



Tough Without a Gun: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of Humphrey Bogart

Stefan Kanfer

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Humphrey Bogart: it's hard to think of anyone who's had the same lasting impact on the culture of movies. Though he died at the young age of fifty-seven more than half a century ago, his influence among actors and filmmakers, and his enduring appeal for film lovers around the world, remains as strong as ever. What is it about Bogart, with his unconventional looks and noticeable speech impediment, that has captured our collective imagination for so long? In this definitive biography, Stefan Kanfer answers that question, along the way illuminating the private man Bogart was and shining the spotlight on some of the greatest performances ever captured on celluloid.

Bogart fell into show business almost by accident and worked for nearly twenty years before becoming the star we know today. Born into a life of wealth and privilege in turn-of-the-century New York, Bogart was a troublemaker throughout his youth, getting kicked out of prep school and running away to join the navy at the age of nineteen. After a short, undistinguished stint at sea, Bogart spent his early twenties drifting aimlessly from one ill-fitting career to another, until, through a childhood friend, he got his first theater job. Working first as a stagehand and then, reluctantly, as a bit-part player, Bogart cut his teeth in one forgettable role after another. But it was here he began to develop a work ethic; deciding that there were "two kinds of men: professionals and bums," Bogart, for the first time in his life, wanted to be the former.

After the Crash of '29, Bogart headed west to try his luck in Hollywood. That luck was scarce, and he slogged through more than thirty B-movie roles before his drinking buddy John Huston wrote him a part that would change everything; with *High Sierra*, Bogart finally broke through at the age of forty—being a pro had paid off.

What followed was a string of movies we have come to know as the most beloved classics of American cinema: *The Maltese Falcon*, *Casablanca*, *The Big Sleep*, *The African Queen* . . . the list goes on and on. Kanfer appraises each of the films with an unflinching critical eye, weaving in lively accounts of behind-the-scenes fun and friendships, including, of course, the great love story of Bogart and Bacall. What emerges in these pages is the portrait of a great Hollywood life, and the final word on why there can only ever be one Bogie.

Tough Without a Gun: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of Humphrey Bogart **Details**

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From Reader Review *Tough Without a Gun: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of Humphrey Bogart* for online ebook

Vince says

Great read! Just enough detail to keep me interested. Now I'm watching the movies.

Lynn says

Terrific Biography

A biography that seems a bit pandering and soft at the beginning and end, has a lot of meat in the middle. Stefan Kanfer seems to really admire Bogie and was able to collect good information on him. I really thought that this biography was substantial and worthy of its subject. Humphrey Bogart made a lot of great movies and had a lot of talent. The author also knows about old Hollywood and how it flourished. I highly recommend this book.

Carl Rollyson says

In 1997, the American Film Institute named Humphrey Bogart the “Greatest Male Star” in cinema history. The same year, Entertainment Weekly christened him the “Number One Movie Legend” of all time. He is on a postage stamp. Woody Allen produced a hit play and film, “Play it Again, Sam” (1972), based on the Bogart mystique, and Albert Camus — no less — was flattered when told of his resemblance to Hollywood’s king.

Stefan Kanfer acknowledges these accolades as well as recent biographies by David Thomson[√], Jeffrey Meyers[√], A. M. Sperber[√] and Eric Lax[√] and memoirs by Lauren Bacall and Stephen Bogart[√]. If anyone has debunked this steadily accruing fame for an actor who died in 1957[√] after more than 30 years of performances on stage and screen, Mr. Kanfer does not let on. He aims, instead, to offer a cogent narrative and analysis of Bogart’s appeal that is shorter than the tomes by Sperber and Lax or and Meyers, but more expansive than Thomson’s brief portrait in his “New Biographical Dictionary of Film.”

Or at least that seems to be Kanfer’s purpose; he does not really say. He mentions working in the archives of Sterling Library at Yale and in “private libraries”[√] that are not otherwise identified. His book contains no notes, and his peculiar bibliography lists as “primary sources” other books about Bogart and as “secondary sources” everything else, such as books about Hollywood in the 1930s, film noir, stardom, and so on. If Mr. Kanfer has done any interviews — usually a staple of serious biographies about contemporary figures — he is silent on who said what.

