

One Eyed Jacks

An Extended Analysis of Marlon Brando's 1961 Western Film

by Trygve B. Sletteland at Northwestern University, May 1968

The screen play for One Eyed Jacks was written by Guy Trosper and Calder Willingham. It is an adaptation of Charles Neider's novel, The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones. The relationship between the novel and the film is generally of the typical variety. By "typical" is meant those thousands of films whose credits acknowledge their adaptation from an obscure novel of which few viewers have heard. Gone With the Wind, The Grapes of Wrath, A Farewell to Arms, and other films based on famous and popular novels are exceptions to the general Hollywood rule. In their cases, audiences expect to see as faithful a translation to the film medium as its peculiar properties will allow. The film is criticized in terms of its faithfulness to the essential contents and emphasis of the novel on which it is based.

This is not the case with One Eyed Jacks. In the first place, The Authentic Death is not an important novel and was never popular. Neither is its author, Charles Neider, famous or important enough for his comments concerning the film version of his novel to even be heard, no less make any difference. Of greatest importance here, however, is the extent to which the film differs from the novel it is based on.

The difference between the two is great enough to safely say that the ^{novel} ~~novel~~ merely provided the seed from which the film grew. And the nourishment ^{for that} ~~for that~~ growth was provided as much by star/director Marlon Brando on location as by the film's scriptwriters. One need only examine the extent to which One Eyed Jacks is the work of one man to arrive at this last conclusion.

What, then, is the nature of the seed from which this fine film grew? The Authentic Death is a typical, poorly written Western yarn. It is no secret

that the Western is told far better on the screen than on paper or any other medium. The Western is easily one of the most "natural" genres the cinema has developed; its accent on physical action and the portrayal of character through that action is ideally suited for the powers and capabilities of the film medium. This has been apparent from the beginning of film's growth as an art form, a growth that began with Edwin S. Porter's revolutionizing editing techniques in The Great Train Robbery.

The seeds of the plot and characterization which are developed in One Eyed Jacks are present in The Authentic Death. Roughly, its plot concerns its hero, Hendry Jones, known as "The Kid" (Rio in the film), his movements around California and Mexico, and his inevitable death. Snatches of plot correspond to that of the film. The Kid is in jail for a murder he did not commit at the opening of the book, in contrast to the near-end of the film. Rather than beginning in Mexico, as in the film, The Kid flees to Mexico after breaking jail in the novel. He does return for a woman, however, hanging out on the Point, as in the film. The scriptwriters received their initial inspiration from the novel, but made basic changes in the plot in re-shaping it. Perhaps the most basic change was in the climax. The Kid is killed by Dad Longworth in the novel, but rides off into the sunset in the film. In the screen play, the tragic death was retained, but after an audience response sample, the ending was re-worked, changing the film from a tragedy to a revenge melodrama.

The changes in the characters from one medium to the other were of a different nature. The novel provided the briefest of sketches for the film's

only character which both the movie and the book have in common whose name was changed. "Hendry Jones" is a bit too common for the Brando character, as is his novel nickname, "The Kid". "Johnny Rio", almost exclusively referred to as just "Rio", is far more fitting, and also serves to emphasize the feelings he has for the film's Mexican characters. Luisa and Modesto are the only two characters that he loves and trusts throughout the film, Dad having betrayed his trust in setting up the central conflict.

Dad Longworth's name is right out of the book, as is Lon Dedrick's. Lon is perhaps the film's most faithful character counterpart to the novel. He is treated as unsympathetically in the latter as in the former, and even has many of his lines and actions transformed from one medium to the other. An example is the way in which he taunts Rio while he's in jail. Other names which remained in the film version are Doc, Bob Emory, Harvey Johnson, and Modesto.

Modesto is typical of the character changes which were made to showcase Brando's noble savage character. He is killed because of his friendship with Rio in the book as well as the film, but is one instance of a shadowy minor character brought to life in order to reflect the good side of Rio's character. An even more important example is Luisa. Her rough counterpart in the novel was a girl who Rio returned to see after escaping jail. His intention was to take her away with him, but she would not have him because of his unfaithfulness. In the novel, she had no relation to Longworth, a character addition which added greatly to the Rio-Luisa relationship in the film. Their love affair is the most important addition to the film, taking precedence over even

characters; It is as if their faces were blank in the novel and were filled in on the screen. The film is pitched as a conflict between two characters: Rio and Dad Longworth. The situation was somewhat similar in the novel, but no motivation was provided for The Kid's revenge. Dad, who had once ridden with The Kid, had turned one side of his face to the shadows and become the Sheriff of Monterey, but did not leave any "dirt" between himself and The Kid before doing so. The characters in the novel are shallow stereotypes, men who exist as puppets whose strings are pulled to cue action by the first person narrator.

The only exception to this rule is the hero himself. Variety said that the film "captured to an astonishing degree the gradually changing quality of events in the novel." The only "gradual change" which they could have been referring to was the change that the narrator observed in The Kid's character. At one point he says "In the old days it had been fun to live like that, but now we were tired. The Kid looked so tired I was greatly surprised. The life of being always hunted was really changing him." Brando builds Rio's character in the film, reflecting not so much an increasing tiredness as a growth in sensitivity, as seen in the development of his love for Luisa. The quiet, intense, stylishly mannered and dressed Kid of the novel is preserved in the film, but Brando's additions are too numerous to recount.

Indicative of the director's one man control of the film he created to showcase himself as its most dominant and powerful actor are the differences in the characters' names and the deeper individual identities within them which occurred in bringing the novel to the screen. The changes which were made were all intended to sharpen the focus on Marlon Brando. He, for instance, is the

Dad's leaving Rio "for rot" in Mexico. For it is through his involvement with Luisa that Rio's duality is most strongly expressed, in the first place by his lying to her, "shaming her", as he says, and secondly by his loving her, after learning from her that "You only shame yourself".

The depth which is added to Dad's character is for Rio's sake as well. The only reason for their conflict in the novel is that Dad has turned sheriff, nothing more. None of the hypocritical harm done to Rio by Dad in the film is present in the book. Dad's evil doing serves as a force which motivates Rio in his central obsession - revenge. And the viewer feels that Rio is justified in seeking that revenge; he is the victim of an unfair world in which he must fight to live - and to love.

