

# Negotiating the Studio System: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Anti-Fascism in *Cornered*

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As numerous film historians have documented, the hierarchical and politically conservative studio system posed particular challenges for radical filmmakers. The relationship between creative workers, especially screenwriters, and the studio executives who monitored markets, morals, and the business of filmmaking was often fraught with distrust and hostility, particularly during the long unionisation struggles of the 1930s and early 1940s. With a few notable exceptions, studio executives had little patience with the artistic or political aspirations of their employees, and Hollywood progressives waged a constant battle to produce socially conscious films within an industry that prioritised profits and entertainment over art or political engagement. In this context, the 1940s represented something of a halcyon period, as the propaganda needs of the war fuelled a greater politicisation of film content. Though avoiding controversy remained a top priority, studio executives increasingly relied on the political expertise of Hollywood radicals to produce films representing the evils of the fascist enemy as well as the bravery and commitment of the Allies both on the battlefields and on the homefront. In the postwar period, freed from the wartime moratorium on representing domestic social problems, film radicals anticipated a new era of political filmmaking.<sup>1</sup>

Producer Adrian Scott was at the cutting edge of this new political filmmaking, producing a flurry of films addressing fascism, anti-Semitism, class inequities, and war between 1945 and 1947. Radicalised in the late 1930s by the collapse of capitalism and the rising threat of European fascism, Scott was part of a generation of young filmmakers who saw movies not merely

as entertainment but as an unsurpassed vehicle for raising public consciousness and fueling social change.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, from his early years as a screenwriter, Scott, like many of his radical cohort in Hollywood, had struggled with the creative and political limitations imposed by the studio system. Though many of his writing peers sought greater control as directors, Scott believed that it was the producers – with authority over budgets and scripts, and the choice of writers, directors and cast, and other key elements of the production process – who held the ultimate power over film product. In December 1943, impressed with his work on *Mr. Lucky*, a wartime conversion narrative starring Cary Grant, RKO promoted Scott to the rank of producer, with the stipulation that he could be asked to write any film he chose to produce.<sup>3</sup>

In producing, Scott found his *métier* and gained much of the creative control he had lacked as a screenwriter. He spent most of 1944 working almost simultaneously on two productions: *My Pal Wolf*, a sentimental wartime weepie about a lonely girl and her dog, and *Murder My Sweet*, an adaptation of Raymond Chandler's novel *Farewell, My Lovely* that became one of the year's biggest box office and critical successes.<sup>4</sup> *Murder My Sweet* also marked the beginning of Scott's long and productive collaboration with screenwriter John Paxton and director Edward Dmytryk. Though the three men worked independently on other projects during this period, the films that they made together – *Murder My Sweet*, *Cornered* (1945), *So Well Remembered* (1947) and *Crossfire* (1947) – are generally considered their best work.<sup>5</sup> The breakaway success of *Murder My Sweet* made

Scott the hottest producer on the RKO lot and encouraged him to address more overtly political themes on his next project, *Cornered*, an anti-fascist thriller that dramatised the search for a band of Nazis plotting the Fourth Reich in Argentina. However, Scott's experience on *Cornered* – his first attempt as a producer to integrate his politics into his creative work – taught him that in many ways producing simply raised the stakes in the complex process of negotiation within the studio system.

In *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, Larry Ceplair and Steve Englund point to Scott's political films of the 1940s – *Cornered*, *Crossfire*, and *The Boy with Green Hair* – as key examples both of the new openness in postwar filmmaking and of the continuing difficulties that the studio system posed for radicals attempting to infuse their creative work with political significance. Their assessment of *Cornered* is particularly harsh: '*Cornered* had been stripped of every anti-fascist reference and turned into a cops-and-robbers picture despite the fact that it was written, directed and produced by Communists.'<sup>6</sup> However, Ceplair and Englund also contend that 'the finished film alone cannot provide evidence of how much the producers changed or how much they did not have to change as a result of the studio conditioning process on left-wing screenwriters.'<sup>7</sup>

This essay takes up that challenge, using *Cornered* as a case study of the politics of film production in the studio system. Drawing on internal studio correspondence, multiple screenplay drafts and the final film, this essay reconstructs the production history of *Cornered* to explore the ways in which Scott both compromised with and challenged the studio's expectations and interventions. I argue that although Ceplair and Englund are correct in their assessment that studio meddling shaped the film's political content in significant ways, Scott's complex negotiations during the film's production ensured that *Cornered* remained a powerfully anti-fascist film.

### Negotiating the Studio System

Unlike *Murder My Sweet*, a project Scott had chosen for himself, *Cornered* was assigned to him by William Dozier, the new head of the story department at RKO. Searching for a property that would help him quickly establish his presence at the studio, Dozier paid \$50,000 for a 20-page original treatment entitled *Cornered*, written by Ben Hecht, Herman Mankiewicz, and Czenzi Ormonde. The story was a thriller about an American Merchant Marine seeking revenge for the death of his brother after the war's end; the ensuing manhunt ultimately leads him to the Caribbean, where the murderer is killed before the American can get to him. Though the rambling story itself was not particularly impressive, Dozier saw in it an opportunity to capitalise on the success of *Murder My Sweet* with another gritty thriller, and he assigned Scott and Dmytryk to the project.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, Scott did not hire his old friend John Paxton, who had written both *My Pal Wolf* and *Murder My Sweet*, as the screenwriter for *Cornered*. Instead, he brought John Wexley onto the project. Though Dmytryk dismissed Wexley's screen writing as 'not impressive', in fact, he had impeccable anti-fascist credits for his work both on and off screen, and he shared Scott's radical vision and commitment to making films as 'political' as possible within the studio system.<sup>9</sup>

Wexley first proposed the key politicising change – shifting the site of the manhunt from the Caribbean to South America – after reading a State Department White Paper by Cordell Hull that exposed Juan Peron's Nazi sympathies and his establishment of a proto-fascist police state in Argentina. Wexley's suggestion that the hero should chase his prey to South America in order to 'reveal the guilt of Argentina – the criminal acts, the anti-U.S. acts' must have appealed enormously to Scott and he gave Wexley the go-ahead. In late 1944 Wexley began researching the political situation in Argentina and outlining the story's new trajectory.<sup>10</sup>

From the very beginning, the studio executives had qualms about the decision to set the story in South America. Since the mid-1930s, the United

States government, via the Good Neighbor policy, had worked feverishly both to protect American political and financial interests in Latin America and to expose German attempts to establish a fascist beachhead in the western hemisphere. In 1939, the Argentine newspaper *Noticias Graficas* had exposed a Nazi plot to annex Patagonia; a year later, a Uruguayan congressional investigation uncovered a plot to form a 'New Germany' embracing Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. In December 1940, *Look* magazine reiterated the threatening situation in South America, reminding its readers of these recent examples of German imperial ambition. Citing the large number of German immigrants in South America, *Look* warned: 'In the light of this totalitarian majority, Hitler's remark, "If ever there was a place where democracy is senseless and suicidal, it is South America," takes on menacing significance.' Despite diplomatic and economic incursions by the Nazis, most Latin American countries remained technically neutral throughout the war, though fears of fifth column agitation to the south continued to provoke American fears. Even as the war drew to a close, the Hollywood studios, still fearful of jeopardising their foreign markets, tried mightily to avoid antagonising those South American nations that were neutral or even sympathetic to the Nazis.<sup>11</sup>

