

= Spencer Tracy =

Spencer Bonaventure Tracy (April 5 , 1900 ? June 10 , 1967) was an American actor , noted for his natural style and versatility . One of the major stars of Hollywood 's Golden Age , Tracy was nominated for nine Academy Awards for Best Actor and won two , sharing the record for nominations in that category with Laurence Olivier .

Tracy first discovered his talent for acting while attending Ripon College , and he later received a scholarship for the American Academy of Dramatic Arts . He spent seven years in the theatre , working in a succession of stock companies and intermittently on Broadway . Tracy 's breakthrough came in 1930 , when his lead performance in *The Last Mile* caught the attention of Hollywood . After a successful film debut in *Up the River* , Tracy was signed to a contract with Fox Film Corporation . His five years with Fox were unremarkable , and he remained largely unknown to audiences after 25 films .

In 1935 Tracy joined Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer , at the time Hollywood 's most prestigious studio . His career flourished with a series of hit films , and in 1937 and 1938 he won consecutive Oscars for *Captains Courageous* and *Boys Town* . By the 1940s , Tracy was one of the studio 's top stars . In 1942 he appeared with Katharine Hepburn in *Woman of the Year* , beginning a popular partnership that produced nine movies over 25 years . Tracy left MGM in 1955 and continued to work regularly as a freelance star , despite an increasing weariness as he aged . His personal life was troubled , with a lifelong struggle against alcoholism and guilt over his son 's deafness . Tracy became estranged from his wife in the 1930s , but never divorced , conducting a long @-@ term relationship with Katharine Hepburn in private . Towards the end of his life , Tracy worked almost exclusively for director Stanley Kramer . It was for Kramer that he made his last film , *Guess Who 's Coming to Dinner* in 1967 , completed just 17 days before Tracy 's death .

During his career , Tracy appeared in 75 films and developed a reputation among his peers as one of the screen 's greatest actors . In 1999 the American Film Institute ranked Tracy as the 9th greatest male star of Classic Hollywood Cinema .

= = Early life = =

Tracy was born on April 5 , 1900 , in Milwaukee , Wisconsin . He was the second son of Caroline Brown (1874 ? 1942) and John Edward Tracy (1873 ? 1928) , a truck salesman . His mother was a Presbyterian from a wealthy Midwestern family , and his father was of Irish Catholic background . His one brother , Carroll , was four years older .

Spencer was a difficult and hyperactive child with poor school attendance . Raised as a Catholic , at nine years old he was placed in the care of Dominican nuns in the hope of transforming his behavior . Later in life he remarked , " I never would have gone back to school if there had been any other way of learning to read the subtitles in the movies . " He became fascinated with motion pictures , watching the same ones repeatedly and then re @-@ enacting scenes to his friends and neighbors . Tracy attended several Jesuit academies in his teenage years , which he claimed took the " badness " out of him and helped him improve his grades . At Marquette Academy he met future actor Pat O 'Brien , and the pair began attending plays together , awakening Tracy 's interest in the theatre .

With little care for his studies and " itching for a chance to go and see some excitement " , Tracy enlisted in the United States Navy when he turned 18 . He was sent to the Naval Training Station in North Chicago , where he was still a student when World War I came to an end . He achieved the rank of seaman second class , but never went to sea , and was discharged in February 1919 . John Tracy 's desire to see one of his sons gain a college degree drove Tracy back to high school to finish his diploma . Studies at two more institutions , plus the additional allowance of " war credits " , won Tracy a place at Ripon College . He entered Ripon in February 1921 , declaring his intention to major in medicine .

Tracy was a popular student at Ripon , where he served as president of his hall and was involved in a number of college activities . He made his stage debut in June 1921 , playing the male lead in *The*

Truth . Tracy was very well received in this role and he quickly developed a passion for the stage . He formed an acting company with friends , which they called " The Campus Players " and took on tour . As a member of the college debate team , Tracy excelled in arguing and public speaking . It was during a tour with his debate team that Tracy auditioned for the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (AADA) in New York City . He was offered a scholarship to attend the school after performing a scene from one of his earlier roles .

Tracy left Ripon , and began classes at AADA in April 1922 . He was deemed fit to progress to the senior class , allowing him to join the academy stock company . Tracy made his New York debut in October 1922 , in a play called The Wedding Guests , and then his Broadway debut three months later playing a wordless robot in R.U.R. He graduated from AADA in March 1923 .

= = Career = =

= = = Stock theatre and Broadway (1923 ? 30) = = =

Immediately following graduation , Tracy joined a new stock company based in White Plains , New York where he was given periphery roles . Unhappy there , he moved to a company in Cincinnati , but failed to make an impact . In November 1923 he landed a small part on Broadway in the comedy A Royal Fandango , starring Ethel Barrymore . Reviews for the show were poor and it closed after 25 performances ; Tracy later said of the failure , " My ego took an awful beating . " When he took a position with a struggling company in New Jersey , Tracy was living on an allowance of 35 cents a day . In January 1924 he played his first leading role with a company in Winnipeg , but the organization soon closed .

