeus* as “the portrayal of a childish drunk who would be right at home in *National Lampoon’s Animal House*.” As his wife Constanze, actress Elizabeth Berridge earned even more negatives from critics. David Denby, writing in *New York* magazine, said she sounded like “she had escaped from the television soap-opera *Santa Barbara*, and labeled the final third of the film a ‘lurid disaster.’” The *Newsweek* review held back only a bit, calling Berridge “hard to accept in her modern, suburban interpretation of Mozart’s wife, Constanze.” Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic* pronounced Berridge “disastrous,” while David Edelstein in the *Village Voice* described the entire movie as “parasitical.” The *New Yorker’s* Pauline Kael found “nothing but confusion” at the heart of the movie. Kenneth Turan said in the *Los Angeles Times* that *Amadeus* “dragged on” for at least half an hour too long, and across town Peter Raines, writing in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, said that it might have been a great idea for a movie, but that the film’s writer, Peter Shaffer, “hadn’t developed his themes.” Nonetheless, *Amadeus* won eight Oscars, including Best Picture, and scored an unexpected, but solid, hit with American audiences at the box office.

The movie’s director, Milos Forman, was at the height of his reputation as an art-film director and had sailed through the troubled waters of Hollywood commercialism with *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*—a \$4.5 million production that earned \$60 million in rentals—two years earlier. For *Amadeus*, Forman was again working with Saul Zaentz of Berkeley, California, who had moved into film producing from the music business. Forman had encouraged Zaentz to support adapting Shaffer’s stage version of *Amadeus*, which was a triumph in both London and New York, for the screen.

Shot almost entirely in Prague, Czechoslovakia, with an \$18 million budget, *Amadeus* did solid box office business, and, as it turned out, spun off an instrumental classical album from the soundtrack that marked the first time such a recording of classical music had ever appeared on *Billboard's* popular music charts. Zaentz himself may have come closest to an analysis of the movie's popularity and success, saying that it was in the story. *Amadeus* portrays the highly competent, but wholly conventional, court composer Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham) as the great nemesis of Mozart, a figure of establishment mediocrity in competition with a true genius. The story hinges on the fundamental structure of an “underdog” story—a familiar narrative and thematic convention in many Hollywood movies—as the wild and eccentric Mozart struggles for recognition against the far less able and far less likable Salieri.

BACK TO STANDARD FARE

Director Sydney Pollack's movie *Out of Africa* (1985) starred Robert Redford and Meryl Streep. It was a Universal Pictures release with Kim Jorgensen as executive producer and a screenplay by Kurt Luedtke based on the writings of Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), Judith Thurman, and Errol Trzebinski. Camera was by David Watkin, and the movie was edited by a team consisting of Fredric Steinkamp, William Steinkamp, Pembroke Herring, and Sheldon Kahn.

In 1913, a proud, wealthy, and willful woman named Karen left her native Denmark and sailed to Nairobi in British East Africa to meet Baron Blixen (played by Klaus Maria Brandauer), whom she had agreed to marry. The skirt-chasing Count Blixen's weaknesses as a husband quickly became clear. His promiscuity led to him contracting syphilis and infecting his wife. Eventually, the disillusioned Karen returned to Denmark to be treated for the disease. Cured, physically if not emotionally, she returned to Africa, and there she fell in love with Denys Finch Hatton (Robert Redford).

The capsule review of the movie in *Variety* read:

At two-and-a-half hours, *Out of Africa* certainly makes a leisurely start into its story. Just short of boredom, the picture picks up pace and becomes a sensitive, enveloping romantic tragedy. Nonetheless, it's a long way to go for a downbeat ending, which may hurt broad appeal.

Streep had top billing, but the trade journal's reviewer thought the movie came alive only when Redford was on-screen—which, unfortunately, was very little in the first hour of screen time.

Out of Africa was a huge, \$30 million project that was shot over five months in Kenya. For the filmmakers, the challenge facing them was how to translate a woman's rich, poetic feelings about seventeen years on an African coffee plantation—based on memoirs she published under an assumed name so that most readers believed the author was a man—into an engaging and compelling drama.

Critic David Sterritt called the film “lovely to look at, but ho-hum as drama.” F. X. Feeney, however, said the opposite: that it was Pollack at his best because he inevitably “locates the human feeling under all that majesty.” In this character-oriented epic, Pollack and his cast kept a low-key and an almost lyrical touch. While he acknowledged Redford only as “an attractive screen presence,” critic Stanley Kauffmann praised Streep as being

back in top form. This means that her performance is at the highest level of acting in film today. . . . She has realized a character utterly different than any she has done before. As was true of Brando, Streep uses her star status to risk versatility, not to sell a standard product.

In his *New York Times* review, Vincent Canby echoed this sentiment and, to emphasize her importance to the film, titled his review “*Out of Africa*, Starring Meryl Streep.” The reviews overall, however, were decidedly mixed. Andrew Sarris saw *Out of Africa* as “an African version of *The Way We Were* with a superb actress like Streep paired with a woefully miscast Redford portraying a Oxford-educated British adventurer.” Still, critic Molly Haskell said in *Ms.* that there is surely something awry when the viewer is more aware of what Streep is wearing than what she is saying. Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker* declared that it “dribbles on—adult, diligently cryptic, unsatisfying.”

VIETNAM REDUX

Studio fears, no mass audience for the subject, and few—or no—veterans working in Hollywood were the industry's standard explanations to account for the lack of serious Vietnam War dramas. Neither of the war movies made at the end of the 1970s, *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter*, was written by a Vietnam veteran. Moreover, the popular Rambo movies, *First Blood* (1983) and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), which depicted returning to Vietnam for the purposes of rescue and revenge, had no contributions from veterans of the war.

A veteran of the war, screenwriter and director Oliver Stone praised both *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter* as being about the general state of

mind at the time of the war. Still, Stone pointed out that these movies had nothing to do with the realities of a nineteen-year-old in combat. Stone had first begun circulating his own script for a movie like that in 1976, but found no one in the Hollywood industry was interested. When *Platoon* finally came together and was put into development, it took a British producing company called Helmdale—which had liked and financed Stone’s *Salvador* the year before—partnering with an independent Hollywood newcomer, Orion Pictures, to get it made.

The same cameraman, Bob Richardson, who had filmed *Salvador* in a graphic style, much of which looked like news footage, was selected as the director of photography on *Platoon*. The actor chosen to play *Platoon*’s main character, Charlie Sheen, had first been to the Philippines at age ten, when his father, Martin Sheen, was working on *Apocalypse Now*. The *Platoon* project was under the watchful guidance of Academy Award-winning producer Arnold Kopelson. The sound design of *Platoon* was especially realistic and aesthetically effective. The movie’s editor, Claire Simpson, observed that the cries of the villagers being set upon by American grunts were especially chilling to her. Stone called *Platoon* his “long deferred dream come true.”

Stone had served in Vietnam in 1967–1968, and he declared in an interview to the *Hollywood Reporter* that there “were no political messages in the film,” just the war as he saw it. In the interview, however, he added that he wanted a younger generation to see what the war was really like, rather than being taken in by a set of Rambo theatrics. Ex-Marine Dale Dye, helped by several Marine reservists, ran a two-week boot camp for the actors to provide realism.

Oscars went to Stone for directing; to Simpson, who worked through 350,000 feet of film, for editing; and to the team of John K. Wilkinson, Richard Rogers, Charles Grenzbach, and Simon Kaye for sound. Stone previously had written *Midnight Express*, *Eight Million Ways to Die*, *The Year of the Dragon*, and *Scarface*, as well as cowriting *Conan the Barbarian*. A new company in the expanding world of ancillaries, Vestron, packaged a deal for release of the VHS tape of the movie, after Dino De Laurentiis’s production deal with Stone fell through. After the film’s release and success, however, Vestron and Helmdale became embroiled in a legal conflict after video rights were offered to HBO; Vestron eventually prevailed in court.

Critic Molly Haskell noted that it was important to know that Stone was an actual veteran in order to appreciate this movie, inspired by mud, fear, dope, body bags, and My Lai. Michael Medavoy, the vice president of Orion Pictures, said that the way the movie makes you feel like you are part of the war is reminiscent of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Unlike Francis Ford Coppola’s *Gardens of Stone*, which was about the families of Vietnam

veterans, Medavoy expected veterans themselves to want to see the film to relive their days in combat. Helmdale chairman John Daly said that the picture's target audience was "the thinking person with a conscience who had family involved in this particular conflict." This was a phrase echoed in the *Village Voice*, whose critic, J. Hoberman, said that Stone might be "the thinking man's Cimino." The film's standard poster proclaimed: "The first casualty is innocence!" *Commonweal's* review thought the film would appeal to the "grunts" who had actually fought in Vietnam and that it would work for them far better than the "manipulations of Sylvester Stallone." *Screen International* called it the "thinking man's *Rambo*: a heart-on-the sleeve liberal film, which is deep-down a reactionary piece of glossy action nearly unparalleled in its visual and verbal violence."

Tom Berenger played the fanatical Sergeant Barnes, while Willem Dafoe took the role of his alter-ego, Sergeant Elias. Kevin Dillon's character "Bunny" enjoys a license to kill, while Sheen's middle-class character is soon enmeshed in the chaos of war and begins recounting his experiences in his letters home, which form the core of the movie.

L.A. Weekly—both with praise and reservation—called Stone a "pulp artist," adding, "In spite of its tendency toward the trite, the overexplicit, and the melodramatic, Stone is the first director since Coppola to put his vision onto the Vietnam War." Vincent Canby said it breathed life back into the "war movie" genre. Indeed, *Platoon* was followed the next year, 1987, by Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* and John Irvin's *Hamburger Hill* as third-wave Vietnam films, with *Platoon* standing out among them for its "realism." Among major critics, only Charles Champlin of the *Los Angeles Times* was amazed at the film's popularity, because he found watching it "arduous."

Platoon's Best Picture Oscar for 1986 established Stone as a major Hollywood director and Orion as a rising independent company to be taken seriously. The picture's success with the Hollywood establishment was noted by many as further evidence of the shift among the American public toward greater acceptance of the tragedy and toll of Vietnam. The *New Republic's* "TRB Column" celebrated the box office popularity of *Platoon* as

more evidence of the cultural collapse of Reaganism. . . . [*Platoon*] summons up Stephen Crane, and Norman Mailer novels, as well as Remarque's. It does not recreate the "surrealism" of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. The ambivalence toward the war doubles back as re-directed in the internal division among the warriors themselves.

Critic David Ansen (with Peter McAlevey) wrote in *Newsweek*: "After nine years of waiting, Stone has made one of the rare Hollywood films that matter."

A EURO-AMERICAN SUCCESS

Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, a definitive Euro-American movie, triumphed with the Hollywood establishment with eight Oscar nominations for 1987: Best Picture, Director, Editing, Art Direction, Cinematography, Costume Design, Scoring, and Sound. As defined by film scholar Peter Lev, the term *Euro-American film* indicates a movie that:

1. makes dominant use of the English language
2. has a European director
3. has a larger production budget and superior production values compared to the typical European art film
4. combines the European art film's emphasis on character over plot with qualities of the Hollywood film, such as stars, genres, presold subjects, spectacle, and action

By the late 1980s, Bertolucci had already won his place in film history, but like any working director, he needed something resembling a hit, which he hadn't had for a decade and a half, since *Last Tango in Paris* (1973), which starred Marlon Brando in what might be labeled a highly typical Euro-American production. Bertolucci turned to China, and the idea of adapting Edward Behr's novel to the screen, in an attempt to keep alive on-screen his faith in what might be called leftist-humanist ideals. For example, every time his name appears in the production contract, it is dutifully annotated: "Bernardo Bertolucci, member of the Italian Communist Party." Nonetheless, *The Last Emperor* isn't about Chinese political history in the twentieth century, even though it has a strong undertow of what might best be called romanticism about the Communist revolution.

Bertolucci coauthored the screenplay with his brother-in-law, Mark Peploe. The interiors were filmed in Europe. Pu Yi, the young emperor, is played by an unknown actor, John Lone, but his British tutor by Peter O'Toole, who had plenty of star appeal at the American box office.

The Last Emperor is, as critic F. X. Feeney claimed, a film that dramatizes life's healing processes with great thoroughness and gives a sense of the life and history of a period wrapped around a soul in transit. It's good enough, says the critic, to have viewers come away reflecting on two lives—Pu Yi's and their own. In keeping with this theme, Bertolucci has called his lush, Academy Award-winning movie "a journey from darkness to light." *The Last Emperor* was re-released in a "director's cut" version in 1998 that added fifty-nine minutes to the original; much in the director's cut elaborates Pu-Yi's imprisonment and his reeducation in prison.

BACK TOWARD OSCAR CONVENTION

The Academy's Best Picture choice for 1988, which was also the Best Picture winner at the Golden Globe Awards, was far more predictable Hollywood fare: *Rain Man*, produced by Mark Johnson and directed by Barry Levinson. The movie won a Best Director award for Levinson, as well as Oscars for Best Original Screenplay and Best Actor (Dustin Hoffman). It was packaged by Michael Ovitz of Creative Artists' Agency and released by MGM/United Artists.

At the Oscar ceremonies, Hoffman repeatedly lauded Ovitz for saving the film. Originally started as a Steven Spielberg project, the director's responsibilities passed to Martin Brest and then Sydney Pollack before finally landing with Levinson, who had started with *Diner* and came into his own with *Good Morning, Vietnam*. *Rain Man* became symbolic as a typical New Hollywood adventure, in which the "elements" of the production, as they were now called, continually kept changing. By the time Levinson was hired and the project was back in place, Roger Birnbaum, who had originally optioned the project for the production firm of Guber and Peters, had become the new head of production at United Artists. With a budget of \$28 million, it was shot primarily in Cincinnati and its suburbs.

At one point, UA/Guber-Peters put the project on hold. Early on, Hoffman realized that his character Raymond could not have an "arc," as an actor normally seeks in his role. It took time for Hoffman to get inside the character, but once he did, he and costar Tom Cruise bonded. His decision not to make eye contact with his fellow cast members, according to Hoffman, put a string of directors off until Levinson came on board.

The original script by Barry Morrow (with Ron Bass) was based on the real-life figure Kim Peek. The screenplay, in this case, definitely was edged into its final form by the cast. The film was shot in sequence, as few Hollywood features are. Cruise went off to work on *Cocktail* during the *Rain Man* postponements. Levinson had to make the plot hinge on the weaker character. Levinson also did a cameo on-screen as one of Raymond's psychiatrists. Levinson's cinematographer, John Seale, and his regular editor, Stu Linder, were central figures in the team that finally made the movie.

The \$27 million film grossed over \$160 million in its domestic theatrical release, but did even better overseas, where it earned roughly \$240 million. Charles Champlin noted that while twenty years of ever greater cynicism in movie writing had contributed to film as an art form, Hoffman's autistic savant brought back "perfect innocence" to the screen. In spite of its convoluted path to being put into actual production, *Rain Man* wound up being an almost classically made Hollywood feature when it finally reached the screen. Nearly

everyone liked this film, except for the airlines, which cut Raymond's "fear of flying" sequence whenever the movie was shown on board commercial flights in the United States.

The decade of the 1980s ended with the Academy's Best Picture award being bestowed on a Zanuck Company production, *Driving Miss Daisy*, directed by Australian Bruce Beresford (*Tender Mercies*, *Breaker Morant*, *Crimes of the Heart*) and released by Warner Bros. Starring Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy, it was based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning stage comedy, for which Alfred Uhry wrote the screenplay. After Daisy Werthan, an independent and eccentric Southern Jewish matron, crashes her car, her son Boolie (Dan Aykroyd) hires a black widower in his early sixties, Hoke Colburn, to be her driver.

After breaking his partnership of eighteen years with David Brown, Richard Zanuck (*Jaws*) and his wife, Lili Fini Zanuck, made this their first project. The Zanucks could get backing from Warner Bros. only by agreeing to slash the budget for this appealing script to \$7.5 million, but they eventually succeeded in getting the production budget increased to just over \$12 million by enlisting the participation of two British companies, Allied Filmmakers and Majestic. At age seventy-nine, Tandy had her best screen role ever. The Pulitzer Prize win for the stage play certainly helped promote the film with a part of its target audience, which found much the same following as the audience for *Steel Magnolias*, which was also a movie adapted from a successful Off Broadway play.

Beginning in 1948, *Driving Miss Daisy* spans two decades and, as one newspaper critic wrote, "is a subtle film of social and moral wisdom." "Predictable and musty," said the *Los Angeles Times* reviewer, while still finding that "the performances salvaged it." The alternative *Los Angeles Weekly* labeled it an "indomitable warhorse," describing the movie as a series of two-character sketches that were opened up only slightly for the screen version. The review in *Boxoffice*, however, bemoaned this opening up, feeling that it cheapened what value the piece had as a stage play. By contrast, *Variety* found its opening up for the screen made it better than the play could ever be and added that its small observations suggest large social truths without pretension, which may be the essence of the film's strength as a medium. Its necessary attention to detail permits small things, gestures, and moments to work like iconography and to be interpreted easily to stand for larger insights and values. Pauline Kael damned *Driving Miss Daisy* with faint praise, calling the movie "cozy and slight," while celebrating the strong acting, including Aykroyd's; her review concluded that it was an appealing but insubstantial movie. Richard Schickel of *Time* liked what he called its "simple moralism."

DO THE RIGHT THING

Produced by Spike Lee's own company, Forty Acres and a Mule Filmworks, with distribution by Universal, *Do the Right Thing* was a controversial movie. Lee called the look he wanted for this film "Afro-Centric bright" and relied on his New York University classmate Ernest Dickerson as the film's director of photography to provide that look. The story chronicles events on the hottest day of summer in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. Smiley (Roger Guenveur Smith) sells postcard photos of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Mister Señor Love Daddy (Samuel L. Jackson) is a knows-no-sleep block radio jock. Other characters included Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), whose boom box blasts "Fight the Power"; Mother Sister (Ruby Dee); and Da Mayor (Ossie Davis), a wino. Lee himself appears as Mookie, and Rosie Perez plays his lover and mother to his child; the only way she can get him to come over is to order pizza, which he usually delivers with sex. *Do the Right Thing* was Lee's first film with significant characters who are not African-American: the pizzeria owner Sal, played by Danny Aiello, and his two sons, Pino (John Turturro) and Vito (Richard Edson). A \$5 million production, it lost out on the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival that year to a movie by another young American, Steven Soderbergh, *sex, lies, and videotape*.

Thulani Davis wrote in the *Village Voice*:

Do the Right Thing is also very funny. The film's humor is Lee's most effective tool, embracing the characters and cajoling the audience. It allows us to deal with the disagreeable in ourselves, as humor should; it does tell people off while telling jokes.

For all its humor, what drifted to the surface in debate about the movie was its portrayal of racial antagonism and tension. In St. Clair Borne's documentary *Making "Do the Right Thing,"* Lee and Aiello debate whether the character Sal is racist.

Especially in New York City, response to the movie was extensive and often heated. Richard Corliss wrote in *Time*:

Not since the Black Panthers cowed Manhattan's glitterati twenty years ago has there been such a virulent outbreak of radical chic—or so many political-disease detectives ready to stanch the epidemic. A single issue of the *Village Voice* ran eight articles on the movie, with opinions running from raves to cries of "fascist" and "racist." . . . Behind the camera Lee wants to create a riot of opinion, then blame viewers for not getting the message he hasn't

bothered to articulate. Though the strategy may lure viewers this long hot summer, it is ultimately false and pernicious.

The article in the *Village Voice* referenced above was Stanley Crouch's "Do the Race Thing: Spike Lee's Afro-Fascist Chic." Crouch accused Lee of invoking an aesthetic that turns people into things. Lee, a thirty-two-year-old graduate of the New York University Film School, had completed two feature films previously, *She's Gotta Have It* and *School Daze*, each of which had essentially all-Afro-American casts. The Crouch article was confrontational but also humorous, at one point referring to Lee's short height—to which the filmmaker himself later responded that he wondered if the criticism would have been different if he were Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

David Denby writing in *New York*, offered that "Lee appears to be endorsing the outcome [in which rioters burn down Sal's pizzeria], and if some amongst his audiences go wild, he's partly to blame; he's pretty mixed up about what he's saying." Geoffrey Nowell-Smith tried to find a judicious and balanced assessment of the movie in his article in *Sight and Sound*:

So long as the film sticks to the level of recording the entropic energy and the diffuse impotence in community life in Bedford-Stuyvesant it is both funny and—I would say—truthful. What [Lee] cannot do is articulate his consciousness of the political problem into a narrative form.

