

Lupino, Ida

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b. February 4, 1914, London, England

d. August 3, 1995, Los Angeles, California, USA

One of the most important auteurs in 1950s cinema is one of the most marginal: Ida Lupino. Even today, only two of her feature films, *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953) and *The Trouble With Angels* (1966), are available on DVD, and, although her feature films *Not Wanted* (1949), *Never Fear* (1949) and *The Bigamist* (1953) were once available on VHS, they are now long out of print. But if anyone deserves a box set of DVDs covering their entire lifespan of work, Lupino does. Because of the sexism which formerly riddled the film industry – and which, to a large degree, still prevails – Ida Lupino’s directorial career is an unusual case. At the time, she was working she literally had no close competition. Although she often made light of her directorial accomplishments, Lupino was obviously driven by a very real need to direct. Otherwise, it seems unlikely that she would have relinquished a secure career as a leading lady to do so. Indeed, her work as a director is, for many observers, Lupino’s most significant contribution to the literature of motion pictures. As Annette Kuhn notes, “the output of The Filmmakers [Lupino’s independent production company] emerges in retrospect as the high point of Lupino’s long career” (1).

Lupino’s first film as a director, *Not Wanted*, was to be directed by Elmer Clifton. However, he suffered a heart attack during the filming in and Lupino served her directorial apprenticeship by completing the production. The next year, she began to tackle themes that the screen had

handled only in a condescending, male supremacist manner: rape in *Outrage* (1950-1), the effects of polio on a female dancer in *Never Fear*, social climbing in *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951), and the mechanics of male violence in *The Hitch-Hiker*. One should also mention *The Bigamist*, in which Edmund O'Brien's Harry O'Brien finds himself in an impossible situation due to his own weakness of character and a Langian series of uncontrollable events. After this film, produced by The Filmakers (which she co-owned and operated with her then-husband, Collier Young), Lupino went over to television where she directed many episodes of *Kraft Suspense Theater*, *Panic*, and other early American tele-series.

By the time she was given another shot at feature direction, it was to handle the nearly all-woman cast in *The Trouble with Angels*. It was clearly sexism that got her the assignment: hire a woman to deal with a film about women. Nevertheless, she did an excellent job on the project, and saved Jane Trahey's treacly novel from being turned into an equally saccharine movie. Under her direction, Rosalind Russell delivered her last really fine performance and Lupino got good work from Hayley Mills in the leading juvenile role. As an actress, Lupino continued working until 1977, when she appeared as an aging star on an episode of the television series, *Charlie's Angels*. But her real talent lies behind the camera, not in front of it. As a stylist, she is on a level with Douglas Sirk in her gracefully sweeping crane/dolly camera work, and her lighting and direction of actors recalls the noirish tendencies of Robert Aldrich and Don Siegel.

To understand Lupino's work as both actress and director, one must consider the events that shaped her life. Stanley Lupino, Ida's father, was a star of the British "West End" theatre and often wrote the plays he appeared in. Ida Lupino's second cousin was the famed Lupino Lane, a music hall star of great prominence in the United Kingdom. Ida's mother, whose maiden name was Connie Emerald, also had a theatre background; years later, when forming her first film production company, Ida Lupino would name it "Emerald Productions" (though it soon after became known as "The Filmakers").

Lupino's first screen role came about in a rather unusual fashion. Director Allan Dwan was searching for a young ingénue for his 1933 British production of *Her First Affaire*. Ida's mother, Connie, read for the part, but Dwan thought she was too mature for the role. Instead, he turned to Ida, who had accompanied her mother to the audition, and asked Ida to read for the part. She was immediately cast in the film and Ida Lupino's cinema career was truly launched. Thus began a period of intense activity for the young actress.

In her initial screen appearance, Ida Lupino was billed as "the English Jean Harlow" and was forced to dye her hair platinum blonde. Lupino protested but to no avail. Other inconsequential British films followed, including *Money for Speed* (Bernard Vorhaus), *High Finance* (George King), *Prince of Arcadia* (Hanns Schwarz), *The Ghost Camera* (Vorhaus) and *I Lived with You* (Maurice Elvey), all made in 1933. But ultimately this period of her life proved unsatisfying. In late 1933, Lupino signed a contract with Paramount Pictures, and sailed for the United States to appear in the title role of the 1933 production of *Alice in Wonderland* (Norman Z. McLeod), a role that actually went to Charlotte Henry. For when Lupino appeared at the Paramount Studios in Los Angeles, the production executives immediately realized that there was

something rather aggressive, assured and adult in Lupino's demeanour, and they scrapped their plans to develop her into a juvenile.

