



RESEARCHING WOMEN IN SILENT CINEMA

NEW FINDINGS AND PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY MONICA DALL'ASTA, VICTORIA DUCKETT, LUCIA TRALLI

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ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



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Women and Screen Cultures is a series of experimental digital books aimed to promote research and knowledge on the contribution of women to the cultural history of screen media. Published by the Department of the Arts at the University of Bologna, it is issued under the conditions of both open publishing and blind peer review. It will host collections, monographs, translations of open source archive materials, illustrated volumes, transcripts of conferences, and more. Proposals are welcomed for both disciplinary and multi-disciplinary contributions in the fields of film history and theory, television and media studies, visual studies, photography and new media.



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Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives

Edited by: Monica Dall'Asta, Victoria Duckett, Lucia Tralli

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Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives

Peer Review Statement

This publication has been edited through a blind peer review process. Papers from the Sixth Women and the Silent Screen Conference (University of Bologna, 2010), a biennial event sponsored by Women and Film History International, were read by the editors and then submitted to at least one anonymous reviewer. When the opinion of the first reader was entirely negative or asked for substantial revision, the essay was submitted to a second anonymous reviewer. In case of a second negative opinion the essay was rejected. When further changes were deemed necessary for publication, the editors worked extensively with the authors to meet the requests advanced by the reviewers.

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Monica Dall'Asta is Associate Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Bologna, Italy. She is the author of the award winning book *Trame spezzate. Archeologia del film seriale* (2008) She edited a new Italian translation of Alice Guy's Memoires (*Memorie di una pioniera del cinema*, 2008) and the first collection on women filmmaking in Italian silent cinema (*Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema italiano*, 2008).

Victoria Duckett teaches film history in the Centre for Ideas, Victorian College of the Arts. She has held posts in the University of Manchester (Department of Drama) and the Università Cattolica, Milan (Department of Communication and Performing Arts). She has published broadly in early cinema, has programmed films for Cinema Ritrovato, Bologna, and been involved in Women and the Silent Screen since its founding in Utrecht, 1999. She is currently completing a book that explores Sarah Bernhardt and early film (*History Fed By Fiction: Sarah Bernhardt and Silent Film*, University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

Lucia Tralli is a Ph.D. Candidate in Film and Media Studies at the University of Bologna. Her main research focus is the re-use of media images in audiovisual productions. She received her MA in 2009 with a thesis about the practice of found footage and the work of two contemporary women filmmakers, Alina Marazzi and Cécile Fontaine. She is now writing her thesis on contemporary forms of audiovisual remixes, focusing especially on fan vidding and gender related issues in remix practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Monica Dall'Asta and Victoria Duckett

**Kaleidoscope: Women and Cinematic Change
from the Silent Era to Now**

A Collective Endeavor

This volume is a partial account of the more than one hundred papers that were presented at the sixth Women and the Silent Screen conference, held in Bologna in 2010. Less than one third of the papers delivered on that occasion did find their way in this publication. This reduction is obviously due to the need to keep the editorial work within a manageable scale, as well as to the wish to offer, with the help of an efficient peer review selection process, some of the best samples of the recent international research in feminist film historiography. Yet these are not the only reasons. As with previous conferences, several more contributions that were first presented in Bologna are being developed by their authors into different publication projects. So in a way, what is missing from this publication is as significant of the richness and vitality of our present collective research as the papers we have collected.

We cannot speak of our community without acknowledging the hard work and effort that has helped to open a new research field, which is now approaching an unprecedented stage of maturity. Beginning with the work of Annette Förster and Eva Warth in Utrecht 1999, Women and the Silent Screen has brought feminist film historians together for fourteen years. The conference was hosted in 2001 by Shelley Stamp and Amelie Hastie at the the University of Santa Cruz; in 2004 by Rosanna Maule and Catherine Russell at the University of Montreal; in 2006 by Joanne Hershfield and Patricia Torres San Martín at the University of Guadalajara; and in 2008 by Astrid Söderbergh and Sofia Bull at the University of Stockholm. While we are working to finalize, with the invaluable help of Lucia Tralli, the editorial work on this collection from the 2010 conference, organized in Bologna by Monica Dall'Asta and Cristina Jandelli, a new WSS event is scheduled in Melbourne (October 2013), hosted by Victoria Duckett and Jeanette Hoorn.

Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives emerges in dialogue not only with previous conferences but with their related publications as well.¹ That we can today issue this volume, supported by a board of referees who have willingly and generously given their time and expertise, is testimony to the collegiality and community that WSS has fostered. We might articulate quite different interests, methods, and projects, but we certainly stand up together in support of our shared endeavors. Our referees—Richard Abel, Kay Armatage, Janet Bergstrom, Giorgio Bertellini, Elaine Burrows, Vicki Callahan, Sumiko

¹ These include Bull and Söderbergh; Hastie and Stamp; Maule; Maule and Russell; Bean and Negra.

Higashi, Sabine Lenk, Jill Matthews, David Mayer, Giuliana Muscio, Jacqueline Reich, Masha Salazkina, Matthew Solomon, Shelley Stamp, Virginia Wexman—deserve particular thanks for this.

In *Researching Women in Silent Cinema* you will find junior scholars writing alongside established Professors, people who transmit the excitement they discover in doing feminist film history, and those who reflect on it after decades of research. In this context, the three invited articles that punctuate the anthology—Heide Schlüpmann’s “An Alliance Between History and Theory,” Christine Gledhill’s “An Ephemeral History: Women and Film Culture in the Silent Years,” and Jane Gaines’ “Wordlessness (to be Continued)” —give a sense of what it means to write feminist film history from within the history of its development. Each of these scholars reflect not only on the wide variety of documentary materials involved in the historiographical research on film (the films themselves, the trade and fan press, different types of visual and paper archives, including the internet, and so on), but on the conceptual boundaries that still need to be deciphered, challenged and developed in women’s film history today.

Used as prefaces to the three sections that form the volume (“Historical Images,” “Women and the Cultural Discourse on Film,” “Gender on Stage”), each of these three articles reminds us of the need to join the history of women’s film to the process of its theoretical reflection. While the papers that follow each keynote are joined to in loose thematic terms, we wish to emphasize that these are not commissioned essays. Our organization of material was made *a posteriori*. It is not proposed as a fixed guide. This may be obvious for our readers; we wish to remind it only to reiterate the flexible nature of our shared endeavor.

Three Essays on Indeterminacy, Fluidity, and Difference

All of our three keynote articles are especially focused on the 1910s, sometimes moving discussion into the 1920s. In Schlüpmann’s opening essay, we return to what (following Eric de Kuyper) she calls the cinema’s “second era.” Schlüpmann argues that in this transitional period, located between the cinema of attractions and narrative cinema proper, an important paradigm that deserves more attention is represented by the home (or, more precisely, by Simmel’s paradigm of the *Haus*). Rather than see this as a site of enclosure and entrapment for women, Schlüpmann suggests that the *Haus* is a fragmentary site of perceptual play, whose form and function meets its technical realization in film. In arguing for a perceptual overlap between the public and private, the institutional and the personal, film and perception, as well as the theater and the home, Schlüpmann frees us from the strictures of traditional models of history. The house, the female spectator, the cinema theater, and the film actress herself are together enmeshed in a historical and theoretical paradigm that takes playful perception as we recognize it as the route to a feminist emancipation we can all identify with and enjoy today.

In “An Ephemeral History: Women and British Cinema Culture in the Silent Era,” Christine Gledhill also returns to questions of perception, albeit in a different way. Gledhill uses the British trade, news and fan press of the 1910s and 1920s to challenge “fixed ideological meanings as the goal of film analysis and fixed social identities as the focus of spectator response.” It is indeterminacy, fluidity, and discursivity that drive analysis and that indicate her critical and conceptual overlaps with the observations of Schlüpmann. In a sense, she provides a historiographical model for the theory that Schlüpmann has put into place: Gledhill’s subtitles preface insightful vignettes that illustrate the “playful” and changing ways in which the British press allows us to rethink the relationships between gender, feminism, and the silent cinema. What Gledhill makes manifest in her essay is the importance of film as an intermediary in the path for social change.

Jane Gaines explores what she calls “wordless mimesis” in her article on physical expression in early film. Like Schlüpmann and Gledhill, her focus is on the “second era” of film history. Gaines focuses on that period of transition when Asta Nielsen (who is also Schlüpmann’s paradigmatic example of the actress) gained fame in narrative cinema. Nielsen achieved global notoriety because of the nuance and depth of her gestural expression; it was her body that conveyed even the slightest intonation. Using Marc Bloch as the impetus for this discussion of “wordless mimesis” in much the same way that Schlüpmann uses Simmel’s *Haus* to construct an alternate way to conceive of women’s contribution to early film, Gaines argues that the traditional centrality accorded to language (the word) in film studies has prevented a thorough understanding of both the female agency on screen and our own agency as spectators. Critiquing the cinema-as-language analogy, she contends that wordless mimesis is not “the antithesis of erudite and cultivated speech” but a conceptual tool that is necessary to our intelligence of film history today. Citing Schlüpmann (in *The Uncanny Gaze: The Drama of Early German Cinema*), Gaines claims that feminists must explore “the involuntary and graspable” (light, color, movement), that is the fluidity and indeterminacy, which represent the unique aspects of film expression.

The intersections and overlaps between these three essays is certainly tied to the temporal period they explore. Yet the authors also make reference (implicit or explicit) to each other’s work in theoretical terms. Moreover, each author has rethought women’s contribution to early film through the lens of a key male thinker: Simmel is invoked in Schlüpmann’s text, Raymond Williams and Bakhtin in Gledhill’s, and Bloch in Gaines’. Developing new feminist ideas, concepts, and paradigms that are not necessarily integral to these scholars’ original thought or aims, Schlüpmann, Gledhill and Gaines each demonstrate how we can use and develop ideas of a given period without denying the originality of our own. Gledhill puts this point succinctly when she states that “what the historical snapshot registers is not comprehensive explanation or fact but a way of engaging with the acculturated gender imaginaries of the past in order to repose our own questions.”



Unknown amateur camera operator.

Touring the World

Schlüpmann, Gledhill and Gaines's research is both national and global: comprehensive critical paradigms are offered that are then discussed in terms of their national specificity. So, too, with the papers included in our three sections. Each confirm our expanding awareness of nationhood, pushing discussion into a number of regions and cinematic practices that Western film historiography has traditionally neglected. We read with interest the work of Qin Xiqing, "Pearl White and the New Female Image in Chinese Early Silent Cinema," who argues that Chinese culture not only absorbed the American serial queens of the 1910s and early 1920s, but produced its own films that took Pearl White as an inspiration and a model for a new female image on screen. In Donna Casella's "Women and Nationalism in Indigenous Irish Filmmaking of the Silent Period," we are instead reminded that national cinemas may provide us with false records: active in the struggle for self-determination in Ireland, women have been removed from the films celebrating the national history they helped to forge. Mark Garrett Cooper explores not just a marginalized genre of film (the amateur travelogs film), but a pair of sisters whose films were first shot on a 1922-23 round-the-world steamship package tour. In his article "Archive, Theater, Ship: The Phelps Sisters Film the World," Cooper cleverly raises questions about the archive, history, film and travel, positing these women as producers of a heterotopian archive that we can unpack today.

From National Cinemas to Comparative Histories

National cinemas do not only expose women's global contribution to film, they also expose the composite nature of women's engagement with film. We read about national cinemas, yet in fact we learn about an array of other subjects. There is the birth control campaign in the United States (Martin F. Norden's "Alice Guy Blaché, Rose Pastor Stokes, and the Birth Control Film That Never Was" and Veronica Pravadelli's "Lois Weber's Uneasy Progressive Politics: The Articulation of Class and Gender in *Where Are My Children?*"), immigration control in America (Mark Lynn Anderson "Her Reputation Precedes Her, or the Impossible Films of Vera, Countess of Cathcart"), the feminist movement in Russia (Dunja Dogo, "The Image of a Revolutionist: Vera Figner in *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*"), Third Reich propaganda in Germany (Margaret Hennefeld, "The Politics of Hyper-Visibility in Leni Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light*"), the condition of women workers in Italy (Federico Pierotti, "Coloring the Figures. Women's Labor in the Early Italian Film Industry"), the impact of the Great War on women in British comedy film (Laraine Porter, "A Lass and a Lack? Women in British Silent Comedy") and a discussion of the connections between cinema's history and urban development in Brazil (Luciana Corrêa de Araújo's "Movie Prologues: Cinema, Theater and Female Types on Stage at Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro").

We tour the world and we tour women's changing relationship to film. It's an exciting journey that also provides us with insights in different comparative histories. These include



First Lady Helen Taft, behind the camera, with silent movie star May Allison, around 1910.
Bain News Service, Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.

the comparison between British actress Elsa Lanchester and Russian actress Alexandra Khokhlova in Amy Sargeant's "However Odd—Elsa Lanchester!" Other articles compare the history of cinema to national history (Casella), to media history (Mary Desjardins, "Fading Stars and the Ruined Commodity form: Star Discourses of Loss in Fan Magazines, 1914-29"), to the history of opera (Elena Mosconi, "Silent Singers: The Legacy of Opera and Female Stars in Early Italian Cinema"), and to the history of intermedial exchange (Victoria Duckett, "The 'Voix d'or' on Silent Film: The Case of Sarah Bernhardt"). In Annette Förster's "A Pendulum of Performances: Asta Nielsen on Stage and Screen," comparison instead gives way to exchange: we learn that Asta Nielsen's stage performances impacted her screen acting just as her screen acting later motivated her return to the live stage. Implicating two traditionally separate histories in each other's development, Förster suggests that by the late 1920s we can establish not just the impact that the theatrical actress had on the screen, but the influence that film acting had on gestures and live performances.

Just as the essays in this collection emerge from different national and comparative histories, so too do they make it clear that we are dealing, in one way or another, with the same sense of historical indeterminacy that weaves its way through the work of our three invited essays. For some scholars, it is the awareness of an indeterminate gap that motivates historical research itself. “How exactly has this process of disappearance and oblivion taken place?” asks Ansje Beusekom, exploring the undocumented career of Dutch film critic Elisabeth de Roos (“Getting Forgotten: Film Critic Elisabeth de Roos and Dutch Culture before World War II”). Faced with the historic absence of de Roos, Beusekom begins to write her back into history, using in her task the biographies of de Roos’s better documented male companion (Eddy du Perron) and friends (Menno ter Braak). In a similar manner, Luca Mazzei investigates the absence of the female cinephile in models of early film spectatorship. Rediscovering the unrecognized, yet extremely brilliant work of Angelina Buracci, a young Italian feminist pedagogue, he writes the female cinephile back into early Italian film history. In Kristen Anderson Wagner’s paper, “Silent Comediennes and ‘The Tragedy of Being Funny,’” the awareness of film history’s indeterminate nature is illustrated through the figure of the comedienne. Challenging traditional definitions of femininity, Wagner exposes the contradictions and complexities that surround women’s performance of comedy in early silent film. In Anne Morey’s “School of Scandal: Alice Duer Miller, Scandal, and the New Woman,” we are introduced to a female author who used scandal as a liberatory and feminist tool. Morey demonstrates that women’s erotic freedom and self-knowledge can be unearthed through narratives that have indeterminacy written strategically into them. Finally, in Claus Tieber’s “Mary Pickford as written by Frances Marion” we are reminded that Pickford is “a composite of the multiple identities she assumed both on and off the screen.” It is the fluidity of her characters and identities on screen that confirm her indeterminacy and, through this, her “modernity.”

Mixing Materials

The range of resources used to explore women’s film histories indicate another way in which we might speak of indeterminacy. Our articles harness a rich variety of materials in their analyses: we encounter home movies, letters, advertisements, early sound recordings, oral histories as well as digital files. For instance, Joanna Schmertz, in “The Leatrice Joy Bob: *The Clinging Vine* and Gender’s Cutting Edge,” examines the stage to screen transition of *The Clinging Vine* using archival research, interview transcripts and notes from Kevin Brownlow’s *Hollywood* television series, conversations with actress Leatrice Joy’s daughter, as well as resources from the Leatrice Joy Gilbert Fountain. In Victoria Paranyuk’s “Riding Horses, Writing Stories: Josephine Rector’s Career at Western Essanay” we learn about three years of Rector’s career in the motion picture industry as both a scenario writer and an

actress through contemporary newspaper accounts, trade press, fan magazines and other types of material related to the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company and the figures Rector was closely affiliated with. Finally, Anke Browsers's "If It Worked for Mary... Mary Pickford's 'Daily Talks' with the Fans" concentrates on just two years of Pickford's newspaper column. Browsers expands her argument to include nineteenth century discourses and rhetorical traditions, such as those represented by conduct books and sentimental Victorian literature. She indicates that the relationship between a film star and her fans was impacted by sources that we would not habitually associate with the emergence of film.



THE PATHÉ COLOUR MACHINE-PRINTING ROOM.

Women workers at Pathé Color printing room.

Conclusion: Towards an Alliance Between History and Theory

Schlüpmann's alliance between history and theory is at once modest and ambitious. On the one hand, she is focusing on German bourgeois society at the opening of the twentieth century, she is speaking to the films of Asta Nielsen, and she is discussing spaces and things we all presume to know: the home, the cinema theater, our own response as women to images on screen. On the other hand, and more poignantly, Schlüpmann is challenging perception itself. She is asking that we reconsider the way we see silent film, play with it, realize it, both as a history and (above all) as a way of being in the world. As she explains, the coincidence between the emergence of narrative cinema, the female actress on screen, and our own agency as women who negotiate public and private spaces, can not be taken for granted.

At the same time, the investigation into the second *époque* of film history that constitutes the subject of so many papers in this collection still provides powerful hints for us to interrogate our own place in "doing women's film history."² This point needs to be emphasized, since the transitional years of silent cinema have traditionally been seen as an undefined, or again, indeterminate period toward the development of cinema proper. However, this is also a time when women's agency appears more visible both on and off screen, as many papers published under "Historical Images" make especially clear. This is certainly the reason why in *Researching Women in Silent Cinema* this period emerges as such a rich ground of inquiry, which extends in each and every direction, and even as our crucial theoretical and historical resting point. As Jennifer Bean has already indicated, our research into these years, and our shared refusal "to toe the 1917 line" as the breaking point between early cinema and cinematic classicism, is causing some trouble into the established paradigms of silent film history (Bean 8).

However, there is another major reason why we all seem to recognize the 1910s as such an important moment for women's film historiography. This is the time that saw the rise of our collective emancipation, yet it contains within it our collective conservatism. Our challenge today is to join both histories in discussion and research. Can we do this? Authors have proposed tentative paths forward, indicating that the sources we read are implicated in this process of re-thinking history and our place in it. We would do well to remember this, particularly when we watch early film. It is the history of cinematic practice, and not only the discourse it devolved, that saw our emancipation. The indeterminacy that so many of us exhibit in our articles is (perhaps) evidence of this. That is, indeterminacy, fluidity, and contingency might just be other ways of expressing our historical emancipation.

² To quote the title of a forthcoming publication edited by Christine Gledhill's and Julia Knight, offering papers presented at the *Doing Women's Film History* conference held at the University of Sunderland, UK, in 2011.

THE AUTHORS:

Monica Dall'Asta is Associate Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Bologna, Italy. She is the author of the award winning book *Trame spezzate. Archeologia del film seriale* [shattered plots. archeology of serial film] (2008) She edited a new Italian translation of Alice Guy's *Memoires (Memorie di una pioniera del cinema* [memoirs of a cinema pioneer], 2008) and the first collection on women filmmaking in Italian silent cinema (*Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema italiano* [not just divas: Italian silent cinema pioneers], 2008).

Victoria Duckett teaches film history in the Centre for Ideas, Victorian College of the Arts. She has held posts in the University of Manchester (Department of Drama) and the Università Cattolica, Milan (Department of Communication and Performing Arts). She has published broadly in early cinema, has programmed films for *Cinema Ritrovato*, Bologna, and been involved in Women and the Silent Screen since its founding in Utrecht, 1999. Research interests include feminist historiography, film's relationship to the other arts, and performance on film. She is currently completing a book that explores Sarah Bernhardt and early film (*History Fed By Fiction: Sarah Bernhardt and Silent Film*, University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

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PROLOGUE TO PART I

Heide Schlüpmann

An Alliance Between History and Theory¹

ABSTRACT: The rediscovery of the early cinema in the 1980s brought about a change in film historiography that the women's movement had in essence already proposed in the 1970s. At the time, at issue here were not only women directors, forgotten by film historiography, but also the varied and primarily anonymous group of women working in the realms that classical film history did not register: those working in film laboratories, in film coloring, as film editors, on the screenplay and (not least) as actresses, something that is not identical with the function of stars, shaped by men. Using the figure of the actress (and Asta Nielsen in particular) and concentrating on the cinema of the *seconde époque*, this paper explores women's liberation from male domination. It argues that the actress places the reality of perceptual play in a public space. Thanks to her, a form of communal life that the women formed in and with the home is freed from the walls of the private.

How New is the New Film History?

The rediscovery of the early cinema in the 1980s brought about a change in film historiography that the women's movement had in essence already proposed in the 1970s. At the time, at issue here were not only women directors, forgotten by film historiography, but also the varied and primarily anonymous group of women working in the realms that classical film history did not register: those working in film laboratories, in film coloring, as film editors, on the screenplay and (not least) as actresses, something that is not identical with the function of stars, shaped by men. But most of all, this was about the audience: it was about film reception by a nameless mass of women in relationship to a production process where named men held the reins. The other film historiography proposed at the time today appears to find itself subsumed in the new film history, for it, too, expands the limited scope of film history beyond works and directors, stars and producers. All the same, it is clearly still necessary to hold sessions on "women and the silent screen."

An Alliance of Theory with History: Which Theory?

The new film history wants to do more than expand the former field of film history. The discovery of the early cinema has changed our notion of what film and what cinema is. In particular, it has led to an awareness of the link between theory and history and "historicizing" theory. This close link between theory and history, the alliance that developed in the course of new film history, is emphasized as one of its main characteristics by Gaudréault in his book *Cinéma et attraction: pour une nouvelle histoire du cinématographe* [cinema of

¹ English translation by Brian Currid.

attractions: a new history of cinema].

But the alliance with feminist theory plays no role here, nor is it to be found in Thomas Elsaesser's exploration of a new film history.

In contrast, both speak of how 1970s theories critical of Hollywood—such as those of Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean-Louis Baudry (“Ideological Effects of the Cinematic Apparatus”; “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches”)—contributed decisively to the new focus on the otherness of the early cinema. In this account, it was with their support that the new film history began. In contrast, no mention is made of feminist theorists such as Laura Mulvey or Claire Johnston. Nor is mention made of the works of Judith Mayne or Miriam Hansen (*Babel and Babylon*) from the 1980s. Of course these women equally contributed to the discovery of and research on this early, other cinema.

Conversely, under the influence of historical discoveries, theory—including feminist theory—has also changed. The old psychoanalytic, semiotic, or apparatus paradigms of film studies were replaced by thinking about and conceptualizing film in historical dimensions. Here in particular, the new film history must respond to the question of which history is given attention.

Those who propose a view of the early cinema as a cinema of attractions almost always tended to limit this cinema to the cinema before 1907, seeing everything that follows as already part of the transition process to narrative Hollywood film. This view was also adopted by and large by feminist film research. However, it is problematic. This becomes clearer when Gaudréault in his recent book takes up a theoretical reconstitution of the early cinema's historiography. For here, a zone of transition is eliminated in favor of a dichotomy. This creates a division between a period of the cinematographic without cinema and a film history dominated by the institution of the cinema.

But the phase of transition is quite interesting from a feminist perspective. It was here that women increasingly found their way to film and the cinema, both as actresses and as a mass audience. In her introduction to *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, Jennifer Bean is far from puristic temporal demarcations or a dichotomizing film history, finding that the “early cinema,” when used as a feminist critical category and not just as a means of periodization, can open the door for research even beyond the 1910s. As she explains, early cinema becomes “more or less coextensive” (Bean 8)² with the silent cinema. And the transition, the multiple transitions, in a given period of time thus become the actual object of research for early cinema.

The Intermediate

In contrast to a dichotomous thinking about a theory of the early cinema, I would like to

² See also: “it is clear, that contemporary feminism has much to gain by troubling the period break between early cinema and cinematic classicism, by refusing to toe the 1917 line” (Bean 8).

take a position for the “intermediate,” a time between the “cinema of attractions” and the silent film of the 1920s. This allows us to ground the critical category of the early cinema once again in historical terms. Here, I am adopting Eric de Kuyper’s suggested periodization. He proposes alongside the *cinema du premier temps* [early cinema] a *cinema de la seconde époque* [a second era cinema] that encompasses the 1910s. This allows us to focus on a phase between the “cinema of attractions” and the narrative cinema, even that of the silent film. I would like to call it the *époque* of the “Spielfilmkino”—which is not “feature film cinema,” but the then used notion “photoplay” comes near to it—and present a few theoretical considerations about it. My thoughts developed—as you will see—in particular from my work on the films of Asta Nielsen. Abstracting from this research implies that Nielsen is only a mirror of the cinema of the 1910s, a special phenomenon in which its emanations are bundled and reflected.

Discoveries in film history and their theorization are—at least if they successfully establish themselves—always shaped by contemporary interests. The cinema of attractions corresponded to the popularity of the blockbuster spectacle and film studies’ interest in them. Gaudréault’s more recent distinction between a film before cinema and cinema film also finds an echo in the current trend that film is increasingly leaving the cinema, diversifying in terms of media and space. The interest in the “intermediate phase” of film history, in turn, the phase of the formation of cinema, corresponds to current efforts to preserve the cohesion of film with cinema and in so doing to emphasize its non-identity with the institution formed by economic and power interests.

Cinema Theory

For me—and not only for me—the discovery of the early cinema provided an impulse to move from the theory of film to a theory of the cinema. In so doing, feminism’s 1970s critique of the Hollywood cinema seemed a strong motivation. The more I concerned myself with the cinema of the 1910s in Wilhelminian Germany, in its films, and also in the beginnings or prior forms of film critique or theory, the more it became clear to me that women constitutively participated in the emergence of the cinema. As subjects. It was also clear that this participation found no echo in the press—or if it did, it was a negative one. The prehistory of film theory contains a repression. It manifested itself later as abstraction (of film) from the cinema and from the mass audience. Recalling the division between the audience and the public of the press demanded a revision of the history of theory in terms of a theory of the cinema. For cinema theorists, the cinema could no longer be subsumed under the theoretical concept of a public institution. From my own experience, and with an eye on the 1910s, it proved to be an intermediate factor, a mediation between publicity and intimacy. There is, I would like to argue, a movement of emancipation concealed here.

Paradigms and the Paradigm of the "Haus"

I picked up Gaudréault's *Pour une nouvelle histoire du cinématographe* with great interest, in the hope of finding theoretical approaches, reflections on a film and cinema historiography that take the special characteristics of early cinema as their starting point. On the one hand disappointed, it also inspired me to present my own view of the matter. One such inspiration was his reference to cultural paradigms and series. Gaudréault subsumes the early cinema in the paradigm of the stage spectacle, and accordingly places it in the series variety, circus, shadow play, pantomime, etc. For later film history, the paradigm of the *cinéma institutionnel* [institutional cinema] applies. It is apparent that here only public cultural phenomena are considered paradigmatic.

I would suggest considering the paradigm of a culture of the private and the intimate when looking at the cinema of the "second era." Adopting a concept that was then contemporary, it could be called the paradigm of the "Haus," the (bourgeois) home. In the early twentieth century, Georg Simmel was concerned with the question of female culture, inspired by the women's movement and the two emancipated women close to him. He recognized that women were indeed capable of all the cultural production that was developed by men and had been dominated by them up until that point. Furthermore, he posed the question of a specifically female culture. He considered two phenomena. The one was the *Haus*, understood as a creation of collective experience, a life sphere and an atmosphere, through which women could gain influence over their husbands (I prefer to use in the following "Haus," because "home" has a slightly different meaning). Simmel saw the other in the actress, something I will return to later.

