

An Interview with Cy Endfield

Introduction and Interview by Brian Neve

This interview with Cy Endfield (1914–1995) was conducted at his then London home on December 19, 1989. The focus is first on political aspects of his life and career, in particular his left-wing affiliations, and his decision in the early fifties to avoid testifying to the House Committee on Un-American Activities by leaving the United States for Britain on the last day of 1951. A further focus is on his film work, and in particular on two films he made just before he was blacklisted and came to England. So unknown had he been that for years Ephraim Katz's standard *Film Encyclopedia* incorrectly recorded his birthplace as South Africa, rather than Scranton, Pennsylvania. Thom Anderson, in his early and influential survey of 'Red Hollywood' films, published in 1985, had drawn attention to the director's 1951 *The Sound of Fury* (US title: *Try and Get Me*) as a key example of the form of social critique that he called *film gris*. My book and several articles by Jonathan Rosenbaum, who explored his wider film career, encouraged renewed interest. The magnificent epic *Zulu* (1964) became Endfield's best known work, and Sheldon Hall has recently written a definitive study. What follows is the bulk of the 1989 interview, although in a few cases I have added some material from a second interview conducted on August 6, 1992, and from his letter to me of September 6, 1991. Cy was a remarkable man, attaining major distinction in science and invention, in magic, as well as cinema. I have kept his long discursive responses intact, while placing them in rough chronological order, in order to give some sense of my luck on that day, in tapping what I felt then, and feel now, is a brilliant reflection on his experiences.¹

Thirties Background

Well I cannot quite tell you the sequence of events. I arrived at Yale in 1933. My father was a businessman, a merchant who sold fur coats and things like that. And he went bust, went bankrupt, in the thirties. And I was originally supposed to enter Yale in 1932 and he came to me and said 'I haven't got any money; I can't send you there.' And I worked hard to get in, to pass college exams – it was a difficult school to get into. And my father was made bankrupt because he bought our house, and his business, on very small mortgages. He was bankrupt, because his business collapsed within three or four years. And I had this great grievance against society for depriving me, at the beginning of my life, at the entrance to my young manhood. I was looking for something to be wrong with it.

I was actually admitted in 1932 and then I had to withdraw from admission. But on the strength of that admission I was allowed to come back the next year. My father had got the businesses started up a little bit and he was able to help me. He actually went through a very bad crisis and I was very unhappy. I saw a man who I thought was going to kill himself or something, he was so desperate, along with everyone else.

I lived in this mining town called Scranton, Pennsylvania. But in 1934 there was a local company in New Haven that was producing some plays, and I saw an announcement on the bulletin board that they were going to do a play called *Waiting for Lefty*. And I went to this group and ultimately I got a part in a play by Bulgakov.² So I knew something about Russian theatre from this experience. The director informed us about all these new developments: constructionist theatre, Stanislavsky's theatre, and so forth. And I was quite enamoured with this kind of progressivism in theatre. That happened in my freshman year, in 1933.

The next year, because of my interest in theatre, I saw a notification in *Yale Stage* of a play in which I was interested. This was a really left wing group of people. They were really the first people I associated with. And I had a friend in Hollywood, Paul Jarrico, who was going to the University of California. He was writing me letters, proselytising letters at the time. It was in the air. And if you were an intelligent young person at that time you said 'This is the wrong world, and alright, there are a lot of bad stories about things that were happening in Russia, but then you were told that this was 'capitalistic propaganda' – it's 'all lies'. You had to choose.

So you preferred to think that they were the good guys, and that your system were the 'bad guys'. So I came out of that when I went to New York. I went to a theatre school that was close to the Group Theatre. This was when I was 22 or 23, around 1937. Joseph Losey was five years older than I was, and he was more into professional theatre. I was doing itinerant directing; I had my own little social-satirical group and we did night club work and so forth. I had people in that who achieved eminence, including Shelly Winters. I also ran an amateur group in Montreal for a year.

It was all political theatre at that time – left wing theatre. I was socially imbued with the message that the world must be improved. I was like all of my generation – we were children of the Depression, and we saw this tremendous, nonsensical, illogical situation – the greatest production force in the world was for no reason redundant, its factories were closed, the windows were broken, there was despair and disillusion. The system that supported it could not provide for its people. It was a faulty system and we were radicalised.

Hollywood: The Early Forties

And when ultimately I did go to Hollywood, seeking my fortune really, the prospects were very bleak. I didn't have any credits in any field. I felt that I was well schooled in my knowledge of theatre and had done some creditable things. But when I got to Hollywood I found that

everyone wants to become a director.

