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# Old Hollywood: Tough Guys and Mad Dames

## Rich Johnson

### Week 4

#### HUMPHREY BOGART: THE QUIET DETECTIVE

When we often think of the iconic private investigator framed by strips of light and shrouded with a stream of smoke and an even smokier femme fatale, Humphrey Bogart was the man. Born on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1899, Bogart was a quiet actor whose style was as much about what *wasn't* said than what was. As with most stars, it was his presence and grizzled features that added a great deal of pathos to what could have so easily become cardboard cut out characters. Having fallen in love with Lauren Bacall while filming *To Have and Have Not* (1944) in 1943, they tied the knot the following year. Bacall was just 19 years old at the time they met, Bogart 25 years her senior. Although the marriage had its problems, the relationship lasted until the time of his death; their collaborations on screen having become as equally iconic as his solo outings. After a battle with cancer, sadly Bogart passed away on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1957.

*Please refer to the reading list for a full reference of films.*

#### **Main:**

*Dark Passage* (1947)

**Director(s):** Delmer Daves

**Studio(s):** Warner Bros.

*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948)

**Director(s):** John Huston

**Studio(s):** Warner Bros.

*In a Lonely Place* (1950)

**Director(s):** Nicholas Ray

**Studio(s):** Santana Pictures Corporation (distributed by Columbia Pictures)

#### **References to:**

*Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938)

**Director(s):** Michael Curtiz

**Studio(s):** Warner Bros.



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***The Maltese Falcon*** (1941)

**Director(s):** John Huston

**Studio(s):** Warner Bros.

***Casablanca*** (1942)

**Director(s):** Michael Curtiz

**Studio(s):** Warner Bros.

***The Big Sleep*** (1946)

**Director(s):** Howard Hawks

**Studio(s):** Warner Bros.

***Lady in the Lake*** (1947)

**Director(s):** Robert Montgomery

**Studio(s):** Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

***The African Queen*** (1951)

**Director(s):** John Huston

**Studio(s):** Romulus Films / Horizon Pictures (distributed by United Artists)

***Johnny Guitar*** (1954)

**Director(s):** Nicholas Ray

**Studio(s):** Republic Pictures

***The Desperate Hours*** (1955)

**Director(s):** William Wyler

**Studio(s):** Paramount Pictures

***Rebel Without a Cause*** (1956)

**Director(s):** Nicholas Ray

**Studio(s):** Warner Bros.

***The Harder They Fall*** (1956)

**Director(s):** Mark Robson

**Studio(s):** Columbia Pictures

### Notes:

*“All you owe the public is a good performance.” — Humphrey Bogart*

Young Bogie

Humphrey DeForest Bogart was born on Christmas day, 1899, in New York City and was the eldest child of physician Belmont DeForest Bogart and Maud Humphrey. His mother was a respected illustrator whose artwork, often featuring children, garnered the moniker the ‘Humphrey Baby’,



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used by advertising agencies and greeting card companies. Born into a wealthy surgeon's family she was well educated, a militant suffragette and later becoming an art director of the fashion magazine *The Delineator*. In the first photo, he's only four months old.

Little Humphrey's chubby angelic face began appearing on advertisements and jar labels of Mellin's Baby Foods. Born into wealth, young 'Bogie' wanted for nothing, yet, due to his parents busy careers, neither showed very much emotion towards their children, the marriage strained, at best.

The Bogarts lived in an Upper West Side apartment – No. 245 West 103rd Street – and had a cottage on a 55-acre estate on Canandaigua Lake in upstate New York.

In terms of his education, Bogart attended the private Delancey School until the fifth grade and then attended the prestigious Trinity School. He was known for being a sullen student who showed no interest in after-school activities. His parents hoped he would attend Yale University, instead attending boarding school from which he ended up expelled. There are many stories ranging from throwing his headmaster into Rabbit Pond on campus to his father withdrawing him for failing to improve his grades.