Still, *Do the Right Thing's* message was so ambiguous that it was denounced by commentators on both the right (e.g., Richard Grenier in the *Washington Star*) and the left (e.g., Murray Kempton in *New York Newsday*) as irresponsible and even incendiary. In the *New York Times*, an article by Brent Staples questioned: "Do the simplistic characters of *Do the Right Thing* foster racial stereotyping?"

The prerelease review in *Variety* commented on the box office prospects for *Do the Right Thing*: "Spike Lee combines a forceful statement on race relations with solid entertainment values in *DTRT*. Militant approach presents Universal with a marketing challenge to tap a potentially wide audience for a thought-provoking pic amongst this summer's fluff." Universal, however, was able to book the movie easily nationwide. In fact, popular mainstream film critic Roger Ebert characterized *Do the Right Thing* as "the most honest, complex, and unblinking film I have ever seen about the subject of racism." Avoiding the politics of it, Vincent Canby wrote in the *New York Times*:

Mr. Lee's particular achievement is in building the tensions so gradually and so persuasively that the explosion when it finally comes seems inevitable. He doesn't deal in generalities. The movie is packed with idiosyncratic

detail of character and event, sometimes very funny and sometimes breathtakingly crude.

Do the Right Thing won the Chicago Film Critics award for Best Picture and Best Director, but the movie was ignored for an Oscar nomination for Best Picture by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. That year, *Driving Miss Daisy*, set in the Deep South in an earlier period, but about the complex relationship of an elderly white woman with her African-American driver, was recognized by the Academy, garnering nine nominations and winning Best Picture.

SUMMARY

At the beginning of the 1980s, the technologies were in place for Hollywood as a business to evolve away from its traditional focus on producing movies for large-screen presentation in theaters as its exclusive source of income. By the end of the decade, the major Hollywood companies, which since the late 1960s had been operating within conglomerate corporations owned by a parent company that did not necessarily have anything else to do with entertainment or communication, were sold off by their conglomerate owners to giant companies specializing in the media and communications.

This transformation was hidden beneath the surface of a mainstream motion picture production in the United States that was becoming more eclectic during the period. During the 1980s, technologies were shrinking the globe, and everywhere audience tastes were becoming more diverse and cosmopolitan. By the time *Do the Right Thing* was showing nationwide, in 1989, and criticism of it was appearing in the national press, the responses to it and some other films were starting to turn toward an assessment of their sociology. In this regard, however, and taken as a whole, the eclecticism of Hollywood production and investment reflected Hollywood's time-worn principle of providing audiences with what they want.

New Hollywood Enters the Digital Age

Much like *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Dances with Wolves*, the Best Picture Oscar winner for 1990, revealed that the conventional wisdom of the Hollywood bosses had gone wrong. Both of these movies were considered by some in the motion picture industry to be “difficult” and “uncommercial,” yet they succeeded quite well. Hollywood studio executives were concerned that *Dances with Wolves* was too long, would be inaccessible to many audiences because Kevin Costner wanted much of the dialogue to be in a native Dakota tongue with subtitles, and also was a pessimistic “downer” movie. So Costner had to turn elsewhere for financing, primarily to a relatively successful newcomer to the Hollywood scene, Orion Pictures, but also eventually to a relative outsider to Hollywood, Canadian financier Jake Eberts. Eberts had backed a total of nineteen different movies in the 1980s, nearly all of which constituted sleeper successes at the box office, including two Academy Award–winning best pictures: *Gandhi* and *Chariots of Fire*. *Dances with Wolves*, however, had already earned a \$75 million box office gross when it garnered its Academy Awards (including Best Screenplay, Actress, and Makeup, in addition to Best Picture).

Set in the 1860s, Lt. John J. Dunbar (Costner) finds himself between two worlds as the sole inhabitant of Fort Sedgwick, where he was assigned as a reward after the Civil War. His contacts with the Sioux soon form bonds of mutual respect and trust. Robert Pastorelli (from network television’s *Murphy Brown*) took the role of Timmons, Dunbar’s rowdy sidekick. Other stars include Graham Greene as Kicking Bird, Mary McDonnell as Stands with a Fist (an emotionally traumatized young White woman adopted by the Sioux), and Rodney A. Grant as Wind in His Hair.

Directed by Costner, who also coproduced it with Jim Wilson (the executive producer was Eberts), *Dances with Wolves* was filmed with a screenplay written by Michael Blake that was based on his own novel; the music was composed and conducted by John Barry. Although the novel had never been a best-seller, Costner and Wilson regarded the material as rich with visual potential. “Americans are kind of rootless in a way,” commented Costner. “The people who truly know how to use this land, how to control it, are not here anymore. . . . At the cost to the people who already lived here, we—the white man—had to have this.”

Costner’s desire to offer the reality of a West that hadn’t been seen on the screen before was to be achieved in part by using the Dakota language in dialogue. Nonetheless, *Dances with Wolves* is neither a history lesson nor an attempt to set the record straight. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, just after the film completed principal photography, that movie industry pundits were calling it either “Kevin’s Gate” or “Costner’s Last Stand,” because filming was two weeks overdue and the production already was \$7 million above budget. Filmed entirely in South Dakota, during the summer and fall of 1989, *Variety* commented:

In his directorial debut, Kevin Costner brings a great deal of grace and feeling to this elegiac tale of a hero’s adventure of discovery among the Sioux Indians on the pristine Dakota plains of the 1860s. Despite its three hour length . . . [it] stands a good chance of being a word-of-mouth hit and one of the season’s most widely popular pix.

“The story of one man’s awakening, and, by extension, all of ours,” the *Hollywood Reporter* called it.

Orion Pictures put up a substantial portion of the movie’s \$18 million budget. Costner had come a long way from *The Big Chill*, in which his character’s suicide was the grounds for the reunion of a group of old college chums, but whose actual time on-screen was cut entirely from the release version of the film. *Dances with Wolves*’s Lieutenant Dunbar learns the Dakota language and keeps a journal, with entries such as, “They have a gentle humor I enjoy. . . . I’ve never known a people so eager to laugh and so dedicated to family”—lines that struck *New York Times* reviewer Vincent Canby as worthy for a popular magazine sold at the checkout counter. Sheila Benson in the *Los Angeles Times* was more focused in her praise for the frontier epic rich in character, action, and spectacle.

Dances with Wolves was an abrupt commercial and critical success that, as the industry says, “went through the roof.” Through its first 140 days, it grossed just about a million dollars a day, making it Orion’s most profitable movie ever.

Although considered a progressive movie by its makers, and one that offered correctives to the history of the American West, *Dances with Wolves*

nonetheless attracted union problems that arose after the film garnered seven Oscars. The leaders of an International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees local complained that union members who had worked on the film did so under an improper contract. Moreover, activist Native American leaders pointed out the irony that Costner had an \$18 million budget for his movie, while at the same time most of the tribes that *Dances with Wolves* romanticized were still using outhouses. David Denby noted that it was a movie story that once upon a time in cinema history could easily have been told in a hundred minutes or less “before actors started to become directors and producers.”

AN ENDEARING MOB TALE

Ray Liotta spoke the opening lines in *GoodFellas*: “As far back as I can remember, I wanted to be a gangster. To me, being a gangster was like being a President of the United States.” A relative newcomer, Liotta, who played the midlevel criminal Henry Hill, had the biggest role in the movie, but there is little doubt that the film’s popularity had much to do with the pairing—for the sixth time—of director Martin Scorsese with the acting talent of Robert De Niro (*Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *New York, New York*, *Raging Bull*, and *The King of Comedy*).

GoodFellas was a Scorsese collaboration with Irwin Winkler, the risk-taking producer who had gambled on *Raging Bull* a decade earlier. As it turned out, Scorsese and Winkler were both drawn to the same written source for the film, Nicholas Pileggi’s nonfiction best-seller, *Wiseguy: Life in a Mafia Family*. Pileggi and Scorsese collaborated on the screenplay for the movie, which recounts the dangerous, delinquent, and sometime uproarious misadventures of Henry Hill, a Queens Mafioso, and the gang of more brutal wiseguys with whom he works.

As David Ansen wrote in *Newsweek*, “Normal, law-abiding society barely makes an appearance in the movie.” Ansen was trying to advance a broader sociological explanation as to why he believed that audiences at the beginning of the 1990s were finding gangsters irresistible.

He may terrify us but he also acts out our primal lust for power: individualism doesn’t get any more unbridled. Crime and punishment is not the issue anymore: at the end of the real-life Mafia chronicle *GoodFellas*, the gangster is unrepentantly ensconced in a witness protection program. Life, and crime, goes on.

“Is it a great?” asked Pauline Kael in her *New Yorker* review. “I don’t think so. But it’s a triumphant piece of filmmaking—journalism presented with the

brio of drama. . . . But Scorsese leaves the themes, and even the story, lying there inert.” David Denby, writing in *New York* magazine, commented:

GoodFellas is the greatest film ever made about the sensual and monetary lure of crime, and the whole perversely brilliant movie—an ambiguous celebration of murderous freedom—comes into focus in a single, staggering shot: Arriving at the “Copacabana,” Henry leaves his car across the street with an attendant and, as the camera follows, walks with Karen [his girlfriend, played by Lorraine Bracco] past the crowd waiting to get in and enters the club through a side door, going along red damask walls, round corners, into the kitchen past waiters and busboys as well as chefs, around more corners, and then out onto the floor of the club itself, where a smiling headwaiter greets Henry and Karen, and offers them a bottle of champagne as a gift from some smiling wiseguys at a neighboring table.

This screen sequence cited by Denby is so powerful because it constitutes a seamless, fluid, four-minute descent to the depth of the underworld life but simultaneously portrays the feeling of its heights. This critic also praises Michael Ballhaus, the director of photography on *GoodFellas*, who works a smoothly galvanized camera that is essential to telling the movie entirely from Henry’s point of view as a record of immoderate pleasures.

Still, some critics complained the movie is more loosely and inconclusively plotted than most Scorsese films. The *Variety* review said the movie was “simultaneously fascinating and repellant, colorful, but dramatically unsatisfying.”

Scorsese had had a great critical success with *Raging Bull* (1980), which was selected by several polls of movie critics as the best film of the 1980s, a picture in which he presented his central character as an icon of brutishness. This time, he wanted the central characters to be realistically shallow, and he succeeded. What plays off their shallowness aesthetically is the rapid-fire switch from visceral violence to giddy comedy throughout the movie as edited by Thelma Schoonmaker. Paulie Cicero (Paul Sorvino) and Jimmy Conway (De Niro) are, in the end, the close friends that Henry betrays and loses forever when he testifies at trial against his Mafia colleagues. Like so many Scorsese films, at the end of the day, *GoodFellas* is best appreciated as a buddy picture.

THE GRISLY RISE OF HANNIBAL LECTER

In the early 1990s, in the competition for the Academy’s Best Picture Oscar, Orion Pictures was on a roll. The company had purchased the rights to the

Thomas Harris novel *The Silence of the Lambs*, initially with the assumption that Gene Hackman would make his directing debut with the feature and star in it. These planned elements of the production package, however, changed quickly, and Anthony Hopkins was given the male lead as Hannibal Lecter and Jonathan Demme was chosen to direct. Earlier films by Demme, such as *Howard and Melvin* and *Stop Making Sense*, had done well with the critics, but were not big moneymakers. After Demme came on board, his company, Strong Heart Productions, worked out a budget for *The Silence of the Lambs* of about \$19 million. Then, Demme quickly assembled the same production team that he had used on *Married to the Mob*, led by his director of photography, Tak Fujimoto. *The Silence of the Lambs* was filmed on location in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.

The story centers on Clarice Starling, a gutsy FBI trainee played by Jodie Foster, who is hunting a serial killer who murders women to make a suit from their skins. With a poster campaign featuring Foster's face with a butterfly with a death skull on its back covering her lips, the movie was released on Valentine's Day, 1991. The poster's single, enigmatic image played off the film's tension and morbidity, while simultaneously evoking the female lead's innocent demeanor.

Even before its release, the movie was the subject of objections and protests because of claims that the movie portrayed the degradation of women and perpetuated negative gay stereotypes. *Village Voice* critic Michael Musto called the film an exercise in disgust: "Mutilation, cannibalism, Roger Corman in a supporting role—not what you'd expect from Jonathan Demme. . . . Jodie Foster's character makes one fleeting disclaimer, assuring us that the psychotic girl-mutilator she's tracking down is not your typical transsexual. No shit, Sherlock." However, many reviewers ignored such complaints. *Boxoffice* assessed *Silence of the Lambs* to be the unusual combination of a "crackling commercial formula film" and "an undeniably brilliant example of the moviemaker's art."

The duel of wits between Hannibal the Cannibal—a brilliant, though perverse, psychiatrist and professor—and Clarice, an orphan child from Appalachia, produces the kind of easily accessible conflict that appeals repeatedly to moviegoers. As he gives her clues to the killer Buffalo Bill's mind and identity, Hannibal simultaneously probes into the recesses of her background. As *Newsweek's* reviewer David Ansen observed of their talks, in them Hannibal becomes a kind of "intellectual suitor," shot in the manner of exaggerated close-ups that have a "horrific, weirdly erotic intimacy."

Critic David Denby argued in *New York* that the film gives viewers the kick of uncontrollable perversions and the thrill of broken taboos: "This is a

creepy thriller, and one with strong audience appeal overseas.” *Variety’s* review called it

a mesmerizing thriller that will grip audiences from the first scene to the last . . . [since it] intelligently wallows in the fascination for aberrant psychology and perverse evil, delivering the goods in a way that should electrify both critics and mainstream audiences and generate solid box office.

True to that forecast, the film performed well both in the United States and abroad. *Variety* reported that *The Silence of the Lambs* set a record for a three-day box office take in the United Kingdom with its opening in London in June.

Despite the protests, the movie drew ten Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, and won a Golden Globe for Best Picture awarded by the Hollywood foreign press. By the time the run-up to Oscar season began, Orion Pictures was in bankruptcy court. Orion still owed Kevin Costner’s production company \$3 million for *Dances with Wolves* and was at least \$360,000 in debt to Demme, the director of its smash hit, which had grossed \$137 million in just domestic rental revenues. In its “dances with debt,” wrote *Time*, Orion was struggling to keep the wolves from the door. (Puns flew about *Silence* as well, such as, “This movie has bite.”)

When the Best Picture Oscar triumph came for *The Silence of the Lambs* in April 1992, Orion already was going out of business as a motion picture distributor. Hence, the movie’s commercial value at the time was hardly increased at all by its Oscar win. Still, it was the only film ever to win a Best Picture Academy Award that can be described by genre as a horror movie.

ANOTHER EASTWOOD SUCCESS

Since the 1950s, a number of actors had become movie directors, some had become movie producers, and some had opened their own motion picture production companies. Clint Eastwood was one of the most successful Hollywood figures to do all three. In 1992, Eastwood starred in and directed one of the finest westerns ever made, *Unforgiven* (with the same title as a 1960 western directed by John Huston that starred Burt Lancaster and Audrey Hepburn). *Unforgiven* was a dark tale, starring Eastwood and Gene Hackman.

A Warner Bros. release of a Malpaso (Eastwood’s production company) film, *Unforgiven* was financed in part by the studio even though westerns weren’t “in” and Eastwood and Hackman were not exactly teenage idols. It was an unapologetically mature and contemplative movie. During development, the film was known alternatively by the titles *The William Munny*

Killings and *The Cut Whore Killings*. The screenwriter, David Webb Peoples, nurtured the script along and was eventually given credit as a producer on the movie, as well.

Unforgiven was perceived throughout the movie industry as bucking the popular wisdom that the western was dead. With a strong supporting cast that included Morgan Freeman, playing Ned Logan, Bill Munny's (Eastwood) only friend, and Richard Harris as a killer-for-hire called English Bob, the movie defied the industry's conventional template, playing well in both urban and rural areas, as well as drawing audiences across age and gender lines. Surely it was a movie to which movie professionals are favorably drawn. It's the kind of film that crosses the predictable tastes of the moment and that pays homage to originality. The Academy chose *Unforgiven* as its Best Picture for 1992.

At a time when the motion picture industry and the national press were both beginning to pay attention to the earnings a movie made on the first weekend of its release, *Unforgiven* opened with the best August weekend up until that time at \$14.6 million. The *Hollywood Reporter* was quick to praise the promotional campaign for the movie as a triumph for the Warner Bros.'s distribution team led by Barry Reardon.

The subject matter was hardly predictable as a big box office draw, the movie being a saga of guilt and redemption set in a grim Wyoming town called Big Whiskey. When a prostitute (Anna Thomson) is slashed to death by a drunken cowboy who cannot perform sexually, another prostitute played by Frances Fisher (Eastwood's real-life romantic partner at the time) years later focuses her anger sufficiently to mobilize support to create a reward and revive the search to apprehend and punish the culprit. However, the local sheriff, Bill Daggett (Hackman), has taken the position that this is much ado about a matter of scant consequence and that the slashing is best left alone. Moreover, it's a matter now seemingly well in the past and behind the town; the accused old gunslinger is now a pig farmer and a widower raising two kids. For those moviegoers looking for lessons, *Unforgiven* does remind its viewers that remedies are illusory and often carry an unexpected price.

The review in *USA Today* remarked that it was Eastwood's best movie as a director and the best western directed by anybody in twenty years. Across the nation, local reviewers and critics were consistent in their praise. In *Time*, Richard Corliss wrote that he saw *Unforgiven* as questioning the rules of a macho genre, with Eastwood summing up macho attitudes in this movie, but at the same time atoning for the flinty violence in his previous films that had made him rich and famous.

Eastwood's mentors were the directors Don Siegel and Sergio Leone, to whom this movie was dedicated. Design was by Hollywood veteran Henry Bumstead. The movie's director of photography, Jack N. Green,

provided a look that was dark and ominous and entirely appropriate to the subject matter.

Among the critics, there are always doubters, of course. Seasoned critic Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic* was unkind, bemoaning Peoples's screenplay and calling Eastwood's direction "lively but unoriginal." Marilyn Beck, writing in the *Los Angeles Press Telegram*, offered: "Odds are he'll walk out of the Music Center laden with Oscars. Not because *Unforgiven* necessarily deserves them, but because this seems to be Clint's year among many in the industry."

HISTORICAL, BLACK-AND-WHITE, TRIUMPHAL

The success of *Unforgiven* surprised movie industry experts, but the success of *Schindler's List* was even more astonishing. How do you sell audiences on a three-hour black-and-white movie, with no major American stars, about the Holocaust? At the time, these questions were being posed by many in the motion picture industry with regard to the project that went on to win the Best Picture Oscar for 1993.

As early as 1963, a development deal for a film about Oskar Schindler, a German factory owner who had apparently saved thousands of Jews from Nazi extermination, had gone into the works with MGM, but had never panned out. In the early 1990s, one answer to the motion picture industry's questions about the viability of such a movie was that Amblin Entertainment and Universal Pictures would be working with Steven Spielberg. By now, Spielberg was a Hollywood giant and an acclaimed director known worldwide. Still, his record was mixed. As a director, Spielberg had succeeded with commercial fantasy-adventure films, such as the record-grossing *E.T.* and the more recent *Jurassic Park*, but had received decidedly mixed reviews and audience responses for his more adult-themed efforts, such as *The Color Purple*, *Empire of the Sun*, and *Always*. Being a name director for nearly two decades was no guarantee for success with your next picture in this high-risk business. *Schindler's List* had become a pet project for Spielberg, but even for the vaunted Hollywood super-player, it took more than ten years to bring the project through development and into production.

The screenplay for the movie was based on Thomas Keneally's 1982 best-seller, adapted for the screen by Steven Zaillian, after Universal purchased the rights for \$500,000. Spielberg served as a producer of the film, along with Gerald R. Molen and Branko Lustig. Polish cinematographer Janusz Kaminski was chosen as the movie's director of photography. Spielberg originally planned to film at the Auschwitz concentration camp, but encountered resis-

tance from the Jewish community. After negotiations with representatives of the World Jewish Congress, the production company eventually built a replica of the camp for its set, supervised by production designer Allan Starski.