Instead, Ida Lupino (as a loan out actress) went straight into a series of hard-boiled roles in such films as *Come on Marines* (Henry Hathaway, 1934) and *Smart Girl* (Aubrey Scotto, 1935), although her fledgling career was almost fatally sidetracked by a little-publicized bout with polio in late 1934. With characteristic tenacity, Lupino fought off the disease through sheer strength of will, and continued to act in a series of predictable program features, including *Anything Goes* (Lewis Milestone, 1936), *Fight for Your Lady* (Benjamin Stoloff, 1937), *The Lone Wolf Spy Hunt* (Peter Godfrey, 1939), *The Lady and the Mob* (Stoloff, 1939) and the first film that gave her a chance to display the considerable range of her abilities, the 1939 production of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Alfred L. Werker), the second film in that long-running series.



Ida Lupino's first big break came in William Wellman's 1940 production of *The Light That Failed*, a role that Lupino fought for over the objections of Wellman, co-star Ronald Colman, and her advisors, who assured her that the unsympathetic cockney girl she played in the film would alienate audiences. Instead, Lupino walked away with the film and emerged as a major star as the year drew to a close. Signing with Warner Brothers, Lupino commanded star billing in such gritty classics as *They Drive By Night* (Raoul Walsh, 1940), *High Sierra* (Walsh, 1941), *The Sea Wolf* (Michael Curtiz, 1941), and *Ladies in Retirement* (Charles Vidor, 1941). In 1943, Ida Lupino received the Best Actress Award from the New York Film Critics Association for her work in *The Hard Way*, but, in truth, she was becoming disenchanted with her career as an actress.

Never a team player, Lupino had quarrelled with Humphrey Bogart during the production of *High Sierra*, and vowed after the film's completion that she would never work with the actor again. As Bogart's star continued to rise, Lupino held firmly to her decree, although Warners tried to pair the two in a number of subsequent productions. Thus, in a sense, Lupino worked against her commercial success as an actress by refusing to work in projects she did not believe

in, and refusing to work with actors who failed to respect her personally, or professionally, as she felt Bogart failed to do.

In 1944 she appeared in a brief bit in *Hollywood Canteen* (Delmer Daves), taking time out to film a brief theatrical commercial urging women war workers, “to stay on the job, and finish the job, for victory”, before portraying Emily Brontë in 1946’s *Devotion* (Curtis Bernhardt). But, beginning in 1945, Ida Lupino began to think of her next career move, beyond her work as an actress. Ida Lupino wanted to direct. At the time, there were, quite simply, no women directing films in Hollywood. Although there had been numerous women directors working in Los Angeles in the 1920s and ’30s, including Lois Weber, Ida May Park, Ruth Stonehouse, Cleo Madison and Dorothy Arzner, by 1943 women had effectively been dismissed from the director’s chair.

Dorothy Arzner was the only woman director working in the Hollywood film industry in the early 1940s; her last film, *First Comes Courage* (1943) was a powerfully feminist production starring Merle Oberon as Norwegian freedom fighter, working undercover. The film retains Arzner’s individual stamp, although Columbia took the film out of her hands as the end of production neared when she fell ill, and brought in director Charles Vidor to complete the project, who just three years later would score his biggest success with *Gilda* (1946). After *First Comes Courage*, Columbia terminated Arzner’s contract, and from 1943 to 1949 there was not a single film directed by a woman made in Hollywood.

Lupino was angered by this blatantly unfair situation, and she set about to put her vision on the screen with typically unwavering energy. “Believe me, I’ve fought to produce and direct my own pictures. [... I] always nursed a desire to direct pictures” (2) she told Robert Ellis in a 1950 interview. Clearly, Lupino’s films formed a personal statement for her. Although Lupino continued to make glossy romance or suspense films for Warner Brothers, including *The Man I Love* (Walsh, 1947), *Escape Me Never* (Peter Godfrey and LeRoy Prinz, 1947), *Road House* (Jean Negulesco, 1948), and *Lust for Gold* (S. Sylvan Simon, 1949), by early 1948 she had laid the groundwork for her later career as a director.

Lupino’s first production company was named Emerald Productions. Ida Lupino had been married from 1938 to 1945 to actor Louis Hayward, but, shortly after her divorce from Hayward, Lupino met and fell in love with production executive Collier Young, who was then working for Columbia Pictures. Ida Lupino and Collier Young were married in 1948, and, shortly thereafter, Lupino, Young and Anson Bond (owner of Bond’s Clothing) formed Emerald Productions. Shortly thereafter, Bond decided that film production was too risky and his share of the partnership was bought out by screenwriter Malvin Wald. With this change in partnership, Emerald Productions became simply the Filmmakers, and Ida Lupino was ready to realize her dream as a director of theatrical motion pictures.



