

= Robert Rossen =

Robert Rossen ( March 16 , 1908 ? February 18 , 1966 ) was an American screenwriter , film director , and producer whose film career spanned almost three decades .

His 1949 film All the King 's Men won Oscars for Best Picture , Best Actor and Best Supporting Actress , while Rossen was nominated for an Oscar as Best Director . He won the Golden Globe for Best Director and the film won the Golden Globe Award for Best Picture . In 1961 he directed The Hustler , which was nominated for nine Oscars and won two .

After directing and writing for the stage in New York , Rossen moved to Hollywood in 1937 . There he worked as a screenwriter for Warner Bros. until 1941 , and then interrupted his career to serve until 1944 as the chairman of the Hollywood Writers Mobilization , a body to organize writers for the effort in World War II . In 1945 he joined a picket line against Warner Bros. After making one film for Hal Wallis 's newly formed production company , Rossen made one for Columbia Pictures , another for Wallis and most of his later films for his own companies , usually in collaboration with Columbia .

Rossen was a member of the American Communist Party from 1937 to about 1947 , and believed the Party was " dedicated to social causes of the sort that we as poor Jews from New York were interested in . "

He ended all relations with the Party in 1949 . Rossen was twice called before the House Un @-@ American Activities Committee ( HUAC ) , in 1951 and in 1953 . He exercised his Fifth Amendment rights at his first appearance , refusing to state whether he had ever been a Communist . As a result , he found himself blacklisted by Hollywood studios as well as unable to renew his passport . At his second appearance he named 57 people as current or former Communists and his blacklisting ended . In order to repair finances he produced his next film , Mambo , in Italy in 1954 . While The Hustler in 1961 was a great success , conflicts on the set of Lilith so disillusioned him that it was his last film .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life and career = = =

Robert Rosen was born on March 16 , 1908 , and raised on the Lower East Side of New York City . His parents were Russian @-@ Jewish immigrants and his father was a rabbi . As a youth Rossen attended New York University , hustled pool and fought some prizefights . - the latter two providing crucial background for his two greatest films , Body and Soul and The Hustler , respectively .

He started his theatrical career as a stage manager and director in stock and off @-@ Broadway productions , mainly in the social and radical theaters that flourished in New York in the early and mid @-@ 1930s , as did John Huston , Elia Kazan and Joseph Losey . In 1932 Rossen directed John Wexley 's Steel , about labor agitation , and Richard Maibaum 's The Tree , about a lynching . A year later Rossen directed Birthright , in which Maibaum attacked Nazism , which had just triumphed in Germany with the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler in 1933 .

In 1935 Rossen wrote and directed his first play , The Body Beautiful , a comedy about a naive burlesque dancer . Although the play closed after four performances , Warner Bros. director Mervyn LeRoy was so impressed that in 1936 he signed Rossen to a personal screenwriting contract .

= = = Marriage = = =

In 1936 Rossen married Susan Siegal ; the couple had three children .

= = = Work in Hollywood = = =

For his first credit in Hollywood , in 1937 Rossen co @-@ wrote with Abem Finkel a script based on the prosecution of crime lord Lucky Luciano and eventually titled Marked Woman . Although some of

Warner Bros. management saw Rossen as an unknown quantity, the result won praise from both Jack L. Warner and the Daily Worker. Rossen's first solo script was for *They Won't Forget* (1937), a fictionalized account of the lynching of Leo Frank, featuring Lana Turner in her debut performance.

*Dust Be My Destiny*, co-written in 1939 by Rossen, is the story of a fugitive from justice who is eventually acquitted with help from an attorney and a journalist, the latter arguing that "a million boys all over the country" were in a similar plight. Warner Bros. then ordered producer Lou Edelman to cut the script, adding that "This is the story of two people? not a group. It is an individual problem? not a national one." Rossen was one of three writers on the gangster melodrama *The Roaring Twenties*, released in 1939. A remake of the 1932 play and film *Life Begins* was written in 1939 by Rossen and released in 1940 as *A Child Is Born*. The plot recounted the experiences of six expectant mothers, and there was little scope to modify the original.

*The Sea Wolf*, released in 1941, was based on Jack London's novel. Although the film had a strong cast and production, Rossen's re-draft of the script may be the greatest influence on the film. While the character of Captain Larsen remained both victim and oppressed in a capitalist hierarchy, he became a symbol of fascism. He split the novel's idealist hero into an intellectual bosun and a rebellious seaman. Warner Bros. cut many political points during production.

