

# Movie's Secret Writer May Be Recognized

POST 7/3/91  
Los Angeles Times

HOLLYWOOD—Six years ago, at a ceremony at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, blacklisted screenwriters Michael Wilson and Carl Foreman were posthumously awarded Oscars for "The Bridge on the River Kwai."

It had been an open secret that Pierre Boulle, who accepted the original Oscar in 1958, did not write the screenplay based on his novel. "Everyone knew Boulle couldn't speak English, let alone write it," said Larry Ceplair, co-author of "The Inquisition in Hollywood," a book about the period.

Monday, at Ceplair's instigation, the board of the Writers Guild of America West will vote on another, and perhaps more problematic, posthumous award involving 20th Century Fox's "Broken Arrow." Preceding "Dances With Wolves" by 40 years, it was the first film made by a major studio to treat American Indians sympathetically.

For more than 30 years, its true authorship was known to only a handful of people, according to Ceplair.

Hollywood has been haunted for years whether to set the record straight on dozens of movie and TV scripts surreptitiously written by blacklisted writers of the McCarthy era—and credited to other people.

"Broken Arrow" may be the last major film still officially credited to the wrong writer, according to Ceplair.

Although they are not actively opposing the move, Julian Blaustein, the film's producer, and Dorothy Blankfort, the widow of the man who fronted for the actual screenwriter, are uneasy about dredging up the past. Blankfort "finds it painful to be dancing on her husband's grave," Blaustein said. "I do too."

To Ceplair, however, getting the truth out is vital. "The more rumor that's eliminated from this period—the more people know—the better," he said. "It was an extraordinarily loathsome, cowardly period. And light should be shone into every corner of it."

When "Broken Arrow" opened in 1950, Albert Maltz, the novelist, playwright and Academy Award-winning documentary filmmaker who wrote the screenplay, was not listed in the credits. Along with other members of the so-called Hollywood Ten, he was in prison for refusing to cooperate with

the House Committee on Un-American Activities investigation of communist influence in Hollywood.

Like many other screenwriters of that era, Maltz had to resort to finding someone to front for him when Blaustein asked him to write the screenplay for "Broken Arrow," based on "Blood Brothers," a novel by Elliott Arnold.

After several people turned Maltz down, he approached his close friend, Michael Blankfort, also a screenwriter and novelist. They had known each other for decades and had dedicated novels to each other.

Blankfort agreed to pretend he had written "Broken Arrow." And unlike the character played by Woody Allen in the 1976 movie "The Front," he not only let his name be used for free but also provided the revisions the studio demanded. Blaustein said that he secretly ran Blankfort's changes by Maltz.

"If this [arrangement] had gotten out, it would have killed the careers of both Blankfort and Blaustein," Ceplair said.

Maltz's widow, Esther, agrees. "It was an act of courage and it was an act of friendship," she said.

But the truth remained hidden, and "Broken Arrow," starring Jeff Chandler as the Apache leader Cochise and James Stewart as an American military scout-turned-pro prospector who becomes his trusted friend, was a smashing success and helped to further several careers, including that of Blankfort, who won an award from the Screen Writers Guild, as the Writers Guild was then called. (The movie also inspired a radio serial and television series.)

As a result of the blacklist, Maltz's Hollywood career had ended. After leaving prison, he lived in Mexico for 11 years and did not see "Broken Arrow" until his return to the United States in 1962.

In "Seeing Is Believing," his book about movies of the 1950s, Peter Biskind explained the significance of "Broken Arrow": "From the earliest Westerns on, Indians had been little more than one-dimensional figures, mere savages, rapers of women, scalpers of settlers, the scourge of wagon trains and the Pony Express."

"During the '40s, there appeared a few films more or less sympathetic to Indians, but it was 'Broken Arrow' that forever laid this caricature to rest."

Blaustein and Dorothy Blankfort said that they will not challenge the guild's decision. "Whatever the guild decides is okay with me," said the writer's widow, who was unwilling to discuss the issue further.

Guild spokeswoman Cheryl Rhoden declined comment pending the board vote. But Alfred Levitt, a guild board member who was blacklisted himself, predicted that the posthumous award would be granted. "Speaking for myself as a blacklisted... we've been careful not to hurt people who did us a service," he said. "But where they are either gone or they are willing, it just seems right to set the record straight."