It seems plausible to conceive of the cinema of the 1910s within the paradigm of the feminine culture of the *Haus*. The cinema buildings, "houses," that emerged at the time were not products of feudalism or the nation-state like the theater, they weren't "people's stages" and they set themselves decisively apart from the sphere of showmen. At issue were spaces run by private male individuals that nevertheless found public interest. These spaces required women to fill them with life, for their mere economic viability. Without a mass female audience, men would not have spent their time in the cinema, or (for many reasons) they would have spent much less time there. There is evidence of how frequently women encouraged men to attend the cinema, and how men were more interested in the female spectators than in the films themselves. In addition, the presence of (bourgeois) women guaranteed the respectability of the location. On the one hand, female cinemagoers were part of the basic arrangement. At the same time, the women on the screen provided the spectator with dreams and fantasies that corresponded to their most intimate desires. This inspired a psychophysical interest in film that did not rely on the spectacular, on attraction.

The significance of the actress for cinema's development in the 1910s characterizes this cinema as a cinema of the *Spielfilm/photoplay*. This can be seen alongside—and in temporal

terms between—both the cinema of attractions and the narrative cinema. For the *Spielfilm* is not just a film genre, but a cinema in which the art of the actress informs the appearance of the cinema itself. For this reason, I will now turn to the actress.

The Actress

The culture of the *Haus* and the art of the actress were closely linked even before the cinema combined them. For Simmel, they are both forms of female culture. The “essence of the art of acting,” he argues, coincides with the “form of the female being” which is the “unrestrained suffusion of the whole personality in artful appearance” (240). In this conception of the *Haus* and the actress, the philosopher of culture subverts the bourgeois subjection of women to the separation between private and public. In the one sphere, they were considered socially recognized women, but in the other—and this is entirely true of the actresses—they were basically considered prostitutes. The cinema continued in practice this theoretical subversion in the concept of a female culture comprising the home and stage, and abolished the separation between private and public. Elsewhere, I have explored this under the term “public intimacy” (Schlupmann, *Öffentliche Intimität* [public intimacy]).

Here I would like to draw attention to the fact that with the subversion of the distinction between private and public, Simmel’s separation between actress and housewife is also subverted. What they share is not a female essence, but rather the cultural and social figure of play. The actress does free herself from public display, she finds herself in the intimate play that she engages in before and with the camera, controlled by no director or author. The woman that goes to the cinema leaves aside the seriousness of the patriarchal, social function of her culture, what remains is also an ability to play. I will go into this capacity in more detail below. First of all, however, the statement that women are productively joined around the cultural and social figure of play is startling on its own accord. Seeing the innermost culture (or core) of the *Haus* in play corresponds neither to then contemporary views nor to more recent feminist research. Does that mean that my attempt at a historiography of the *Spielfilmkino* must in the end do without an alliance with theory?³

All the same, there is a theory in the cinema, a view of society and history that is created in the cinema alone. My exploration of the early cinema, my experience with its films and especially the actress Asta Nielsen bring me to the insight that in play we can find the capacity to create the privacy and intimacy of the *Haus*. Theoretically speaking, this view divorces the *Haus* from the attribution of female identity. The discursive emancipation is preceded by the emancipatory practice of the cinema, the liberation from male domination in that identification with play.

If a piece of history is revealed, if it is made transparent to me by the cinema, conversely a bit of film history is revealed in the context of this socio-historical phenomenon. Cinema

³ The link between “Hausfrau” and cinema is also subject in Klippel.

history and history cannot be separated from one another. In the field of tension between the history of the cinema of the 1910s and gender history, a movement of emancipation takes place. This movement consists not only in the entry of women into male society. It also contains within it the liberation of a context of living, the freeing of a life sphere from its implication in the bourgeois patriarchal household and thus ultimately in the order of capitalist society. The awareness of such emancipation within the women's movement was eroded by the antagonism between the conservatism of female culture and the progressive project of the freedom of female individuals.

In theory formation, the rediscovery of the cinema of the 1910s engendered the separation of feminist film theory and historiography from the concept of female identity and from the interrogation of this concept as well. But where could this next step lead us? Perhaps the reflection on play as a specifically historical phenomenon can take us further.

In the last part of my lecture, I want to explore the issue of play, but without discussing the theory of play to any great extent. Instead, I would like to sketch out the facets of play that found their way into the *Spielfilmkino* from the *Haus* and became visible there.

The Mode of Play

Feminist theory and critique focused on the psychoanalytic concept of scopophilia as well as that of narration. The theory of the cinema of attractions in turn underscored the role of exhibition and display in the "early cinema." All these concepts imply a dichotomous way of thinking. For there is always a separation conceived between the looker and the seen object, between the narrative and the listener or reader, between the showman, the artist, and the spectators, those hungry for sensation. With play, in contrast, a mediation, an intermediate zone seems to me possible that forms the space of the cinema in which film and the audience find their place and where separation, together with the hierarchy that is usually associated with it, has no decisive importance. In contrast, what takes place is an ensemble of play, a playing together, the space of the cinema as a space of play. Its origins, the bourgeois home; its technical prerequisite, film. Its historical realization, the entrance of the actress in film and the female audience into the cinema.

The mode of play with its origins in the home and its becoming public in the actress has several facets.

Child's Play

One of the rare theorists to introduce the term play into the aesthetic of film was Walter Benjamin. He tried to conceive of film not only using the traditional philosophical terms of appearance and perception, but rather with that of play. Miriam Hansen explored this attempt in the original version of the Artwork essay (Benjamin, "L'oeuvre d'art à l'époque de

sa reproduction mécanisée” [the work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility]) in her important article “Room for Play: Benjamins Gamble with Cinema.” In the later versions of the Benjamin essay, this aspect has disappeared—perhaps not least due to the influence of Theodor W. Adorno’s criticism. Benjamin’s sensibility for play as an element of the cinema should be seen alongside his interest in childhood—for example, in his *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*. And Adorno’s mistrust of all forms of regression in mass culture is well documented.

In his lecture “Der Dichter und das Phantasieren” [the poet and fantazising] Sigmund Freud spoke in 1907 about play as a basic human capacity that can only develop in childhood. He saw play as “adapting . . . imagined objects and relations” to the “tangible and visible things of the realm world” (Freud 171). With regret, he states that growing to adulthood no longer allows for this adaption. Imagination is banned to the realm of fantasy and daydreams. It is only in the form of the artwork, that is, divorced from the one who fantasizes as well as from external reality, that it is publicly allowed. But the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal recognized in cinema the possibility to once more return to a relationship to the world surrounding us that we had as children, full of poetry, full of mystery—and for this reason treasured the then-new medium. The cinema rescues play into adult life.

But these writers do not associate the play element of film nor that of child’s play in itself with woman, neither with the actress nor with the housewife. Benjamin had Chaplin in mind, and early Lukács, who—here like Hofmannsthal—attributes a playful quality to film, simply dropping the actress who has just been honored in the pathos of high seriousness of the stage by the wayside when he begins to speak of film.

In so doing—in the experience of these men in particular—it is the bourgeois home, and thus women, that provide room for child’s play by allowing it to take on its specific form. This is possible because women, unlike men, are not equally subject to the censorship of adulthood. Perhaps they can play for their entire lives. On the one hand, they are not considered fully responsible subjects. On the other hand the bourgeois division of labor foresees not only that they provide children with room for play, but also that they form it with them: they occasionally even play together with them, something which the men have neither the time nor the inclination to do. Unlike aesthetically interested film theories, theories of mass culture often linked their object to childhood and femininity. All the same, this association was usually made with an air of superiority and denigration.

Asta Nielsen self-confidently brought the substructure of child’s play in film acting to display. Playing the role of a seventeen year old in *Engelien* (little angel, Urban Gad, 1913), not only did she get her children’s clothing from the attic for the rich uncle from America, but also for the endless desire of the audience, male and female. Nielsen recalls her own childhood behavior from the depths of her physical memory. Visible for us, she adapts the imagination of a living, childlike body to her actual body.



Asta Nielsen in *Englein* (Urban Gad, 1913).

Playing with the Male

The woman at home not only played with her children, she also played with her husband. Behind the Victorian *façade* of prudery, in the nineteenth century a differentiated realm of erotic play often thrived. That Nielsen carried out this play in public was scandalous. But it was also charming for the male spectators, who—as Béla Balázs formulated it in the early 1920s—thought she embodied the “great, complete lexicon of the gestures of sensual love” (139). Other actresses from the 1910s seduced in a more subtle fashion, fitting for the morals of the time.

The Victorian wife undertook play with and for her husband primarily in the furnishing of his home. It was her responsibility to create for her husband and his leisure an atmosphere of shared life that served the pleasure principle rather than the reality principle. Often this was no more than the creation of a surface, a suggestion of such a life. The early films show the dysfunctional spatial arrangements of the bourgeois home, the doilies and opulent curtains, the pictures on the walls, the floral arrangements, and not least the unavoidable divan, the sofa. The bourgeois interiors were in reality a product of the imagination of the woman of the house, and in film they once again become things to play with. This is also true of her clothing, her costume. All these playful aspects are presented in harsh visual contrast to an outer world that is rather sober, shaped by technology and industry. The 1916 scene of *Die Börsenkönigin* (the queen of the stock exchange, Edmund Edel) which shows Nielsen rushing through an industrial compound as “stock market queen” in her snow white, ample gown lined with ermine could be seen as almost emblematic of this.

With the form of child’s play and its extension to playing with the husband, the actress provided the cinema access to a male audience that, like Hofmannstahl or Benjamin, looked back with regret at a lost childhood. But there were also men like Béla Balázs, who saw both the domestic oasis and eroticism getting lost in the present of the twentieth century. It was especially for the male audience that a *Spielfilmkino* saved a disappearing world of the private and the intimate, an individual lifetime and a historical time. In the films of Franz Hofer, made during the First World War—*Weihnachtsglocken* (christmas bells, 1914) or *Kammermusik* (chambermusic, 1916)—this found its incomparable filmic reflection. For the female audience, in contrast, the cinema as a site and an experience signified emancipation or the hope of it. That is: the cinema was also the future, the possibility of other forms of social collectivity.

Play with Perception in Women’s Playing Together

Generally, the female audience is considered naïve in comparison to a male audience, which has a distanced and informed relationship to film. But early *Spielfilm* photoplays show just the opposite. The audience here is able to engage in play with perception that is initiated



Asta Nielsen in *Die Börsenkönigin* (Edmund Edel, 1916).

by the actress. The male spectator instead devotes himself in view of the star to a language of love that he thought lost: for him, the actress becomes the *Hobe Frau* [high lady]. This is like the minnesinger once addressed the lady of his heart, who was in fact a noblewoman. The imagination of the female spectators, in contrast, is coupled with sobriety.

For women—who had been limited for decades, if not centuries to the home—have developed in this confinement a capacity that corresponds to the possibilities of the cinema, the “Lichtspiel”: namely, the ability to play with perception. This capacity becomes a life necessity with the step into modern society and inclusion in the male world of professional and public life. If, seeing with their own eyes, they want to enter a world that was otherwise closed to them, to complete the transition, they initially only have access to playful perception. The social reality that women saw in an external, abstract, and above all only fragmentary way was therefore combined with their imagination in “play.” Their glimpses of the outer world reaffirmed the *Lichtspiel* of female perception.

In 1914–1915, at the start of the war, the film critic Malwine Rennert was surely under the impression of wartime enthusiasm when she spoke of cinemagoers as “Zaungäste des

Lebens,” [sideline guests of life]. In relationship to male society and life within it, the mass of women took a position as “sideline guests” already during peacetime at the start of the twentieth century (217 *passim*). They could only participate in social reality beyond the *Haus* through their husband or other male family members; alternatively, they could observe it from the window or during their limited forays outside. As a rule, they could not participate. In this way, they lacked perception from inside. This not only meant that the reality in which the men lived remained elusive, it also meant above all the separation of external perception from those sensations, feelings, and interests that only could form in living experience and with full awareness. What could the women do but to fantasize about the ultimately ungraspable perceptions of the male world?

Housewives, women of the *Haus*, developed an apparently childish play with their own perception of external reality. The women’s novels of the nineteenth century are considered trivial because they communicate such a playful perception. But in the twentieth century, film brings female readers similar views of the world, ones that are similar to their own views. They are similarly robbed of the sensual and intellectual possibilities of participation. However, the eye of the camera could register much more than was possible for these women with their limited horizons; it expanded their horizon of perception endlessly. This entailed a new challenge for a playful approach. The actress helps to fulfill this.

The actress becomes a mediator between camera takes and the audience’s capacity for play. She overlays documentary views of social surroundings and life within it with her imagination. Using photographic fragments, she thus creates a perception of reality. But she does not seduce the spectator to identify with this perspective. For she presents her way of dealing with an abstract and fragmented perception of the outer world. She knows that she herself is not being registered by the camera, for the camera can only capture the external. But the camera is receptive to the way she makes her playful perception accessible. It is thus possible this play with perception, which appears on screen, becomes something that a female audience, in particular, is able to relate to. Accustomed to abstract and fragmented vision, the female audience accepts the film shots and at the same time reacts to them, imposes their own imagination on to them. In the cinema, this audience forms a space for play. Here, the limitations that the patriarchal home had established between women fall by the wayside. The barrier between them and the outer world have, in turn, been absorbed by the technical abstraction of film shots. This alone would keep the women fixed in their “incomprehensive” gaze and at the same time in constant imaginary production.

But the actress broke this spell. The great significance that she had for the female spectator was that she could create in the midst of a playful appropriation of what is seen a real perception that encompasses all senses, feelings, sensations, and deepest desires: the perception of play on the screen. For the play in which the woman on screen engages is something that the women in the cinema are deeply familiar with: it is part of their actual world. This is suddenly realized in the perception of the female audience. The actress breaks

through the spell of spectatorship and places the reality of play in a public space. Thanks to her, a life sphere, a form of communal life, that the women formed in and with the home is freed from the walls of the private.

This is why the cinema was a site of emancipation. The perception of one of the sideline guests of society could endure here, outlasting their superficial integration in society. Furthermore, the capacity of play liberated itself, which means an approach to reality emerged in which imaginations free themselves from being banned to childhood. It—the capacity of play—becomes aware of its adulthood, and can stand up to male seriousness and the earnestness of capital.

In Conclusion: A Cinema of Transition

In conclusion, I would like to return to my interest in the feminist research on transitions, the time of transition. *Spielfilmkino* is, in many ways, a cinema of transition. But it is a cinema of transition not so much in the sense of an intermediate step between a cinema of attractions and narrative film. It is cinema not as an institution, but as a passage that has become form. Seen historically, it emerged and formed as a moment of women's attempt to step out of private domestic existence into a public, social one. In terms of personal life history, this transition repeated with each visit to the cinema, and once again renewed the perceptive subject that threatened to get lost in the course of social integration.

Within film, play develops an aesthetic of transition. It is not formal, but inseparable from the content. Play recalls the forces of childhood, a phase in human life. It equally forms the familiar, intimate atmosphere of the intermittent, temporary stay of the male. And it represents a perception in transition. That is, the passage from a gaze divided between abstraction and imagination, and real perception. Or vice-versa: play moves through perception to an outer reality that previously remained abstract.

Finally, a lost bourgeois world manifests itself in *Spielfilmkino*, a reality that passed, but at the same time reveals a possible, other social life.

THE AUTHOR: Heide Schlüpmann studied philosophy during the 1960s in Frankfurt on Main. She is Emeritus Professor of Film at Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt, Germany, where she taught from 1991-2008. She is co-editor of the journal *Frauen und Film* [women and film], and the author of *Öffentliche Intimität: Die Theorie im Kino* [public intimacy: theory in the cinema]. She is also co-founder of Kinothek Asta Nielsen. Amongst her publications are: *Unheimlichkeit des Blicks. Das Drama des Frühen deutschen Kinos* (1990), Eng.: *The Uncanny Gaze. The Drama of Early German Cinema*, transl. Inga Pollman, Chicago 2010.

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I.
HISTORICAL IMAGES

Martin F. Norden

**Alice Guy Blaché, Rose Pastor Stokes,
and the Birth Control Film That Never Was**

ABSTRACT: The worldwide popularity of Lois Weber's pro-birth control, anti-abortion film *Where Are My Children?* (1916) prompted many in the movie industry to develop films with similar themes. Prominent among these filmmakers was Alice Guy Blaché, who approached renowned birth-control activist Rose Pastor Stokes about collaborating on such a project. The two women eventually developed a script for a film on birth control tentatively titled *Shall the Parents Decide?* They hoped to finish their film in time for a key event due to occur in the fall of 1916: Margaret Sanger's opening of the first birth-control clinic in America. *Shall the Parents Decide?* was never made, however, and this chapter explores the reasons for its failure. The research materials include Pastor Stokes' unfinished autobiography, Guy Blaché's memoirs, and correspondence between the women and Guy Blaché's representative, Bert Adler. The most important document by far is the unpublished script itself. A fifty-page typewritten affair prepared by Guy Blaché and supplemented by Pastor Stokes' numerous hand-written emendations, the script offers a fascinating glimpse into the women's collaborative process. It gives a clear and detailed account of the film that Guy Blaché had hoped would be, in her words, her "crowning cinema achievement."

As is widely known, the Universal Film Manufacturing Company's biggest hit of 1916 was Lois Weber's pro-birth control, anti-abortion film *Where Are My Children?* It reeled in three million dollars at the box office but cost only about ten thousand dollars to make, and its enormous worldwide popularity prompted many others in the movie industry to develop films with similar themes. Prominent among these film practitioners was writer-director-producer Alice Guy Blaché, then marking her twentieth year in the film business. Like any successful filmmaker, she had learned to bend with the times. When it became clear that the topic of birth control, which had been tentatively explored in such films as *The Miracle of Life* (1915) and *Race Suicide* (1916), had reached exceptionally lucrative proportions in the form of *Where Are My Children?* during the spring and summer of 1916, Guy Blaché decided to enter the fray with her own take on the subject: a proposed film with the working title *Shall the Parents Decide?*

Due to a variety of circumstances, however, the film was never made, and this paper will explore the reasons for its collapse. In the belief that failed film projects—particularly ones associated with high-profile filmmakers—can be just as informative as successful ones, this study examines the various factors that contributed to the project's development and eventual failure: Guy Blaché's collaboration with birth control activist Rose Pastor Stokes, the themes explored in their fifty-page unpublished screenplay, and pressures within the film industry that hastened the project's demise. Fortunately, a wealth of printed materials survives: principally, the script itself and pieces of key correspondence, all of which are available at New York University's Tamiment Library. My hope is that this essay will not only

provide additional insight into the career of one of the most prominent women filmmakers of the time but also shed further light on the film business and its practices during the volatile years of the mid-1910s.

In July 1916, just as the agitation for legalizing birth control information was heading toward a climax in New York City and elsewhere, Alice Guy Blaché and husband Herbert Blaché were contemplating a major change in their business operations. The Blachés' film production company—Solax, based in Fort Lee, New Jersey—had been absorbed into a concern called Popular Plays & Players in late 1914, and though Guy Blaché as PP&P's principal director was able to provide a steady stream of films to such companies as Metro, Pathé, and World for distribution (Tinée; Guy Blaché, *Memoirs* 79), the Blachés soon became unhappy with the new company's distribution agreements. Within a month, the Blachés decided to reduce their involvement with PP&P and return to independent film production under the banner of a company they had formed several years earlier but through which they had not yet produced any films: the U. S. Amusement Corp. (McMahan 186). Their plan now was to develop projects on a film-by-film basis that would meet the needs of their long-time distribution partners—Pathé, Metro, etc.—and any new ones with the understanding that these concerns would provide production funding upfront to the Blachés. Under this new business arrangement, Guy Blaché doubtless believed that she would have little difficulty attracting takers for a proposed film based on a topic then taking the country by storm: birth control.

She realized, however, that she needed a collaborator for such a sensitive and controversial subject. She was uncertain to whom she could turn until a scholarly acquaintance made a suggestion. As Guy Blaché remembered, “One of the Columbia University professors with whom I had kept up friendly relations advised me to visit [Rose Pastor Stokes] of whom people told scandalous tales. Why? . . . ‘Go see her’ [said the professor] ‘she’s an advocate of birth control’” (Guy Blaché, *Memoirs* 88).

Pastor Stokes was an auspicious recommendation, to say the least. Characterized by her biographers Arthur Zipser and Pearl Zipser as a “literary propagandist” (141), she had penned numerous socially minded plays such as *Squaring the Triangle*, *In April*, *A Man of Peace*, *The Saving of Martin Greer*, *Love and Marry*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't*. She was also a socialist who, with no small irony, happened to be married to a millionaire, James Graham Phelps Stokes. Associated with a number of leftist causes, she quickly gained her greatest renown as a birth control agitator.

Pastor Stokes was keenly aware of her unusual and highly contradictory social standing in New York City, and she used it to her advantage. Knowing that well-to-do women had ready access to birth control information but impoverished women did not, she made it one of her missions to reveal to lower-class women the same birth-control information that their wealthy sisters already possessed. “Whether birth control is practiced upon Fifth Avenue or upon Hester Street makes no difference,” she said. “What is good for the uptown

gander is certainly good for the downtown goose” (qtd. in “Told Birth Control Secrets at Dinner to Emma Goldman” 6). She uttered these words on April 20, 1916, during a New York City meeting in support of Emma Goldman shortly before the latter’s trial for having given a speech on birth control. In violation of the law, Pastor Stokes then walked up to each attendee, whispered birth control secrets in her ear, and gave her a slip of paper with additional information. “I am not bidding for arrest,” she said.

I want to do what Emma Goldman did. My being married and now having social standing makes a difference in a way. I want to give out to some women in this, a public audience, the



Rose Pastor Stokes, well-to-do socialist and “literary propagandist” who agreed to work with Alice Guy Blaché on a feature film. Her highly publicized experiences as a birth-control advocate served as the basis for the women’s collaboratively written screenplay.

information I possess. I am not the only one. There are many other women who do that very thing. The courts found it best to quash the indictment against Margaret Sanger and, perhaps, they will find it best to quash the indictment against Emma Goldman. At any rate, we know the courts will have a bigger fight than they ever had before. (qtd. in “Rose Pastor Stokes Is Getting Gay Again” 1)

Rose Pastor Stokes, well-to-do socialist and “literary propagandist” who agreed to work with Alice Guy Blaché on a feature film. Her highly publicized experiences as a birth-control advocate served as the basis for the women’s collaboratively written screenplay.

Pastor Stokes’ provocation only increased. On the evening of May 5, 1916, she spoke at a meeting in Carnegie Hall to welcome back Goldman, who had just been released from the Queens county jail for having given a birth control speech. Pastor Stokes was the very embodiment of defiance. “For the good of the cause, be the penalty what it may, I here frankly offer to give out slips with the forbidden information about birth control,” she proclaimed. “I have been breaking the law right along. I have given this information to whomsoever has written to me for it” (qtd. in “Mrs. Stokes ‘Mobbed’” 2). As a reporter for the International News Service breathlessly noted, Pastor Stokes’ comments and actions caused a near-riot:

Mrs. Rose Pastor Stokes was literally mobbed by an eager crowd in Carnegie Hall tonight when she offered, in defiance of the police, to distribute printed slips bearing a formula for birth control. The audience seemed to rise at her en masse. Those nearest the platform invaded it, and surrounded the speaker. Others tried to approach. Everybody shouted for the slips. In its excitement, the crowd overwhelmed Mrs. Stokes. ... Her hair was pulled and her shirtwaist almost torn off. With great difficulty Mrs. Stokes was finally rescued from her friendly besiegers, and maneuvered through a side door, whence she and her husband gained the street, and boarded a street car. (“Mrs. Stokes ‘Mobbed’” 2)

Such inflammatory events hardly went unnoticed in the film industry. Given the timing of certain situations—the April 16 opening of *Where Are My Children?* at New York City’s Globe Theatre and its immediate and phenomenal box-office success, Pastor Stokes’ comments on April 20, the pandemonium that she caused on May 5—it is hardly surprising that she would become a magnet for moviemakers interested in capitalizing on the hot topic of birth control.

Instantly intrigued by this woman who not only was at the epicenter of the birth control controversy but also had considerable experience as a playwright, Guy Blaché authorized one of her company’s top employees, Bert Adler, to find a way of getting in touch with her. Adler, a one-time theater manager who in June 1916 had been hired as an assistant to her husband Herbert (“Bert Adler with Blache”; “With the Film Men”), was the perfect go-to person for Guy Blaché’s request; he had cultivated an extensive web of business contacts while serving as publicity director for the New Rochelle, New York-based Thanhouser Film

Corp. from 1909 to 1914 and as manager of Universal's studio in Coytesville, New Jersey, starting in June 1915.¹ He knew that Pastor Stokes was among the two hundred-odd people who agreed to examine films on behalf of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, and he contacted Wilton Barrett, the person in charge of coordinating the reviewers, about setting up an introduction with her. Barrett, who had known Adler for years and valued his long and cooperative relationship with the board, agreed to help. In a letter to Pastor Stokes dated July 16, 1916, he wrote that Adler was "anxious to get in touch with you with regard to consulting you about a sociological picture which the company is planning to produce" and that "Madame Blaché who superintends the selection of scenarios and their production for this Company suggested to Mr. Adler that some arrangement might be made for her to meet you and to discuss the possibilities of such a film. Madame Blaché, I understand, is much interested in social phenomena as affording themes for motion pictures and believes that some good propaganda work can be done in this matter" (Barrett).

Her interest piqued, Pastor Stokes quickly agreed to meet with Guy Blaché, who was quite willing to journey from her Fort Lee studio to Stamford, Connecticut, the site of one of Pastor Stokes' homes. Guy Blaché vividly recalled their initial encounter:

Madame Rose Pastor [Stokes] lived in New England in a tiny bungalow.² Dressed in an overall and sandals, her hair loose to the wind, she was working in her garden. "In fact," she told me "I encourage birth control. I have taken work in a factory in order to mingle with women workers. I try to gain their confidence. Have you seen some of the hovels in Brooklyn where many families live in a single room? Where the woman who is always pregnant may lose courage and ask help of an abortionist, who may leave her mutilated for life, if not dying? What I advocate is that a loving couple not fear to unite, taking precautions, so that they may have children when they desire them, and can care for them, and rear them to be healthy. I have discussed this with priests who have encouraged me" (Guy Blaché, *Memoirs* 88).

The two women hit it off and agreed to collaborate, with Adler acting as an intermediary with regard to correspondence. Pastor Stokes shared some birth control literature with Guy Blaché, who, according to their plan, was to complete a scenario draft and then send it to Pastor Stokes soon thereafter. Adler reported to Pastor Stokes in an August 1 letter that Guy Blaché had started working on the scenario that day, and their ensuing correspondence revealed a deep desire on the part of Guy Blaché and Adler to get the script written and the film produced as quickly as possible. They wanted to take advantage of a key event that was due to occur that September: the opening of the first birth control clinic in the United States. Margaret Sanger's plan to establish such a clinic in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn was the country's biggest open secret at the time, and Guy Blaché and Adler were convinced

¹ Adler's career as publicity director for the Thanouser, Princess, Majestic, and Apollo Mutual film brands is observed in Grau 326–27; "Film Flashes"; "In the Busy World of the Movies."

² Guy Blaché was being facetious in her description of the Stokes home; the place was a mansion set on a private island.

that their company's film would greatly benefit from the huge publicity that was certain to accompany that event.

Adler was nervous about word getting out about the proposed project. "Undoubtedly if it got forth that this concern was contemplating such a film, by Madame and yourself, other [motion picture] concerns would 'beat us to it!'" he wrote to Pastor Stokes in a letter dated August 1, 1916. "Would also ask that inasmuch as this scenario is by Madame *and you*, that you would not endorse any similar *film* plays – if any *were* launched. That might take away from this effort of your's and Madame's. But I do not look for any similar film plays if we all of us hold the work preparation 'quiet'" [emphasis in original text]. He also emphasized speed. In a follow-up letter dated August 3, he pushed Pastor Stokes to set aside her other work (she was then correcting the proofs for her first published play, *The Woman Who Wouldn't*)³ and devote all her energies to the scenario "since it *does* seem best to have the photoplay ready by September," he wrote.