Interestingly my first job in Hollywood, in a studio and working on a set, was almost with Orson Welles, when Mark Robson and Robert Wise were cutting *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). I learned picture making by visiting them in the cutting room every day, and finding out how pictures are pieced together. I had a theatrical background, and I had not yet made my short. I had met Welles at a magic shop. He had made *Citizen Kane* (1941), which I thought at the time was the greatest picture that had ever been. And then he made *Ambersons*. And I got a job working for a fellow called Jack Moss, who was his producer, He replaced John Houseman. And the reason I was hired by Jack Moss was because Moss had seen me do some card tricks that had fooled Orson, and he said 'You're the only man who I've ever seen who made Orson look bad. If you can teach me how to do a trick that would fool Orson, I'll give you a job'. I went and worked for Moss while Welles was in South America, shooting the Carnival.

Welles left his own cut of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, two hours and twenty minutes in length. When he was in South America he was trying to cut the picture long distance by cable and letter and telephone. He was being ignored completely, kidded. Everybody was making the picture – Joseph Cotton, Jack Moss and the editors. All decided that they knew how to make a picture better than Orson. I saw a picture that you and the world will never see; I saw the original Welles cut. The film that we now call *The Magnificent Ambersons* runs an hour and twenty minutes of which at least thirty minutes was material reshot while Welles was away. The original cut was tedious from an audience point of view. I agree with that – I think it would have been a trial for normal money paying audiences – but I think it would have been as great a classic, in a totally different *metier*, as *Citizen Kane*. I've seen Bob Wise on television explain what was done. But they have a vested interest in it because they were doing the work.

But after two years, I got someone to believe me. I got an assignment to a short subject at

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MGM. Meantime the war had started, and my status as a potential draftee was not very clear and I was exempted for a while and then that exemption was reduced. I made a short subject for MGM, and they signed me on a contract on the basis of it. I made the picture, *Inflation* (1942), and it was banned. The Chamber of Commerce saw it in Washington. It got fantastic write-ups, the best I think that any short subject ever got. The subject was inflation. It was a parable. But it was never released. It had a star cast, and it was so good that the Office of War Information wanted it distributed to all the other cities. My short was booked in every chain (not just in MGM theatres), 750 prints. It was incredible. And the day before it was supposed to open a cable came from Nick Schenck in New York saying 'Chamber of Commerce saw the picture, doesn't like it'. And it was banned by request of the US Treasury. The picture was never shown, and that was the beginning of my career.

For *Inflation* I had been given Edward Arnold, the MGM contract player. I also directed Esther Williams – before she swam. It was extraordinary for a new director. Jerry Bresler, who was head of the short subject department at MGM, was a hard-headed production manager, a numbers man. I told him: 'I owe you a lot, because not everyone will hire someone off the streets and put him in charge of a picture with good casting'. He said: 'I always figured the film needed some kind of Communist to direct it'. He had been given the subject matter by the OWI. The writer, Herman Boxer, got the idea of doing it as a modern morality play, in which the Devil appears as a businessman (played by Edward Arnold). By showing all the personal, petty practices the film pointed up how the nation needed to control inflation during the war period.

I did, because of my thinking at the time, make it in a particular way. There were price controls at the time. A lot of the big firms like Campbell's Soup were changing their labels and raising prices, and this was subverting Roosevelt's seven anti-inflationary points. And I attacked them. So the Chamber of Commerce objected to a picture with this kind of sway. The

film was criticising commercial practice. Democracy was one thing but anti-producer messages were not welcome. And suddenly I turned from being a white haired boy to being a black sheep. And within months I was in the Army – uselessly, as a signal centre clerk. I think that there was a political X on my basic papers that prevented me from being transferred to the training film unit at Astoria, Long Island.

Politics, Yale and Hollywood

When I was at Yale I actually joined something called the Young Communist League. That was a very tenuous thing. It was a unit in New Haven and I was the only Yalee. Although there was something else called the National Students League which was a left wing organisation, and I was a member of that at Yale. There were only seven members of the NSL in the whole of Yale.

My interest was really in theatre. From time to time I was obviously a target for recruitment into the Communist Party. So I had people who I knew who were open or admitted communists who said 'OK, you must come to a meeting'. And so I went to the meeting with friendly attitudes. I just didn't have the personal discipline, nor, most important, the desire to part with dues. So I never actually became what was called a card carrying communist. I never signed up. I went to a number of meetings and I sympathised with what was said there.

Anyhow being a Communist didn't mean anything. There was nobody plotting to start a revolution. There was usually some local situation. There was a rent strike against some overbearing landlord in some district, so you picketed on that. When I was at Yale I got up on four mornings at four in the morning to go to the Colt factory, in Hartford Connecticut, where I picketed for them. When I was at Yale I also helped to organise a strike of the domestic workers. It got a lot of attention and we had meetings with the Dean and the President of the School. I didn't have a very good scholastic record because I was in so many things. When I was in New Haven I also helped lead, agitated for, a strike of the ILGWU, the garment Workers

Union, in the Italian district there. I fraternised with these very basic Italian immigrant workers who were the heart and soul of the New England garment manufacturing trade.