This sensitivity to relations with South America had a significant impact on the development of *Cornered*. On 8 February 1945, RKO executive William Gordon forwarded a telegram to William Dozier, along with a memo outlining the studio's position on using Argentina as the film's setting. The telegram, from George Dorsey, reiterated the studio's concern for its financial interests in Argentina and suggested altering the film's locale to Spain since Argentina had 'severed relations with the Axis officially at least while Spain is still a neutral.' Explaining to Dozier that there was a distinct possibility that the United States would soon 'come to some understanding' with Argentina, Gordon suggested that it would be 'impractical and highly risky' to move forward with the project. However, Gordon felt that it would be premature

to share these concerns with Scott, and Wexley continued work on *Cornered* as an expose of pro-Nazi designs in Argentina.<sup>12</sup>

The first full draft of Wexley's screenplay, completed on 26 March 1945, opens with a chorus singing 'La Marseillaise,' punctuated by machine gun fire, as the French Resistance liberates a German POW camp near Marseilles in the final days of the war. One of the prisoners is a Canadian RAF lieutenant named Gerard, who searches through the littered corpses for his wife, Celeste (a member of the French Resistance), only to learn that she had been executed months earlier after enduring unspeakable torture. Gerard becomes obsessed with finding Vaudrec, the collaborationist who turned Celeste over to the Gestapo to be killed. Though the official record shows that Vaudrec is dead, Gerard discovers this is a lie, but his informant is killed before Gerard can learn the details. Tracking Vaudrec through bank transfers to his widow, Gerard follows the trail to Argentina where he poses as an electrical engineer working to build a government power plant (a project he learns is rife with corruption). In Buenos Aires, Gerard stalks the elusive Madeleine Vaudrec and confronts her with a phony dossier that 'proves' Vaudrec is alive. Calling his bluff, Madeleine says she's glad her husband is dead, raising doubts in Gerard's mind about her commitment to Vaudrec and to fascism. Through his connection to the power plant project, Gerard infiltrates a nest of collaborationists and escaped Nazis who have established themselves in the 'best' circles of Argentine society: Senor Carmago, a wealthy industrialist; General Regules, a corrupt Argentine government official; Baron von Strahle, a Nazi 'hero' of the London Blitzkrieg who now controls a cartel called the German Trust; Ounce, a sleazy informant for the Argentine secret police; and Monsieur Perchon, a wealthy Belgian banker with major business interests in South America. Convinced that one of these villains is posing as Vaudrec, Gerard plays a dangerous game of cat and mouse and uncovers a vast fascist conspiracy to take over Argentine industry as a springboard to eventual world domination.

However, Gerard also stumbles across the Argentine Resistance, which has planted an agent at Gerard's hotel to serve as his valet and monitor his activities. Though they know of Gerard's valorous work with the French Resistance, they fear that he has become deranged by his desire for revenge and that he will undermine their own careful work. One of their leaders, Santayana, is a prominent lawyer, who uses his social position to gather information on the fascist network in order to publish it in the underground press. Ultimately, both Gerard and Madeleine gain the trust of the Resistance, and Madeleine reveals that Monsieur Perchon is really Vaudrec. Santayana and his lieutenants explain that they cannot turn to the authorities for help; they will only get 'excuses and lies' because the government and the secret police are part of the conspiracy. However, they must convince Gerard that killing Vaudrec in revenge will not bring justice; the justice they seek will come when they reveal the fascist conspiracy to the people of Argentina.

In the final scene, Madeleine offers herself as bait to trap her husband into revealing himself and opening the safe that holds the documents that prove the existence of the Nazi conspiracy. Gerard steps in at the critical moment, only to be outsmarted by Baron Von Strahl; in the ensuing melee, both Perchon/Vaudrec and Von Strahl are shot. The government and secret police concoct a story to cover up the deaths, and Gerard and Madeleine are deported. Gerard joins her on the ship to France, bringing with him a copy of the underground newspaper, *Libertad*, with a blazing headline: 'We Accuse!'

Wexley did an enormous amount of research on Argentina and created an elaborate and constantly evolving backstory, though little of it found its way in the form he originally imagined into the final script. Wexley's notes for the project, for example, reveal his myriad attempts to dramatise the vast scope of Nazi ideology and tactics, from fascist control of all radio and newspapers to the indoctrination of soldiers by former Junker officers teaching in Argentine schools. At one point, to emphasize the essential goodness and anti-fascism of the French people,

Wexley planned to show Gerard living in a French pension where everyone is friendly and patriotic. Another unused scene reveals Wexley's attempts to dramatise the role of the Popular Front in the defeat of fascism: Gerard challenges an American newspaper reporter who tells him 'our forces' are having trouble with the FFI (French Resistance) and asks if they are 'starting this Popular Front stuff all over again.' Gerard sternly corrects the reporter: 'The only trouble the FFI makes is for the Nazis. They have captured over 75,000 of them to date and have killed almost as many. . . . They're not starting the Popular Front again. The Popular Front never stopped. That's why France is free.'<sup>13</sup>

Though Scott no doubt applauded the overt anti-fascism in Wexley's script, other elements presented problems for him. Scott's handwritten notes reveal his frustration with the repetition and lack of clarity in the earliest versions of the screenplay. In his personal copy of the first draft continuity, dated January 16, 1945, Scott crossed out huge sections – sometimes entire pages – of dialogue. Despite Scott's attempts to tighten the script, however, Wexley's final version remained overly complicated and repetitive. Part of the problem was that Wexley knew and perhaps cared too much about fascism, and he tried to put everything he knew into his screenplay. The following extended quote is just one example of Wexley's romantic over-dramatisation of the anti-fascist struggle:

**Santayana:** This time they must not escape. This time there must be retribution. Not revenge because revenge implies the doctrine of a life for a life and Vaudrec would need a thousand miserable lives to pay for all those good ones he destroyed. But retribution! Firm, unrelenting, merciless retribution.  
**Gerard:** Look. . . when the people of Paris seized the city in July – they didn't try to drive the Nazis and quislings out. They barricaded every street to make sure they didn't escape alive.

**Damonte:** But that is exactly what we want too. To hunt down every one of them – not merely Vaudrec. To prove that through a puppet like Vaudrec – the Nazis actually control large industries here, then we automatically expose the entire nest of rotten

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corruption that permits them to operate!