Even the screen talent appeared to finally find just the right level and tone for their performances. The complex SS commandant Amon Goeth is played convincingly by British stage actor Ralph Fiennes. Ben Kingsley delivers the role of Itzhak Stern, the Jewish accountant who Schindler chooses to run his factory, with a delicious combination of gratitude, disdain, subservience, and pride. Spielberg credited Universal, the studio with which he had been working since he broke into Hollywood in the early 1970s, with pursuing a \$22 million project for which there appeared to be “little commercial upside.” Ostensibly, MCA president Sid Sheinberg urged Spielberg to stay with the project, telling him: “It will be remembered when *Jurassic Park* is long forgotten.” The movie played out as complex and provocative to many viewers because the title character remains such an enigma. Schindler’s motives are puzzling, because he was driven by no clear political, religious, or social principle.

As *New York Times* movie critic Janet Maslin observed, Spielberg directed *Schindler’s List* with a fury and immediacy that most critics like her found to be profoundly surprising. She praised Michael Kahn’s nimble editing. Similarly, Julie Salamon, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, said that she believed that Spielberg’s passion for the subject liberated him enough so that he could make a film that is almost entirely free of artifice. In *Screen International*, reviewer Ana Maria Bahiana called it Spielberg’s most passionate, yet simultaneously most restrained, film; John Williams’s score showed Bahiana a similar restraint, and, she continued, Kaminski’s camerawork had the depth of feeling and hypnotic beauty of Italian neorealist films made right after World War II. Kenneth Turan also praised the director’s restraint, which he found surprising coming from a director whom he considered to be the “Master of Razzamatazz.” Critic David Denby observed that the film caused Spielberg to work with his usual kinetic dynamism, but now with a furious purpose as well.

The photography is in black-and-white, and Spielberg actually operated a camera himself for many of the sequences, but the thematic complexity of the movie is constantly reinvestigating good and evil. David Thompson in Britain’s *Independent* called it one of the cinema’s finest achievements: “With its grave documentary thoroughness and moral complexity, it rewrites film history.” In the *New Republic*, Leon Wieseltier argued that Hollywood had owed the American public this film after decades of stupefying the public, stuffing it with illusion, and blurring the distinction of fiction and fact. Shortly after its premiere in 1993, the *Hollywood Reporter* began touting *Schindler’s List* as an Oscar-worthy picture.

Spielberg told an interviewer for the *Jerusalem Post* that, when prepping *Schindler's List*, he could only find documentaries, and no feature films, about the Holocaust to watch in preparing his film, even though Hollywood had been founded and led for years by Jewish moguls. While *Schindler's List* received much praise for taking on its topic, and although free morning showings of the film were provided to high school seniors in many places, there were the occasional voices of skepticism about the movie. The *Times* of London wondered in print: "Has the century's most grotesque event simply fed into the maws of Spielbergian optimism?" J. Hoberman of the *Village Voice* compared Spielberg's presentation of the chosen Jews on the list to "a transport of underprivileged waifs [on] a special trip to Disneyland." The *New York Times's* Frank Rich wrote that the film "is already taking on a life of its own, wrapping the movie and the Holocaust in a neat, uplifting Hollywood ending." Rabbi Eli Hecht's critical column in the *Los Angeles Times* in early 1994 regretted the glorification of the "unworthy" Schindler and bemoaned a contemporary Jewish penchant for portraying themselves as victimized like the actual sufferers of the Holocaust. The article drew much response, some of it quite heated, and most of it in disagreement with Hecht's viewpoint. A number of Middle Eastern and other Muslim countries banned or restricted the film's showing.

THE DIGITAL ERA SETS IN

The actual physical materials and the hands-on processes of filmmaking had changed little during the seventy-five years from World War I into the mid-1990s. Filmmaking meant the use of celluloid film for the process of recording pictures, and the exhibition of motion pictures to movie theaters required celluloid prints. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, though, digital processes would penetrate deeply into motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition. By the mid-1990s, the first wave of digital technologies was having an impact, primarily on motion picture postproduction, in editing and sound.

Professional editors and sound mixers and sound editors were the first of the Hollywood craft personnel to have to adjust to the new technologies. For these postproduction crafts personnel, the process was essentially a given: wean yourself away from the tactile customs of handling celluloid film in workprints and working with full-coat magnetic film to which sound had been transferred from quarter-inch tape, and develop a new set of skills—looking at a computer screen and handling picture materials and digitized sound at the click of a

mouse. This technological revolution spread fast, and like past previous adjustments in moviemaking dictated by technology, were accepted fully.

The new digital world meant that the potential of ancillary earnings for movies increased greatly over whatever they had been during the 1980s and early 1990s because of videotape. The transfer of motion pictures to DVDs meant far superior quality of picture and sound when compared to videotape, and rentals and sales of DVDs by the early twenty-first century had expanded rapidly. For example, anyone who wishes to do so may now watch a movie on a cell phone. The impact of digital technologies on the exhibition sector of the motion picture industry has been revolutionary.

Just what, however, did this digital revolution truly mean for Hollywood in terms of what viewers saw on the screens in movie theaters? First of all, digital filmmaking meant that many of the illusions we see on-screen could be accomplished with ever greater mastery, and the creation of special effects in movies was transported onto an entirely new plane. Digital technologies—especially computer-generated imagery, or CGI—lent themselves perfectly to action films, sci-fi adventures, movies with talking animals, and advances in production design that were handled in computers. For example, a scene filmed on a street in Los Angeles with the cast in parkas and mittens, could then be turned into a Buffalo, New York, winter scene by digitizing in snow on the ground, snow banks along sidewalks and curbsides, and a raging snowstorm for good measure, all during postproduction.

This was new and advanced, of course, but movies had been about illusion since their beginning, and Hollywood was no stranger to convincing effects in any era. Seventy years earlier, the snow banks of Alaska in Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* had been created by hauling sand from the beach in Santa Monica seven or eight miles up to the studio, then treating the sand and filming it to look convincingly like snow. The tornado in *The Wizard of Oz* was made by filming a damp white sock being dangled in front of a fan. Digital filmmaking, however, allowed for clever mixing of animation and live action in movies, such as 1988's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Six years later, a major Hollywood feature prominently used digital technology to create the semblance of a character being present and part of historic events in *Forrest Gump*.

A HOLLYWOOD DOCU-FABLE

It did not take a lifetime to make *Forrest Gump*, the Oscar winner for Best Picture of 1994, but it felt that way for Wendy Finerman, the thirty-three-year-old producer who nursed the project along to completion. After nine

years in the works, this sweet-natured movie about a slow-witted man who follows the tide of American history from the late 1950s onward, opened to solid audiences amid reviews ranging from mixed to enthusiastic. It made an immediate impression, however, on most professionals in the film industry. *Forrest Gump* ranked at number 71 on the American Film Institute's 1996 list of the greatest American films.

An adaptation from the novel by Winston Groom by screenwriter Eric Roth, the protagonist Forrest Gump becomes a football star at Alabama, a Vietnam War hero, a Ping-Pong champion in China, and a dumb-luck millionaire. Finerman, a Wharton M.B.A. and the wife of Mark Canton, the chairman of Columbia/Tri-Star, was floored by the novel when she first read it in 1985 in galleys before it was published. "When do you come across material that literally makes you laugh and cry at the same time?" she wondered. Roth, however, made the love story the spine of the film, and on the basis of that script, Paramount bought into the \$45 million project. Robert Zemeckis, director of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and the *Back to the Future* trilogy, was tapped to direct it.

Paramount publicity started calling it a "docu-fable," in which the viewer sees thirty years of history almost exclusively through the protagonist's perspective. With a mid-July release on 1,595 screens for the weekend, it came out of the starting gates with startling popularity, even though, as Zemeckis pointed out, the movie lacked many of the elements common to popular formulas: there was no villain, for example, and there is an absence of conflict.

The movie took up CGI where it had left off in 1988 with *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Digital effects not only give the illusion of Forrest meeting presidents Kennedy and Johnson but also added Ping-Pong balls to his matches. Forrest teaches dance steps to Elvis Presley and helps John Lennon learn how to compose.

Although *Forrest Gump's* sentimentality irritated many critics, audiences overwhelmingly were pleased. "Life is like a box of chocolates," as Forrest says, "you never know what you are going to get." For moviegoers in their thirties and forties, *Forrest Gump* manages to push nearly every historical, cultural, and sociological button. In its first sixty-eight days, it became the highest-grossing domestic release of all time at \$248 million. Conservative cultural critic Michael Medved told a newspaper: "For me, the great secret of the film's popularity is that it connects with our tremendous national yearning for innocence, and for recapturing lost innocence." A sea of books, calendars, and other related products followed in the wake of its runaway success at the box office, even though Paramount had issued absolutely no franchising licenses when the movie was first released.

Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun* and president of the Berkeley Students for a Democratic Society from 1966 to 1968, complained that the movie portrayed 1960s antiwar activists as “drug-crazed, women-beating monsters.”

Critic Anthony Lane, writing in the *New Yorker*, called it “a goofy, indolent, wander through the past.” By contrast, the *Variety* review argued:

Forrest Gump is whimsy with a strong cultural spine . . . shrewdly packaged to hit baby boomers where they live, offering us a non-stop barrage of emotional and iconographic identification points that will make post-yuppies feel that they're seeing their lives passing by onscreen.

Forrest's true love, Jenny (Robin Wright), indulges all the excesses of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but as Robert Alleva's review in *Commonweal* points out, the fantasy of *Forrest Gump* doesn't really take place in a fantasy world, but rather in the real world that we inhabit. If this, however, is the essence and the problem of Zemeckis's fairy tale, it is one that arises from the fundamental tensions of movies as a medium in which artifice is inevitably based so strongly in photographic realism.

For Janet Maslin of the *New York Times*, the best moments of Forrest's benign whimsy brought to mind Kurt Vonnegut's early fiction. Zemeckis called it “an allegory of all that's good and pure about America.” Barbra Streisand commented that she “was thrilled to see a film about decency doing so well.” One agitated *Time* commentator announced that the story of the kind and selfless Forrest Gump, who believes in goodness and friendship and honor and who triumphs over affliction, actually poses a danger of leading Americans to “a mindless, heartless conservatism.” Interestingly, however, *Forrest Gump* even found a following in Communist China, where it was called *The True Story of Ah-Gan*, a clever play on the twentieth-century Chinese classic *The True Story of Ah Q*, a popular and renowned political satire.

Of course, *Forrest Gump* wasn't the only movie that summer that got similar treatment as fodder for political interpretations and elevation onto the fields of America's culture wars. Of Disney's movie *The Lion King*, which relates the tale of a lion cub who struggles against an evil uncle, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Neil Chethik wrote: “It strongly reinforces the stereotypes of men as peer-driven competitors and women as helpless, hapless victims.” Nationally syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman found the movie to reinforce male prejudices, as did Carolyn Newberger, a professor at Harvard. A spokeswoman for Disney, the production company for *The Lion King*, however, pointedly urged such guardians of cultural propriety and political correctness to “get a life.”

THE SHANK

Critics were generally positive about *The Shawshank Redemption* when it came out in 1994, but subsequently, in the Internet age, the movie has become a perennial contender in popular voting for the best film of all time. On the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), it competes neck-and-neck with *The Godfather* as a contender for the number-one spot. Younger moviegoers and movie buffs adore it. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the movie has become known affectionately among a generation of college students simply as *The Shank*.

The writer-director of *The Shawshank Redemption*, Frank Darabont, however, recalls: “We couldn’t beg people to go see this movie when it first came out.” The appeal of *The Shawshank Redemption* among younger audiences has continued to grow. Offering an explanation of this, *Orange County Register* critic André Moouchard writes:

The episodic nature of the movie is critical. Films like *Shawshank Redemption* . . . can deliver their punchy message every few minutes, not unlike network television shows. Movies that tread more complex themes, or depend on more visual panache—movies that in essence play like movies—don’t do as well in heavy-rotation style cable. For instance, *The English Patient*, a slow but visually arresting film, has been a spotty performer on cable.

Taking a slightly different read on it, Jason Gay, writing in *Gentlemen Quarterly*, caustically remarks:

Jackasses don’t even call it *The Shawshank Redemption*. It’s simply *Shawshank*, as in “Dude, *Shawshank*, best movie ever made.” Why do they love it? Simple. *The Shawshank* is the most shameless male-bonding movie ever. . . . *Shawshank* is like the Jackass *Steel Magnolias*. There’s a reason they run it 785 times a week on cable.

Darabont initiated the project as an adaptation from a Stephen King short story entitled “Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption.” The film’s producer was Niki Marvin, and Tim Robbins signed on in 1993 for the lead role. Shooting began in the summer of 1993 at an abandoned prison in Mansfield, Ohio. The studio, Castle Rock, wanted “Rita Hayworth” dropped from the title because it thought that promoting the film was already going to be tricky, and it didn’t want to risk further confusion for potential viewers. The film was a Columbia release.

Under director of photography Roger Deakins, the film is shot in warm blues and grays, which, according to film critic Sheila Whitaker, “avoids all the clichés of prison and male bonding.” Indeed, Deakins won the American Society of Cinematographers award for achievement that year for his work on it.

Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins), a banker, is sent to Shawshank Prison for the murder of his wife and her lover. There he meets Red (Morgan Freeman), who is also incarcerated for murder. James Whitmore plays another veteran con, the prison librarian. Andy does taxes and runs scams for the fanatically religious warden (Bob Gunton) to earn perks, but he becomes so valuable that the warden can’t afford to have Andy paroled.

The *Los Angeles Times* film critic, Kenneth Turan, judged the screenplay to be overly sentimental: “Solid portrayals, but a dubious treatment.” *Variety*’s criticism, written by Leonard Klady, concluded:

There’s a painstaking exactness that is both laudable and exhausting. The nineteen years that the film’s protagonist spends behind prison walls is a term shared by the audience. . . . Definitely a film requiring careful nurturing, *Shawshank* will need critical kudos and year-end honors to maintain slow but consistent box office. . . . A testament to the human spirit, the film is a rough diamond. Its languors are small quibbles in an otherwise estimable and haunting entertainment.

Still, overall, its length drew flak. Jon Silberg’s review in *Boxoffice* concluded that this adaptation of the King story had “attributes,” but that they didn’t “justify its excessive length.” Likewise, critic Leslie Camhi panned it in the *Village Voice*, and writing in *New York*, David Denby referred to the movie as “142 minutes of hard labor . . . a gray, gray movie . . . the worst movie title since *The Hudsucker Proxy*.”

Nonetheless, the president of Castle Rock, Martin Shafer, who called his company “script-driven,” paid Darabont, a first-time director, \$750,000 plus a percentage of the net profits and gave him a \$25 million budget for the production. Darabont was the son of Hungarian refugees who fled that country after the anti-Communist uprisings of 1956. He was born at a refugee camp in France in 1959 and then moved with his parents to Los Angeles, but he never attended film school. In that sense, his professional biography is like many of the filmmakers of Classic Hollywood. After completing high school at Hollywood High, he worked around movie sets, getting his first steady work as a production assistant on low-budget horror films. Subsequently, he began writing scripts and negotiating his way through the Hollywood business toward his professional goal. Darabont also won the Humanitas Prize (founded

in 1974 to reward writers for communicating human values in their scripts) for his screenplay's "ringing affirmation of the centrality of hope in human life." Darabont gave the prize money to the AIDS project of Los Angeles in memory of his agent, Allen Greene, who had died of AIDS in 1989.

PULP FICTION

Variety's review enthusiastically welcomed the second feature film written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, as a marvelous encore to his first, *Reservoir Dogs*.

Quentin Tarantino makes some of the same moves here but on a much larger canvas, ingeniously constructing a series of episodes so that they ultimately knit together, and embedding the always surprising action in a context set by delicious dialogue and several superb performances.

By now, Tarantino also had two previous screenplays to his credit: *Natural Born Killers* (directed by Oliver Stone) and *True Romance* (directed by Tony Scott).

Pulp Fiction was distributed by Miramax, a rising independent company founded by brothers Bob and Harvey Weinstein, who had scratched their way to Hollywood from a launching pad of promoting rock bands in Buffalo, New York. And find their way they did. By 1994, Miramax was regarded as a new kind of Hollywood phenomenon, and its place in the Hollywood firmament was clear. And, if the Weinsteins were becoming the new equivalent of Hollywood moguls, director Tarantino was equally well on his way to the status of Hollywood legend. In typical New Hollywood fashion, the list of major Hollywood names linked to the production package that had been put together to finance *Pulp Fiction*—Lawrence Bender, Danny DeVito, Michael Shaberg, and Stacey Sher—was hardly surprising. (Displaying the kind of playful link any true fan of *Pulp Fiction* would like, producer Bender's company name, A Band Apart, had been derived from the title of a 1964 film by Jean-Luc Godard entitled *Bande à Part* [Band of Outsiders].)

Tarantino, also, was no film school product. As one of the most insightful attempts to explain Tarantino's success, movie critic David Denby wrote in an article for *New York*:

Like the earlier movie-men, Tarantino is immersed in cinema: he even comes garlanded with a myth comparable to Scorsese's asthmatic, movie-enriched childhood. A sort of southern California swamp-mall creature, he

rises, unschooled, from a clerk's position at a video store with thousands of films in his head and grand ambitions in his heart. Having seen and digested everything, he understands the logic and secrets of movie genres. . . . Therefore, he can play, he can mix cruelty and formal inventiveness (sometimes the formal play itself is cruel), teasing, undermining, subverting, while telling a story at the same time.

To paraphrase film critic Pauline Kael, Tarantino's approach to moviemaking as a career derived from his getting drunk on movies!

There are elements in *Pulp Fiction*, however, that appear to go against the grain of movie history. The single story isn't the point, and Tarantino completely eschews psychological realism as either drama or allegory. Instead, he gives his viewers a string of screen personalities, played by John Travolta, Bruce Willis, Ving Rhames, Uma Thurman, Harvey Keitel, Samuel L. Jackson, and Christopher Walken. The tales are simple sketches: a hit man placed in uneasy and dangerous proximity to his gangster boss's wife; a second hit man who undergoes a change of heart; a boxer who is to take a dive, but doesn't.

Lionized as an artistic risk taker, for the late 1990s Tarantino was anointed the director that most budding filmmakers wanted to be, displacing Martin Scorsese. His outrageous characters reveal their deeper feelings in long takes blessed with an absolute torrent of words, which are simultaneously poetic and profane.

Pulp Fiction, consisting of a prologue and five chapters, winds up back at the prologue when two undernourished, fidgety young people, Tim Roth and Amanda Plummer, trying to think of places to rob, decide to rob the one they are in. So *Pulp Fiction* ends with Roth apparently moving in on Jules, the ostensibly reformed hit man played by Jackson who faces a new moment of truth as he fingers his revolver under the table. Reviewer Todd McCarthy applauded Tarantino's buildup of tremendous tension in a scene, only to spice it with humorous non sequiturs. Janet Maslin, writing in the *New York Times*, went further, calling it "a stunning vision of destiny, choice and spiritual possibility."

Praised as a brilliant postmodern film noir, *Pulp Fiction* won the prestigious Golden Palm at the Cannes International Film Festival, besting the favorite for the award, Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colors: Red*, which earlier had won Best Picture awards at both the Berlin and Venice film festivals.

The soundtrack for *Pulp Fiction* does not have a score in the conventional sense; rather, its music is an amalgam of blaring surfer music, down-and-dirty funk, and atmospheric folk and rock songs spanning five decades of American popular music. In fact, Tarantino remarked in one interview that he cast Thurman because she fit the image that came to him in his mind's eye as he

was listening to a song, “Girl, You’ll Be a Woman Soon,” which is heard in the movie’s soundtrack.

A marketing rush by Miramax claimed the movie’s first weekend box office take was more than \$9 million—a figure that competitors argued was grossly inflated and that drew threats of a lawsuit against the Weinsteins’ company for false marketing. The cost to Miramax of the overall promotional plan for *Pulp Fiction* matched or exceeded the actual costs of the movie’s production, which was about \$8.7 million. The scheme was made possible only by the fact that Disney had purchased Miramax for \$60 million just prior to the release of *Pulp Fiction*. In its theatrical run, the movie earned \$107 million, and then promptly sold a record three-quarters of a million units in its initial run for video rentals.

The line between independent film and studio product was already blurred considerably when Disney purchased the leading independent company, Miramax. Additionally, in the Hollywood of the mid-1990s, in terms of tie-ins, the edgy, indie feature *Pulp Fiction* and the principles of high concept appeared to merge. The *Pulp Fiction* script was turned into a book and marketed as a successful hot item.