The person in the film is omniscient, as most movie narrators are. The film is a story told by no one; the viewer sees it unfold as if he were there. This represents a further improvement over the book, in which the first person narrator told his folksy Western yarn in a rather crude manner. His point of view was rather like Ishmael's - the tale of a lone survivor. And the stories are not unlike, either. Both tell of one man's mania for killing, pulling all those around him down. Rio and Ahab are both epic characters, unjustly punished, who seek to wreak their vengeance upon the world through one central character, in one case, Dad Longworth and in the other, Moby Dick.

As a result of the way in which it is told, the structure of The Authentic Death lacks all of One Eyed Jacks' emphasis on drama. For the start of the novel, the reader knows The Kid's fate. It is the story of his death, as the title

indicates. References are made to his death from the beginning, and to those of the other characters as well, long before the death is actually described. The plot of the film plays an integral part in the impact of its success; the lack of any dramatic plot whatsoever in the books contributes to its miserable failure. Although there is an inevitability about Brando's character in the film, it is a strength which echoes the weakness of the book's uninspiring inevitability. If The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones has done nothing else, however, it has provided the inspiration for a film which proclaims the greatness of Marlon Brando, and for this alone it was worthy of publication.

The Western is one of the four native American genres (along with the gangster film, the musical, and the slapstick comedy). It demands understanding, feeling, and fidelity in exchange for a form of broad personal expression. Many directors have occasionally essayed it. For some, it has allowed remarkable and profound statements: Cukor's Heller in Pink Tights, Vidor's Man Without a Star, Ray's Johnny Guitar, Siegel's Flaming Star, Heisler's Along Came Jones, Aldrich's Vera Cruz, Fuller's Run of the Arrow, Lang's Ranche Notorious, Preston Sturges' Beautiful Blond from Bashful Bend, and any number of works by Wellman, Curtiz, and Walsh. For some it has been the cruellest revelation of weakness: Miller's Lonely Are the Brave, Zinneman's High Noon, Ritt's Hud, and the Westerns of John Sturges.

The Western has five absolute masters: William S. Hart in the silent period; then John Ford, Howard Hawks, Budd Boetticher, and Anthony Mann. Ford's vision involves history as progress from old to new through a series of tests provoked by change. Hawks' Westerns are concerned with maturity, and discovering the limits of a deterministic world through the pursuit of a job. Boetticher wistfully defines nobility, from a distance, through a microcosmic revenge drama. Mann's didactic works center on revenge through complex moral dramas of identity. Their heroes are all endowed with nobility, often with epic stature.

Brando's vision is different. For his first work, Brando chose to direct a Western, one which draws on the torn t-shirt, motorcycle driver, dockworker image of earlier pictures. But through the visuals, Brando summons up successive images of a wild Byronic hero: Don Juan in red ruana and tight leather pants. Brando as director is able to realize the Brando character very well indeed.

Brando understands his image as hero. The duality of character which is the central theme of Jacks is an extension of Brando's screen character. Brando is the product of an unjust, brutal world and behaves accordingly. Yet when confronted with good, the beautiful and the gentle, he can respond in kind.

The hero Brando presents unifies the film with an electric presence (If you don't like Brando, you won't like the movie), and it is a hero quite different from the traditional Western figure. Hart, Hawks, Ford, Mann, and Boetticher give us heroes of rather constant quality. They are able to fight, of course, and can handle themselves in the brutal world of the frontier, but they do so with consistent nobility - they don't malign their enemies or behave like bad guys. The classic Westerner (derived, as Warshow suggests, from a Puritan heritage confronted with frontier morality) is dressed in simple work clothes: jeans, a work shirt, sometimes a vest, sometimes a sheepskin coat, a drab bandana, and a hat. The hat provides a fine point for comparison. Randolph Scott, Jimmy Stewart, John Wayne, Henry Fonda, and Gary Cooper wear their hats at a sober angle, parallel to the ground, they don't smile much, either, no less smirk. Brando's clothes are extravagant, almost like the dude cowboy figure of Tom Mix, and he wears his hat like the cap in The Wild One.

He is a practicing bad guy, not just a man of the frontier tarnished but uncorrupted through long exposure to evil. But Brando is a good bad guy: involved in a world of deceit, the deceits he practices to survive are the deceits common to the traditional Westerner - deceits drawn from the practice of bluffing at poker, practices in situations as formalized and well signaled as the gathering under the yellow lamp at the card table.

The Western world in Jacks, is not as pure, or as simple, or as distant as the classic Western world. This is a legacy of the psychological Western, spawned in disillusioned "B" pictures of the fifties. Brando's revenge melodrama forces the audience into uncomfortable proximity with dirty, corrupt people - whores, sadists, weaklings, phonies - and these characters linger in the mind after the good people fade. Brando renders them in stronger tones, employing his characteristic brand of black humor along the way to temporarily (or permanently, depending on the viewer's own sense of humor) lighten the darkness of his vision.

The story which Jacks tells is classic - the old Western motif of revenge. Many of the plot conventions of the traditional Western are observed. Rio seduces Dad's stepdaughter in order to hurt him and ends up in love with the girl. Lon, the bully jailer, gets his in the end. A bit actor is brought in to be caddish in order to show the hero's essential noble nature and physical prowess. And there is even a scene where Rio bears a brutal whipping and falls to the ground without crying out.

Yet the film is exciting and original in spite of the conventionality of its plot. There are many reasons for the tremendous richness of the film as a viewing experience. Component parts of the composite art of Jacks are its meanings, content, and characters; the performances of its actors, the style of its direction and editing; its screenplay and language, and its photography, music and sound.

At its core, Jacks presents a conflict between two characters - Johnny Rio and Dad Longworth. The idea examined throughout is that Dad and Rio are both one-eyed jacks, appropriately a poker illusion. You can see one side of the face, the character, but the other is hidden. From his jail cell, Rio tells Dad, "You're a one-eyed jack around here, Dad, I seen the other side of your face". Rio's aim is not so much to expose the other side of Dad's face, or character, as to destroy the side which faces the world. The same holds true for Dad.