With no viable career options left, he enlisted in the United States Navy in the spring of 1918 during World War I. Apparently he was a model sailor and even attempted to re-enlist in the Navy during WWII but was rejected due to his age. He then volunteered for the Coast Guard Temporary Reserve in 1944, patrolling the California coastline in his yacht, the Santana.

Circa 1920. Bogart returned home after the Navy to find his father in poor health and the family's wealth lost in poor investments. Investments. Bogart's attitudes around this time and political views changed. He became a liberal who disliked pretensions that came with wealth and snobbishness and would often defy such conventional behaviours associated with the rich. He was, however, known for being well-mannered, articulate and professional. Around this time he worked stage manager and eventually, through no formal training, began acting in Broadway productions from 1922. When he became noticed by Hollywood he didn't make the permanent move, travelling from the East to West coast, back and forth to star in films and plays.

#### First appearances

He debuted in the 1928 short "The Dancing Town" and, two years later, with Joan Blondell and Ruth Etting in a Vitaphone short, "Broadway's Like That" (1930), which was rediscovered in 1963.

He may have been known later on for defining the film noir anti-hero and iconic private eyes, but early on he was often the strong arm or villain, such as lawyer and co-conspirator James Frazier in Michael Curtiz's *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938).

#### Play it again

Arguably his most iconic movie is another Michael Curtiz and Warner Bros. movie, 1942's *Casablanca*.



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#### Bogie and Bacall

Bogart was married four times: Helen Menken (m. 1926; div. 1927), Mary Philips (m. 1928; div. 1937) Mayo Methot (m. 1938; div. 1945)... his marriage to Lauren Bacall lasting the longest from 1945 to his death in 1957. They were introduced by Howard Hawks while Bogart was filming *Passage to Marseille* (1944). He reportedly said in an early encounter with the young actress, "I just saw your test. We'll have a lot of fun together".

As a trio, the director and stars collaborated on three productions including *To Have and Have Not* (1944), which was Bacall's film debut. It was actually Hawk's wife, Slim, who discovered her flicking through Harper's Bazaar when she worked as a model. Bacall was 19 when they met, Bogart 44 and still married at the time. Their difference in age was hardly addressed, their bond and chemistry always seen as one of the most authentic Hollywood relationships. Even Hawks fell for her early on, and in one instance spread gossip – that Bogart felt nothing for her. After calming Bacall down, Jack Warner had to settle the dispute between Bogart and Hawks.

Bogart filed for divorce from Mayo Methot in February 1945 and they were married a few months later. Their son, Stephen Bogart, was born in 1949 and daughter Leslie Bogart born in 1952.

The couple was among the first celebrities to become political activists and stood up for democracy under threat in the late 1940s when the House Committee on Un-American Activities imagined the 'Red Threat'. Their authentic outrage at the committee's mischief bonded Bogart and Bacall early in their marriage with a shared view about the First Amendment and freedom of expression. But they eventually backed down in the face of public criticism, studio fears and threats which led to them railroaded into stating that communists were: "just as any other decent American does."

Bogart was a heavy drinker and smoker which showed. He looked very much beyond his years needing heavy makeup and wigs for the majority of his performances.

#### King of noir

Bogart owned the 1940s. This was a decade in which his career exploded with *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), in particular, signalling the start of a new chapter.

Some people don't realise that the Bogart/Huston version is the second adaptation, the first released in 1931 also from Warner Bros.

Another notable film noir is *The Big Sleep* (1946), another film with Howard Hawks, in which Bogart plays the definitive detective Philip Marlowe from Raymond Chandler's original novel. It was adapted again in 1978 starring Robert Mitchum in the lead role and a follow up to his previous outing as Marlowe in *Fairwell, My Lovely* (1975).

"You know, it's wonderful when guys like you lose out. Makes guys like me think maybe we got a chance in this world." — Vincent Parry



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Directed by Delmer Daves (*3:10 to Yuma*, 1957), *Dark Passage* (1947) is a top notch film noir in which an innocent man, Vincent Parry (Bogart) escapes from prison after being accused and locked up for the murder of his wife. –Upon escape, in the outside world, he finds that his own face betrays him and proceeds to have plastic surgery in an effort to forge a new identity. After receiving a ride out of town from a stranger, Vincent crosses paths with a young woman (Lauren Bacall) who lets him stay in her apartment while he heals and continues to try and clear his name.

