

Three Hollywood Stalwarts in Literature

A Study in Film Perception Through References
to Peck, Mitchum and Holden

Henryk Hoffmann

Series in Cinema and Culture



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This book is dedicated to
three STALWARTS in my own life:

Greg Corrado and Piotr Świątek,
whose consistent support of my writing endeavors
has not been so far recognized in this form;

and the memory of John Gregory Peck,
who was my true mentor.

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Foreword

Once again, Henryk Hoffmann shines a light on the fascinating relationships and effects on our culture that movies and their stars have had over the decades. Film – its stories, its actors, its celebrities, and its power to influence – has touched the viewing audience worldwide and is presented in these pages, which give the reader much more to think about than just the plot of a good story or how charismatic and sexy its stars are. The book shows how interwoven the arts are and how the various areas of creativity communicate with each other directly and indirectly.

The three marvelous actors of this book, Gregory Peck, Robert Mitchum and William Holden, each represent such a different facet of their art, and I found it fascinating to read how the author weaves together influences and inspirations that transcend time and space. Whether the readers of this book are cinephiles or an average movie-goer or a young person just becoming acquainted with the science and the art of filmmaking, to delve into “Three Hollywood Stalwarts in Literature” will, I believe, open up new worlds even for those who think they are well versed in cinematic history. Thank you again, Mr. Hoffmann, for helping us expand our horizons.

Maria Cooper Janis

Introduction

All born within a period of two years, between April 1916 and April 1918, Gregory Peck, Robert Mitchum and William Holden started their film careers roughly within a period of five years, between 1939 and 1944. Even though Holden was the youngest of the three, his screen debut took place in 1939, a few years before the other two actors appeared on the screen for the first time, Mitchum in 1943 and Peck, the oldest of them, in 1944. Thus, the sequence of their debuts happens to be reverse to their ages, but it is the chronology of their births, rather than their film debuts, that was taken into consideration in the way the three movie stars are listed in the title of the book. Ironically, it was Holden that died first (at the age of sixty-two), then Mitchum (about a month before turning eighty) and Peck, even though born first, outlived the other two and was the only one to welcome the twenty-first century (reaching the age of eighty-seven). Except for Mitchum, who spent just a few years of playing small parts at the beginning of his career, they were leading men from the start. Holden kept that position till the very end, or till his premature death that ended his career. Mitchum, who also kept being busy until his death, was compelled to accept some smaller parts in the last decade or so. And Peck, with a few exceptions, continued playing leading roles until the end of his career, which took place five years before his death.

All three, just like Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas (two other actors born in the second decade of the twentieth century with whom they share the honor of being the most important American actors of that generation), were at the peak of their careers between the late 1940s and the mid-1970s. While the actors' personae were considerably different, their careers had several common denominators. All three actors appeared in westerns, crime pictures (including films noir), thrillers, war movies, serious social dramas, sea pictures and romantic comedies. All played pioneers, cowboys and lawmen, soldiers (of different branches of the Armed Forces and of different ranks including, in Peck's and Mitchum's cases, generals), doctors, hunters and clergymen, and each of them—interestingly—has created a convincing portrait of a villain or at least a character operating on the wrong side of the law. They all, on several occasions, appeared in international productions and made memorable movies set in Europe, Africa and Asia.

Gregory Peck, Robert Mitchum and William Holden managed to reach positions at the very top in the American movie industry, which is proven—among other things—by certain statistics. Two of the actors have appeared on the lists of the Top 10 Money-Making Stars: Peck in 1947 and 1952 (as #8 both

times); and Holden in 1954 (#7), 1955 (#4), 1956 (#1), 1957 (#7), 1958 (#6) and 1961 (#8). Furthermore, in the 1997 poll of *Entertainment* magazine, Peck was selected as #58, Mitchum as #61 and Holden as #63 movie star of all time. The American Film Institute's 1998 List of America's 100 Great Movies includes four pictures starring Holden (*Sunset Boulevard* – #12, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* – #13, *Network* – #66 and *The Wild Bunch* – #80) and one with Peck (*To Kill a Mockingbird* – #34). Moreover, the AFI's 2005 List of the Top 100 Movie Quotes includes two quotations from *Sunset Boulevard* – #7 and #24, and one from *Network* – #19. In terms of the Academy Awards, Peck leads with two Oscars including a special one (the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award) plus four nominations, Holden is second with one Oscar and two nominations, and Mitchum is third with just one nomination and even that was for a supporting role (at the beginning of his career).