So when I came out to Hollywood I was immediately approached, mainly by writers. Again I went to a meeting or two. But I never showed up later on, because I just didn't like the coercion of attending and taking on extra-curricular duties that I wasn't prepared to do. I had too many interests, too many other things that I wanted to do. So I didn't do it. And during the war, when I was in the army, and then when I came out, I began to develop a good deal of scepticism about Russia. It was very intensive because, apart from my interest in theatre and drama my other predilection in life was science. And shortly after the war, in 1947 and 1948, there was Lysenko, the geneticist, and before that there was a lot of criticism of Einstein, who I was a tremendous admirer of.³ People were saying that this notion of relativity, which they did not understand, was idealism instead of communist dialectical materialism. I did a good deal of reading on the philosophic side of dialectical materialism, which I thought was silly, was not a true philosophy. I did not think that it was really meaningful. It was a methodology of thinking applied to materialist processes, organising evidence out of real life. I am a materialist, but in the name of materialism they were being metaphysical. So when I examined these things as a personal philosophy it just did not make sense to me. So by the postwar period, 1945–48, I began to treat with great suspicion the trials that Stalin was having, where all his best friends were supposed to be German spies. I saw the criticism of the persecution of the Jewish doctors, and so forth, and the persecution of the geneticists, of the idealists, and of Einstein's views.

I began to think that people who can think like that, they can do anything. So I really disengaged myself, to the extent that my friends and associates who came out of that world, gave up on me and began to start accusing me of being a renegade, and intellectual renegade. I was never a renegade in the sense that I went

into anything else. But all the time I knew that I was vulnerable, because of my attendance at earlier meetings, before I went into the army in 1942–3, and in New York, way back. I was never really involved very much in Hollywood. I was in the progressive group in the Screen Writers Guild. There were not enough left wing directors to compose a reasonable fraction of the Directors Guild.

I remember going to a meeting, connected to the Communist Party, in Beverly Hills. Everyone there was rich and there was an air of unreality about it. They gave 10% or whatever it was that made them feel better.

I'm a qualified type of person. If I sat before a Committee that had power to get a yes or no kind of answer, it would be difficult for me to answer. If they said 'Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?' I would say that I never signed up for the Communist Party and I never carried a card as a paid up member. But I probably went to a couple of dozen different meetings that were Communist meetings, over this period of time, by which people assumed that if I wasn't a member I would become one; would do the formalities next week. It is a hard question to answer.

The House Committee and the 'Naming Names' Issue

It was David Lang who named me. Martin Berkeley may have re-named me; he became a champion namer.⁴ Lang was Carl Foreman's collaborator. When I went to work at the MGM short subject department in October 1942 Foreman was there, or arrived shortly after. Lang was a Communist and I think Carl was. I went to one meeting, which I think was a Communist meeting, in Culver City, and this was the basis for Lang's testimony. It was absolute fabrication. It was absurd. And I was expecting my name to come up for years before that. I was always dreading it. Furthermore I had made an internal decision that if I was named, I was not going to give up my career. Why should I do that for associations that I didn't treasure, for people

who I disagreed with, for a system that I disagreed with. So I said that I would talk if I had to.

I had been separated from my first wife. The way I found out that I was named was that I was working for a man called Sol Lesser, who made the Tarzan pictures. He had seen *The Sound of Fury* and had decided he wanted to make a better class of picture, and wanted also a young director. He was incredibly wealthy and he wooed me. I signed a contract for \$1,000 a week. In 1951 this was like three-quarters of a million dollars a year, that kind of salary. I had made B pictures up until that time, very B pictures. I had just made *The Underworld Story* (1950) and *The Sound of Fury* (1950). It was a very important transitional point in my life. It was a great opportunity. For in Poverty Row, where I was, it was junk and it could only be junk. These were eight-day pictures. I received a call from my agent who said, 'Sol wants to know what he should do about you, about being named'. He said, if you think you've got to clear yourself, you can clear yourself. He said, 'Are you a Communist?', and I said, 'No, don't be ridiculous, that was my wild youth'.

A week or two after I was named I went over to see my agent. I was in the Sam Jaffe agency: they were very hard-boiled about it and could not help much. He explained that they wanted to close out the contract. But they were not going to terminate on morality grounds. They would settle it for one third of its residual value. The promise to do better films was forgotten. I had just finished another Tarzan film, *Tarzan's Savage Fury* (1952) which was not bad.

My wife of that time called me: 'You've been named?' I hadn't talked to her for a couple of weeks. I said 'Yes'. She asked me what I was going to do. I told her I had not made any decision. She said to me: 'Well don't forget, you're a married man and you have responsibilities'. I was equivocal, but something happened with that telephone call which made me think about what I was going to do. Because it was well established that the only thing that you could do to get out of testifying, in the sense of giving names; if someone said that you were a

communist, was to deny being one. The FBI had all these stories of people who were friendly witnesses. You had to be truthful or you had a perjury rap against you, which was a potential sentence of ten years. Or you could take the Fifth Amendment – non self-incrimination.

