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REVIEW OF CINEMA NO. 10

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Mark Robson (to the left of the camera) directs a scene from CHAMPION



MARK ROBSON REMEMBERS RKO, WELLES, & VAL LEWTON

Mark Robson spent more than a dozen years at RKO during the thirties and forties working with such people as Dorothy Arzner, Orson Welles, Garson Kanin, Jean Renoir, and Val Lewton. He was Robert Wise's assistant editor on Welles' CITIZEN KANE and THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS, and the editor on JOURNEY INTO FEAR. With Lewton's horror unit, Robson was, next to Lewton himself, the most important contributor, editing the first three of the critically acclaimed films (Tourneur's CAT PEOPLE, I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE, and THE LEOPARD MAN), and subsequently directing five others (THE SEVENTH VICTIM, GHOST SHIP, YOUTH RUNS WILD, ISLE OF THE DEAD, and BEDLAM). Robson left RKO in 1947.

Robson's post-RKO films range from such socially-relevant films of the fifties as CHAMPION, HOME OF THE BRAVE, TRIAL, BRIGHT VICTORY and THE HARDER THEY FALL to adaptations of spicy best sellers such as PEYTON PLACE, FROM THE TERRACE, THE PRIZE, and VALLEY OF THE DOLLS. He has done a comedy, PHFFT, and has returned once to the horror genre for DADDY'S GONE A'HUNTING. Today, Robson is considered one of the most successful "commercial" filmmakers. Still, his projects reflect a personal involvement and commitment (both stylistically and politically) that are rare among typical "Hollywood" filmmakers. I found Robson an easily-approached, extremely friendly man whose enthusiasm for film I thought quite exciting.

I spoke to Mark Robson for 5½ hours. The following is excerpted from that interview:

Q: You were at Fox before coming to RKO?

I was an assistant to a set dresser at Fox. When Darryl Zanuck came in he hired a head of the Property Department. I asked for advancement and was told I would be given an answer in two weeks. In two weeks, almost to the second, I was fired.

Q: How did you come to RKO?

I played golf with a stranger named Herman Zohbel who was an executive at RKO. He told me to ask James Wilkinson if there were job openings in RKO's film library. There was an opening because someone had been moved up to take the place of an unfortunate who had used acetone to clean a film about to be previewed. I started out shagging cans and while I became more and more educated about film, I moved up.

Q: How long were you at RKO?

I guess from the mid-thirties until about 1947.

Q: What was RKO's organization?

There was a changing executive level. The early holders of the major stocks were the banks. The Rockefellers controlled it for awhile. After Selznick left RKO, Pandro Berman became the head of the studio. He was running it when I got there. After him there were several non-creative studio heads, among them Zohbel, Peter Rathvon, Charles Koerner, Eglington, Briskin, and Joseph Breene who brought in Welles and I think Val Lewton.

On a lower level were the technical departments. RKO was a very good studio technically, as good as any studio around considering it was not among the biggest. There was the camera department, the editorial department headed by James Wilkinson, Ahlberg's excellent sound department, and a fine special effects department headed by Verne Walker. All the department heads were exceptional. These men seemed to weather the storm from one regime to another, whereas at other studios when there was a change at the top, people would be let go.

This whole period was one of business management. As directors were considered extremely important, deals were made for the services of the best: Leo McCarey, John Ford, Gregory La Cava, George Stevens, John Cromwell, Tay Garnett and William Dieterle. Toward the end of my stay there, they made a deal with David Selznick to make films at RKO. Dore Schary

headed Selznick's production unit at RKO. It was he who fired me and later rehired me at 10 times my previous salary.

Q: Did RKO have a political line that its filmmakers had to follow?

Ford had made *THE INFORMER* and *PLOUGH AND THE STARS* at RKO, so to a certain extent they did allow social comment. In fact, *YOUTH RUNS WILD*, a film with a social message, was brought to Lewton by the studio. But of course they preferred that we not discuss politics. The industry was interested in making money so entertaining films were what was produced. Anyway, at least in the films I was involved in, I don't think we had the audacity to make stronger statements than we did. Consequently, we had no censorship problems.

Q: How much room for creativity did editors have in the late thirties and early forties?

Quite a bit. Remember, in those days there were very few cinemateque organizations, no editing textbooks, and no schools to learn how to edit a film. The younger editors, such as Bob Wise, me, John Sturges, used to have daily discussions about editing, about why you make cuts and how you make cuts. We were very excited about it. We used to listen to the editing theories of veteran editors such as Bill Hamilton, Danny Mandel and Sherman Todd. We discovered a great deal about editing through our experimentation and discussion.