The Filmakers lasted as a production entity from 1949 to 1953, during which time the company made eight feature films. Lupino directed six of the eight features. Collier Young served as the company's president, Lupino was vice-president and Wald functioned as the business manager. The first production of the Filmakers was Elmer Clifton's *Not Wanted* (1949), the story of an unwed mother (Sally Forrest) who gives up her baby for adoption, then regrets it and kidnaps another child to replace the child she has lost. Lupino co-wrote the film's screenplay. While the film is often unduly melodramatic, it is still important as a pioneering examination of what was then considered a taboo social problem, and the film is also noteworthy as Ida Lupino's maiden voyage as a director.

The film's nominal director, Elmer Clifton, a Hollywood journeyman whose career reached back into the days of the silent films, had a heart attack 72 hours after the start of principal photography. Lupino stepped in to direct, and brought the film in on time and under budget, as Clifton watched from the sidelines. Up to her death in 1995, Lupino maintained that her first assignment as a film director was simply a matter of necessity and budgetary constraints, and that there was simply no money in the budget to hire a replacement director. This may or may not be true, but, had Lupino wished to, she certainly could have found another reliable Hollywood professional to take Clifton's place, such as William Beaudine, Sam Newfield or the then-up-and-coming Anthony Mann. Visitors to the set noticed that Lupino seemed very much in charge; for all intents and purposes, *Not Wanted* is Lupino's film. *Not Wanted* was made for the very small studio Eagle Lion Productions, which had formerly been known as Producer's Releasing Corporation, arguably the cheapest studio in Hollywood. If Lupino had needed a replacement, Eagle Lion could have supplied a director on a moment's notice. But she didn't. She was more than ready for the challenge.

Lupino had been studying the craft of direction for several years, most assiduously during a period when she had been "on suspension" for refusing to star in a program picture that she felt was beneath her dignity as an actress. In "Me, Mother Directress", an article that Lupino wrote for the Director's Guild of America's in-house magazine, *Action*, Lupino described how she began to pick up the skills that would successfully guide her through her directorial career: *For about eighteen months back in the mid-Forties I could not get a job in pictures as an actress*

[...] I was on suspension [...] when you turned down something you were suspended [...] I was able to keep alive as a radio actress. I had to do something to fill up my time [...] I learned a lot from the late George Barnes, a marvelous cameraman. (3)

Not Wanted cost only \$154,000 and was shot in less than thirty days, but it still did not make back its negative cost. Still, the film was enormously influential among those viewers who went out of their way to see it, and, although Lupino refused to sign the film (giving Clifton full credit), it remains a remarkable directorial début.

The next production of the Filmmakers was *Never Fear*. The film starred Sally Forrest as a young dancer who is stricken with polio. Through sheer determination, the young woman recovers, and the film seems obviously influenced by Lupino's own brush with the disease. The film was shot at the Kabat-Kaiser Institute in Santa Monica, California, and the film as a whole has an earnest, documentary air in its construction, which did not, however, sit well with the public. The Filmmakers distributed *Never Fear* through a tenuous States Rights system of theatrical bookings, as they had with *Not Wanted*. Even when retitled *The Young Lovers* to gain additional attention at the box-office, *Never Fear* failed to earn back its production costs. However, the film caught the eye of Howard Hughes, who had recently purchased RKO Studios, and who was looking for suppliers of low-budget feature films to fill out his distribution schedule. Hughes agreed to distribute the Filmmakers' next three features and put up financing of \$250,000 per film as part of a negative pickup deal. The Filmmakers would have total control over the content and the production of the films, and Hughes would distribute them through RKO. Thus, Lupino's company had worked its way into an ideal situation: guaranteed distribution, creative freedom and "up-front" financing. Lupino's next three films, happily, would be both commercially and critically successful.