Tracy finally achieved some success by joining forces with the notable stock manager William H. Wright in the spring of 1924 . A stage partnership was formed with the young actress Selena Royle , who had already made her name on Broadway . It proved a popular draw and their productions were favorably received . One of these shows brought Tracy to the attention of a Broadway producer , who offered him the lead in a new play . The Sheepman previewed in October 1925 , but it received poor reviews and closed after its trial run in Connecticut . Dejected , Tracy was forced back to Wright and the stock circuit .

In the fall of 1926 , Tracy was offered his third shot at Broadway : a role in a new George M. Cohan play called Yellow . Tracy swore that if the play failed to be a hit he would leave stock and work in a " regular " business instead . Tracy was nervous about working with Cohan ? one of the most important figures in American theatre ? but during rehearsals Cohan announced , " Tracy , you 're the best goddamned actor I 've ever seen ! " Yellow opened on September 21 ; reviews were mixed but it ran for 135 performances . It was the beginning of an important collaboration for Tracy : " I 'd have quit the stage completely , " he later commented , " if it hadn 't been for George M. Cohan . " Cohan wrote a part specifically for Tracy in his next play , The Baby Cyclone . It opened on Broadway in September 1927 and proved to be a hit .

Tracy followed this success with another Cohan play , Whispering Friends , and in 1929 took over from Clark Gable in Conflict , a Broadway drama . A variety of other roles followed , but it was the lead in Dread , written by Pulitzer Prize @-@ winning dramatist Owen Davis that gave Tracy high hopes for success . The story of a man 's descent into madness , Dread previewed in Brooklyn to an excellent reception , but the very next day ? October 29 ? the New York stock market crashed . Unable to attain funding , Dread did not open on Broadway . Following this disappointment , Tracy considered leaving the theatre and returning to Milwaukee for a more stable life .

In January 1930 , Tracy was approached about a new play called The Last Mile . Looking to cast the lead role of a murderer on death row , producer Herman Shumlin met with Tracy , and later recounted : " beneath the surface , here was a man of passion , violence , sensitivity and desperation : no ordinary man , and just the man for the part . " The Last Mile opened on Broadway in February , where Tracy 's performance was met by a standing ovation that lasted 14 curtain calls . The Commonweal described him as " one of our best and most versatile young actors " . The play

was a hit with critics , and ran for 289 performances .

= = = Fox (1930 ? 35) = = =

In 1930 , Broadway was being heavily scouted for actors to work in the " talkies " , the new medium of sound film . Tracy was cast in two Vitaphone short movies (Taxi Talks and The Hard Guy) , but he had not considered becoming a film actor : " I had no ambition in that direction and I was perfectly happy on the stage " , he later explained in an interview . One of the scouts who saw Tracy in The Last Mile was director John Ford . Ford wanted Tracy for the lead role in his next picture , a prison movie . Production company Fox Film Corporation were unsure about Tracy , saying that he did not photograph well , but Ford convinced them that he was right for the role . Up the River (1930) marked the film debut of both Tracy and Humphrey Bogart . After seeing the rushes , Fox immediately offered Tracy a long @-@ term contract . Knowing that he needed the money for his family ? his young son was deaf and recovering from polio ? Tracy signed with Fox and moved to California . He appeared on the stage again only once more in his life .

Winfield Sheehan , the head of Fox , committed to making Tracy a bankable commodity . The studio went to efforts to promote the actor , releasing adverts for his second film Quick Millions (1931) with the headline " A New Star Shines . " Three films were made in quick succession , all of which were unsuccessful at the box office . Tracy found himself typecast in comedies , usually playing a crook or a con man . The mold was broken with his seventh picture , Disorderly Conduct (1932) , and it was the first of his films since Up the River to make a profit .

In mid @-@ 1932 , after nine pictures , Tracy remained virtually unknown to the public . He considered leaving Fox once his contract was up for renewal , but a rise in his weekly rate to \$ 1 @,@ 500 convinced him to stay . He continued to appear in unpopular films , with Me and My Gal (1932) setting an all @-@ time low attendance record for the Roxy Theatre in New York City . He was loaned to Warner Bros. for 20 @,@ 000 Years in Sing Sing (1932) , a prison drama co @-@ starring Bette Davis . Tracy was hopeful that it would be his break @-@ out role , but despite good reviews this failed to materialize .

Critics began to notice Tracy with The Power and the Glory (1933) . The story of a man 's rise to prosperity , written by Preston Sturges , Tracy 's performance as railroad tycoon Tom Garner received uniformly strong reviews . William Wilkerson of The Hollywood Reporter wrote : " This sterling performer has finally been given an opportunity to show an ability that has been boxed in by gangster roles ... [the film] has introduced Mr. Tracy as one of the screen 's best performers " . Mordaunt Hall of The New York Times stated : " No more convincing performance has been given on the screen than Spencer Tracy 's impersonation of Tom Garner . " Shanghai Madness (1933) , meanwhile , gave Tracy a previously unseen sex appeal and served to advance his standing . Despite this attention , Tracy 's next two movies went largely unnoticed . Man 's Castle (1933) with Loretta Young was anticipated to be a hit , but made only a small profit . The Show Off (1934) , for which he was lent to Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer , proved popular , but his subsequent outings continued to be unsuccessful .