Madeleine: It is true – don't you see? Vaudrec is not only an enemy of France but to all people. All over the world. Gerard wants to kill him – he doesn't care if he's called an assassin. In Vichy they called every patriot an assassin.

Gerard: Maybe I've seen too much blood. . . maybe I've just gotten a little kill-crazy . . .

Vasquez: When you are fighting for a big thing – you must grow big yourself. Like those you saw die. . . . Because all those who have died in all countries do not lie by themselves, lonely. They hold each others hands, like a great chain linking up the whole world. And yet I say, amigo, not to kill Vaudrec now. We can wait a little longer.<sup>14</sup>

Given that Scott's initial problems with Wexley's work were less political than artistic, Dmytryk's analysis of the screenplay is particularly revealing: 'The trouble was that Wexley engaged in agitprop. At every opportunity, he wrote long speeches loaded with thinly disguised communist propaganda. Expressed in classical antifascist rhetoric, there were manifestos by the dozen, or so it seemed.'<sup>15</sup> Dmytryk's comment suggests the dilemma faced by radical writers dealing with overtly political subject matter. As a Communist writer, Wexley was certainly committed to injecting as much radicalism as possible into his work, making him vulnerable to charges of propagandising. Nevertheless, the extent to which the 'radical' and 'mainstream' perceptions of fascism overlapped during this period is striking. In many ways, Wexley's script is a shining example of the Office of War Information (OWI) guidelines for representing the nature of the anti-fascist struggle. For example, Wexley dramatised the Allied forces engaged in a 'people's war,' showing a unified internationalist front of Canadians, French, and South Americans working together to defeat fascism. He also dramatised very clearly that the foes of democracy were not simply the Germans, Italians, or Japanese, but included anyone with anti-democratic tendencies, from fifth columnists and saboteurs to the uncommitted and pessimistic. If anything, Wexley's anti-fascists are overly romanticised, while his Nazis and

collaborators are overly demonized. Some scenes, too, are rather sensationalistic. In an early scene in which Gerard learns of the Gestapo's torture of his wife, for example, Wexley included gory details of burning flesh and repeated whippings – representations of fascist sadism that Dmytryk himself had earlier used to great advantage in *Hitler's Children* (1943) and *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943).

Nevertheless, Wexley's screenplay caused great consternation among the studio executives as it made the rounds at RKO. On 3 April 1945, William Dozier fired off a memo to Scott with a critique that cut to the heart of Wexley's indictment of the fascist nature of the Argentine government. The requested changes included deleting all references to the network of secret police, official wiretapping, and the existence of an anti-fascist resistance movement or an underground newspaper. Several weeks later, in a six-page memo to Dozier, RKO executive James Francis Crow echoed his critique, reiterating the studio's sensitivity to South American relations:

Now of course all this is all right with me personally. I believe Argentina really has been guilty of such things as these. [Walter] Winchell has said as much and more. Recently in *Collier's* there was quite a candid expose of such goings-on in Argentina. But does the company wish to do battle with Argentina – just now, when Argentina has made a technical declaration of war against Germany, and has become, or is trying to become, a technical member of the United Nations? What will the OWI think of this? And the State Department – at a time when the State Department is trying to foster world unity?<sup>16</sup>

To forestall an imbroglia with either the Argentine or American government, Crow suggested that the script avoid naming a specific South American country by having Gerard cross many unnamed borders. He also emphasized that the script should show that the underground operates secretly so as not to tip their hand to the Nazis, not because the local authorities are themselves implicated in the fascist conspiracy. Interestingly, Crow draws a parallel with the rather murky conventions of

morality in the emerging cycle of what is now sometimes termed '*films noirs*.' 'Show that the underground workers, once they have got the goods on a Nazi fugitive, are quite ready to cooperate with the local police – in much the same way that many movie detective heroes are represented as doing.'<sup>17</sup>

At the heart of these negotiations between Scott and the studio executives is the very representation of the commitment to anti-fascism. Crow, on the one hand, recommended that the story show that the Nazi fugitives are trying to establish themselves not just in Argentina, but throughout the world, and that the underground is not only South American, but made up of transplanted Europeans, French, Dutch, Poles – 'people like Gerard, with special, personal grievances against the fugitive Nazis – banded together, wherever they may meet, in the common cause of revenge upon the Nazi criminals, wherever they may seek refuge.'<sup>18</sup> Wexley and Scott, on the other hand, hoped to portray anti-fascism as a specifically *political* commitment. In their representation, an anti-fascist commitment might be reinforced by personal motives such as revenge, but true anti-fascism was altruistic and uncompromisingly ideological.

In this sense, Dmytryk's criticism that Wexley's script was 'too much of an attack against fascism' is significant. On the anti-fascist continuum, one might be *too* anti-fascist – an over-commitment that would later be condemned as 'premature' anti-fascism. In later years, after his own repudiation of the left, Dmytryk would explicitly denounce Wexley's script as 'communist propaganda.'<sup>19</sup> Ceplair and Englund suggest that despite his membership in the Party and his presumed anti-fascism, Dmytryk was also 'strongly career-oriented' and 'wanted the films he directed to be commercial successes.' To this end, he advocated major revisions in the screenplay, changes that Wexley feared would 'whitewash' the Peronists.<sup>20</sup> These fears were confirmed when Dmytryk flew to Buenos Aires on 11 April, ostensibly on a creative reconnaissance mission. Though the film would be shot on a Hollywood sound stage, Dmytryk

'wanted to minimize the possibility of errors of ignorance by absorbing the feeling, the color, of this great city. The plot of our film was there [in the script], but not the smells, the tastes, the dark places our pilot would haunt during his search for the killer. What was even more important was my need to flesh out the characters he would encounter in this strange and distant environment.'<sup>21</sup>

Wexley, however, believed that Dmytryk's motives were more cynical, that he had gone to Argentina to 'get the government's approval of the script.' Wexley was particularly outraged that news of Dmytryk's trip had appeared in the trade papers, which to him seemed a public confirmation that the film would be made with the approval of, if not in direct collaboration with, the Argentine government.<sup>22</sup> Whatever Dmytryk's original motives, he returned from Argentina convinced that *Cornered* would lose money if filmed from Wexley's perspective and that RKO might face a full boycott in Argentina. This assessment hit a nerve with the studio executives, and Wexley was removed from the project. Wexley remembers that Scott was 'very embarrassed about the whole affair. He was working under great pressure and ashamed of what was going on, with Dmytryk trying to take the content out before shooting his picture.'<sup>23</sup>

By this point, however, it must have been abundantly clear to Scott that he could not hope to overcome the objections to Wexley's script. Though he was certainly committed to making political films, Scott, like Dmytryk, understood the importance of producing films that would be successful at the box office. His experiences as a screenwriter had taught him well that screen credits were everything in Hollywood. And he certainly recognized that even if a film's radical content survived the scrutiny of the executives and the censors in the Breen Office, the film still had to appeal to the taste and expectations of the movie-going public. Acquiescing to the studio's demands for substantial revisions, Scott turned next to his friend John Paxton – in Dmytryk's words, 'reliable, nonpolitical John Paxton.' Dmytryk's equation of 'non-political' and 'non-Communist' is particularly interesting

in this context, since Paxton – though not a Party member – was far from non-political. According to Norma Barzman, Paxton was sympathetic liberal, even a ‘fellow traveller,’ who agreed with most Communist positions ‘straight down the line.’<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Dmytryk was correct in describing Paxton as reliable. By May 3, 1945, Paxton had completed his first revision of Wexley’s screenplay, addressing not only the political objections raised by Dozier and the other studio executives, but also the creative problems that had concerned Scott. Though he retained the general plot trajectory created by Wexley, Paxton excised all references to wire tapping and other illegal secret police tactics and any implications of direct collaboration between the Nazis and the Argentine government, as well as Wexley’s painstaking delineation of the fascist infiltration of Argentine industry.