Despite the best intentions of all concerned, however, the birth control project was delayed. Illness along with the press of other film projects forced Guy Blaché to diminish her progress on the script, and in the interim Pastor Stokes began developing her own scenario. Guy Blaché would then meet with Pastor Stokes again as soon as her health and schedule allowed to compare their drafts.

In late September 1916, Pastor Stokes proudly announced her debut as a screenwriter. "I have just completed for a [New Jersey] company a scenario, which deals with social reform," said she. Asked by a wire-service reporter to elaborate on her scenario's birth-control subject, she was blunt: "We have failed to think as much of the breeding of the human race as we do of cattle; therefore, the human race is a failure" (qtd. in "Use Movie Shows to Aid Campaign for Birth Control" n. pag.).

Pastor Stokes, Guy Blaché, and Adler were relieved when Margaret Sanger had to delay the opening of her long-planned birth control clinic until sometime in October. That gave them a few extra weeks, but the self-imposed pressure of completing their film and getting it into movie theaters as soon as possible was still on. In a letter dated October 6, 1916—only days before Sanger opened her birth control clinic in Brooklyn—Adler wrote to Pastor Stokes that Guy Blaché, who was still ill, "realizes the value of quick work—both scenario and production—so [that] the final picture [can] be ready when B-C is agitating this Fall"—in other words, when Sanger opened her clinic.

More delays ensued, with Guy Blaché's illness extending well into October. Finally up and about later that month, she was still plugging away at a script. In a letter to Pastor Stokes dated October 27, 1916—eleven days after Sanger opened her clinic and only a day or so after police shut it down and arrested her—Guy Blaché wrote that "I am working now and hope to be able to see you next week with my version" of the script. She also returned Pastor

³ Pastor Stokes' book was published in November 1916. A reviewer for the Pittsburgh-based *Jewish Criterion* praised *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, calling it "a tense, terse little play, with motherhood rights and social and industrial limitations for its basis." See "Two Notable Women Write Brilliant Tales."



Alice Guy Blaché, longtime New Jersey-based writer, director, and producer who late in her career sought to create a birth-control film with Rose Pastor Stokes.

Stokes' press clippings and claimed to have found some inspiration in them. "I have read every one and find many interesting things that I am going to use in my scenario," she wrote. To put it another way, the script was still far from completed.

The two women finally finished a script, presumably sometime in November 1916. In perhaps an acknowledgment of *Where Are My Children?* and its question-posing title, Guy Blaché initially titled the script *Shall the Mother Decide?* On the recommendation of Pastor Stokes, who did not view birth control as exclusively a woman's concern, they changed the title to *Shall the Parents Decide?* At the last minute, the women agreed to change the name yet again; wishing to make their project as censor-proof as possible, they finally settled on a title that they believed no one could possibly object to: *Sacred Motherhood*.

The script that emerged from the women's collaborative efforts and is on file at New York University's Tamiment Library reveals the women's uncertainties about the title. It is labeled *Shall the Mother Decide?* but the word "Mother" is marked out and replaced with "Parents"—a change made by Pastor Stokes. Overlaying the script is a handwritten page laden with hyperbole presumably penned by Guy Blaché after the script had been finished: "Mme. Alice Blaché Presents Her Crowning Cinema Achievement 'Sacred Motherhood' With the World's Best Loved Rich-Woman Rose Pastor Stokes."⁴

The vagaries surrounding the title are actually emblematic of the entire script—at least, the version of the script that survives. It is principally a typewritten affair, but it is overflowing with handwritten emendations. The emendations are in Pastor Stokes' hand, which may lead us to the conclusion that the typewritten portion was largely Guy Blaché's doing (though much of it appears to have been developed from newspaper accounts of Pastor Stokes' activities). Adding to the script's uncertainties is its rather odd structure; it begins with a nine-page scene that reconstructs the first meeting of its two writers and their eventual agreement to work together.

Since the script is not readily available for perusal as of this writing, I hereby offer the following summary:

The main narrative begins in the modest Midwestern home of the Hope family, where a wedding is taking place. The screenplay describes the mother of the bride as looking quite a bit older than her husband. She is, to use the language of the script, an "invalid." The mother speaks to her seventeen-year-old daughter Helen, one of five siblings who attend the wedding of their sister Claire. The mother says that someday Helen, too, will find the right man and get married, to which her daughter replies "Never." She continues: "Mother, I'm afraid of a life like yours, an ever increasing family, health declining, and bringing children into the world like our poor little Jane." Helen pats the head of Jane, who the script describes as a "little crippled girl, age 4," and goes on to say: "You cannot really wish me such a life as this, mother dear."

⁴ Pastor Stokes remembered that statement and used it in her unfinished autobiography to poke a bit of fun at herself: "A Madam B. wrote a scenario—"The Least-Loved Rich Woman in the World" in 'Sacred Motherhood' etc., etc." See Pastor Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class* (147).

Four years later, Helen works as a stenographer for a box manufacturing company. One day she passes a tenement where much hubbub is occurring. A spectator tells her that a woman, whose husband is nearly dead from consumption, tried to commit suicide and kill her children. Helen learns from another onlooker that a second woman has been arrested for causing the death of a woman who had sought an abortion. That night, after falling asleep, Helen dreams of numerous women reaching out to her for help.

A few days later, Helen and an unnamed “very prominent woman”—a composite figure based largely on Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman—start a birth control league. The Sanger/Goldmanesque chairperson asks Helen to visit the Matron of a so-termed “Institute for the Feeble-Minded” to pick up a statistics sheet. While there, Helen spies Maude Miller, a former co-worker and friend who is having a child institutionalized. Helen also recognizes the man with Maude: her boss, Simon Sulphur, who is also a local judge. Helen takes out a small camera and snaps their picture without their knowledge.

After Maude and Simon depart, Helen introduces herself to the Matron and the two go to the latter’s office. The Sulphur-Miller child—a girl named Alice (a name pointedly shared with Guy Blaché)—is still there. While the Matron goes out of the office to find the statistics sheet, Helen snaps the child’s picture.

Two weeks later, Simon propositions Helen on the job. She rejects his advances and returns home highly upset. There’s a knock at the door; it’s a newsboy with the evening paper. She reads the paper and then tells her mother that the chairperson of the birth control league has been arrested for giving out information. She tells her mother that she is going to volunteer to hand out birth control information and be arrested, too, if necessary.

Helen’s proclamation finds its way into the press; Simon reads in the newspaper that she plans to give out printed slips of information at a public meeting. He decides to quash the meeting and, at the office the next day, dictates a letter to the Police Chief about it. Helen ironically is the stenographer taking the letter.

Helen later witnesses Simon’s firing of Mrs. Jones, a co-worker who has been routinely late for work at the box factory. Her excuses are related to the extensive amount of time that she needs to care for her big family. Helen hectors Simon for his actions and then rallies her fellow factory workers to support Mrs. Jones by refusing to work until Simon reinstates her. Helen’s agitation among her co-workers only adds to Simon’s resolve to get rid of her.

Several intercut scenes follow: Helen at home with her mother at lunch, making plans for the mass meeting that evening; Simon at the Police Chief’s office, swearing out an arrest warrant for Helen. Later that afternoon, Simon visits Maude, the mother of their developmentally disabled child, Alice. Maude berates him, whereupon he breaks off their relationship, throws a thousand-dollar check at her, and departs.

Meanwhile, a police officer with an arrest warrant arrives at Helen’s home, but her mother distracts him while the young woman escapes down a fire escape. Helen soon arrives at the mass meeting, hands out slips of paper containing birth control information, and is arrested.

That evening, Maude reads a newspaper story about Helen's arrest. Touched by her erstwhile co-worker's selfless actions, Maude uses Simon's thousand-dollar check to post Helen's bail.

A week later, Helen stands trial and acts as her own attorney. Simon is one of the three presiding judges. In an echo of Pastor Stokes' own statements, Helen says she "was only trying to insist that the poor possess the knowledge that the rich have and use." Simon argues for her conviction but the other two judges are impressed with her speech. She then produces the photograph she took of Alice and says, "I snapped it the day you brought your child to the institute. We advocate the prevention of the conception of such and other unfortunate children." Even Simon is touched by that remark, and the film concludes with the dismissal of the charges against her.

Though the story hinges on a number of unlikely coincidences (most notably, that Helen's boss at the factory is also one of the judges who hear her case), it should be clear from the foregoing summary that several of its key moments—namely, Helen's distribution of slips of paper containing birth control information, and her speech at the end—are based on Pastor Stokes' immediate experiences. In addition, it is worth noting that some scenes in the factory may also have been drawn from Pastor Stokes' personal history; as a young woman, she had worked in a cigar factory in Cleveland for more than ten years. Even the nine-page prologue is based on an actual event: Pastor Stokes and Guy Blaché's first meeting, though someone—Guy Blaché, presumably—changed the venue from Pastor Stokes' main home in Stamford to her second home at 88 Grove St. in New York City. By including such references to people and events of the very recent past, Guy Blaché and Pastor Stokes hoped they had made their script as timely and relevant as possible.

While the collaborative script was shaping up, Guy Blaché and Adler began approaching potential partners to finance the project. With the proposed film to be released under the U.S. Amusement Corp. banner, Guy Blaché and Adler needed to secure production funding up front from a distribution company that would eventually handle the film's release. As Guy Blaché put it to Pastor Stokes in late October 1916, she hoped "that the financials will decide to help us." It was at this juncture that they ran into the difficulty that would sink the project; to their surprise and dismay, they could find no takers. Guy Blaché's past contractual partners—Pathé, Metro, Alco, World—expressed no interest. She then thought that her best bet would be Lewis J. Selznick, former general manager of the World Film Corp. and current president of the Clara Kimball Young Film Corp., which he formed around May 1916. Guy Blaché knew Selznick fairly well; a number of her Popular Plays & Players films had been released through World, which like the Blachés' various film production enterprises was based in Fort Lee. She was aware that Selznick was on the lookout not only for properties that would showcase his resident star but also for other performers whom he could add to his roster ("Selznick Increases Operations"). Though Selznick was impressed with the actorly talents of Pastor Stokes—she claimed that he made a screen test of her, proclaimed her "a Sarah Bernhardt," and offered her a contract (Pastor Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class*)

147)—he was not interested in pursuing a birth control project.⁵ Selznick was known for being blunt and direct in his business dealings, and his immediate reaction to Guy Blaché's proposed film with Pastor Stokes was not promising. As Guy Blaché remembered it: "I suggested to Selznick about making a propaganda film with her. He laughed in my face" (Guy Blaché, *Memoirs* 89).

It is possible that Selznick himself had another birth control film under development. More likely, he knew of a similar project underway at another studio: a film written by and starring Margaret Sanger, who was then under contract to the B. S. Moss Motion Picture Production Co. According to Bert Adler, who also approached Selznick, the latter was just not comfortable with the idea of producing such a film. In a letter to Pastor Stokes dated November 24, Adler wrote that "Mr. Selznick can give no definite information about the similar picture. It is my own belief that he was simply afraid to produce this subject."

Adler and Guy Blaché were not about to give up, but their options were fading fast. Casting about for another company to which he could pitch the project, Adler hit on the idea of approaching the Universal Film Manufacturing Co. His arguments for so doing, he thought, were sound; not only had Universal distributed earlier Guy Blaché productions, but Adler himself had been a mid-level manager at Universal and maintained his network of business contacts there. He also reasoned that Universal was the studio that had produced *Where Are My Children?* earlier that spring and that hugely successful film "may serve as a precedent for its acceptance," as he wrote to Pastor Stokes on November 24.

Adler was understandably bitter when his former employer turned him down flat a few days later. In a letter to Pastor Stokes dated December 6, 1916, Adler grumbled that "I did not write you promptly because I have had some discouraging news again. A craven spirit seems to dominate the producers; they will take a 'sex play' if it is sufficiently sugar-coated, but not if it is red-blooded and points a *real* lesson." Of the studio in particular he wrote: "Universal accepted and produced 'Where Are My Children?' with its half lesson but return 'Shall the Mother Decide' with its *whole* lesson. So there we are" [emphasis in original text].⁶

Unbeknownst to Guy Blaché, Adler, and Pastor Stokes, Universal had other reasons for turning down their project. Movie companies back then were quite secretive in their dealings, just as they are now; there would be nothing to be gained by tipping their hand about their ongoing projects (except, perhaps, to build "buzz"). In the case of Universal, the company was not about to make another birth-control film without its star director-writer, Lois Weber, at the helm. In the wake of Margaret Sanger's opening and shut-down of a birth control clinic in Brooklyn and her multiple arrests (all occurring in October and November of 1916), Weber had started developing a film that would be based more explicitly on the Sanger story than *Where Are My Children?* had been. By the time Adler approached Universal, the studio had already committed to the new Weber birth control film, tentatively titled *Is a Woman a*

⁵ Pastor Stokes also asserted that Guy Blaché's company offered her the film's leading role, though I have not found any other sources that corroborate that point.

⁶ For reasons unknown, Adler had reverted to the project's working title.

Person? and which would be released in May 1917 as *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*. Though Adler promised Pastor Stokes that he would continue searching for a partnering company, his efforts went for naught. By the time he had taken a new job as the New York manager of the Educational Films Corporation of America in January 1917 (“News of the Film World”), the project, to cite a Guy Blaché expression, had “died in the egg” (Guy Blaché, *Memoirs* 69).

The script developed by Alice Guy Blaché and Rose Pastor Stokes was unusual for its time in a number of respects, and these factors may have played a role in its rejection by potential distributors. Firstly, it has a heavily self-referential quality; it indicates that both Guy Blaché and Pastor Stokes would appear as themselves at the beginning of the film to discuss the need for exploring birth control in a popular entertainment such as a film. Indeed, the first nine pages of the fifty-page document—about a fifth of the script—is taken up with a scene depicting the initial encounter of the two women. It is very expository and information-heavy, with Guy Blaché coming across as ingenuousness personified; she states that she does not even know which topic she wants to explore. After she has been enlightened, she says: “Mrs. Stokes, I have come to ask you if you will not collaborate with me in writing a moving picture scenario that would interest the people in this subject of birth control.” Pastor Stokes says, “I should like to try, and I would call the play ‘SHALL THE MOTHER DECIDE?’” The two women shake hands and Guy Blaché departs, an action that finally allows the script’s main narrative to begin.

Unusual, too, was the fact that its headstrong twenty-one-year-old heroine required no direct assistance from a male to accomplish her goals (except for the judges clearing the charges against her, of course) nor did she find herself enmeshed in any romantic subplots. For some distributors interested in catering to mainstream audience tastes, such factors would doubtless have constituted glaring oversights.

Ultimately, however, the film’s failure may have come down to a matter of timing; Guy Blaché and Pastor Stokes had simply missed their window of opportunity. Margaret Sanger’s birth control clinic and attendant publicity had come and gone, and they were not much farther along with their project than they had been before. A movie based on their script might have been a respectable short feature, but “the moment” for such a film had clearly passed. Now, with the United States hurtling toward direct military involvement in the Great War, the time for movies that advocated the limitation of birth—to say nothing of movies that featured feisty and rebellious women unencumbered by romantic relationships and male help of any sort—was rapidly coming to an end. A new conservatism was setting in, however briefly, and it was enough to derail the project that Guy Blaché had hoped would be, in her words, her “crowning cinema achievement.”

THE AUTHOR: Martin F. Norden teaches film history and screenwriting as a Professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA. He is the author of dozens of scholarly publications, including *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (Rutgers University Press). He is currently editing *Lois Weber: Interviews*, a collection to be published

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Veronica Pravadelli

Lois Weber's Uneasy Progressive Politics: The Articulation of Class and Gender in *Where Are My Children?*

ABSTRACT: After decades of oblivion the status of Lois Weber's production has emerged as one of the most important in American cinema of the 1910s. Indeed, recent historical research has made clear that by 1915 Weber had become a popular celebrity whose work was as distinctive as that of Griffith and De Mille. In her most famous and successful films, Weber tackled some of the controversial issues of the period which she treated in a moral fashion. *Where Are My Children?* (1916) is the first of four films dealing with birth control while *Shoes* (1916), for example, deals with underpaid female labor. In both cases, as in other films, Weber's social discourse develops along a dual axes, that of gender and class. Though she didn't consider herself strictly a feminist, she thought of her work in line with that of activists and reformers, including feminists such as Margaret Sanger and Jane Addams. It is interesting to note that well before current debates around essentialism and anti-essentialism, Weber was well aware, like many feminists of the time, that women's condition as gendered subjects was not unique and universal, but intimately related to their class.

After decades of oblivion the status of Lois Weber's production has emerged as one of the most important in American cinema of the 1910s. Recent historical research has made clear that by 1915 Weber had become a popular celebrity whose work was as distinctive as that of Griffith and De Mille. For some she was "the greatest woman director," for others "one of the top six directors in the entire industry" (Mahar 97), while according to *Photoplay*, in 1917 she was the highest paid director in Hollywood (Mahar 140). In her most famous and successful films, Weber tackled some of the most controversial issues of the period—birth control, abortion, capital punishment, underpaid labour, etc.—which she treated in a "moral" fashion. Around the mid-1910s, Weber's peak years, the filmmaker represented the industry's ideal since her films were a perfect example of cinema's contribution to the uplift movement. As Karen Ward Mahar has argued, Weber "achieved her reputation as a serious social lifter [because] she did not take a simplistic approach. Her films did not talk down to the working classes that frequented the movies" and questioned middle-class values and attitudes (90). As another critic has pointed out, Weber believed that "social improvements could be inspired and implemented by films and that the films could serve as a vanguard to develop many necessary social reforms" (Heck-Rabi 55). In the opening title of *Where Are My Children?* (1916) we read:

The question of birth control is now being generally discussed. All intelligent people know that birth control is a subject of serious public interest. Newspapers, magazines and books have treated different phases of this question. Can a subject thus dealt with on the printed page be denied careful dramatization on the motion picture screen? The Universal Film Mfg. Company believes not ... In producing this picture the intention is to place a serious drama before adult audiences, to whom no suggestion of a fact of which they are ignorant is conveyed.

While her cinema has been described as a mixture of realism, melodrama and propaganda, I would like to stress Weber's ability to "investigate" the issue she chooses from multiple perspectives. In *Where Are My Children?* Weber builds up, along with and within the narrative logic, a series of dialectical oppositions which open up the problem of birth control to different "solutions" and judgments. Very much like the public debate that was going on at the time, the film gives voice to diverse positions. By introducing an *essayistic mode* into the narrative logic the film inevitably forces the viewer to experience an intellectual process. To this end Weber, an extremely talented filmmaker with a penchant for complicated visual imagery, uses specific formal and aesthetic devices. In my opinion, in this film *crosscutting* is the most important one.



Lois Weber on set.

In this paper I will discuss *Where Are My Children?* in the attempt to unravel the film's position vis-à-vis birth control, abortion and female agency. Recent research has focused on the topic by looking especially at the film's complex struggle with censorship. Annette Kuhn and Shelley Stamp ("Taking Precautions") have similarly argued that the film was censored because its message appeared ambiguous and confusing. Yet they both interpret the film in a straightforward way: for Kuhn and Stamp the film supports birth control but is against abortion. Differently, I would like to consider the relation between contrasting positions on birth control, motherhood and femininity and Weber's formal articulation of such materials, in order to show that the film may be read in a different way. While to my mind the film's ambiguity stands—the proof that the film is not propaganda—I would argue that such an ambiguity can be explained vis-à-vis competing discourses on women, motherhood and sexuality available in the social arena of the time. In this context, the relation between gender and class is a fundamental tenet. Well before recent debates around essentialism and anti-essentialism, Weber was well aware, like many feminists of her time, that women's condition as gendered subjects was not unique and universal, but intimately related to their class.

Lois Weber's "serious cinema" was very much in line with the work of activists and reformers/feminists such as Margaret Sanger and Jane Addams. After Emma Goldman, Sanger became the leader of the birth control movement in the mid-1910s and influenced Weber enormously. Birth control was indeed a key issue both in the social debate of the period and in Weber's cinema. In 1917, a year after *Where Are My Children?* was released, Weber made *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, inspired by Sanger's legal troubles for disseminating birth control information. No print of the film is known to exist, but we can gather a lot of information from the continuity script. In the film Weber plays Mrs. Broome, the wife of a physician who refuses to give his patients birth control information. The woman, on the contrary, secretly helps out women by informing them on how to limit the size of their family. Like Sanger, she gets in trouble with the police and is arrested.

Similarly, in the opening episode of *Where Are My Children?* a doctor is brought to trial for disseminating birth control information among the poor. This event is the focus of the first part of the film. While the overall narrative centres on the life of Mr. and Mrs. Walton and their opposite views on parenthood—Mr. Walton, the DA at the trial, desires to have children, but his wife doesn't—the film also focuses on two more episodes concerning birth control *and* abortion. Besides the opening trial of doctor Homer, the middle part of the film tells the story of the seduction, pregnancy, abortion and death of Lillian, Mrs. Walton's maid's daughter. The last section of the film deals with the trial of doctor Mitlif, who has performed the abortion. During the trial Mr. Walton discovers that his wife and most of her friends have also had an abortion. The discovery causes a dramatic fight with his wife to whom he shouts "Where are my children?" At the end, the childless couple sits sadly in front of the fireplace "imagining" the children they haven't had: via spectacular superimpositions—a visual device Weber is very fond of—the screen is filled first with infants, then with children and then

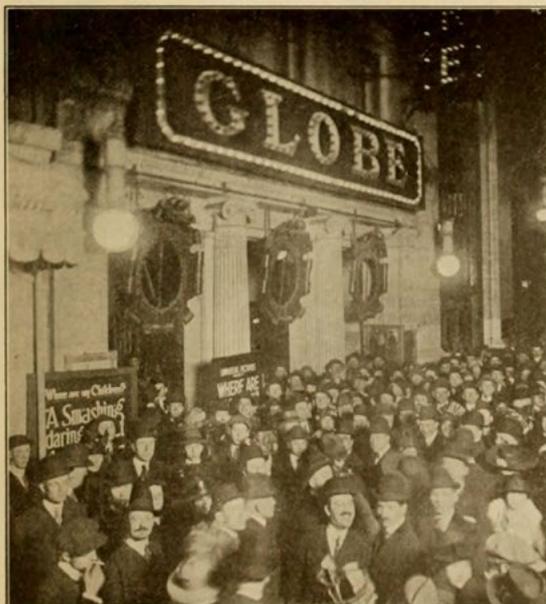
Where are My Children?

Blocks Broadway Traffic

Old Timers along the Great White Way who saw the huge mob struggling to gain admission to the GLOBE THEATRE to see "Where Are My Children" pronounced it "Unbelievable" that Broadway Traffic could be blocked by ANY Moving picture ever produced.

Yet the crowd shown in the picture reproduced below is ONLY the crowd that jammed the sidewalk in front of the Globe Theatre.

Inside, in the lobby (which is nearly 100 feet deep),



another huge crowd was massed from doors to entrance. That's how "Where Are My Children" packed 'em in on Broadway, the hardest show street in the world, and in spite of the fierce competition in this, the greatest Theatre neighborhood in the world. The New York Newspapers, the Clergy, the Trade Press and the Public pronounced it "Wonderful," "Amazing," "Sensational," "Dignified." With

TYRONE POWER

playing the lead, supported by a brilliant cast, including Marie Walcamp and others, "Where Are My Children" presents the Box Office Attraction of the decade. Scenario and story by that brilliant genius of filmdom,

LOIS WEBER

Produced by Lois Weber and Phillips Smalley. STATE RIGHTS Now Selling. (State of Ohio Censors have passed the production.) To State Rights buyers who understand the game and to Exhibitors who are in business to get the money—"Where Are My Children" is the hugest financial opportunity offered in years.

Huge Box Office Attraction

The right to the territory still open will not remain open long. At the time of the writing of this advertisement 16 States have already been sold with negotiations for many more, therefore it will require IMMEDIATE ACTION. Many of the shrewdest State Rights Buyers in this country have already snapped up this picture. The time to act is NOW.

Still a Few States Left

is all the description that you need to know about "Where Are My Children." The largest and most complete newspaper advertising campaign ever instituted for ANY production is ready. Complete musical score ready also. Send for the Ad sheet. It points the way to get the BIG money. Direct all communications, wire, letter or otherwise, to the STATE RIGHTS DEPARTMENT of the

Universal Film Manufacturing Co.

CARL LAEMMLE, President
 "The Largest Film Manufacturing Concern in the Universe"
 1600 Broadway New York

"Where are my children?" Blocks Broadway Traffic," *The Moving Picture World* June 3, 1916.

teen-agers.

Critics have tended to read the film mainly in relation to the Waltons' trajectory. They have overlooked the tripartite division of the film and the relevance of other characters and events. They have privileged the narrative logic and selected the two trials as the key to the film's ideology. Studying the film's reception in the US and England, Annette Kuhn has argued that the theme of eugenics that runs through the film allows us to understand "the apparent inconsistency of the film's pro-birth control and anti-abortion stances" (34). The lower classes, the unfit, "were breeding at a rate which threatened the extinction of the best elements of the race" while bourgeois women like Mrs. Walton, the best type, were not. "For such a woman to 'evade' motherhood by resorting to abortion or other forms of birth control was thus doubly reprehensible" (33-35). Shelley Stamp makes the same point when she states that "*Where Are My Children?* appears far less contradictory if the film is seen as an argument for eugenics-based family planning rather than pregnancy prevention per se *Where Are My Children?* makes the case that poverty-stricken women ought to practice birth control in order to limit the size of their families, whereas women of wealth and good breeding were selfish if they chose to remain childless" ("Taking Precautions" 275). Such comments are lacking in two respects: on one hand, they don't consider the way Weber represents her female characters. Mrs. Walton and Lillian's choice to have an abortion is never criticized. The film also promotes female agency and does not simply comment on family planning. Second, one needs to consider that the debate over motherhood, sexuality and women's rights at the time presented a whole web of positions. Therefore the film's supposed confusion is a sign of the complexity of the debate.

As Linda Gordon has shown, towards the end of the nineteenth century "eugenic thought emphasized heredity . . . hereditary arguments explained social problems in terms of individual biological inferiority Beyond suggesting birth control as a means of abolishing existing vice, the same people also suggested that involuntary motherhood produced vice" (76). Eugenics also tainted feminist thought as some believed that women's emancipation, especially through voluntary motherhood, education and financial independence, would foster "race progress" (80-81). But when motherhood was proved to be weakened by women's higher education—women who had a career had fewer children than poor and uneducated women—eugenics became predominantly anti-feminist and anti-birth control. The race-suicide controversy lasted from about 1905 to 1910 and enlisted among its fiercest exponents the President Theodore Roosevelt himself. The demographic changes at the beginning of the twentieth century—smaller families were becoming a trend in American society—led to an attack on women's emancipation: women were accused of selfishness and self-indulgence in avoiding their duty of having babies. Women were thought to avoid conception by using birth-control devices without the complicity of their husbands "or by bamboozling their husbands into accepting their selfishness." Roosevelt wrote, "a desire to be independent, that is, to live one's life purely according to one's own desires... in no sense substitutes for the

fundamental virtues” (Gordon 89).

Feminists responded to these attacks by rejecting motherhood, something they had never done before. In fact, by 1870 the women’s rights movement in the US advocated, first and foremost, “voluntary motherhood,” that is, women reclaimed the right to decide *when*, not *if* to become mothers. Only in the 1910s some feminists started to reject motherhood. While the issue was often posed in terms of the opposition between motherhood and career, more radical positions defended childlessness even within marriage. Some said, “some marriages ought to remain childless” (Gordon 94). Those who challenged motherhood but accepted marriage implicitly separated sexuality from reproduction and defended sexual activity *per se*. These positions seem to explain quite well Mrs. Walton’s attitude: she has an autonomous opinion but also loves her husband—the reason why at some point she changes her mind and decides she will have a baby—, she likes to indulge in luxury and probably sex (with her husband), and she prefers having fun with her friends instead of taking care of a flock of children like her neighbor. Several times we see her looking at her husband while he looks/talks to their neighbor’s children or hugs his sister’s baby. Mrs. Walton seems selfish, but she also feels guilty towards her husband: she finally decides to have a baby only to make him happy.