But I felt: 'I don't want to do that'. I want to be able to say what I want to say. I began to draw parallels in my mind. And I thought of the situation of being in Germany, and your best friend was a Jewish doctor who saved your life as a child. And you are coming down the street, and he is being kicked to death by a bunch of SS and Nazi activists. Then if you don't put your own foot in they say, 'Well, what's wrong with you, you are under suspicion'. Do you kick too? In other words, when they say 'Was Mr X a person that you saw, or Mr Y', even though they have been named and they cannot have any more damage done to them, do you add your foot and kick them? And I said to myself: 'You do if you are saving your life, but do you do it for saving your job?' Some people were frightened or scared to death, and I was too, about losing my profession. It is your way of living, your way of talking to the world, of saying who you are. I was totally involved in becoming the best film director that I could become, and making my niche. I had worked very hard under difficult circumstances and was on the brink of a potential breakthrough. So it was a very testing situation. So when I went to my agent I said 'What do I have to do to testify, and what does one do?' He said: 'I'll give you an address in Pasadena'. It was all very well organised. 'You meet a couple of people in the FBI office there; you will talk to them and they will ask you all kinds of questions, and they will arrange a hearing for you. And if you are going to be a friendly witness you go there and they take care of you and so forth. And the whole seediness of this action, somehow, of becoming an informer to the FBI, struck me. And you are obviously going to be exploited for every bit of information that you have. The whole thing was a propaganda exercise. It was supposed to be a legislation creating committee. And I just had a sense of personal revulsion. And I can truthfully

say that, because most of the blacklisted people (not all of them) had in a sense a political horse to whip; they had a political stake in what they believed, or in some past action.

For instance, I'll give you an example, and I've never seen this stated previously. In California there had been a parallel committee to the HUAC. This was the Tenney Committee. Now all the Communists at the time had gone there, and the policy at the time was for Communists to be told to deny that they were Communists. So many people who took the First Amendment at the beginning had already committed perjury to the Tenney Committee. Therefore they had no option but to take a total position which was the Fifth Amendment – of non-incrimination. Because they were protecting themselves politically, an awful lot of them. So that is why I never admired the courage of those people who went before the Committee and refused to answer, especially on the Fifth Amendment. The ones who refused to answer on the basis of the First Amendment I considered to be adopting a courageous position. But after that was invalidated, as unacceptable – they could be thrown in jail – it could no longer be used. So their lawyers then advised them to use the Fifth Amendment, and this amendment was an immoral position if it were not being used for the validity for what they were doing at the moment. They were using it to conceal a past action. So I had contempt for them. I did not feel that there was anything noble about taking the Fifth Amendment. So I took my own escape route. I would not appear before the Committee. I did not want to confront a dilemma if I could possibly avoid it.

Anyway I decided, if I could avoid it, not to testify. And then a most fortuitous thing happened. About four months earlier I had got a call from a girl friend who liked me a lot, an adventurous person, a free spirit. She had returned from a round the world trip and she called me up from New York and told me that she wanted to go back and see places she had not had time to see. I was a young director and I thought it was a great idea. I was separated from my first wife and I had never travelled. So I

went and got my passport. I got involved in the Lesser contract and could not do anything about it immediately. But I did, rather whimsically, get my passport, and if I had waited till the day I was named (or when my name had reached the State Department) I would not have obtained a passport.

I was talking to Robert Rossen shortly after, in New York. I had a long talk to him. I knew him in Hollywood. He had gone to Mexico and come back and they had taken his passport from him, and he was desperate. Ultimately he went back and talked. He said 'They'll never get me', because he was a very tough guy. But a year or two later he collapsed under the pressure and he cleared his name before the Committee. But the difference was that he did not have a passport, but I was going to Europe and I had a passport. I said 'Bob, good luck, I'm not going to get in front of those bastards. They'll have to come and put me in chains and bring me back', and I knew that they were not doing that kind of thing.

Postwar Filmmaking

When the war ended, in 1946, the whole country had been ordered by number and categorised. There was a common objective, to 'Win the War'. All morality and differences were made subservient to the common cause. After the war you start getting films like *Crossfire*, *Gentleman's Agreement* – that genre. Picture makers, including the people who were approving the pictures, became aware of an audience that wanted to be given the material with which they could make evaluations of themselves. They wanted to look at the more subtle crosscurrents and forces within people, at what can make them warriors and killers of their brothers.

These films were socially conscious. To ask questions about yourself you have to first ask about the social context in which you live. But they were not really radical. Except that sometimes a careful look at the objective conditions leads to radicalism. This was not the social realism of the Russian kind, which was a mockery of social realism. It is real social realism.

It was a departure from old Hollywood clichés: of the funny rich people with their eccentricities, of notions like ‘the good will always triumph’, etc. These were really children’s fantasies – not reality but mistaken for reality. Social realism says: ‘Wait, there is another thing, which is content, and to experience that content is not dreadful and oppressing, but enlightening’.