Tracy drank heavily during his years with Fox , and gained a reputation as an alcoholic . He failed to report for filming on Marie Galante in June 1934 , and was found in his hotel room , virtually unconscious after a two @-@ week binge . Tracy was removed from the Fox payroll while he recovered in a hospital , and then sued for \$ 125 @,@ 000 for delaying the production . He completed only two more pictures with the studio .

The details on how Tracy 's relationship with Fox ended are unclear : later in life Tracy maintained that he was fired for his drunken behavior , but the Fox records do not support such an account . He was still under contract with the studio when MGM expressed their interest in the actor . They were in need of a new male star , and contacted Tracy on April 2 , 1935 , offering him a seven @-@ year deal . That afternoon , the contract between Tracy and Fox was terminated " by mutual consent " . Tracy made a total of 25 pictures in the five years he was with Fox Film Corporation , most of which lost money at the box office .

== = Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer (1935 ? 55) = = =

= = = = Growing reputation = = = =

In the 1930s , Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer was the most respected movie production studio in Hollywood . When Tracy arrived there , his own reputation was not strong . Biographer James Curtis writes : " Tracy was scarcely a blip on the box office barometer in 1935 , a critics ' darling and little more " . He was , however , well known for being a troublemaker . Producer Irving G. Thalberg was nevertheless enthusiastic about working with the actor , telling journalist Louella Parsons : " Spencer Tracy will become one of MGM 's most valuable stars . "

Curtis notes that the studio managed Tracy with care , a welcome change from the ineptitude he had known at Fox , which was like " a shot of adrenaline " for the actor . His first film under the new contract was the quickly produced The Murder Man (1935) , which included the feature film debut of James Stewart . Thalberg then began a strategy of pairing Tracy with the studio 's top actresses : Whipsaw (1935) co @-@ starred Myrna Loy and was a commercial success . Riffraff (1936) put Tracy opposite Jean Harlow . Both films were , however , designed and promoted to showcase their leading ladies , thus continuing Tracy 's reputation as a secondary star .

Fury (1936) was the first film to prove that Tracy could make a success on his own merit . Directed by Fritz Lang , Tracy played a man who swears revenge after narrowly escaping death by a lynch mob . The film and performance received excellent reviews . It was popular with the public , going on to make \$ 1 @. @ 3 million worldwide . Curtis writes : " audiences who , just a year earlier , had no clear handle on him , were suddenly turning out to see him . It was a transition that was nothing short of miraculous ... [and showed] a willingness on the part of the public to embrace a leading man who was not textbook handsome nor bigger than life . "

Fury was followed one month later with the release of the big @-@ budget disaster movie San Francisco (1936) . Tracy played a supporting role alongside Clark Gable in the film , allowing audiences to see him with the top male star in Hollywood . Taking on the role of a priest , Tracy reportedly felt a heavy responsibility in representing the church . Despite having only 17 minutes of screen time , Tracy was highly praised for his performance and received an Oscar nomination for Best Actor . San Francisco became the highest grossing picture of 1936 . Donald Deschner , in his book on Tracy , credits Fury and San Francisco as the " two films that changed his career and gave him the status of a major star . "

By this point , Tracy entered a period of self @-@ imposed sobriety and MGM expressed pleasure with Tracy 's professionalism . His public reputation continued to grow with Libeled Lady (1936) , a screwball comedy that cast him with William Powell , Loy and Harlow . According to Curtis , " Powell , Harlow and Loy were among the biggest draws in the industry , and equal billing in such a powerhouse company could only serve to advance Tracy 's standing " . Libeled Lady was his third hit picture in the space of six months .

= = = = Oscar wins = = = =

Tracy appeared in four movies in 1937 . They Gave Him a Gun went largely unnoticed , but Captains Courageous was one of the major film events of the year . Tracy played a Portuguese fisherman in the adventure movie , based on the novel by Rudyard Kipling . He was uncomfortable feigning a foreign accent , and resented having his hair curled , but the role was a hit with audiences and Tracy won the Academy Award for Best Actor . Captains Courageous was followed by Big City with Luise Rainer and Mannequin with Joan Crawford , the latter of which took good billings at the box office . With two years of hit movies and industry recognition , Tracy became a star in the United States . A 1937 poll of 20 million people to find the " King and Queen of Hollywood " ranked Tracy sixth among males . Tracy was reunited with Gable and Loy for 1938 's Test Pilot . The film was another commercial and critical success , permanently cementing the notion of Gable and Tracy as a team .

Based on the positive response he had received in San Francisco , MGM again cast Tracy as a priest in Boys Town (1938) . Portraying Edward J. Flanagan , a Catholic priest and founder of Boys Town , was a role Tracy took seriously : " I 'm so anxious to do a good job as Father Flanagan that it worries me , keeps me awake at night . " Tracy received strong reviews for his performance , and the movie grossed \$ 4 million worldwide . For the second year running , Tracy received an Academy Award for Best Actor . He was humble about the recognition , saying in his acceptance speech : " I honestly do not feel that I can accept this award ... I can accept it only as it was meant to be for a great man ? Father Flanagan " . He immediately sent the Academy Award statuette to Flanagan . Tracy was listed as the fifth biggest money @-@ making star of 1938 .