Q: Would you have had such freedom to experiment at other studios?

No. It was too regimented and the head of the department was a king. I would say that RKO in particular spawned some unique individuals—particularly editors.

Q: Were editors under contract?

No. We could have left anytime we wanted, or gotten fired anytime they wanted.

Q: You were involved with many financially successful films at RKO (particularly with Lewton), yet your salary remained low. Was there widespread exploitation of RKO employees?

I started to work in the film library for 66¢ an hour. Some men who were editors were earning the ridiculous sum of \$45 per week to edit a film. This was at RKO, but it may have been as bad at other studios. Later, when the National Labor Relations Board was formed and minimum wages were set, we got a raise to 88¢ an hour. Later the minimum wage went up again.

I and a group of other people very active at RKO helped organize the film editor's guild. Most of the fellows at RKO were involved. Then I could get the large sum of \$1.25 an hour as an assistant editor. Things were improving.

Before there were such things as overtime pay, we'd work 100-110-120 hours a week. When Bob Wise and I were working for Welles on *THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS* and *JOURNEY INTO FEAR* we were so overwhelmed by the amount of work that we both moved away from our homes and into a motel in Culver City. There were endless hours and I don't think we were paid any more for the 110th hour than the 1st hour.

In the early days, when there was a personal property tax on film, there was a rush to get all the film out of the studio and the state because of the March Tax. That was a terrible time in which we might come to work and not leave for a week. I recall that during one March Tax time, after having spent a week in the studio taking catnaps on top of the cutting bench, I found fellow editor Theren Warth* crying on the sidewalk because he couldn't remember where he parked his car days before. So those were the days of exploitation I guess. Hours meant nothing, because they were so cheap.

* Robson informed me that Warth passed away during the week of this interview. His funeral was attended by many of the old RKO editors.

Q: Were there strikes?

No. At the time, I don't think we really felt exploited. This was a great experience for us because under enormous pressure we did many interesting things. Looking back they were valuable days.

Q: Though it would have been better to have been paid properly for the extra hours . . .

Of course.

Q: Were you learning directing techniques all along?

Not at first. Orson and Garson Kanin, for whom I was assistant editor for three films, stimulated the notion that there was a future in becoming a film director. I also worked around John Ford, Leo McCarey, George Stevens and William Dieterle.

Q: You worked with Dorothy Arzner?

I helped edit one of her films. She was a marvelous, talented woman. She had come up through the ranks and had experienced quite a lot. Unfortunately, in this male-oriented business, there was no place for her. At the end, she had a hard time getting an assignment, so she went into teaching.

Q: What was the reaction at RKO when Welles first came to the studio?

Remember that Welles came to RKO with a free-wheeling contract and was given what was in those days a great deal of money to make films. It caused RKO ruptures with several directors, who were upset by the freedom given to Orson that they did not have. There were great jealousies around. But Orson's period was not a long one.

Q: During Welles' period were there many new technical achievements at RKO?

The sound department won several awards because of the development of a valve in the sound system that was a noise depressor. So we had sound that was relatively free of ground noise. I was in charge of voice looping for *THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS* when we pioneered the field of massive looping. We did it out of necessity because Orson had pre-recorded the entire film to playback.

Q: Were new departments opened up or old ones expanded? Were there many people trying to invent new devices?

No more at RKO than at any other studio. As I recall, studios, then spent much more money on research and development than they do today, when most research is done by people outside the industry.

Actually, there haven't been many new developments in film technique. The most innovative instrument beyond the new cameras has been the butt splicer. Put to use in the late 50's, it revolutionized the editing of film.

Q: How much was shot of *HEART OF DARKNESS*?

Welles only made test scenes. I think he thought he would do it—but maybe he was just sharpening his technique.

Q: You didn't know him very well at the time?

Not yet. Scenes would come in and Bob and I would string them together. One day some strange footage came into the projection room. The slate on the film said *HEART OF DARKNESS*, yet as it turned out this was the first material for *CITIZEN KANE*.

Q: While watching the dailies come in did you sense something extraordinary developing?

Only after a few weeks...

Q: Did you have trouble figuring out how to cut such a film?