A wide range of critics called it the best film of the year, which provoked a severe rebuke from columnist Joe Urschel in *USA Today*. Urschel argued that filmmakers and movie critics who applauded *Pulp Fiction* were taking no moral responsibility for antisocial movies, likening them to tobacco company executives playing down the relation of cigarettes to health problems. In retort, academician Roger Shattuck asked what Tarantino, Baudelaire, and Nabakov have in common. Taking *Pulp Fiction* as a less serious subject, Gilbert Adair in the London *Times* summed it up in three words: “Nasty, brutish, and stupid.” The *New York Times Sunday Magazine* headlined an edition with the title “Evil’s Back,” featuring an article on Tarantino and *Pulp Fiction*, written by Marshall Arisman.

BRAVEHEART

Alan Ladd Jr. and Bruce Davey produced 1995’s Best Picture Oscar winner, *Braveheart*, based on a screenplay written by Randall Wallace. Based on the story of thirteenth-century Scottish patriot Sir William Wallace, it was filmed entirely at locations in Scotland and in London at the Shepperton Studios. Ladd had taken the project with him from MGM when he left there as CEO in the summer of 1994. Mel Gibson, whose Icon Productions had an investment in *Braveheart* as well, originally was slated only to direct the film—even though he had not directed an action movie before—but wound up starring

in it, too. Cast as King Edward's daughter-in-law was French actress Sophie Marceau, a recent winner of the French equivalent of an Oscar, the César, but hardly a known box office draw for audiences in the United States. The village girl with whom William falls in love is played by another newcomer, Catherine McCormack.

An epic entitled *Rob Roy*, starring Liam Neeson, was being filmed at the same time. The industry trade papers took this to be an emerging strategy of Paramount's parent company, Viacom, using the "split-rights" model to hedge against production costs that might not be covered by gross rentals, whereas the parent company of Fox, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., was committed to holding exclusive rights to its productions. Indeed, the *Variety* review at the time of the movie's opening predicted that the lack of marquee appeal, beyond Gibson himself, and its thirteenth-century subject matter would likely prevent it from effectively "hacking its way through this summer's pack of aspiring blockbusters, its merits notwithstanding." By Labor Day, *Braveheart* had grossed \$60 million in domestic rentals.

David Denby, writing in *New York* magazine, called *Braveheart* dismissively "the kind of movie in which one man shows his affection for another by knocking him down." *Newsweek's* Jack Kroll, however, thought Gibson as a director had found a well-balanced blend of romantic and documentary styles and had achieved an honorable shot at a big, resolute ode to human freedom, like *Spartacus* (1960)—although, at three hours, he considered *Braveheart* way too long. Many other reviewers commonly compared it favorably alongside two strong movies from the early 1960s, *Spartacus* and *Lawrence of Arabia*, accepting the movie's length as appropriate to its epic qualities. Richard Schickel in *Time*, however, lambasted the movie's length, complained about its unhappy ending, and found King Edward (Patrick McGoohan) lacking in villainy and true evil; his conclusion, "too much, too late." *Rob Roy*, after all, was already languishing in America's movie theaters before sparse audiences.

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) predictably judged Edward's throwing his son's male lover out a castle window to be offensive: "The message of this film is that all gay men are idiot effeminate and that they're really annoying, so it's okay to get rid of them." Argued the *Village Voice*: "Anyone who reviews this film without raising the issue of gay portrayals is not fulfilling his or her responsibility as a critic." The mainstream popular press opted to generate lots of kilt stories and sidebars, but the alternative press picked up their message. Andy Lein, writing for the *Los Angeles Reader*, lambasted *Braveheart* as "Out of kilter . . . overlong . . . historically ridiculous, and homophobic."

An *Entertainment Today* article blasted the Academy for giving the Best Picture Oscar to *Braveheart* over films like *Sense and Sensibility*, *Apollo 13*,

Babe, and *Il Postino*, dismissing it as “Depraved Heart.” But the movie’s Oscar wins were solid evidence that occasionally a big-screen epic could capture the Academy’s favorable attention. Indeed, since such Best Picture Oscars were not common for epics, *Braveheart* received a good jolt of adrenaline at the box office from its Best Picture win.

TOY STORY

Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation studios collaborated on the first full-length animated film that was created entirely by artists using computer technology, and which was made over the course of four years. It could be described as a buddy picture with toys, meant to appeal to adults in its audience as well as children. Composer Randy Newman did the score and contributed three new original songs, which he performed as well.

Conceived and directed by John Lasseter, a former Disney animator who won an Academy Award in 1989 for a short entitled *Tin Toy*, the story of *Toy Story* is about Woody (voiced by Tom Hanks), a traditional pull-string cowboy, and Buzz Lightyear (Tim Allen), a spaceman action figure, and how the two learn to overcome their differences. Casting for voices in many ways is like casting for any film. Voices needed to match character traits and the situations they’ll be in, and the use of the voices of known actors from popular movies is considered to help enormously in attracting audiences to these films. *Toy Story* includes voice work for Mr. Potato Head by Don Rickles, Slinky Dog by Jim Varney, and a flirtatious Bo-Peep by Annie Potts. Woody is the young boy Andy’s favorite toy until he discovers Buzz. Buzz and Woody squabble, unexpectedly enter the big bad outside world, and must avoid the grasp of the sadistic neighbor kid, Sid (Erik von Detten).

Although excluded for consideration from all the standard Academy Award categories—including Special Effects—*Toy Story* was widely recognized as being significant and marking a turning point in cinema history. Joe Morgenstern in the *Wall Street Journal* wrote: “My only concern in sending adults to see Disney’s *Toy Story*, the first full-length animated feature created entirely by computers, is the danger of wonderment overload. . . . [It] gives grounds for reassurance about the future impact of technology on the visual arts.” The readers of the other pages of the *Wall Street Journal* saw another response to this breakthrough in moviemaking, as Disney’s stock rose significantly after a great holiday season run for *Toy Story*.

Two decades after the appearance of *Jaws*, high concept was by now riding high in Hollywood, and *Toy Story* was high concept with a vengeance. Burger King ran out of the action figures made for the movie tie-in. As

Morgenstern's analysis asserted, kids like it because it shows toys coming alive after hours; adults think it's a moving meditation on identity, packed with clever-cool jokes.

The entire culture of the toy world, including Mr. Potato Head and Slinky Dog, come alive. Is it the future of toons? A typically Disneyesque storyline, *Toy Story* joins the ranks of classics like *Snow White* and *Fantasia*. *Toy Story* explores social hierarchies, camaraderies, romantic impulses, fears, and insecurities.

David Ansen wrote in *Newsweek*:

The computer-made *Toy Story* pops off the screen with shiny wit, rich characters, and a very human heart . . . [and a] vibrancy that is totally unlike traditional hand-painted animation. . . . *Toy Story* is a marvel because it harnesses its flashy technology to a very human wit, rich characters, and a perception no computer could think of, that toys, indeed, are us.

Most likely the best summation of *Toy Story* was provided in the industry's leading trade journal, *Variety*, by the critic Michael Rechtschaffen:

Walt Disney continues its long domination of cutting-edge animation with the computer-generated *Toy Story*. The very good news is that, in addition to stylistic innovation, the film sports a provocative and appealing story that's every bit the equal of this technical achievement.

While excluding *Toy Story* from Oscar consideration in 1995, the Academy nonetheless bestowed a special Oscar, outside all the normal categories of the award, on the movie's creator, Lasseter.

ANOTHER MIRAMAX WINNER

The English Patient, the Academy's Best Picture for 1996, was written and directed by Anthony Minghella and produced by Saul Zaentz. Zaentz, who lived and worked in Berkeley, California, although considered an outsider to Hollywood, had two previous Best Picture Oscars with *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Amadeus*. According to an article in *Newsweek*, Twentieth Century-Fox was behind the movie's financing to begin with, but pulled out when Zaentz and Minghella refused to cast big enough stars, such as Demi Moore, who reportedly was eager to be in it and whom the studio wanted. So, in the emerging Hollywood style of differentiating between big-budget

high-concept movies and smaller-budget films that could be marketed as having an “independent edge” to them, Twentieth Century-Fox begged off, only to find *The English Patient* soon reborn as a project for a Fox subsidiary called Searchlight. Fox Searchlight was so named because this subsidiary studio ostensibly was continually looking for new directors, new talent, and more independent and edgy projects that were waiting to be discovered. Fox Searchlight immediately partnered with J&M, a British firm, to coproduce the movie, which, in turn, opened the way for Miramax, now considered the juggernaut of independent movies in the United States (even though it had been acquired by Disney) to invest \$27 million in the project and to become the movie’s distributor. It was this pivotal film that opened the way for motion picture industry observers to acknowledge Miramax as a major player in Hollywood right alongside the major studios.

Minghella brought with him the kind of pedigree that devotees of independent film admire. After a brief career as a university lecturer, he had become a playwright. He directed his first feature film, *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, in 1991 and followed two years later with *Mr. Wonderful*, a movie produced in the United States starring Matt Dillon and Mary-Louise Parker. A preproduction article in *Variety* assessed the prospects of *The English Patient*:

This detailed, time-jumping study of the intertwined fates of several of battle’s victims carries the prestige to be a strong attraction for upscale audiences, and Miramax can be counted upon to push it as far into the mainstream as possible.

Far from echoing the wild praise for the adaptation frequently found in the reviews at the time, the leading trade magazine focused on how the screenplay actually functioned, “nudged in the direction of fairly conventional adulterous melodrama, even as the characters’ British reserve keeps the central romance somewhat emotionally restrained.”

The project emerged as perfect crossover material and constituted the first true jewel in the Miramax Company’s crown. Janet Maslin, writing in the *New York Times*, greeted the film as “a stunning feat of literary adaptation as well as a purely cinematic triumph.” Michael Ondaatje’s 1992 novel was a dreamlike, nonlinear tale to which the film’s writer-director remained faithful. The script indulged the exotic material shaped from the mind of a terribly disfigured central character—a British airman, horribly burned and now lying in a hospital bed in Tuscany in the waning months of World War II.

Praise was lavish for the great polish of John Seale’s cinematography, Stuart Craig’s production design, Gabriel Yared’s music score, and Walter Murch’s editing. Any reasonably successful adaptation to film of this popular but labyrinthine novel appears destined to have been widely admired, especially by those who had any acquaintance with *The English Patient* as a book.

Much, of course, comes apart before being finally reconciled and resolved in this convoluted work. As the movie's central figure and narrator, Laszlo de Almásy (Ralph Fiennes), delves deeper into the two central, parallel narratives of the story, it turns out that he isn't English at all, but rather a Hungarian count whose body is broken and badly burned. The cast is complex as well: Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe) and an exotic Sikh named Kip (Naveen Andrews), a mine expert who is constantly courting danger, each bring another facet of life into the villa where Almásy is recuperating, and, in so doing, they are constantly pushing the patient into new memories and new pain.

At the end of the day, *The English Patient* may be regarded as quite an old-fashioned movie—extravagantly romantic, full of spies, intrigues, battles, and a sandstorm—but it also is a contemporary epic of the 1990s that is elliptical in its structure, so that the audience is forced to piece together its fragments in order to discover its logic as a modernist melodrama.

Time's Richard Corliss swooned over this movie that he found to be “beyond gorgeous.” As he explained:

All year we've seen mirages of good films. Here is the real thing. To transport picture-goers to a unique place in the glow of the earth, in the darkness of the heart—this, you realize with a gasp of joy, is what movies can do.

Indeed, this kind of praise was typical of the broad, positive critical response to the film, which found few negative reviews. Indeed, the edition of the novel when re-released as a tie-in to the movie, quickly reached number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list by early December 1996. The movie itself claimed a total of nine Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

FROM WORLD WAR II TUSCANY TO FROZEN MINNESOTA, YOU BETCHA

For many industry insiders, the odds-on favorite to capture the Best Picture Oscar for 1996 was *Fargo*; instead, it won only two categories: Best Actress (Frances McDormand) and Best Writing (Ethan and Joel Coen). Financed by Polygram, in association with Working Title Films, and released by Gramercy, *Fargo* was produced by Ethan Coen and was directed by his brother Joel. The movie's \$10 million budget was considerably less than the budget for the Coen brothers' most recent previous feature for Warner Bros., *The Hudsucker Proxy*.

Frances McDormand stars in this offbeat script as Marge Gunderson, a local police chief in a sleepy town in northern Minnesota, who is pregnant.

Marge's husband has a passion for drawing duck designs and hopes to have one of them purchased by the Postal Service. When it is only selected for placement on a three-cent stamp, Marge consoles him. Theirs is a warm, unpretentious marriage, and their love for each other is sincere.

By contrast, Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy), a car salesman, lives a sterile life symbolized primarily by his mistreatment at the hands of his father-in-law (Harve Presnell), who owns the automobile dealership where Jerry works. Jerry plots to kidnap his own wife (Kristin Rudrüd) for ransom. Lundegaard is, as critic Gene Siskel phrased it, "a classic everyman in the tradition of Willy Loman [in Arthur Miller's classic play *The Death of a Salesman*]." Struggling financially, unable to impress his father-in-law and his banker friend into supporting a development scheme, he hires Carl Showalter (Steve Buscemi) and Gaear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare) to kidnap his wife with the intent of getting his father-in-law to pay her ransom, which Lundegaard will pocket. Buscemi and Stormare combine as a pair of especially unappealing and inept bad guys with a dose of wry comedy underlying their characters through most of the film. Holed up in a hideaway cabin, Grimsrud winds up killing their captive, and then Marge makes her arrests. Industry observers agreed that their performances in *Fargo* moved McDormand, Macy, and Buscemi up to the next level as screen talent in Hollywood's eyes.

Fargo is a dark comedy based on a quirky script, frequently playing cleverly with conventions from different movie genres and adding in scenes that do not advance the movie's story so much as they convey a sense of the fictionalized upper Midwest that gives the movie its title. For example, there is a brief scene of Marge meeting a high school classmate who had a crush on her for lunch at a restaurant. He is a buttoned-down Asian-American engineer (Steve Park), and their scene comes to absolutely nothing, violating one of the fundamental principles of standard narrative screenwriting. In a similar manner, Marge's pregnancy is visible throughout the film, but is entirely incidental to the plot. It is part of her character, but serves no storytelling purpose. The movie begins, moreover, with a false claim that the movie is based on the case of a true murder.

The Coens, who grew up in the suburbs of Minneapolis, poke fun at their characters' favorite foods, local idiom, and seemingly witless conversations, but in Marge they create a wondrous human being and a great heroine. With Swedish actor Stormare playing the kidnapper and killer Grimsrud, the exact opposite is created: a sullen, and inarticulate, lout, with neither sense nor scruples.

The Coen brothers continued their in-joke humor and toying with movie conventions right into the film's end credits, attributing to the fictitious Roderick Jaynes the role of editor, as they had on two earlier movies, *Blood*

Simple (1984) and *Barton Fink* (1991), when the Coen brothers themselves were the actual editors. Indeed, Roderick Jaynes gained an Academy Award nomination for his “presumed” role on the movie. As the Coen brothers were quoted as saying: “Multiple murders aside, it is our warmest movie.”

As a deft independent feature, unusually quirky and decidedly edgy, *Fargo* had a lasting resonance with audiences and critics alike. It was very much a movie self-consciously made for viewers in the know about movies and is full of insider jokes and allusions to cinema history. Much in the same way, the Coen brothers themselves are insiders to modern independent film and are at the center of its culture. Ethan Coen is married to film editor Tricia Cook, and Joel, an M.F.A. graduate from the Film School at New York University, is married to the movie’s lead actress, Frances McDormand. *Fargo* initially grossed just over \$5 million in its domestic release.

As *Fargo*’s director of photography, Roger Deakins was applauded for taking on the challenge of making snowbanks and snow-covered parking lots visually exciting. The photography is haunting, and the occasional whiteouts are used to great effect. Deakins won a Best Cinematography Oscar for his efforts. In this movie, Joel Coen took a more observational approach with the camera than in any of the Coen brothers’ previous movies, underscored by the fact that they think of all their movies, including *Fargo*, in terms of fairly long and sustained scenes.

Gramercy Pictures president Russell Schwartz claimed that “with *Fargo*, the marketing job was to remind the Academy of the fun time they had watching the film, giving them an opportunity to see it a second time.” In Hollywood, much was made of the freshness of setting the movie so solidly in the Minnesota–North Dakota nexus and using the local dialect portrayed in the movie, for example, “You betcha” and “Darn tootin’.” Still, there’s a lightness of tone in the movie that, perhaps, helped keep even Minnesotans and North Dakotans from being more upset with the stereotypes.

As Janet Maslin wrote in her *New York Times* review of the movie:

Testing limits, breaking boundaries, going too far: the Coen brothers’ eclectic films, ranging from the great (*Barton Fink*) to the inscrutable (*The Hudsucker Proxy*), always manage to make that their guiding principle and secret weapon. They are road movies headed toward the tricky unknown, and *Fargo* finds the Coens roaming exuberantly across their favorite terrain.

And that terrain is a buoyant mixture of expert style and goofball content. David Denby, writing in *New York*, observed:

Fargo is not completely an exercise in attitude. The movie is more than mere hipster sarcasm. The Coen brothers have created an unusual kind of

suspense: When is blandness really fortitude? When is it faith and courage? . . . The Coens are not realists; their style is a modern equivalent of the dramatic mode known as “the comedy of humors” in which characters are obsessed with a single desire or dominated by a single trait.

The farce in *Fargo* keeps slipping into horror. A state trooper is shot and killed, as well as two witnesses who happen to be passing by. Here violence just happens, with shocking bluntness and slovenliness. As a British reviewer, Tom Shone, wrote in the London *Sunday Times*: “The Coens have an abiding, if mischievous, respect for the soft fug of American good cheer, and a featherlight touch for the tiniest of key changes necessary to transpose normality’s soft lullaby into something more threatening.”

The review in the trade journal *Screen International* offered:

Maybe the return to familiar turf has enabled the Coens to transcend the ironic detachment and arch cleverness that has marked their recent work—and banished them to the art house fringe. Despite the freezing temperatures, *Fargo* is the Coens’ warmest and most satisfying film to date. . . . The Coens have toned down their kinetic camera trademarks and hyperactive tracking shots in favor of a determinedly low-key approach. . . . [McDormand] lends a human dimension so far missing from the Coens’ oeuvre, enabling the brothers to connect with—rather than simply impress—the specialized film-going public. They go back to their stylistic roots of broader humor as well as to their own geographic roots growing up outside of Minneapolis to create a small-scale character-driven gem.

The aged Stanley Kauffmann, writing in the *New Republic*, who called *Fargo* tolerable, still found cause to complain about its “wobbling in tone. Carter Burwell’s score seems like it was written for a different picture.”

TITANIC . . . IN STORY, IN PRODUCTION BUDGET, AND IN PROFITS

Although there had been numerous books on the sinking of the *Titanic*, and several feature films and documentaries made about the catastrophe, James Cameron’s interest in the subject was inspired more by the 1985 discovery of the sunken ship than by any previous film or book about it. A new project about the *Titanic* was developed by Cameron’s company, Lightstorm, to be written and directed by him. Paramount Pictures agreed to partially back the project, but capped its investment at \$65 million. About 60 percent of the financing for the film came from Twentieth Century-Fox, so that this massive

undertaking was a truly unusual case of two of Hollywood's oldest and best-known studios partnering for the same production.

A 1997 release, *Titanic* won the Academy Award for Best Picture for that year. The movie was full of classic themes: life and death, class and wealth, humanity vs. nature. Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio starred, but at that point neither of them was regarded as an A-list talent who could assure the producers much in the way of audience.

Much of *Titanic* was filmed at Fox Studios Baja, at Rosarito Beach, Baja California, in Mexico just south of San Diego. Although newly built for the production of *Titanic*, these facilities, of course, had the capacity to be leased in the future to generate continuing revenue for Fox. Nevertheless, the production risk was still high. Cameron, a forty-three-year-old Canadian, had the reputation in Hollywood as a brilliant but difficult filmmaker. CBS television had a miniseries in the works for November, also called *Titanic*, which starred Peter Gallagher, George C. Scott, and Eva Marie Saint. In addition, a musical entitled *Titanic* opened on Broadway while the film was still in production.

By April 19, 1997, the *Los Angeles Times* reported "Epic-Size Troubles on *Titanic*," noting that the budget was about to surpass Universal Pictures' financial debacle *Waterworld* and that *Titanic* was behind schedule to open for the coveted Fourth of July weekend premier. The Screen Actors Guild even sent investigators to query Cameron's reputed "perfectionism" for cost overruns approaching \$75 million. A staggering 1.6 million feet of film were shot, with 1.3 million feet printed.

