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By Antonia Quirke

Rating: ★★★★★

A thrilling documentary, **Cameraman: The Life and Work of Jack Cardiff**, (4 stars) is playing on and off at the BFI Southbank over the next couple of months. “When did you start in this business, Jack?” asks an interviewer of the then ninety-something cinematographer behind *Black Narcissus* and *The Red Shoes*, who died last year. “I started in 19...er, uhm... 1918 as a kid actor. That’s a long way back isn’t it?” he replies.

Full of useful interviews with fans and colleagues such as Scorsese, Kirk Douglas and Lauren Bacall, the film benefits most from Cardiff’s own good humour and articulacy. He was particularly beloved of actresses for responding sympathetically to their funks and weight fluctuations; on meeting Ava Gardner, he recalls, the first thing she said to him was: “When I get my period, Jack, I don’t look so good.” He also talks about working with Dietrich – who knew better than anyone how she ought to be photographed. “Yes, she sprinkled gold dust in her hair,” says Cardiff, his age-spotted hands imitating the motion.

Others, of course, weren’t quite so bothered about looking luminous. “Jack, don’t light me to look like a goddam fag,” wheezed Bogart on the deep-jungle set of *The African Queen* in 1950, one of only two people at that moment not to be struck down with water-borne infections because he was living on neat whiskey. Cut to Bacall rolling her eyes.