Of course. It took a great deal of time. We did the Time Marches On prologue several times. I redid that voice over with Bill Allend countless times. I was making cuts in the negative while Bob was in the East with Welles without anybody taking a look at it. It was strange. They'd tell me to do something, and I'd do it flying blind.

Q: But, did Welles oversee everything?

Yes.

Q: Were there pressures put on the studio to cut out production?

I personally can't tell you. I'm sure there were moves in the background of which I wasn't aware. I remember running the film for Louella Parsons and some lawyers. The lawyers liked the film, and couldn't understand why Louella ran from the projection room crying.

Q: Do you want to talk about the recutting of AMBERSONS?

Sure, I'll talk about it. While Orson was in South America, we took AMBERSONS to numerous unsuccessful previews. Under the supervision of Jack Moss who represented Orson, we kept making changes to keep the audience in the theatre.

Q: Were you in contact with Welles?

Not at all. But I suspect Jack Moss was in touch with him. After all, Moss was representing his company.

Q: Then Welles knew what was going on?

I don't know. But Moss was here and Welles was in South America. Anyway, it was cut and cut and recut. That film was heartbreaking. The great things that happened on film... I guess people didn't care. They just left the theatre. I think we must have taken it to dozens of previews. It reached a point when we had to pick up the film at the booth, people were waiting for us as if they were going to beat us up. They were so angered and annoyed.

Q: Were there more problems editing JOURNEY INTO FEAR?

When Welles came back to California, nobody would talk to him. I was sent to see him as an intermediary to try to get him to see the incomplete JOURNEY INTO FEAR. The script ended with a tag scene but none had been filmed. I persuaded him to shoot the finish to the picture.

Joseph Cotten and Dolores Costello in THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS



Q: Tell about the break-up of the Welles unit.

I guess, when he was in South America with his IT'S ALL TRUE production in shambles, AMBERSONS in trouble, and JOURNEY INTO FEAR incomplete, the studio asked him and his Mercury Theatre group to move out. Many of those closely involved with Orson had a rough go of it. I was sent down to the "B" picture group. There I met Lew Ostrow, and old film "doctor" and it was he who assigned me to Val Lewton. It was a demotion, but as it turned out I got an awful lot of experience. I actively worked with Lewton and while Lewton was busy preparing something, I would be doing something else with Lew Ostrow. So in a period of 2 or 3 years, I had a tremendous amount of editorial experience.

Q: Were you assigned to Lewton to teach him about films?

No, only to teach him about editorial theory. Lewton was a really great filmmaker. One of the best there's been.

Q: How did Welles' unit differ from Lewton's?

Lewton was much more intimate. He had the capacity to bring in as many elements as he could into the making of a film. As an editor, I worked very closely with the director, writer, and Lewton. With Val we were all deeply involved. We had daily meetings. This wasn't so with Welles. Orson had writers who wrote and he worked with them, but few were involved much with planning—at least I wasn't. But Welles had a group around and I'm sure they had discussions.

Q: Did Lewton do any actual directing?

No. He was most often not even on the set.

Q: How seriously did the Lewton unit take its films?

We took them very seriously. We worked long and hard on those films. Our standards were very, very high. Some people tend to put down horror stories but you must remember many of the great folk stories of every nationality are horror tales, and many great writers wrote horror pieces.

Q: Did the members of the Lewton unit read horror stories?

Of course... Algernon Blackwood, W. W. Jacobs, Ambrose Bierce, Conrad, Stevenson, etc., etc. We read everything.

Q: Did you feel the studio did an injustice to the films in their exploitation campaigns?

Val had been involved in publishing and had a great sense of typography, so the lettering of the main titles was gone over very carefully. We used Caslon old style, very clear, lovely,

Val Lewton and Boris Karloff on the BEDLAM set (publicity shot)





wonderful stylish lettering and we would italicize caps for the first letter of each word. We would ask the heads of the advertising unit to please not use the goddamn "fur" letters and other trick lettering that gave one a supposed sense of horror. I don't know how far we got, but I imagine there are a lot of fur letters around.

The publicity campaigns were ridiculous, because the films never lived up to the luridness of the ad campaigns. The films were delicate and interesting. But you must understand that in the smaller towns there is little advertising... not much publicity of any kind on any film. So the people who go to the movies see what's coming by the one-sheet and it is that one-sheet that either sells them or not. Therefore, it is not surprising that the studios tried to make those one-sheets as exciting as possible.