Tracy was absent from screens for almost a year before returning to Twentieth Century @-@ Fox on loan and appearing as Henry M. Stanley in Stanley and Livingstone , his only film of 1939 . Curtis maintains that Tracy 's non @-@ visibility did little to affect his standing with the public or exhibitors . In October of that year , a Fortune magazine survey to find the nation 's favorite movie actor listed Tracy in first place .

= = = = Established star = = = =

MGM capitalized on Tracy 's popularity , casting him in four movies for 1940 . I Take This Woman with Hedy Lamarr was a critical and commercial failure , but the historical drama Northwest Passage ? Tracy 's first film in Technicolor ? proved popular . He then portrayed Thomas Edison in Edison , the Man . Howard Barnes of the New York Herald Tribune was not charmed by the story , but wrote that Tracy , " by sheer persuasion of his acting " , made the film worthy . Boom Town was the third and final Gable @-@ Tracy picture , also featuring Claudette Colbert and Hedy Lamarr , making it one of the most anticipated films of the year . The film opened to the biggest crowd since Gone With the Wind .

Tracy signed a new contract with MGM in April 1941 , which paid \$ 5 @,@ 000 a week and limited him to three pictures a year (Tracy had previously expressed a need to reduce his workload) . The contract also stated for the first time that his billing was to be " that of a star " . Contrary to popular belief , the contract did not include a clause that he receive top billing , but from this point onward , every film Tracy appeared in featured his name in pole position .

In 1941 , Tracy returned to the role of Father Flanagan in Men of Boys Town . It was followed later that year by Tracy 's only venture into the horror genre , an adaptation of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde , co @-@ starring Ingrid Bergman and Lana Turner . Tracy was unhappy with the film , disliking the heavy make @-@ up he needed to portray Hyde . Critical response to the film was mixed . Theodore Strauss of The New York Times wrote that " Mr. Tracy 's portrait of Hyde is not so much evil incarnate as it is the ham rampant . " The film was popular with audiences , however , taking in more than \$ 2 million at the box office .

Tracy was set to star in a film version of The Yearling for 1942 , but on @-@ set difficulties and bad weather forced the production to close . With the end of that project , he became available for the new Katharine Hepburn movie , Woman of the Year (1942) . Hepburn greatly admired Tracy , calling him " the best movie actor there was " . She had wanted him for her comeback vehicle , The Philadelphia Story (1940) . Hepburn was delighted that Tracy was available for Woman of the Year , saying " I was just damned grateful he was willing to work with me . " The romantic comedy performed well at the box office and received strong reviews . William Boehnel wrote in the New York World @-@ Telegram , " To begin with , it has Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy in the leading roles . This in itself would be enough to make any film memorable . But when you get Tracy and Hepburn turning in brilliant performances to boot , you 've got something to cheer about . "

Woman of the Year was followed by an adaptation of John Steinbeck 's Tortilla Flat (1942) which met with a tepid response . MGM did not hesitate to repeat the teaming of Tracy and Hepburn and cast them in the dark mystery Keeper of the Flame (1942) . Despite a weak critical reception the film was a popular success , outgrossing its predecessor and confirming the strength of the partnership .

Tracy 's next three appearances were all war @-@ based . A Guy Named Joe (1943) with Irene

Dunne surpassed San Francisco to become his highest @-@ grossing film to date . The Seventh Cross (1944) , about an escape from a Nazi concentration camp , met with critical acclaim . It was followed by the aviation film Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo (1944) . On the strength of these three releases , the annual Quigley poll revealed Tracy was MGM 's biggest money @-@ making star of 1944 . His only film the following year was Without Love (1945) , a third film with Hepburn that performed well at the box office despite muted enthusiasm from critics .

= = = Stage and screen = = =

In 1945 , Tracy returned to the stage for the first time in 15 years . He had been through a dark patch personally ? culminating with a stay in hospital ? and Hepburn felt that a play would help restore his focus . Tracy told a journalist in April , " I 'm coming back to Broadway to see if I can still act . " The play was The Rugged Path by Robert E. Sherwood . It first previewed in Providence on September 28 , to a sold out crowd and tepid response . It was a difficult production ; director Garson Kanin later wrote : " In the ten days prior to the New York opening all the important relationships had deteriorated . Spencer was tense and unbending , could not , or would not , take direction " . Tracy considered leaving the show before it even opened on Broadway , and lasted there just six weeks before announcing his intention to close the show . It closed on January 19 , 1946 , after 81 performances . Tracy later explained to a friend : " I couldn 't say those goddamn lines over and over and over again every night ... At least every day is a new day for me in films ... But this thing ? every day , every day , over and over again . "

Tracy was absent from screens in 1946 , the first year since his motion picture debut that there was no Spencer Tracy release . His next film was The Sea of Grass (1947) a drama set in the American Old West with Hepburn . Similarly to Keeper of the Flame and Without Love , a lukewarm response from critics did not stop it from being a financial success both at home and abroad . He followed it later that year with Cass Timberlane , in which he played a judge . It was a commercial success , but Curtis notes that co @-@ star Lana Turner overshadowed Tracy in most of the reviews .

A fifth film with Hepburn came in 1948 , Frank Capra 's political drama State of the Union . Tracy played a presidential candidate in the movie , which was warmly received . He then appeared in Edward , My Son (1949) with Deborah Kerr . Tracy disliked the role , and told director George Cukor , " It 's rather disconcerting to me to find how easily I play a heel . " Upon its release , The New Yorker wrote of the " hopeless miscasting of Mr. Tracy " . The film became Tracy 's biggest money @-@ loser at MGM .

