



# Burt Lancaster: An American Life

*Kate Buford*

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## **Burt Lancaster: An American Life** Kate Buford

Startlingly handsome, witty, fanatically loyal, charming, scary, and intensely sexual, Burt Lancaster was the quintessential *bête du cinéma*, one of Hollywood's great stars. He was, as well, an intensely private man, and he authorized no biographies in his lifetime. Kate Buford is the first writer to win the cooperation of Lancaster's widow, close friends, and colleagues, and her book is a revelation.

Here is Lancaster the man, from his teenage years, bolting the Depression-era immigrant neighborhood of East Harlem where he grew up for the life of a circus acrobat -- then the electric New York theater of the 1930s, then the dying days of vaudeville. We see his production company -- Hecht-Hill-Lancaster -- become the biggest independent of the 1950s, a bridge between the studio era and modern filmmaking. With the power he derived from it we see him gain a remarkable degree of control, which he used to become the auteur of his own career. His navigation through the anti-Communist witch-hunts made him an example of a star who tweaked the noses of HUAC and survived. His greatest roles -- in *Sweet Smell of Success*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Birdman of Alcatraz*, *The Swimmer*, *Atlantic City* -- kept to the progressive edge that had originated in the tolerant, diverse, reforming principles of his childhood. And in the extraordinary complete roster of his films -- *From Here to Eternity*, *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, *The Leopard*, *1900*, and *Field of Dreams*, among many others -- he proved to be both a master of commercial movies that pleased a worldwide audience and an actor who pushed himself beyond stardom into cinematic art. Kate Buford has written a dynamic biography of a passionate and committed star, the first full-scale study of one of the last great unexamined Hollywood lives.

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