Nonetheless, Paxton’s changes improved the script in significant ways. For example, he deleted the entire opening section that Scott had extensively edited and marked as repetitious and confusing, beginning instead with Gerard being mustered out of the Canadian RAF in London and then returning clandestinely to France to search for his wife’s murderer. Though this change obliterated the stirring liberation of the POW camp by the Free French envisioned by Wexley, it also prevented the film from appearing too dated. By the late spring of 1945, as Allied troops marched on Berlin, the liberation of France was old news. Though the new opening was temporally vague, Paxton managed to keep the key political elements of Gerard’s character – his impressive war record, his work with the French Resistance, and his imprisonment by the Germans – while simplifying the narrative and saving the big action scene for the end of the film. Paxton also rethought the scenes in which Gerard tracks Madeleine Jarnac to Buenos Aires, deleting the series of improbable coincidences in Wexley’s version and making the trail to Argentina far more plausible. And if the studio’s injunction against showing the government in cahoots with the Nazis forced Paxton to cut minor characters like Baron von Strahle and General Regules, it also allowed him to expand

the character of Ounce (Inza in his version), Gerard’s ‘guide’ through the world of Argentine fascism. In Paxton’s version, Inza emerges as a man utterly without loyalty, playing one side off the other in a convoluted web of cross and double-cross.

Under pressure from the studio executives, Paxton also significantly revised the character of Madeleine, aligning the representation of women in *Cornered* more closely with the ‘good-bad girl’ and ‘bad girl’ categories delineated by Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites in 1950.<sup>25</sup> Both Dozier and Crow, anticipating problems with the Production Code, expressed concerns about Madeleine’s suitability as a love interest for Gerard, given her collaborationist past. Crow was particularly uneasy about the ‘not satisfactorily regenerated’ Madeleine, noting that ‘for two years this girl has been sleeping luxuriously with one of the foulest of Nazi murderers.’ Crow was not averse to love scenes between Gerard and Madeleine so long as the ending would show her as ‘a complete heavy, and that she has been playing him for a sucker all along.’ Crow wanted to see ‘sex in the scenes between Madeleine and Gerard – and the clean satisfying romance with someone else,’ suggesting *Murder My Sweet* as a model, in which ‘Dick Powell has the sexy affair with Claire Trevor, but Anne Shirley is his true love.’<sup>26</sup> Scott and Paxton chose instead to ‘regenerate’ Madeleine’s character, and in their version she is a classic ‘good-bad girl.’ Though Gerard suspects she is a Nazi sympathizer, her marriage to Vaudrec (called Jarnac in the final version) is ultimately revealed to be a sham, arranged by her collaborationist father as part of the scheme to fake Jarnac’s death. Madeleine, who has never actually met her ‘husband,’ goes along only to protect her sister, who had been badly injured in an Allied bombing raid. For the real ‘bad girl,’ Scott and Paxton developed a new character, Senora Carmago, who attempts first to seduce Gerard and then to frame him for murder.<sup>27</sup>

Given these sorts of compromises, Paxton’s version of *Cornered* is a more conventional manhunt thriller than originally envisioned by Wexley. Nonetheless, *Cornered* remains an anti-

fascist film at heart. 'Today there is only the right side and the wrong side,' says one of the film's minor characters, and this principle guides Paxton's dramatisation of the politics of anti-fascism throughout the film. The right side, obviously, is the Resistance, depicted as an international movement of 'ordinary' people driven by a hatred of fascism and a desire for justice. The model of the French Resistance is critically important here. In an early scene, Gerard visits the cave where his wife and fifty others were lined up against the wall and shot. His father-in-law points to the graves of those Gerard had known personally, ordinary villagers who had risked their own lives to help him after his plane was shot down. 'Why were they shot?' Gerard asks, and his father-in-law replies bitterly, 'They were French.' Indeed, being 'French' is invoked throughout the film as a key sign of anti-fascist commitment and essential goodness. The true French despise and resist fascism, in marked contrast to the collaborationism of the 'un-French' Vichyites. When Gerard asks if Jarnac, his wife's murderer, is French, his father-in-law barks, 'Vichy,' and spits disdainfully. Similarly, one of the signs of the righteousness of Santayana, the Argentine Resistance leader, is his profound shame that his nephew Senor Carmago is a fascist collaborator. The Argentine Resistance is also linked to the French by its respect for the rule of law, one of the key distinctions between fascism and liberalism. Santayana is a lawyer who repeatedly chides Gerard for seeking revenge rather than justice; he insists that the fascists will only be destroyed when the Resistance has sufficient *evidence* to convict them in the court of world opinion.

In contrast, the wrong side is depicted as a viper's nest of Europeanised decadence and corruption. Constrained by the studio executives from depicting the fascist infiltration of Argentine industry envisioned by Wexley, Paxton and Scott drew instead upon images of the moral bankruptcy of upper class society to suggest capitalism's collaboration with fascism. At a lavish party hosted by the Carmagos, Inza describes himself as an 'epicure' whose blood is a 'mixture of fine European wines.' Though he

refuses to answer when Gerard asks whether he is French or German, Inza the cosmopolitan longs for the days when his good friend Hermann Goering threw parties 'like Roman festivals.' Senora Carmago, first seen narcissistically inspecting the reflection of her flawless beauty and glittering jewels in a windowpane, complains that one cannot throw a good party in Argentina because the Latin Americans, unlike the Europeans, have no passion for intrigue – political, business, or romantic.

Despite Senora Carmago's disclaimer, *Cornered* is rife with intrigue, and Paxton makes clear that the political stakes are dangerously high. Raising the spectre of escaped Nazis infiltrating circles of power throughout the postwar world, Santayana insists to Gerard that their enemies are 'more than war criminals fleeing a defeated nation. They do not consider themselves defeated. We must destroy not only the individuals but their friends, their very means of existence, wherever they start to entrench themselves. Not only here but everywhere. In the United States, in England, in France, in Alaska or East Africa.'