An article in *Time* claimed to expose tactics on the film's set as Cameron rushed to meet the planned release date, overworking and underfeeding of the crew. The article did suggest that such conditions were not unusual, however, as these same steps that rushed work and exploited the craft personnel frequently had been taken on others of Hollywood's big megabudget "event" movies in order to try to complete them on time. Industry observers gave much credit to the project's "other" producer, Jon Landau, for steering *Titanic* through roiling and troubled waters to its conclusion.

Once the film was completed, audiences were responding positively, and the enormous box office take was becoming clear, the establishment of the motion picture industry enthusiastically endorsed its success: *Titanic* won a record-tying (*Gone with the Wind*, 1939) eleven Academy Awards on Oscar night, including Best Picture. The film's earnings eventually topped \$1 billion just for the movie's theatrical release.

Titanic isn't a disaster movie, according to Cameron. "It's a love story, but don't worry, the ship does sink." From the very first sneak preview of the completed film in Anaheim Hills, California, at the end of August, audience response cards praised not only *Titanic*'s technical aspects but also the tender

romance of the characters played by Winslet and DiCaprio. It was the most ambitious Hollywood movie of the decade, made by a Canadian who as a nine-year-old boy was inspired toward directing, according to his mother's recollection, by seeing *Godzilla* at a matinee in his hometown of Niagara Falls, Ontario. Cameron worked for Hollywood's "B-movie" legend, producer Roger Corman, and then went on to direct *Terminator*, *Aliens*, *The Abyss*, *True Lies*, and *Terminator 2* before *Titanic*.

James Horner scored the music, which was performed by a 100-piece orchestra. Eager publicists called its running time "2 hours and 75 minutes." Charles Champlin regarded it as a cultural artifact of the dimension of a *Jaws* or *Schindler's List*. Said former film and television producer Dominick Dunne: "This is a film that surprised them all in Hollywood. They were going to throw Cameron to the dogs. Now he will sweep the Academy Awards." Mike Medavoy, at the time the chairman of Phoenix Pictures, attributed a portion of its staggering earnings to the love story that appealed to younger girls, especially under the age of seventeen, who were going back repeatedly to see it. So, in sum, it was a perfect "chick flick" and period piece rolled into one.

DiCaprio enjoyed an especially popular publicity tour of Japan, where Michika Ishikawa, critic for the weekly TV *Cinema Report*, observed: "In Japan, if the young girls don't catch fire, you can't have a hit." The film's world premiere was at the Tokyo International Film Festival during the first week in November.

According to veteran producer Al Ruddy, by casting DiCaprio and Winslet, this became a movie for eight- to eighty-year-olds, almost a kind of throwback to Classic Hollywood, and a movie that would not have succeeded nearly as well had it cast better-known screen stars. Anthony Lane said in the *New Yorker* that by some miracle, in spite of its three-hour-and-fifteen-minute length, it turned out to be the least boring movie of the year.

Cameron at one point noted that he interpreted the sinking of the *Titanic* as a warning that the old, elitist social structure was not going to last much longer. By contrast, University of Southern California history professor Steven J. Ross, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, argued:

Yet, beneath the liberal veneer of *Titanic* and cross-class fantasies of the 1920s are highly conservative attitudes toward class relations. Cameron concedes a moral superiority to his blue collar protagonist, but in the end it is the rich who triumph, while the poor return to their "proper" place.

However, China's Communist president Jiang Zemin declared himself the number-one fan of the film, which became enormously popular in China. As reported by *Time*, Jiang said: "This movie gives vivid descriptions of the

relationship between money and love, rich and poor, and the performance of all kinds of people in danger.”

Such an enormously expensive movie, which gravitated toward becoming its own franchise, of course drew criticism. J. Hoberman, writing in the *Village Voice*, claimed that the movie hit its own fatal iceberg almost immediately. “To call the ‘framing’ story tacky does an injustice to its torpor. . . . Two thousand passengers, and not one recognizable human being.” The *Commonweal* review claimed that *Titanic* was broken in half:

The first ninety minutes is Harlequin romance drivel starring Leonardo DiCaprio as a bohemian artist and Kate Winslet as a society debutante who cross class barriers to fall in love. . . . *Titanic* will win the best-picture Oscar this year, but it is strictly in its second-half that James Cameron becomes the one-and-only poet of disaster movies.

The *Los Angeles Times*, in an unusual gesture, even opened its pages to a column written by Cameron himself excoriating Kenneth Turan, the *Times*’s regular movie reviewer and a severe critic of *Titanic*. Cameron wrote: “Year after year, he [Turan] has become further and further removed from the simple, joyful experience of movie-watching.”

According to *L.A. Confidential* director Curtis Hanson: “The worst thing that has happened to the movie business is the public’s obsession with the box office—turning every weekend into a horse race.” Two studios and one obsessed writer-director appear to risk everything. Alas, before the end of the year, reported *Variety*, *Titanic* had already sailed past \$100 million in domestic ticket sales in just twelve days, and it gathered another \$60 million in the next five days. From Britain to Beijing, the film conquered audiences all around the world, where earning eventually surpassed the domestic gross revenues. It became the biggest-grossing film of all time in just ten weeks and passed a billion dollars in rental receipts by early March 1998. In addition, Sony Music had sold 9.2 million copies of the film’s soundtrack, featuring the music of Horner, and merchandisers and marketers were rushing to come up with product tie-ins.

The general appeal of the movie came from its delivery of even greater grandeur than the audience anticipated, its engaging story, and the special effects and the sound design. The popular print and TV movie critic Roger Ebert observed in a magazine called *Outlook* that this “high-tech melodrama” had created neither just success nor just popularity, but genuine and heartfelt enthusiasm. Many viewers returned to see the film a second or third time on the big screen in a theater, perhaps anticipating that much of the film’s effect would be lost on the small screen of a television set when watching it as a rental or a telecast.

Moreover, the video release of *Titanic* in the summer of 1998 meant all kinds of additional earnings and set new records for revenues for a movie as generated by ancillary sales. Within just one week, *Titanic* became the largest-selling video of a movie in the United States ever. The film also quickly surpassed video sales records in many markets overseas. Furthermore, *Titanic* had a stupendous 18.3 Nielsen rating when it was telecast for the first time on the HBO cable network in April 1999.

Motion pictures had passed their hundredth anniversary in 1895, and as the calendar approached the end of the twentieth century, Hollywood high-concept moviemaking was carrying on in grand style, with *Titanic* marking a new benchmark in its accomplishments.

SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE

The 1998 Best Picture was *Shakespeare in Love*, with Joseph Fiennes as William Shakespeare; Judi Dench as Queen Elizabeth I; Gwyneth Paltrow as Viola De Lesseps, young Shakespeare's love interest; Colin Firth as her obnoxious fiancé; and Ben Affleck as actor Ned Alleyn. A Bedford Falls production, with Miramax backing and Universal's participation, *Shakespeare in Love* was based on a screenplay by Tom Stoppard and directed by John Madden. Credit for writing the screenplay was shared by Stoppard and Marc Norman. "Shakespeare is often portrayed as a boring, iconic, almost mythical person," observed Fiennes, "but I embraced Tom's script because it gives him a warmer, more generous human touch." It was originally in development to be directed by Ed Zwick (*Glory*) and to star Julia Roberts, but that project proposal disintegrated quickly even by Hollywood standards. Reminiscent of two other Miramax productions with modest budgets that were selected as Oscar-winning best pictures in the 1990s, *Fargo* and *The English Patient*, *Shakespeare in Love* was a \$25 million production.

The plot of *Shakespeare in Love* is labyrinthine, but the spine of the story can be reduced to Shakespeare having writer's block, needing to find a muse, and discovering her when he falls for the lovely Viola. Viola becomes Shakespeare's inspiration. His creative passion thus liberated, the ineptly titled *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate's Daughter* is transformed into *Romeo and Juliet*. Set against the backdrop of London in 1593, Shakespeare is part of a theater community where he is but one of several successful, and competing, playwrights. Since only men may audition, Viola—who admires Shakespeare—disguises herself as "Thomas Kent." In this context, the editor, David Gamble, was challenged and worked deftly, as seen especially in sections of the film which

cross-cut between the rehearsals of the play-within-the-film and the “real” lovers’ romantic liaisons.

Stanley Kauffmann wrote in the *New Republic*: “Call it ‘gratifying fiction.’ The film is not quite light enough to qualify as a ‘romantic comedy.’” After all, Will is married, and Viola is already promised to the priggish Lord Wessex. Nonetheless, any of the darker moments of this movie are displaced and duly forgotten by a sparkling climax that celebrates the glories of the theater. *Time*’s Richard Corliss praised *Shakespeare in Love*:

The true, rare glamour of the piece is its revival of two precious movie tropes: the flourishing of words for their majesty and fun, and—in the love play between Fiennes and his enchantress—the kindling of a playfully adult eroticism.

The *Los Angeles Times*’s review by Kenneth Turan exclaimed: “With a whimsical premise, a clever script, and a flawless cast, *Shakespeare in Love* is a glorious, romantic romp.”

Madden directed with a style that was much more rollicking and passionate than in his previous success, *Mrs. Brown*. The only sour note on the movie and eventual Best Picture Oscar winner appeared in the *Village Voice* review by Amy Taubin, entitled “A Very Bard Thing”:

Everything’s awirl in *Shakespeare in Love*: the camera, Gwyneth Paltrow’s dresses and tresses; Joseph Fiennes’s eyes, which, when they’re not darting this way and that, seem to gyrate in their sockets, like spinning tops. . . . Paltrow, who once upon a time seemed such a promising actor, plays every scene as if she’s sprinkling fairy dust upon her own head. . . . Fiennes is not much better here. . . . It soon becomes evident just how inane a film this is.

At the Oscars, *Shakespeare in Love* took seven Academy Awards, and its Best Picture triumph registered as a genuine surprise for a great many industry insiders who had thought that Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* was a shoo-in for that distinction. Tina Earnshaw, who had won an Oscar for her makeup on *Titanic* the year before, was shut out from even a nomination for her work on *Shakespeare in Love*, an exclusion that both she and Miramax felt obliged to protest. Miramax advertised in the trades heavily for the picture, and its Oscar “bump” was significant. The *Los Angeles Times* reported the “independent” studio’s promotional expenditures as a “\$15 million onslaught.” Because of all the money that Miramax was spending as a lead-up to the Oscar voting, there was speculation within the motion picture industry that the campaign would be resented by many professionals and would backfire.

THE TERROR OF BEING THERE

Saving Private Ryan, a 1998 production for DreamWorks with Paramount, was directed by Steven Spielberg and written by Robert Rodat, with Janusz Kaminski as director of photography. Tom Sanders was the film's production designer. The film was orchestrated with music composed by John Williams. The story idea and screenplay was based in large part on oral histories of D-day collected by historian Stephen Ambrose.

Framed by the visit of an elderly veteran to a military cemetery in Normandy, France, where the Allied forces lost at the D-day invasion were buried, which both opens and closes the film, *Saving Private Ryan* begins with a thirty-minute scene of G.I.s landing on the beaches, being shot to ribbons, and dying in screaming agony. Todd McCarthy in *Daily Variety* called it

a searingly visceral combat film. . . . Grim, sometimes moving, and occasionally windy, [*Saving Private Ryan*] is unusually demanding and serious for a mainstream midsummer attraction, as well a questionable bet for some women and more conventional thrill-seeking teens. . . . *Saving Private Ryan* is akin to a great silent film. The speechifying here can't compare in power to the brute force of warfare, which is sufficient commentary by itself.

Kenneth Turan, critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote: "*Saving Private Ryan* is a raw and powerful work from Steven Spielberg that overcomes a conventional script." By contrast, Amy Taubin in the *Village Voice* offered:

Other films, starting with *Birth of a Nation*, have tackled this war-is-bigger-than-the-fate-of-any-one-soldier theme, but no one has taken it to these heights. But, in fact, Spielberg isn't being quite as radical as the above description implies. Because after all, he does have Tom Hanks.

As Taubin further says with regard to the use of an elderly veteran visiting the cemetery at Normandy to frame the narration: "Spielberg is being either lazy or incredibly manipulative in these scenes, vis-à-vis storytelling and point of view. It may not be immoral filmmaking, but it certainly creeped me out."

The story's premise comes from a U.S. policy directive in World War II which provided that the military avoid exposing siblings to combat in such a way that a family might lose all its male heirs. Hence, when three of Private Ryan's brothers have been killed, that policy dictates that he must be located and removed from harm's way. The mission to find Private Ryan in the midst of battle and to escort him out of it to safe haven becomes paramount. For Spielberg, the quest for authenticity was strong, so he even went so far as to have his front-line players (including the lead star, Tom Hanks, and Matt Damon, who played Ryan) endure ten days of basic military training, includ-

ing sleeping out at night, eating K-rations, sliding under barbed wire with live ammunition fanning their backsides, and struggling underwater with full backpacks and bayonets.

David Ansen's critical assessment of *Saving Private Ryan* in *Newsweek* was as follows:

The squad is a familiar melting pot assortment of WW2 grunts—the cynical New Yorker (Edward Burns), the Jew (Adam Goldberg), the Italian (Vin Diesel); the bible-quoting sniper from Tennessee (Barry Pepper), the medic (Giovanni Ribisi). Part of the movie's power comes from Hanks's quietly mysterious performance as the decent, but reticent squad leader who just wants to get the job done and come home alive.

But Joe Morgenstern, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, called *Saving Private Ryan* “a clumsy, flag-waving coda.” Stanley Kauffmann, in the *New Republic*, appeared to agree: “Steven Spielberg's new film begins as a monumental epic; then it diminishes; and, by its finish, is baffling.”

At the time, Spielberg had the distinction of being the director, producer, or executive producer of seven of Hollywood's twenty top-grossing movies ever. The negative critiques of *Saving Private Ryan* had no apparent effect on the movie's box office performance. Its video release in the summer of 1999 opened with a record sales volume, and the film's commercial success was international. In December 1998, *Variety* reported good earnings for *Saving Private Ryan* in China, which at the time was an especially tough market for Hollywood to crack. The film also did well in Germany, earning \$4.4 million during its release on 649 screens. *Saving Private Ryan* played to mixed reviews, but captured solid box office support.

DYSTOPIC SUBURBIA

For 1999, DreamWorks Pictures (the company of Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen) presented a Jinks/Cohn Company production of *American Beauty*, directed by Sam Mendes, a British stage director making his first feature film, and written by Alan Ball. The stars are Kevin Spacey and Annette Bening; their daughter, played by Thora Birch; and her friend Angela, played by Mena Suvari. Wes Bentley is Ricky Fitts, and his father, Colonel Fitts, is played by Chris Cooper. The director of photography was veteran Conrad Hall. This was the first entry of DreamWorks into the low-budget arena, by picking up television writer (*Cybill*) Ball's script and beating out the other studios competing for the project—Fox Searchlight, October, Goldwyn, and Lakeshore. It's a dark comedy set in the suburbs, following the tragic results

of a man's obsession with his teenage daughter's best friend. Glenn Williamson served as the overseer for DreamWorks on the project.

During its world premiere engagement at the Toronto International Film Festival, there was a great deal of "buzz" about *American Beauty* among industry insiders. Mendes, although unknown as a screen director, generated high hopes because of his handling of the Broadway stage revival of the musical *Chicago* and his success directing Nicole Kidman in *The Blue Room*. In spite of being scripted by a television comedy writer, directed by a Broadway stage veteran, and produced by a duo who had never worked together before, the Hollywood industry was remarkably open to this decidedly "un-Hollywood" film, according to Claudia Eller in her column "The Biz" in the *Los Angeles Times*. As un-Hollywood as it might have been, *American Beauty* explored a popular and familiar theme for sophisticated audiences. David Ansen, writing in *Newsweek*, praised it as "a darkly comic peek at the underbelly of suburbia."

As Lester Burnham, Spacey plays the run-down shell of a husband and father consumed by suburban ennui and restlessness. Hall's lighting and images are spare but bold views of the malaise afflicting affluent suburbia. A mesmerizing score by Thomas Newman complements the film well. The movie is aimed simultaneously at both older and younger audiences, hoping to attract the interest of both forty-year-olds and twenty-year-olds. The older audience was targeted with a television spot promoting Spacey, Benning, and the screen debut of a legitimate stage director. Another television ad, aimed at the MTV and WB audience, struck an "aren't your parents weird?" tone.

Beginning with the Toronto Film Festival, *American Beauty's* release came front-loaded with advance raves and Oscar talk. Using what is called a "platform" pattern of release, first into a few select locations, it opened in just sixteen theaters on its first weekend, an exhibition strategy developed in Hollywood through the decade of the nineties for use with features considered to have special appeal to what the industry considered more sophisticated and upscale audiences. By the time *American Beauty* was put into a more general release to more than seven hundred theaters nationwide, the *Hollywood Reporter* noted that it was already one of the most favorably reviewed movies of the year.

The *Wall Street Journal* took a read on reported overseas enthusiasm for the movie amid growing Oscar buzz on its behalf. The report noted that the French newspaper *Le Monde* regretted that Lester dies in the end, as if it were his punishment for becoming too free and, hence, symbolizes the triumph of a kind of Puritanism.

Since, according to the producers, everyone working on the film had cut their fee, its production cost was only about \$15 million. As of April 2000, *American Beauty's* worldwide gross was reported at \$275 million.

ORDINARY PEOPLE MEETS THE EXORCIST

A review in *Screen International* referred to the film *The Sixth Sense*, written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan, as a cross between *Ordinary People* (1982), which was about a suburban family, and *The Exorcist* (1973, directed by William Friedkin), in which a twelve-year-old girl is possessed by the devil. *Screen International* observed that *The Blair Witch Project* was also released that same summer, and, like it, *The Sixth Sense* managed to fool and satisfy audiences at the same time to become the tenth highest-grossing film in Hollywood history up to that time.

Produced by Frank Marshall, Kathleen Kennedy, and Barry Mendel, released by Hollywood Pictures/Spyglass Entertainment, and funded by Buena Vista (a subsidiary of Disney created to give the company access to projects outside Disney's traditional niche), *The Sixth Sense* was a psychological thriller. The cast included Bruce Willis, Haley Joel Osment, Toni Collette, Olivia Williams, Donnie Wahlberg, and Trevor Morgan. The production team included director of photography Tak Fujimoto and editor Andrew Mondshein, with music by James Newton Howard and production design by Larry Fulton. The film was modestly budgeted at \$40 million. Nominated for six Oscars (although it didn't win any), it grossed more than \$290 million just in theater rentals for North America.

Reviewers were mixed in their assessments of the film. For example, Stephen Holden's *New York Times* review complained:

Since Mr. Willis has only one basic facial expression in all his films, it isn't his icky smirk that telegraphs the doctor's extra-special sensitivity. . . . No, it's the movie's treacly soundtrack by James Newton Howard, the Hollywood maestro *du jour* for smearing on goo whenever it's time to clench back tears.

The story is about a Philadelphia psychologist named Malcolm Crowe (Willis), who encounters the eight-year-old Cole Sear (Osment), who reveals to Crowe that he is troubled by the fact that at times he can see dead people. Dr. Crowe at first dismisses this as the boy's imagination, but eventually he becomes convinced that Cole really does communicate with the dead. Cole realizes his own powers when the ghost of a young girl named Kyra appears to him and gives him a videotape that implicates the girl's own mother in the girl's death. This opens a path that eventually leads to Cole's mother (Collette) accepting him and his "gift," and for Crowe to feel redemption from the success he has had in counseling Cole.

Quoting Holden again:

For Mr. Shyamalan, *The Sixth Sense* is a slight improvement over last year's *Wide Awake*. But that isn't saying much. First, the doctor must convince the boy that what seems a curse may really be a gift from God. . . . Second, the doctor accepts his own limitations and rediscovers his relationship to his wife.

While Holden's *New York Times* critique echoed the negative comments from *Screen International*, Todd McCarthy in *Variety* found a redeeming feature to the movie:

A terrific last-minute story saves *Sixth Sense*, a mostly ponderous tale of paranormal communication across the River Styx. Moody, low-key and semi-pretentious effort is ominous without being scary or suspenseful for most of its running time, but the positioning of a child at the center of other-worldly goings-on has worked many times before. The last-minute plot twist, in the tradition of *Rosemary's Baby*, *Repulsion*, and *The Omen*, works on reality-based fright.