*Blues in the Night*, written by Rossen and two colleagues and released in 1941, shows a group of jazz musicians traveling in the Depression. Their informal methods represent working-class culture rather than the commercialized music of the big bands. However, *The New York Times*' reviewer thought the sound track was "about all the film has to offer", and Warner was disappointed with the sales.

After the Attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Screen Writers Guild set up on December 8, 1941, the Hollywood Writers Mobilization, a body to organize writers for the war effort. Rossen served as the body's chairman until 1944 and advocated the opening of a Second Front to support West European resistance against the Nazis. His earnings were much greater than in 1937. However, his work for Hollywood Writers Mobilization and for the Communist Party forced him to abandon some partly developed film projects, including *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which John Huston eventually directed in 1948.

In 1945 Rossen joined a picket line against Warner Bros., making an enemy of Jack Warner. Rossen signed a contract with an independent production company formed by Hal Wallis, who had previously been Warner Bros.' head of production. However Rossen wrote only two full scripts for this company, *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* in 1946 and *Desert Fury* in 1947. In *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* Rossen used a short story by John Patrick to introduce the main plot, which was set fifteen years later and which Rossen wrote himself. The relationship between Rossen and Wallis broke down when Rossen received offers from other production companies.

Dick Powell had been a crooner but was making a new career as a dramatic actor. When Columbia Pictures agreed to make *Johnny O'Clock* for him in 1947, Powell successfully campaigned for Rossen to direct, and this became Rossen's debut in directing. As this crime melodrama proved a modest success, Roberts Productions signed Rossen to direct Abraham Polonsky's script of *Body and Soul*, described by Bob Thomas as "possibly the best prizefight film ever made." Rossen preferred an ending in which the hero wins a boxing match and then is killed by a gangster, but Polonsky insisted on his own ending, in which the hero escapes into obscurity before the fight. Following the success of *Body and Soul*, Rossen formed his own production company and signed with Columbia Pictures a contract that gave him wide autonomy over every second film that he made at the studio.

*All the King's Men* (1949) was based on the novel of the same name by Robert Penn Warren, which in turn was based on the career of the Louisiana politician Huey Long. Rossen introduced a new concept, that the defenders of the ordinary people can in turn become the new exploiters. As a requirement for his participation in the film, Rossen had to write to Columbia's Harry Cohn saying that he was no longer a Communist Party member. Cohn's critiques of the draft of Rossen's script included scrapping a framing structure that was difficult for audiences to follow and several improvements in the relationships and motivations of characters. A meeting of the Communist Party

in Los Angeles severely criticized the film , and Rossen severed all relations with the Party . All the King 's Men won the Academy Award for Best Picture , Broderick Crawford won the award for Best Actor and Mercedes McCambridge was honored as Best Supporting Actress . Rossen was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director but lost to Joseph L. Mankiewicz for A Letter to Three Wives . Rossen won a Golden Globe for Best Director and the film won the Golden Globe for Best Picture . His next film , The Brave Bulls , was directed in 1950 and released in 1951 . This was Rossen 's last work before the studios blacklisted him . New York Times critic Bosley Crowther called this " the best film on bull @-@ fighting yet . "

= = = Examinations by HUAC = = =

After the end of World War II in 1945 , the rightwing elements who had resisted the US entry into World War Two because of their pro @-@ Fascist isolationism , continued their attempts to control and punish the left @-@ leaning and highly talented entertainment professionals who had done so much to support Churchill and FDR and fight the spread of Fascism in Europe during the 1930s while the United States was technically neutral . In 1946 , the Republicans gained an overwhelming majority in the Congressional elections. and used this power to re @-@ invigorate committees there that had failed to stop anti @-@ Fascist artists before the war . The Communist victory of China in 1949 and the start of the Korean War in 1950 reinforced the anti @-@ Communist hysteria being whipped up at the time .

During hearings in 1947 , Jack Warner included Rossen among the many openly leftist writers whom his studio , Warner Bros. , had hired as the earliest and most openly anti @-@ Nazi studios in Hollywood ( Warner Bros had made " Confessions of a Nazi Spy " in 1939 and were attacked by GOP forces for this at the time ) . Warner reportedly accused Rossen of incorporating Communist propaganda in scripts and claimed this was why he had fired him , though in fact the real reason for Warner 's enmity with Rossen were his writer 's union activities .