I made three to four Joe Palooka pictures, Poverty Row pictures. I actually wrote the first one, my first full screenplay. They were eight-day pictures for Monogram. I was hanging on to a living. During this time I did my first *auteur* job: *The Argyle Secrets* (1948). I had returned from my stint in the army. As the law provided, I returned to MGM and directed tests there. I shared a car pool with Bob Spiers, who had a position at the studio and was involved with the hit CBS radio show, *Suspense*. I wrote three radio plays and one of them, *The Argyle Album*, was then filmed. The album that people were trying to find listed people who had made wartime deals with the enemy, so that they would win, however the war went. The idea came in part from *The Maltese Falcon*. Raymond Rohauer (the film collector) had some money – around \$100,000 – to make the film.

Monogram formed a special unit called Allied Pictures, which actually became the basis for an important unit. It was going to make a better grade of picture, releasing through United Artists. The assignment was *The Underworld Story*; Hal E. Chester, the producer of the Joe Palookas, found this story, and I wrote a screenplay for him. Chester got Dan Duryea and Herbert Marshall. The picture was termed a ‘nervous A’ picture. Any picture over \$500,000 began to creep into the ‘A category’ (usually \$750,000). A million dollars was a big, expensive picture. Pictures between half a million and a million began to be A-pictures. A picture around \$400,000 was a ‘nervous A’. They were never too sure whether it would go out as the first feature or the second feature – that is what it really meant. Budgets below that, of \$150,000 to \$200,000 were B pictures with 8–9 days of shooting. Allied Artists, told Hallie (Hal Chester) to go ahead on *The Underworld Story* for \$500,000.

I wrote and finished the script. As I wrote it the girl was to be black. It had a social message in it, but this was obscured by the fact that we had to cast a dark skinned white girl as the black girl. The distributors did not want to get into the race issue. There was dubbing to cover the change. The other theme related to the arbitrary exercise of power for one’s own interests at the expense of the community. The man of real power has to be concealed. *The Underworld Story* was a struggle to make. It had a four-week shooting schedule. I nearly lost the assignment to another director but I had the copyright of the script, because I had not been paid. The picture was quite good and could have been very good had the facilities been better. It was skilful and I was not unproud of it.

My next film was *The Sound of Fury* (*Try and Get Me* in the US). Robert Stillman was the producer. He was the partner of Stanley Kramer, then a young agent. I had been offered a very bad script for a company run by Ralph Cohn and Mary Pickford, but I turned it down.⁵ I told them that they could risk their money but that I was not going to risk my unborn reputation. Stanley Kramer used to come around, talking about pictures he was going to make. He was a tremendous salesman, as the leg-man for the Kramer Agency.

Mark Robson was directing for Stanley. When Kramer formed his company he brought in Carl Foreman as the writer and George Glass as his publicity man – a winning personality. They started off with *Champion* and *Home of the Brave*. Mark Robson began his career proper. Mark is quite good I think but pedestrian. I think Bobby Wise was more talented as a director. That is subjective. The other important thing was that Kramer was in money trouble. One day someone said to him, ‘Why don’t you ask your assistant director, Bob Stillman’. Stillman was a long time first assistant. His father, Bob Stillman Sr., was a major department store owner, and a millionaire. So Kramer got Robert Stillman to talk to his father, and his father agreed to back some half a million dollar pictures, some ‘nervous As’ or ‘nervous As plus’. Lo and behold they were sleepers, because they were good pictures,

certainly for the time and the facilities. They had a very good publicity man so they did not escape attention. They got a lot of trade recognition.

Bob Stillman was associate producer, and George Glass ignored him, despite his role in getting the money. So he left and formed his own company. Stillman at first tried to hire Dick Fleischer, but that fell through. Another producer wanted me for *Cry Danger* (1951), with Dick Powell. Bob Parrish got that job, and I did the Stillman picture. Commercially I made the worst choice. After the war people were reaching out for self-expression. The liberal Adrian Scott pictures were coming out, and *Gentleman's Agreement*. The country was looking at itself: what were we, and what did we go through? Then the Korean War came along and there was a clampdown. *The Sound of Fury* came out and people did not want to see it. It got fantastic reviews. They changed the title to make it seem more like an action picture: *Ty and Get Me* rather than the abstract *The Sound of Fury*. But the picture did not do good business. My first picture received recognition, but was not a commercial success.

There are a few things wrong with the picture. There is a rather preachy element in it, with the Italian doctor. It was a thread put in by the writer Jo Pagano. He loved it and Bob Stillman loved it, but I would have rather stayed with the story. Of the two guys one was a brutal psychopath while the other was brutalised by society. It is just a story of people who lose control of whatever their instincts are. The same actors were used as in the Stanley Kramer pictures, but I reversed their roles. Lloyd Bridges played the psychopath, while Frank Lovejoy played the good guy. Stillman cast it the other way. Lloyd Bridges had always played the good guy, the clean cut American. He was always the hero, even when under contract at Columbia. Playing him as the psychopath gave him a career as a heavy after that. I tried to expurgate that self-conscious message sending, but I didn't get my way. Stillman felt that we needed relief from the drabness of their lives, that we needed the middle class environment: the newspaper reporter and so forth. I could not win these arguments.

