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# Dartmouth Film Society

## THE INFORMER (1935)

Gypo Nolan	Victor McLaglen	Tommy O'Connor	Neil Fitzgerald
Mary McPhillip	Heather Angel	Rat Mulligan	Donald Meek
Dan Gallagher	Preston Foster	Blind Man	D'Arcy Corrigan
Katie Madden	Margot Grahame	Donahue	Leo McCabe
Frankie McPhillip	Wallace Ford	Daly	Gaylord Pendleton
Mrs. McPhillip	Una O'Connor	Flynn	Francis Ford
Terry	J. M. Kerrigan	Madame Nelly	May Boley
Mulholland	Joseph Sauers	The Lady	Grizelda Harvey

Screenplay by Dudley Nichols, adapted from the book of the same name by Liam O'Flaherty. Photographed by Joseph H. August. Edited by George Hively. Art direction by Van Nest Polgase, assisted by Charles Kirk. Costumes by Walter Plunkett. Music by Max Steiner. Sound by Hugh McDowell, Jr. Associate producer, Cliff Reid. Released by R.K.O. -Radio Pictures, May 1, 1935

Produced and directed by JOHN FORD

When Liam O'Flaherty's novel The Informer was published in 1925, it scored an enormous success both in America and in Europe, and was even made into an early sound film in England. However, when director John Ford wanted to film it in America, the R.K.O. studio heads considered it almost a criminal waste of money to buy the rights to the book, although the asking price was a mere \$5,000.

But Ford persisted in his desire to make the film, and even went so far as to join with his scriptwriter, Dudley Nichols, in turning down a salary for the film, asking instead for a percentage of what R.K.O. thought would be non-existent profits. The film was at last budgeted at \$240,000 and actually cost \$20,000 less than that modest figure. THE INFORMER was shot in Hollywood in three weeks with a cast that, with the exception of Una O'Connor and J.M. Kerrigan, was entirely British or American. Ford remarked a few years ago that it was the easiest film he ever made.

The result of all this, to the great surprise of R.K.O., was almost immediate acclaim of THE INFORMER as an unquestioned masterpiece by the critics, and enormous popular success at the box-office with the paying public. To this date, the studio had hardly won an Academy Award nomination, but THE INFORMER brought Oscars to Victor McLaglen as best actor, John Ford as best director, Dudley Nichols for the best screenplay, and Max Steiner for his score. The film was also selected as the best of the year by the New York Film Critics, and third best (after DAVID COPPERFIELD and LIVES OF A BENGAL LANCER) by Film Daily. The happiest people of all were Ford and Nichols, who for many years continued to get a healthy cut of the profits from the film.

Considering that the film is almost thirty-one years old, it has dated very little. The acting at times is a bit on the ripe side, but this is a characteristic of Ford's films; if anything, his sentimentality seems to have increased with the years to a point where it is now almost unbearable.

It is hard to know exactly where to put the credit for the success of the film. Certainly, there is no contesting the excellence of Ford's direction. It was his 81st film, but oddly enough his first real success with the critics; the only other films of his which seem to have attracted much attention were THE IRON HORSE (1924) and THE LOST PATROL (1934), the latter another R.K.O. "sleeper" which the studio thought would be a dud but which turned out to be a major hit. From THE INFORMER on, Ford directed an enormous number of popular films, some of which are listed in the filmography below. His most recent work, SEVEN WOMEN, is his 131st film.

Dudley Nichols (1895-1960) is considered by many to be the finest of all Hollywood screenwriters. His first script in 1930 was MEN WITHOUT WOMEN for Ford, and his best work was done in connection with that director, although he also wrote brilliant material for Howard Hawks (BRINGING UP BABY), Fritz Lang (SCARLET STREET), Jean Renoir (SWAMP WATER), René Clair (IT HAPPENED TOMORROW) and many



other major directors. Nichols also directed a few films, including MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA (1947), but his real talents were in the writing department. Nichols' script for THE INFORMER is often cited as one of the best ever written for a film, and has been printed in several collections.

And certainly praise should be given to Victor McLaglen (1886-1959) for his performance as Gypo. This British-born actor played in several hundred American films including several by Ford. However, he is probably best remembered as Captain Flagg in WHAT PRICE GLORY? (1926) which was screened last spring. His performance in THE INFORMER is probably his best, revealing far more subtlety than he usually displayed in his screen roles.

Reviews at the time all seem to have singled out Margot Grahame, a British actress who made her American debut in THE INFORMER. Great things were predicted for her, but despite some big roles in the late 'thirties she is almost forgotten today.

Another important factor in the success of THE INFORMER is the highly imaginative use of sound. Ford uses sounds not only to intensify the drama, but also to make interesting transitions. For example, after Gypo has informed on his friend, there is a sudden ticking of a clock, which continues into the next shot in which Frankie is at home with his mother and sisters; there another clock continues the sound and thus welds the transition. Another good example is the tapping of the blind man's cane which appears several times. The use of the inner monologue was considered quite an innovation at the time, and it is used here as a necessity, not as a stunt. Every small item in the picture is used to intensify the moment; nothing appears that is not made significant. A richness resulting from economy is the paradoxical result.

--David Stewart Hull

Some other films of John Ford: THE PRISONER OF SHARK ISLAND (1936); STAGE-COACH (1939); YOUNG MR. LINCOLN (1939); THE GRAPES OF WRATH (1940); THE LONG VOYAGE HOME (1940); TOBACCO ROAD (1941); HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY (1941); MY DARLING CLEMENTINE (1946); THE FUGITIVE (1947); SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON (1949); WAGONMASTER (1950); RIO GRANDE (1950); THE QUIET MAN (1952); MOGAMBO (1953); MISTER ROBERTS (1955); THE SEARCHERS (1956); THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE (1961); CHEYENNE AUTUMN (1964); SEVEN WOMEN (1965).

Our short subject today is a condensed version of D. W. Griffith's famous film of the French Revolution ORPHANS OF THE STORM (1922) with Lillian and Dorothy Gish.

The next film program is TOP HAT (1935), probably the best of the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals, with a wonderful Irving Berlin score including such songs as "Cheek to Cheek" and "Isn't This a Lovely Day". It is screened Saturday, April 9, at 10:30 pm and Monday, April 11, at 4 pm.