By the end of June, Paxton had completed the major revisions on *Cornered*, and in early July, RKO sent the script to the OWI. The comments of reviewer Gene Kern reflect the government's unabashed use of Hollywood 'entertainment' to further the ideological work of the Allies. Kern gave the screenplay the green light, noting, 'This exciting melodrama strikes us as potentially valuable overseas fare.' In striking contrast to the studio's objections to the depiction of an Argentine Resistance movement, the OWI was concerned that the anti-fascist forces were not represented as 'strong, well-organized or capable.' Kern hoped that even though the story concerned a 'personal grudge, a one-man war,' some minor revisions still might be made to show that 'Gerard is aware that he is not alone in his fight against the Fascists, that there are others, organized and strong.' In keeping with the OWI's prohibition on outright propaganda, Kern added, 'I am not suggesting a propaganda speech which would be useless if recognized, but

rather an implication of organization and power that might be encouraging of freedom loving foreign audiences.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the positive review by the OWI, the RKO executives remained nervous about the potential political repercussions of *Cornered*. In a memo to Scott, dated July 7, 1945, William Gordon reviewed the script point by point. Reiterating the studio's desire to exonerate the Argentine government, he suggested that Paxton show that the Nazis, 'during the period of neutrality, took advantage of the opportunity to betray Argentina' and that 'the anti-democratic elements or Nazis have been so clever in their manipulations that even the Government, with its respect for law which is inviolable, has not been able to crack down on these elements, because of their apparently clean surface.' In addition, the film's use of the word 'fascist' continued to disturb him, and he felt it was 'certain to give offense even possibly to the extent of causing the finished film to be banned in Argentina.' To avoid this problem, Gordon ordered protection takes to be made for the Argentine print in which the word 'fascist' would be replaced by the word 'antidemocratic' or 'some other equally acceptable synonym.' Thus, in the scene in which Gerard first confronts Santayana, for example, Gordon ordered that the phrase 'the worst kind of anti-democratic heel' was to be used (at least in the Argentine print) instead of 'the worst kind of Fascist' – the phrase that remained in the American print.<sup>29</sup>

Though Paxton, working closely with Scott, continued to tinker with the script well into August, by early summer pre-production work on *Cornered* moved forward quickly. Set construction began in May, and in June Scott began running screen tests and assembling his cast. Scott's choice of actors, particularly for secondary roles, reflected in some ways his political vision for the film. Dick Powell, of course, had signed on early, starring as Gerard in a reprise of the tough guy persona he had established in *Murder My Sweet*. A number of actresses, including Jane Greer, Ruth Roman and Marjorie Masson, tested for the female lead, but the role of Madeleine eventually went,

appropriately perhaps, to French actress Micheline Cheirel.<sup>30</sup> For the role of the oily con man Inza, Scott cast character actor Walter Slezak. Though often typecast as a bumbling idiot or menacing heavy due to his excessive weight, Slezak was also an apt choice for this internationalist film. Viennese by birth, Slezak was discovered by Hungarian director Michael Curtiz and played romantic leads in German films before emigrating to the United States in 1930. After working exclusively on Broadway for over a decade, Slezak went to Hollywood in 1942, where he made notable appearances in several anti-fascist films, including *This Land Is Mine* (1943), *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943), and *Lifeboat* (1944). Scott also cast two prominent actors from the Group Theatre in key supporting roles. Both Morris Carnovsky and Luther Adler had come to Hollywood from New York in 1937, when the Group Theatre was beginning its slow disintegration. Carnovsky, cast as the anti-fascist leader Santayana, was well known for his leftist activism, as well as his work on progressive films including *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) and *The Master Race* (1944). Luther Adler was less successful in Hollywood than most of the other Group members and had acted in only one film – *Lancer Spy* (1937) – before Scott cast him as the fascist mastermind Jarnac. Adler only appears in the final reel of *Cornered*, but his performance is stunning.<sup>31</sup>

Though *Cornered* could not match the visual innovation and relentless pacing of *Murder My Sweet*, under the direction of Edward Dmytryk the film uses similar stylistic devices to convey the politics of fascism and anti-fascism. Working with great economy, Dmytryk suggests the heroism and sacrifice of the Resistance through the wartime devastation of France, a stark landscape of firebombed buildings, ragged knots of villagers huddled against a whipping wind. The decadent world of the Argentine fascists, in contrast, is brightly lit and overflowing with abundance; in postwar Buenos Aires the trains still run on time, and there are no shortages or rationing. This shiny façade masks the much darker world of fascist intrigue, and here Dmytryk is at his best. Menacing footsteps in a

shadowy park, the disruptive roar and flash of passing trains during a clandestine meeting in a subway station, the flare of a match illuminating for the first time the dark satanic face of Jarnac – all convey the sinister, conspiratorial world of the fascists. Gerard's growing paranoia and the emotional damage wrought by the war are brilliantly depicted through a series of brief, disorienting close-ups punctuated by staccato gunfire.

The film's ending, written under immense pressure by Paxton and Scott as the opening scenes were already being shot, saves *Cornered* as an anti-fascist film and reiterates the importance of the German example in shaping the filmmakers' understanding of the postwar fascist threat: Jarnac is a brilliant and evil leader surrounded by a handful of flunkies who do his bidding, much like Hitler and his henchmen. However, the denouement also reveals the filmmakers' muckraking sensibilities, particularly their deep-seated faith in the power of truth, brought into the light, to rally good Americans – or in this case, Argentines – into action against the forces of evil. In the final scenes, Gerard tracks Jarnac to the deserted waterfront bar that serves as the fascists' secret headquarters. Jarnac speaks from the shadows, his voice silky and insinuating as he rebukes Senor Carmago and Perchon for handling the situation so poorly. 'Do not attempt brilliant decisions,' he warns them, reiterating his role as the mastermind of the fascist plot. Carmago and Perchon are clearly meant to be understood as tools of an evil genius, as is the collaborator Inza, described by Jarnac as 'that fat sycophant.' However, the filmmakers take their critique a step further. 'The next time you want to indulge your hot Spanish passions for dramatics put on a uniform with polished boots and stomp around your wife's bedchamber,' Jarnac mocks his toadies, suggesting the sado-masochistic lure of fascism and linking the drive for political power with perverse sexual desire.

Luther Adler's Jarnac is most compelling and malevolent as he outlines the fascist vision for postwar resurrection. Hidden in the darkness, he ominously invokes the failure of World War I and

the Versailles treaty to contain German aggression: 'Remember, you plastered us off the map once before. You held the fruits of victory in your hands, but you let them decay. We caught the soggy rot that dribbled through your fingers and used it.' Suggesting the inadequacy of liberalism to penetrate the fascist mind, he sneers, 'You did not understand our methods. You do not understand now. You continue to attack the wrong things in the wrong way. You attack the evil in man. We accept it. We find it good and fertile.' In a twisted fascist rendition of Tom Joad's final 'I'll be there' peroration in the film version of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), Jarnac concludes: 'Wherever you create misery and discontent, in whatever country, wherever men cannot earn the money to feed their children, there you will find us at work. If you look. I do not think you will look. Your political arteries will harden again. You will forget.'