For the ending of *The Sound of Fury*, there were thousands of people. I consider that my talent for making pictures was best expressed in two pictures, *Zulu* and *The Sound of Fury*. I think the one big talent I have is to make big pictures. There is a sense of structure about something of dimension that I have found lacking even in pictures that were supposed to be big. A successful example is *Ben Hur*. I had, I think, a feeling for doing something big, the big organisation, without losing the detail.

The Sound of Fury was made mostly from my blood circulation and nervous system. We were in Phoenix Arizona. Bob Stillman was hysterical. He had another director pacing up and down outside, because he felt that I was three days behind. He could not understand what I was doing. We had ten days on location in Phoenix. And after three or four days his judgement was that we were two weeks behind. They were all huge scenes, night scenes, including the scene in the pit.

We put out a general call for extras and for people. The temperature was 120 degrees. Everyone within miles showed up. There were ten thousand people on the square. And I had assistants and stunt men, and I was running around, starting fights in various places. We got the people who were not paid extras involved in scenes and movements, and rushing here and there with people directing them on the ground. And I had cameramen with shoulder sets, which was not done in those days at all, filming in the crowd. It was a kind of tremendous ad lib that was going on in one sense, but they were all things that I had dreamed up to do if they were possible. And they were all done on my energy. I was doing it like you do a piece of sculpture, chopping and shaping it. I came back to LA after ten days. We were in that jail for about three or four days. It smelt so bad. They were demanding that they had to empty their prisoners into the central jail, were we were. Messages were arriving that there were riots in the outlying jails: 'We cannot keep them out any longer'. I had never seen so much uncontrolled, frenzied activity, and it all added to the totality of what happened. It was a nightmare – a combination

of exultancy and self-ruinisation. On returning to Los Angeles I immediately played in a hand ball tournament; after twenty minutes on court I went into total muscular spasm. My system could not take it. The whole picture only had a three-week schedule. It was unbelievable.

It was based on an incident that I researched a lot. The actual incident, the kidnapping of the young man, and his murder, and the lynching, took place in San Jose. They dragged him out of the jail. The whole town, a very civilised community, went mad. I put the period into postwar. The theme of the picture as stated by the Italian doctor is that there is violence in us all and it must be controlled; that our violence is our kind of biological inheritance. In a sense that is a kind of truism. Everybody can rape and kill. People don't do so because of the constraints – morality, ethics – of civilisation. This was a generalisation to the audience: look at yourselves, look at what you might become, unless you mind your conditioning, to de-animalise yourself.

In England *The Sound of Fury* was short-listed for the equivalent of a BAFTA. But the ceremony was cancelled (in 1952) because of the King's funeral.

Britain, 1952 on

The fact of the matter was that in a very short period of time (this was October, I left in December, 1951) I tied up odds and ends in LA, visited my family in Pennsylvania, and then went to New York. I got booked on the Queen Mary because I'd been in a plane crash on a location trip for Sol Lesser on a Pan Am flight to Mexico, and I did not trust planes. I got on the boat and never heard another thing. The only official thing that happened to me was that after I'd been in London for about a year and a half the renewal date on my passport came up. So I went to the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square.

And they took my passport away and said I had to wait for the renewal. They refused to let me have the old passport. They said that they would write to Washington, but I was in this country for two and a half years without a

passport. From the very beginning I had Home Office and police knocking on the door saying 'Get out of the country'. And after this I got a letter from the Home Office telling me that unless your passport was restored I would no longer have facilities for renewing my stay here. They were trying to get me out all the time. So I sparred with them for two and a half years. I could not go anywhere. The condition given to me by the Embassy was that the new passport would only be validated for travel back to the United States – where I could not work. I kept writing to Washington, to the State Department, arguing my position. I never got an answer or the answer was 'no'.

And then about four and a half months after that, I read something in the paper about a Supreme Court ruling resulting from a case in which someone had sued the State Department in relation to a passport. And the Supreme Court gave a ruling that the State Department did not have the authority to withhold a passport on these grounds. They ruled that a passport was a right and not a privilege.⁶

And one day, when I was living off Park Lane on South Street, just as casually as the morning post arrives, a letter fell through my letter box. This was in 1956, just prior to my marriage. The letter said that if I came to the US Embassy, and brought £6 or so, I would be issued with a passport. I just could not believe it. I was getting work, using false names, living with the threat of being sent back. And then I got this letter.

I went over to the embassy and received my passport. I had a Morris Minor, a company car, the first car I had in England. I remember getting that passport, getting back in the car, and driving round Grosvenor Square five or six times in a state of exultation, of sustained joy. We went away on a pre-honeymoon honeymoon, just to show that I could leave these shores. Sometimes that kind of experience makes everything that happened before almost worthwhile.