As a readable work dealing in moderate depth with a world-famous movie star, Mr. Kanfer’s awkwardly titled book is serviceable. But if you have read his predecessors, then “Tough Without a Gun” is dispensable — unless, perhaps, the nuances of Bogartiana appeal to you.

Did George Raft really pass up the part of Rick, the role of a lifetime, in “Casablanca”? Mr. Kanfer says this

story is a myth. David Thomson may be closer to the truth in suggesting that lots of names get thrown around when a film is coming together for production, implying that Raft never really had the opportunity to turn the part down. Sperber and Lax, wading through studio files, found instead that producer Hal Wallis never seriously considered Raft, although others seemed to think he Raft was a contender. He Raft lobbied for the role, according to Aljean Harmetz¹ in “Round Up the Usual Suspects,” a comprehensive study of the making of “Casablanca.” So what Mr. Kanfer offers is nothing new, just a distillation of secondary sources.

In general, Mr. Kanfer seeks to split differences between Sperber AND Lax and Meyers & Co. Many critics consider He is not an iconoclast of the Thomson variety, who argues “Casablanca” was not a mess that came together only at the last minute; in Thomson’s iconoclastic view, however, as some critics have suggested — “Casablanca” was rather a thoroughly professional job of work not all that differently made from other in the Hollywood products of that period. But that begs a Thomson’s analysis, however, begs the question, doesn’t it? How did an efficient product become a classic? Its stars, especially Ingrid Bergman, thought the film was a muddle and were astonished when it came to be ranked as a great film.

Mr. Kanfer takes the traditional route, describing the hectic script consultations, the different writers, the rewrites even as the film neared the end of its shooting schedule — but then he shuts down discussion of all the shenanigans, saying that, in the end, “Casablanca” the film triumphs because of Bogart. And, according to Mr. Kanfer, Bogart succeeds not only because of his impeccable performance, but also because of the persona he perfected in earlier films like “The Maltese Falcon.” Here Mr. Kanfer shines, getting all of Bogart in an evocative, inventive phrase: “wounded, cynical, romantic, and as incorrodible as a zinc bar.” [69¹]

What makes Bogart great is the oxymoronic nature of his appeal. The greatest legends, the supreme myths, are founded on an amalgamation of opposites. How can one person be both cynical and romantic? But this mix is exactly what Bogart embodies in “Casablanca,” where he plays Rick Blaine, a soured anti-fascist who seems not to care, and yet cares so deeply that he will suppress sacrifice his feelings of betrayal to serve a larger cause — aiding the escape of Bergman’s freedom-fighter husband from the Nazi-controlled city. Bogart only has to look at Bergman, his sunken eyes revealing his anger and sorrow because she abandoned him in Paris, and deliver his sentimental lines with deft understatement. His heroism emerges unheralded and is all the more powerful because subtlety is not what Hollywood typically had to offer in Bogart’s heyday.

Consider Mr. Kanfer’s biography, then, as a sort of confirmation and consolidation of the Bogart mythos, an elegant, if not especially challenging evocation of the man and his work.

Michael says

Not a great read by any stretch of the imagination. I was hoping for a thorough examination of the man and his work, but the author's interpretation is hazy at best. This is not helped by the author's constant darting off into the marginalia of Bogart's life and career. I will be interested to see if someone can suggest a better biography of this fascinating character.

Ed says

I'm not going to assign a rating to this biography of Bogart. I read a few of the sections, and I didn't get

excited enough to continue reading. I want to know about the person behind the persona. For instance, we're told Bogie liked to read. Okay, so tell me which books and authors he preferred. Did he read Hammett to make The Maltese Falcon movie? Couldn't this information be derived from his living widow or friends? Maybe nobody else cares about Bogie's reading tastes. No doubt I'll probably give the bio. another try at some point.

Brooklyn Tayla says

3 stars because I read it in a sitting. Wasn't the most enthralling of biographies though, it was lacking emotion, I personally feel. Nonetheless it was fascinating reading about the early life of such an iconic actor, a man who's fast becoming one of my all time favourites; and needless to say I'm going to seek more books on Bogie and also Bacall too.