Visually, *Cornered* ends in a scene of exceptional violence by 1940s standards: after Jarnac empties his revolver into Inza's face, Gerard beats him to death and then apologises breathlessly for getting 'a little kill crazy.' Ideologically, *Cornered* ends with the promise that the forces of democracy will continue to challenge the international fascist threat, by raising the cry of alarm and rallying the 'decent peoples of the earth' to the anti-fascist cause. Though Santayana is outraged that Jarnac is dead, Gerard presents him with the documents that prove Jarnac secretly controlled Carmago's vast industrial empire and planned to use his financial power to launch a Fourth Reich. Santayana will use this evidence in the courtroom to expose the fifth column in Argentina and awaken the people to the fascist menace. He crows, 'We cannot kill the whole animal with one blow, but we'll make him scream. We'll make a start.' In the final lines of the film, Madeleine is fully rehabilitated and absolved of all suspicion that she was a collaborator. As Gerard announces, 'She was a little confused, but she's all right now. She's a good girl. She's French.' This emphasis on Madeleine's essential Frenchness is both a reminder of the un-Frenchness of the Vichyite

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collaborators and an insistence that 'true' Frenchness is essentially democratic and anti-fascist. Thus, the conclusion of *Cornered* works to rearticulate the boundaries between democratic and anti-democratic forces in the postwar world and to construct the anti-fascist vanguard as a broad-based movement that incorporates all freedom-loving peoples throughout the world.<sup>32</sup>

### The Public Reception of *Cornered*

*Cornered* was finally released on 25 December 1945, more than a year after the project was first conceived. Not surprisingly, in selling and publicising the film, the RKO advertising campaign downplayed the political angle and pitched *Cornered* as a mainstream thriller, hoping to build on the success of *Murder My Sweet*. The trade press, always concerned with box office performance, certainly made the connection and predicted that this 'tense, suspenseful yarn' with 'a few nifty diatribes on Fascism' would do almost as well financially as *Murder My Sweet*.<sup>33</sup> An early review in the *Hollywood Reporter* argued that 'high-powered exploitation and selling can bring some impressive box office business to first-run engagements, but this will chiefly be cashing in on *Murder*. It is doubtful if there will be a proportionate critical response.'<sup>34</sup> *Variety* was more optimistic and predicted a box office smash. Writing in typical industry-ese, *Variety* called *Cornered* 'lurid to the last minute,' gushing:

*Cornered* is an exciting batch of melodramatic international intrigue. . . . Chills, shivers and violent death are the ingredients of the story, which stems from the plotting of some of the nastiest Nazis yet screened to perpetuate themselves in a war-battered world. Adrian Scott has produced with a de luxe finish and Edward Dmytryk's direction whips the dramatic values and a lot of eerie atmosphere into the most suspense an average audience can take.<sup>35</sup>

Dick Powell's 'new' screen persona was an integral part of the publicity campaign, and film reviewers frequently drew parallels between his

roles in *Cornered* and *Murder My Sweet*. One reviewer noted, for example, 'Having first established in *Murder My Sweet* a distinctly individual and arresting technique of unshaven charm and gun-wielding toughness, Powell now extends his reputation in a swifter, harder, more solid and gripping characterisation'.<sup>36</sup> The reviewer for the *New York Herald* commented that Powell's performance 'is likely to make Humphrey Bogart suspect that he is being asked to move over.'<sup>37</sup>

The violence in the film, particularly the brutal showdown between Gerard and Jarnac, also became a selling point. As one reviewer noted, 'The final shots must be seen to be appreciated. They constitute a memorable chapter in the depiction of sheer violence on the screen.'<sup>38</sup> The reviewer for *The New Yorker* found the final scene 'filled with just about as much violence as I, personally, can stand.'<sup>39</sup> Highlighting *Cornered* as its 'Movie of the Week' in early December, *Life* magazine published a splashy four-page photo spread on *Cornered* that focused almost exclusively on the final fight scene. The review emphasised not only the violence in the plot – a vengeful search that 'gets [Powell] blackjacked by energetic Argentine patriots, slugged by Fascist conspirators and mixed up in one of the most brutal beatings ever filmed' – but also the behind-the-scenes details of the fight itself, which suggested that Powell was a tough guy both on and off the set:

But in this movie middle-aged Dick Powell also shows he can dish it out, a fact which pleases Powell and may earn him a place with middle-aged Humphrey Bogart on the hard-boiled hero's bench. . . . It took five days to rehearse and film this scene, but Luther Adler, Powell's opponent, never wholly mastered the art of pulling his punches, at which Powell was an expert. As a result Adler emerged from the screen battle unscarred but Powell wound up with a bruised jaw, a slashed wrist, and a sprained finger.'

*Life* illustrated the article with two still photos from the final fight scene, accompanied by remarkably lurid captions: 'With bone-crushing blows of his fists an enraged Powell methodically



• Publicity still of Dick Powell in *Cornered*.

mashes the face of the conspirator who had tried to kill him. Here battering fight is nearly over.' And: 'Conspirator begins to slump as blow after blow crashes against his bearded jaw but Powell holds him up and keeps on pounding in a frenzy even after his victim is dead.'<sup>40</sup>

Despite RKO's attempts to sell *Cornered* as a conventional thriller, most reviewers recognized the anti-fascist message at the heart of the film, though not all were impressed. Arguing that '[t]here is nothing especially cogent about the international complications of the show,' the

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*New York Herald Tribune* reviewer suggested, 'What is important is the man-hunt and the slugging sequences that give it a sustained crescendo.'<sup>41</sup> And *The Hollywood Reporter* sniffed, 'If a postwar warning is the purpose of this picture, a very round-about way is chosen to give it importance.' Pointing out that Gerard's primary motive was revenge, the *Reporter* added, 'It is therefore incidental that he brings to justice a Nazi band. His antagonists could just as well have been jewel thieves or coffee planters. It wouldn't have changed the chase'.<sup>42</sup> Though these are not terrible reviews, they do point to the limitations of using traditional film genres to convey overtly political themes.