I also worked on *Crashout* (1955), a William Bendix breakout story. I sold an original screenplay, but was not credited. I did substantial rewriting of Charles Bennett's script for *Night of the Demon* (1957).⁷ I received no credit because

of the blacklist. Hal Chester added poor special effects, but there is a satirical treatment of science, and of magic. I used my own name, Cyril Endfield, for the first time on *Hell Drivers* (1957). Previously I'd used a couple of names in Britain, Hugh Raker, my mother's maiden name, and Charles de la Tour. Then in 1956 I made *Hell Drivers*. The blacklist had diminished. They did a rotten cutting job, taking out many of the best scenes, things I liked the best. It was a very effective picture. I talked to local lorry gangs. Rank's distribution company crashed. The losses were divided up over eight or nine pictures, including *Hell Drivers*, so it never made a profit. It raises an interesting comment on English pictures and an American director, because I was still an American when I made the picture, looking with a fresh view. People should see with an alienated eye, seeing things that others saw only as ordinary and therefore not worth delineating.

Hide and Seek (1962), with Ian Carmichael, was a silly little comedy. There was no money. It could not have been more ordinary.

Rossen, Parks and Reflections on Communism and the Committee

Bob Rossen was a very tough guy. I knew him somewhat in Hollywood. I visited him at his home. He was ambitious for himself. He liked combat with studio executives. He liked the authority of being able to make or break actors. If a person was not compliant he could be very ruthless, and he could exploit loyalties. He was a hard man. Yet he was moved by social conscience. You know, I don't know how to reconcile these two aspects, sometimes. For me it is being soft and at the same time being very tough and ruthless.

As I told you, I met him in New York and we had this discussion. He couldn't get his passport. He had been in Mexico for five or six months. He got trapped on coming back briefly and then he could not get back out of the United States. And now he was in New York. I think that we were in the same hotel by chance. He came up to my room. I was en route to England. He clenched his

fist and said: 'Those bastards aren't going to get me, no matter what they fucking think, they are not going to get me'. He made me believe him. I don't know how long it was – maybe a year or two years he lasted out. But he was stranded in the States, couldn't go abroad, which offered him the chances that we had. In the States he had to use his name, and could not get work. He could not stand it.

Now, what was interesting is that, about three years later, he showed up in London. Mo and I were taken out to dinner and I found myself sitting opposite Bob Rossen. And this was, at the time, supposed to be a very embarrassing situation. I also ran into Larry Parks in London. I had known Larry very well in Hollywood, we shared a house together as young aspirants. I knew him later, after he became famous as Al Jolson. Then his career was ruined in a most disgraceful way by HUAC. He co-operated but also made his disgust plain, which made it worse than ever. He said, in effect, that you are morally wrong for asking me these questions. So it was not a clean enough bill of health and he was grey listed, and lost his status as a movie star. He was here making a cheap picture. And I was making a cheap picture here at the same time, under one of my several pseudonyms or near pseudonyms. We sat in the same car one night, and I talked to him. We were very good friends. He was telling me all kinds of embarrassing jokes. The subject was skirted around. But I had no ill feeling for him or any of the people really, because I had thought to myself that I would talk – to the Committee.

I understood the pressure. And furthermore, there is a funny kind of confirmation in history. Because they were wrong. Stalin was as evil as a man could be. Russia was a mass concentration camp. Every time they defended these positions, they defended their politics, pro-communist politics, and in a sense they were helping to condemn to death the victims – people like Bukharin – who were being brought to jail. They were giving weight to their condemnation, and they were agreeing with the torturers. Out of ignorance or out of deception, they were on the wrong side. They were rooting for Russian

runners to beat American runners, in the Olympics. They wanted the Russians to be the good guys. So they were really wrong, and it is hard to say who were the villains. Now the Congressmen are contemptible, the whole HUAC operation was a contemptible exercise because it was a lie. Their function was to gather enough evidence on Un-American activities to determine what kind of legislation was required to control it, and to prevent damage. Yet the Committee was in existence for twenty-five years and they never introduced one bloody single piece of legislation. It was obvious that the reason they were holding these hearings was to get their names in the paper every day, thereby connecting themselves with Hollywood. It was headline mongering. It was 'reds under the bed' self-publicity.

But on the other hand the victims were people who were lured into another position by lies that were as evil or more evil than these things. We don't want to pay our debts, we as individuals, I don't. I confess that. No, in the thirties, in the forties, I was an idealist. I only wanted the best things to happen in the world. I wanted there to be equity and not inequity, I wanted there to be justice where there was no justice. I wanted there to be peace where there was no peace. I thought that capitalism should be ended because capitalism ended inevitably in fascism or war, or both. That was the Leninist doctrine at the time. Well! That's not what has happened. After seventy years and the sacrifice of a great number of generations, we find that all the good things in these societies were taken over by the bureaucrats, by the apparatchiks. And vast areas of extermination and cruel control of a kind which we see evidence of in China and so forth now. So if you're that wrong you cannot go around saying, 'Oh, I only did it for the best motivations'. You were a fool. You were a companion of evil. I was a companion of evil, to the extent that I believed these things. Sure, I was doing things that I thought were good, and probably were good in a more local context, but really in the final way it is hard to say who was more wrong.