At the outset, Rio and Dad are robbing a bank. They are both jovial hard cases, gunslingers who bust border town boxes and live easy. Rio, however, sets himself apart from Dad at the very beginning. His calmness contrasts Dad's nervousness as they rob the bank. Rio moves and rides gracefully; Dad is clumsy in his movements, walking like a tenderfoot. In Sonora, the contrast between the women each goes to could not be drawn more sharply. Lines are drawn: Rio is a romantic gallant, Dad is a redneck.

Then the rurales pin them down on a ridge with one horse between them. They will draw cartridges to determine who rides for fresh horses. Rio, in an instinctive gesture of chivalry, puts a cartridge in both hands assuring that Dad will ride to possible safety, leaving Rio with the approaching rurales to fend off. Rio's heroic gesture is balanced when Dad reaches the horse farm - Dad decides to strand Rio, equally a gesture of instinct. The characters are determined. Like older poets, Brando cues the elements: as Rio is captured, the imagery is of wind whipping dust all around him, obscuring everything but his captors.

Five years later, after Rio has served Dad's hitch, we see Dad again. Dad has attained the respectability of the middle class - and ambiguous motif of class comparison runs through the film - and its hypocrisy. He is a political figure, one of a series of malignant political portraits the movies lean toward, a smiler with a dagger under his cloak. He understands the threat Rio poses - Rio has knowledge of the character he is hiding.

The supporting characters divide neatly into two camps: The evil people, around Longworth, and the good people, around Rio. Longworth is intelligent enough to understand his evil. Bob Emory, Rio's bank-robbing partner is not. He is deceitful by nature and knows no virtue. He is clever, and is treated as a sort of evil person. Lon, the deputy, is a corrupt Andy Devine figure devoid of any real human standing. Brando relegates him to the level of animal by virtue of his unredeemed sadism, his simple animal impulses. Harvey Johnson, Bob's cohort, falls between Bob and Lon as an incarnation of evil. He is a bit more human than Lon, a bit less than Bob. There are several other minor caricatures of evil in the film. They are included to showcase Rio's compassion, gallantry, and physical prowess. Howard Tetley, who is first savagely beaten and then killed by Rio for his treatment of a local prostitute, is an example.

With Rio are Modesto, Luisa, and Maria, all of whom are able to sympathize with other people and to conduct themselves with honor and dignity. The good characters are used as foils for Brando's goodness - his courtesy, his understanding, and his sympathy. When Modesto, his Mexican friend, leaves Rio and Punto del Diablo, he pulls Rio to him. Soon afterwards, Modesto dies defending

Rio against evil. Theirs is a touching human friendship. Maria, Luisa's mother and at the same time Dad's wife, is suspicious of Rio at the start. Her suspicions are gradually turned against her husband, until she turns away from him at the end. It is deeply ironic that Rio tells Luisa to tell her mother whatever she has to after he has killed Dad, but this serves to exemplify Rio's sympathy, one-sided though it is.

Luisa lacks her mother's experience and maturity. The encounters between her and Rio illuminate most strongly the two sides of his face, the good and the evil in him. Luisa is perhaps the film's most warmly human figure - she represents much more than a foil for Rio's goodness. She alone has the power to turn Rio from his prime obsession of revenge, and it is through her belief in Rio's goodness that she does it.

The drama is polarized between two poles, as with most Westerns when the woman speaks for good - give up the idea of revenge, be completely good. But revenge is a necessity of character for Rio. Love vs. revenge is the most obvious of the value comparisons that run through the film. Others are deceit vs. integrity, loyalty vs. betrayal, generosity vs. self-interest, dignity vs. animalism. No absolute victory is established for any of the values. Brando's Mexican friend dies for his loyalty, Luisa bears Rio's illegitimate child and the destruction of her family, her mother loses a husband and a daughter's honor. Rio, finally, suffers outrageous tribulations to receive his revenge. Along the way he also finds love, and perhaps some sort of peace. At any rate, he rides off in the end like a Western hero should.

It is the evil people who are rendered more strongly, however. This reflects the dominant visceral imagery, verbal and visual, which is the outstanding tone of the film. Characters are constantly making threats like: "I'm gonna take you off at the shoulder", "I'll blow your liver", "I wouldn't wanna lose me a handfulla brains", "I'm gonna tear your arms out". Visually, the film is brutal and realistic. Doc's and Rio's deaths are on screen, and Rio's outbursts of violence are short but forceful.

The imagery does well in Rio's challenge to Lon as Lon taunts Rio to try overpowering him. Rio says, "Go on, Lon, pull one off...Let's see if you got the nerve to squeeze one off, Lon", impotence fully implied. The purity of Luisa is a counterpoint. Central to the plot is the ritual image of castration. Longworth smashes Rio's gun hand (in a Western, castration) because Rio has taken away his daughter, and because Rio is a threat to his position as father of family and town. Rio tells Dad earlier that he doesn't "run into studs like you no more". Lon tells Rio that he'd like to kill him himself, "with both barrels about waist high". When Bob taunts Rio about his seeing Luisa, Rio explodes with, "Git up, you scum suckin' pig." The first women that Rio encounters in the film, while he is robbing the bank, are warned by the phallic symbol of his gun, as he waves it at them slowly with a smirk.

Passive imagery is used, too. The isolation and distance of Rio is seen often. Peace and good things are found away from the town, away from people. Rio finds pastoral seclusion in the fishing village on the Point. The ocean figures behind Dad's house, and the fishing village - always an image of termination. Rio has followed Dad as far as Dad can go. Rio's encounters with

Luisa are always by the ocean; it is here that their love was founded. As usual, the evil characters don't respond to the beautiful in life. Bob says, "I'm sick of sittin' around this puke hole, listenin' to those damn waves flop in all day long". Dad is seen silhouetted against the ocean as he lies to Rio about his betrayal, and later as he rides pompously into town to shoot Rio down for finding love, something that Dad is incapable of feeling.