If we consider the representation of the main female character the argument that the film is against abortion is shaky. Mrs. Walton epitomizes, first of all, the sexual revolution that began before WW1 and that revolutionized women’s sexuality, not men’s. Freud’s writings, as well as those of others sex theorists such as Havelock Ellis, were read in the US “against the grain,” that is, in order to promote sexual expressiveness (D’Emilio and Freedman). Reproductive self-determination was of course an obvious effect of this new freedom. While the sexual revolution has been associated for a long time with flappers and the jazz age of the 1920s, some historians have argued that these cultural changes began earlier (Gordon 128). I would thus claim that the sexual politics of the film is not “unclear or confused,” as many reviewers and critics have stated. *Where Are My Children?*’s sexual politics registers the inscription of different and divergent points of view on these issues. The strategy of Weber’s social problem films was not to end up with a straightforward answer, that is, to solve through a narrative solution all the implications that had emerged at different moments of the film. Rather, it seems that the ultimate scope of Weber’s cinema was to present different cases and perspectives on the same problem in order to arouse an intellectual experience in the viewer.¹ Significantly, the continuity script of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* ends with the title “What do *you* think?” This seems to be also the scope of *Where Are My Children?*’s rhetorical structure. In this fashion, Weber’s film bypasses the standard representation of “troublesome” topics common at the time. Janet Staiger has argued that in the 1910s the movie industry devised rules for talking about women and sexuality. In particular, “the total-picture theory” allowed to display “immoral or improper behaviour” provided that the film ends “with a principled

¹ Perhaps the notion of “progressive text” would be relevant here. On the “progressive text” see Klinger.

resolution that would teach youth and wayward souls about restitution for good and evil actions. This *prescriptive*, reformist function for storytelling . . . *stimulated and directed talk about sex, sexuality, and gender characteristics*” (78). My contention throughout this paper is that *Where Are My Children?* luckily fails to conform to such a prescriptive model.

Critics have interpreted the film in relation to eugenics by linking the opening episode, doctor Homer’s trial for disseminating birth control information among the poor, with Mrs. Walton’s decision not to have children. Since the film refers specifically to eugenics, one may indeed compare the healthy children of the Waltons’ neighbors to the sickly ones that we see in the slums. While nobody can dispute the fact that the debate on eugenics is inscribed in the film, I don’t think that Weber simply supports it. In particular, I disagree that the character of Mrs. Walton should be seen only in relation to it. There is no textual cue indicating that we should read the opening in this fashion. On the contrary, I think that crosscutting suggests that we interpret the episode differently. As in other scenes, editing choices are the key to the film’s politics. In those years crosscutting was being popularized by Griffith especially in his last-minute-rescue scenes. Yet Weber’s use is significantly different from Griffith’s since in *Where Are My Children?* crosscutting doesn’t have a “narrative” function, but an *intellectual* one. The standard use of crosscutting requires that two actions, evolving in different spaces at the same time, finally converge on the same locale. When Weber crosscuts from the scene in the slums where poor women have multiple pregnancies and are unable to support their family, to the rich women like Mrs. Walton who know how to avoid motherhood, I read the episode as a comparison between women with different options and possibilities. Such a difference is connoted in terms of class: working-class women have no agency, are unable to avoid motherhood, while bourgeois women know how to escape it. Class difference implies a different degree of self-determination. In this regard, it is interesting to recall Sanger’s account. In *My Fight for Birth Control* (1931) she states that poor women were aware of this: “It’s the rich who know the tricks’ they’d say ‘while we have all the kids’. Then if the women were Roman Catholics, they talked about ‘Yankee tricks’ and asked me if I knew what the Protestants did to keep their families down They would nudge each other and say something about paying me before I left the case if I would reveal the ‘secret’” (338).

Weber’s strategy is to confront poor and rich women in order to reveal how gender is inextricably intertwined with class. I read her formal choice as an invitation not to condemn bourgeois women for refusing motherhood, but as a statement in favour of those women who lack self-determination. Class difference is exacerbated by crosscutting: the viewer cannot but empathize with the sufferings of poor women and advocate birth control. On a broader level, a female viewer cannot but support the idea that any woman should become the active agent of her life. The expository style of the film avoids any judgment on society women’s desire not to be mothers. The husband’s desire to have children doesn’t appear more legitimate than his wife’s desire not to have any. Mrs. Walton is never condemned throughout the film and her choice is not presented as a threat to the race. After all, the

Waltons are surrounded by children: their neighbors have four little kids and Mr. Walton's sister has just had her first baby. The ending suggests that in their old age the couple had a sad life, but the comment has no real social or ideological value.

One should note that crosscutting is essential to create the film's meaning. In other words, while Weber's progressive cinema depends on her use of sociological studies, journalistic exposés of real events and true-to-life facts, it's cinematic language that finally decides the film's point of view on its subject matter. In her study of Weber's *Shoes*, also made in 1916, Shelley Stamp has similarly argued that the film's "address fluctuates between an imagined identification with a reformer's gaze from outside diegetic space . . . and, at the same time, an identification with the heroine's own fears, desires, and emotions fostered through narrative and cinematic tropes. Even as Weber explicitly aligns her filmmaking eye with Addams's sociological observations, *Shoes* engages specifically cinematic modes of identification that counteract and complicate this address by focusing on psychological interiority and subjective experience" ("Lois Weber, Progressive Cinema" 144).

Weber's treatment of Lillian is also sympathetic. The middle section of the film centres on the seduction of the maid's daughter. The episode is also structured around class difference. While visiting her mother the girl meets Mrs. Walton's brother. The man is sexually attracted to the girl and seduces her. The iconic and narrative texture of the episode is explicitly melodramatic. The viewer recognizes the typical melodramatic conflict narrated in Richardson's novels, in Schiller and Lessing's dramas and in the stage melodramas studied by Peter Brooks in his famous *The Melodramatic Imagination*. The male character is the "aristocratic villain" who seduces a pure and naïve girl of a lower class. Predictably, the woman gets pregnant. Like in the classic melodramatic plot the male character doesn't take responsibility for his deeds. The girl is taken to a doctor to have an abortion and will die for its effects. But before dying she tells her mother the truth. Even though the doctor who practiced the abortion will later be brought to trial and condemned (abortion was illegal then), the narrative logic of the episode puts the blame on the villain's immoral behaviour. He is educated and rich, and perfectly aware that he is cheating Lillian. The girl, on the contrary, is of humble origins, totally inexperienced and unaware of what is going on. When she dies, all the protagonists condemn Mrs. Walton's brother. At this stage, no comment is made on abortion. The young woman is presented as the victim of the man's vicious tricks. In this episode the convergence between gender and class suggests that women of humble origins are victimized by men of higher social status. Therefore, Lillian is a victim in the same way that the poor women visited by Doctor Homer in the slums are. Like in the other episode the film spurs the viewer to support female agency.

To conclude, the rhetorical structure of Weber's film, namely the technique of confronting the trajectories and choices of women of different social conditions, along with the strategy of exposing a social issue—birth control and abortion—from different points of view, force the viewer to interrogate the "nature" of women's role and sexuality. But sexuality is of course



LOIS WEBER

is the best known and most able woman director in the film field as well as a capable actress and a clever writer. She went into pictures back in 1908 with Gaumont after a successful stage career and most of the time since she has been with Universal, although she was with Bosworth long enough to win lasting fame with her "Hypocrites." She directed "Where Are My Children?" "Shoes," "Jewel" and other film "best sellers."

Lois Weber portrait, *Photoplay* 11.12 (Feb.-Sept. 1917)

inherently social. In Gayle Rubin's words "a sex/gender system is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (106). In *Where Are My Children?* Weber shows that in the 1910s the social apparatus devised by patriarchy to "domesticate" women was starting to be questioned. Especially through the character of Mrs. Walton, Weber shows that female agency and desire were devising new lifestyles and modes of behaviour in which sexuality and reproduction were separated. The task of *Where Are My Children?* was, very much like Sanger's conferences and seminars, to disseminate knowledge, promote reason and increase the social awareness on women's rights.

THE AUTHOR: Veronica Pravadelli is Professor of Cinema at Roma Tre University, where she directs the Center for American Studies (CRISA) and has been coordinating the Ph.D. Program in Film Studies since 2004. She graduated at the University of Verona under the supervision of Franco Moretti in 1989 and then entered the Graduate Program in Comparative Literature, Film Studies and Italian Studies at Indiana University. She discussed her Dissertation (on Chantal Akerman) in 1999. Her main areas of research are: classical Hollywood cinema, women's cinema, Italian post-neorealist cinema. She has written and edited 7 books and about 60 essays. Besides Italy, her work has appeared in the United States, England, France, Germany and Greece.

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Donna R. Casella

Women and Nationalism in Indigenous Irish Filmmaking of the Silent Period

ABSTRACT: Women in Ireland came into focus and onto the political stage during and as a result of nationalist and socialist movements that began in the mid-1700s and continued through the 1920s. Women like Anna Parnell, Constance Markievicz, and Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington participated in the land wars, struggles for independence from Britain and the suffragist movement. Indigenous silent feature filmmaking in Ireland was born out of this critical period of political and social change. From 1916 to 1935, Irish filmmakers produced over forty silent feature films only six of which have survived. A close study of these films, fragments of three others, and contemporary film reviews and archival synopses of the non-surviving films reveals how early Irish silent films tackled nationalist issues, but did little to represent the active participation of women. Women in these films are passive sisters, lovers, and mothers, impacted by rather than impacting historical events. This is not surprising. Irish silent cinema was a male-dominated industry with a nationalist agenda that perpetuated gender stereotypes. This study links nationalism and women in Irish silent cinema by looking at how female representation in these early films reflected a gendered ideology that existed in Irish culture alongside other narratives of the nation.

Women in Ireland both north and south came into focus and onto the political stage during and as a result of nationalist movements that began in the early 1800s with Robert Emmet's rising, and continued through the formation of the Irish Free State government in the 1920s. Women participated in a variety of ways on a broad range of nationalist movements: insurrections over colonial treatment; revivals in Gaelic language, art, theater and literature; movements for worker's and women's rights; and the push for Home Rule and independence. Anna Parnell and other women took over the Land League in 1881 after the men were jailed. They fought tenant evictions, held political views, often in opposition to a parliamentary system with Britain, and were generally more militant than their male counterparts (Parnell 173). British born Maude Gonne MacBride, who adopted Ireland as her home country, was an early supporter of Land League efforts and took on such causes as the rights of Irish political prisoners and the conditions of women and the poor (MacBride 96–97, 104–118; Ward, *Maud Gonne* 22–24, 65–67, 96–97, and 123). Constance Markievicz was active in *Cumann na mBan* [the Irish women's council] formed in 1914 to work with the men in the nationalist struggle. She fought in the 1916 Rising, was the first woman elected to Westminster in 1918 while she was still in jail, and the only female cabinet member in the Free State's 1st Dáil Éireann [lower house] in 1922 (see Haverty; Marreco; Van Voris). Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, whose husband Francis was also a supporter of women's rights, was active in putting women's right to vote ahead of the Home Rule issue (see Ward, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington*; *Sheehy Skeffington Papers* MS 41, 177 and 41, 178). Women participated in a

variety of ways as part of a broad range of nationalist movements.¹

Indigenous silent feature filmmaking² in Ireland (1914 to mid-1930s), born out of this critical period of political and social change for both Ireland and women, reflected these nationalist movements. Limited to the south, the industry produced thirty-eight indigenous films, beginning with *Ireland a Nation* (Walter MacNamara)³ in 1914, two years before the start of an armed fight for independence from Britain, and continuing sporadically until *Guests of the Nation* (Denis Johnston)⁴ in 1935 during the presidency of Irish rebel Éamon de Valera. Men and the handful of women who worked in front of and behind the camera made films that often addressed Ireland's nationalist struggles under British colonial rule.⁵

¹ Since silent filmmaking was limited to the south, this study focuses on southern women in nationalist movements. Many women from the north did join their sisters in the south as evident in Urquhart.

² The indigenous Irish feature films chosen for this study were made in the south by Irish film companies utilizing a predominantly Irish cast and crew. Selections were based on film history, filmographies, and contemporary sources: advertisements, newspaper articles, and articles in trade papers like *The Irish Limelight* (IE); *The Bioscope* (GB), *The Picture Show*, and *Picture Plays* (GB); and the *Moving Picture World* (US). The following films are included, though some of their crew were not Irish. For *Irish Destiny* (1926), Irishman Isaac J. Eppel used a British director, George Dewhurst, on his all-Irish film. *Ireland a Nation* (1914) was directed by Irish born Walter MacNamara who was living in America when he decided to make a film in Ireland. He returned to Ireland and employed an Irish cast and crew, but worked on the final print with a New York production staff. (K. Rockett, "The Silent Period" 12, 42; Condon 195). *In the Days of St. Patrick* (1920) was produced and directed by Norman Whitten who came from Britain to set up the General Film Supply Company of Ireland. His company initially made the Irish newsreel series, *Irish Events*. A number of scholars including Condon regard Whitten's General Film Supply Company as an indigenous film company (261).

³ *Ireland a Nation* was made in Ireland, but the film's final production was handled in New York where it premiered at the 44th Street theater (*New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1914 11; *Variety*, Oct. 10, 1914 25). World War I, however, interrupted the film's release in Ireland. According to *The Irish Limelight* one print sank coming across in May 1915, and another failed to avoid the blockade ("Between the Spools"; "Ireland a Nation," *The Irish Limelight*). A third print arrived in Ireland in late 1916 and was submitted and cleared by the censors. The film opened in Dublin on January 8, 1917 for a one-week run, but was quickly suppressed by the British military fearing it would prejudice recruiting. ("Ireland a Nation," *The Freeman's Journal*; Advertisement. *Irish Independent*, Jan. 11, 1917; "Ireland a Nation Film"; Advertisement. *Dublin Evening Mail*, Dec. 30, 1916; Advertisement. *Dublin Evening Mail*, Jan. 11, 1917; Advertisement. *Evening Herald*, Jan. 9, 1917; Advertisement. *Evening Herald*, Jan. 11, 1917; "Ireland a Nation," *Evening Herald*; Advertisement. *Irish Times*, Jan. 9, 1917; Advertisement. *Irish Times*, Jan. 10, 1917; Advertisement. *Irish Times*, Jan. 11, 1917; "Film Picture Suppressed"; "Ireland a Nation," *The Irish Limelight*). For the British version of the closing, see "Irish Film Suppressed." In 1920 the Gaelic Film Company bought the film and added later scenes of nationalist struggles. The film was re-released in 1922 after the Anglo Irish Treaty was passed by the Dáil (Advertisement. *Dublin Evening Mail* Jan. 28, 1922).

⁴ *Guests of the Nation* is included even though a low budget forced Denis Johnston to make a silent instead of a sound film. He intended to post-synchronize later, but never did. As a film artist, however, he was clearly interested in the techniques of silent filmmaking. In his article, "Our First Film," he notes the influence of silent filmmakers Robert Flaherty and Sergei Eisenstein on his work (80). In correspondences and a later radio talk he asserts his belief that dialogue would not have added to the film. See Adams (132) and correspondences between Johnston and P. A. O'Connor, a possible U.S. distributor, on Jan. 28, 1938; Feb. 11, 1938; Feb. 23, 1938; and Feb. 24, 1938, and between Johnston and Henry Dixon, a possible UK distributor, on July 7, 1938 and July 11, 1939 (*DJ Papers* MS 10066/290/496, 507, 509, and 623). See also K. Rockett, "1930s Fictions" (60–62).

⁵ Women wrote, directed, edited and set designed in early Irish cinema. Three romance writers had writing credits on the pre-1930 films: Ulster novelist Mrs. M. T. Pender's novel was the basis of J. M. Kerrigan's *O'Neil of the Glen* (1916); British born Dorothea Donn-Byrne authored the original story for *Land of Her Fathers* (Herbert Hall Winslow, 1925); and Mrs. N. F. Patton did the adaptation for *Knocknagow*. Among the women behind in the camera post-1930 was Mary Manning who assisted on *By Accident* (Norris Davidson, 1930), and wrote the adaptation and served as Johnston's assistant on *Guests of the Nation* (Mary Manning's interview in "Program 2: Irish Productions Find Their Feet"; D. Johnston, "Our First Film" 79; *Irish Film Society Programme*). Máirín Hayes co-edited *Guests of the Nation* (D. Johnston, 3rd *Omnibus X Book*, *DJ Papers* MS 10066/181 101).

This was particularly true prior to 1930 when popular generic forms became important vehicles of national consciousness. Many of those early films have been lost. Only the historical epic *In the Days of St. Patrick* (Norman Whitten, 1920), the war film *Guests of the Nation*, and the historical melodramas *Ireland a Nation*, *Knocknagow* (Fred O'Donovan, 1918), *Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* (John MacDonagh, 1920), and *Irish Destiny* (George Dewhurst, 1926) have survived. A study of these films, fragments of three others, and contemporary reviews and archived synopses of the non-surviving films reveals how closely the national fervor of the period penetrated early Irish cinema.⁶ Such films, however, advocated a form of nation-building that “prescribed” women’s roles in the nationalist struggles of the period,

Lettice Ramsey and British born Frances Cautley Farrell worked on sets for *Some Say Chance* (Michael Farrell, 1934). (“Irish Film & TV Research Online”).

⁶ The following prints were viewed for this study; most are available at either the Irish Film Institute archives in Dublin (IFA) or the British Film Institute (BFI) in London: *Ireland a Nation* (Walter MacNamara, MacNamara Feature Film Company, 1914 and Gaelic Film Company, 1920, IFA), *Knocknagow* (Fred O'Donovan, Film Company of Ireland [FCOI], 1918, BFI), *Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* (John MacDonagh, FCOI, 1920, BFI and IFA), *In the Days of St. Patrick* (Norman Whitten, Killester, BFI and IFA), and *Guests of the Nation* (Dennis Johnston, BFI and IFA). *Irish Destiny* (George Dewhurst, EppelsFilms, 1926) is available for viewing at the IFA and on DVD (Irish Film Institute, 2009). Also available for viewing are reel 1 of 2 of the comedy *Paying the Rent* (John MacDonagh, FCOI, 1919) at RTE, and 11.20 min. of the drama *Some Say Chance* (Michael Farrell, 1934) at the IFA and RTE. Fragments of the drama *By Accident* (Norris Davidson, Irish Amateur Films, drama, 1930) can be found in “Program 1: From Lantern to Slide Show.” Incomplete, unavailable negatives of the drama *Land of Her Fathers* (Herbert Hall Winslow, Transatlantic Pictures, 1925) are held at RTE (incorrectly dated 1922) and at the IFA. Contemporary sources and archival material were used to determine plots, characters and themes for the following lost films (genre and director are included when known): *Fun at a Finglas Fair* (F. J. McCormick, prod. James M. Sullivan, comedy, 1915); FCOI films – *The Eleventh Hour* (Fred O'Donovan, drama, 1916), *Food of Love* (J. M. Kerrigan, comedy, 1916), *The Girl from the Golden Vale* (romantic drama, 1916), *Irish Jarvey Tales* (1916), *The Miser's Gift* (J. M. Kerrigan, romantic comedy, 1916), *O'Neil of the Glen* (J. M. Kerrigan, social melodrama, 1916), *Puck Fair Romance* (J. M. Kerrigan, social melodrama, 1916), *Shanachie's Tales* (1916), *Treasure Trove* (1916), *An Unfair Love Affair* (J. M. Kerrigan, romantic comedy, 1916), *Widow Malone* (J. M. Kerrigan, comedy, 1916), *Woman's Wit* (J. M. Kerrigan, comedy/drama, 1916), *Blarney* (J. M. Kerrigan, comedy, 1917), *The Bynways of Fate* (J. M. Kerrigan, comedy, 1917), *Cleansing Fires* (comedy, 1917), *A Girl of Glenbeigh* (J. M. Kerrigan, social melodrama, 1917), *The Irish Girl* (J. M. Kerrigan, social melodrama, 1917), *A Man's Redemption* (drama, 1917), *Passing Shadows/A Passing Shower* (comedy, 1917), *Rafferty's Rise* (J. M. Kerrigan, romantic comedy, 1917), *The Upstart* (J. M. Kerrigan, comedy, 1917), and *When Love Came to Gavin Burke* (Fred O'Donovan, social melodrama, 1917); Celtic Film Company films—*Willie Scouts While Jessie Pouts* (William J. Powers, comedy, 1918) and *Rosaleen Dhu* (William J. Powers, historical melodrama, 1919); and the Irish Photo-Plays films—*The Casey Millions* (John MacDonagh, romantic comedy, 1922), *Cruiskeen Lawn* (John MacDonagh, romantic comedy, 1922, released 1924), and *Wicklow Gold* (John MacDonagh, romantic comedy, 1922). Credits and dates were determined by cross listing filmographies: K. Rockett, *The Irish filmography* (6–14); “Irish Film and TV Research Online”; “Film and TV Database”; Condon (274–83). Also consulted were the following credit lists on prints: the Liam O'Leary Archives (LOLA), NLI; archival collections at the TML; trade papers, particularly *The Irish Limelight*, and contemporary newspapers. There is some disagreement over both the credits and whether *Land of Her Fathers* is indigenously Irish. In his 1980 pamphlet for the London Festival of the Irish Arts, *Film & Ireland*, and in “1930s Fictions” (57), Kevin Rockett lists John (Sean) Hurley as the producer. “Irish Film & TV Research Online,” last updated in 2012, points to Winslow as the producer, and the U.S. Transatlantic Pictures as the production company. Production credits in his more recent filmography were taken from the available trims at the IFA. According to Hugh Oram and Hurley's daughter, Maureen, however, the film was produced by Hurley who brought over an American director and used a script by a British writer, Donn-Byrne; however he employed Abbey players in his cast. See Oram, and “Letter from Maureen Hurley to Sunniva O'Flynn.” Oram also notes the film had only one showing at the Grafton Cinema on October 1, 1925, since Hurley was aiming for an American market. The American distributors Hurley hired disappeared in New York with the print and apparently screened it in several US cities. His own copy was presented in 1960 to the National Library in Dublin and subsequently disappeared (13).

limiting those roles to the domestic sphere.

Irish studies on the intersection of Irish nationalism and women in history and literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century point to a complex connection between gender and national identity. As Myrtle Hill notes, women's "major contribution was seen to be in the private domain, sustaining and nurturing family life and thus perpetuating the race" (59).⁷ The Catholic Church in its alliance with the state and civil societies in the south promoted these conservative views. Carol Coulter, however, explains how a number of Irish feminists negotiated a place for themselves in the national arena: "these politically active women of the early twentieth century came out of a pre-existing tradition of women's involvement in nationalist struggles . . . this offered them a scope for a wider range of activities in public life" (3; see also Nash). Literary studies, like C. L. Innes' book and Kathryn Kirkpatrick's compilation of articles on Irish women writers of this period, reveal a similar mix of traditional and radical views of women's role in the nationalist struggles (see "Introduction." Kirkpatrick 5).

Studies connecting nationalism and women, however, have been absent from scholarship on Irish silent cinema. When nationalism is discussed, research focuses on Irish identity, the landscape or connections to the Anglo/Irish conflicts at the time of production. When either women filmmakers or images of women are discussed, the focus is predominantly on contemporary cinema.⁸ This study links nationalism and women in Irish silent cinema by looking at how female representation in these early films reflected a gendered ideology that existed in Irish culture alongside other narratives of the nation. This gendered ideology codified women as national symbols. As such, they could only serve the state in their role as maidens, wives and mothers. Such images, however, ignored women's lived experiences and their published reflections on nationhood. Irish women not only fought for self-determination in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but they also set a variety of nationalist agendas. Early Irish cinema, then, reflected one side of a deeply divided Irish culture.

Historical Images of Women

One image noticeably absent from these early films is that of women's active involvement in the narrative's historical events. The historical melodrama *Ireland a Nation* fictionalizes Robert Emmet's 1803 rebellion after Britain's dissolution of the Irish parliament in Dublin.⁹

⁷ Hill's social historical study is one of the few that discusses women both in the north and south of Ireland.

⁸ For general studies of Irish filmmaking in the silent period, see Condon (236–60); Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (23–33); McLoone, "National Cinema in Ireland"; Pettitt; K. Rockett, "The Silent Period." For works on censorship, see Martin; K. Rockett and E. Rockett; Burns-Bisogno. For film history, see the above works and Flynn, *The story of Irish film* (19–29); K. Rockett and Finn; McIlroy (4–33); Slide (1–38). For women and Irish cinema, see Barton, "Why We're Not Getting It . . ." ; Barton, "Feisty Colleens and Faithful Sons"; Meaney, "Landscapes of Desire"; Murphy.

⁹ Thomas Schatz in *Hollywood Genres* discusses the cinematic social melodrama in early American and European cinema, explaining how "'melodrama' was applied to popular romances that depicted a virtuous woman or

The film, which makes a case for national self-determination and legitimizes armed rebellion, establishes the male characters as nationalist subjects. In contrast, the two women historically connected to the rebellion, Anne Devlin and Sarah Curran, are portrayed simply as the housekeeper who didn't betray Emmet and the woman who stood by him during his trial and death. They are seen as peripheral players in the nationalist struggle, not agents of history. *Women's recovered history*, however, portrays a very different Anne Devlin. Her prison journal tells of how she participated in discussions of rebel plans, organized and delivered messages, and spent three years in jail for her involvement (Finegan; Devlin; Ward, "Irish Women and Nationalism"). In the film, the full extent of her participation is avoided. Instead she is married off to fellow rebel Michael Dwyer to satisfy the narrative's romantic underpinnings.

The other historical melodramas also exclude women from any participation in the political struggles. *Knocknagow*, scripted by Ulster romance writer Mrs. N. F. Patton from Charles Kickham's 1879 novel, chronicles the landlord/tenant disputes of the 1800s. Conflicts involving the female protagonists, Bessie and Mary, center only on their romantic relationships. Similarly, in *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn*, based on William Carlton's 1855 novel, Protestant Helen is caught in the middle of the Protestant/Catholic clashes of the mid-1700s only because the man she loves is a Catholic. *Irish Destiny*, which chronicles the events surrounding the Anglo Irish War (1919-1921), features three women: Mrs. O'Hara, mother of IRA fighter Denis; Moira, the school teacher who loves him; and Kitty, the Jarvey's daughter and friend to both Moira and Denis. However, none of them effect change in the political events around them. The most active in the conflict is Kitty who helps Denis prepare for his courier run, and tells the IRA commander of her concerns about his safety. Kitty, however, is motivated only by a desire to protect the budding romance between Moira and Denis. Political conflicts in these films are addressed and resolved through the efforts of men, while women are pushed to the side awaiting outcomes that impact them only on the level of the romance.

If these films are to be understood, as some scholars have argued, in terms of their connection to the political upheavals at the time of production, then the absence of women is particularly telling. Ruth Barton explains that the popularity of both *Knocknagow* and *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* depended on their creation of a national belonging through their presentation of both an imagined and historical past (*Irish National Cinema* 30). To look at these films, however, one would conclude that women had no role in nationalist movements throughout Irish history. As a number of scholars have pointed out, not all women supported nationalist causes. Of those who did, not all contributed outside the domestic sphere (Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* 248; McCarthy 100). But there were women in Ireland very active in various nationalist struggles in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, though Irish

couple victimized by repressive and inequitable social circumstances, particularly those involving marriage, occupation, and the nuclear family" (221–222). In the historical melodrama, social circumstances are intertwined with political events. Romance may or may not be central to the narrative, but is always featured.

history for the most part has ignored or marginalized them. Cultural historians like Louise Ryan, Margaret Ward, Ruth Taillon, and Sinéad McCooole have recovered women's lived experiences in Irish history (L. Ryan and Ward; Taillon; McCooole, *Guns & chiffoin*; McCooole, *No ordinary women*), while the women's memoirs, journals, and other personal accounts tell us how these women saw their role in Ireland's changing political and social scene.