Others, however, applauded the melding of anti-fascist politics and crime thriller stylistics in *Cornered*. Edwin Schallert of the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, praised the film's depiction of 'the ambition of one supreme scoundrel, seeking to spearhead the way for a war of aggression at some time in the future.' Schallert clearly made the connections the filmmakers had hoped: 'For the most part, *Cornered* evolves in the Argentine, refuge of Nazi-Fascist factions, as well as their opponents. Buenos Aires is here depicted as a fertile field for far-reaching schemes for conquest, and a vast array of spying activities.'<sup>43</sup> Even the reviewer in *Life* got the point: 'RKO's *Cornered* is a bluntly outspoken spy thriller which gives Hollywood its first big chance to unmask a World War III plot being spawned in Argentina.'<sup>44</sup>

Writing for *Liberty* magazine, Helen Parker enthused, 'Here's a picture that's alive – both politically and dramatically. . . . A devastating picture of the morally decadent Fascist society [in Buenos Aires]. . . the plotters of a third world war.' She was particularly impressed with the film's emphasis on a united front against fascism:

On our side (that is to say, Powell's side) is an intelligent lawyer (Morris Carnovsky) who does a thoroughly creditable job of broadening the young fanatic's philosophy, finally making him see that the murderer of his wife is not the single enemy, and that a really successful attack must be a broadside

against all Fascists. . . . This isn't just another war picture or just another murder mystery. *Cornered* is genuine drama, illuminating reality in a most telling way.<sup>45</sup>

Don Craig, the reviewer for the *Washington Daily News*, pointed out the timeliness of the topic: 'What really makes *Cornered* of importance – and Hollywood won a neat gamble to achieve it – is the coincidence of having a picture ripping into Nazi-Fascist sympathizers in Argentina playing day and date with the State Department's blast on the same subject in headlines all over the country.' Though Craig was disappointed that 'what *Cornered* tries to say is of more interest, for the most part, than the way it says it,' he was impressed enough with the film's final scene to quote from it extensively:

Collaborationist Jarnac's sneering prophecy – in effect: 'You defeated us once before and we rose again on the dregs of victory you carelessly let slip through your fingers. . . and we'll do it again' – is enough to make everybody who hears it stop and think, if only for a moment. So is his other warning in approximately these words: 'Wherever you let poverty and disease and unrest go unheeded, you leave fertile ground for our seeds.'<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

To bring his anti-fascist vision to the screen, producer Adrian Scott walked a political and creative tightrope in his negotiations with the executives at RKO, compromising where he had to and carefully picking the battles he felt were necessary to preserve the political content in *Cornered*. Though he could not protect Wexley or the political critique of the Peron government in his original screenplay from the depredations of the studio heads, Scott did not take the easy way out and change the film's setting to assuage their political concerns. Instead, he continued to fight for *Cornered* as an expose of the postwar menace of fascism in *Argentina*.

Scott employed a number of strategies that enabled him to maneuver the project through the production process without completely sacrificing its political message. One of the most

important was hiring John Paxton, a writer Scott knew he could count on both creatively and politically. Though Paxton later claimed that 'he had no feeling for the script' and that his work on *Cornered* was 'a hack job,'<sup>47</sup> his contributions significantly improved Wexley's original screenplay. The strategies of indirection employed by Paxton and Scott may have blunted the critique – as the studio executives had intended – but also enabled them to preserve the larger anti-fascist vision within the film. Certainly by 1945, film audiences were well-acquainted with films dramatising the 'right side' and the 'wrong side'; Scott relied on the ability of astute filmgoers to read between the lines and understand *Cornered* as an anti-fascist film. In this context, casting can also be seen as an extra-textual strategy for politicising the film. In assembling a cast of international and left-wing actors, many of whom had previously appeared in anti-fascist films, Scott may have hoped that at least a segment of the movie-going audience was familiar with these actors and would read *Cornered* within the framework of this larger body of political film work.

My analysis of *Cornered* also suggests that using the conventions of contemporary crime melodrama to dramatize fascism and anti-fascism could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, as a number of reviewers suggested, the political content could become muddled or even lost within the familiar narrative of the manhunt or 'cops and robbers' chase. On the other hand, the aesthetics of the crime thriller were ideal for conveying the dark, conspiratorial world of fascism. Historian William Graebner, for example, explicitly connects these genre conventions to the pervasive postwar mood of doubt and contingency arising from the vast scale of carnage and destruction wrought by the war. In the summer of 1945, as the war ground slowly to an end, the world witnessed not only the liberation of the death camps, revealing the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews and other ethnic and political 'undesirables' by the Nazis, but also the annihilation of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians by the American decision to use atomic bombs. In the mood of

radical contingency of the 1940s, in which the banal evil of the Holocaust seemed matched by the barbarism of the atomic destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, it could become difficult to tell the 'right side' from the 'wrong side.'<sup>48</sup>

*Cornered* grapples with this dilemma in interesting ways. The complex web of plots and counterplots, the looming doubts about the collaborationist sympathies of Inza and Madeleine, Gerard's own murderous quest for revenge rather than justice all raise the question, 'Who can be trusted?' At the same time, the film's depiction of the heroism and commitment of the Resistance, both French and Argentine, insists that there is, indeed, a 'right' side and that ordinary people can be counted on to recognise and resist the evils of fascism. The anti-fascist politics at the heart of *Cornered* are thus deeply existential, recognising the impossibility of reconciling contradictions or imposing order, but nonetheless, embracing the 'primacy of the struggle, the value of waging the good fight for what one believed was right, if need be forever.'<sup>49</sup> In the end, it is this very negotiation between doubt and faith, between contingency and commitment that makes *Cornered* such a compelling film. At the same time that the film forces the audience to ask, 'Who can you trust?' it also demands that they declare, 'Which side are you on?' These were to be the defining questions of Cold War America, and they resonated as powerfully for the viewers of *Cornered* as they did for its producer.

## Notes

- 1 The uber-text on film and politics during this period is Larry Ceplair and Steve England's magisterial work, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979). Other works that have particularly informed my analysis include Brian Neve, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (London and NY, Routledge, 1992); Paul Buhle and David Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies* (New York, The New Press, 2002); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London, Verso, 1996); Lary May,

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*The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000).

