

Philip Yordan . . . a profile



Philip Yordan is a man of rich, creative vision who for over 30 years has devoted himself to being a playwright, novelist, motion picture producer and screen writer. He has been nominated three times by The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, winning an Academy Award Oscar for the film *Broken Lance* starring Spencer Tracy. Other pictures Mr. Yordan either wrote or produced include *Syncopation*, *Unknown Guest*, *Johnny Doesn't Live Here*, *When Strangers Marry*, *Dillinger*, *Whistlestop*, *The Chase*, *Suspense*, *House of Strangers*, *Edge of Doom*, *Detective Story*, *Mara Maru*, *Houdini*, *Blowing Wild*, *Broken Lance*, *Conquest of Space*, *Man from Laramie*, *Last Frontier*, *Harder They Fall*, *Men in War*, *No Down Payment*, *God's Little Acre*, *Bravados*, *Time Machine*, *The Day of the Outlaw*, *Studs Lonigan*, *Crack in the World*, *Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *The Mad Bomber*, *Brigham and Cataclysm*.

Mr. Yordan has also been instrumental in creating epic films in Madrid, Spain, and has written or produced such films as *King of Kings*, *El Cid*, *Circus World*, *Fifty-five Days in Peking*, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, *Battle of the Bulge* and many others.

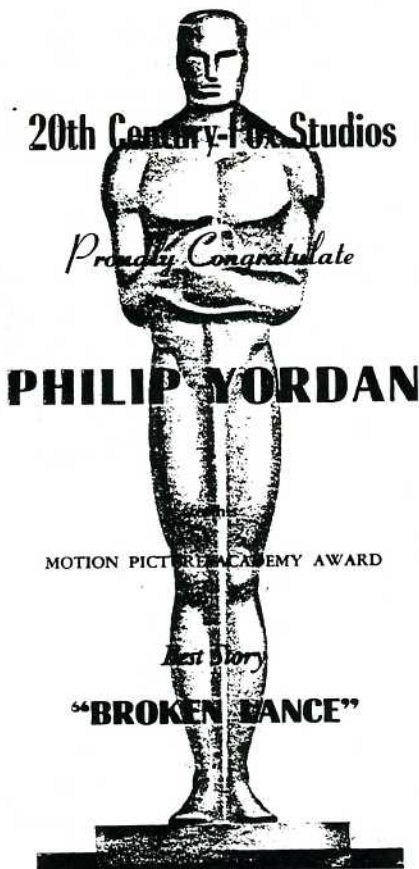
Mr. Yordan, a former resident of Chicago, Illinois, received his B.A. degree from the University of Illinois and his law degree from Kent College of Law.

"The honest, sledgehammer writing of Phil Yordan and his producership assures him Academy Award contention..."

— **The Hollywood Reporter**

"Yordan believes in hard, straight story-telling. . . and writes skillfully."

— **Time Magazine**



A mystery man with many hard-hitting screenplays to his credit, including *Edge of Doom*, *House of Strangers*, *Detective Story*, *The Man From Laramie*, *Johnny Guitar*, *The Harder They Fall*, *The Bravados*, *God's Little Acre* and many others, Philip Yordan specialized in neurotic Westerns, big-budget historical epics and low-budget thrillers. His name was used by blacklisted writers during the 1950s and by occasional "surrogate writers" throughout his long career. As a producer-writer nowadays, Yordan continues to crank out exploitation programmers.

I WAS WORKING AT COLUMBIA [IN THE early 1940s], and George Beck came in one day and said, "I just had a meeting with the King brothers. They want me to write a script, but they can't pay any money. I told them you're a good writer; why don't you go see them?"

I went to see Frank and Maurice. Frank always had a big cigar in his mouth and his drawer full of Hershey bars. Always wondering why he

Philip Yordan

THE CHAMELEON

was so fat because, he said, "I don't eat." Maurie had been a prizefighter and would always have black coffee, but he was heavy, too.

They were, uh, they weren't gangsters, but they had [investments in] slot machines and they were probably running something [illegal] in town. Nobody questioned it. They had a few bucks—not rich, but they had a few bucks. They asked me to write them a gangster picture.

First I wrote them a gangster picture called *Dillinger*; they liked it. Frank gave the script to [studio head Steve] Broidy. Broidy said, "Are you crazy? It's expensive! We have got to protect our investment, so Chester Morris has to play Dillinger." I said, "Chester is 50 years old, and he can't play Dillinger." He said, "Well, I'm not going to put up the money unless. . . ." A kid had come into the office by the name of Larry [Lawrence] Tierney. Boy, he looked like Dillinger, and I wouldn't sell the script until they agreed to put him in it.

So Frank said, "Look, write something simple first. . . ." He put me in touch with a fellow who taught me production, and the next script I wrote was very tight. They decided to make it. I said, "But you haven't made any arrangements to buy it." Maurie turns to Frank and said, in Yiddish, "Give the bum a few dollars." I guess they didn't know if Yordan was Jewish or not. I understood explicitly.

I said, "Look, I don't want to get paid for the

script. I'll write. If you don't make the picture, you don't pay me. If you make it, I want a third of everything. Your producer fee, the writer's fee, the profits—the three of us together." Well, Maurie said, "Meshuggener," which means, *he's crazy*. And Frank said, "No, look, he writes, he's good. If we don't make it, we don't pay. So what the hell's wrong with it?" And they were very honest. They always paid me.

We made that second script before *Dillinger*. It was called *The Unknown Guest*, and it all took place on one set. It was the first Monogram picture to play the Chinese theater [Grauman's in Hollywood] as a B.

Look, I must tell you a story about being nominated for my first Academy Award for *Dillinger* [in 1945], my original screenplay. In the '40s the studios, all the majors, had signed a consent agreement not to make gangster pictures. Monogram was not a signatory, so Louis B. Mayer was indignant. He called up Frank

King and said, "Frank, you gotta destroy the negative of this picture for the good of the industry." Frank said, "Sure, what'll you pay me?" Louis B. Mayer said, "I'll pay you nothing." Hell, the picture cost \$65,000, and it made \$4 million. I had a third of it.

I'm not sentimental about the Oscar I won later on for *Broken Lance* because I really won it for *Dillinger*. I was leaving my seat to pick up the Oscar when they announced that *Marie Louise*, some picture made in Switzerland that nobody had ever seen, had won. I can't prove it, but Walter Wanger was high up in the Academy and later told me, "Look, we couldn't give it to *Dillinger*. We pulled a switch." What the hell!

It doesn't mean anything to me anymore. At the time, it was important. But you know that *Dillinger* was one of the first crime films of its type. Darryl Zanuck ran that picture again and again, and used it for the basis of many pictures at Fox. In other words, I had created a style.



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