Tracy finished off the 1940s with Malaya (1949) , an adventure film with James Stewart , and Adam 's Rib (1949) , a comedy with Tracy and Hepburn playing married lawyers who oppose each other in court . Tracy and Hepburn 's friends , Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon , wrote the parts specifically for the duo . The film received strong reviews and became the highest grossing Tracy @-@ Hepburn picture to date . Film critic Bosley Crowther wrote , " Mr. Tracy and Miss Hepburn are the stellar performers in this show and their perfect compatibility in comic capers is delightful to see . "

= = = Final MGM years = = =

Tracy received his first Academy Award nomination in 12 years for playing the role of Stanley Banks in Father of the Bride (1950) . In the comedy film , Banks attempts to handle preparations for his daughter 's (played by Elizabeth Taylor) upcoming wedding . " It 's the second strong comedy in a row for Spencer Tracy , doing the title role , and he socks it " , Variety noted . The film was the biggest commercial success of Tracy 's career to date , earning \$ 6 million worldwide . MGM wanted a sequel , and while Tracy was unsure , he accepted . Father 's Little Dividend (1951) was released ten months later and performed well at the box office . On the strength of the two movies , Tracy polled as one of the nation 's top stars once again .

In 1951 , Tracy portrayed a lawyer in The People Against O 'Hara . The next year he re @-@ teamed with Hepburn for the sports comedy Pat and Mike (1952) , the second feature written

expressly for the pair by Kanin and Gordon . Pat and Mike became one of the duo 's most popular and critically acclaimed films . Tracy followed it with Plymouth Adventure (1952) , a historical drama set aboard the Mayflower , co -@- starring Gene Tierney . It met with a poor response and posted a loss of \$ 1 @. @ 8 million . In 1953 , Tracy returned to the role of a concerned father in The Actress . " That film ... got more [acclaim] from the critics than any film I ever made in all the years , and we didn 't make enough to pay for the ushers in the theatre , " recalled producer Lawrence Weingarten . For his performance in The Actress , Tracy won a Golden Globe Award and received a nomination for the British Academy Film Award (BAFTA) .

MGM lent Tracy to Twentieth Century @-@ Fox for the Western film Broken Lance , his only appearance of 1954 . The picture was well received . In 1955 Tracy turned down William Wyler 's The Desperate Hours because he refused to take second @-@ billing to Humphrey Bogart . Instead , Tracy appeared as a one @-@ armed protagonist who faces the hostility of a small town in Bad Day at Black Rock (1955) , a film directed by John Sturges . For his work , Tracy received a fifth Oscar nomination and was awarded the Best Actor prize at the Cannes Film Festival . He had personally been unhappy with the picture , and threatened to leave it during production . This behavior became a regular occurrence for the aging Tracy , who was increasingly lethargic and cynical . He began production on Tribute to a Bad Man in the summer of 1955 , but pulled out when the location shooting in Colorado gave him altitude sickness . The trouble caused by the picture fractured Tracy 's relationship with MGM . In June 1955 he was the last remaining star of the studio 's heyday , but with his contract up for renewal ? Tracy opted to go independent for the first time in his movie career .

= = = Independent player (1956 ? 67) = = =

Tracy 's first post @-@ MGM appearance was in The Mountain (1956) with Robert Wagner , who played his much younger brother (Wagner had earlier played his son in Broken Lance) . The location filming in the French Alps proved a difficult experience , and he threatened to leave the project . His performance earned a BAFTA nomination for Best Foreign Actor . Tracy and Hepburn then paired together for the eighth time in the office @-@ based comedy Desk Set (1957) . He again had to be convinced to stay with the film which met with a weak response .

In 1958 , Tracy appeared in The Old Man and the Sea , a project that had been in development for five years . An adaptation of Ernest Hemingway 's novella of the same name , Hemingway 's agent , Leland Hayward , had previously written to the author : " Of all Hollywood people , the one that comes the closest to me in quality , in personality and voice , in personal dignity and ability , is Spencer Tracy . " Tracy was delighted to be offered the role . He was told to lose some of his 210 pounds before filming began , but failed to do so . Hemingway thus reported that Tracy was a " terrible liability to the picture " , and had to be reassured that the star was being carefully photographed to disguise his weight . Appearing alone on screen for the majority of the film , Tracy considered The Old Man and the Sea the toughest part he ever played . In reviewing the performance , Jack Moffitt of the Hollywood Reporter said it was " so intimate and revealing of universal human experience that , to me , it almost transcended acting and became reality . " Tracy received Oscar and BAFTA Award nominations for the work .