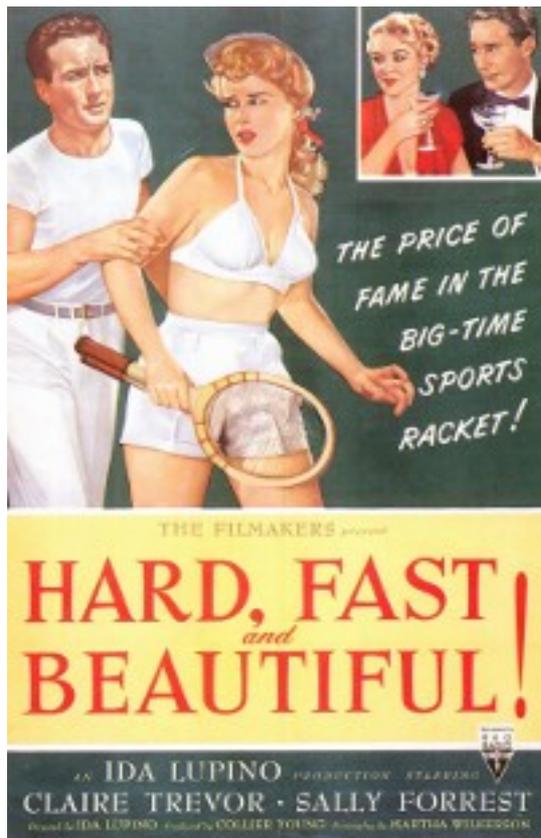


Outrage was Lupino's first film under the RKO deal. Co-scripted by Lupino, the film was the first major Hollywood production to deal with rape in a sympathetic, non-sensational manner – the same cannot be said, for example, of *They Won't Forget* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1937) or *The Story of Temple Drake* (Stephen Roberts, 1933) – and was Lupino's first solid success at the box office. The film starred Mala Powers as the rape victim, although, due to the censorial climate of the

period, Lupino could only refer to the crime as a “criminal assault” in the screenplay. In sharp contrast to earlier, male-centrist films dealing with rape, Lupino stages this film almost entirely from the viewpoint of a sympathetic, undeniably feminine omniscient observer, and stages the rape itself off-screen, thus depriving the audience of any scopophilic “pleasure” they might have derived from witnessing the horror of the event because the action is implied, rather than directly stated. In this film, for the first time, Lupino demonstrates her mastery of the mobile camera, with a number of impressive crane and dolly shots, and indulges in noirish low-key lighting, placing most of the events for the first half of the film in a netherworld of ominous shadows.

Hard, Fast and Beautiful showcased Lupino’s continued growth as a director, as a filmmaker who was essentially growing up in public with the creation of her previous films. Although *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* was another low-budget production, shot in 30 days for a total of slightly less than \$200,000, Lupino was able to secure the services of actress Claire Trevor for a pivotal role in the film, which again featured Sally Forrest as one of the principal characters. Not a few critics, including Francine Parker and Ronnie Scheib, have commented on the close physical resemblance between Forrest and Lupino. *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* is another film based upon actual events, and these critics have come to the conclusion that, through Forrest, Lupino may be casting “herself” as the protagonist in these films.

The plot of *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* is straightforward. Claire Trevor appears as Millie, a ruthless maternal figure who coerces her daughter, Florence (Forrest) into becoming a professional tournament tennis player. In this quest, Millie is aided by an unscrupulous promoter, Fletcher Locke (Carleton Young), who attempts to seduce Millie and wreck her marriage to her long-suffering husband (Kenneth Patterson). Robert Clarke appears as Florence’s boyfriend and it is through his continual criticism that Florence begins to question the validity of her pursuit of sports stardom. At the film’s conclusion, Florence refuses to continue on as a tennis champion, thus forfeiting her title, in order to care for her ailing father. In this, Lupino restates her own desire to remain subservient – at least superficially – to the existing patriarchal order. As she observed in her article, “Me, Mother Directress”:



Any woman who wishes to smash into the world of men isn't very feminine [...] Baby, we can't go smashing. I believe women should be struck regularly – like a gong. Or is it bong? If a woman has a man who loves her, she better stick close to home. I've turned down jobs in Europe because I'd have to leave my husband and my daughter and my cats. I couldn't accept those jobs unless I was a guy. (4)

The promoter immediately shifts his sights to a rival tennis player, and Millie is rebuffed by her husband and her daughter. The final shot of the film shows Millie at night, alone, sitting in the now empty bleachers of the championship tennis court, her plans for vicarious stardom smashed.

What raises this somewhat melodramatic narrative above the level of a standard program picture is, as in all her work, the visceral intensity that Lupino brings to the production. By shooting on location, as she did in *Outrage* and *Never Fear*, Lupino gives *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* a documentary look that makes Florence's bid for tennis stardom all the more real. In addition, Lupino is not averse to detailing the grubby mechanics of sports exploitation: endorsements, product promotions, publicity stunts and merchandising tie-ins.

Remembering that Lupino made these films in the early 1950s, it is not surprising that contemporary critical commentary was overwhelmingly negative. Bosley Crowther, for example, writing in *The New York Times*, called Lupino's directorial style "over-wrought," and an extension of "her own jittery screen personality" (5). As time passes, the film looks anything but "overwrought"; indeed, it seems restrained in its criticism of the marketing of sports personalities. At 79 minutes in length, the film is compact, epigrammatic and suitably brutal. In her examinations of unwed motherhood, rape and the debilitating effects of polio, and

parental exploitation, Lupino was certainly ahead of her time, and served as both an entertainer and a social commentator.