When the first of these historical films, *Ireland a Nation*, was screened in 1914, women were actively involved in public efforts at self-determination. Some were speaking up for Home Rule, while others advocated complete independence. By the time *Knocknagow* and *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* graced the Dublin screens in 1918 and 1920 respectively, nearly two hundred women had already taken part in the 1916 Rising as couriers, gun runners, nurses, doctors, armed combatants, commanders, and ghosts (persons prepared to assume the duties of a dead leader), and many were to continue in these capacities during the ensuing fight for independence.¹⁰ Nora Connolly O'Brien's memoir speaks of her nationalist passion in the days leading up to the Rising. She moved between the north and the south delivering messages that united the efforts of rebels throughout Ireland (20–21, 31, and 80). Linda Kearns' memoir reads like a textbook case of post-traumatic stress disorder. A nurse and dispatcher, Kearns was captured and held in Walton Prison in Liverpool for transporting men and weapons. In her memoirs she describes her nightmares: "Well, it is all over now, but still sometimes . . . a terrible feeling grips me for the moment, and an icy fear descends upon me that I am asleep – asleep in Walton Jail, and that I only dream that I am free!" (28).¹¹ When *Irish Destiny* was released in 1926, Ireland had already established an independent government and women like Constance Markievicz, Mary MacSwiney, Alice Stopford Green, and Jennie Wyse Powers were active in the running of that government (Haverty 187–230; Fallon 75–157; Comerford, "Alice Stopford Green"; O'Neill). Women's activism took many forms prior to and during the formation of the Irish Republic government in 1919 and the later Free State government in 1922. They were, in fact, very much a part of Ireland's nation building.

Early Irish filmmaking seems to have taken a lesson from the annals of a male-centered history, however, writing women out of the frames much as they have been written out of history. Instead of presenting women's varied social and political roles, the films advocate a nationalist ideology where women function as symbols of an Irish nation struggling for self-determination. Such iconography configuring the nation as female is not unique to Ireland. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias point out how women function in multiple symbolic ways during periods of national liberation: "Women do not only teach and transfer the cultural and ideological traditions of ethnic and national groups. Very often

¹⁰ For couriers during the Anglo/Irish conflict, see K. K. Behan and B. Behan; Donnelly; Comerford, "Women in Struggle"; McCooole, *No Ordinary Women* (172); Clarke. For the nurses and doctors, see Kearns (28); McCooole, *No Ordinary Women* (177–178, 181). See also the women's stories of participation in Ward, *In Their Own Voice*; Taillon (xxi–xxvii); Shiubhlaigh and Kenny (164–167).

¹¹ See also the writings of Mary Spring Rice and Molly Childers who endured a month at sea smuggling weapons into Ireland for the Rising. (Spring Rice, "Diary of the Asgard: 1-26 July 1914"; "Letters from the Asgard, July 1914").

they constitute their actual symbolic figuration” (315; see also Anthias, Yuval-Davis, and Cain 28, 115; Kristeva 34; Hearne). In Ireland this link between women and nationalism is evident in the three foundational female images of Irish national discourse: the pre-Christian sovereignty goddess, the seventeenth-nineteenth century *aisling*, and the nineteenth century Catholic Republican Irish mother. One can trace both the *aisling* and the Irish mother to the sovereignty goddess trope from native Irish tradition. In pre-Christian Ireland the goddess is seen as a personification of the land; when she suffers so does the land. Later she emerges in Irish mythology as the warrior queen: Queen Medbh of Connacht who in the Ulster cycle brings land and wealth to a marriage, and defends and expands that land in wartime.¹² In the literature of modern Ireland (post seventeenth century), this image is reflected in the representation of Ireland as a woman, and in the association of women with the land. In late seventeenth century poetry, the more timid *aisling* enters the national discourse as an embodiment of a suppressed Ireland under British rule. And in the nineteenth century, with the growing influence of the Catholic Church, a related image appears: that of the suffering Irish mother who sacrifices her male children for “Mother Ireland.” The Kathleen ní Houlihan figure of poetry, prose and drama surfaces as a combination of all three: the sovereign, the *aisling* and the Irish mother.¹³ In each of these images, women serve as the site where different threads of male power intersect. Eventually, these images find their way into early Irish cinema.

Feminization of Ireland

In the first of these cinematic images women emerge as symbols of an “imagined” nation, bearing the burden of threat to that nation. As Gerardine Meaney notes in her study of contemporary filmmaking, “From the beginning, the way in which Irish women were represented on screen was intimately connected with the way Ireland itself was perceived” (“Landscapes of Desire” 238). This feminization of Ireland is evident in *In the Days of St. Patrick*. Patrick feels a calling to return to Erin, which is suffering under the rule of an oppressive king. This manifests in the form of a dream featuring a collective of women, arms outstretched, beseeching him to return. When he does, these very same women populate the crowds that come to hear him advocate religious and civil freedom. That gendering of Erin transfers from the collective in his dreams to the figure of the Queen of Erin. She appears physically weak as she pleads with her husband to listen to Patrick whose very presence is the key to a more stable nation. It is Patrick, however, who unifies the country. His closing remarks to his religious followers reflect directly on an Irish national identity that is both Catholic and Irish-speaking: “if they remain as Irish as the soil I have so often blessed in

¹² The following collections of Irish histories, myths and sagas were used in this study: Gantz; Carson; Jackson; *Lady Gregory's Complete Irish mythology*; Byrne; Ó hÓgáin.

¹³ See the discussion of all these images in Cullingford 79–88; Sawyer 1–46; Nash 111–116; Innes 9–62; Hywel; Reynolds.

their land, they shall live on for eternity.” Women’s role in this nation-building is purely representational. The female image is the embodiment of a nation not yet formed.

This association of women with the land also is evident in the historical melodramas, where nationalist clashes impact both women and the land. During the Anglo Irish War in *Irish Destiny*, the raiding Black and Tans displace villagers and fracture families. Denis is engaged to be married to Moira, but leaves her to run messages for the IRA. In his absence she is abducted by the British informer Beecher, leader of a gang who is raiding the land to make poteen. Beecher imprisons her in the poteen mill and threatens her with rape. Kathleen Murphy in her brief discussion of this film equates the raiding of the land with the raping of Moira. This connection between women and the land is obvious when Denis saves his village and Moira from both Beecher and the Black and Tans (31). In *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn*, Helen’s body becomes the figurative site of a nationalist conflict. Because of Willy and Helen’s religious differences, her father encourages her to marry Whitecraft. Motivated by bigotry, Whitecraft uses anti-Catholic laws to drive Willy away. This sends Helen into a catatonic state, and her deteriorating condition reflects a disjointed Ireland that is in need of healing. In the end, Willy returns and their mixed religious marriage is an endorsement of a more united Ireland. Though operating from two different, but related political arguments—one for a united Ireland and the other for a complete break from Britain—the two films present women as symbols of an Irish nation. Their suffering echoes the nation’s suffering.

In *Knocknagow* land disputes, evictions, and poverty have put an “imagined” agrarian utopia of budding romances, the Knocknagow of old, in abeyance. Corrupt land agents, an inefficient legal system, and the British dragoons that enforce that system interfere with the business of building families and farming the land. This is reflected in the relationship between Norah and Billy. Daughter of poor tenant farmers, Norah is seriously ill, but the family cannot afford medical care. Flashbacks showing Billy and a healthy Norah walking in the countryside contrast sharply with the escalating evictions that are ripping the Irish from their land. Her physical deterioration parallels the violated pastoralism of Knocknagow. At the end of the film, Norah dies. She is a casualty, like Ireland, of colonial rule. Barton argues that the film was probably not intended to be read as an example of nation-building, “but as a tale of simple folk whose innate goodness enables them to overcome injustice. It is redolent of the cult of the peasant that imbues Irish cultural representations of the period, displacing onto the country people of its central narrative the values of the imagined nation” (Barton, *Irish National Cinema* 25). However newspaper advertisements and reviews indicate that the film’s attention to a lost pastoral ideal at the hands of an unjust colonial land system in the 1800s resonated in a country struggling for political independence from Britain in the 1900s (Advertisement. *Irish Independent*, Apr. 24, 1918; “Empire Theatre”; “Knocknagow A Splendid Irish Film Play”; “Knocknagow: Filming of Kickham’s Famous Novel”). By aligning Norah’s destruction with the ruptured pastoralism, the film also acknowledges women as figurative representations of the land.



In *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* (John MacDonagh, 1920), Helen's body becomes the site of the nationalist conflict between Protestants and Catholics. Protestant Helen (background) is in love with Catholic Reilly, but their relationship is thwarted by landowner Whitecraft, a British sympathizer during the land wars of the mid-1700s, who wants Reilly's land and Helen as his wife.

Courtesy of Irish Film Archive.

The symbolic rhetoric of Irish femininity is further evident in the second female image found in early Irish cinema, that of the eighteenth and nineteenth century literary *aisling*, the helpless maiden of colonial Ireland.¹⁴ In early poetry and ballads, her misfortunes are an allegory of Ireland's problems after the Williamite land confiscations at the end of the seventeenth century. The films drew on two nineteenth century popular literary types in the *aisling* tradition: the *Colleen Bawn* and the *Rosaleen Dhu*.¹⁵ The *Colleen Bawn* appears throughout nineteenth century romances as an innocent, childlike woman confronted with competing suitors, one of whom is an emotional and physical threat to her. A similar stereotype is found in James Clarence Mangan's popular nineteenth century ballad "My Dark Rosaleen," which features a young maiden suffering at the hands of a colonial oppressor. Rosaleen's sorrows are borne out in the damage to the land: "O! the Erne shall run red / With redundance of blood" (Mangan 273–275). That both *Colleen* and *Rosaleen* could be saved in literature brought hope to an Ireland suffering under the economic and political oppression of colonial rulers.¹⁶

The cinematic *aisling* owes much to her literary ancestors. The same gender polarities are evident in the construction of masculinities and femininities in the films. Female protagonists are inert, passive, and innocent, while male protagonists are strong, active, and knowledgeable. In *Ireland a Nation*, Anne Devlin and Sarah Curran remain fixed in the domestic settings, while Robert Emmet moves freely through the countryside leading the United Irishmen of Ireland against the invading British. In *Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn*, Helen is helpless in the hands of a jealous suitor who emotionally and physically abuses her, though they are of the same religion. Willy protects her while at the same time fighting to keep his land from the Protestants. And in *Irish Destiny*, Moira is confined to the village, while Denis joins the IRA and runs messages between Dublin and his village. This polarity is further reflected in a gendered relationship to the land. Women are composed in tight frames that reveal their association with an imagined idyllic land. Moira is placed beside the foliage outside her home, Helen is posed amidst her father's luscious gardens, and Mary in *Knocknagow* is profiled against Slievenamon, the mountain of the women. In contrast, the men are filmed in loose frames as they hold meetings and battle on the land fighting for Irish rights. It is the feminized image of Ireland and the land that the men struggle to preserve.

¹⁴ An entire genre developed around this helpless image of women as evident throughout the *An Duanaire*, a collection of Irish poetry that spans the period from the collapse of the Gaelic culture in the seventeenth century to its revival in the twentieth century (Ó Tuama).

¹⁵ McLoone in *Film, Media and Popular Culture in Ireland* argues that female stereotypes dominated Irish national ideology, along with the heroic male, the supportive Parish priest and the "nasty" colonizer (90). Mary Trotter makes a similar argument in her discussion of theatre history in *Ireland's National Theatres* (38–39). See also Nash, (114).

¹⁶ As Gibbons notes in "Identity without a Centre: Allegory, History and Irish Nationalism," such figures "promised apocalyptic deliverance from the Williamite confiscations in Ireland" (366).

Contemporary reviews and filmographies of the lost titles suggest the popularity of both the Rosaleen Dhu and Colleen Bawn images, though only a few of these films allude to nationalist struggles. The Celtic Film Company's 1919 historical melodrama *Rosaleen Dhu* (William J. Powers) is set during the Land Wars of 1879-1882.¹⁷ When a Fenian is evicted from his home by evil land grabbers, he joins the French Foreign Legion where he meets and marries a local Algerian woman who proves to be the kidnapped heiress of a murdered Irish landowner. An advertisement in the *Irish Times* calls the film "A Tense Thrilling Historic Irish Drama of the Land League Days."¹⁸ The film features all the key Rosaleen players: the colonial oppressors, the female victim, and the Irish hero who not only rescues her, but sees that Irish land is returned to its rightful owners.

The Colleen character was a company staple for the Film Company of Ireland (FCOI), which produced social melodramas and romantic comedies in addition to the historical melodramas *Knocknagow* and *Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn*. Female desirability, vulnerability, and dependence are at the center of films like their 1916 social melodrama *O'Neil of the Glen*. Based on a story by romance writer Mrs. Pender, the film features a woman (Nola) tormented by a suitor (Graves) who is blackmailing her father for a murder he committed many years earlier. Nola rejects Graves' offer of marriage, because she is more interested in Don O'Neil. Like the other women in early Irish films, she has little control over the direction of her life. The conflicts are settled by the men as Nola waits in a distant village.¹⁹ The popularity of the Colleen image is further evident in the company's twenty five romantic comedies all of which featured some aspect of the Colleen character.²⁰ *Paying the Rent* (John MacDonagh,

¹⁷ William Powers shot this film, *Willie Scouts While Jessie Pouts*, and the incomplete *Irish Vendetta* (1920) around Wicklow and supposedly developed the film in barrels behind his barber shop. A copy of *Rosaleen Dhu* survived but was destroyed in the 1932 floods in Little Bray. See O Fearail, "For the Film"; "Bray Notes"; Flynn, "Bray's Film Pioneer"; and the Celtic Film Company File (LOLA).

¹⁸ For reviews and other information on *Rosaleen Dhu*, see "Celtic Film Company's 'Rosaleen Dhu'"; "Rosaleen Dhu"; "Irish Film & TV Research Online"; Condon (238); Advertisement. *Irish Times*, May 1, 1920; Advertisement. *Dublin Evening Mail*, May 1, 1920.

¹⁹ For plot summaries and reviews of *O'Neil of the Glen*, see: Paddy; *The Bioscope* Sept. 14, 1916 1060; Advertisement. *The Bioscope* Aug. 24, 1916; "Advertisement," *Irish Times*, Aug. 7, 1916; "Stage and Gallery"; Advertisement. *Dublin Evening Mail*, Aug. 12, 1916; K. Rockett, "O'Neil of the Glen"; "'O'Neil of the Glen,' 1916 Programme"; "Irish Film & TV Research Online"; Condon (239-242). According to a later advertisement in the *Evening Herald* on May 3, 1920, the film reemerged for a three-day run (2). Another social melodrama from the FCOI, *When Love Came to Gavin Burke*, is interesting for its message about women and marriage. Because they have no earning power, women must consider the financial worth of potential partners. The film features two generations of women, Kate and later her daughter, Grace, who are both courted by suitors of different financial means. According to "When Love Came to Gavin Burke" in *The Irish Limelight*, "Kate is torn between conflicting emotions, but finally, determines that her head instead of her heart must govern" (6). She marries the prosperous hotel-keeper, instead of the poor farmer. Years later her daughter is faced with the same decision, but follows her heart and marries the man she loves.

²⁰ Unfortunately, most of the FCOI's comedies were lost in Dublin fires during the 1916 Rising ("What the Irish Film Company Is Doing"; K. Rockett, "The Silent Period" 17). Reviews and advertisements of the lost films, however, point to the popularity of this image: "Market at a Glance (An Unfair Love Affair)"; "The Miser's Gift"; "Rafferty's Rise." See also reviews and advertisements for Irish Photo-Plays which produced romantic comedies in this tradition: *The Casey Millions* ("Casey's Millions"; "Public Amusements"; "Before the Footlights"; "The Casey Millions, Program"); *Cruiskeen Lawn* ("Cruiskeen Lawn"; "An Irish Film"); *Wicklow Gold* ("Cinema Notes," *Irish Times*, Sept. 9, 1922; "Cinema Notes," *Irish Times*, Sept. 16, 1922; "Amusements in

1919).²¹ Here Molly is at the mercy of a mother who promises her daughter in marriage to a wealthy fifty year-old bachelor as part of a deal to help her parents make the rent payments. The surviving RTE reel includes intertitles describing Molly as “young and fair” with “big blue eyes and golden hair.” Her drunken father even bets on a horse appropriately named Molly Bawn. Though many of these FCOI comedies were not historical, they carried on the Colleen image, now firmly embedded in the national discourse.

The Irish Mother

The aisling model is deeply rooted in Ireland’s Catholic teachings, which early established the Virgin Mary as a model of female behavior. Roger Sawyer argues that the Church’s influence in these matters dates back to the days of St. Brigid (fifth and sixth century) when the cloister tradition enforced a virginal, self-sacrificing code of behavior that removed women from any influence in public affairs (8–10).²² By the late middle ages, the Cult of the Virgin Mary wedded this code with the spiritual ideal of the Virgin Mary, prescribing female traits like humility, obedience, compassion, and purity (Warner 185; Lyons; Innes 26–42; Crilly).²³ According to Belinda Loftus, the nineteenth century Irish famine produced another view of Mary, the suffering Mater Dolorosa. In the twentieth century, the image assumed political significance as mothers gave their sons to the fight for independence (58). This Lady of the Sorrows shaped cinema’s third iconic image of womanhood: the self-sacrificing Irish mother.

The Irish mother was a powerful image in the national discourse surrounding the struggle for self-determination and formation of Irish Free State. Women were important not as individualized citizens, but in their association with the men who fought and died for Ireland’s freedom. Their value resided in their biological role as producer of male warriors for the state, and in their social obligation to transmit Irish culture to their children. Eamon de Valera’s 1932 eulogy delivered upon the death of Margaret Pearse, mother of slain 1916 Rising leaders Padraic and William, praises this “ideal Irish woman” who served the aspirations of the state in her role as mother: “Yet it was from her that . . . [her sons] learnt that ardent love for Ireland and for Gaelic culture and tradition that became the passion of their lives. It was from her that they inherited the strength of soul that made them resolute and unshrinking in the career they foresaw would end in death” (Valiulis 117). Like the

Dublin”; Advertisement. *Dublin Evening Mail*, Nov. 20, 1922; “Wicklow Gold”; “Irish Picture at the Empire”) See also K. Rockett, *The Irish filmography* (10–11); P. B. Ryan (37–38, 47).

²¹ See the program for *Paying the Rent* and other material related to the film in the FCOI File (LOLA).

²² Women in early medieval Ireland did not enjoy many of the benefits that have gathered around the legend of St. Brigid. Lisa Bitel reminds us that “all women in early medieval Ireland, including saints, were legally disenfranchised At best, Irish gender ideologies were generally ambivalent toward women and, at worst, rigorously misogynist” (2).

²³ The Cult of True Womanhood in eighteenth and nineteenth century US and European culture prescribed similar conservative values sanctioned by a Christian religion. See Barbara Welter’s frequently quoted article on this subject: “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820 to 1860.”

Lady of the Sorrows, she was obligated to sacrifice her sons for the larger good. In *In the Days of St. Patrick* this is the image of Begninus' mother who sacrifices her son to Patrick's ministry. His departure is heart-wrenching, but she must lose her son to save Ireland from a "darkness" brought on by an oppressive king. The image of the suffering Irish mother is also prevalent in the 1919 non-fiction film, *The Dáil Bonds*, shot during the filming of *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn*. This short film features Michael Collins seated behind the block on which Robert Emmet was beheaded. He is selling Dáil Éireann bonds to raise money for the new government. The women notables supporting the bonds are introduced in the intertitles as mothers, wives, and sisters of Ireland's martyrs: the mother of Padraic Pearse, the mother of Michael O'Hanrahan, the daughter of James Connolly, and the widow of Tom Clarke – all of whom sacrificed children, fathers or husbands to the national cause.²⁴

The self-sacrificing Irish mother is central to both *Irish Destiny* and *Guests of the Nation*, but in vastly different ways. *Irish Destiny* was released five years after the 1921 peace treaty that ended the Anglo Irish War. The film looks back at that struggle for self-determination and its impact on the villages of Ireland. Two nationalist symbols of Ireland figure in this film: the home and the Irish mother who never leaves it. The country's political instability threatens to disrupt the O'Hara home whose matriarch is troubled by rumors of British soldiers pillaging villages. By the time the Black and Tans invade her village in search of rebels, she has both emotionally and physically deteriorated: "Oh, Denis! Everything turns black when I'm startled, my sight is failing." When she learns that Denis has joined the fight and no one has heard from him, she physically collapses. The family priest echoes this association between her now troubled home with all of Ireland: "We and Ireland's Destiny are in the hands of God." The film ends with Denis escaping prison and returning home to his ailing mother.²⁵ The reunion is bittersweet. Though her physical strength starts to return, her sight does not. Mrs. O'Hara's sacrifice, however, does not go unnoticed. The return to stability in the home, the film tells us, marks the beginning of freedom and harmony for all of Ireland.²⁶ *Guests of the Nation* paints a very different picture of the Irish mother. As the Irish silent period came to a close with this film, the industry already was abandoning its reliance on both nationalist stereotypes and historical melodramas. Set during the Anglo Irish War, *Guests of the Nation* is a war film. Void of the romantic underpinnings of the historical melodrama, the film is more

²⁴ A viewing copy of *The Dáil Bonds* (John MacDonagh, 1919) is in the IFA. (MacDonagh 11; K. Rockett, *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn*; Palmer "Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn, exhibition video"; *Reviewing the Revolution. Ireland 1916-23 on Film*).

²⁵ Denis' escape from prison, along with other prisoners, sets this film in 1921, the year of the massive Curagh prison break of IRA Volunteers. Shortly after, the Anglo Irish War came to a close and the Irish Free State was born.

²⁶ *Irish Destiny* was banned in Great Britain, not surprisingly given its pro-Republican message. However, the universal appeal of the Irish mother is evident in a recut version that removed the nationalist underpinnings. Re-titled *An Irish Mother*, the film had a successful run in Britain in 1928. An advertisement in the *British Kinematograph Weekly*, quoting the *Sunday Express Review*, writes "An 'Irish Mother' is Ireland's most notable contribution to the screen. The story is concerned with old political disturbances and the exploits of the Irish Republican Army. It is an interesting and a charming picture of Irish life and scenery" (6). See also "An Irish Mother."



Mrs. O'Hara is the self-sacrificing Irish Mother in Isaac Eppel's *Irish Destiny* (1926), set during the Anglo Irish War that followed the 1916 Uprising. Two nationalist symbols are at the center of this film: the home and the Irish mother who never leaves it. As Black and Tans terrorize the peaceful village of Clonmore, Denis comforts his mother. After Denis joins the IRA and fails to return, she physically and emotionally collapses. Courtesy of the Irish Film Archives.

critical of the female stereotypes, particularly the Irish mother. Two women worked behind the camera on this film: Mary Manning adapted the script from a Frank O'Connor short story and Máirín Hayes co-edited the film with director Denis Johnston.²⁷ The film features two women: a courier in a minor role and an old woman. In contrast to the O'Connor short story, which is narrated by one of the Irish soldiers guarding the British prisoners in the old woman's home, Manning's adaptation places her at the center of the conflict. The prisoners are her surrogate sons. Many Irish women voiced their resistance to British presence by opening their homes to the Irish Volunteers during the 1916 Rising and subsequent Anglo

²⁷ In 1930 Manning directed the non-fiction short *Bank Holiday* ("Irish Film & TV Research Online").

Irish War. Johnston's own mother, a Home Ruler, was one of them.²⁸ But the old woman in Manning's screenplay holds none of the nationalist views that motivated women to open their homes to Irish freedom fighters. When the captors prepare to move the prisoners, she fears for their safety: "Where are you taking them?" The picture of the Virgin Mary adorns the wall behind her. After the prisoners are executed, she is seen saying her rosary in an empty house. The Irish mother holds no symbolic value here. She has given no sons to the nationalist cause, nor is she able to care for other mother's sons. *Guests of the Nation* provided an alternative view of the nationalist struggle and exposed the stereotype of the Irish mother for all its limitations. The film, however, had a very limited run and Johnston never made another film.²⁹ In fact, few films were made in Ireland between *Irish Destiny* and *Guests of the Nation*. The Irish film industry was already faltering by 1930.³⁰

The pre-1930 films,³¹ however, with their images of innocent maidens (aislings), suffering Irish mothers and virulent male rebels resonated with audiences of the period. The popularity of these films reflected the way in which nationalist traditions are created and maintained through cultural practices. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "cultural and literary traditions (including the most ancient ones) are preserved and continue to live . . . in the objective forms of culture itself (including linguistic and discursive forms)" (qtd. in Todorov 85).³² These indigenous productions boasted enthusiastic audiences who cheered on-screen struggles for independence. Both *Knocknagow* and *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* had long runs with packed houses and repeated screenings in later years. During *Knocknagow's* third week, the

²⁸ In Pat Brennan's interview, Johnston notes, "My mother very properly brought tea for the boys. It seemed very natural . . . There was nothing frightening about it" ("First Night Jitters 52 Years Later" 11).

²⁹ According to Johnston's *Miscellaneous Notebooks*, the film premiered at the Gate Theatre on January 20, 1935 in a private showing, and again at the North London Film Society and the Paramount in March (*DJ Papers* MS 10066/167 107, 114, and 115).

³⁰ Only two feature films were made between *Irish Destiny* and *Guests of the Nation*: *Some Say Chance*, about the relationship between a prostitute and her estranged daughter, and *By Accident*, a psychological drama about a young man obsessed with a woman who doesn't return his affections. For information on *Some Say Chance*, see: "Irish Amateur Film"; "Some Say Chance"; "New Irish Film"; and the Michael Farrell File (LOLA). For information on *By Accident*, see: "Program 1: From Lantern to Slide Show"; "Producing Films in Ireland"; "Film Makers at Work"; "Irish Amateur Films in Dublin"; "Dublin May Rival Hollywood If Film Productions Pay"; "Irish Girl Makes Film Name." The Irish film industry suffered as a result of foreign imports, personal tragedies and a dwindling interest in filmmaking. Advertisements in newspapers and trade papers between 1907 to 1934 (*Dublin Evening Mail*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times*, *Evening Herald*, *Evening Press*, *The Irish Limelight*, and *The Bioscope*) confirm competition from foreign imports. See also "Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer, the Joseph Holloway Diaries (1851-1930)." The prolific FCOI had already ceased making films in 1919 when its producer James Mark Sullivan's wife and child died of the flu, and William J. Powers' Celtic Film Company stopped producing when he died in a riding accident during the filming of *Irish Vendetta* in 1920 (Condon 238, 254). Slide explains in *The Cinema and Ireland* that a number of filmmakers, like J. M. Kerrigan and Norman Whitten, left to work abroad in the 1920s (10, 11, 47, 82, 101). Others like John MacDonagh, Fred Donovan, Mary Manning and Máirín Hayes lost interest and returned fulltime to their work in theatre (Dean; "Program 2: Irish Productions Find Their Feet").

³¹ Advertisements and articles in all Dublin newspapers and those in the Provinces (*Clonmel Chronicle*, *Connaught Telegraph*, *Connacht Tribune*, *Limerick Leader*, *Tuam Herald*, *Nenagh Guardian*, and *Westmeath Examiner*) between the years 1914 and 1935 were examined for information on film screenings and reception.

³² In "From Notes Made in 1970-71," Bakhtin argues that literature cannot be studied outside its cultural context (Morris 53).



Guests of the Nation (Denis Johnston, 1935) featured the only female role in early Irish cinema that directly reflected the work of women who participated in the Anglo Irish War. Shelah Richards, a Gate Theatre actor, played a courier in a minor role. During the war, many women served as couriers, including Nora Connolly O'Brien who delivered messages between the north and the south of the country. Courtesy of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin.