It is worth noting that the three actors' professional paths have crossed each other a few times. Peck and Mitchum co-starred in J. Lee Thompson's *Cape Fear* (1962) and then, in 1991, were both invited by Martin Scorsese to play small parts in the remake. Mitchum and Holden co-starred in Norman Foster's *Rachel and the Stranger* (1948). While Peck and Holden were never cast in the same film, they played the leading (and equivalent) roles in two related movies: Peck in Richard Donner's *The Omen* (1976) and Holden in its sequel, Don Taylor and Mike Hodges's *Damien: Omen II* (1978). Interestingly, even though altogether they were nominated for nine Academy Awards (only one of them for best supporting actor), they never competed against each other in the Oscar run.

Understandably, all of the actors worked with the best Hollywood directors, but, surprisingly, there are only two directors, Edward Dmytryk and John Huston, that worked with each of them (the latter directed Holden in one of the episodes of *Casino Royale*). The list of directors that collaborated with two of the three stars is quite long. The ones that worked with both Peck and Mitchum include Clarence Brown, William A. Wellman, Raoul Walsh, Elia Kazan, Vincente Minnelli, Lewis Milestone, Henry Hathaway, Stanley Kramer, Stanley Donen, Fred Zinnemann and J. Lee Thompson. Those that collaborated with both Mitchum and Holden include Norman Foster, George Cukor, Otto Preminger, Robert Wise, David Lean and Robert Parrish. And the ones that worked with both Peck and Holden include Henry King and John Sturges. The lists do not include cases when two of the three actors worked under the same director only when they appeared in the same picture; otherwise, Martin Scorsese would have been mentioned as the director that collaborated with both Peck and Mitchum.

Among female co-stars, there are only two, Susan Hayward and Deborah Kerr, that had the honor of working with all three of the male megastars. The

list of the actresses that played with two of the stars is relatively long. The co-stars of both Peck and Mitchum include Greer Garson, Dorothy McGuire, Ava Gardner, Ann Blyth, Jean Simmons, Lillian Gish, Carroll Baker, Lauren Bacall and Angie Dickinson. Both Peck and Holden had the honor of playing opposite Jennifer Jones, Audrey Hepburn and Sophia Loren. And Mitchum and Holden, in addition to vying for the attention and love of Loretta Young in *Rachel and the Stranger*, shared two other female co-stars, Eleanor Parker and Shelley Winters. All of the three actors happened to play opposite such other major male stars as John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Broderick Crawford and Richard Widmark. Moreover, Peck and Mitchum were each cast in different (or same, in one case) movies with James Stewart, George Peppard and Robert De Niro; Peck and Holden shared film credits with Fredric March, Orson Welles and David Niven; and Mitchum and Holden appeared on the screen with Ray Milland, Glenn Ford, Robert Ryan, Trevor Howard, Jack Hawkins, Dana Andrews, Peter Ustinov, Paul Newman and Cliff Robertson. Just this list of collaborating celebrities, far from being complete, can give the reader a fairly good idea about those three actors' ample opportunities to exchange comments, advice and anecdotes (not only regarding acting) with their peers, to socialize quite extensively, to get to know each other rather well and to react to each other either in a positive or negative way. In case of male-female co-starring, a lot of those professional encounters also led, inevitably (with, however, a surprising number of exceptions), to short-lived or steamy, deep and long-lasting love affairs.

With all this said, it is worth pointing out that movie references and allusions (henceforth, the word 'reference' will be frequently used to cover both) encountered in literature are probably the factors that most unambiguously and most objectively reconfirm the greatness of the three stars. While the overall number of literary (mostly narrative but, occasionally, also lyrical) works (novels, short stories, plays, poems and some nonfiction books) containing references to the three actors and their films is overwhelming, the validity of the data is strengthened by the time span of the sources: a great deal of them were published in the last two decades and quite a few (referring to each of the actors) within the last ten years; which means that numerous writers—either old or young—remember and respect those stars many years after they died.