It was the third of four films Bogart and Bacall made together. The other three are *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Key Largo* (1948).

*“He told himself she wasn’t really such a bad person, she was just a pest, she was sticky, there was something misplaced in her make-up, something that kept her from fading clear of people when they wanted to be in the clear.”*

Adapted from the 1946 crime novel of the same name by David Goodis.

Although not the first film to make use of POV work, the film’s opener makes supreme effort to use the technique effectively to tell the story and lend a unique perspective for the audience, literally putting you in the shoes of the audience.

Released several months before *Dark Passage Lady in the Lake* (1947), directed by Robert Montgomery, was shot entirely in first person in an effort to capture the first-person narrative style of the Raymond Chandler novel it was based on.

Daves employed similar techniques throughout *Dark Passage* until he hooked the audience, using a mix of mirrors and stand-ins.

According to IMDb, Warner Brothers studio head Jack Warner was not pleased to discover that the face of one of his biggest stars was not seen for the first half of the movie. By the time Warner knew this, the film was too far along to be changed.

For its time, the film remains a sharp and brutal piece of work with some deftly macabre flourishes throughout. It has often been criticised for sagging once the POV gimmick is boxed up, and more than likely has something to do with it being a somewhat overlooked Bogart film.

Grizzled

*“I think I’ll go to sleep and dream about piles of gold getting bigger and bigger and bigger.”* — Fred C. Dobbs

Bogart stars in a classic adventure film as two rough-and-tumble wanderers, Dobbs (Bogart) and Curtin (Tim Holt), meet up with a veteran prospector, Howard (Walter Huston), in Mexico and head into the Sierra Madre mountains to find gold. Although they discover treasure, they also find plenty of trouble, not only from ruthless bandits lurking in the dangerous Mexican wilderness but from their own insecurities and greed, which threaten to bring conflict at any moment.



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It's a classic adventure tale and, amongst a decade of noir and drama, makes for a refreshing change in the cinematic landscape of the era and Bogart's roles. This isn't the suave anti hero, but a shambling destitute character.

*"It isn't the gold that changes man, it is the power which gold gives to man that changes the soul of man. This power, though, is only imaginary. If not recognized by other men, it does not exist."*

Adapted from the 1927 adventure novel of the same name by B. Traven.

Huston and Bogie made six films together in total and had this to say about his friend: "He was endowed with the greatest gift a man can have--talent. The whole world came to recognize it. With the years he became increasingly aware of the dignity of his profession--Actor, not Star. Himself he never took seriously--his work, most seriously. He regarded the somewhat gaudy figure of Bogart, the Star, with amused cynicism; Bogart the actor he held in great respect. He is quite irreplaceable."

It is a film that depicts iconic elements of the Old West, yet goes beyond all of that to tell a rollicking classic adventure. In light of this, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas were inspired by Humphrey Bogart in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* when they created *Indiana Jones*.

Punching into the '50s

*"I was born when she kissed me. I died when she left me. I lived a few weeks while she loved me."*  
— Dixon Steele

Arguably Bogart's best film, *In a Lonely Place* (1950) tells the story of Hollywood screenwriter Dixon Steele (Bogart) and his neighbour Laurel (Gloria Grahame) who are just getting to know each other romantically when the police begin questioning Dixon about his involvement in the murder of a girl he met once. In true noir fashion, as the story unfolds elements of paranoia are at play as Laurel – despite believing Dixon is innocent as the police continue to press him – sees Dixon become more and more erratic. Is he the killer or is it just the pressure of being accused for a crime he hasn't committed that is sending him over the edge?

*"Again in the dark, sea-scented night, he was filled with power and excitement and rhythm."*

Based on the 1947 novel of the same name by Dorothy B. Hughes.