Elisha Condie says

I don't think I've ever heard a book so aptly named. Humphrey Bogart IS tough without a gun. I am really liking the book - and him - so far.

The book follows Bogart through his life and how he became the symbol of the ultimate man's man. A cool guy, uncompromising in his beliefs, with no patience for phonies. I thought it was really interesting that there hasn't been another Humphrey Bogart, and there couldn't be. Heroes today are more emotional, younger, more vulnerable than the stoic Bogart.

And I did really like this book. But I still don't feel like I really *know* him all that well. This book is very detailed about his professional life. Kanfer goes into great detail about Bogie's relationships with his costars and colleagues. What it was missing was personal details - there are a few quotes from Lauren Bacall about their marriage, but not that many. The births of his children were side notes. What really makes a biography for me is the *personal* details. A person's professional life, while important, isn't the whole story!

Kanfer did reference a book that someone wrote about the history of the film "Casablanca" that I want to read now. Overall, this book was good, not great.

Robert Wilson says

Tough without a gun

Love the actor was a good read on his life and career, liked the pictures and notes about marriage. Nice summer read

Chuck says

I am a "Bogie" fan, but this book was tedious. There was much more about marginal characters in his life

and career than I had hoped. The meat of this biography was very informative, but many of the long passages in between made a page last forever. I enjoyed "Kanfer's" discussion of his early childhood, the summary of the significant movies, discussions about the "rat pack" and the events leading up to his death. Surprisingly, I enjoyed his dissertation on what has happened to the film industry. It is a well supported contention that the film industry presently panders to an average age that has not begun to shave and he supports that premise by listing the top twenty movies of all time.....guilty, I have seen two of them and bought the other half for my kids. As he so eloquently quotes from a conversation between a Paramount executive and a movie buff, "If you'd make more adult movies we'd come back to the theatre" to which the executive replied "If you'd come back to the theatre we'd make more adult movies." You know, The old chicken and the egg thing. Well, I have to go, get on twitter, facebook and get my email then maybe I'll get on my Ipad and watch a 1939 movie.

Alicia says

I am a Bogart fan, and this book definitely made me want to re-watch his movies. However, there were portions I skimmed, and I'm not really sure why the author felt he had to insert french phrases here and there. It did not add anything to the book for me personally, and I found it annoying.

Cat Grant says

A fair to middling bio that stays pretty much on the surface. The author depends on other, better researched books for most of his quotes & anecdotes. Frankly, I found it rather boring. I'd recommend Lauren Bacall's By Myself over this book.

Derek Solomon says

In depth look not only at a great actor but the circumstances surrounding Bogart. This includes home and studio.

Jenna Ward says

Books about actors always run the risk of being less interesting than the mystique of the star would suggest, and that's at least partly true in this case. But Bogart was a late bloomer, and the account of his days before stardom as a working actor, which amounted to a good chunk of his short life, is interesting and inspiring to anyone still looking to find success. The "afterlife" of Bogart recounts mostly familiar information, and less fulsome or interesting than the title suggests. Nevertheless, it's worth reading if the subject matter interests you.

Julie Bestry says

I was unimpressed with the biography and the author. Kanfer seemed a little taken with himself, lapsing into Spanish or French or Italian adverbs (lamentablemente) for little reason other than to call attention to himself as storyteller. And yet, he barely tells the story, or a least a story worth hearing.

More paragraphs were devoted to Bogie's wife Mayo Methot than to Lauren Bacall. Granted, Methot was wackadoodle and colorful, but Kanfer seems intent on repeating the same few details about Bacall -- she was breathy and young, she had a crush on Adlai Stevenson, and she washed Bogart's socks during the filming of *The African Queen*. Twice as much space is given to forgettable films as to *Casablanca*, *The Big Sleep* or *Mutiny on the Bounty*. There are some colorful anecdotes, including one about a stuffed panda, but there's no depth, no sense that any of these living and breathing human beings were anything more than two-dimensional script characters.

Unless you're a completist and must read everything ever written about Bogart, feel free to skip this one.

Alyssa says

I enjoyed the personal history of Humphrey Bogart. I thought the descriptions of ALL his movies EVER was a little too much information and I found myself skimming those parts but otherwise, I enjoyed the book!