Q: For *THE LEOPARD MAN* there were spot radio announcements of a man who compared seeing the film with spending the night in a graveyard. A one-sheet of *BEDLAM* tells the viewer to come see Dorothea the Dove, Dan the Dog, Tom the Tiger, and Paul the Pig.

We had nothing to say about it.

Q: Were there tricks you played on the studio?

Yes, we had great freedom because there was little money at stake.

Q: It has often been told how great the Lewton story sessions were. What were the bad sessions?

I don't think there were any bad sessions. I'm sure that if the work wasn't interesting or if Val was critical of what was turned in, he would have been critical in private conferences and not in group sessions to embarrass anyone. Lewton was a very gentle man.

Q: *BEDLAM* and *ISLE OF THE DEAD* were inspired at least in part by paintings, and in many of the films there are tableau shots that look like reproductions of art works. How much of a part did art play in the Lewton films?

Before filming, we looked endlessly at books and books of paintings. This came out of Val's training with David Selznick. If there was a sunset, we looked at hundreds of paintings and photographs of sunsets. We looked at modern art and at 18th Century art to find the light and shadow of a painting. Now with the stress on the documentary, naturalistic-style, little attention is paid to these concerns.

Q: What more was involved in pre-production planning?

We thought everything out. We had to do this to accomplish what we did with such low budgets. Val emphasized detail. I

remembered that Orson had said that "detail is the most important thing, the big things take care of themselves." Detail was very important in terms of the texture of these films. Also, we chose the sets very carefully, used them as modules.

Q: Did you ever go out on location?

Very little. In those days, not many people did go out, primarily because the heads of the studios wanted to control the filmmaker.

Q: Was the low-key lighting attributed to low budgets?

Not really. It was attributed more to the desired mysterious look of the films. Of course, the streets we had in *THE SEVENTH VICTIM*, for instance, were studio streets and the less light we put on them the better they looked. We would just suggest certain things on that street hidden in the darkness because the streets were architecturally wrong. We were interested in single source lighting. We chose sets that were suitable for single source. It made setups and characters very interesting. It was important for us to use light for dramatic purposes.

Q: How much leeway did the cameraman have?

In terms of camera movement, position, setups—none. In terms of light source, very little. We proscribed all the shots. The cameraman's job was to see that we captured the image on the negative with enough balance. He worked with us very closely, but he wasn't an inventor of setups or design.

Q: When did Roy Webb or C. Bakaleinikoff come in to do the music?

After the film was completed.

Q: The Lewton films have the strangest casting imaginable. There are beauty queens, models, culinary experts, old time actors, a 1904 poster girl, a famous intellect, talented animals, a calypso singers, tyros, etc.. Christine Gordon who was told that she had to get rid of her Czech accent to get any films role was perfectly cast in the speechless role in *I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE*. Who did the casting?

We all did. I'll tell you what used to happen. Val was very friendly with a lot of the smaller agents who tried to get jobs for their clients. Val would give them an enormous amount of time. One day, Chef Milani was brought in by an agent and we thought it would be interesting to have him play a character in an Italian Restaurant in *THE SEVENTH VICTIM*. I think, too, that Val and DeWitt Bodeen and others around the unit had a great love for the old movie or theatrical figure. (In an article in *Focus on Film* no. 7, DeWitt Bodeen tells how he persuaded Lewton to cast an aged actress named Julia Dean in *CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*. — Ed.) They had a great feeling and great warmth for these people. Val's aunt was Alla Nazimova and I imagine that he met some of these people through her. Ben Bard, a long time out of film, was having a difficult time with a theatre and Val took him in. Elizabeth Russell was a personal friend of Val and his family.

Q: The vision of the world in the Lewton films seems pessimistic, almost fatalistic, in nature. The films are quite existential, with everyone contemplating the meaning of life. What were you trying to get across?

I would think this—simply from the time you're born the inevitable is going to happen and you're going to die. It is the struggle within that time slot that is life.

Q: Is man fated to die in a specific manner, at a specific time?

No, not necessarily. Depending on his character he may or may not die a noble death. The struggle between birth and death is an admirable struggle against the fates, against the inevitable. If he uses himself well to make his life worthwhile, I guess he lives an honorable life and he faces an honorable death no matter



Simone Simon ("like a cat in heat") in *THE CAT PEOPLE*

how he dies. That's the general philosophy of most of these films. In *THE SEVENTH VICTIM* there is a John Donne passage. "I run to death and death comes to me as fast and all my troubles are like yesterday..." In a way that fits many of these films.