The Hitch-Hiker was reportedly Lupino's favourite of all her films. Based on the case of one William Cook, who murdered six innocent people during a hitchhiking "thrill kill" spree, *The Hitch-Hiker* is a mere 71 minutes long and was shot for the most part on location in the California desert. Once again, Lupino was tackling a controversial theme, although the film did have a harrowing precedent in Felix Feist's 1947 film, *The Devil Thumbs A Ride*, in which Lawrence Tierney played a psychopath who goes on a similar rampage. As a woman directing in Hollywood, Lupino was still something of a curiosity to the press, and UPI sent a reporter and photographer to the Baja desert to photograph Lupino in action.

Stills taken during this visit reveal the Spartan working conditions endured by Lupino, her cast and crew. Lupino is dressed in dungarees, sneakers and a check flannel shirt topped with a baseball cap, her hair tied back in a bun. The crew, entirely male, look on with professional detachment as Lupino explains a typically complex shot to stars Edmond O'Brien and Frank Lovejoy. There are a few reflectors (to enhance the use of natural daylight in the film), but the camera equipment used is modest, outdated (a 35mm Mitchell camera) and somewhat bulky. Trash cans full of soda pop on ice are in evidence, as a small compensation for the brutal desert heat, but, on the whole, the film is obviously being shot under extremely difficult circumstances. Yet, all of the participants look as if they are having an excellent time on the film, laughing, joking and working very, very quickly.



Lupino was beginning to feel that her role as a social critic was somewhat limiting, and later declared that during the making of *The Hitch-Hiker* she realized that suspense was her niche. As the psychopathic killer who terrorizes Roy Collins (O'Brien) and Gilbert Bowen (Lovejoy), William Talman is remarkable as Emmett Myers, an escaped convict with a paralyzed right eye, which remains open whether Myers is asleep or awake. *The Hitch-Hiker* is certainly Lupino's most purely visual film and also her most intimate. Once again working with an essentially triangular situation (Myers' terrorizing of Roy and Gilbert echoes the conflict between Fletcher, Florence and Millie in *Hard, Fast and Beautiful*), Lupino stages *The Hitch-Hiker* in a series of starkly-lit close-ups, wide-shots that emphasize the inhospitality of the desert terrain, and

lighting strategies that favour shafts of light in the darkness of the desert night, or else slightly overexposed shots to convey the heart of the desert during the daytime.

Still, during the production of the film, Lupino was criticized for her usurpation of what was considered a traditionally male occupation, and she felt compelled to give an interview during the filming which appeared under the heading "Ida Lupino Retains Her Femininity as Director." In part, Lupino stated that:

I retain every feminine trait. Men prefer it that way. They're more co-operative if they see that fundamentally you are of the weaker sex even though [you are] in a position to give orders, which normally is the male prerogative, or so he likes to think, anyway. While I've encountered no resentment from the male of the species for intruding into their world, I give them no opportunity to think I've strayed where I don't belong. I assume no masculine characteristics, which can often be a fault of career women rubbing shoulders with their male counterparts, who become merely arrogant or authoritative. (6)

It is also worth noting that *The Hitch-Hiker* was made by Lupino and the Filmakers Company after her divorce from Collier Young, and represents a return to the director's chair after a two-year hiatus. Though filming of *The Hitch-Hiker* went smoothly, and all seemed well on the surface (Collier Young even appeared in a cameo within the film as a sleeping "Mexican peon"), there is an atmosphere of real violence in the film – not only in the subject matter, but also in Lupino's relentless pacing, hyperkinetic camera set-ups, and her intense use of oppressive close-ups to heighten the film's suspense.

The Bigamist was the last of Lupino's films under her RKO deal, which was not renewed. For the first time, Lupino appeared in a film that she directed. The production is surrounded by considerable irony, inasmuch as it was Joan Fontaine's involvement with Collier Young (and Lupino's corresponding association with actor Howard Duff) that precipitated the divorce between Lupino and Young. Young and Fontaine were then married, as were Lupino and Duff. The film was distributed by the Filmakers group after RKO passed on the complete film. Without the necessary national distribution mechanism afforded by a major studio, the film failed to obtain adequate bookings and the Filmakers went out of business.

While a number of critics consider the film the most accomplished of Lupino's early films, *The Bigamist* remains a problematic entry in Lupino's directorial career for most viewers. The acting is superb, but visually the film fails to excite. Nevertheless, in its examination of social standards in the early 1950s, the film gives us an uncomfortably claustrophobic vision of the constraints forced upon both women and men during this period. Yet, it would be impossible not to notice the lack of visceral energy in *The Bigamist*. Lupino's career as a theatrical director was about to be abruptly terminated, and she was about to enter television direction in earnest, both to make ends meet and also to provide herself with a creative outlet in a medium that required exactly those directorial skills that Lupino so obviously possessed: speed, and the authority to deal with actors despite tight shooting schedules.