Rossen was one of 19 " unfriendly witnesses " subpoenaed in October 1947 by the House Un @-@ American Activities Committee ( HUAC ) during the second Red Scare but was one of eight not called to testify . In 1951 , Rossen was named as a Communist by several HUAC witnesses and he appeared before HUAC for the first time in June 1951 . He exercised his rights under the Fifth Amendment against self @-@ incrimination , taking what came to be known as the " augmented Fifth " . He testified that he was not a member of the Communist Party and that he disagreed with the aims of the party , but when asked to state whether he had ever been a member of the party , Rossen refused to answer . He was placed on the unofficial blacklist by the Hollywood studios , and Columbia broke its production contract with him .

In an unconstitutional though widespread practice during the Communist witchhunts , the U.S. State Department refused to renew Rossen 's passport . This , and his inability to find work , brought Rossen , like his friend , ex @-@ Communist Elia Kazan , back to the committee in May 1953 , where he named 57 people as Communists . He explained to the committee why he chose to testify : " I don 't think , after two years of thinking , that any one individual can indulge himself in the luxury of personal morality or pit it against what I feel today very strongly is the security and safety of this nation . " Stephen Rossen later shed light on his father 's decision :

" It killed him not to work . He was torn between his desire to work and his desire not to talk , and he didn 't know what to do . What I think he wanted to know was , what would I think of him if he talked ? He didn 't say it in that way , though . Then he explained to me the politics of it ? how the studios were in on it , and there was never any chance of his working . He was under pressure , he was sick , his diabetes was bad , and he was drinking . By this time I understood that he had refused to talk before and had done his time , from my point of view . What could any kid say at that point ? You say , ' I love you and I 'm behind you . ' "

Like Elia Kazan 's testimony , Rossen 's HUAC testimony destroyed many lifelong friendships , along with dozens of careers ; however , unlike Kazan , Rossen 's career never recovered , while Kazan 's flourished for the rest of his life .

= = = Return to filmmaking = = =

From 1952 to 1953 , Rossen wrote Mambo , trying to repair his finances after almost two years without work following the 1951 HUAC hearing . He had to produce the film in Italy , and it was premiered in Italy in 1954 and the USA in 1955 . Rossen later said " Mambo was to be for fun only , " but he " took it seriously , and it didn 't come off . " Critics dismissed the film . However , in 2001 , Dorothea Fischer @-@ Hornung concluded that the film achieved more than Rossen and contemporary critics realized . The female lead resolves her own conflicts by devoting herself to dance . Katherine Dunham 's choreography highlights this process ; and innovative cinematography intensifies the dance scenes .

Rossen hoped Alexander the Great ( 1956 ) would be a blockbuster , but the majority of the reviews criticized the film for failing to keep the audience 's interest . However , the review from The New York Times wrote that " its moments of boredom are rare ... an overlong but thoughtful and spectacular entertainment . "

In 1961 , Rossen co @-@ wrote , produced and directed The Hustler . Drawing upon his own experiences as a pool hustler , he teamed with Sidney Carroll to adapt the novel of the same name for the screen . The Hustler was nominated for nine Academy Awards and won two . Rossen was nominated as Best Director and with Carroll for Best Adapted Screenplay but did not win either award . He was named Best Director by the New York Film Critics Circle and shared with Carroll the Writers Guild of America Award for Best Written Drama . The Hustler was an enormous popular success and is credited with sparking a resurgence in the popularity of pool in the United States , which had been on the decline for decades .

Rossen was already ill when he started on his final film , Lilith ( 1964 ) , and it was poorly received in the United States . After it Rossen lost interest in directing , reportedly because of conflicts with the film 's star , Warren Beatty . The filmmaker said , " It isn 't worth that kind of grief . I won 't take it any more . I have nothing to say on the screen right now . Even if I never make another picture , I 've got The Hustler on my record . I 'm content to let that one stand for me . " However , at the time of his death Rossen was planning Cocoa Beach , a script he conceived in 1962 , showing the hopes and struggles of transients in a local community and contrasting this with nearby Cape Canaveral , which Neve described as a " symbol of America 's imperial reach " .