- 2 Scott's FBI file suggests that he formalized his radical anti-fascist commitment by joining the Communist Party in 1942, following the US entry into World War II and the reconstitution of the wartime Popular Front.
- 3 After graduating from Amherst in 1934, Scott did a brief stint as a junior screenwriter at RKO, before moving to New York, where he worked as film editor on *Stage* magazine and pursued his dream of becoming a playwright. In 1938 he returned to Hollywood as a freelance screenwriter, shuttling between Paramount and MGM, racking up co-writing credits on largely forgettable films like *We Go Fast* and *The Parson of Panamint*. In 1942, he landed a screenwriting contract at RKO and quickly became a rising star at the studio, following the release of *Mr Lucky*, his first solo screenwriting credit. A wartime conversion narrative starring Cary Grant, *Mr Lucky* was Scott's first opportunity to dramatize, however obliquely, the politics of anti-fascism on film. Bernard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1989), pp. 121–128.
- 4 R. B. Jewell, *The RKO Story* (London, Octopus Books, 1982), p. 200. For details on the production histories of *My Pal Wolf* and *Murder My Sweet*, see the RKO Production Files, UCLA.
- 5 Paxton had been one of Scott's closest friends since the mid-1930s, when they worked together at *Stage* magazine in New York; his other credited work of the 1940s included *My Pal Wolf* (written for Scott) and *Crack-Up* (1946). Edward Dmytryk moved from editing to directing in the late 1930s; his major credits at RKO included two sensationalistic wartime thrillers, *Behind the Rising Sun* (1943) and *Hitler's Children* (1943), as well as the Ginger Rogers vehicle, *Tender Comrade* (1943), which had catapulted him onto RKO's A-list of directors in 1944. Scott's independent work included *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), scripted by Clifford Odets and directed by Harold Clurman, both denizens of the Group Theatre, and *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948), which was in pre-production when Scott was fired by RKO after refusing to cooperate with the HUAC hearings in November 1947.
- 6 Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, p. 73.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 323.
- 8 Dmytryk, *It's a Helluva Life*, p. 69; Dick, *Radical Innocence*, pp. 144–145; *Cornered* Script Files, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).
- 9 Originally an actor and playwright, Wexley was recruited by Universal in the early 1930s to adapt *The Last Mile*, his Broadway play about an uprising of convicts on death row. Over the next decade, he worked at every major studio in Hollywood, with particular success at Warner Bros., where his work on films like *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) helped to confirm the studio's reputation for realistic, tough-guy thrillers. Wexley was also responsible for two of the most powerful anti-fascist dramas produced in Hollywood: *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), directed by Anatole Litvak, and *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), written in collaboration with Bertolt Brecht and directed by Fritz Lang, both European refugees from fascism. An ardent Communist, Wexley was very active in left politics, working on the defense of the Scottsboro Boys (about whom he wrote another successful play, *They Shall Not Die*), Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC campaign, and the highly publicized and volatile strikes by the Conference of Studio Unions in 1945. Interview with John Wexley, in *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York, St. Martin's Griffin, 1999), pp. 699–715; Edward Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 19.
- 10 Wexley, interview in *Tender Comrades*, p. 716; Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, p. 314. See also the RKO Script Files at UCLA, which contain extensive notes from the planning stage of the project and Wexley's incomplete first draft of *Cornered*, dated 28 December 1944.
- 11 William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, Dell Publishing, 1962), pp. 162–200; Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Bros's Campaign against Nazism* (New York University Press, 1999), pp. 22–23; 'Nazi Propaganda in America,' *Look* (December 31, 1940), 15. Though Scott and Wexley could not have known it at the time, Argentina did indeed become a haven for leading Nazis, including Josef Mengele and Adolf Eichmann, who fled Germany at the end of the war. In *The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Peron's Argentina* (London, Granta Books, 2002), Argentine journalist Uki Goni suggests that the escape network was a collaborative project of the Peron government and the Vatican. After the Israeli capture and execution of Eichmann in 1962, South America as a hotbed of escaped Nazis remained a theme in fiction and film well into the 1970s. See, for example, Frederick Forsyth's novel (and film), *The Odessa File*, as well as major Hollywood films like *The Boys from Brazil* (1978) and *Marathon Man* (1976).
- 12 RKO memo from William Gordon to William Dozier and telegram from Dorsey to William Gordon, 8 February 1945, both in Adrian Scott Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming – Laramie.
- 13 Wexley's notes on *Cornered* are included with his screenplay drafts in the RKO script files at UCLA.

- 14 Wexley, *Cornered* Screenplay, in RKO Script Files, UCLA.
- 15 Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, p. 19.
- 16 Dozier to Scott, 3 April 1945; Crow to Dozier, 24 April 1945, in Scott Papers.
- 17 Crow to Dozier, 24 April 1945, in Scott Papers.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, p. 19.
- 20 Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, p. 315; Wexley, interview in *Tender Comrades*, p. 716.
- 21 Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, p. 19.
- 22 Wexley, interview in *Tender Comrades*, p. 716.
- 23 Wexley, interview in *Tender Comrades*, p. 716; Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, p. 315; Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, p. 19.
- 24 Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 19; Barzman, interview with author, April 1999. See also, taped interview with John Paxton, 1977. My thanks to Sarah Jane Paxton for the loan of the tape.
- 25 Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, *Movies: A Psychological Study* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 19–47.
- 26 Crow to Dozier, 24 April 1945, in Scott Papers.
- 27 The character of Gerard also is an excellent example of the 'good-bad man' often partnered with the 'good-bad girl.' As Wolfenstein and Leites describe, 'he is frequently suspected of crimes which he did not commit. He tends to be absorbed in crime investigation and in warding off attacks by male assailants. . . . The suspicious appearance of the girl further tends to evoke a certain wariness. At the same time, the hero's manner with women is sure and easy, and suggests experience. He talks in a tough bantering style, and without polite preliminaries.' Wolfenstein and Leites, *Movies*, p. 46.
- 28 Letter from Gene Kern, Office of War Information, to William Gordon, RKO, 5 July 1945, in Scott Papers.
- 29 RKO memo from William Gordon to Adrian Scott, 7 July 1945, in Scott Papers.
- 30 *Cornered* Production File, UCLA.
- 31 'Luther Adler,' 'Morris Carnovsky,' and 'Walter Slezak,' in *The Film Encyclopedia*, ed. Ephraim Katz, pp. 12, 209, 1066. See also, Wendy Smith, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931–1940* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), on Carnovsky and Adler's work with the Group.
- 32 All quotes from the film are taken from the *Cornered* Screenplay File at UCLA and from the revised screenplay by Paxton in the Scott Papers, B11–F2.
- 33 'Cornered,' *Independent*, 24 November 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.
- 34 'Cornered,' *Hollywood Reporter*, 14 November 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 35 'Cornered,' *Variety*, 14 November 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 36 'Cornered,' *Cue*, 29 December 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 37 'Cornered,' *NY Herald Tribune*, 16 December 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *New Yorker*, 29 December 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 40 Notice the slippage between fantasy and reality here as Dick Powell is identified by his name rather than his character, while Luther Adler is identified wholly with his screen character and referred to only as the 'conspirator.' 'Cornered: Ex-crooner Dick Powell is tough guy in film about Argentine plotters,' *Life*, 10 December 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 41 'Cornered,' *NY Herald Tribune*, 16 December 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 42 'Cornered,' *Hollywood Reporter*, 14 November 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 43 Edwin Schallert, 'Cornered Absorbing Melodrama,' *LA Times*, 1 March 1946, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 44 'Cornered,' *Life*, 10 December 1945, in *Cornered* Production file, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 45 Helen Parker, 'Liberty Goes to the Movies,' *Liberty*, 9 February 1946, in *Cornered* Production File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- 46 Don Craig, 'New Powell Tackles Fascists in Argentina,' *Washington Daily News*, 15 February 1946, in Scott Papers, American Heritage Center.
- 47 Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, p. 315.
- 48 William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), passim.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 147.