After abandoning two projects , including a proposed remake of The Blue Angel with Marilyn Monroe , Tracy 's next feature was The Last Hurrah (1958) . It reunited him with his debut director , John Ford , after 28 years . Tracy took a year to commit to the project , in which he played an Irish @-@ American mayor seeking re @-@ election . The movie was favorably reviewed , but not commercially successful . At the end of 1958 , the National Board of Review named Tracy the year 's Best Actor . He nevertheless began to ponder retirement , with Curtis writing that he was " chronically tired , unhappy , ill , and uninterested in work . "

= = = = Stanley Kramer partnership = = = =

Tracy did not appear on the screen again until October 1960 , with the release of Inherit the Wind ,

a film based on the 1925 Scopes " Monkey Trial " which debated the right to teach evolution in schools . Director Stanley Kramer sought Tracy for the role of lawyer Clarence Darrow from the outset . Starring opposite Tracy was Fredric March , a pairing Variety described as " a stroke of casting genius ... Both men are spellbinders in the most laudatory sense of the word . " The film garnered Tracy some of the strongest reviews of his career ? he was nominated for an Academy Award , BAFTA Award and Golden Globe Award for the performance ? but it was not a commercial hit .

In the volcano disaster movie The Devil at 4 O 'Clock (1961) , Tracy played a priest for the fourth time in his career . His co @-@ star , Frank Sinatra , ceded top @-@ billing to guarantee Tracy for the picture . Continuing his pattern of indecisiveness , Tracy briefly pulled out of the production before recommitting . Critics were unenthusiastic about the film , which was nevertheless Tracy 's most successful box office outing since Father of the Bride .

Inherit the Wind began an enduring collaboration between Stanley Kramer and Tracy ? Kramer directed Tracy 's three final films . Judgment at Nuremberg , released at the end of 1961 , was their second feature together . The film depicts the " Judges ' Trial " , the trial of Nazi judges for their role in the Holocaust . Abby Mann wrote the role of Judge Haywood with Tracy in mind ; Tracy called it the best script he had ever read . At the end of the film , Tracy delivered a 13 @-@ minute speech . He recorded it in one take , and received a round of applause from the cast and crew . Upon seeing the film , Mann wrote to Tracy : " Every writer ought to have the experience of having Spencer Tracy do his lines . There is nothing in the world quite like it . " The film met with positive reviews and a large audience ; Tracy received an eighth Oscar nomination for his performance .

Tracy turned down roles in Long Days Journey Into Night (1962) and The Leopard (1963) , and had to pull out of MGM 's all @-@ star How the West Was Won (1962) when it clashed with Judgment at Nuremberg . He was , however , able to record the film 's narration track . Tracy was in very poor health by this time , and working became a challenge . He took the role of Captain T. G. Culpeper in Kramer 's comedy It 's a Mad , Mad , Mad , Mad World (1963) , a small but key part that he was able to complete in nine days . Tracy 's name topped the list of performers , and the comedy became the highest grossing American film of the year . As his health worsened he had to cancel commitments to Cheyenne Autumn (1964) and The Cincinnati Kid (1965) . Offers continued to come , but Tracy did not work again until Kramer 's Guess Who 's Coming to Dinner (1967) , Tracy 's ninth and final film with Hepburn .

Guess Who 's Coming to Dinner explored the topic of interracial marriage , with Tracy playing a liberal @-@ minded newspaper publisher whose values are challenged when his daughter wishes to marry a black man , played by Sidney Poitier . Tracy was happy to be working again , but told the press the movie would be his last . To commence filming , Tracy had to be insured for the high premium of \$ 71 @,@ 000 ; Hepburn and Kramer both put their salaries in escrow until Tracy completed his scenes . In poor health , Tracy could only work for two or three hours each day . He completed his last scene on May 24 , 1967 . Tracy died 17 days later from a heart attack on June 10 .

The film was released in December , and although reviews were mixed , Curtis notes that " Tracy 's performance was singled out for praise in nearly every instance . " Brendan Gill of The New Yorker wrote that Tracy gave " a faultless and , under the circumstances , heartbreaking performance . " The movie became Tracy 's highest grossing picture . He received a posthumous nomination for Best Actor ? his ninth ? at the 40th Academy Awards , along with a Golden Globe Award nomination and a BAFTA win for Best Actor .

= = Personal life = =

= = = Marriage and family = = =

Tracy met actress Louise Treadwell while they were both members of the Wood Players in White Plains , New York ? the first stock company Tracy joined after graduating . The couple were

engaged in May 1923 , and married on September 10 of that year between the matinee and evening performances of his show .

Their son , John Ten Broeck Tracy , was born in June 1924 . When John was 10 months old , Louise discovered that the boy was deaf . She resisted telling Tracy for three months . Tracy was devastated by the news and felt a lifelong guilt over his son 's deafness . He was convinced that John 's hearing impairment was a punishment for his own sins . As a result , Tracy had trouble connecting with his son and distanced himself from his family . Joseph L. Mankiewicz , a friend of Tracy 's , later theorized : " [Tracy] didn 't leave Louise . He left the scene of his guilt . " A second child , Louise " Susie " Treadwell Tracy , was born in July 1932 . The children were raised in their mother 's Episcopalian faith .

Tracy left the family home in 1933 , and he and Louise openly discussed the separation with the media , maintaining that they were still friends and had not taken divorce action . From September 1933 to June 1934 , Tracy had a public affair with Loretta Young , his co @-@ star in Man 's Castle . He reconciled with Louise in 1935 . There was never again an official separation between Tracy and his wife , but the marriage continued to be troubled . Tracy increasingly lived in hotels and by the 1940s , the two were effectively living separate lives . Tracy frequently engaged in extramarital affairs , including with co @-@ stars Joan Crawford in 1937 and Ingrid Bergman in 1941 .

