Von Sternberg, Josef (1894-1969) Encyclopedia Article

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Although there are other achievements for which to salute film director (and screenwriter, producer, and occasional cinematographer) Josef von Sternberg, his reputation has come to rest indissolubly on his most famous creation, Marlene Dietrich. After making *Underworld* (1927) and *The Docks of New York* (1928), two near-masterpieces of the late silent era, von Sternberg was invited to Berlin to film *The Blue Angel* (1930). There he found Dietrich and cast her as the predatory Lola-Lola. He brought her to Hollywood and turned her into an international screen goddess of mystical allure in six exotic romances, beginning with *Morocco* (1930) and ending with *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935). In this last and most baroque of Sternberg's films, his sensual imagery and atmospheric play of light and shadow on fabulous costumes and inventive sets found its fullest expression. Once parted from Paramount and his star he endured a slow decline, but at the height of his success this Viennese-born son of poor immigrant Jews (the "von" was acquired), who had served a ten-year apprenticeship as an editor, was acknowledged as Hollywood's outstanding visual stylist and undisputed master technician.

Further Reading:

Bach, Steven. *Marlene Dietrich: Life and Legend.* New York, Harper Collins, 1992.

Finler, Joel W. *The Movie Directors Story.* New York, Crescent Books, 1986.

Sternberg, Josef von. *Fun in a Chinese Laundry.* New York, MacMillan, 1965.