The stock imagery of the Western is extravagantly employed by Brando: horses, gunds, women, bars, jail, the desert. We see this even before the action begins. As the credits appear, the camera pans to wall to reveal a saddle bag and rifles sitting picturesquely on the ground in the corner. Rio is always dependent on horses and guns for escape, for his life. In a typical touch, Bob kicks Modesto's hat over the cliff away killing him. We hear his spurs click twice as he kicks at the hat in a close-up of his legs and the ground. It would have taken Rio only one try. When Modesto quietly takes his first woman in five years, she is a huge barroom prostitute with huge breasts.

The world of Jacks is deterministic. Its world has boundaries, its characters are static in terms of their values. Dad motivates the action authoritatively until his death, and Rio comes to a decision, and ultimately a kind of resolution. There is a fateful quality about the events in the film. While he and Dad are reminiscing, Rio toys with him, saying, "It's a wonder we didn't wind up in the pen". Dad's answer is "Lucky". Rio casually throws in, "Just luck, huh?" knowing full well that luck plays no role in his life and never did.

Rio knows his world, and he plays games with lies. He can get whatever

he is after more easily if he prepares his way with a few well placed lies. He can receive his revenge more easily by lying to Dad and his stepdaughter. Often his deceptions become more effective when phrased as questions. He says to Dad, "A man can't stay angry for five years, can he"?, later telling Luisa the truth he has hidden - the only thing that kept him going for five years in the Mexican prison was his intense hatred of Dad and desire for revenge.

Rio's lying is part of his style. He uses the same lines and tricks on women he is after, and they work. "My mother gave me this just before she dies". When he reaches the beach with Luisa, Rio tells her that he lied to her earlier, and proceeds to tell her another pack of lies about himself. It is Luisa who finally shows him that "You only shame yourself". He later tells her that he hasn't got any time for lyin', but neither has he the desire to do so.

Dad is seen at his most hypocritical when his deceit encounters another's integrity. After denying his wife's charge that he had once left Rio to die, he explodes upon hearing that Luisa is pregnant. He screams "You lied" at Maria, throwing his dinner napkin violently down on the table. Maria's lie was a result of a compassion and sympathy that Dad is incapable of feeling, and a foreknowledge of her husband's hypocrisy which she comes to know heartbreakingly just before Rio kills him.

The lie, then, is as potent a weapon in the Western world of Jacks as is a gun. Brando's deceit is, of course, a characteristic uncommon to the usual Western hero. His lies charm the viewer as well as the women he seduces, however. His brand of humor is black, but it makes us laugh nevertheless. We enjoy the lies he tells Dad and the lines he feeds the high-tone Spanish lady

he visits in the beginning. There is something comic about the way he wrenches the ring his "mother gave him just before she died". Brando doesn't miss a trick in embellishing his Rio character with stylish details, and it is his character more than anything else that makes the film so entertaining.

Even some of the film's most seemingly brutal lines get laughs. The language of "scum suckin' pig", "gob 'o spit," and "tub 'o guts," is comically obscene and so characteristic of Rio that it found its place in the American vernacular after the film was released. Even Dad's betrayal is infused with humor, the rurales laughing heartily on learning that he had no shoes on. And Brando's smirk, authentic and loaded as it is, can't help but infuse a certain comic anticipation within the viewer. The scene at the Longworth's table is particularly funny, as Rio breaks every conventional manner, yet exhibits his own brand of gentlemanliness. The audience laughs with Rio as he chews quietly on a partially concealed piece of bread while Dad says his hypocritical grace, or when Rio accepts Luisa's invitation to stay for the fiesta with a knowing smirk. The picture of Rio casually chomping on a banana while robbing a bank is also quite funny. The essential theme of duality is set up here as Rio throws one peel on a scale, tipping it, and then another on the other side to balance the opposing forces. Eating is played by Brando for all the comic effect it can yield. Even as Rio is suffering a brutal whipping from Dad, the comic note of Harvey's ugly face covered with watermelon is thrown in. Humor is found elsewhere in the most unlikely places. The girl who enters the bank as Bob is busting it and is killed gets laughs first when her authentically ugly face is taken in close-up.

In making the transition from a discussion of the film's meanings to the actors who in part created them, one must start with Marlon Brando. As director and star, he dominates the film. It is impossible to discuss Brando and his Rio character separately since each is so wrapped up within the other. An in-depth discussion of Rio's character as Brando conceived and played it is in order here.

Much has already been said about Rio's style; one gets the feeling that this is Brando's style as well.

The film depends on Brando's personal style to hold it together. Brando is the sort of star so powerful that he bends whatever movie he is in around himself. The nobility within the savage has always been his theme. Brando sees himself accurately as a sort of half-articulate poet asserting his dignity through whatever small amounts of beauty he encounters. As a figure, Brando often uses his body and his face to strike expressionistic attitudes in the absence of dialogue. His face works well, intelligent as it is, conveying an implacable control of the torture and the energy behind it.

Brando is able to give life to violent actions as if they were his own. His "method" acting has the great virtue of enabling him to live his role as Rio. His body moves with a catlike grace and coordinated muscularity that makes it one of his greatest assets. The way he administers his beatings to Howard Tetley and Lon is short and sweet. He doesn't dwell on the harm he does to others the way he does on the harm that is done to him. The way he kicks the chair behind him after exploding at Bob's teasing or lashes out of his shackles as Lon undoes them is so violently real that the audience would cringe if anyone but Rio moved like that.

In its review of Jacks, TIME Magazine referred to Brando as "...the Method Cowboy, who incessantly mumbles, scratches, blinks, rubs his nose and sulks". Dwight McDonald called Brando an "anti-actor", saying that, "An actor is expressive; he acts, that is, he does something; Brando has become a specialist in the passive and inarticulate".

Stanley Kaufman thinks differently about Brando. "He is an actor whose very shoulders seem to speak, to suggest a sense of energy always about to explode - in affection or attack a frame packed with theatrical dynamism. His face is smashed-brutish or authentically beautiful, depending simply on how he wants it to work".