Phibsboro' extended its run because so many people had been turned away (Advertisement, *Evening Herald*, May 16, 1918). When *In the Days of St. Patrick* was first shown in 1920 during the annual National Festival, "full and appreciative audiences" applauded the Irishness of the film ("A Look Around: Dublin's Theatre Attractions" 2). A "deafening ovation" was heard throughout the showings of *Irish Destiny* ("Attractions of the Week" 2). And when *Ireland a Nation* had its brief two-day run at the Rotunda in Dublin, crowds shouted "Up the rebels!" and cheered on the demise of British soldiers ("Ireland a Nation," *The Irish Limelight* 19). The film was quickly withdrawn for inciting audiences with national fervor ("Film Picture Suppressed").

The gendered images of Irish nationalism extended beyond cinematic practices and into the political rhetoric of the period. In the 1920s, the newly formed Irish Free State government passed measures that limited civil examinations on the basis of sex, excluded women from jury duty, and regulated women's employment because such activities kept women from their prescribed roles in the home (Beaumont). Such measures were disconcerting to many of the women who were serving in the Free State government at the time (Valiulis 120–126; O'Neill 135–165).³³ By 1937 a constitution was in place recognizing "the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of the Society," and "that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" (Article 41, "Bunreacht Na Héireainn [Constitution of Ireland]" 236).³⁴ Drafted by then president de Valera, a man who refused to fight alongside the women soldiers during the 1916 Rising,³⁵ this document reinforced a political climate that already viewed married women's work outside the home as an act of selfishness. As Mary E. Daly notes in *Women and Work in Ireland*, "Attitudes in the Irish Free State were extremely hostile to the employment of women, particularly married women outside the home (49). Many women had participated in Ireland's nation-building, but when the country settled into the business of governing, their place in the national model was dictated by a gendered ideology that restricted their identity in Irish society and politics just as it had restricted their identity in Irish popular cinema.

Women in Ireland faced social, economic, and political prejudice well into the 1970s and 1980s when protests took to the streets and women spoke openly about the restrictions on their lives (Meaney, "Sex and Nation"; Beaumont). In the same period women emerged behind the camera and, together with the men, made films that challenged the gender stereotypes of early Irish cinema. The work of Pat Murphy, Joe Comerford, Cathal Black and Margo Harkins offered multiple perspectives on women, nation, and society. Murphy was one of the first of these early women directors. With *Anne Devlin* (1984) she inserted women back into Irish history, destabilizing the nationalist image of women found in the early silent

³³ For a discussion of women deputies who supported these bills on the grounds that they protected women's rights in and outside the home, see Clancy.

³⁴ For a discussion of the impact of this Constitution on women, see Scannell (123–36).

³⁵ See the interview with Sighle Humphries in Crilly's film *Mother Ireland*; McCarthy (56), and Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (110).

films.³⁶ Murphy's camera rarely leaves Anne who owns the cinematic space. This is Anne's story as we follow her developing understanding of her role in the 1803 fight for sovereignty. While posing as a housekeeper in the rebel headquarters in order to divert suspicion away from their activities, Anne finds an outlet for her republican leanings. She listens intently to plans for the insurrection and inserts her own views on strategy. Before her arrest, she is hiding important papers, helping the men escape and running messages. Anne's commitment to an active role in this nationalist movement is further evident when she meets Emmet in the prison yard at Kilmainham Jail. Already a condemned man, he urges her to inform on him to save herself. Pacing back and forth in front of Emmet, she refuses to look at him, asserting, "I'll not swear one word against you. It was not for you we did it."³⁷ Murphy's Anne is a nationalist who, like the historical Devlin of the Kilmainham prison journals, made her voice known even in her silence.

Murphy's cinematic female protagonist appeared seventy years after *Ireland a Nation* featured a very different Anne Devlin. This 1914 film ushered in a silent period in which filmmakers gave women no voice in the Irish national struggle. Tapping into foundational images of Irish national discourse, these films presented women as innocent victims of British atrocities or mothers of rebel sons. Historically, both genders helped forge a common history of struggle for self-determination in Ireland. Women were active in eighteenth century rebellions, helped run the nineteenth century Land League, and were contributors to Irish republicanism in the early twentieth century. However, silent cinema in Ireland favored images of women more palatable to the patriarchal national consciousness. As such, Irish women in all their diversity remained absent from early indigenous Irish cinema.

THE AUTHOR: Prof. Donna R. Casella is the director of the Film Studies Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato (USA). She also teaches courses in women filmmakers, film genres, nationalist films and film theory. She has published on early Irish cinema, Dorothy Arzner and US women screenwriters of the silent era.

³⁶ *Anne Devlin* (Pat Murphy, Bórd Scannán na hÉireann [Irish Film Board], 1984, IFA). This and Murphy's *Maeve* (BFI Production Board and RTE, 1981, IFA), gives voice to women's attitudes and involvement in both national and civil struggles.

³⁷ For studies of this and other Murphy films, see Gibbons, "The Politics of Silence"; Gibbons, "Lies that Tell the Truth"; Sullivan; C. Johnston.

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Dunja Dogo

**The Image of a Revolutionist:
Vera Figner in *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty***

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I will examine an excerpt from the first Soviet film reconstruction of the 1917 February Revolution, Esfir' Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927). My purpose is to provide a specific example of how, by means of cinema, Bolshevik propaganda related to the subject of women's involvement in the 1917 upheavals in Russia. The analysis of this fragment will serve as an illustration of how the initiative of women's organizations was played down in the early Soviet mass culture, and how their history was left out of the process through which an official, public memory of 1917 Russian Revolution was finally brought into existence.

A Visual History of the 1917 Revolution: Esfir' Shub at Work

Esfir' Shub's masterpiece, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (*Padenie dinastii Romanovykh*, 1927), offers an interesting source for a critical apprehension of the obliteration of women's role in the history of pre- and post-revolutionary Russia. A short sequence portraying Vera Figner, an old anarchist and a regicide, in the middle of a feminist rally in February 1917 prompts an interrogation on how early Bolshevik propaganda related to the subject of women's contribution to the events that led to the October Revolution. In what follows I will try to show how Shub's treatment of this fragment can only be understood in the frame of the Bolshevik attempt to mould a biased official memory, where all the different political strands of the revolutionary movement would be aligned under the single flag of the Bolshevik Party.

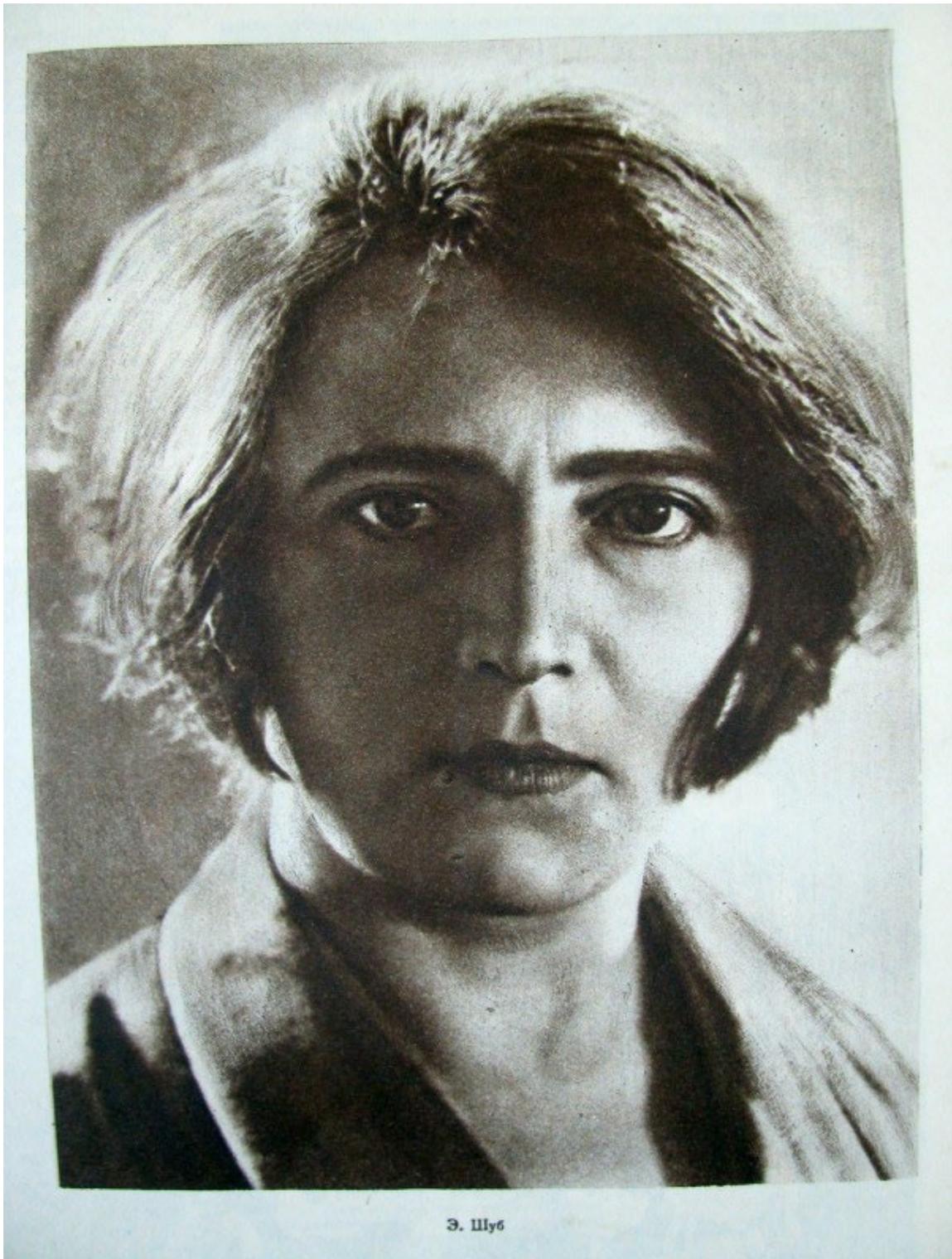
The project of a film recounting the events of 1917 February Revolution in Russia was assigned to Esfir' Shub in 1925.¹ The idea to use the cinematographic medium to convey the Bolshevik Party's official viewpoint on the year 1917 had been advocated by two well known Marxist scholars of the Russian revolutionary movement: Mikhail Z. Tseitlin, a research consultant at the Museum of the Revolution in Petrograd/Leningrad) and Mikhail N. Pokrovsky, who was then chair of the new Society of Marxist Historians, as well as in charge of several other leading positions in the Soviet cultural administration, including a long term mandate as an assistant chief at Narkompros [all-soviet union commissariat of enlightenment].²

When Shub was assigned the making of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*,³ she was already a

¹ For a complete profile of Esfir' Ilyichna Shub, also known as Esther in Anglo-American literature, see Petrich.

² In 1925, the historian Michail N. Pokrovsky (1868-1932) founded the first Marxist upper school for preparing professors to teach on the basis of the Marxist thought ideology. The historians who graduated at this institute did more than just writing about the historical events development: they interpreted the past according to a paradigm made to legitimize the October revolution. (Enteen; Ferro 163-70; Fitzpatrick 316).

³ Prepared under the working title "February," the film was released in March 1927 as a 1500 metres feature.



Esfir' Shub portrait, *Sovetskij ekran* 27 (5 July 1927).

professional editor, with a particular expertise in the practice of re-editing and re-titling. As she recalls in her memoirs, Shub had specialized in this particular practice since 1922, during her work at Goskino [central state directory body of the soviet cinematography], while she was still carrying out her training in film editing at the experimental laboratory held by Lev Kuleshov at VGIK (Shub, *Krupnym Planom* [close-up] 61–75; *Zhizn' moia—Kinematograf* [my life—cinema] 66–83; Alekhsandrov 42). Her task was to adapt any kind of films—from archival films of the pre-revolutionary period, to foreign popular titles imported for domestic distribution—to the needs of communist propaganda: she worked especially on foreign serials, to remove their politically more ‘incorrect aspects’ through cutting, reassembling and retitling. The lack of production facilities in the earlier years after World War I and the Russian Civil War, as well as the limited supply of films from abroad, also sometimes required the reissue of old films from the pre-revolutionary period, which in turn required significant adjustments to the new ideological principles. After gaining her reputation in the early 1920s as a master of re-editing techniques and the editor of a dozen of Soviet features, she was soon recognized as one of the most original pioneers of Soviet cinema—that is, not only one of the first Russian women director but also a pioneer in the area of the compilation film genre (Leyda 22-31).

In 1925, Tseitlin assigned Shub to study a project that was to become a prime example among the Soviet films of the decade, a work giving voice to the Soviet communist ideology and its view on history. Though she hadn’t joined the Bolshevik Party, Shub was certainly familiar with political matters. In the late 1910s, as a young committed student in Literature at the Moscow Institute for Women Higher Education, she had become a member of a group of Marxist young women.⁴ After following the social-democratic mainstream throughout World War I, she took part in the February uprising in Moscow in 1917. In her memoirs she often voices opinions on certain relevant political issues of the revolutionary period.

The development of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* started when Sovkino, the mainstream Soviet State film company in the second half of the 1920s, asked for a feature-length documentary movie, which was meant to become the first public visual historical reconstruction of the 1917 February Revolution promoted by the Soviet establishment. The film was especially thought for the masses and was distributed on large-scale, as the press noticed when the film was released in March 1927.⁵ Two years before, Sergei M. Eisenstein had directed *Battleship Potyomkin* (*Bronenosets Potyomkin*, 1925), one of the many silent Soviet films commemorating the 1905 Revolution. Inspired by Eisenstein’s spectacular cinematographic narrative, Shub came up with the idea of telling historical events by means of pure *montage*. Unlike Eisenstein though, Shub chose not to rely on staging, but rather on

⁴ This particular group fought to change the entire society and assumed that women would benefit from this along with other oppressed groups. (Shub, *Krupnym Planom* [close-up] 23–32).

⁵ See the period reviews included in the *Shub archival collection* located at the VGIK Institute. An anonymous reviewer closes his article in *Molot* (“Padenie Dinastii”) stating that the *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* will be studied as a book of history by the next generation of Russian communists. A similar statement is found in the reviews of Nedobrovo and Trauberg.



Esfir' Shub portrait.

archival non-fictional footage taken from Russian documentary films. At the same time, she followed Eisenstein in the choice to represent the rise of communism in Russia through a trilogy of epics, by conceiving *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* as the first title in a series of three.⁶ The following two titles in Shub's trilogy, *Veliky put'* (the great way, 1927) and *Segodnia* (today, 1929), were produced by Narkompros shortly afterwards. Both Eisenstein's and Shub's works, then, were born as epic propaganda efforts to celebrate the October Revolution as the starting point of a new course of progress and civilization in the country's history.

Shub's project to create a kind of *visual book* of the Revolution was pursued by assembling various types of film documents. For this purpose Shub collected and restored numerous film prints, mainly from private sources that had been acquired by the newly formed Soviet government at the end of November 1918, and were since then stocked in national archives.

⁶ The other two titles in Eisenstein's famous trilogy are *Strike* (*Stachka*, 1924-25), and *October* (*Oktiabr'*, 1928).

Part of this early film collection was stored in facilities (e.g. cellars, vaults, closets) belonging to wartime Russian cameramen. After the assignment, Shub studied the archive for a long time. The material included old newsreels of the Tzarist period, as well as nonprofessional and official footage of the imperial family. Shub even personally restored some of these prints that had fallen into a state of decay, and eventually succeeded in having the Soviet State purchase valuable material from the United States. These seemingly obsolete materials offered in fact plenty of scope for activity. Shub believed that a clear propaganda message could be shaped and communicated by means of a pure montage of documentary fragments. The whole process of research, restoration and editing lasted more than three years (Deriabin).

Padenie dinastii Romanovykh was completed on time to be released on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the February uprising, on March 11 (February 26, O. S.), 1927. Though this nonfiction work was tailor-made to give an official account of the February days through an ideological lens, it also offers an important, if somewhat involuntary source for the history of women's political agency in the early Soviet society.

Vera Figner, a Revolutionist

In the second part of *Padenie dinastii Romanovykh*, the February riots following the downfall of autocracy are evoked as a prelude to the October, which is presented as the *real* Revolution. In this reconstruction, the involvement of the women's movement in the 1917 events is drastically compressed into a brief appearance of just thirty-five seconds, out of an overall duration of ninety minutes. Yet even this brief and apparently meaningless fragment can be studied as a historical object, through which to recover an unofficial memory of 1917—a social memory that may throw some light on a little known side of the history of the women's movement in Russia.

The footage under consideration is placed at the end of the sequence and shows the antiwar demonstrations during the first Provisional Government, after the fall of the Tzarist monarchy in February 1917. For just thirty-five seconds we see a mass comprising of about forty thousands women (amid whom many textile workers, housewives, war widows, manufacturers) marching in the streets of Moscow, claiming female suffrage and an expansion of legal rights. The scene was recorded on March 19 (April 1, O. S.), 1917, shortly after the outbreak of the insurrection in the February days. The women formed a huge parade, one of the largest, spontaneous mass rallies ever staged in Russia. The head of the march was led by a motorcar, guarded by a female militia mounted on horseback, on top of which stood Vera Figner with Poliksena Shishkina-Yavein, next to some Bestuzhev students.⁷ The historian

⁷ The Bestuzhev Institute was one of the most enduring universities where women were admitted in St. Petersburg. In 1878 it opened its courses to women of all social classes (though in fact most students were girls from a gentry background), and four years later it had graduated about one hundred women. In 1883 the Institute hosted the Society for the Financing of Higher Women's Courses. The Society counted one thousand members and was directed by an executive committee largely composed of feminist leaders, such as Sofia Kovalevskaia. While other academic courses had stopped admitting women by the mid 1880s, the



Vera Figner, c. 1880. Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.

Richard Stites has provided a reconstruction of the event in which he states that perhaps nowhere like at this parade the Bolsheviks and the feminists came closer to enter in strident conflict.

This impressive demonstration of feminist street politics had a disappointing, if not wholly unsuccessful, outcome. At the Tauride the demonstrators, who filled the broad Shpalernaya and the horseshoe driveway, had to wait for several regimental parades. Then Shishkina-Yavein made a stirring speech to Chkheidze of the Soviet and Rodzianko of the Provisional Government, full of references to Figner and other heroines of the Revolution and ending with a categorical demand for a statement on women's suffrage. Chkheidze, as always cautious and politic, uttered the words "we will struggle together with you for your justly deserved rights," which evoked a shout from the crowd "against whom?" Rodzianko temporized as well; but both won the applause from the assembled feminists and from Figner, who remained in the car to avoid the press of the crowd. (Stites 292–93).

This is exactly the scene that is briefly evoked in the mentioned fragment of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*. Vera Figner, a former member of the Russian Populist group known as *Narodnaia Volia* (the People's Will Party, 1879-87) is shown while she greets the people around the vehicle. Considering the film's strong ideological structure, the emergence of Vera Figner in this context might well have served a precise propaganda purpose.

Vera Nikolaevna Figner (1852-1842) was one of the leaders of the revolutionary Russian populist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. As she recalls in her autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist (Zapechatlennyi trud)*—published in 1921 and repeatedly reprinted throughout the 1920s—her commitment to the socialist revolutionary movement began when she adhered to the *Zemlia i Volia* organization (the Land and Freedom Party), whose radical branch (the People's Will Party⁸) she joined in 1879. As a member of the People's Will, Figner embraced terrorism and was responsible for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, in 1881. After the regicide, she left Petersburg and took refuge in Southern Russia, where she led the People's Will members that had escaped immediate arrest. Captured by the Tsarist police at the beginning of 1883, Figner was later condemned to death penalty by a military tribunal. The sentence however was commuted into life imprisonment, and for the next twenty years she was kept in an isolation cell at the Schlüsselburg fortress on Lake Ladoga. After the 1905 Revolution, Figner was allowed to expatriate in Europe, where she joined the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party in exile. She was back in Russia in 1915. Now old, she kept her political commitment toward socialism alive through underground

Bestuzhev Institute was allowed to carry on its activities and to provide grants for women students. Several former Bestuzhevs' students were later involved in radical activities during the 1890s. (Stites 82–83; Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia 1700-2000* 108–115).

⁸ The People's Will was the more radical of the two groups that were born in 1879 of a split inside the populist party *Zemlia i Volia*. The political aim of this organization was to overthrow the autocracy regime and to establish the people's government in Russia. After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, by the hand of some of its members, the organization was harshly repressed by the Tsar and disintegrated in a short time.

literary and propaganda writing (Stites 50).

As the majority of Soviet foundation films, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* was created in a complex relationship between the rulers and the ruled, between the production executives and the director. Shub had a personal knowledge of the Russian pro-suffrage movement since her University years—namely since her encounter with Nina Kolomeeva, a young socialist who had first introduced her to feminist and socialist student groups, as well as to Marxist literature and pamphlets by Herzen, Chernishevsky, and Plechanov (Shub, *Krupnym Planom* [close-up] 23–32). Yet the initiative to include a reference to Figner in the film is not likely to have been taken directly by Shub, but under the instructions of the Party, which were outed continuously throughout the editing process. The preliminary treatment, written by Shub and approved by Sovkino in 1926, does not refer to Figner in any of the film sequences, whether explicitly or implicitly (Shub, *Skebema Stsenarnogo Plana* 1–4). Figner's name was added only later in the editing script, along with a brief description of the 1917 street parade, and without any hint to her close involvement with the women's front. A third subject different from either Shub or the production executives, presumably introduced the reference after the completion of the script. There can be little doubt that the adjustment was required by the Soviet censorship office, since it is scribbled out on paper with a blue grease pencil, as was typical of the preventive intervention of Glavrepertkom [State head commission for approval of performers' repertoire] on any kind of written material either to be staged or published.

When Vera Figner appeared on screen in *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, she was still alive. By this time, however, her image etched more a public personality and a revolutionary icon than a supporter of the feminist movement. Together with Lenin, Figner is the only other historical figure who is mentioned in the intertitles. No mention is made to any other socialist leaders or relevant historical actors, such as, for instance, Figner's strict companion Shishkina-Yavein, who in 1917 chaired the most influential political league for women's rights, the *Soyuz ravnopravīia ženshin* [all-Russian union for women's equality], also known as the Women's Union. The members of this league had attempted to coordinate their efforts with those of other socialist revolutionary groups (particularly within the social-democratic area) since the birth of their organization. Their goal was to create a common front in the fight against the restrictions to freedom imposed by the old autocratic order, reclaiming equal rights for all citizens. While educated women activists rarely succeeded in combining socialism and feminism, during and after the first Russian revolution of 1905, the Women's Union actually managed to forge alliances with several groups of women workers and peasants (Alpern Engel, "Women and the State" 468–71).

Before the Great War, the Women's Union did not enjoy large support, neither from the population nor from the political parties. However, its status changed rapidly soon after the outbreak of the war. As soon as the Union acquired the strength of an independent political force, the feminist participation in a left-wing coalition was reconsidered. On the eve of

the 1917 February Revolution, Shishkina led one of the most influent women's political organizations of the period, responsible for a number of legislative joint initiatives within the Third and Fourth State Duma, widely publicized at legal assemblies and debates. When, on March 1, 1917, the Council of the Union organized a massive street demonstration, women eventually obtained what they had been fighting for since at least a decade: that day by the evening, Prince L'vov, chair of the Provisional Government, declared women's right to vote, and therefore to participate in the election of the Constituent Assembly, forthcoming in November-December 1917.⁹

As commonly maintained, until the end of her life Vera Figner never adhered to Shishkina's League, nor to the feminist movement as a whole. Yet she was ready to give open moral support to the feminists and to the struggle for universal suffrage, by accompanying Shishkina in the March 1917 street parade that is reproduced in Shub's film. In the edited sequence, however, Figner appears more in the position of a people's heroine, than in that of a champion of the women's political front; her image fitted the case, as she was a woman who had been punished by the Tsar and had served twenty years in prison for her involvement in the assassination of Emperor Alexander II in 1881. Therefore, film spectators could be easily taken to perceive Figner's salutation to the crowd of women in Moscow as the reapparition of a mythical survivor after a long period of asylum abroad.

In the film Figner is introduced in a caption as "an old revolutionary, a member of the People's Will Party," so as to emphasize her connection to a populist group that was no longer extant, neither in 1927, nor in 1917. In fact the People's Will Party had ceased to exist since the end of the nineteenth century, after a harsh repression during the last decade of the century. By restoring the People's Will Party to life, the Soviet propaganda was offering a deformed vision of history, one in which Vera Figner was presented as a living example of a single, never-ending struggle with deep roots in the past, in the attempt to build an ideal lineage that was meant to unite different revolutionary traditions (utopian socialists, nihilists, anarchists) under the flag of the Bolshevik Party.¹⁰

Women Faded into Oblivion

The memory of the heroic period of nineteenth-century revolutionary attempts, marked by the violent punishments (arrests, beatings, executions, exiles) inflicted by the Tsarist monarchy on the political opposers—from Decembrist masons to the philo-republican United Slavs to moderate populists and nihilists—was especially cultivated by Soviet propaganda. After the 1917 October Revolution, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party began a process

⁹ Between 1907 and 1912, the Women's Union gave its contribution to the Duma proceedings on issues concerning women's civil rights. The movement asked for bills on divorce, separate accommodations for couples, the right of women to practice law, and women's suffrage (Corigliano Noonan and Nechemias 77).

¹⁰ For an in-depth exploration of the Russian revolutionary culture and the narrative strategies that were applied to political subjects in 1917, see Corney, one of the brilliant, pioneering works on the history of Russian revolution appeared in the last decade.



L. Petuchov, *Equality to Women*, 1917.

of rapid political proselytising, with the primary aim of moulding an official public memory of the past. This memory had two principal characteristics: it revolved around the myth of the October upsurge, and it was aimed to relegate the political culture of nineteenth-century insurrectional clandestine groups to the prehistory of the Revolution. Propaganda efforts were directed toward forging an ideal lineage that was to unite chosen elements of previous political groups (such as the parallel branch of the populists, i.e. the utopian socialists, the nihilists, and others) to the ruling party. In this context, a place of honor was reserved to the People's Will Party for its efforts in defense of the communitarian ideal, despite persecution and imprisonment. Its members were thus elevated to the status of *martyrs* of a never-before written history of failure and redemption (Venturi VII-CXII; Zverev 5-31).

The attempt to build a revolutionary genealogy can be seen in many other the historical

films produced between 1918 and 1934, especially those whose stories revolved around well-known figures of terrorists and regicides of the extinct nihilist societies (Sergei Nechaev, Dmitrii Karakozov, Stepan Khalturin, along with other historical figures of nineteenth-century terrorism).¹¹ The filmic portrayal of the populists and their terrorist exploits was part of a larger phenomenon of wide-ranging publicity of relevant episodes in the long-term fight against Russian autocracy.

In *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, the first official Soviet film chronicle of the 1917 February Revolution,¹² the single recording of women's presence and political agency is related to the mythical icon of Figner, portrayed in the role of a populist leader. The intertitles make no mention to the situation in which we see her involved, nor to the significant role played by the women's democratic movement during the February days, which contributed to the collapse of the autocracy. On February 23, O.S., i.e. March 8 in the Western calendar, a huge rally of working-class women had thronged the streets of St. Petersburg during a strike at the major factories and plants in the city area. Even simple urban housewives were in a militant mood—not just working women, but the masses of women queuing for bread and kerosene.

Despite the rhetoric efforts made by the ideologists to build a connection between the Bolshevik Party and the tradition of Russian women's movements, the only feminist event that was given any resonance during the 1920s was the International Woman's Day, first celebrated in Russia in 1913. However, the real reason behind this choice was that the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party had chosen this relevant date to give resonance to its decision to join the ranks of the Bolshevik Party. As a consequence, many historical accounts, as well as propaganda material on the Bolshevik Party's support of feminism, made use of this early event to create a specific narrative, aimed at emphasizing the painful birth and triumphal advent of the Soviet age. From the standpoint of the Soviet ideologists, women's participation to the February days had therefore to be reduced to a form of "spontaneous" response to Bolshevik agitation (Chatterjee).