So I just found, when I got in the presence of Bob Rossen, that I felt really sorry for him,

because I saw that he was embarrassed, and I saw that he really did not know what to say. I had met this assured guy with the iron jaw and his great personal determination, and he was now a shadow of that guy. He had lost his feeling for himself. He had said 'They won't get me', and they got him. And Larry Parks was telling me inept jokes to show that he was still a liberal, because he thought I was a stalwart because I had not turned state's evidence.

After Zulu

Zulu (1964) came from the suggestion of a friend of mine, John Prebble, the military writer. He had written a battle story, 'The Battle of Rorkes Drift'. I wrote the first script in 1959.⁸ It was turned down numerous times, but I gave a copy to Stanley Baker. Stanley went to Rome to make a picture for Joe Levine, and showed him the script. There were endless problems, but I toughed it out – I wanted to direct it. *Zulu* was two hours and twenty minutes, of which an hour and twenty minutes was battle. The battle only consisted of two things: the Zulus coming up and being shot down. These two movements had to be made into a symphony, and linked with a small theme. They had to be made into a unit. I know that it succeeded. I was really amazed that it did what it was meant to do.

During *Zulu* the saga of Burton and Taylor developed. Everyone wanted to be the first to get them in a picture. Joe Levine sent the book, *Sands of the Kalahari* to me. It is a great story of survival. The only way to do it was to show the essentialism of survival, which was impossible given censorship rules. Otherwise it seems like 'Swiss Family Robinson'. A deal was made, however, but MGM wanted Taylor and Burton to do *The Sandpiper* and were willing to pay huge money. So they dropped out of our project. I suggested Warren Beatty, Marlon Brando and Albie Finney, but the Paramount executives rejected all three. In the end Stuart Whitman took the role, with Susannah York, and *Sands of the Kalahari* was released in 1965.

I would have liked to make more pictures. The last thing that happened to me was that after

many years of difficulty I was able to sell the script for the follow up to *Zulu*. The death of Stanley Baker was the last in a long line of dramas and failures, especially financing failures. (The old studios gave you financing *and* distribution; later it was more fragmented, more risky). We had money problems in 1974: pictures were off and on and there was a world crisis. British Lion broke up and Stanley got cancer the next year. All financing had left the UK. I came back to Stanley in 1971 and said 'Lets do the follow up to *Zulu*'. It was about the battle that preceded the defence of Rorke's Drift. Joe Levine wanted to do it, but he and Stanley were in a fight, which continued for four to six years. South African financing fell through. British Lion fell apart (Stanley was a major shareholder). Finally, after Stanley died, I was asked to do it, in 1977. But by that time I had not made a film for ten years. It was at the beginning of my technological life, and I did not feel like going back to do the film. I recommended Doug Hickox for *Zulu Dawn*; he had been my assistant director on the first film. But he did not really understand how to make a big picture. I never enjoyed film making itself. It was too harrowing.

Notes

1 Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Pages from the Endfield File', *Film Comment*, 29:6 (1993), 48–55; also in

Rosenbaum, *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), pp. 323–27; Brian Neve, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (London, Routledge, 1992); Sheldon Hall, "*Zulu*": *With Some Guts Behind It: The Making of the Epic Movie* (London, Tomahawk Press, 2005); Christopher Sharrett, 'Zulu, or the limits of liberalism', *Cineaste*, 25:4 (2000), 28–33; Thom Andersen, 'Red Hollywood', in Suzanne Ferguson and Barbara Groseclose (eds), *Literature and the Visual Arts in Contemporary Society* (Columbus, Ohio, Ohio State University Press, 1985).

- 2 A reference to the Russian author and playwright Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940).
- 3 Trofim Denisovich Lysenko (1898–1976) was Stalin's officially and ideologically approved biologist.
- 4 Endfield may be wrong here. Both Martin Berkeley and David Lang named him, but Berkeley did so on September 19, 1951, and Lang on March 24, 1953. See Robert Vaughn, *Only Victims, A Study of Show Business Blacklisting* (New York, Limelight Editions, 1972), pp. 276, 285.
- 5 Endfield had previously made 'script contributions' to that company's production of *Sleep, My Love* (Douglas Sirk, 1948).
- 6 It was in June 1958 that the Supreme Court ruled that the State Department did not have the authority to deny people passports because of their 'beliefs and associations'. Walter Goodman, *The Committee* (London, Secker & Warburg, 1968), p. 402.
- 7 Hal Chester confirmed Endfield's work on the script of *Night of the Demon* (phone interviews, Cy Endfield with BN, 11.2.92; Hal Chester with BN, 14.2.92).
- 8 Endfield shared writing credit for *Zulu* with John Prebble and co-produced with Stanley Baker.