Apart from the stylization of his language, Brando does use his body and his face in striking expressionistic attitudes. Mr. McDonald apparently lacks an appreciation of the subtlety of Brando's method of expression. The way in which he throws his gun to his side as the rurales close in on him does more to express the hopelessness of his situation and the vanity with which he accepts his fate than anything he could or do about it. While at the Longworth's house, his loaded smiles give away the truth he is hiding to the viewer, and prepare for Luisa's seduction. Brando uses his characteristic smirk frequently in Jacks. When Dad asks him to hand over his gun, he smiles slowly and quietly and softly says "all right", backing off for a showdown which Dad's betrayal postpones temporarily.

, On Rio, the archetypal classless, enduring wanderer, Brando the director imposes an evil world for which Rio can accept no responsibility, a world appropriate for the display of Rio's qualities. This world is an active one -

it seeks to destroy Rio for what he is. Rio is sought out and punished primarily for things he didn't do. He must fight to preserve his life and the values that it is built upon.

The character contrasts are drawn between Rio and Dad sharply from the start. Rio would never dig greedily in the dirt for a few gold coins after his bulging saddle bags had spilled. When Bob suggests shooting Dad down with scatter guns and then taking the Monterey Bank, Rio replies, "That's not my style, Bob". When Bob answers that his style is getting a little slow, that even he could probably outdraw him now, Rio reaffirms that his style won't die until he does in saying, "You might get six in me, Bob, before I get that one in you". Rio is as stylish when an underdog as he is when he's roaming free. He literally knows no fear. When Lon bullies him up the stairs to his cell, Rio tells him that he'll "get his", and he does, being shown more mercy by Rio than he deserves.

Rio knows no illusions, he just does what he feels he has to. When Luisa calls his avowal to kill Dad murder, he says "that ain't murder, it's just standin up same as any man would do." She asks him if killing Dad will make him a man, and he answers simply, "Well, I don't know about that". And he doesn't - Rio doesn't think about being a man or try to be one, he just does what he has to, and if that doesn't make him a man, he couldn't care less.

Brando is a poet of words. He stylizes the language broadly, rearranging the rhythms of sentences. After he has killed Howard Tetley in self defense, Rio says, "He didn't give me no selection". When Rio faces Lon from the cell as Lon climbs the stairs, he doesn't bark or growl "Hands up", or "Hold it,

right there"; he says in a loaded conversational smile, "That's right, Lon". Brando as Fate has a fitting sense of propriety: Lon is an animal, a stature not to be dignified with a shoot-out. Brando plainly reduces him to his place. With a scowl on his face which represents the closest he comes in the film to showing fear, Rio replies coolly to a man in the square while he is escaping that doesn't recognize him that the stable man he has just slugged in "over to the saloon".

Brando as hero conveys, through the style of his speech, movement, and action more than his dialogue, a history, a character, a dialectic, even a certain world. American heroes in movies do this; its a function of the star to suggest far more than he says or does. Personal style is a language without words.

One Eyed Jacks introduced Pina Pellicer to the screen. Here was a command performance. She was beautiful in an intense, defenseless, unselfconscious way that made conventional prettiness seem boring. After seeing the film, it is almost impossible to visualize Rio falling in love with anyone but her. Her face, as sadly expressive as it was, was created for her role, and she used it to perfection.

A victim, at least at the outset, of her own inexperience, Luisa portrays her somewhat pathetic surrender beautifully. There is something about the way she gives herself to Rio that tells us that she will come to love Rio even after learning the truth about him. She comes to seem convinced of the fact that if she loves a man, there must be something good in him, and she finds it in the end. There is a poetry about Miss Pellicer's performance that makes her as beautiful as the waves which are often seen behind her. She balances the sturdy inevitability of the crashing waves with her own delicacy.

Karl Malden was magnificent as well. He rose to the great difficulty of handling a role as one-sided as Dad Longworth's. His eyes were perhaps his greatest asset, showing in their glint his hypocrisy and partial madness. His portrayal of the old Dad Longworth, robbing and whoring, was a little unconvincing in retrospect, perhaps only because of his beautifully handled, extremely convincing portrayal of his new life as an exceedingly evil political figure who is an object of the viewer's hatred. His role was awfully one-sided, as Brando wanted it, but he managed the almost impossible task of making Dad appear to be real.

Life magazine said in a review of Jacks that "Probably never in Hollywood history have the minor players been so thoroughly coached".

Malden responded well to director Brando's improvised method of scripting and shooting. When Brando improvised by spitting in his face just before being whipped by him, Malden came back with, "That's a pretty good start", after a look of genuine shock and hatred had come into his sadistically glinting eyes. Katy Jurado, as Dad's wife, had a difficult role to handle as well. She was able to convince the audience that she had lived with Dad for years and had not discovered his evilness previous to the events of the film. Her integrity, compassion, and sympathy, especially in her scenes with her daughter were very convincing. She was the ideal mother.

The time which Brando spent in getting what he wanted out of every member of his cast shows in the film. Even characters with few or no lines seemed to be living their roles. There is an authenticity about the world of Jacks which is as much to the credit of the minor players as the major ones. On the top, Bob, Harvey, Modesto, and Lon made their varyingly stereotyped roles seem true to life. Even Slim Pickens, cast in the inhuman role of Lon the Deputy, made himself seem real. On the bottom, minor characters like Red, the Flamenco Dancer, Howard Tetley and others moved as if they were part of the world the film created.

A large part of the credit for the magnificent performances which contributed to the great authenticity of Jacks must go to its director. Brando reportedly asked his actors to do nothing that he himself couldn't do; he even showed the flamenco dancer how he wanted her to dance.

As director of Jacks in the studio and on location, Marlon Brando proved himself to be a perfectionist. (see sec. IV) Perfection of the visuals aside, however, Brando's mise-en-scene and manner of cutting are basically those of the typical Hollywood director. Brando tells his story as most Western stories are told. Its stock Hollywood moments include an assortment of two-shots, romantic and dramatic close-ups, and large scale crowd scenes. The high points in the direction are generally moments of action. In the middle range, it has moments of copybook imagery which attain validity. On the bottom, Brando seems to have pacing trouble.