= = Death = =

Rossen died in New York City at age 57 on February 18 , 1966 , following a series of illnesses and is interred at Westchester Hills Cemetery in Hastings @-@ on @-@ Hudson , Westchester County , New York . He was survived by his wife Susan , son Stephen , and daughters Carol and Ellen . His grandchild , Daniel Rossen , is the guitarist / vocalist of alternative bands Grizzly Bear and Department of Eagles .

= = Reception = =

Rossen was one of the directors who developed film gris ( French for " grey film " ) . In his films for Warner Brothers ' between 1937 and 1944 , consistent themes were the conditions of working people , the portrayal of gangsters and racketeers , and opposition to fascism . After Dust Be My Destiny , written by Rossen and released in 1939 , Frank Nugent , who regularly reviewed for The New York Times , complained about Warner Brothers ' long line of melodramas about boys from poor neighbourhoods . Unlike filmmakers such as John Ford and Howard Hawks , Rossen was willing to explain his aims as a director : " The element common to many of my films is the desire for success , ambition , which is an important element in American life . It is an important element , and has become increasingly more important in what is known as Western Civilization . " Polonsky commented that " Rossen 's talent is force applied everywhere without let @-@ up . " Neve acknowledged that social concerns were central in most of Rossen 's works , but commented that Lilith was different from Rossen 's earlier films as it emphasized mood rather than narrative and

examined through pictures and silences the nature of maladjustment and madness .

Farber noted the strong female characters of the 1930s and 1940s , and laments their replacing by all @-@ male relationships from the 1950s onwards . For the earlier pattern Farber cited Rossen 's 1946 script *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* , which was over melodramatic but portrayed a woman consumed by power , money and success . *Lilith* created one of the few strong women in the 1960s . Rossen generally destroyed the main character .

All of Rossen 's playscripts were adaptations except *Marked Woman* , *Racket Buster* and *Alexander the Great* , which were based on real events . Before he was blacklisted in 1951 , only two of Rossen 's adaptations were of serious novels , and Rossen 's early drafts of the script for *All the King 's Men* received serious criticisms within Columbia .

While head of production at Warner , Hal Wallis considered that some of his best films ? including *The Roaring Twenties* , *Marked Woman* and *The Sea Wolf* ? were written by Rossen . Wallis was very pleased with Rossen 's script in 1946 for *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* , which was produced by Wallis own company . However , Rossen turned down Wallis 's next two films . Both Wallis as producer and Rossen as writer @-@ director wanted to operate as independents , rather than under the control of a studio .

*All the King 's Men* was one of the last of the social " message " films , as they were eclipsed as America turned conservative . Thomas Schatz ' regarded *All the King 's Men* as possibly the best of the genre , as it examined alcoholism , adultery , political corruption and the influence of journalism . In 2001 the United States National Film Registry preserved the film as " culturally , historically , or aesthetically significant . "

Rossen produced , directed and co @-@ wrote *The Hustler* in 1961 . At the time *Variety* praised the cast , complained about the " sordid aspects " of the story and felt the film was far too long . *The New Republic* praised the cast and Rossen 's " sure , economical " direction , but thought the script " strains hard to give an air of menace and criminality . " The film won two Academy Awards and was nominated for another seven , was nominated in four of the Golden Globes ' categories , and gained many other awards and nominations .

In 1997 the National Film Registry preserved *The Hustler* as " culturally , historically , or aesthetically significant . " In 2002 Roger Ebert described the film as one " where scenes have such psychic weight that they grow in our memories " and praised Rossen 's decision to develop all four main characters , and James Berardinelli listed the film in his All Time Top 100 for similar reasons . Ebert also praised Rossen 's decision to shoot the film in the " stygian gloom of the billiard parlor " created by black @-@ and @-@ white . Other accolades appeared in the 2000s ( decade ) .

In 1966 Stephen Farber used " Gothic " to describe *Lilith* and a few other American films of the early 1960s based on psychological horror , and regarded *Lilith* 's female protagonist as a demonic temptress . Nina Leibman regarded *Lilith* as the most extreme of the American film industry 's applications , or rather misapplications , of psychoanalytic concepts , as the patient is already psychotic and has a track record of previous conquests . In *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* David Thomson describes *Lilith* as " an oddity , the only one of [ Rossen 's ] films that seems passionate , mysterious and truly personal . The other films will look increasingly dated and self @-@ contained , but *Lilith* may grow . "

= = Works = =