= = = Hepburn = = =

While making Woman of the Year in September 1941 , Tracy began what was to become a lifelong relationship with Katharine Hepburn . The actress became devoted to him , and their relationship lasted until his death 26 years later . Tracy never returned to live in the family home , although he visited regularly .

The MGM moguls were careful to protect their contract big stars from controversy , and Tracy wished to conceal his relationship with Hepburn from his wife , so it was hidden from the public . The couple did not live together until the final years of Tracy 's life , when they shared a cottage on George Cukor 's estate in Beverly Hills . In Hollywood , however , the intimate nature of the Tracy @-@ Hepburn partnership was an open secret . Angela Lansbury , who worked with the pair on State of the Union , later said : " We all knew , but nobody ever said anything . In those days it wasn 't discussed . " Tracy was not someone to express his emotions , but friend Betsy Drake believed he " was utterly dependent upon Hepburn . " Tracy 's infidelity apparently continued , however , and Tracy is reported to have had an affair with Gene Tierney during the making of Plymouth Adventure in 1952 .

Neither Tracy nor his wife ever pursued a divorce , despite their estrangement . He told Joan Fontaine , " I can get a divorce whenever I want to , but my wife and Kate like things just as they are . " Louise , meanwhile , reportedly commented : " I will be Mrs. Spencer Tracy until the day I die . " Hepburn did not interfere and never fought for marriage .

= = = Character = = =

Tracy was an avowed Catholic , but his cousin , Jane Feely , said that he did not devoutly follow the religion : " he was often not a practical Catholic either . I would call him a spiritual Catholic . " Garson Kanin , a friend of Tracy 's for 25 years , described him as " a true believer " who respected his religion . At periods in his life , Tracy attended Mass regularly . Tracy did not believe actors should publicize their political views , but in 1940 lent his name to the " Hollywood for Roosevelt " committee and personally identified as a Democrat .

Tracy struggled with alcoholism throughout his adult life , an ailment that ran in his father 's side of the family . Rather than being a steady drinker , as commonly thought , he was prone to periods of binging on alcohol . Loretta Young remarked that Tracy was " awful " when he was drunk , and he was twice arrested for his behavior while intoxicated . Because of this bad reaction to alcohol , Tracy regularly embarked on prolonged periods of sobriety , and developed an all @-@ or @-@ nothing routine . Hepburn commented that he could stop drinking for " months , even years at a time " .

Tracy was prone to bouts of depression and anxiety : he was described by Mrs. Tracy as having " the most volatile disposition I 've ever seen ? up in the clouds one minute and down in the depths the next . And when he 's low , he 's very , very low . " He was plagued by insomnia throughout his life . As a result , Tracy became dependent on barbiturates to sleep , followed by dexedrine to function . Hepburn , who adopted a nursing role towards Tracy , was unable to understand her partner 's unhappiness . She wrote in her autobiography : " What was it ? ... Never at peace ... Tortured by some sort of guilt . Some terrible misery . "

= = = Illness and death = = =

As he entered his sixties , years of drinking , smoking , taking pills , and being overweight left Tracy in poor health . On July 21 , 1963 , he was hospitalized after a severe attack of breathlessness . Doctors found that he was suffering from pulmonary edema , where fluid accumulates in the lungs due to an inability of the heart to pump properly . They also declared his blood pressure as dangerously high . From this point on Tracy remained very weak , and Hepburn moved into his home to provide constant care . In January 1965 , he was diagnosed with hypertensive heart disease and began treatment for a previously ignored diagnosis of diabetes . Tracy almost died in September 1965 : a stay in the hospital following a prostatectomy resulted in his kidneys failing , and he spent the night in a coma . His recovery was described by his doctor as " a kind of miracle " .

Tracy spent the majority of the next two years at home with Hepburn , living what she described as a quiet life : reading , painting , and listening to music . On June 10 , 1967 , 17 days after completing *Guess Who 's Coming to Dinner* , Tracy awakened at 3 : 00 am to make himself a cup of tea in his apartment in Beverly Hills , California . Hepburn described in her autobiography how she followed him to the kitchen : " Just as I was about to give [the door] a push , there was a sound of a cup smashing to the floor ? then clump ? a loud clump . " She entered the room to find Tracy dead from a heart attack . Hepburn recalled , " He looked so happy to be done with living , which for all his accomplishments had been a frightful burden for him . " MGM publicist Howard Strickling told the media that Tracy had been alone when he died and was found by his housekeeper .

A Requiem Mass was held for Tracy on June 12 at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in East Hollywood . Active pallbearers included George Cukor , Stanley Kramer , Frank Sinatra , James Stewart , and John Ford . Out of consideration for Tracy 's family , Hepburn did not attend the funeral . Tracy was interred in Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale , California .