The end of her career as a theatrical feature film director led to Lupino's work in television, which began after a directorial lapse of five years. During this period, Lupino acted in a series of conventional melodramas, including *Jennifer* (Joel Newton, 1953) in which Lupino, co-starring with new husband Howard Duff, becomes involved in a murder in an old, forbidding mansion; *Private Hell 36* (1955), a Don Siegel crime film, again with Duff, and *Women's Prison* (Lewis Seiler, 1955), in which she played a sadistic prison warden, opposite crusading prison doctor Duff. Her best film as an actress during this period is probably Fritz Lang's *While the City Sleeps* (1956), and she also appeared in *Strange Intruder* (Irving Rapper, 1956). In addition, Lupino and Duff co-starred in the mid 1950s television sitcom *Mr. Adams and Eve*, which was a substantial ratings success.

In late 1958, David Niven, one of the partners in the Four Star Television Company, creators of the television series *Four Star Playhouse*, asked Lupino to direct several episodes of the series, in addition to appearing in other segments of the series. The arrangement was successful on all counts and led to episodes of other television series, including *On Trial* ("The Trial of Mary Seurat", 1959), *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* ("Sybilla", 1960; "A Crime for Mothers", 1960), *Have Gun – Will Travel* ("The Trial", 1960; "Lady with a Gun", 1960; "The Gold Bar", 1961), *Dick Powell Theatre, Thriller* (the Boris Karloff anthology series; Lupino directed a good number of the 1961 episodes of this program), *Hong Kong*, *The Untouchables*, *Mr. Novak*, *The Virginian*, *Kraft Suspense Theatre*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Bewitched*, *Gilligan's Island*, *The Fugitive*, *The Rogues* and a number of other series. In all of these assignments, Lupino quickly consolidated her reputation as a no-nonsense director, who used effective camera coverage combined with astute direction of actors to complete her television episodes on time and often under budget. On *The Untouchables*, for example, she had only six days to complete a 48-minute program, under strict I.A.T.S.E. union conditions, which meant no night shooting and no overtime. Lupino's half-hour shows, whether drama (*Have Gun – Will Travel*) or comedy (*Bewitched*) had to be shot in 2 to 3 days. In all cases, Lupino rose to the challenge.

Most previous studies of Lupino have failed to consider her television work, yet a careful

examination of her series projects reveals that her directorial sensibility is still apparent, although muted, to some degree, by the inevitable television treadmill. There is little to say, for example, about Lupino's work on *Bewitched* or *Gilligan's Island*, but Lupino's work for *The Untouchables* and *Thriller* is often adventurous and individualistic. Barbara Scharres comments on the fluidity of Lupino's camera work in an episode of *Thriller*, describing the complexity of a single shot in this hour-long tele-film.

In one continuous close-up shot [the actress] reaches for the sponge, her hand hovers over it in a moment of indecision, she reaches instead for the chocolates; just when you think she's safe, her hand darts back to the sponge, grabs it, and she is electrocuted. Comedy, suspense, and a tour-de-force display of Lupino's wittiness come together in one shot. In contrast to the often static camerawork of Fifties and Sixties television, Lupino made extensive use of the moving camera. (7)

Executing a shot like this can be difficult enough under the most relaxed production circumstances, but to attempt something of this order within the physical context of a six-day television show is quite remarkable. Still, Lupino viewed her television work with a healthy dose of pragmatism. In an interview with Dwight Whitney, Lupino commented that:

*Directing keeps you in a constant state of first-night nerves. ... You may be terrified but you mustn't show it on the set. Nothing goes according to Hoyle. ... Reshuffle your schedule. ... Keep your sense of humor, don't panic. I sometimes wonder how anything gets on film. And yet, if I don't work, it's *Panic Manor*. (8)*

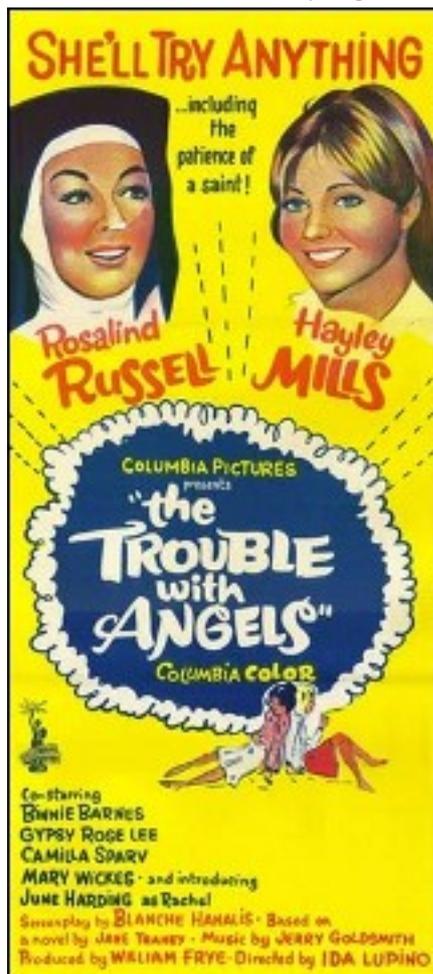
Perhaps one of the most difficult assignments that Lupino tackled in television direction was her work on one episode of the Universal television series *The Virginian*, a 90-minute weekly series starring James Drury. *The Virginian* is noteworthy as the first feature-length television program and is considered by many to be the forerunner of today's made-for-television movies. With typical cost-consciousness, the Universal executives decreed that each episode of the series had to be completed in ten days, an unheard of schedule for a major studio feature film. In addition, most of *The Virginian* had to be shot outdoors, as opposed to night-time soap operas, which use "interior" scenes of confrontation interspersed with a few "exterior" establishing shots. As a final difficulty, Lupino found herself being used by Universal as an attraction on their studio tours during production of *The Virginian*. In a 1967 interview with Francine Parker, Lupino recounted her experience working on *The Virginian*, and briefly discussed the straightforward manner in which she prepared for shooting:

I would never think of indulging in what has come to be known as the woman's right to change her mind. As soon as I get a script I go to work on it. I study and I prepare and when the time comes to shoot, my mind is usually made up and I go ahead, right or wrong. If I get a script in time, I prepare on a weekend. I go out on the back lot or to the sets on Saturday and Sunday, when it's nice and quiet, and map out my set-ups. I do that every time it's at all possible.

*I went out on the back lot at Universal awhile back to prepare a *Virginian*, but I had forgotten those studio tours, you know, twelve thousand people traipsing all over the place over the weekend. There I was on the set, dripping wet in the killing heat, wearing no makeup, looking like a witch searching for an old house to haunt, and these tours started coming through. The*

bright young know-it-all guide would happily tell his eager charges, “And there, ladies and gentlemen, is the famous actress-directress Ida Lupino preparing for *The Virginian*.” I tell you, I wanted to die. (9)

Lupino became known primarily as an action director, one who could handle fights, murders, scenes of violence and destruction. In *Have Gun – Will Travel*, for example, her first episode for that series (“The Trial”, 1960) included, according to Dwight Whitney, “a rape, eight murders, and a sandstorm” (10). Lupino was also surprised to discover that the star of the series, Richard Boone, displayed a very cavalier approach to his role. On the first day of shooting, Boone called her over and told her (as recounted by Whitney), “Doll, I don’t care what you do. Just don’t ask me to rehearse.” (11) Faced with these difficulties, one would expect Lupino to simply shoot the program in the most efficient manner possible – which she did – but even under these decidedly unfavourable circumstances, Lupino gave every ounce of her considerable stylistic energy to the project. Other memorable projects included in Lupino’s television work include “What Beckoning Ghost?”, (from the series *Thriller*, 1961), “The Man in the Cooler” (*The Untouchables*, 1962), “Heart of Marble, Body of Stone” (*Breaking Point*, 1963), “To Walk in Grace” (*Dr. Kildare*, 1964), “Love in the Wrong Season” (*Mr. Novak*, 1963) and a number of other programs.



Lupino’s last theatrical feature was the much-underrated *The Trouble with Angels* (1966). The film was almost universally dismissed upon its initial release, and yet Lupino orchestrated a

beautifully restrained performance from Rosalind Russell as the Mother Superior, and created a work of considerable depth and feeling within the confines of a rather blandly modern Columbia program picture. Indeed, a number of observers have compared the film to Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931). While no one can argue that *The Trouble with Angels* is an altogether less ambitious and more compromised production than that film, *The Trouble with Angels* still displays Lupino's grace under pressure as a director. Lupino has the ability to make a personal statement within the confines of a decidedly commercial enterprise. Although the film was a commercial success, Lupino found the critical reception of the film difficult to take, and so she went back to acting on a full-time basis. In 1972, Lupino appeared in Bernard L. Kowalski's minor exploitation film, *Women in Chains*. In director Sam Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner* (1972), she played Steve McQueen's mother. In a 1991 interview with Graham Fuller, Lupino remembered working on the film:

I played Steve McQueen's mother, but I was only twelve years older than him, and he complained to Sam. He said, "What's going on here? How can I look at Ida and think of her as my mother?" I said, "That's good, because when I look at you, I'm not thinking of you as a son." We went to the races together, Steve and I, and we won five races and came back with a small fortune. One of the horses was called Ida's Pet, and it went on to become quite famous. Sam was angry – he said, "The next time you go racing make sure you take me with you." (12)