Q: It fits all the films up until *BEDLAM*. In that film Anna Lee fights against the system and against her destiny, unlike Jean Brooks in *THE SEVENTH VICTIM* who commits suicide. I think *BEDLAM*, a film of human progress, is a step forward from the pessimism of *THE SEVENTH VICTIM*. So it is good to see *BEDLAM* being the last of the Lewton series instead of *THE SEVENTH VICTIM*.

As a filmmaker since *BEDLAM*, I've tried to be a social commentator. I'm optimistic as a person and I've tried to show this. I think that the struggle to improve the world is important and I believe that if you try hard enough you can make some dent in the wall that imprisons us.

Q: Did your Lewton films have sexual overtones?

I don't think so.

Q: In *CAT PEOPLE*, on the night of their marriage, Simone Simon and Kent Smith say goodnight through a closed door and Simon crouches on the floor against the door like a cat in heat.

Yes, but Jacques Tourneur directed that film. My contributions to that film were editing techniques that were quite good. I did the editing of the echoes in the swimming pool sequence. Also, we developed a sharp cutting technique we later grew to call the "bus" and that is that from a close-up of a person in terror we cut to the impact of a bus (with the hiss of the airbrakes) coming to a stop. The sharpness of that cutting would knock people out of their seats in a theatre.

Q: There is a great utilization of the "bus" in *THE LEOPARD MAN* when the terrified girl walking below the train overpass spots two eyes in the darkness and is suddenly jolted by the roar of the train.

Jacques Tourneur directed that also. I admire his work so much. He had a rare, gifted eye. The magnificent things he did in that little movie. The chase in the graveyard is marvellous. And the light effects of that train—you know there was no train. We were on a stage. The light effects of the train going through and the sound effects put in later—terrific!

Q: Did you try to insert at least one "bus" shot per film?

We tried to do it very often. The "bus" was done again in *BEDLAM* with the hands shooting out of the cell. And we did it in *THE SEVENTH VICTIM* when frightened Jean Brooks crawls along the alley wall and suddenly there is the sound of someone laughing shrilly.

Q: Hitchcock follows suspense sequences with extremely calm scenes. Did you try to do the same thing?

I recall that after a horror sequence we always tried to give the audience relief by going to something very beautiful, lyrical if possible. We tried to make the films visually interesting. We didn't have anything else, you see.

Q: How old were you when you directed *THE SEVENTH VICTIM*?

About 27 or 28. The first breakthrough to young people came to Bob Wise and me. I got \$200 a week for directing *THE SEVENTH VICTIM*.

Q: Have you seen it lately?

No.

Q: It's an amazing film. It's not the greatest film, but it's amazing. Every line, every scene is important.

Isn't that amazing...

Carol Reed and the Boulting Brothers used to bicycle it around England during the forties.

Q: *YOUTH RUNS WILD* opens very dramatically--we see a street sign that reads "Drive Slowly, We Love Our Children," and immediately a truck runs over the sign.

We dealt with the position of young people faced with a dislocated family during the war. The mother and father were working so the kids weren't guided or managed by their parents.

Q: Didn't the studio interfere with that film?

YOUTH RUNS WILD was shipped. But one of the heads of the "B" picture department wasn't happy about the film—even in the face of some very fine critical reviews. There was a big fight and I was fired. Within a couple of weeks, I was rehired as a writer-producer-director. I eventually got the film back to somewhat the original form.

Q: Toward the end of the Lewton cycle, the films shifted from the contemporary to the costume picture.

It ended with the costume films simply because we had Boris Karloff and it's very difficult to think of Boris Karloff as a contemporary man. He seemed more suited to costume. Incidentally, we loved Boris. He was a wonderful man.

Boris Karloff in *BEDLAM*



Q: How were you able to make costume pictures so cheaply?

Cecil B. DeMille, of all people, asked Val the same question. Actually, I don't think they're much more expensive than other films. We were very innovative with design and planning. I made the battlefield set for ISLE OF THE DEAD by using a grey (neutral) drop falling to the floor to create a horizon line. There was a sense of endless space. With that 50-60 foot cyclorama I made the whole battlefield. That set cost us nothing. Honestly speaking, our art designer for BEDLAM was Hogarth. Today one would think it impossible to make an inexpensive costume picture. If the film doesn't take place in the present, film companies become terrified because very few people have been involved with costume films and know what can be done in terms of low cost.