Although *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* was made to express the Party's utilitarian position on the history of the February Revolution in light of the subsequent October events, it still represents an important source for women's historical studies. Historians have

¹¹ Extant examples preserved in Russian film archives are *Veterany russkoi revoliutsii*, (veterans of the Russian revolution, 1924), and a series of three films directed by Aleksandr Ivanovsky: *Dvoret's i krepost'* (the palace and the fortress, 1924), *Stepan Khalturin* (1925), *Dekabristy* (decembrists, 1927). I learned this information by analytically studying the entries reported in the annotated catalogue of Gosfil'mofond (National Film Foundation of Russian Federation), (Glagoleva, A. et. al.). Further information on Russian and Soviet films whose subjects strictly relate to the biographies of some historical Russian populists can be find at Narovold.ru (Troitskii 88-91).

¹² The first chronicles of the Revolution were made by the Skobelevsky War Committee, a professional team of cameramen and technicians created in 1914. Besides filming the February days, the Skobelevsky operators provided important documentation covering the whole period ranging from the Tsar's abdication to the Bolsheviks' rise to power. Their February 1917 footage was never fully edited nor distributed; the only complete filmic work comprising a portion of this footage is *Oktiabr'skii pereverot* (aka *Vtoraia Revoliutsiia*; the second revolution, 1917) (Listov 30-31, 77-78).

widely shown that, during the war years 1916–17, women were the prime resource for the Russian economy, due to the extreme shortage of male workers: men were forced by massive conscription to serve in the Imperial Army, often to be killed in sanguinary fights at the warfront. While the film allows wide room for the representation of women as a powerful engine of the Russian Empire industrial development at the outbreak of World War I, and in its immediate aftermath, their relevance as political agents in the historical process is obliterated all throughout the plot. The single spot where the female suffragist movement makes an appearance, the sequence with Figner, is not overlaid by Shub with any commentary. As a result the identity of this movement remains undefined.

Across the political spectrum, from liberals to socialists, the Russian suffragists played a key function in interpreting the mood of a rapidly increasing number of women who were then entering the labor force. The so-called “woman question” became a burning issue in February 1917, when women went to strike as they had done in 1905, when long-simmering discontent had burst into a revolution that had given the feminist movement a particular urgency and strength. No doubt women played a significant role in exacerbating the socio-political struggle in 1917: pressure from their movement, as well as from the organized workers’ movement, contributed to push the Tsarist establishment to consider the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II (Stites 392–422).

Despite their extremely important role in the February days, only ten years later women could hardly find a place in the moulding of an official public image of the 1917 Russian revolution. Moreover, to defend the dictatorship they ruled, the Bolsheviks had to convey the idea that the February Revolution had been a failed revolution, a still immature event they could pretend to have brought to completion with their seizure of power in October.

In conclusion, the thesis behind this investigation may be widened to a few other Soviet historical epics that were tailor-made on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. There is a significant absence of women considered as both a social and a political force in all the plots of the films set in 1917. Whether individual or collective, the characters who epitomize the revolutionary hero are regularly male in as many examples as *The End of St. Petersburg* (*Konets Sankt-Peterburga*, Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1927), *Moscow in October* (*Moskva v Oktiabre*, Boris Barnet, 1927), *The Eleventh Year* (*Odinnadtsatyi*, Dziga Vertov, 1928), and particularly in the giant example of *October*, a state production made with the intended purpose to achieve a popularity comparable to that of *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. De Mille, 1923), with Lenin substituting for Jesus Christ.¹³ As with all of these films, the ideological historical narration offered in *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* was part of a prodigious State-sponsored program to establish a memory designed to enhance the Bolshevik rule over the Soviet society.

¹³ *October* had to contribute to cast the October revolution into an imagery celebrating the birth of the Soviet system. In order to pursue this goal, the state production displayed a budget twenty times the average budget of the Soviet film in their day, and Eisenstein was paid more than any other Soviet film director (Taylor 13).

THE AUTHOR: Dunja Dogo received a Ph.D. in *Logos* and Representation at the University of Siena in 2009. She co-directs the Russian section of the Women Film Pioneers Project. A member of the editorial board of the Italian peer-reviewed journal, *Cinergie* (University of Udine), she has published numerous essays in international scholarly journals. In 2012 she started a post-doctoral project on the representation of the Decembrist masons and the Russian populists in early Soviet cinema, within the framework of the ERANET MUNDUS program (Euro-Russian Academic Network, University of Siena–St. Petersburg State University). Her work is strongly focused on archival research, with an interdisciplinary approach to the historical study of silent cinema.

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Margaret Hennefeld

The Politics of Hyper-Visibility in Leni Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light*

ABSTRACT: While the inadequate archival preservation of films by early women directors such as Alice Guy-Blaché, Lois Weber and Elvira Notari has led to their virtual erasure from dominant film history narratives, German film director Leni Riefenstahl's work and biography have suffered from inverse but revealingly parallel problems: a plenitude of memory and historicization. An excess of discussion regarding Riefenstahl's implication in National Socialism, and her personal relationship with Hitler continues to haunt analysis of Riefenstahl's oeuvre.

However, this conflation of Riefenstahl's personal politics with her filmmaking puts more at stake than the public memory of her as a film director. In auteurist compilations such as Andrew Sarris' "Interviews with Film Directors," Riefenstahl stands alone as the only woman filmmaker sandwiched between thirty-nine male directors. As Riefenstahl's interview with Sarris reveals, cinematic memory of Riefenstahl's earlier German mountain films (such as *The Blue Light*) has been largely overshadowed by the visibility of her later fascistic texts (*Olympia* and *The Triumph of the Will*).

In this paper, I suggest as an alternative or complementary effort to feminist excavations of invisible women's film histories, a more extensive probing of the female filmmaking histories that mainstream publics already recognize. Perhaps the hyper-visible spectacle made of Riefenstahl's canon contains its own forgotten histories that we can use to rethink the careers of early women directors.

This paper thinks about methods in feminist film historiography, and the questions they have raised about the gender politics of silent film's "visibility," by revisiting the early work of a notoriously historicized but in many ways under-theorized filmmaker: Leni Riefenstahl. Better remembered for her proto-fascist bodily athleticism both in front of the camera in Arnold Fanck's German mountain films, and behind it in her 1936 documentary about the Berlin Olympics and, of course, her triumphs in the "aestheticization of fascism" in *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1935), Leni Riefenstahl actually co-directed her first film, *The Blue Light* (*Das blaue Licht*, 1932), with the Jewish Hungarian film theorist Belá Balázs. An ambivalent allegory about the perils of being a female "übermensch" in remote Northern Italy, *The Blue Light* exhibits a dizzying pull between Riefenstahl's aesthetics of bodily athleticism and Balázs' obsession with close-ups of the face as "the lyrical essence" of dramatic form. I offer this interpretation of a most unusual and historiographically precarious "collaboration" in order to open up a new space for re-examining the archives of women's silent filmmaking that history has remembered all too well—in contrast with the reels upon reels of vanished and dilapidated archives by prolific women filmmakers from Alice Guy-Blaché, to Lois Weber, to Elvira Notari.

Whereas the inadequate archival preservation of films by many early women directors has led to their virtual erasure from dominant film history narratives (and vice versa), German film director Leni Riefenstahl's work and biography have suffered from inverse but revealingly parallel problems: a plenitude of memory and historicization. An excess of discussion about

Riefenstahl's implication in National Socialism, the extent of her knowledge about Nazi concentration camps, and her personal relationship with Hitler continue to haunt analysis of Riefenstahl's filmmaking oeuvre. I will argue that this conflation of Riefenstahl's politics with her cinematic innovations is relevant to larger questions in feminist film historiography. Indeed, these sensationalized accounts of Riefenstahl's filmmaking career put a great deal more at stake than her individual example as a film director. Riefenstahl's scandalously hyper-visible film career has worked to distract public attention from other histories of women filmmakers, while at the same time implicitly shading those invisible histories as fascist through synecdoche.

In contrast to many of the women filmmakers whose works have been resurrected by the Women Film Pioneers Project, Riefenstahl's cinema has been condemned by its excess of historicity, not by its invisibility. What I want to argue here is that Leni Riefenstahl's politically hyper-visible filmmaking career should merit equally rigorous efforts in theoretical excavation. From her perilous appearances in the 1920s traversing pristine white landscapes in what Siegfried Kracauer has called the proto-fascist German mountain film genre, through her Hitler-commissioned propaganda documentaries, to her later unfinished work filming athletic black bodies of the Nuba tribes in Sudan, Riefenstahl's legacy has suffered from a troubling confusion between history and memory. How intimate was her relationship with Hitler? Did she really not know that the Gypsy extras in *Lowlands* (*Tiefland*, 1954) were brought in from German concentration camps? What does she have to say about her own complicities in the wake of her public exposure to the Nazis' unthinkable atrocities? I enumerate these questions not to diminish their political significance, but to compare them with the types of biographical questions that present day feminist film theorists have inherited through their research on less contentious women filmmakers of the silent era.

For example, Amelie Hastie has made "memory suspicious of history," in a provocative inversion of Pierre Nora's assertion that "History is perpetually suspicious of memory," in her attempts to weave together coherent threads from the forgotten fragments of Alice Guy-Blaché's instrumental and vastly prolific early filmmaking career with Gaumont and Solax. Jennifer Bean has emphasized the entanglement between women's on-screen bodily indexicality and off-screen fodder for biographical publicity in her essay on "The Technologies of Early Stardom." "The fascination with a destructive force emanating from within technology's steely body certainly exceeded (and preceded) the frame of the star system, tapping into an 'imagination of disaster'" (422). Bean looks at the faces of star discourse as an attempt to humanize the disturbing but enthralling slippage between "serial queen" antics and the unruly apparatuses of modernity. To make somewhat of a leap from Pauline's de-politicized perils, we might even say that Riefenstahl "produces a body" for the unimaginable limits of modernity that erupted with the Second World War.

The slippage between Riefenstahl's iconic "aestheticization of politics" (to invoke Walter Benjamin) and the politics of silent film historiography bears closer examination. Riefenstahl

is often enlisted in popular film history narratives to compensate for an otherwise baffling absence of canonized women filmmakers. For example, in Andrew Sarris' widely read compilation of "Interviews with Film Directors," Riefenstahl stands alone as the only woman filmmaker sandwiched between thirty-nine male directors. This would suggest that only a limited amount of space has existed in film history narratives for the presence of female authors. Further, as Riefenstahl's interview with Sarris reveals, cinematic memory of Riefenstahl's early German mountain films, such as *The Blue Light*, has been largely overshadowed by the visibility of her subsequent fascistic texts, such as *Triumph of the Will*, *Olympia Part Two: Festival of Beauty (Olympia 2. Teil – Fest der Schönheit, 1938)*, and *Lowlands*.

In her interview with Sarris, Riefenstahl attempts to establish a revisionist meta-narrative about her filmmaking career by hitching her own biography to the protagonist's plight in *The Blue Light*. Riefenstahl clearly identifies with this character Junta, a pariah and suspected witch in her conservative, Northern Italian village. The villagers, who call her "the damned devil's witch," suspect Junta due to her mystical bond with a mountain-top crystal grotto that glows with a blue light only during full moons. Junta's "blue light," a thinly veiled metaphor for her dangerous sexuality, fascinates the village men, the most virile of whom lose their lives attempting to ascend the steep Mount Crystal every full moon. When Junta reveals a secret passageway to the blue light to one of the men, an outsider and German painter named Vigo, he betrays her by revealing its mystery to the rest of the townfolk. The villagers opportunistically pillage Junta's grotto and commodify her mystical blue crystals. This drives Junta to heartbreak, madness, and suicide: she throws herself off a precipice.

As Riefenstahl reflects, Junta's "death brings happiness to the others, to all those who didn't understand her, the peasants and the painter as well as those who accused her of having cast a spell on the village, who pursued her in order to throw stones at her and who would willingly have burned her as a sorceress" (Sarris 455). Riefenstahl's identification with her ostracized heroine echoes *The Blue Light's* own entanglement between different political and cinematic modes. Historically, thematically, and aesthetically, *The Blue Light* arguably provides a meta-discourse for reimagining Riefenstahl's relevance to broader conversations within feminist film historiography. The discourse about women's participation in silent cinema has primarily addressed the question of invisibility. In contrast, *The Blue Light* helps us think about women's marginal industry status as a problem of hyper-visibility.

Although an early sound film, *The Blue Light* bears many aesthetic similarities to silent cinema, a mode that Balázs made no bones about favoring over the corrupting and despiritualizing conventions of sound films. Indeed, the film unfolds as an art of the "magnified image," showcasing the interpenetration between emotive close-ups of Junta's face and aurally-lit depictions of the mountains. The film straddles both technological and political divides within the German film industry: its proto-fascist romanticization of German *volke* [folk] expresses a concomitant nostalgia for pre-sound era cinematic techniques. (Balázs' Jewish name, along with the Jewish producer Harry Sokal's, would later be suppressed from the film's



The Blue Light (Das Blaue Licht, 1932) original poster.

credits.) For Balázs, the sound film's use of dialogue to advance narration de-emphasizes the importance of the close-up, which has the power to reveal "the soul" and "hidden life of man." Balázs asserts: "Not even the greatest writer, the most consummate artist of the pen, could tell in words what Asta Nielson tells with her face in close-up" (Balázs and Carter 66).

Balázs' signature appears with the first instance of Riefenstahl's face, in the form of a dissolving close-up of Junta's portrait that motivates the film's opening flashback from 1932 to 1866: a spectral transition from photographic close-up to snowy mountain landscape that graphically matches the graininess of Junta's dematerializing image. Riefenstahl's dissolving face here, which provides an aesthetic alibi for a mystical collapse of temporality, resonates with Balázs' broader theory of the close-up as a "spatialization of time" that brings history into focus: "The abstract picture of the big things of life arises mainly from our myopia" (Balázs and Carter 39). (It is indeed not coincidental that the treacherous Vigo is a landscape painter.) This use of Junta's face as a temporal and narrative framing device is consistent with the film's general strategy to humanize the conflict between myth and finitude, between timeless nature and physical embodiment. The narrative itself progresses towards the physical demise of its superhumanly robust female protagonist. Throughout the film, Junta's agile body is set apart from those of the vulnerable Italian village men, who all fall to their deaths attempting to scale the impossibly steep precipice. The film emphasizes this metaphysical duality between the body and nature with frequent cuts between sweeping natural panoramas and narrative scenes that foreground the limits of the human body—and that dramatize the escalation of rugged Junta's own vulnerability.

This dynamic between the physical and the spiritual reaches its narrative climax, and arguably also its aesthetic climax, during a suspenseful full moon, mountain climbing sequence in which Junta, her German love interest Vigo, and the Italian innkeeper's son, Tonio, all attempt to scale Mount Crystal in order to reach the blue light. The dramatic ascent is prefaced by a series of close-ups depicting the bewildered faces of the peasant villagers, which are intercut between images of the breaking full moon. I want to argue that this sequence attempts to make good on the film's effort to mediate between its two metaphysical poles: the embodied and the ethereal. It does so by psychologizing the conflict between human finitude and folkloric mysticism. Technologically, the film itself is torn between its silent cinema aesthetic—artistic use of close-ups, marginal function of dialogue, and histrionic physical gestures—and its cutting-edge experimentation with on-location sound recording equipment. Again, in his film theory, Balázs laments sound cinema's adoption of the trendy talkie, and praises silent cinema's ability to reveal familiar ideas in novel forms. This nostalgic fascination with cinema's potential kernels of meaning arguably governs Balázs's interest in *The Blue Light's* sound technology.

In his text *Theory of the Film*, Balázs explains how the close-up drives his method of cinematic writing:



Leni Riefenstahl as Junta in *The Blue Light*.

By means of the close-up the camera in the days of the silent film revealed the hidden mainsprings of a life which we had thought we already knew so well...We skim over the teeming substance of life...A multitude of close-ups can show us the very instant in which the general is transformed into the particular. The close-up has not only widened our vision of life, it has also deepened it. In the days of the silent film it not only revealed new things, but showed us the meaning of the old. (Balázs and Carter 55)

This climactic sequence, a feat of parallel editing, is absolutely haunted by the persistent appearance of the human face, which mediates the film's contradictory pulls between the embodied and the ethereal, between suspenseful narration and lyrical spectacle. The film interweaves objective aerial views with these subjectively positioned shots that narrate character psychology during the ascent. Cloud panoramas and vertical tracks towards the precipice punctuate the tense dynamic among Junta, Vigo, and Tonio, each of whom climbs separately. By intermingling the human with the *über*-human, the film thereby psychologizes its existential portrayal of nature. A close-up of Vigo's face, with reverse-shot of Junta's body, lithely slips into a disembodied study of riveting cloud formations in the sky. The film thereby positions Junta's athletic body as a third term to make legible the relationship between the human face and the natural landscapes: if, as Balázs argues, the face reveals the soul of humanity, the body here explains its relation to the movement of life.

With Vigo's arrival at the summit, the film's entire subjective frame of reference gets upturned from distance to nearness. Vigo's point-of-view shots during the climb foreground the hovering remoteness of Junta's faraway body. In abrupt contrast to this dominant spatial paradigm, Vigo's initial point-of-view shot at the top of the mountain presents the blue crystals in arrestingly close focus. From a close-up of Vigo's face, his eyes widened in disbelief, the film cuts to a close-up reverse-shot of the crystals, and thereby displaces what had been the spatial frame of reference up until this point. In this way, the film narrates its own literalization of what had been its unseen, mystical lure: the blue crystals, an implicit metaphor for Junta's dangerous sexuality, subjectively positioned through the eyes of a male character. (It is significant that these crystals are seen by Vigo, the outsider, German artist, and not by one of the Italian village men.) Somewhere between psychologized reverse-shots and antithetical cells of a montage, these close-ups of Vigo's face mediate between the film's mystical beyond-space and the space of the cinematic image itself. Through the close-up of the face, the film provides a concrete visual image for that which it also represents as ineffable: the mystical value of the crystals.

In the context of Leni Riefenstahl's own endeavors in feminist film historiography in her interview with Sarris, *The Blue Light's* meditative discourse on the face helps us reconsider how we historicize *The Blue Light's* relation to Riefenstahl's subsequent filmmaking projects. Film and cultural theorists from Siegfried Kracauer to Susan Sontag have categorized *The Blue Light* somewhat teleologically as a proto-fascist prelude to *Triumph of the Will*. Indeed, the aesthetic parallels between the mountain film as a genre and Riefenstahl's 1930s Nazi-commissioned

documentaries are striking. For example, Riefenstahl's documentary of the 1936 Berlin Olympics employs metaphysical comparisons between human bodies and transcendent natural panoramas that echo *The Blue Light's* mountain scenes. In *Olympia*, Riefenstahl deploys Balázsian close-ups to powerful effect in order to glorify and to naturalize the presence of different athletes' bodies within a German national landscapes.

However, I would argue that, unlike *The Blue Light*, *Olympia* wields its close-ups for purely propagandistic ends. Ironically, Riefenstahl does so by decapitating the German athletes whom she depicts. In its intense aesthetic study of the German athlete's body, *Olympia's* filmmaking dispenses with its vital Balázsian element: the face. As Balázs asserts, "Close-ups are the pictures expressing the poetic sensibility of the director. They show the faces of things and those expressions on them which are significant because they are reflected expressions of our own subconscious feeling. Herein lies the art of the true cameraman" (Balázs and Carter 56). During a gymnastics sequence in *Olympia Part 2: Festival of Beauty*,



The Pommel Horse event at the 1936 Berlin Olympics in
Olympia Part Two: Festival of Beauty (Olympia 2. Teil – Fest der Schönheit, 1938).

Riefenstahl's meticulous control over the limits of the frame synchronizes itself with the gymnasts' undulating bodies, but at the expense of their faces, which repeatedly spill in and out of the edges of the frame. Using strategies similar to the ones she employs in *The Blue Light*, Riefenstahl further aestheticizes these robust German bodies by positioning them in front of jutting green mountains and dramatic billows of clouds. Yet, without the face as a mediator between the physical and the ethereal, *Olympia* resists psychologizing its own oppositions,¹ and thereby, in Balázs's terms, suppresses the poetic sensibility of its director. In other words, *Olympia* suspends its own meta-discourse in order to provoke its spectator's un-meditative absorption in the totality of the aesthetic spectacle.

As Amelie Hastie asserts in her essay, *Circuits of History and Memory*: "Both the rediscovery and the production of alternative histories have been an important part of feminist scholarship, as this work seeks to bring to light new knowledge about women's lives that has been forgotten and/or made invisible" (36). I would suggest as a complementary effort to Hastie's excavation of invisible histories, a more extensive probing of the female filmmaking histories that mainstream publics already recognize.

THE AUTHOR: Maggie Hennefeld is a Ph.D. Candidate in Modern Culture and Media at Brown University. Her teaching and research interests include comedy, feminist theory, and film history. She has published in the journals *Screen*, *Projections*, and *Media Fields*, with essays forthcoming in *Camera Obscura*, *Studies in American Humor*, and a Blackwell *Companion to D.W. Griffith*. Maggie's dissertation, "Slapstick Comediennes and the Politics of Silent Film Metamorphosis," looks at the rhetorical conjunctions between comedy and sexuality through the emergence of cinema.

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¹ The marathon sequence, which cuts between close-ups of athletes' strenuously engaged limbs and their point-of-view reverse shots, represents a striking exception to the film's tendencies not to psychologize its grueling bodily performances.

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Coloring the Figures. Women's Labor in the Early Italian Film Industry

ABSTRACT: The essay deals with the problem of women workers employed as hand colorists in Italy between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. It explores general issues such as the relation between the modern development of industrial coloring processes and the professions involved, the continuity between the coloring techniques in the film industry and those employed in other production fields (e.g. photography). The text subsequently investigates the situation of women workers and the gendered forms of labor division in the Roman laboratories of Cines between 1905 and 1910.

Before introducing the subject of this contribution, I wish to begin by closely examining the cover illustrations of an Italian magazine, *Il Progresso fotografico* [the photographic progress], published between 1899 and 1909. These covers exploit an interesting association between the representation of female figures and the modern photographic technologies emerging at the turn of the twentieth century. From 1899 to 1902, the cover illustration produced a sophisticated *mise en abyme* effect: it showed a woman with her hair tied up, working at a desk and surrounded by technical equipment, while she reads what the viewer can surmise is a “how to do” article on the first page of the same magazine. [fig. 1]. The purely material dimension of the developing and printing process is transformed into an ordered system of signs, symbolizing the different phases of the photographer's work.

Over the next few years, the leitmotif of the female photographer was profoundly transformed. From 1903 to 1904, the cover girl turned into an elegant reader of *Il Progresso fotografico* [fig. 2]. While the *mise en abyme* trope was maintained as a constant stylistic feature, the emphasis shifted from the production of images to their reception. Evidently, an idealized figure of a woman in a long dress with her hair down was more attractive than a woman at work with her hair tied back; the technical instruments, while still present, were now relegated to the background of the illustration. In 1908, after several years without displaying any cover illustration, a new emblematic image appeared on the magazine to reinforce this transformation: two female figures in an *art nouveau* setting were portrayed while leafing through a photo album and dispersing light through a prism [fig. 3]. This Newtonian theme of light refraction was taken up again in the 1909 cover. On the left, in the foreground, a woman is sitting with a prism raised in her hand. On the right, a Cupid stands in the background, playing with a photo-camera mounted on a tripod [fig. 4]. No material trace of the photographic process is left; the covers convey a series of symbolic references meant to promote the aesthetic dimension of the photographic medium. The female figure, therefore, is idealized as the modern Muse of the new photographic art, whose foundation myth is inscribed in the birth of the Newtonian science of light.

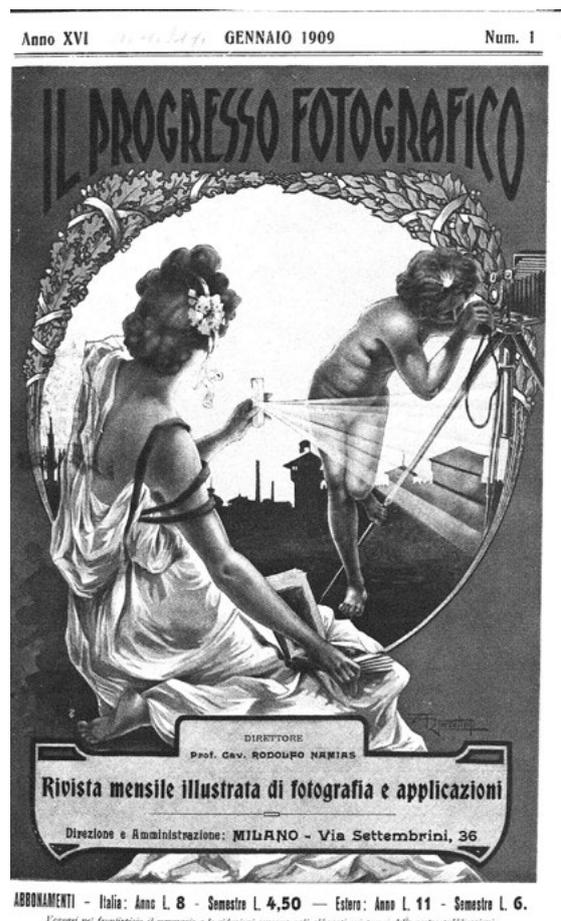


1. Cover illustration of *Il Progresso Fotografico* [the photographic progress], 1899-1902.
2. Cover illustration of *Il Progresso Fotografico* [the photographic progress], 1903-1904.

The cultural tendency to idealize the female figures as Muses of technology appears in paradoxical contrast with the very real experience of so many women who were materially working within the industries that produced this same technology.¹ In what follows I will deal with this veritable “dark side” of film history, the hidden history of female labor in Italian early cinema. By looking for and analyzing the few remaining traces left by these women workers, I will focus in particular on the specific activity of hand-coloring.² What concerns me in the first place is the structure of female labor in the Roman laboratories of Cines at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

¹ On the role of women in the material production of visual culture, see Higonnet.

² For an overview of the practices of hand coloring prior to film, see Crompton, Henry, and Herbert; Brunetta and Zotti Minici; Pierotti (27–29).



3. Cover illustration of *Il Progresso Fotografico* [the photographic progress], 1908.

4. Cover illustration of *Il Progresso Fotografico* [the photographic progress], 1909.

Female Labor and Hand-Coloring at the Turn of the Century

Miss. Gladys E. Hartley in *The Queen* magazine advises women who, after studying drawing or painting, struggle to make a living coloring miniatures or doing similar underpaid jobs, to look for a better source of income in photography.³ (“In giro per il mondo. La fotografia quale professione per la donna” [all around the world. photography as women’s profession] 2561)

This brief remark, published in the pages of an Italian photography journal, hinted at the emancipation of women in the more advanced countries of Northern Europe, where female personalities such as Miss. Gladys E. Hartley were presented as already so well acquainted

³ “Miss. Gladys E. Hartley nella rivista *The Queen* suggerisce alle donne che dopo aver studiato disegno o pittura trascivano una vita stentata colorando miniature od in simili lavori poco retribuiti, di cercar una miglior fonte di guadagno nella fotografia.” (All the quoted texts in this paper are translated by the author).

with the new technology that they could be asked their opinion as expert advisers. The quote also reveals that the practice of coloring small images was culturally attached to women's work.⁴ Indeed, hand-coloring required skills, such as precision and patience, that aligned themselves closely to the female vocational training. Besides learning pattern cutting, sewing and embroidery the female professional schools of the time educated the girls to practice activities such as drawing, painting, artificial flower making, and coloring small objects and images (Giulio Benso). There is evidence that coloring practices were encouraged as a pastime in the pages of women's magazines too.⁵

Beyond their recreational aspect, these activities—and the women who performed them—were becoming a resource for certain branches of industry. Hand-coloring may, in fact, be compared to other jobs held by women, such as assembling artificial flowers, decorating wallpaper, porcelain glazing and doll manufacturing. All of these jobs demanded manual dexterity and involved lengthy timeframes for their execution.

