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John Huston's Filmmaking analyzes the career of one of cinema's most versatile artists. Lesley Brill argues that Huston created a body of work far richer than the formulaic stories of masculine failure with which he is often credited. Stylish, superbly scripted, and informed by a wry sense of humor, Huston's films portray characters who attempt to conceive their identities. His work consistently returns to questions of love and mortality; of happiness and home; of society and the individual; and of the connections among what one of his most famous characters called "the Lord or fate or nature."

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Wayne State University



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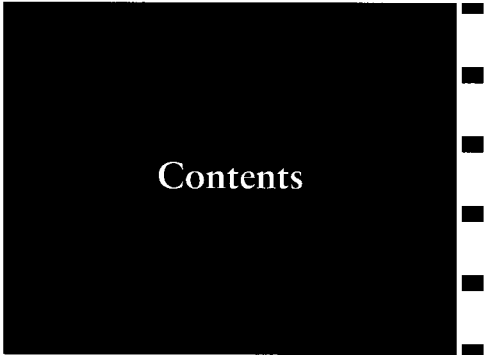
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For Megan,
and for Ben and Calista



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Preface and Acknowledgments

Bergman	Hitchcock	Lang
Dreyer	Huston	Murnau
Eisenstein	Kubrick	Satyajit Ray
Griffith	Kurosawa	Renoir

An alphabetized list of celebrated directors, plausibly someone's favorite dozen on a given day in a certain mood – a list for making conversation at a dull reception after a lecture, in a traffic jam, or for an earnest student. But “one of these things,” as they used to sing on “Sesame Street,” “doesn't belong”: Huston. Few academic film scholars would insert *that* name into such a small pantheon. Those who have made movies themselves might, and those who simply watch them. And I.

Because most of Huston's films have had relatively little extended analysis, the exploration of his authorship that follows is embodied chiefly in essays on a dozen of his movies. I have chosen works that are among Huston's more commonly shown (with a few exceptions). As a result, a number of his most accomplished and interesting films are considered only in passing: *Moulin Rouge*, *The List of Adrian Messenger*, *A Walk with Love and Death*, *The Kremlin Letter*, *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*, *Wise Blood*, *Under the Volcano*. As Huston's work returns to currency, one trusts that these superb movies will get some of the attention they deserve.

Like that of other auteurs of commercial films, Huston's authorship is a complex matter. It extends from his own talents as a writer, visual artist, actor, casting agent, director of actors, and editor to the leadership required for all collaborative undertakings that incorporate the contributions of many people while sustaining a unified objective. Huston's film authorship is affected both by his professional origins in Hollywood and by the fact that he was among the first major filmmakers to move from

the great studios to the semi-independent production that became increasingly common in the American film industry. I hope that my discussions of Huston's movies will make clear – perhaps chiefly by implication – that he was a remarkably effective artistic manager as well as a creator of great personal gifts.

Most books are also collaborative enterprises, and this one owes much to many people. Errors of fact, infelicities of expression, and implausibilities of argument are mine alone. Megan Parry commented helpfully upon the entire typescript, as did William Rothman. Various sections were sympathetically read by Stephen Cooper, Marian Keane, James Kincaid, Sue Palmer, James Palmer, Steve Rosen, and George Toles; thanks to all of them for their encouragement. Similar thanks to my amiable colleagues in Film Studies at Wayne State University and to the students with whom I studied Huston's films at Wayne State, the University of Colorado, and the Université de Nantes. James Boyer and Mary Iverson assisted with frame enlargements, and Norman Holland kindly supplied a videotape of the first release version of *Freud*. Lou Ellen Kramer and others at UCLA made available rare prints and videotapes on which Huston worked in a variety of capacities. Sam Gill and Ed Carter at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences were energetic in giving me access to a wide range of unique Huston materials. Walter Havighurst was a resourceful copy editor. Leaves and other financial support from Wayne State University provided crucial time and resources for my research. Earlier versions of the discussions of *The Misfits* and *The African Queen* appeared in *Proteus* and *Cinema Journal*. Finally, I am happy to recall three gracious friends and teachers whose memory animates this book and its author: John Hagopian, Claude Richard, and Steve Rosen.

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