This was followed by assignments in a series of routine films, including Bert I. Gordon's *Food of the Gods* (1976), Robert Fuest's *The Devil's Rain* (1975), in which she appeared opposite John Travolta, and a 1977 "guest star" appearance on the television show *Charlie's Angels*. After this, Ida Lupino retired from the screen, and, in 1984, she moved from the Brentwood house she had lived in with Howard Duff (whom she divorced that same year) to a smaller residence in Van Nuys, California. As she entered the final period of her life, she watched her old films on late-night television and thought of her long career. At the time, Lupino told interviewer Graham Fuller that "I sit up every night watching lots of films, from midnight till six or seven o'clock, and I see some wonderful films." (13) Occasionally, Lupino dismissed her work as a director as the result of sheer economic necessity. But to Fuller, in what would be one of her last interviews, she admitted that she got "more satisfaction out of directing than acting [...] I enjoyed it much more." (14) Lupino died on 3 August 1995, at her home in Los Angeles.

The perpetual paradox of the motion-picture medium is the inherent compromise between artistry and finance required of its practitioners. Ida Lupino's position as a film director is remarkable for a number of reasons. She was a woman working in Hollywood at a time when both the cultural climate and the incipient sexism of the industry mitigated against her efforts; she was an actress who turned to direction when her career in front of the camera failed to satisfy her needs as an artist; she directed films and television shows of a surprisingly violent nature during a period when television was known as the "safe" medium; and she was unafraid to tackle impossible schedules and production budgets on a routine basis, creating work of dignity and originality under exceedingly difficult circumstances. Lupino's work is one of the most singular testaments of the 1950s, an era when women were still very much on the margins of cinematic practice.

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Endnotes

- 1 Annette Kuhn, “Introduction: Intestinal Fortitude”, in Annette Kuhn (Ed.), *Queen of the ‘B’s: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1995), p. 4. ↑
- 2 Robert Ellis, “Ida Lupino Brings New Hope to Hollywood”, *Negro Digest*, August 1950, pp. 48. ↑
- 3 Ida Lupino, “Me, Mother Directress”, *Action*, 2.3 (May-June 1967), pp. 15. ↑
- 4 Ibid. ↑
- 5 Bosley Crowther, “Hard, Fast and Beautiful”, *The New York Times*, 2 July 1951, p. 16. ↑
- 6 Ida Lupino, “Ida Lupino Retains Her Femininity as Director”, feature article in pressbook of *The Hitch-Hiker*, 1953, p. 4. ↑
- 7 Barbara Scharres, “Ida Lupino”, *The Film Center Gazette*, 16.2, p. 4. ↑
- 8 Dwight Whitney, “Follow Mother, Here We Go, Kiddies!”, *TV Guide*, 8 October 1966, p. 16. ↑
- 9 Francine Parker, “Discovering Ida Lupino”, *Action*, 2.3 (May-June 1967), p. 14. ↑
- 10 Ibid, p. 16. ↑
- 11 Ibid, p. 16. ↑
- 12 Graham Fuller, “Ida Lupino”, *Interview*, April 1991, pp. 118. ↑
- 13 Ibid ↑
- 14 Ibid ↑

Filmography

Never Fear (1950)

Outrage (1950/1)

Hard, Fast and Beautiful (1951)

The Hitch-Hiker (1953)

The Bigamist (1953)

The Trouble With Angels (1966)

Uncredited

Not Wanted (1949). Credited to Elmer Clifton, but Lupino directed all or virtually all of this film.

On Dangerous Ground (1952). Lupino directed certain scenes during director Nicholas Ray’s absence from the film due to illness.

Full credits to Lupino’s acting and television work can be found on IMDb.com.



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Debra Weiner, "Interview with Ida Lupino", in Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary (Eds), *Women and the Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1977), pp. 169-78.

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Articles in Senses of Cinema

Richard Armstrong, "[Road House](#)", *Senses of Cinema*, No. 15 (July–August 2001).

[California Dreamin': High Sierra \(Raoul Walsh, 1941\)](#) by Luke Goodsell

[They Drive By Night \(Raoul Walsh, 1940\)](#) by Stephen Gaunson



Web Resources

[Classic Movies: Ida Lupino](#)

Comprehensive index of many Lupino sites on the web.

[Wikipedia: Ida Lupino](#)

Reasonably good Wikipedia entry on Lupino.

[IMDB: Ida Lupino](#)

IMDB entry on Lupino; very accurate.

["A Tribute to Ida Lupino"](#)

Classic Movie site on Lupino; rather "fanzine" but still good.

["Lupino, Ida: U.S. Actor/Director"](#)

Museum of Broadcast Communications page on Lupino.

[“South of the Chocolate Mountains: Scattered Impressions of *The Hitch-hiker*”](#)

Bright Lights Film Journal essay on Lupino’s film *The Hitch-hiker*.

[Ida Lupino](#)

Fan site on Lupino’s work as an actor and director.

