

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE FILMS OF ROBERT ROSSEN, a new book by Alan Casty, examining the entire career of the controversial film director, has been published by The Museum of Modern Art.

Coinciding with the first Robert Rossen film retrospective, presented at the Museum from July 17 through July 27, this book deals with Robert Rossen as writer, producer, and director, and places his films within the context of his abiding concern with social realism and human values. Twenty-four stills illustrate Rossen's filmography in this publication.

Alan Casty, a teacher of film at U.C.L.A., analyzes Rossen's work, which includes such films as "Body and Soul" (1947), "All the King's Men" (1949), "The Hustler" (1961), and "Lilith" (1964). Relating the violence and emotional intensity of a Rossen film to an inner struggle and a search for identity within society, Mr. Casty states: "Typically, Rossen's searcher is a young man--often rootless or socially dispossessed--with a certain natural inner force, someone who cannot fully identify or control this energy, this source of grace and power. Under the shaping pressures of a corrupt society, his élan turns aggressive, perverse, destructive."

"The element common to many of my films," Rossen is quoted as saying in 1962, "is the desire for success, ambition, which is an important element in American life....Modern industrial society creates certain highly competitive things, which are often emotional and tends I think to keep reducing the stature and dignity of the individual more and more. It presses him, if he is trying to maintain that dignity, to strike out against society and to get on top of that society."

Like so many of his own heroes, Mr. Casty points out, Robert Rossen, born in 1908, grew up in a tough slum neighborhood on New York's East Side. In an area where fighting was a defense, Rossen boxed professionally for awhile before becoming interested in literature and history. His career started in dramatic workshops, including The Washington Square Players, and after directing several plays and writing scripts, he received his first Hollywood contract as a screen writer for Warner Brothers in 1936.

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Rossen's idealism and concern for the realization of the inner man are evident in the films he wrote during his seven years at Warner's, including his first important film "They Won't Forget" (1937), written in collaboration with Aben Kandel and directed by Mervyn Le Roy.

Mr. Casty examines Rossen's early films including "Johnny O'Clock" (1947) when Rossen first became a screen director, the extremely successful picture "Body and Soul", and others. One of the first American film-makers to control his work from inception to final editing, Rossen eventually assumed the triple role of writer, director and producer.

In 1949, Rossen produced his major political film, "All the King's Men." "At the very time that moral and ethical principles were being twisted and exposed like raw nerves illustrating the dilemmas of the use and misuse of political power, Rossen, with integrity and courage, dramatized the process by which the personal loss of self was made public and political--dramatized the interaction between personal corruption and the corruption of society.

Subsequently, political pressure on the motion picture industry interrupted his creative activities, though he was later to continue working independently. He wrote, directed and produced "Alexander the Great" (1956), "The Hustler" and "Lilith." Robert Rossen died in February 1966, ending a career that had brought him "...prominence and success, but little recognition of the unified artistic achievement of his work or of its significant place in the history of the American motion picture."

The author of numerous critical articles on film, drama, and fiction and of several publications, Mr. Casty is currently preparing a book on film aesthetics and theory titled The Dramatic Art of the Film. He will appear at the 8:00 p.m. screening of the opening film "Johnny O'Clock," on July 17, to talk about Rossen. The Museum's retrospective was organized by Adrienne Mancina, Assistant Curator, Department of Film.

THE FILMS OF ROBERT ROSSEN by Alan Casty. 62 pages; 40 illustrations. Paperbound, \$2.50

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