The exposition of the film's opening sequence, which sets the central conflict and theme of revenge is handled quickly and efficiently. Camera movement and functional editing play important roles in this achievement. The introduction to the story is begun before the credits are through. They are superimposed upon a brick wall which is part of the set upon which the film opens, and the camera pans that wall in the direction of the opening action as the credits appear. The movement which follows is to a window framing the story, and then a truck through the window to the bank which is robbed at the outset.

Inside the bank, the camera trucks back from Brando to reveal the robbery. The escape is handled with many traditional long shots, the usual chase cutting from the chasers to the chased being employed effectively in building suspense. The sequence between the initial escape and the chase is an example of parallel editing at its best. The lines are drawn between the two conflicting central characters at the outset. Rio has innate class - he is making it with a hightone Spanish lady, charming in his demure deceit; Dad is

whooping it up at the local whorehouse where you pay for a sure thing. While Rio quietly seduces his woman, we cut abruptly to the Rurales shooting up Sonora.

In the chase sequence the cuts are appropriately fast - the action is speeded up, far faster than real time. The takes slow down for Dad's betrayal and Rio's capture - these are actions upon which the rest of the film dwells. Close-ups are used here: Rio's hands as he and Dad choose bullets for who will ride for horses, Dad's feet when he arrives at the small farm, Dad's face as he decides to abandon Rio. This last action provides a good example of the perfection of Brando's mise-en-scene. As Dad decides to betray his buddy, he is taken in medium shot, his head and shoulders appearing above the fresh mount he has gotten, with the bags of gold, the price of his sell-out, about chest-high on him. He even rubs some of the coins between his fingers as he makes his fateful decision.

Fast dissolves link the action of Rio's capture together, and the five-year jail term transition is handled with a fade to black. When we fade up, titles tell us five years have passed. The escape is covered mostly in long shot, and those that are closer are from above or behind Rio and Modesto. It is clearly the director's intention here that the stylish hero should not be seen clearly while in this shape. A dissolve shows us Rio, now cleaned and shaven and dressed romantically with a red blanket for a cape.

Brando generally handles movements through time and space well. The 2 week ride from Mexico to Monterey is accomplished in only a few appropriate shots - mostly focusing on Rio in order to establish his intense, brooding desire for revenge. The ocean is used beautifully to bridge the transition from night to

day when Rio and Luisa are together on the beach. Brando fades out on the ocean at night and fades in on the sunlit surf with Luisa running into the frame to wet a cloth to wipe his face with. In this shot, she becomes a woman, and the two taken together represent a tasteful handling of what occurred between the two during the night. Brando's suffering after Dad's whipping is handled in a static transition shot in which he lies shaking on a bed; the image presented here is sufficiently powerful to move on from. An example of a particularly effective move in place occurs when the posse captures Rio. The dissolve is from a medium long shot of the posse coming out from hiding to Rio being mobbed in the center of town as he is being taken to jail.

Editing serves to suggest in many instances where the movement from the images presented is only within the bounds of Monterey, there being no transition in time to bridge. An example is the dissolve from Rio's answer to Bob's question about Dad, "I'm gonna' kill him", to Dad himself addressing the townspeople as the fiesta begins. A straight cut which is similar is the one from Dad saying to Rio "I'm gonna hand you, personally", to the scaffold being tested outside. Between the words "you" and "personally" there is an extremely effective cut where Dad tilts his head to deliver the final word. The shot cut moves closer in on him, catching the sadistic glint of his eye and tilt of his head.

Elsewhere in the film the editing is equally functional. In the case of Jacks, the editing is an extension of the directing, Brando having been in charge of both. Half of the film's production time - three years - was devoted to the editing. The cutting in the encounter between Lon and Luisa after she has returned from the beach in the morning creates a maximum of suspense,

focusing on their hands in close-up. The high points in the editing, or directing, are generally those of action - for instance the film's climax. Parallel editing at its best is used during Rio's escape. Rio working frantically to get the gun on the table, Lon hurrying back to the jail, and Dad riding into town with the surf behind him are all intercut to build suspense. In the final shoot-out with Dad, the pacing of the foreplay and the feint neatly emphasizes the final blur of movement in the middle distance as Rio kills him. This shot does more to endow the static position of the villain and the vital energy of the drifting hero with meaning than the two hours of plot which precede it. Without them, though, the shot would mean very little.

Brando's mise-en-scene is often very rich. The framing of his shots, the view he has of his world, reveals much about that world. When Rio walks towards Dad in their first meeting in five years, Dad's apprehension and Rio's strength are seen as Rio walks towards the camera and Dad from a full length medium shot to a close-up of his middle section - the part of his body representing his manliness, through groin and gun. When Bob reveals his plan and Dad's whereabouts with Rio, he seemingly has the upper hand on him. The camera, however, sees things differently. Bob is seen in profile in the foreground, the majority of the frame being with the quiet power of Rio's head and shoulders; he dominates the scene.

The composition of his shots is one of Brando's greatest directorial talents exhibited in Jacks. Another well-framed shot takes Dad towering in the foreground as he is about to browbeat his daughter, seated in the corner of the screen. The film's final sequences exhibits Hollywood mise-en-scene at its best. All the shots

which make up Rio's farewell to Luisa include both of them, emphasizing their unity and love for each other. The film's final shot is a long one of Rio disappearing down the beach with Louisa in the foreground on her horse. This shot reminds us once more of Rio's wandering nature, but also emphasizes the fact that Rio will return for her.

An abundance of close-ups underscore perhaps a bit too heavy-handedly at times the film's dramatic and romantic high points. They are used appropriately when focused on Rio's face, marvelously expressive as it is. After his prison break, an assortment of close-ups reveal the intensity of the revenge he is after - they reveal a new, more quietly determined Rio. Those of Dad are usually appropriate as well. He is taken in extreme close-up as Rio rides towards his house. He is taken looking through the porch railing as though trapped behind bars.