The authors whose works are quoted in the book include a large number of highly acclaimed American mainstream writers—Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, John Irving, Jack Kerouac, Ken Kesey, Larry McMurtry, James A. Michener, Thomas Pynchon, Philip Roth, Irwin Shaw, Sam Shepard, John Updike and Gore Vidal; many masters of the mystery genre—Ace Atkins, George Baxt, James Scott Bell, Lawrence Block, James Ellroy, Joseph Finder, Evan

Hunter/Ed McBain, Greg Iles, Stuart M. Kaminsky, William X. Kienzle, Dennis Lehane, Elmore Leonard, Paul Levine, John D. MacDonald, William P. McGivern, Sara Paretsky, Robert B. Parker, George Pelecanos, Robert K. Tanenbaum and Joseph Wambaugh; some major representatives of the horror/thriller genre—Stephen King, Dean Koontz; and a few foreign writers representing all genres, either from Canada (Elizabeth Hay), South America (Julio Cortázar, an Argentinian who, in fact, was born in Belgium and lived, for many years, in Europe, including France, where he died), Europe (John Connolly, Henri Charrière, Sebastien Japrisot) or Australasia (Graeme Simsion, C. K. Stead, Markus Zusak). The total number of writers quoted in the book is about 140, while the overall number of their literary works listed in the Bibliography is nearly 220.

In many ways, this book is a continuation of my previous projects, such as *Four Hollywood Legends in World Literature: References to Bogart, Cooper, Gable and Tracy* (2016) and *The Careers of Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas as Referenced in Literature: A Study in Film Perception* (2020). It does then aspire to use at least some of the quoted samples in the study of movie perception. Thus, in order to do so, one needs to establish certain terminology that would be understood in the same way by the reader as it is meant by the author. I have already done it in the book on Lancaster and Douglas, but, for the reader unfamiliar with that work of mine, I am going to readdress the problem here. The first four terms that are useful, or even indispensable, in a study of that kind, have been briefly defined by Ken Wlaschin in the Introduction to his book *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of the World's Great Movie Stars and Their Films* (1979). They are *an actor's off-screen personality* (rather obvious), *his/her screen personality* ("composed of almost every aspect of the star, from timbre of voice and way of speaking to bodily movement and unconscious mannerisms"), *image* ("a combination of screen roles, screen personality and screen presentation with off-screen behavior and public relations") and *persona*. The last one, according to Wlaschin, "is the most intriguing aspect of a star and is usually developed over a period of time in conjunction with the personality. It is the most mythical part because it is the basis of what a star means. Although it derives from the roles that stars play in films, it soon becomes a separate entity which links the different roles" [pp. 7-8].

The other important concept closely related to the problem of film perception is *identification*. As comprehensively discussed by Alicja Helman in her *Słownik pojęć filmowych (A Dictionary of Film Terminology)*, 1991, pp. 123-151), the idea was first addressed by Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in *Massenpsychologie und Ich – Analyse* (1921) and has been further developed throughout the twentieth century by other psychologists, scholars and film theorists. Since film

perception is the topic of this book, let us list most of those that, according to Ms. Helman, have considerably contributed to the theory. Thus, here is the list of the names, followed, in some cases, by the pivotal work:

- a) Jacques Lacan (1901-1981, French psychologist;
- b) Béla Balázs (1884-1949), Hungarian film critic, *Der Geist des Films* (1930);
- c) Jean Deprun (1923-2006), French philosophy historian, article “Le Cinema et l’identification,” (*Revue Internationale de Filmologie*, 1947);
- d) Albert Michotte van den Berck (1881-1965), Belgian experimental psychologist;
- e) Edgar Morin (b. 1921), French philosopher, *Le cinéma ou l’homme imaginaire* (1958);
- f) Sigfried Kracauer (1889-1966), German sociologist and film theorist, *Theory of Film* (1960);
- g) Jean Mitry (1907-1988), French film theorist and filmmaker, *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* (Volume I, 1963);
- h) Jean-Pierre Meunier, the author of *Les structures de l’expérience filmique. L’identification filmique* (1969), translated into English as *The Structures of the Film Experience: Historical Assessment and Phenomenological Expansions* (Amsterdam University Press, 2019);
- i) Jean-Louis Baudry (1930-2015), French novelist and psychoanalytical film theorist, article “Cinema: effects idéologiques produits par l’appareil de base” (1970), translated into English as “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” (*Film Quarterly*, Volume 28, Winter 1974-1975);
- j) Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (b. 1939), Project Director of the Joint European Filmography, and Fellow of the European Humanities Research Centre at Oxford University, article “A Note on History – Discourse” (*Edinburgh Magazine*, #1, 1976);