Directed by the maverick filmmaker Nicholas Ray, *In a Lonely Place* sets an incredibly high benchmark for 1950s cinema. He was married to Gloria Graham from 1948 to 1952.

Controversially she was caught in bed with his 13 year old son, who she later married. Her latter years are portrayed in the superb film *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool* (2017).

According to IMDb, producer Robert Lord was worried about having Ray and Grahame – whose marriage was on the rocks at this point – working together. He made Grahame sign a contract stipulating that "my husband shall be entitled to direct, control, advise, instruct, and even command my actions during the hours from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., every day except Sunday. I acknowledge that in every conceivable situations his will and judgment shall be considered superior to mine, and shall



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prevail." Grahame was also forbidden to "nag, cajole, tease, or in any other feminine fashion seek to distract or influence him."

They quietly separated during filming, keeping it a secret for fear that one of them would be replaced. Ray slept on the studio set, saying that he needed to work late on preparation for the remainder of the film. It worked, and nobody suspected that their marriage was on the rocks.

Ray would go on to make the cult Western *Johnny Guitar* (1954) and, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956).

In her essay "Humphrey and Bogey", iconic silent star Louise Brooks wrote that more than any other role that Humphrey Bogart played, it was the role of Dixon Steele in this movie that came closest to the real Bogart she knew. You can [read the essay](#) over at BFI from the Winter 1966 issue.

Having studied architecture as an apprentice to famed architect *Frank Lloyd Wright*, it is no surprise that set pieces and spaces are a major character in his films. The apartment complex in which Dixon and Laurel live in was actually a replica of Ray's own residence when he first moved to Hollywood.

Known for his intensity, it is no surprising that the background vitriol and controversy would seep through into the film.

Naturally Bogart wanted his wife to play opposite him, but Warner Brothers refused to release Bacall from her contract. Grahame's po-faced demeanor and coldness comes through in the performance, despite her being a sympathetic character.

Goldfrapp wrote a song based on Grahame's character Laurel Gray. It is on their film-inspired album *Tales of Us* and is entitled Laurel; an album that feels like a lost collection of movie soundtracks.

Some overlooked classics include: *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *Beat the Devil* (1953), *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), *We're No Angels* (1955) and, of course, *The African Queen* (1951).

Final years...

A friend of Frank Sinatra's, Bogart was actually a founding member (and the original leader) of the Hollywood Rat Pack. It was Bacall who came up with the term after the wreckage of a long Las Vegas party. "You look like a goddamn rat pack." The name stuck and was made official at Romanoff's in Beverly Hills. After Bogart's death, Bacall would end up engaged to Sinatra but he dropped when news leaked of their engagement blaming it on Bacall.

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In the few years he had left, Bogart still remained a powerhouse player, filming some notable classics such as *The Desperate Hours* (1955), which was remade as *Desperate Hours* in 1990 by



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Michael Cimino, starring Mickey Rourke and Anthony Hopkins. His final film was the boxing movie *The Harder They Fall*, released in May of 1956, just over 8 months before his death.

On her late husband, Bacall would recall:

“He was a very gentle soul. He was very strong, and very sure about what he believed in and what he thought was important and not important. He couldn’t be pushed around. But he was a gentle man. I was very, very lucky to have even met him, much less have been married to him. He had extraordinary gifts. He was much more of a complete individuals than most people are. He had the kind of standards my mother had. Their values were very much the same. It was very interesting. He had tremendous character and a great sense of honor and would not tolerate lies, even if they asked him what he thought of a movie.

We were once at a screening at somebody’s house, I forget whose, and they ran a movie that he was in, that he never thought much of. Afterward, the producer asked what he thought of it, and Bogie said ‘I think it’s a crock.’ [laughs] And this producer was horrified! He was about the release the movie, and he said to Bogie ‘Why would you say that?!’ Bogie shrugged and said ‘Then don’t ask me.’ He never played the schmoozing game. He was not into that at all.”

*“The problem with the world is that everyone is a few drinks behind.”* — Humphrey Bogart

Having developed esophageal cancer, Humphrey Bogart passed away on January 14, 1957.