Close shots in the action sequences sometimes go too far. In the case of Rio's hand smashing, the close-up of Dad's gun barrel smashing down is appropriate, but that of the teller's hand reaching for his gun as Bob robs the bank is not called for. The same holds true for the close-up of Luisa's hand with the bullets in it when she tries to help Rio escape, or that of the derringer and the table when Rio is trying to get his hands on them. Brando has a tendency to push too hard at times, but these are relatively infrequent and certainly forgivable.

Brando's direction and editing have a tendency to draw the action out at times, as well. When Bob kills Modesto and heads for Dad's house, four shots are used to get him there where only two were needed. Brando included a picturesque shot with Harvey in the foreground watching Bob ride away down the ocean trail

which was unnecessary. He earlier uses two shots which are redundant and also heavy handed to begin with. These focus on Modesto's gun, lying on a chair near Bob and Harvey. Their purpose is to anticipate Modesto's empty gun when he tries to save himself and Rio, but this forewarning is both unnecessary and almost annoying. The editors reportedly had trouble matching some sequences correctly. An example is the one on the beach where Luisa begs Rio to forget about Dad. He finally takes her hands away from his face, an important action revealing the torture within him, but in the next shot they are back on his face again.

The direction and editing have their faults, their excesses, yet it is these very excesses which make the film a great one. They are the excesses of Marlon Brando, excesses which make Rio the memorable character that he is. Jacks is a testament to his greatness, and his hand is seen as strongly in the screenplay as elsewhere. Since the acting and some of the dialogue was improvise, it is impossible to tell how close Brando stuck to the original, but one suspects that he shaped it to fit his conception of the film. Its language appears to be his language.

Much has already been said about the brutality of the film's language and its visceral imagery. It is clear that Brando stylized both his dialogue and those of the other characters. His use of the Spanish language and the English language spoken by Mexicans is marvelous.

Luisa's lines match her great charm and beauty. Her Mexican accent is particularly in the love scenes between herself and Rio. In these, she says things like: "I will very proud to wear it", meaning the necklace Rio gives her,

"These are not reasons for to kill a man", meaning Dad, and "I am so afraid to losing you". There is a charm to these lines which matches that of herself.

Well written, also, are the patches of Spanish dialogue incorporated into the film. For the viewer who does not understand Spanish, these lines represent something he has missed in the film. The old man who owns the horse farm, the rurales, the people Rio visits to ask about Dad, and Maria and Luisa all speak in Spanish. When the rurales question the old man, he tells them that Dad is "un hombre muy malo", a very bad man". This is something he would not have said about Rio if he had come for horses. When Rio is trying to find out about Dad's whereabouts, he describes him "un hombre con nariz gordo", a man with a fat nose". The comedy of this line is missed by most American viewers.

The Spanish dialogue which occurs between Luisa and her mother is of crucial importance to the plot, yet may not be readily understood by the viewer. She tells her mother that she has slept with Rio, and later that she is going to have his baby, in Spanish. In the latter case, the viewer may not necessarily understand, thus missing the significance of her visit to Rio on the Punta and an essential thread of her character. The use of Spanish in these incidents represents, however, a gesture of tastefulness by the scriptwriters and director. Events which some viewers regard as shockingly immoral are handled with a gentleness and feeling befitting their role in the picture.

The photography in Jacks has been universally praised as some of the best color photography to ever come out of Hollywood. Charles Lang, Jr. has clearly done a striking job with his camera. Some of the credit already given Brando for his mise-en-scene must go to Lang as well. He is a talented and experienced

cameraman and must have aided the beginning director greatly.

The photography is both striking and subtle. The extent to which the beauty of the mountains and ocean has been captured on film is remarkable. Lang was equally the perfectionist in taking the Pacific as Brando was in waiting for its waves to "become dramatic". Also striking was his night photography. The shot of Rio silhouetted against the pitch black night is an unforgettable one. Lang also makes excellent use of focus during the film. Luisa's beauty is enhanced by his soft focus and, at times, accented by an out-of-focus background. This technique is used during the beach scenes, the out-of-focus ocean forming a softened background for the beauty of both Rio's and Luisa's faces. An instance of incredibly subtle camerawork is the shot of Rio shaking on a bed after Dad has whipped him brutally. Brando's face here is made to appear quite differently than anywhere else in the film. The exposure is set very low and the lighting on his face testifies to the great suffering and pain he is enduring. The film's use of color is so beautiful that it has to be seen to be appreciated.

Hugo Friedhofer's music is equally as beautiful. It is at its best when Rio and Luisa are together, the theme he composed for their love being one of the most hauntingly beautiful and touching I have ever heard. It is scored, of course, to the film, recatching its climaxes as the film reaches it. The love theme reaches a high point when Luisa makes the decision to go to Rio after he has just left her. It speaks for Luisa's feelings far more than Rio's as it reaches a high pitch when she puts on the necklace he has given her. The

next morning, however, it becomes as sad and mournful as Luisa herself as she sits at her window gazing out at the ocean. Dramatic stabs are employed occasionally, as when Dad explodes at Luisa that same morning. As he screams "Answer me!", the musical stabs build to a feverish pitch and then the track is absent of all but Luisa's crying. The same thunderous technique is used when Modesto is shot and when we cut from Rio's quiet encounter with the Spanish nobleman to the entrance of the rurales into Sonora.

The guitar is used well, as it should be in a Western. It helps establish the flavor the Mexican bar in which Rio meets Bob. When Luisa tells her mother that "I thought he loved me, but he was lying", in Spanish, after the night with Rio, one mournful guitar plays wistfully in the background.

The sound is of a high technical quality, the recording easily intelligible. The most imaginative use of sound in the film is that which is used off camera. The technique serves to emphasize the significance of what is being said by focusing on someone other than the speaker. An example from early in the film is the camera's focus on Rio as the rurales and the old man who owns the horse farm talk of Dad and the money he paid him. This gold was the price of Dad's betrayal of Rio. When Dad lies to Rio later about this betrayal, the camera is on Rio and his reactions to Dad's lies. What he will do at this point is the viewer's central concern. During the scene where the drunkard is manhandling the prostitute he has spent the night with, the camera spends much of its time on Rio, recording his reactions and the build in his anger as he sits quietly in the corner. The first shot of this sequence is of Rio, with Howard Tetley's insane laughter off screen. When Modesto shouts "Cuidado", to

warn Rio that the man he has just beaten to the ground is about to shoot him, the camera is on Rio to catch his lightening fast reaction. When Rio slugs the innocent stablemaster, we hear it, but don't see it. It is something that had to be done, but nothing to dwell on.