- k) Lawrence Crawford, article "Actional Nameability and Filmic Narrativity: Film Inner Speech to Identification" (*Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Volume 6, #3);
- l) John Ellis (b. 1952), English professor of media arts, *Visible Fictions* (1982);
- m) Teresa de Lauretis (b. 1938), Italian feminist, psychologist and film and literary theorist, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984);
- n) Dudley Andrew (b. 1945), American film theorist, *Concepts in Film Theory* (1984);
- o) Mary Ann Doane (b. 1952), American professor of film and media, *The Desire to Desire* (1987).

Since it would take a lot of space to present in detail each of those scholars' contributions to the idea, it should suffice to focus on at least four of them, the ones whose discoveries and opinions are related to our interests in the most obvious or direct way. Deprun, for instance, tries to convince us that the concept of *identification* is derived from a religious attitude that evokes film. Mitry suggests that *identification* needs to be addressed within a wider concept, *participation*; and Baudry is one of the first ones to notice that *imitation* develops into *projection* when the imitation reaches higher levels and focuses on more complex behaviors, in addition to copying superficial features (such as mood, hairdo and characteristic gestures of a movie star). Finally, de Lauretis comes up with the distinction of two categories of identification, 'maleness' and 'femaleness,' and insists that they impact the perception on both sides of the experience: in the viewer and in the image on the screen.

In addition to discussing all the findings and opinions of the other scholars and critics, Helman offers her own conclusive definition of *identification*, which can be translated in the following way: "This concept means a certain mental mechanism, an essential constituent of film perception, analyzed by some film theoreticians in the combination of *projection-identification* [p. 123]. Howard Suber, in his book *The Power of Film* (2006), indirectly supports this combination or composite when discussing the concept of *acting*. He says, "Thus we revealed the secret of great film acting: it is not action, but *reaction* that counts. The emotional response of the audience comes not just from what is projected *from* the screen but also from what the audience projects *onto* it" [p. 5]. What it all means is that not only does a film viewer identify with a given character, but he/she also endows (usually) the protagonist with his/her own

traits, especially those that are pertinent to or helpful in resolving the problem the fictitious or real-life character has to face. Summarizing the words of all the scholars mentioned above, one can add that the *projection-identification* process (sometimes referred to as the *identification-projection* process or phenomenon, meaning exactly the same) consists in the viewer giving up his “ego” and, oblivious of what is happening around him/her, completely transforming him/herself into a character on the screen through intensive concentration and due to the distraction caused by the action on the screen. The other conducive elements include the intimate atmosphere in a movie theater—created by such elements as darkness, illusive sense of loneliness and passivity combined with high expectations—as well as the cinematic effects that the viewer is exposed to/manipulated by, such as motion, close-up, editing and musical score. One of the most vivid examples of this phenomenon that I have found in fiction is the influence of Burt Lancaster, his movie characters and their individual or combined behavior on the actions of Norman Woodrow, a character in Tom Kakonis's *Flawless* (multiple samples of which are presented in the book on Lancaster and Douglas).

Another interesting point in Suber's book is the idea of individual or subjective perception, which he mentions in the entry on “Values”: “Next time you're at home watching a film on DVD with others, try stopping the film halfway through and asking the people in the room to rate the power of each of the characters at that point in the film relative to the others. You will nearly always find substantial agreement. But if you then ask them how they *value* those same characters, there will frequently be significant disagreement. People often value characters differently at different points in the story, and their valuation often correlates with their opinion of the film as a whole. If you see Michael Corleone as nothing more than a ruthless gangster determined to wipe out all opposition, you will value *The Godfather* one way. If you see him as a man forced to take desperate measures to save his family, you will see the film in another way” [p. 392].