In a case of public opinion appearing to ignore—and negate—negative criticism, *The Sixth Sense* was a surprising movie. Between the lines, audiences read into it themes about openness and communication. The picture was not given a saturation booking by its distributors, which was a contemporary practice indicative of the fact that they did not expect the movie to be a box office success. It turned out to be, in that sense, one of Hollywood's great all-time sleepers.

The film's success registered widely; Scholastic Press, for example, began publishing a series of children's books based on *The Sixth Sense*. This publishing decision in turn inspired Richard Alleva, the film critic for the independent Roman Catholic magazine *Commonweal*, to write: "With its ghost-like connections to ever-lasting love, the child as a redeeming figure who suffers and loves, its deft use of the color red to movie and deepen it, the movie is memorable."

THE ACADEMY'S BEST PICTURE AT THE DAWN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Directed by Ridley Scott, *Gladiator* was selected by the voting members of the Academy as the Best Picture for the year 2000. Scott previously had directed *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Thelma and Louise* (1991), as well as his biggest mon-

eymaker, *Alien* (1979). *Gladiator* starred Russell Crowe and was produced as a joint venture between DreamWorks (which had the rights to North American distribution) and Universal (which held the international distribution rights). Crowe plays the general Maximus, who is taken into slavery and then thrown into the Colosseum with killers and lions.

Producer Doug Wick, who worked alongside Branko Lustig, said that screenwriter David Franzoni first discussed with him doing a film set in the Roman Empire. Franzoni had collaborated with Steven Spielberg on his film *Amistad*. On the final credits for the movie, Franzoni earned recognition for the story, but shared screenplay credits with John Logan and William Nicholson.

As Wick explained to the *Los Angeles Times*:

For me, it was never about redoing a genre. When David first showed me all the research he'd done about the Roman Empire, I saw that it could serve as a peephole into a whole world—its politics, its military, its values. And because I was aware of the whole new frontier of digital effects, I knew we could do it in a way that had never been done before.

For Scott, who had studied art in London and graduated with the famed contemporary artist and designer David Hockney, the challenge was essentially about creating a world. Much as with the futuristic *Blade Runner* (1982) and its production design by Larry Paull, this historical epic invited a complete reimagining of the past that would translate into its re-creation for the screen. The director of photography for *Gladiator*, John Mathieson, found inspiration from Romantic paintings as well as from the monumental staging found in German director Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1936), which celebrated Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. The production designer for *Gladiator* was Arthur Max. Budgeted at just over \$100 million, during production *Gladiator* was described by some industry insiders as *Ben-Hur* meets *Spartacus* and by other pundits as *Lawrence of Arabia* meets *Braveheart*.

In the increasingly important financial calculations of the motion picture industry on opening revenues for movies, *Gladiator* scored high marks by grossing nearly \$35 million in its first three days. Toward the end of the year, the film was released on several giant IMAX screens nationwide in order to improve its chances for the Oscar competition. By year's end, *Variety* was claiming that the movie, which already had earned \$187 million in its theatrical release since May, "has Maximus heat behind it" leading up toward Oscar season. The other films considered "epics" that had won Best Picture previously were *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and *Braveheart* (1996).

Because DreamWorks marketing experts feared this bloody and sometimes brutal Roman epic would be a tough sell to female audiences, they

used a scene of Maximus kissing Lucilla as a central element in the movie's television advertising campaign, even though their relationship was only a minor subplot of the movie. That strategy appeared to work. After that ad began running on television, trackers observed that the female portion of the audience increased from just over a third of the attendance figures to slightly more than 50 percent. Maximus kills a lot of people, which doesn't seem to bother men, but there's also an emotional and heartfelt message in the movie, because Maximus is a man committed to avenging the deaths of his wife and son, which appeals to women viewers as much as do Crowe's looks and sex appeal.

With two thousand extras, the project hearkened back to Hollywood epics of the past, but much of *Gladiator* depended on the latest digital technologies. In that regard, it was, for a while, a Hollywood industry forerunner. Nearly all the "sets" were created in the computer, by production supervisors Tim Burke and Rob Harvey. The director of photography, Mathieson, created an effect of clouds casting shadows on a large crowd of extras by using huge sails that could be pulled in and out to control the light and create the pattern of the changing light as he wished.

The fight depended entirely on the computer-generated stadium. The animals were filmed against a blue screen and then inserted into combat by computer animation. Different ways to populate the spaces had to be created. A method called "Photo-booth" was used to create most of the crowd scenes. Select groups of thirty to forty real extras were filmed in specially constructed green-screen tents, with each extra performing six different actions that would be appropriate to what might be occurring in the arena. They wore interchangeable blue and white togas, to allow the digital experts to later digitally key off the toga to create multiple variations of color. Their actions were recorded on three time-coded, synced digital cameras, positioned to capture angles from the front, side, and top simultaneously. Three different lighting setups, to represent two opposing angles of sunlight, as well as shade, were also used. By then, using proprietary software developed at a company called Mill Film, this small number of actual performers could be replicated to create all the crowds at the Colosseum and to populate the streets of Rome in their entirety.

A dummy stuffed tiger was used for some of the close shots of Crowe fighting with it. When the British actor Oliver Reed died of a heart attack during production on location in Malta, where final filming for *Gladiator* was being done, instead of trying to recast for his role (as the warrior Proximo), digital technologies were put to use by animatronics and special-effects experts to find ways to superimpose Reed's image on a stand-in for scenes he had not yet shot. Most of *Gladiator* was shot in the United Kingdom, with exteriors

filmed in a fairly remote forest in Surrey, forty-five minutes from London; the rest of the movie was filmed in Malta and Morocco.

Peter Travers, the reviewer for *Rolling Stone*, applauded the movie as raising the bar on blood, sweat, and kinky sex.

Gladiator sweeps the viewer into a world of marvelous adventure. [The Roman emperor] Commodus has an attraction for his widowed sister Lucilla that is strikingly weird. Commodus strangles his father, orders Maximus to be murdered, but Maximus survives and is enslaved, and so do Commodus's perversions.

Travers declared Scott to be at "top form" in *Gladiator* and called the effects "stunning," such as in the shot in which the camera swoops over Rome and streets packed with chariots and dips into the Colosseum to reveal a world teeming with life. The bloodletting battle scenes owe a great deal to Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and to that movie's director of photography, Janusz Kaminski. For J. Hoberman, however, writing in the *Village Voice*, "*Gladiator*, like *Titanic*, is a fearfully expensive, relentlessly high-tech revival of deeply retro material—in this case, the ancient-world epics invented by Italian filmmakers before World War I . . . complete with love story and otherworldly palaver." He found Scott's Rome to be a place of

sinister, Nazi-like pomp combined with mad street life. It's easy to marvel at his multimillion-dollar computer-generated aerial pans over the digital landscape. . . . The filmmaker wants to show that he can do action, but repetitively predicated on a mix of slow motion and fast cutting, the big slugfests keep *Gladiator* marching in place.

In the *New York Times*, reviewer Elvis Mitchell called the movie "silly and grandiose." Likewise, *Commonweal* called it a "boy's story."

To quote the *Hollywood Reporter*: "Although the physically daunting production at times threatens to overwhelm the implausible tale, Crowe and several actors, most notably the late Oliver Reed, Connie Nielsen, and, in an extended cameo, Richard Harris, never let the human dimension get lost." The critic Kenneth Turan in the *Los Angeles Times* credited Crowe's muscular performance, along with the stylish battle scenes and rich atmosphere, as helping to cut through the shortcomings of the movie. "Scott has demonstrated a wonderful gift for ambience, for making the out-of-the-ordinary worlds come alive on film, again here." As Peter Rainer said in *New York Magazine*: "If the film doesn't rise above the epic genres, Russell Crowe's performance does."

After nearly three and a half decades, the Roman Empire had made a grand return to Hollywood's silver screen. Any reviewer who mentioned it managed

to point out the historical inaccuracies and the movie's bizarre interpretation of Roman history and politics, but the movie was shielded from much inquiry about actual history and assessed pretty much on its own terms.

SUMMARY

During the 1990s, digital technologies impacted moviemaking. Hollywood postproduction—namely, editing and sound—converted to computer applications. The veteran professionals in these crafts simply learned the new tools. By the late 1990s, virtually all special effects and animation were generated by computer. Though threatened, celluloid film held on as the slightly preferred medium of capture for a majority of productions. When DVDs replaced videotape, the quality of picture and sound was greatly improved, as were the prospects of ancillary earnings.

Critical responses to movies during the 1990s tended to become more ideological. The profile of cinema, on the battlefields of America's culture wars, increased. The major studios now were integrated into larger media and communications companies. During the 1990s, the high-risk business of Hollywood became more "high-stakes," with bigger earnings or bigger losses.

The most successful independent, Miramax, became a subsidiary of Disney. Even the major studios had "independent" subsidiaries, such as Fox Searchlight or Sony Classics. *Independent* for years had meant where the production funding came from; now it referred to types of movies and their content. Hollywood high concept began to morph more broadly into what was called *synergy*. Sentiment, spectacle, and sensation coexisted on-screen. Production was diverse and aimed at many different tastes.

Hollywood Enters the Twenty-First Century

*F*or the first year of the twenty-first century, the Academy awarded the Best Picture Oscar to *A Beautiful Mind*. This movie was coproduced by one of Hollywood's oldest studio names, Universal, in conjunction with one of its newest companies—the contemporary success story DreamWorks. The legendary mogul Carl Laemmle had founded Universal in 1915, and Universal succeeded through the decades by becoming the first motion picture studio to go into production for television and by merging with the music corporation MCA. DreamWorks began in 1994 through the ambitious partnership of Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen. Like most film companies in the New Hollywood, by the twenty-first century DreamWorks had become ripe for spin-offs, mergers, and buyouts. In 2004, the company's animation studio was spun off as DreamWorks-SKG, whose productions were to be distributed by Paramount. The following year, its founders sold the studio to Viacom, which is run by media mogul Sumner Redstone.

A Beautiful Mind is about the life of an eccentric Princeton University mathematician named John Nash. Both producer Brian Grazer and Universal Pictures chairman Stacey Snider had read a biography of Nash by Sylvia Nasar on which the movie is based, and Snider purchased the rights for a screen adaptation to the book for Grazer's company, Imagine Entertainment. Grazer enlisted screenwriter Akiva Goldsman to write the script. Goldsman's credits included *A Time to Kill* (1996), *Batman and Robin* (1997), *Lost in Space* (1998), and *Practical Magic* (1998). Besides these Hollywood A-list screenwriting credits, Goldsman ostensibly brought to the project one additional qualification for writing a screenplay based on the adult life of a paranoid schizophrenic—Goldsman's parents had founded one of America's first group homes for emotionally disturbed children. Hence, Goldsman had grown up

interested in the shadowy corners of the human mind. So, the idea and challenge of writing about how Nash saw the world interested Goldsman greatly. He saw in Nash's biography the natural structure for an effective movie story based on the conflict of genius and madness, leading to the resolution of Nash receiving a Nobel Prize.

With a screenwriter on board, Grazer enlisted Ron Howard as a coproducer and also slated Howard to direct the movie. The production team consisted of director of photography Roger Deakins, A.S.C., a past Oscar nominee (*Fargo*); production designer Wynn Thomas; editors Mike Hill and Dan Hanley (Oscar winners for *Apollo 13* in 1995); and composer James Horner. Russell Crowe was tapped to play Nash; the far less well-known actress Jennifer Connelly was cast as his devoted wife, Alicia.

Goldsman's screenplay begins with the intrigue of Nash's recruitment by William Parcher (Ed Harris) for a top-secret assignment to break an enemy communication code early in the Cold War period of the 1950s. Teaching at MIT, Nash meets the brilliant and beautiful Alicia Larde (Connelly), a physics student who introduces Nash to a concept he'd never seriously considered before—love.

As Howard said, "John Nash's journey is incredibly heroic, but so is Alicia's." Having learned how to reject some of his delusions intellectually, and winning a Nobel Prize in Economics in 1994, Nash could honestly say that he never would have survived without Alicia. As *Newsweek* reported, however, the real John Nash never saw visions, and after 1970 he never took medication. But his love affair with Alicia, he has said, was "just like a movie."

In his review for *Time*, Richard Schickel wrote:

What's terrific about Howard's somewhat fictionalized but entirely absorbing biopic about John Forbes Nash Jr., who was for several decades immobilized by paranoid schizophrenia, is the simple, elegant way that Howard thrusts us into Nash's disastrously troubled mind. He forces us without any distracting or disturbing cinematic devices, to experience the world as Nash does, and one can't say much more about that because Howard's style brilliantly hides the movie's slowly dawning central surprise.

While some other critics echoed Schickel's praise, much of the response by movie critics nationwide was negative. The discrepancies between Goldsman's screenplay and the actual facts of Nash's life provided plenty of fodder. David Ansen, writing in *Newsweek*, asked rhetorically:

How do you make a mainstream movie out of the life of a man whose activity is almost entirely mental—the brilliant, Nobel Prize-winning, schizophrenic mathematician John Nash? Screenwriter Akiva Goldsman's

clever solution is to turn the story of a troubled academic into a Hollywood thriller. How? He makes things up. . . . [Still,] *A Beautiful Mind* is too facile to resonate deeply. Shouldn't a movie celebrating Nash give you some idea of what his mathematical work is about?

In the *New Yorker* movie review by Anthony Lane, Lane wrote:

Nash's story is well told by his biographer, Sylvia Nasar, in *A Beautiful Mind*, the book that underpins Howard's film. The book is far superior to the film; study the two together and you will receive a master class in the art of the Hollywood massage. . . . Howard makes him a shy, prickly virgin who is salvaged from himself by one good woman, Alicia Larde (Jennifer Connelly). Now compare a slice of his actual resumé, as recounted by Nasar [who teaches journalism at Columbia University]: "Between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-nine, Nash became emotionally involved with at least three other men. He acquired and then abandoned a secret mistress who bore his child." (Even without the production Code, the gratuitous sex seems to have gone missing here.) Note: His Nobel acceptance speech isn't in the book either, so we'll have to give Howard the benefit of a doubt and believe he went all goopy on the Swedes, talking on about love.

The *New Republic's* short review concluded that

the screenplay by Akiva Goldsman is a glossy example of how a troubled and troublesome life can be sanitized into a movieland saga. . . . When Goldsman was jogged about the omissions and alterations in his script, he said, "This was never a biopic." That is true. But what sort of a pic did Goldsman think that he was contriving?

In answer, in *Variety* Goldsman was quoted as saying: "This was never a biopic. I wanted to try to create some sense in the mind of the audience what it might feel like to be touched by this disease in order to create more sympathy and empathy."

New York Times critic A. O. Scott accused the script of "historical revisionism on the order of *JFK* or *Forrest Gump*." Peter Travers's review in *Rolling Stone* concluded: "Sadly, Howard blands out in the final third, using age-old make-up and tear-jerking to turn a tough true story into something less digestible. Until then, you'll be riveted."

The movie might be seen from one perspective as being a typical Hollywood feature in the tradition of moviemaking long drawn to the spectacle of a moody, insulated man and the portrayal of a mad genius. Less kindly, British critic Jonathan Romney titled his review "Twitch. Stutter. Oscar, Please" in the London *Independent on Sunday*: "Crowe's performance is shamelessly pitched to appeal to the Academy's love of moody dysfunction."

Perhaps the most balanced critical assessment of *A Beautiful Mind* was left to movie critic Kenneth Turan, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*:

There is more to admire in *A Beautiful Mind* than you might suspect, but less than its creators believe. When the film does succeed, it almost seems to do so in spite of itself, at those moments when the power of the underlying story structure and the strength of the actors overcome the film's inevitable weakness for hitting things too much on the nose. This is probably the most successful serious film that director Ron Howard has ever done, but at the end of the day it's still too much a too-tidy Ron Howard project, and it is in the space between those two statements that this picture's true nature lies.

Whatever the final judgment about the accuracy of the screenplay as a biopic, and the questions raised by critics over the screenplay's approach to its subject, both inside Hollywood and outside, the movie's popularity fueled a great deal of publicity about mental illness and discussion and debate about mental health and social policy, at least briefly.

THE RARE MUSICAL CHOSEN FOR BEST PICTURE

The Academy's Best Picture for 2002 was *Chicago*, from Circle Co. Zadan/Meron Productions, in conjunction with Martin Richards Productions. Produced by Martin Richards and directed and choreographed by Rob Marshall, it was based on a screenplay by Bill Condon. Cinematography was by Dion Beebe, with editing by Martin Walsh, production design by John Myhre, and music by John Kinder.

Chicago became the first musical since 1968 to be awarded a Best Picture Oscar by the Academy. In 1968, when *Oliver* won that award, critics had been skeptical of the choice, complaining—not surprisingly—that the cultural changes of the late 1960s could not be reconciled with such a selection; the awarding of the Best Picture Oscar to a screen adaptation of a popular stage musical then was seen as unforgivably anachronistic. The greater truth is that movie musicals have always been a tough sell to serious critics and to a substantial portion of the motion picture industry's establishment. No such debate was caused by the choice of *Chicago* for the 2002 Oscar, even though *Chicago* was a decidedly well-worn Broadway and Hollywood property.

Based on a Jazz Age murder in 1924 and the trial of Beulah Annan and Belva Gaetner that followed, Maurine Dallas Watkins wrote a play entitled *Chicago* that premiered on Broadway in 1926. A 1927 silent film based on the play, produced by Cecil B. DeMille and starring Phyllis Haver, was made,

and in 1942 a film adaptation of the same material, entitled *Roxie Har*, starred Ginger Rogers soon after she had gone from dancing to straight acting. A modern Broadway version of the musical by Bob Fosse, Fred Erb, and John Kander opened in turn, in 1975, starring Gwen Verdon and Chita Rivera, and had a lengthy and successful run. In 1996, a revival of that Broadway musical was similarly successful. In the twenty-first century, finding properties that are thought to be reliable for box office success, reworking movie material with some proven track record, recycling successful formulas, and making movie sequels are as much a part of the Hollywood business as ever.

The emerging quasi-independent studio giant of New Hollywood, Miramax, had tried to get a movie of *Chicago* made as early as 1994, hoping to engage either Baz Luhrmann, Herbert Ross, or Milos Forman to direct. But it still took nearly eight years until the film was actually made. Shot in Toronto, it was budgeted at \$45 million, with a sixty-four-day shooting schedule. The cast that was assembled for the production in 2002 was thought to effectively position the movie to succeed at the box office with a younger demographic than might normally be expected for a movie musical: Renee Zellweger, Catherine Zeta-Jones (Oscar winner for Best Supporting Actress), Richard Gere, and Queen Latifah (also a nominee for the Best Supporting Actress Oscar).

Roxie Hart (Zellweger) is a married showgirl who murders her rat of a boyfriend. A famed lawyer, Bill Flynn (Gere), who specializes in such cases, gets her off and makes her a celebrity. She teams up in an act with Velma Kelly (Zeta-Jones), another showgirl-criminal, and they wow audiences. As Flynn sums up what is in essence the movie's theme: "It's all a circus, kid. A three-ring circus. These trials—the whole world—all show business."

Variety, in a review article by Derek Elley, summed up the movie:

A stylish cast and some clever scripting solutions help *Chicago* make the transition from stage to screen with considerable appeal intact. But despite these assets, plus the enduring kick of the superlative Kander and Ebb song score, this film version dilutes a good deal of the live show's sizzle and wit. First-time feature director Rob Marshall and Oscar-winning *Gods and Monsters* screenwriter Bill Condon have spun the dark tale of two murdering floozies into a widely palatable entertainment that could score midrange business with older crowds drawn by the novelty of its all-singing, all-dancing stars.

Richard Corliss wrote in *Time*:

Director Rob Marshall's bold, strutting, rapaciously funny version puts the cynicism up front, where it can titillate, horrify, and instruct us. The movie

cheerfully displays the backstabbing and lies—the desperation to be number one and have everybody else be zero—that go into making the tabloid and celluloid shams that beguile us. . . . The movie has lots of terrific turns to support its leading ladies: from Richard Gere, as the sexy weasel lawyer; from Queen Latifah, exuding the wry sizzle of a star who doesn't mind that Hollywood has yet to figure out how to use her; and, we almost forgot from John C. Reilly [Roxie's husband, Amos Hart], another in a sad gallery of losers not even daring to hope for sympathy. . . . *Chicago* has so much razzle-dazzle that viewers may end up both raised and dazed. It's remorselessly inventive, trying anything fast and sassy to keep you watching. In other words, it's the most honest display of showpeople's need to be noticed this side of a Madonna concert.