Q: Were you asked to ignore the war in the horror films?

Not at all. We had leeway and chose to do this.

Q: All of the Lewton films and most of the subsequent films by the three Lewton directors have strong female characters. All your male leads are mild-mannered and non-heroic, which is most peculiar considering that these were the war years. When Kent Smith was asked to do the CAT PEOPLE lead he was "offered the part of a boring man." Through the 11 Lewton films there is only one instance of the male lead doing an heroic act. On all other occasions the woman is at the center of the danger and she gets out of it herself. In ISLE OF THE DEAD, the villainous Boris Karloff dies before the hero can come to the rescue. The fantastic Anna Lee character in BEDLAM and the Katherine Emery character in ISLE OF THE DEAD are stronger by far than any of the males throughout the series.

Why did this happen?

Q: That's what I'm asking you.

It just so happened. There was no conscious effort.

Q: In GHOST SHIP . . .

There is no woman. . .

Q: Still it is not the male lead who does in the villain, but a character listed far down in the credits. The hero does nothing. That's very strange.

These were unstructured works. Unstructured in the sense that character conflicts between protagonist and antagonist were diffuse. I think that this added the charm of those films. In ways they broke many of the rules of story telling. They're almost film novels. Their form is different from any films of that period or since—they're much freer. They follow very few dramaturgical rules.

Q: In all the horror films someone's mind is a little deranged. In CAT PEOPLE, Simone Simon suffers from an odd form of sexual repression. Christine Gordon in I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE has the symptoms of extreme withdrawal. James Bell in THE LEOPARD MAN and Richard Dix in GHOST SHIP are schizophrenics. Jean Brooks in THE SEVENTH VICTIM is a manic-depressive. There are many ways Lewton characters become insane: Henry Daniell in THE BODY SNATCHER because of guilt; little Ann Carter in CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE and once again Simone Simon in THE CAT PEOPLE because of loneliness; Boris Karloff and Katherine Emery in ISLE OF THE DEAD through fear; Karloff in all his films becomes mad with power. This is also true of Dix in GHOST SHIP, while the inmates in BEDLAM became insane because they were told they were insane.

If you're dealing with melodrama, these mental aberrations or mental defects lend themselves very well to the situation. It may have been an easy way out.

Q: I don't think this is true. Your films are more developed in respect to the psychological element than the films of late, in which there is no real reason for someone's mental illness. For instance, if a new filmmaker wants a sick man, he simply gives him a possessive mother and leaves it at that.



Boris Karloff in ISLE OF THE DEAD

Our stories, in fact, dealt with the development of the aberrations. The deranged characters were the pivotal characters and moved the story. Their derangements made the movie progress. So in a way it was easy, but it was still more honest and forthright than trying to justify an entire background of a character by having an excuse from the past. With us, it was germane to the subject. This is untrue in many contemporary films.

Q: It has been stated that the Lewton films saved the studio. Just how important were they financially?

Not very important. They paid their way, but they weren't big grossing films. They returned about four times their investment and did extremely well, but we were dealing in small amounts of money.

Q: Was RKO a successful studio?

After Leo McCarey, Garson Kanin, George Stevens and Buddy DeSilva—not very successful. It seemed to go down hill.

Q: Could Lewton have stayed on longer at RKO?

He could have stayed on forever. But he went to Paramount.

Q: You directed on non-Lewton film at RKO?

ROUGHSHOD. It was an experimental western that had a shootout at the end, but little action before that.

Q: You were unemployed for a while?

I was fired from RKO by Dore Schary because I hadn't done any important films as far as he was concerned. I was unemployed for 1 or 2 years. During that time I was offered horror films, but I didn't want to do them anymore. I got involved in coaching actors. I prepared a test scene for Audie Murphy for 8 to 10 weeks. The test was good and an independent picture was set up for Murphy at Allied Artists. I could have done that film, but at that time Stanley Kramer, Carl Foreman and a few other people had gotten me very interested in doing CHAMPION. On the first day of shooting, I was informed by my assigned film editor that a previous engagement precluded him from taking the job. While I was on the stage, an unemployed assistant editor, Harry Gerstad, came by to wish me luck. Harry and I had spent many hours together on the unemployment lines. He still needed a job. I made Harry the editor of CHAMPION. Come Academy Award time, I was asked to present the Editorial Award. In front of the camera, under all those bright lights, dressed in tails—I pulled out the name of Harry Gerstad. Winner!

DANNIS PEARY