= = Reputation and acting style = =

Tracy had a high reputation among his peers and received considerable praise from the film industry . After his death , Dore Schary , head of Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer , said , " There can be no question that he was the best and most protean actor of our screen . " Humphrey Bogart , Clark Gable , James Cagney , John Ford , Garson Kanin and Katharine Hepburn also called Tracy the greatest actor of his generation . Richard Widmark , who idolized Tracy , said : " He 's the greatest movie actor there ever was ... I 've learned more about acting from watching Tracy than in any other way . "

Tracy was particularly respected for his naturalism on screen . Hume Cronyn , who worked with Tracy on *The Seventh Cross* , admired his co @-@ star 's screen presence : " His method appeared to be as simple as it is difficult to achieve . He appeared to do nothing . He listened , he felt , he said the words without forcing anything . " Joan Crawford likewise expressed her admiration for Tracy 's seemingly effortless performances . His four @-@ time co @-@ star Joan Bennett said , " One never had the feeling he was ' acting ' in a scene , but the truth of the situation was actually happening , spontaneously , at the moment he spoke his lines . " James Cagney noted that Tracy was rarely the target of impressionists , because " You can 't mimic reserve and control very well " and " there 's nothing to imitate except his genius and that can 't be mimicked . " Specifically , Tracy was praised for his listening and reacting skills . Barry Nelson said that Tracy " brought the art of

reacting to a new height " ; Stanley Kramer declared that Tracy " thought and listened better than anyone in the history of motion pictures " . Millard Kaufman noted that " [Tracy] listened with every fiber of his entire body " .

Despite the perception of being able to perform effortlessly , acquaintances of Tracy said that he would carefully prepare for each role . Joseph L. Mankiewicz lived with Tracy during the production of *Test Pilot* , and recounted that the actor would lock himself in his bedroom " working extremely hard " each night . Many co -@-@ workers commented on his strong work @-@ ethic and professionalism . Tracy did not like to rehearse , however , and would lose his effectiveness after two or three takes . Kanin described him as " an instinctive player , who trusted the moment of creation . " Tracy 's close friend Chester Erskine pinpointed his acting style as one of " selection " ? he strove to give as little as was needed to be effective ? reaching " a minimum to make the maximum . "

Tracy disliked when he was asked about his technique , or about what advice he would give to others . He often belittled the profession , for instance saying to Kanin , " Why do actors think they 're so God damn important ? They 're not . Acting is not an important job in the scheme of things . Plumbing is . " Tracy was humble about his abilities , telling a journalist , " it 's just that I try no tricks . No profile . No ' great lover ' act ... I just project myself as I am ? plain , trying to be honest . " He was known to have enjoyed the quip once made by Alfred Lunt : " The art of acting is ? learn your lines ! " Katharine Hepburn , in an interview six years after Tracy 's death , suggested that Tracy wished he had held a different profession .

= = Assessment and legacy = =

In the 21st century , Tracy is best known to general audiences for his association with Katharine Hepburn . He continues to receive praise from film scholars : critic Leonard Maltin calls Tracy " one of the 20th century ? s finest actors " , while film historian Jeanine Basinger describes his career as a " golden record of movie achievement " . Charles Matthews , writing for *The Washington Post* , argues that " Tracy deserves to be remembered for himself , as a master of acting technique " .

Preserving Tracy 's legacy , an award for excellence in film acting is bestowed in his name at the University of California , Los Angeles . Past recipients of the UCLA Spencer Tracy Award include James Stewart , Michael Douglas , Denzel Washington , Tom Hanks , Anthony Hopkins , Kirk Douglas and Morgan Freeman .

A 1986 PBS documentary titled *The Spencer Tracy Legacy* was hosted by Hepburn . It includes clips from Tracy 's films , and behind @-@ the @-@ scenes archival footage and home movies of Tracy 's private life and career , as well as newly filmed interviews with many of his former co @-@ stars , and with his daughter Susie Tracy . In 2009 , Tracy provided inspiration for the character Carl in Pixar 's Oscar @-@ winning film *Up* . Director Pete Docter explained that there is " something sweet about these grumpy old guys " . In 2014 , a film about Tracy 's relationship with Katharine Hepburn was announced to be in development .

Several of Tracy 's films , particularly his comedies , are regarded as classics of American cinema . He starred in four of the titles on the American Film Institute 's list of " 100 Years ... 100 Laughs " : *Adam 's Rib* , *It 's a Mad , Mad , Mad , Mad World* , *Father of the Bride* and *Woman of the Year* . *Guess Who 's Coming to Dinner* was included on AFI 's list of the 100 greatest American movies , while *Captains Courageous* was featured on their list of America 's most inspiring movies .

= = Awards and nominations = =

Tracy was nominated for nine Academy Awards for Best Actor , a category record he holds with Laurence Olivier . He was the first of nine actors to win the award twice , and is one of two actors to receive it consecutively , the other being Tom Hanks . Tracy was also nominated for five British Academy Film Awards , of which he won two , and four Golden Globe Awards , winning once . In addition , he received the Cannes Film Festival award for Best Actor and was once named Best Actor by the National Board of Review .

Tracy was recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for the following performances :

1937 : Nomination for San Francisco

1938 : Win for Captains Courageous

1939 : Win for Boys Town

1951 : Nomination for Father of the Bride

1956 : Nomination for Bad Day at Black Rock

1959 : Nomination for The Old Man and the Sea

1961 : Nomination for Inherit the Wind

1962 : Nomination for Judgment at Nuremberg

1968 : Nomination for Guess Who 's Coming to Dinner (posthumous nomination)

= = Filmography = =

Selected filmography :