Peter Travers, in *Rolling Stone*, added:

A 1920s musical that really roars ADULTERY! MURDER! GREED! TREACHERY! What else do you want in a musical? Some people are ripping on this razzler-dazzler because the characters aren't lovable. Grow up. . . . Zellweger wins our hearts. That's what makes her dangerous. Just like the movie. Depraved? Call it dynamite.

And in the *New Yorker* review by Anthony Lane we read:

Rob Marshall does his best to leave the stage show behind, but the cards are stacked against him, for *Chicago* is a pack of theatrical tricks. . . . Many people may get off on the highs of this picture, but they might want to ask why there are no other levels. Musicals depend on the contest of innocence and experience, and we are just not culturally equipped to provide that mix anymore. . . . Hollywood is realizing that audiences didn't tire of musicals. They tired of bad musicals. When a good one comes along—*Cabaret* in 1972 and *Grease* in 1978—audiences proved more than willing. While *Chicago* doesn't have the stylistic daring of *Moulin Rouge*, it is a crowd-pleasing re-imagining of a show that is kept current by its up-to-the-minute cynicism, its skewering of the media, and its heroines' obsession with stardom.

FOR THE NEW CENTURY, A VINTAGE SOURCE

By honoring the third film in the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, *The Return of the King*, as the Academy Award Best Picture for 2003, the Hollywood establishment recognized a landmark in motion picture history. The trilogy was the brainchild of native New Zealander Peter Jackson. In 1999, Jackson

had proposed filming the three films simultaneously at a production cost of nearly \$300 million, while advancing and pioneering numerous advances in the techniques of CGI (computer-generated imagery) for motion pictures. In so doing, Jackson moved the entire world of Hollywood high-concept filmmaking fully into the new millennium.

Distributed by New Line, each of the three movies (including *The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2001 and *The Two Towers* in 2002) ranked very high among all feature film earnings for their theatrical release. Moreover, in each case, the films of the trilogy all had special extended editions, which were released on DVD within a year after their theatrical release. Jackson—an admirer of George Lucas and the *Star Wars* series—had created a motion picture franchise out of a single idea that widely surpassed the earnings and critical acclaim of *Star Wars*. By filming all three movies simultaneously from late 1999 and through 2000, Jackson provided an ambitious model for moviemaking that hearkened all the way back to the groundbreaking efforts of D. W. Griffith in 1915–1916, producing and directing *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*. Between them, the three films that Jackson produced and directed for the trilogy received thirty Academy Award nominations and won seventeen Oscars in various categories.

Just before *The Return of the King* was released in December 2003, a *Newsweek* article predicted that “New Line will likely position *The Return of the King* . . . as a sort of ‘actors’ movie,’ in an effort to make an end run around the Academy’s well-documented antipathy toward fantasy [for Best Picture].” As this article’s author, Jeff Giles, surmised, however, there still was no guarantee that the movie would necessarily be well received by Oscar voters. “In Jackson’s movies, as in Tolkien’s novels, the love stories tend to be undernourished. And even with three hours and 12 minutes to work with, he has had to make cuts that will initially cause gasping among some fans.”

Todd McCarthy wrote in *Variety*:

Peter Jackson’s final installment in his monumental *Lord of the Rings* represents that filmmaking rarity—a third part of a trilogy that is decisively the best of the lot. With epic conflict, staggering battles, striking landscapes and effects, and resolved character arcs all leading to a dramatic conclusion to more than nine hours of masterful storytelling. . . . So Jackson has done it. After seven years of work, the young New Zealander has pulled off one of the most ambitious and phenomenally successful dream projects of all time, a complete visual rendering of a 1,000-page literary classic beloved by countless readers internationally, a set of films that satisfies the Tolkien purists, and, when all is said and done, will generate upward of \$3 billion dollars in all markets.

In *Rolling Stone*, Peter Travers quibbled with some of the CGI and other details, but was finally laudatory:

The are missteps in *King*. Some of the computer-generated effects (the army of the dead, the exploding Mount Doom) look subpar. There's no heat in the romance between Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen), the reluctant leader, and Arwen (Liv Tyler), his Elf love, and Jackson fails inexplicably to show us that moment when the spark of kingship first lights up in Aragorn's eyes. . . . I won't add to the clamor against the multiple endings (hell, they're in the book). The rueful profundity the film needs for closure is spoiled by an orgy of hobbit-hugging with Frodo (Elijah Wood), Merry (Dominic Monaghan) and Pippin (Billy Boyd) jumping around in bed (the *Village Voice* called it "gayer than anything in *Angels in America*"). . . . To praise Jackson isn't enough. He's more than director—he's a miracle worker. After four years, a \$270 million budget, and three films that add up to more than the sum of the parts, the *Rings* trilogy is more than a movie. It's a colossus on the march into screen legend.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

A Malpas Production in association with Albert S. Ruddy that was released theatrically by Lakeshore International in association with Warner Bros. won the Best Picture Oscar for 2004. *Million Dollar Baby* could be considered a throwback to Hollywood traditions. Produced and directed by Clint Eastwood, the movie was based on a screenplay by Emmy-winning writer Paul Haggis based on a short story from the collection *Rope Burns* by F. X. Toole. Toole had spent ten years working in professional boxing as a cut man—the one who patches up a boxer's injuries so he can continue fighting—and his writing vividly captures the essence of life in the ring. The motion picture industry trade magazines (*Variety*, the *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Boxoffice*), along with the *Los Angeles Times*, all made note of Eastwood's reliance on veterans he'd often worked with, including director of photography Tom Stern, stunt coordinator Buddy Van Horn, editor Joel Cox, and art director Henry Bumstead. "To me, it's almost like a repertory company," said Stern, meaning that this kind of filmmaking is the contemporary equivalent of the old Hollywood studio that runs like a factory with a wholly reliable labor force. Eastwood himself composed the movie's music score.

A legendary producer, director, and actor, Eastwood chose *Million Dollar Baby* as the follow-up to his highly-acclaimed drama of 2003, *Mystic River*, for which Sean Penn won a Best Actor Academy Award and Tim Robbins

received the Oscar as Best Supporting Actor. Upon reading Haggis's script, Eastwood concluded:

What interested me about *Million Dollar Baby* is the fact that it really isn't a boxing story. It's a love story about a person who is distressed about his non-existent relationship with his daughter, and who then finds a sort of surrogate daughter in this young girl who is dying to make her mark on the world as a boxer.

Eastwood plays Frankie Dunn, a former professional boxer who has become a coach and trainer and owns the Hit Pit gym in downtown Los Angeles. "Frankie is searching for redemption," Eastwood explained.

He's an Irish Catholic guy who's in his senior years, and he's become disillusioned with his church and a lack of a relationship with his daughter. The dilemma with his daughter is very tough on him, and it's left a huge void in his life. . . . I was trying to get a period look for the film, even though the picture is set in the present. I was trying to capture that this story is taking place in another time in history—it could have been the '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s—I wanted it to have a timeless quality.

The decision to have the movie narrated by Morgan Freeman, who plays Eddie "Scrap-Iron" Dupris, an ex-boxer who had been managed by Frankie Dunn and still works with him, added a considerable dimension to the film. Haggis thought his best idea was creating a relationship between Frankie and Scrap-Iron that went back many years, making the story of Frankie and Maggie Fitzgerald part of a continuum. Morgan won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his role as Scrap-Iron, but, more importantly his role as narrator added the warmth, intimacy, and caring of a longtime friendship between to men to the "love story" of Frankie's infatuation with the much younger Maggie, a role for which Hilary Swank won the Best Actress Oscar.

David Ansen began his review of *Million Dollar Baby* in *Newsweek* by saying:

As F. Scott Fitzgerald famously wrote, there are no second acts in American lives. Somebody forgot to tell Clint Eastwood, who, at 74, and well into his *third* act, is doing the best, most assured work of his career. . . . Swank, who was extraordinary in *Boys Don't Cry*, hasn't fared so well in conventional leading lady roles where she tends to disappear. Extremity becomes her. As Maggie, she pops off the screen, funny, touching, and ferociously physical. . . . Her body language shouts. . . . If you fear strong emotions, this is not for you. But if you want to see Hollywood filmmaking at its most potent, Eastwood has delivered the real deal.

Todd McCarthy echoed the same sentiments in *Variety*:

Staying at the top of his game when most of his contemporaries have long since hung up their gloves, Clint Eastwood delivers another knockout punch with *Million Dollar Baby*. As if *Unforgiven* and *Mystic River* weren't rave enough, this endlessly resourceful filmmaker goes just as dark and deep in this slow-burning drama of a determined female boxer and her hard-shelled trainer, a tale Eastwood invests with rewarding reserves of intimacy, tragedy, tenderness, and bitter life knowledge.

A. O. Scott in the *New York Times* called it “the best movie released by a major studio this year, and not because it is the grandest, the most ambitious, or even the most original.” The review in *Boxoffice* noted:

On the surface, the film is a simple boxing story about a hellcat from the Ozarks and a grizzled Irish Catholic trainer who takes her on. Under Eastwood's painstakingly stripped-down direction—his filmmaking has become the cinematic equivalent of Hemingway's spare though precise prose—the story emerges as that rarest of birds, an uplifting tragedy.

At first, Frankie is unwilling to train and coach a girl fighter. Eventually, of course, he changes his mind, turning Maggie into a rising star headed toward a championship bout. The rise is cut short dramatically when she takes a beating from a much larger and stronger German fighter. Maggie is hospitalized and survives, but is paralyzed and disabled. She tells Frankie—her only friend and visitor—that she wants to end the suffering and die. Eventually Frankie enters the hospital late at night, slinks into her room, and injects her. He then leaves and disappears from the screen as Scrap-Iron narrates the speculations as to what then happened to Frankie.

Time's Richard Corliss offered: “The story has a sucker punch which reveals both the importance of family and the ways loyalty can trump official morality.” But the protagonist's complicity in injecting a solution to cause her death did not escape the attention of the contemporary culture warriors. Conservative culture critic Michael Medved attacked *Million Dollar Baby* as “an insufferable, manipulative right-to-die movie.” More neutrally, veteran movie critic Andrew Sarris wrote of the ending: “No movie has depressed me more than *Million Dollar Baby*.”

By the end of March 2005, *Boxoffice* reported international earnings on *Million Dollar Baby* to have exceeded \$36 million just since its Oscar win at the end of February. Nonetheless, the project had been viewed initially with suspicion by many in the industry as a “boxing movie.” Originally, Warner Bros. had been a reluctant partner in the project, even given Eastwood's

legendary status and track record. When the accounts were tabulated on this \$30 million production, the gross revenues for its theatrical distribution alone exceeded \$100 million.

ON A ROLL

The screenwriter for *Million Dollar Baby*, Paul Haggis, built on the success of that 2004 Best Picture with *Crash*, the 2005 Oscar winner for Best Picture, which he produced, wrote, and directed. Packaged and distributed by Lions Gate, the company trumpeted the social significance of *Crash*:

It's a fast-paced portrait of the multi-cultural metropolis all disarranged and out of joint. A young African American man complains when a white woman clutches her purse as she passes him, then he carjacks her SUV. An L.A.P.D. officer goes on a rant against a black employee at an HMO, but later saves the life of a black woman. An Iranian shop owner, the victim of a hate crime, takes out his anger on a hardworking Latino locksmith. After a fender-bender, a Latina police detective and a Korean woman exchange racial epithets.

Out of the blocks, *Crash* was perceived as polarizing. The *Los Angeles Times* called it “a grim, histrionic experiment in vehicular metaphor laughter.” By contrast, its distributor, Lions Gate, insisted: “There’s a cultural relevance to it.” The *New Yorker* apparently agreed, labeling *Crash* “the strongest American film since Clint Eastwood’s *Mystic River*.” The *New York Times*, however, panned it.

The movie was Haggis’s directorial debut, and as a director he won praise from the venerable critic Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic*:

The screenplay originated with Paul Haggis, who wrote *Million Dollar Baby*, and, as in that overrated picture, he builds on basically familiar material. But Haggis is making his directorial debut here, and—as was *not* the case with *Baby*—the directing gives this film stamina. Director Haggis greatly helps his writing self.

It was reported that the genesis of the screenplay had occurred fifteen years earlier when Haggis and his wife’s Porsche was stolen by two black teenagers while the Haggises were shopping at a video rental store. Haggis reportedly had begun thinking about the thieves and their motivation, which drew him into concocting the lengthy dystopian descent into the

heated passions and ethnic and racial antagonism seething beneath the façade of contemporary Los Angeles.

Structurally, *Crash* is reminiscent of Hollywood classics dating back as far as MGM's Oscar-winning Best Picture *Grand Hotel* (1932). It is a story of a number of different people, from different social backgrounds and with decidedly different life histories, thrown together in a pell-mell blend of incidents that are cleverly connected. The ensemble cast of *Crash*, including Dom Monaghan, Matt Dillon, Sandra Bullock, Brendan Fraser, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, Thandie Newton, Jennifer Esposito, and Ryan Phillippe, was perhaps not the equal in star power to the cast that MGM brought together in 1932. Some motion picture industry observers—commenting on what seemed to be somewhat of an upset win for *Crash* as Best Picture, beating out *Brokeback Mountain*—noted that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it is estimated that roughly 20 percent of the Oscar voters are actors and members of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). Actors are widely assumed to be partial toward "actors' films" with large casts, and as Oscar voting time began, Lions Gate distributed free DVDs of *Crash* to a lengthy list of SAG members.

The first positive buzz for *Crash* had begun when the film premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, the long-standing venue that served so well for many American independent films to gain attention and secure at least a credible initial following. *Crash*, a \$7.5 million production, earned \$53.5 million domestically, but by the time the Oscars were awarded it had already been out on DVD for nearly half a year, thus limiting its possibilities for theatrical re-release.

Producer credit on the movie went only to Cathy Schulman and Haggis, prompting a lawsuit filed by Schulman's former business partner, Bob Yari (Yari is recognized in the film's credits). The Producers' Guild, however, decided that only two producers could share an award. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences concurred, and, eventually, so did a court.

The review by David Denby in the *New Yorker* gave *Crash* a good boost, when he applauded it as "breathhtakingly intelligent and always brazenly alive." He noted that, like other recent movies set in Los Angeles (*Grand Canyon*, *Short Cuts*, *Magnolia*),

the picture is structured in vignette form, a natural dramatic outgrowth of a strange automotive paradise in which people live in separate racial and class enclaves, drive to work, and stick with their own. [Haggis] has laid the groundwork for emotional release by writing some of the toughest talk ever heard in American movies. Some things may be better left unsaid, but the exuberant frankness of this movie burns through embarrassment and chagrin and produces its own kind of exhilaration.

Across Manhattan, Haggis's portrayal of Los Angeles earned similar praise from Ken Tucker in his review for *New York* magazine:

If *Crash* resolves itself around a series of sentimental familial tableaux . . . it also makes its social and political collisions resonate in our heads so as to leave them ringing. It's a film you won't stop thinking about, arguing over, and debating, after the lights come up.

However, at the *New York Times*, A. O. Scott offered an alternative to Denby's praise:

Mr. Haggis is not unduly concerned with subtlety. At a time when ambitious movies are knowing cleverness and showy sensation, he makes a case for blunt, earnest emotion, and shows an admirable willingness to risk sentimentality and cliché in the pursuit of genuine feeling. . . . That these bromides count as insights may say more about the state of the American civic conversation than about Mr. Haggis's limitations as a storyteller. . . . So what kind of a movie is *Crash*? A frustrating movie: full of heart and devoid of life; crudely manipulative when it tries hardest to be subtle; and profoundly complacent in spite of its intention to unsettle and disturb.

In a similar vein, writing in the London *Sunday Times*, critic Edward Porter claimed that while the film tackled racism head-on, on the whole it felt like "a social studies project. . . . The frequency with which characters use racial slurs is not just monotonous, it means that the film drifts into pomposity." As Richard Alleva wrote in *Commonweal*:

Haggis seems to think that if you scratch a bigot, you automatically find a decent human being, and if you scratch a decent human being you automatically find a bigot. . . . Haggis has been praised for creating complex characters. But simply to supply a character with wildly contrasting traits doesn't guarantee complexity. It merely guarantees that movie critics, hungry to believe that Hollywood still caters to adults, will praise you for a complexity that isn't there.

A LONG TIME COMING

Previously nominated for the award but always passed over in the actual voting, many industry insiders called Martin Scorsese's 2006 Best Director Oscar a lifetime achievement award. Of course, there were also critics who argued that an award for his work on *The Departed* was undeserved because it was far from

being his most significant directorial achievement. In some ways, the media attention to Scorsese's long-awaited Best Director triumph overshadowed the Academy's recognition of *The Departed* as the year's best picture. Such a debate within the arts will never be finally closed, but what critic Scott Foundas wrote in the *L.A. Weekly* tried to put that debate into perspective:

I'd like to begin by thanking the Academy—for snubbing Martin Scorsese. Scorsese's last two pictures, *Gangs of New York* and *The Aviator*, felt like hat-in-hand pleas for acceptance by an organization that considers *Crash*, *Chicago*, and *American Beauty* among the greatest of recent American films, and which holds Scorsese himself lower than Robert Redford, Kevin Costner, and Rob Marshall. But with his new picture, *The Departed*, Scorsese seems to have abandoned his Gollum-like quest for golden trinkets, and the result is the best thing he's done in ages—an exhilarating pulp entertainment.

The Departed, produced by Brad Pitt, Brad Grey, and Graham King for Warner Bros. distribution, stars Jack Nicholson as Boston mobster Frank Costello, Leonardo DiCaprio as Billy Costigan, and Matt Damon as Colin Sullivan. The movie was based on a successful Hong Kong film entitled *Internal Affairs* (*Mou gaan dou*, directed by Wei-keung Lau, 2002), with a new screenplay written by William Monahan. It was edited by Scorsese's longtime collaborator, Thelma Schoonmaker, who—with *The Departed*—earned her third Oscar for editing a Scorsese film.

The director of photography on the movie was Michael Ballhaus. Scorsese, an aficionado of film history, instructed Ballhaus to watch two movies from the late 1940s for the look: *T-Men* (1947) and *Raw Deal* (1948), both of which were shot by the master of noir cinematography, John Alton. Scorsese and Ballhaus wound up using five cameras on the shootout, toward the end of the movie, between the Costello gang and the cops.

Critic David Ansen, writing in *Newsweek*, commented:

Martin Scorsese's profanely funny, savagely entertaining *The Departed* is both a return to the underworld turf he's explored in such classics as *Mean Streets* and *GoodFellas* and a departure. What's new is that he's hitched his swirling, white-hot style to the speeding wagon of narrative. For all his brilliance, storytelling has never been his forte or his first concern. Here he has the devilishly convoluted plot of the terrific 2002 Hong Kong cop thriller *Internal Affairs* to work from and it's a rich gift. . . . *The Departed* is Scorsese's most purely enjoyable movie in years. But it's not for the faint of heart. It's rude, bleak, violent and definitely un-PC. But if you doubt that it's OK to laugh throughout this rat's nest of paranoia, deceit, and bloodshed, keep your eyes on the final frame. Scorsese's parting shot is an uncharacteristic, but well-earned, wink.

Here, too, was a motion picture for movie buffs who could savor a certain irony apparent in Scorsese doing a Hollywood remake of a Hong Kong movie. The New Wave of Hong Kong films of the 1990s celebrated Scorsese, and the breakthrough Hong Kong director in that period, John Woo, even dedicated his film *The Killer* (1989) to Scorsese.

Peter Travers's review in *Rolling Stone* speculated that "maybe you'll recognize *The Departed* for what it is: a new American crime classic from the legendary Martin Scorsese whose talent shines here on its highest beams." Travers went on to applaud Scorsese's use of found music—a unique uniting of the Rolling Stones, John Lennon, Nas, Van Morrison, the Beach Boys, and Patsy Cline—as typical of the director's influence on his movies' soundtracks and simultaneously astute. At the same time, he recognized Howard Shore's evocative original score for embellishing the vital, visceral filmmaking. Recognizing the central importance of editing, Travers writes:

And once again, Thelma Schoonmaker turns editing into an art form. She's the wizard at Scorsese's side, getting the action to jump off the screen while setting up psychological provocations that reverberate hellishly in your head. Scorsese tops the list of American directors because, even when he fails, he strives passionately to make movies that matter. *The Departed*, a defiantly compromised vision of a society rotting from inside, is one of his best.