Thus, the concept of subjective or individualized perception, addressed in different ways by de Lauretis and Suber, can be further studied and developed into more conclusions regarding the decisive factors. Significantly expandable, those factors can be divided into three categories: those related to some obvious or superficial criteria, such as the viewer's age, background, level of education, social status and system of values (in addition to de Lauretis's gender); those determined by mental idiosyncrasies, e.g., general and specific knowledge, beliefs, intellectual curiosity, imagination and level of intelligence; and those shaped by affective components, such as emotions, mood, attitudes, expectations, etc. (Suber's is a complex idea resulting from a combination of various factors). While not all of those factors can be

exemplified by the quotations cited in the book (the data at hand are dependent on what is offered by the writers), some of them are definitely addressed and presented in an unambiguous way.

The terms and concepts defined in the above six paragraphs should be helpful in the understanding and appreciation of the data provided in this book. An overwhelming number of fiction excerpts will be quoted to illustrate Peck's, Mitchum's and Holden's impacts on the feelings and thinking of countless literary characters—either through their film roles, their screen personalities or, simply, their established fame. And, all of the excerpts, when taken collectively, will make it possible to track the gradual development of the actors' personae throughout the years of their acting careers. The reader will be presented with the circumstances of and the reasons for a narrator's or a character's mentioning of one of the three actors or any of his films in a given context. Wherever possible or appropriate, a deeper analysis will be carried out and the influence of such a reference on a character studied. Since most of the resources are fiction books, it is quite obvious that it is the author himself or herself that makes a deliberate choice (in most cases) to attach certain references to certain characters.

The book consists of three parts, each part devoted to one actor and each having five identical sections. In the first section, references to the actor's films are discussed; the second section presents references to the actor himself; the third section shows the complete list of references to the actor and his films (such a list, in addition to offering a clear picture of which writers and to what extent favor each actor, is justified by the fact that not all excerpts found in the resources are presented in the first two sections—either because of their relative insignificance or repetitiveness, their abundance in a given work or for some other reason); the fourth section offers the credits of the films referenced (in order to avoid unnecessary repetition in the expository film descriptions in the first section); and the fifth section offers the actor's complete monographic bibliography (which seems appropriate considering the kind of reference book it aspires to be). The name of an actor when mentioned within a quoted passage in his own part is always in **bold print** and underlined, just like all the titles of his films. **Bold print** itself is used for a given movie's other members of the cast and crew and for any related key words, phrases, clauses or sentences, such as character names, unique locations or dialogue lines quoted from that film—in addition to the names of the other two stars and/or their films mentioned in excerpts outside of their own parts. The information about the original written sources is provided in three different places: in the main body (Sections I and II of Parts One, Two and Three), the list of references to an actor and his films (Section III in each part) and the Overall Bibliography.

As shown in Sections V of Parts One, Two and Three, there are several monographic books on each of the three stars that quite comprehensively address the facts related to and draw conclusions about their lives, careers and impact. However, there is always something important to add, and a book like this, a book offering a new angle, a database of quotations, comments and reflections with a perspective and a filter provided by one of the possibly most respected and acclaimed groups of intellectuals, writers, is definitely a fresh and significant contribution to the general image that past and current generations of moviegoers have had about the three unquestioned legends of the screen.

Thus, the information contained in the book, in addition to providing countless cases for the study of film perception, offers one more significant and precious data base for assessing the *impact factor* of each of the three actors and his films; at the same time, it constitutes a unique documentation of and a commentary on an important era of Hollywood's history—the 1940s through mid-1990s—created by representatives of another medium both during that era and years after it became a time long gone, a time evoking reflections and nostalgia. Moreover, without a doubt, the book provides a precious source for further studies of the complex and bilateral correlations between film and literature. The fact that three fascinating men and talented professionals are the topic of this project should make the book engrossing all the more.

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Overall Bibliography

The letters GP (for Gregory Peck), RM (for Robert Mitchum) and WH (for William Holden) after the bibliographical information refer to the actor(s) whose name(s) and/or film(s) is/are mentioned in a given work. Several items on the list are not followed by any of these initials; they are nonfiction books by authors whose discoveries and opinions regarding either the three actors or film theory and history in general are also quoted in the analytical parts of the book.

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