Jacks has been examined in considerable detail. The component parts - meanings, content, characters, acting, direction, editing, screenplay, language, photography, music, and sound - which make up its composite filmic life have been dealt with at length. An overview in terms of its purpose and completion is what is needed to complete this discussion.

Marlon Brando said, "I have the obligation and opportunity...to communicate the things I think are important", through this film. He chose to communicate to the viewer through the genre of the Western, acknowledging the importance of history in our society. He also said, "Our early day heroes were not brave 100% of the time nor were they good 100% of the time." Clearly, Jacks is successful in communicating this conviction of his. Rio is not the hero of the traditional Western. His character has two sides, and both are shown to the audience. It is their choice to like him or not, but they have to agree with Brando that, beneath his stylish mystique, Rio is more real, more human, than the hero of the traditional Western, or the traditional hero, for that matter. History tends to remember only one side of a man, be it good or bad, and this would seem to color our judgment of our fellow contemporary man.

The film to say beware of judging too quickly - there are two sides to every man's face. Its value judgments are intentionally nebulous. Jacks seeks

to communicate these ideas through one man, and this is both its strength and its weakness. It is my opinion, however, that the former far outweighs the latter, but it all comes down to Brando. One must judge the success of the film in terms of the man who made it. Stanley Kaufman has heralded him as, "...the greatest actor of his generation", but Brando is an extremely controversial man, whether actor or man. It seems to me that he must be taken as both at the same time. The roles he plays are himself.

In the final analysis, Jacks is a film with some technical and artistic lapses, but hardly to be quibbled over. It is a remarkable example of Brando creating on the scale of the entire film the excesses and controls which animate him as a hero figure - not as literate, perhaps, and not as aesthetically successful as the works of Orson Welles, but conceived on a similar scale. Brando's purpose was to create a film of broad personal expression, and, in fulfilling that purpose, he was successful.

Jacks creates a world of its own; it is entirely self-contained, and the viewer must learn what he can, not what he wants to, from Brando's world. Brando's vision of the world, as seen in Jacks, has its merits. His expression is at times crude and excessive, yet so is Rio and Brando himself. Brando has said that, "film is not art", but in making One Eyed Jacks he has disproven himself. He needn't feel bad about it.

Title: One Eyed Jacks

Year: 1961

Running Time: 137 minutes

In Technicolor and VistaVision

Credits:

Studio: Paramount

Producer: Frank P. Rosenberg

Director: Marlon Brando

Script Writers: Guy Trosper and Calder Willingham

Cameraman: Charles Lang, Jr.

Editor: Archie Marchek

Composer: Hugo Friedhofer

Cast: Marlon Brando... Johnny Rio

Karl Malden.....Dad Longworth

Pina Pellicer...Luisa Longworth

Katy Jurado.....Maria Longworth

Slim Pickens.....Lon Dedrick

Ben Johnson.....Bob Emory

Larry Duran.....Modesto

Ray Teal.....Bartender

Elisha Cook.....Bank Teller

(Additional Credits):

Cast: Sam Gilman.....Harvey Johnson

Timothy Carey...Howard Tetley

Miriam Cook.....Redhead

Rudolph Acosta..Leader of the Rurales

John Dierkes....Bearded Townsman

Margarita Cordova..Flamenco Dancer

Hank Worden.....Doc

Nina Martinez.....Margarita

(Additional Credits-Continued):

Executive Producers: George Glass and Walter Seltzer

Assistant Directors: Francisco Day and Harry Caplan

Art Directors: Hal Pereira and J. McMillan Johnson

Sound: Hugo and Charles Grenzbach

Second Unit Cameraman: Wallace Kolley

Special Photographic Effects: John P. Fulton

Process Photographer: Farciot Edouart

Title and Author of Work on Which Film Is Based:

The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones (a novel)

by Charles Neider

Awards: None

Synopsis:

After robbing a bank, Rio and Dad Longworth are chased by Mexican troops. Dad abandons Rio after going for horses. Rio spends five years in a Mexican prison and escapes. Rio discovers that Dad is now the Sheriff of Monterey, California, and goes there to avenge himself. He eventually falls in love with Dad's adopted daughter, but is innocently flogged and jailed by Dad. In the end Rio breaks jail, kills Dad, and promises to return for Luisa, the girl he loves.

Comments: "Stirring adventure tale masterfully directed by Marlon Brando. Striking settings and camera work."

....Variety

"One of the most intriguing Westerns ever made... It is high achievement that its beautiful, unobtrusive direction and strong, subtle acting are in perfect harmony from start to finish."

....Newsweek

Comments (Continued):

"...the movie is a slick, professional Western, not as forthright as 'High Noon,' nor as evocative as 'Shane,' but certainly among the best of the type."

...Hollis Alpert, Saturday Review

FILMOGRAPHY

As Director:

One Eyed Jacks (1961)

As Actor (Director in parenthesis):

The Men (1950-Zinneman)

A Streetcar Named Desire (1950-Kazan)

Viva Zapata! (1951-Kazan)

Julius Caesar (1953-Mankiewicz)

The Wild One (1954-Laslo Benedek)

On the Waterfront (1954-Kazan)

Desires (1954-H. Koster)

Guys and Dolls (1955-Mankiewicz)

The Teahouse of the August Moon (1956-Daniel Mann)

Sayonara (1957-J. Logan)

The Young Lions (1958-Edward Dmytryk)

One Eyed Jacks (1961-Also Directed)

The Fugitive Kind (1960-Lumet)

Mutiny on the Bounty (1962-Milestone)

The Ugly American (1963-G. Englund)