Mahola Dargis's review in the *New York Times* praised Scorsese's direction as covering potential flaws in the screenplay: "There simply isn't time to think about the story and whether any of it makes sense." Writing in the *Village Voice*, J. Hoberman attempted to clarify where one of the pillars of modern and contemporary American independent film actually stood in relationship to this work. "*The Departed* is a wildly commercial project, but let no one imagine it a work for hire."

Typical of the hybrid approach to motion picture production in early twenty-first-century Hollywood, *The Departed* was a Warner Bros. release of a Plan B/Initial Entertainment Group/Vertigo Entertainment production in association with Media Asia Films. *The Departed* won Oscars for Best Picture, Director, Adapted Screenplay, and Editing. Scorsese recognized it as a genre film—like the Warner Bros. gangster films of the 1930s—precisely the kind of movie that film fans love but Oscar voters generally ignore. *The Departed* had opened on three thousand screens nationwide, and by the time the Oscar ceremonies came along, domestic theatrical earnings on the movie already had exceeded \$132 million. Patrick Goldstein, however, posed this question regarding the movie itself in the *Los Angeles Times*: "Scorsese will remember his big night. But will filmgoers remember *The Departed*?"

IDEAL MATERIAL FOR A SEASONED TEAM

The 2007 Best Picture, *No Country for Old Men*, was a coproduction of Paramount Vantage and Miramax, which distributed the film in North America. The film was produced by Scott Rudin at Disney-Miramax, who considered the material of a novel by Cormac McCarthy to be a perfect match for Ethan and Joel Coen. To quote Rudin:

The Coen brothers are the filmmaking-language equivalent of what McCarthy does in his books. They had dealt with these Melville-like themes of fate and destiny in their films. I bought the book, but the only way I was interested in making it was with the Coens. They committed to write, but down the road I'd hoped they'd want to make it, too.

Robert Graf and Mark Roybal were credited as the film's executive producers. Roger Deakins, A.S.C., was the director of photography and "Roderick Jaynes" (a pseudonym for the Coen brothers themselves) was credited as the editor.

No Country for Old Men is a mesmerizing thriller, set in West Texas in the early 1980s, where cattle rustlers have become drug runners and small towns have become veritable war zones. When Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) finds a pickup truck surrounded by dead men with a load of heroin and two million dollars in cash, his discovery sets off a chain reaction of violence that the aging and disillusioned local sheriff Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) cannot contain. As Moss tries to evade his pursuers—led by a mysterious manipulator named Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), who has developed a habit of flipping coins to determine who lives and dies—the film was said to strip down the American crime drama, while at the same time broadening its concerns to encompass themes as ancient as the Bible's. Though Brolin's character might be called the protagonist, Bardem's performance took the Best Actor Oscar. There were strong supporting performances from Kelly Macdonald and Woody Harrelson, as well.

Writing in *L.A. Weekly*, Scott Foundas noted:

The mechanics of *No Country for Old Men* recall those of a vintage *film noir*, and in that respect, the movie is brilliantly executed, as gripping and mordantly funny a treatise on the corrosive power of greed as *The Killing* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* were before it. In terms of filmmaking and storytelling craft, it is a work destined to be studied in film schools for generations to come, from the threatening beauty of Roger Deakins' O'Keefe-like images to what is surely the most pulse-raising scene of motel-room suspense since Marion Crane took her fateful shower. There

isn't a moment here that feels false, less than fully considered, or outside the Coens' control.

Writing in the industry's major trade publication, *Variety*, Todd McCarthy offered this buoyant assessment:

Cormac McCarthy's bracing and brilliant novel is gold for the Coen brothers, who have handled it respectfully but not slavishly, using its built-in cinematic values while cutting for brevity and infusing it with their own touch. Result is one of their very best films, a bloody classic of its type destined for acclaim and potentially robust B.O. [box office revenues].

Joel Coen analyzed the project in this way:

It's as close as we'll come to doing an action movie. It's a chase story—with Chigurh chasing Moss and the Sheriff bringing up the tail. It's a lot of physical activity to achieve a purpose. It's interesting in a genre way; but it was also interesting to us because it subverts the genre expectations.

As Kenneth Turan opined in his *Los Angeles Times* review:

Although only the spawn of the Marquis de Sade would consider this harrowing, uncompromisingly violent film a comedy, the Coens have understood the potential for acid humor in the dialogue and even added an unexpected comic moment or two, like a cheerful *norteño* band waking a seriously wounded man.

Like Turan, most critics were positive about the movie, but the critic Ray Bennett, writing in the *Hollywood Reporter* noted:

Plot holes, cracker-barrel philosophizing, and setting a major climactic scene off screen serve to undo all the Coens' fine work. The entire premise of the film is to pitch three men onto a path that will lead to a final reckoning, but it just peters out. Audiences will flock to see a mainstream Coen brothers film with such a colorful villain, but word-of-mouth about its fizzled conclusion might do damage at the box office.

With *No Country for Old Men*, Miramax had followed its patented gradual-release strategy for the movie's marketing. Produced for \$30 million, it had earned just over \$60 million by the time it won the Best Picture Oscar. Industry predictions expected only another \$10 million to \$20 million in revenues theatrically following the awards. The final balance sheet on *No Country for Old Men*, indeed, was a \$74 million gross.

BOLLYWOOD IN HOLLYWOOD

The Academy bestowed its Best Picture award for 2008 on *Slumdog Millionaire*, an essentially British production, filmed in India with a largely native cast and crew (although the lead role in the movie was played by Dev Patel, who is British and of Eastern Indian ancestry). Two British production companies, Caledor Films and Film4, financed the movie, which was distributed in North America by Fox Searchlight. Fox Searchlight had become one of the most successful of Hollywood's subsidiaries, specializing in finding unique and edgy low-budget features and foreign titles for distribution.

In accepting the Oscar at the Academy's annual award ceremonies in February 2009, producer Christian Colson announced: "Together, we've been on an extraordinary journey. When we started out we had no stars, no power or muscle, and we didn't have enough money to do what we wanted to do." Danny Boyle, holding up the Oscar statuette that he received as Best Director, intoned: "Just to say to Mumbai, all of you who helped us make the film and all of you who didn't, thank you very much. You dwarf even this guy." *Slumdog Millionaire* proved successful across the Oscar categories, including wins for cinematography, sound mixing, original score, original song ("Jai Ho"), and editing.

Slumdog Millionaire follows the travails and eventual triumphs of Jamal Malik (Patel), an orphan from the teeming slums of Mumbai (Bombay), who witnesses his mother's violent death, artfully dodges and escapes from a criminal gang that mutilates children to make pitiable beggars, endures police torture, and struggles with betrayal by his brother, while single-mindedly pursuing the apparently hopeless quest to reunite with Latika (Freida Pinto), the long-lost love of his childhood. A penniless Mumbai teenager who works as a tea boy, Jamal becomes a contestant on India's version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Toward the conclusion of his time on the show, he is arrested and subjected to intensive police interrogation on suspicion of cheating, which frames the narrative. While being interrogated, events from his life are seen as flashbacks, each of these incidents explaining the source of his knowledge of the answer for one of the quiz show's questions.

In a welter of praise for the film, one widely repeated assertion was that of a film critic for the *Montreal Gazette* who ventured the opinion that the movie was vastly superior to the novel by Vikas Swarup on which it was based. In general, the only caveat that seemed apparent was that the use of these flashbacks as triggering explanations for his quiz show answers seemed sometimes contrived and overly mechanistic. Still, most of the national critics in the United States lined up with Roger Ebert's assessment of *Slumdog Millionaire* in the *Chicago Sun-Times*: "This is a breathless, exciting story, heartbreaking and exhilarating at the same time." As Lou Lumenick noted in his *New York Post*

review: “*Slumdog Millionaire* just may be the most entertaining movie I’ve ever labeled a masterpiece in these pages.”

The movie was put together by a creative team of individuals with very different kinds of successes to their credit, including screenwriter Simon Beaufoy (*The Full Monty*, *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*) and director Danny Boyle (*Trainspotting*, *Shallow Grave*).

Scott Foundas wrote in *L.A. Weekly*:

The potential for a treacly *Good Will Hunting* of the Mumbai ghetto abounds, but Boyle and screenwriter Simon Beaufoy think more in terms of a minor-scale Dickensian epic (with one minor nod to Dumas); as Jamal journeys down memory lane, the crux of *Slumdog Millionaire* becomes the pull of time on the relationship between Jamal, his artful-dodger brother Salim, and the suitably beautiful, unattainable Latika (Freida Pinto), the life-long object of Jamal’s affection. . . . Ziggling to and fro, *Slumdog Millionaire* whips these familiar raw ingredients into a feverish masala, at once touristic and something deeper, which drenches the screen in sights and sounds of modern Mumbai. . . . That sort of hyped-up aesthetic can quickly turn wearying, as it has in several of Boyle’s less successful ventures (including *Shallow Grave* and the duly forgotten *A Life Less Ordinary*), but here it is a fount of renewable energy.

The editing of Chris Dickens cuts from shot to shot, scene to scene, leaping back and forth from Jamal in the game-show hot seat to Jamal in a very different kind of hot seat going through a police interrogation. Cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle’s camera and lighting make the colors pop out, and the music by composer A. R. Rahman sustains the movie throughout and infuses the grand production number at the end of the film. Mantle, by the way, was using compact digital cameras to move with speed and stealth through the streets and slums of the city.

The contrived episodes explaining how a tea boy (*chai-wallah*) could know the answer to such a range of questions on the quiz show may function too mechanically, but this seems not to matter. The likeability of the protagonist and the sheer energy and pace of the film transcend what might be considered structural flaws in the movie. As critic Anthony Lane wrote in the *New Yorker*: “Subtlety, you will have gathered, is not the prime concern here.”

The film premiered in North America at the Telluride (Colorado) Film Festival, and a week later it won the audience award at the jewel of autumn film festivals in Toronto. As Kenneth Turan, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, observed:

Who would believe that the best old-fashioned audience picture of the year, a Hollywood-style romantic melodrama that delivers major studio satisfactions in an ultra-modern way, was made on the streets of India with

largely unknown stars by a British director who never makes the same movie twice? Go figure. . . . That would be the hard-to-resist *Slumdog Millionaire* with director Danny Boyle adding independent film touches to a story of star-crossed romance that the original Warner brothers would have embraced, shamelessly pulling out stops that you wouldn't think anyone would have the nerve to attempt anymore. . . . A story where, in true Frank Capra fashion, chance, luck, suffering, and street smarts all play major roles.

A review in *Gentlemen's Quarterly* called it “the most action-filled, uplifting, hope-inducing (and only slightly cheesy) movie of the year.” As *Variety* said: “Driven by fantastic energy and a torrent of vivid images of India old and new, *Slumdog Millionaire* is a blast.” At the end of the day, stories about friendship and family had disproportionately dominated Best Picture nominees and winners.

SUMMARY

Several months after *Slumdog Millionaire's* Best Picture triumph on Oscar night, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced that beginning with the Academy Awards for 2009, instead of five nominees for Best Picture, in the future there would be ten. Thus, the Best Picture Oscar presented in February 2010 would have twice as many competitors as in the past. Most speculation predicted that more titles in the areas of sci-fi, action, and animation would be contenders for the best picture of the year. In that regard, the Academy appeared to be giving a nod to the audience-driven preferences of the previous thirty years, which had been becoming increasingly evident since the mid-1970s. These categories, of course, happen to be the ones thought to appeal to a younger demographic (primarily twelve- to twenty-four-year-olds), including comedies, that have been the core of box office earnings at theaters. Perhaps, as the adolescents and young adults in this age group—primarily males—have driven theater box office earnings for a couple of decades, they might in the future come to drive the Academy's Best Picture selections.

The Best Picture selections of the first decade of the twenty-first century reflected a range of movies not unlike the ones chosen for Best Picture Oscars by the Academy for the preceding seventy-three years. *Slumdog Millionaire*, a melodrama of personal struggle and love triumphant—enhanced by accomplished production values (if not necessarily the most expensive and technically most clever ones provided by CGI)—was an energetic revisiting of story lines and themes long familiar to Hollywood. Its imaginative energy was not

directed toward complex computer-generated imagery. At the same time, the movie presented a glimpse into a cultural diversity with which North American audiences had some acquaintance, but which could also be considered new for Hollywood.

The titles chosen by the Academy as Best Picture from 2001 through 2008—*A Beautiful Mind*, *Chicago*, *Lord of The Rings: Return of the King*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *Crash*, *The Departed*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *Slumdog Millionaire*—cross a range of motion pictures that reflect Hollywood's present bears striking resemblance to its past. These selections reflect a range of genres and types, new techniques and time-worn ones, and are motion pictures that display the virtuosity of writers, directors, performers, cinematographers, special-effects creators, and editors. They are movies that display a panoply of sentiment, spectacle, and sensation. For all the changes in moviemaking and movie-viewing that the twenty-first century holds, they still indicate that some things about movies change slowly indeed.

Conclusion

*T*here's a saying in French that translates into English as "The more things change, the more they stay the same." That slogan provides one way of looking at history. For the history of Hollywood, it provides a good approach to summarizing its story for the twentieth century. In the early twenty-first century, much still remains of Hollywood's past. With the exception of RKO, which folded in the late 1950s, all the other major Hollywood companies remain in business, and all of them still are connected to the motion picture industry in some way. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Hollywood remains the dominant force in global cinema, a status it has held since the era of World War I, having been challenged seriously in that role only briefly in the 1920s and then again in the early to mid-1960s.

By contrast, it is reasonable to argue exactly the opposite. Hollywood has changed enormously since its beginnings. The studios that remain are mere shells of what they once were. All of them are now subsidiaries of giant media corporations in which moviemaking is but a single, relatively small, portion of their business. These large media corporations are just as likely to be owned by financial interests from outside the United States as from within. We might plausibly argue that in the early twenty-first century, movie production is so far removed from Hollywood's studios of the Classic Era as to have little or no kinship with it.

Surely, the composition of audiences for movies has changed, and where movies are seen varies greatly from the movie theaters of the 1920s—when live musical accompaniment was the rule—to today when someone may watch a movie on a laptop computer. In the mid-twentieth century, the abiding question for people seriously interested in film was "What is cinema?" In the early twenty-first century, that question may have been replaced by

“Where is cinema?” What for most of the twentieth century could be described sociologically as the public consumption of movies, increasingly has become a private matter. But just what may this mean?

Going out to a movie theater was a public act, but the social decorum of movie-watching in a theater demanded there be no conversation. Watching a movie in a private space at home—with someone else or others—may facilitate more conversation and human interaction. The observation that Hollywood movies enjoyed their greatest popularity (in terms of the size of moviegoing audiences) and cultural prominence in the United States during World War II (1941–1945) is plausible. That observation, however, explains little in itself. The safest assertion is that Hollywood, at a period of unusual national unity and before the advent of television as a competitor, enjoyed circumstances very favorable to it. The art of movies exists always within some system of production, distribution, and exhibition, and the circumstances favorable to exhibition during World War II were ideal.

What about the actual art and craft of making movies? Haven’t the new digital technologies that have developed since the early 1990s completely taken over motion picture production? Haven’t these new technologies completely changed what movies are? People who call themselves filmmakers may have never seen or touched an actual piece of celluloid film.

The answer to these questions, again, is both yes and no. Motion picture postproduction—namely, editing and sound—has become work done by craftsmen and craftswomen with their hands on a mouse at a computer screen. Editors, who, with their assistants, used to spend time with reels of film and rewinds, now spend time digitizing footage and rendering output. Sound editors need to be expert with a program called Pro Tools. The process of *capture*, meaning the camerawork of actual filming, in some cases may mean working with digital cameras and tape, or solid-state tapeless formats of capture, rather than with a film camera and celluloid. Decisions about whether to shoot film, digital, hi-def, or tapeless depend on the goal for each project and its budget. Technology may influence certain artistic choices, but technology neither defines nor determines the art of film, or any of its constituent crafts. For editing, sound, and cinematography, the primary creative tools for filmmakers are as they’ve always been—the eye and the ear.

In the early twenty-first century, it is relatively safe to say that nearly all animation, special effects, and the like are computer generated, and that even relatively simple and straightforward feature films regularly employ CGI for some of their scenes. The computer permits the manipulation of material to create illusions that are particularly convincing. Still, production designers interpret the script and bring the physical elements of a production into accord with that interpretation, and composers provide music for movies that

is almost always created electronically rather than as a written score. Keeping up with changing production technologies is necessary, but the artistry of film remains bound to basics: textual, visual, and auditory design.

Throughout the history of the cinema, film has been about illusion. And even the creation of illusion for the viewer is less about tools and technology than it is about creative imagination. Long before computers, movies were achieving effects—both special and conventional—that are entirely convincing and believable. In a basic sense, the fundamental illusion that is most important on the screen is that of performance. The viewer has to be able to believe the character and to care about the character's role in the story that is being told on-screen. Screen talent has been sought, nurtured, and well paid throughout Hollywood's history. At the end of the day, most movies are about who is on the screen; who is on the screen is most important because movies depend on storytelling, and the most engaging stories are about people and the relationships between them. Storytelling in movies nearly always combines elements that simultaneously are literary and theatrical.

After any movie is made, there are many ways of interpreting it. Its meaning and value relies heavily on who sees it—when and where. The approaches to interpretation have been formalized in criticism, and these approaches broadly reflect and respond to changes in the prevailing culture. Criticism, moreover, adapts to its own culture—whether it is in popular circles or among academics. Movies are said to be about all kinds of things, but because the motion picture is a specific art, all movies are in some way or another about all other movies all the time—essentially, cinema may be regarded as a closed system. We understand it as a system that expands into spheres of culture, economics, ideologies, and social practice, but cinema may be best understood and appreciated as an artistic system unto itself.

Former shopkeepers, peddlers, and the owners and promoters of various other entertainments and amusements founded Hollywood. They wanted to do business by pleasing audiences, and they forged a cinema that for a century has made movies strongly driven by perceptions of audience taste and by the demographics of who is thought to constitute the audience. This has remained a constant of Hollywood.

Alongside this constant of trying to please audiences and anticipate shifts in taste, Hollywood learned how to accommodate and channel the creative talents and ambitions of filmmakers as well. Hollywood is a surprisingly resilient cultural system that arguably has financially rewarded the artists who work in it better than artists have ever been remunerated anywhere else at any time. And it has been surprisingly open in its embrace of talent: from the foreign immigrants who started the early studios, to talent like director F. W. Murnau who was hired from Germany by Fox in the late 1920s to direct *Sunrise*, to the

waves of talent who have come to Hollywood from Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, up through the Academy's selection of *Slumdog Millionaire* as 2008's Best Picture.

Exploring the movies of Hollywood through the approximately 180 films that have been selected as Best Pictures by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences or were voted onto either of the two lists of the greatest and most significant American movies assembled by the American Film Institute provides us broad insights into the history of motion pictures and their development. Accomplishment in movies is achieved through the efficacious practice of the various crafts. But the total art of movies exists in a financial and business system of production, distribution, and exhibition.

What may be most unusual about creativity in the movies is its collaborative nature. Collaboration often depends on positive interpersonal relationships among the collaborators, but it doesn't necessarily have to. In the past century, Hollywood has created an extraordinary body of work that appeals to the aesthetic satisfactions of sentiment, spectacle, and sensation. Hollywood craft always is accomplished and polished, but, in the long run, the crafts are practiced primarily in the service of storytelling. Truly significant movies are rarely about "cool shots," or other formal elements, that draw attention to themselves.

What are the most reliably effective movie stories about? The answer is that stories in movies may be about almost anything. The settings for them may be familiar or exotic. They may come from episodes or events that have actually happened, or they may be entirely imagined and implausible in real life. The bottom line is that the viewer needs to care about the characters no matter what situations they find themselves in. As with all generalizations, there may be exceptions. The Hollywood movies of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that have gained the most positive attention from other industry professionals tend to boil down to being about human relationships that really matter. To an exceptional degree, they are about friendship, either discovered or lost; family, discovered or lost; love, discovered or lost; or self-identity and integrity, discovered or lost. In being about these basics, they transcend the other things that they may appear to be about, such as the issues, causes, ideologies, and moral lessons that may be discerned in them thematically.

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About the Author

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