The need for these skills arose especially in productive sectors based on low-profile technology and labor-intensive work. Essentially, employers in these fields limited their costs so as to keep their activity as lucrative as possible. Since female labor was considerably cheaper than that of men, it was by far the preferred choice for employers. Equally, some of the new professions that emerged in the fields of photography and film also employed low-cost female labor. In photography, women were frequently hired in photographers' laboratories with the task of retouching the negatives and coloring the prints, and in film factories in jobs such as preparing plates and emulsions. Their presence occasionally emerges as a visual clue in the photographs taken within the laboratories and other establishments and used to illustrate articles in the trade press [fig. 5]. Otherwise, the presence of women is indicated in dramatic news reports of accidents caused by the toxic or explosive materials in use in these precarious workplaces (“Il processo per lo scoppio nello stabilimento Ganzini” [the trial for Ganzini establishment's blast]. The article concerns the death of two women working in the Ganzini establishment, following a blast).

The work of the film colorists should be thought of as a part of the broader phenomenon of technological innovation. In particular, the hand-coloring process performed in the motion picture industry evokes the techniques of retouching and coloring in photography. However, the descriptions given by sources from these two separate fields differ in some significant way. While photographic magazines and handbooks usually presented retouching and coloring as implicitly male activities (or, at least, not typically female), their cinematographic equivalents, on the other hand, always specified that these tasks were regularly assigned to women.

⁴ This at least with regard to the purely executive fields of application, excluded from artistic recognition. For an introduction to the problem of women's work in Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth century, see Pescarolo. On the issue of women's access to artistic professions, see Trasforini.

⁵ For instance, two articles in *La Donna e la famiglia* [the woman and the family] taught women how to color real flowers with aniline dyes: “Pittura delle rose” [roses' painting] and “Colorazione artificiale dei fiori” [flowers' artificial coloring].



5. Women preparing photographic plates in the laboratories of “La luminosa” (Serravalle Scrivia, Alessandria) (*Nel campo dell'industria. Una visita allo stabilimento della “Luminosa”* [in the field of industry. a visit to the “Luminosa” plant] n. pag.).

This disparity in the consideration of the role of women's work reflected a different approach towards coloring in the two respective media. In photography, colorists worked on individual images, which were usually painted in full.⁶ In motion picture films, on the other hand, the work was repeated on a series of very small frames; only the main parts of the image were colored, while the flesh tones were left gray. Finally, according to the basic principle of the division of labor, each woman was called to apply a single color.⁷ Women were more frequently employed as colorists in those fields where the job was more repetitive, as in the motion picture industry. Conversely, when it came to producing an effect of uniqueness, as in photography, the attribution of gender tended to disappear. Moreover, the idea of repetition highlights the material and conceptual proximity of coloring to the technique of editing. As a matter of fact—as we will see—editing would soon be considered as another occupation suitable for women. Perhaps, for women who had first been hired as colorists, editing might have become a new, extremely promising, field of employment.

⁶ See Cocanari. This short handbook taught how to paint hair, eyebrows, eyes, mouth, skin tone, cheeks, clothes and background colors.

⁷ On the technological aspects and the organization of the work in hand- (and pochoir) coloring, see Murette; Dana, “Couleurs au pochoir”; Malthête; Brown; Yumibe.

Clearly, the use of women as colorists was determined by both economic and cultural factors. Although the phenomenon, due to the paucity of documentation, appears difficult to research, looking at single case studies can help us make some significant inroads. For instance, analyzing the case of an important Italian cinematographic firm of the early period, the Cines film company, can test some of the previous assumptions. Based in Rome, Cines originated from the very first Italian film company, Alberini & Santoni, created in 1906. The coloring process within this and other small-scale companies and operations was relatively close to the Pathé industrial model.⁸

Between 1906 and 1907, four articles were published that described the Alberini & Santoni (then Cines) establishment located in Vicolo delle Tre Madonne. The reader was informed that

The [company's] main building has three floors. One is underground and it lodges the darkrooms where more than fifty female workers—a number that will soon be doubled thanks to a rapidly increasing demand—carry out the preparation and the coloring of the films.⁹ (“Alberini & Santoni. Il primo stabilimento italiano di manifattura cinematografica” [Alberini & Santoni. the first Italian film production establishment] 4–6)

Further evidence emerges from a 1906 article on Cines by Giustino Ferri. The processing of positives carried out in underground rooms is described by the author in rather suggestive words. He reports seeing “male shadows wandering through the shadow” and “uncertain female shapes bent over mysterious looms and narrow desks for coloring”¹⁰ (796).

The employment of women at Cines is additionally confirmed by a demographic survey of the Testaccio popular neighborhood in Rome: of the almost four hundred under-age working women who were covered in the study, three were employed at Cines as film colorists, reportedly one in 1907 and two in 1910 (Orano).¹¹ If three under-age women living at the Testaccio were working during this time as colorists, it would be rational to think that more women from different working-class Roman neighborhoods were also employed in the same field. From 1907 to 1910, the study reports, an Italian hand-colorer working at Cines in Rome was earning from a minimum of one and a half liras to a maximum of three liras per

⁸ On the history of the Cines company, see Redi.

⁹ “Il fabbricato principale è a tre piani di cui uno sotto terra per le camere oscure, in esso oltre 50 operaie procedono alla preparazione e colorazione dei Films, e questo numero verrà quanto prima raddoppiato per le ognor crescenti richieste.” The article was published in both Italian and French; the Italian version also appeared in *Bollettino della Società Fotografica Italiana* [bulletin of the Italian photographic society] (38–39).

¹⁰ “La cortesia dell’ingegnere Pouchain e del signor Alberini mi fece presto passare alle siberiane temperature dei sotterranei per gli sviluppi e lavaggi, dove al barlume rosso d’infernali lampade elettriche s’intravedono ombre maschili aggirantisi nell’ombra, forme incerte femminili curve sopra misteriosi telai e stretti banchi per la colorazione.” The other two articles mentioning the area dedicated to the coloring process at Cines are “I cinematografi” [the cinematographs] and “La Società Anonima Cines” [Cines joint stock company].

¹¹ I wish to thank Luca Mazzei for providing this precious reference.

day. For an apprentice, this amount was reduced to one lira. The working day lasted ten hours (Orano 618–619). During this time a worker was able to color up to four or five meters of positive (Mariani 193–194). Compared to the other female jobs listed in the survey, coloring was in the middle of the salary scale, commanding daily pays from fifty cents to four lira. However, it is interesting to observe that one of the highest paying jobs in the list of female professions was that of the photographic negative retoucher, which confirms that this activity must have been deemed to be a more skilled one (Orano 616–617).¹²

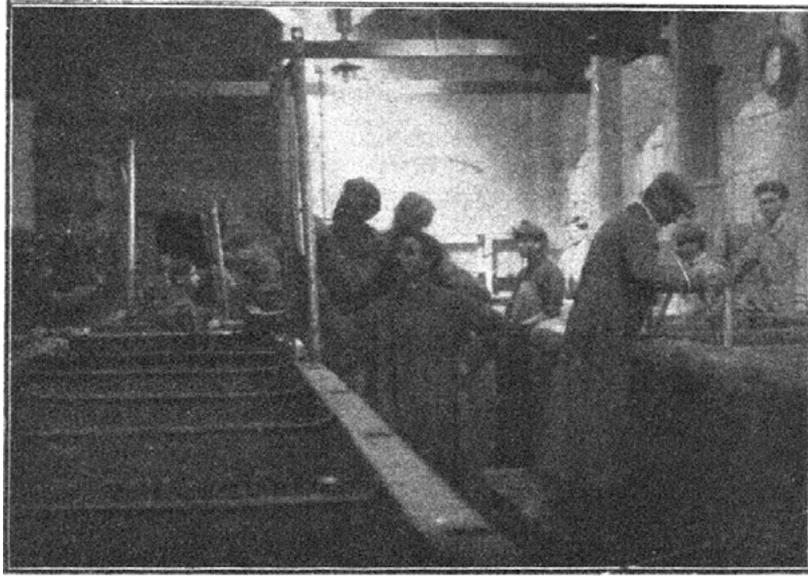
While several sources agree on the presence of women workers in the first phase of the company's management (under the direction of Adolfo Pouchain), for the next phase, beginning in the summer of 1910 with the nomination of Alberto Fassini as Cines' new president, information becomes more complex. When Fassini came to the head, the situation concerning film coloring at Cines was changed. That year in August, Fassini declared in his report on the company's industrial situation of Cines that "the issue of coloring was an utmost priority" and "had to be confronted and resolved" (Fassini [typewritten on letterhead]). Fassini also asserted that "by 1911 we must enable ourselves to color our own films" (Fassini), thereby revealing that, for some reason, the company had no longer been able to do so for a while. A possible implication is that Cines was no longer able to do so in a cost-effective manner. Yet Fassini advises against "trying something new" in the field of coloring, stating that the company would better "stick with what others had found that worked" and indicating Pathé and Gaumont as models to follow (Fassini)¹³. These two French companies had been using stenciling techniques for several years (in the case of Pathé since as early as 1906). Fassini was then probably suggesting that Cines should adopt this specific technology too.

As far as coloring was concerned, then, Cines was no longer in a favorable position. Had the color division been closed? Had the activity of hand-coloring been rejected as obsolete? By supposition, we may assume that the problem pointed out by Fassini was resolved (at least temporarily) thanks to the tinting and toning technology. This is confirmed by a letter written to Fassini by the laboratory supervisor, Carlo Moretti. In this correspondence the engineer informed Fassini about the installation of "a small *coloring* laboratory, limited, for now, to obtaining combined effects of panoramic scenes with tinting and toning techniques" (Moretti [typewritten, highlight in the original])¹⁴.

¹² For the retoucher, the daily pay ranged from a minimum of two and a half liras to a maximum of four liras (for a ten hour working). Compared to the average wages of male workers (Orano 577–599), women's wages were significantly reduced. Orano himself highlights that "women work much more than men; women are tied to their profession for many many hours of the day, while earning much less" (613). ["La donna lavora molto di più dell'uomo, è legata, cioè, al suo mestiere per molte e molte ore della giornata mentre guadagna molto di meno."]

¹³ "Fra questi problemi, quello che si presenta più degli altri impellente, è quello della 'colorazione', che bisogna subito affrontare e risolvere, come hanno già fatto le Case più importanti, Pathé e Gaumont. Anche per questo bisognerà non avventurarsi in tentativi nuovi, ma usare dei sistemi già sperimentati favorevolmente da altri." I wish to thank Fabio Del Giudice and Flavia Magnolfi for their kind contribution on this point.

¹⁴ "... impiantai un piccolo laboratorio di Coloritura limitandola per ora ad ottenere degli effetti combinati con le tinte ed i viraggi nelle scene panoramiche."



"CINES" — Sala per il lavaggio.

6. The Cines washing room (*Gli stabilimenti della società italiana "Cines"*
[Cines company facilities] 36).

These documents show that by 1910-11 hand-coloring was no longer taken into consideration at Cines. It belonged to a season that had flourished under the previous management. Tinting and toning were easily the preferred choice at this time, while stenciling remained a project in Fassini's mind. The 1910 and 1911 reports show that Cines wanted to bridge the technical gap with its French rivals—Pathé and Gaumont—which meant adopting stenciling coloring processes. However, not being in a position for immediate change (because of costs, time restrictions, and other obstacles) Cines finally settled on tinting and toning.¹⁵

The abandonment of hand-coloring in favor of the faster and cheaper technology of tinting and toning reflects the changes that were then sweeping the global motion picture industry. Such technological applications call into question the material problem of labor division at the Cines plant. Indeed, unlike hand-coloring, tinting and toning were tasks reserved to male workers, since they required an apprenticeship in the field of chemistry, an area from which women were excluded. In any event, monochrome coloring was ultimately a simpler and quicker operation than hand-coloring.

So what happened to the women colorists? Were they still working at Cines when the company shifted to tinting and toning as its standard coloring technique? In the attempt to

¹⁵ Cines would continue to focus on tinting and toning, using this technique (especially toning) as a distinguishing factor on the international market. See, for example, the contract with George Kleine, signed in December 1911 (Harrison and Mazzanti).



" CINES " — Un angolo del montaggio.

7. The Cines editing room (*Gli stabilimenti della società italiana "Cines"* [Cines company facilities] 36).

venture an informed guess, we can look at an advertisement published in Cines's official bulletin, *La Cinematografia artistica* [artistic cinematography], in October 1912. The text explains:

From the printing department, the film is transmitted to *Development* and *Drying*, then, if needs be, to *Toning* and *Tinting* and, finally, to the *Draining rooms*. From here, the positives become ready for *Editing*, yet they reach this department only after a careful *Revision*, and for some positives, if necessary, after *Coloring*.¹⁶ ("Gli stabilimenti della Società Italiana 'Cines'" [Cines company facilities; highlights in the original])

Therefore, the department devoted to the processing of positives was segmented into several working processes, all of which showed the same kind of gendered differentiation between the two types of work already described by Giustino Ferri. On the one hand, there were activities such as the development, washing, toning, tinting and drying of the positives, which apparently were all performed by men. On the other, there were the editing, the revision and the coloring processes, which constituted mostly a female realm. Unfortunately, the photos attached to the 1912 Cines advertisement do not document all of the women's activities in the plant. No image of the color laboratories is included; neither is there one for tinting, toning or coloring. Nevertheless, the existence of a rigid division of labor based on

¹⁶ "Dalla stampa la pellicola è trasmessa ai reparti di Sviluppo e di Lavaggio, poi eventualmente, a quei [sic] di Viraggio e Tintura, e, infine, nelle sale di Prosciugazione. Da qui i positivi escono pronti per il Montaggio, ma giungono a questo reparto dopo un'accurata Revisione e alcuni, se del caso, dopo la Coloritura."

gender can be clearly identified thanks to the photographs of the washing room—which is occupied only by men [fig. 6]—and the editing room—which portrays numerous women at work [fig. 7].

This kind of labor division based on gender is further confirmed by the author of an interesting handbook appeared in 1916, Vittorio Mariani. The volume includes several photographs from the already mentioned 1912 Cines advertisement [fig. 8], which are used to illustrate different chapters. In the part devoted to “coloring, editing and positive arrangement,” the author affirms the necessity to combine the rooms where these tasks were carried out, and to physically separate them from the areas dedicated to development, fixing and tinting and toning. Mariani states:

[Coloring] can be performed both before and after editing, and it is done only for a few special films whose manufacture will have to not impede the progress of ordinary production. This means that coloring will take place away from the developing, fixing and tinting and toning equipment, in separate rooms that may also be used for editing and the arrangement of positives.¹⁷ (Mariani 193)

Mariani also observes that both coloring and editing were usually assigned to female workers. From his description we can grasp that such physical separation reflected a sheer conceptual separation between men’s and women’s activities.

Furthermore, Mariani’s description of the work encourages the supposition that a certain crossover must have usual between the coloring, editing, and the so-called arrangement of positives, processes. Therefore, once hand-coloring had become obsolete, a colorist could perhaps be re-employed as an editor. Indeed, as Giuliana Bruno points out in *Streetwalking on a ruined map*, editing required skills similar to those involved in other traditionally female jobs, such as sewing, and her remark may be easily extended to the practice of hand-coloring (105–121).¹⁸ This kind of transition is actually documented in the case of Germaine Berger at Pathé laboratories at the end of the 1920s (Dana, “Couleurs au pochoir”). Might this have also been the case of colorers at Cines at the beginning of the 1910s? The photos of women editing at Cines certainly encourage this hypothesis.

In the case of the Alberini & Santoni company, laboratory operations—from the development of positives to the packing of the final copies—were separated according to genders. Men attended to tasks requiring higher levels of technological know-how and less manual skill. For them, we may consider the single reel of stock as the basic unit of their work. Conversely, women were assigned tasks where only a low level of technological knowledge was required and where, at the same time, other types of skills, such as manual dexterity, precision

¹⁷ “[La coloritura] può essere eseguita prima e dopo il montaggio, ed ha luogo soltanto per alcuni films speciali, la cui fabbricazione non deve ostacolare l’andamento della produzione ordinaria. Ciò significa che la coloritura dovrà aver luogo in locali separati dagli impianti di sviluppo, fissaggio, viraggio e tintura, e più propriamente in sale abbinabili con quelle di montaggio e sistemazione dei positivi.”

¹⁸ On editing as a specifically female profession, see also De Miro d’Ayeta.



Fig. 98. — Sala di montaggio (Cines - Roma).

8. The Cines editing room (Mariani, *Guida pratica della cinematografia*
[a practical guide to cinematography] 216)

and patience, were needed. Coloring and editing were precisely this type of job, as they were considered to require purely manual and non-artistic work.¹⁹ Both jobs were deemed suitable for female hands and were actually assigned to women.

Curiously, both coloring and editing deal with films at the level of the single frame. I would argue that for the female workers in the motion picture industry, their basic unit was the more laborious, time-consuming single frame. In this sense, while they appear to have been denied access to technologically intensive jobs, nonetheless they engaged with industrial manufacturing in a more intimate, familiar, and (perhaps) more “female” way.

THE AUTHOR: Federico Pierotti is a Researcher at the Department of Art History and Performing arts of the University of Florence, where he is currently teaching Film History and Italian Film History. He is the author of *La seduzione dello spettro. Storia e cultura del colore nel cinema* (2012) [ghostly seduction. a cultural history of color in the cinema]. He has published several essays in scholarly collections and journals and given conferences in Italy and abroad on topics related to film history.

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¹⁹ For almost the entire silent period, editing, like coloring, was sometimes performed on positive prints. Both activities were much more repetitive and less creative than one might think today. On the technological aspects of editing in the silent era, see Read (11–12).

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Mark Garrett Cooper

Archive, Theater, Ship: The Phelps Sisters Film the World

ABSTRACT: Examines the archival survival of the amateur travelog films made by Eleanor and Claudia Lea Phelps from 1923 to 1930. Argues that early twenty-first century interest in these materials testifies to archives' heterotopian properties, as described by Michel Foucault in his 1967 essay "Of Other Spaces." It follows that the aim of archival work should not be to preserve or recover the past, but to transform present day institutions and their relationships. Scholars of "women and the silent screen" are engaged in precisely this kind of activity.

This story, like all archival stories, begins twice. It begins, first, with the 1922–1923 cruise of the *Laconia*. Organized by American Express with the aim of broadening access to luxury travel, this round-the-world by steamship package tour was extensively documented by Claudia Lea and Eleanor Sheffield Phelps. Thanks to these sisters and their heirs the *Laconia*'s story also begins with the rediscovery of a stack of films, photographs, and papers in the University of South Carolina's archives where I work. The Phelps Sisters films comprise more than fifty reels on diverse subjects. Most of the footage records travel to various parts of the world between 1923 and 1930. In addition, there are domestic scenes from their winter home in Aiken, South Carolina. And there are copious records of dog breeding activities. (Claudia Lea Phelps played a key role in introducing the West Highland Terrier to North America). In addition to home movies, the University Libraries care for photographs and scrapbook diaries documenting the Phelps sisters' lives and travels. Of all this archival material, the footage of the *Laconia* trip is of particular interest not only because of the novelty of the voyage itself, but also because it seems to be the first footage Claudia Lea and her sister Eleanor shot with their *Filmo 70*, which was introduced by Bell & Howell in 1923 as the first 16mm camera marketed to amateurs. From the two beginnings of event and archive, then, the Phelps films are poised to illuminate an array of histories concerning tourism and travel, Aiken's "winter colony" of well-to-do (mostly northern U.S.) families, amateur filmmaking, and the Phelps family's own shifting fortunes—not to mention dog breeding.

The Phelps Sisters collection also provides evidence of the women's participation in the history of film production and exhibition, which may make it worthy of attention by scholars concerned with women and the silent screen. Here too one encounters a temporal doubling. Jane Gaines observes that scholarly recovery of the many women who helped create film industries around the world poses the questions of "why *we* forgot them" in the first place. She suggests that, in part, feminist film scholars "forgot" the women behind the camera because they were preoccupied with the women in front of the screen. "The existence of so many women attempting to form companies in the international film industry requires

us to revisit ‘production,’ just as the emphasis on female spectators, beginning in the 1980s, reformulated ‘reception’” (Gaines 113). Patricia Zimmermann makes a similar point in advocating attention to amateur filmmakers. She envisions that home movies will enable and provoke film history “from below,” both making visible a broad popular engagement with screen culture and throwing the methodological biases of industry-centered historiography into relief (3). To insert the Phelps Sisters into twenty-first century conversations about women and amateur filmmakers gives them a mission they did not know they had and peers around the world with whom they are unlikely to have compared themselves. In so doing, it gives us the opportunity to reflect on the productivity, and the limitations, of our scholarship and of the institutions that sustain it.

The Phelps films stand ready to provide evidence for such a range of histories thanks to the recontextualization that occurred when they moved from the Phelps’s home into the institutional space of the archive. They also provide an occasion to examine the kind of institutional space an archive is, and particularly to investigate the remarkable assumption that accumulation there will change practice elsewhere—the premise, shared by funders, curators, and researchers alike, that preservation and access will make a difference we can feel good about. More specifically, the case of amateur filmmakers who happen to be women presents the opportunity to examine the proposition that archival accumulation might alter gendered practice outside the archive, might help make gender matter less in where we go and what we do. By the same token, the fact that the filmmaking sisters happen to be white American women from a prominent family requires us to acknowledge the distribution of interests and powers that condition archival accumulation from the get-go. As I am hardly the first to note, the archive promises egalitarian change even as it ossifies inequities (see, e.g., Harris). To understand the archival promise as more than wishful thinking it is necessary to consider the archive’s relationships with other institutions.

Archives, like cinemas and cruise ships, encourage, segregate, and shelter alternatives to what we might call “normal life.” This is the suggestion of Michel Foucault’s 1967 essay “Of Other Spaces,” which lists ships, cinemas, and archives among its exemplary heterotopias, spaces distinguishable from utopias in that they actually exist and exist in functional relation to the network of sites comprising modern social space. According to Foucault, heterotopias are “most often linked to slices in time.” Museums and libraries provide an indicatively modern example in their ambition, Foucault says, to “enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes,” thereby manifesting “the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (26). He’s partly right about this. The archives do inspire a sense of temporal immediacy, but no one who has done time in them could fail to recognize this as a fantasy. To work in the archives, as Foucault surely knows, and as Jacques Derrida, Carol Steedman, and Phillip Rosen have explained in different ways, involves a desire for the past to speak as well as a realization that it will not do so absent supplementary feats of imagination in the present. The spatializing metaphor of

the heterotopian “slice” acknowledges while occulting the irreversibility of temporal process and the duration of archival work.

It does so in a manner Foucault identifies with cinema, which appears to him as a heterotopia “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several . . . sites that are in themselves incompatible,” such as the rows of seats in the theater and the ever shifting worlds on its screen (25). This principle has as its corollary the observation that heterotopias are set apart by procedures that limit admission and conceal knowledge of what exactly goes on within them. Thus they are also spaces of deviance. Foucault’s examples include psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and retirement homes—hints that he imagines deviance not only in the sense of the deviant individual who is isolated in order to be “corrected,” but also in terms of governmental norms for defining healthy, secure, and productive populations, as emphasized by his later work on biopolitics. In any event, Foucault is clear that heterotopias are not anti-normative. They do not defy normalization, but rather enclose deviance in a manner that confirms a norm. This delimits their “function in relation to all the space that remains” (27).

The ship marks the limit of what Foucault is able to tell us about this functional relationship. It concludes the essay as “the heterotopia *par excellence*. In civilizations without boats,” Foucault laments, “dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.” The ship is also a “great instrument of economic development,” although Foucault allows in a parenthetical remark that “I have not been speaking about that today” (27). And indeed, to speak about it would require elaboration of his taxonomy along the lines the ship suggests. Instead of locating heterotopias in a static distribution of sites and functions, as is Foucault’s general procedure in “Of Other Spaces,” the ship requires us to think about process as change. In juxtaposing spaces, it collects and deposits persons, things, and information, moving cargo from one place and time to the next. This is how it provides an instrument of economic development and a focal point for dreams of pirate adventure.

As if to demonstrate this point, the cruise ship *Laconia* set out from New York in November of 1922 to circumnavigate the globe with 450 passengers on board, including the Phelps (“Many to Sail Today on a World Cruise”). The ship was notably “wet,” allowing alcoholic consumption prohibited on the mainland. Shipboard activities included topical lectures, themed dinner parties, games and contests, and an equator-crossing ritual, in which Father Neptune’s victims wear what one could perhaps call pirate outfits. At each of the twenty-two ports of call, American Express agents arranged tours of notable sites, visits to prominent locals, and, of course, shopping trips. In the month before departure, American Express advertised berths at costs comparing “favorably with the average expense of Wintering at Home . . . \$650 a month and up” (“Wonder Cruise Around the World.” Display Ad). This was a trip for people who “wintered” rather than worked, but it was also pitched to those on a budget. It exemplified American Express’s aim to grow the market for leisure travel by designing experiences accessible to a segment of the middle class. Passengers

would be encouraged to transform a voyage of entertainment and education into memories made durable by commitment to paper and celluloid. Doubtless an instrument of economic development for American Express and the Cunard line, likely an engine of dreams for its well-healed passengers, the ship offers a powerful reminder that regulating access to heterotopian space confers privilege as well as sheltering deviance, that unlike certain utopias, heterotopias cannot be imagined innocent of or radically alter to the relations of privilege in which they are enmeshed.

The Laconia reel's screening at the 2010 Orphan Film Symposium in New York brought this ship into the heterotopian space of the cinema, in whose darkness anyone might be sheltered for a modest ticket price. So far as I know, this was the first screening outside the Phelps household. The film appeared as part of a program devoted to amateur women filmmakers who travel. This programming choice counted on audiences to be interested in films shot by amateurs, by women, and by women who got away from "home," with all that term connotes. Yet if all of these attributes might be expected to suggest rare and even exotic offerings, programmer Dan Streible announced from the podium that he had no shortage of possibilities for inclusion in the session. Which means: the Laconia reel can be described either as a rarity or as a commonplace. Because we know that its makers were women who travelled, the film can be presented as an exception that confirms our understanding of historical filmmaking and viewing norms. Or, it might equally be thought of as requiring us to revise our understanding of those norms. Either unusual women occasionally resisted masculinist screen culture, or else women were everywhere part of making an emerging screen culture. In posing these interpretative alternatives, if in little else, the Phelps sisters have something in common with their professional counterparts. The transposition of screening venue from the parlor of the Phelps' winter estate to New York University's School of the Visual Arts cinema demands this kind of reflection.

Because they are poised between home and elsewhere, Devin Orgeron finds in family travel films from much later in the century a "preservational awareness of a personal and global world in transition" (77). Such an awareness is certainly evident in the [Laconia reel](#). To pick just one example, an early sequence begins with the title card "The 'Savage Headhunters' of Formosa, when requested to look ferocious and animated, responded in this manner." Cut to a woman and child in what appears to be traditional costume staring blankly into the camera. Other observers circle the stone-faced pair: two photographers, perhaps professionals, manipulate their cameras and exit frame right; a man in a smart suit and tie enters behind the woman and child to stare out at the movie camera (and, presumably, a Phelps sister) but does not raise his camera to photograph them; the stare of the man in the suit echoes the looks of the workmen centered in the background who gaze out at us across the entire shifting scene. If the savages of colonialist imagination existed, this little sequence suggests in its irony, modernity has tidily swept them up. Gender is part of this process, we may see, by observing that neither woman nor child fits the stereotype of headhunter.

Gender is in play, furthermore, in the difference between the woman who looks through the camera, the one who looks at it, and the crowd of men who observe the entire scene. Discovery of difference within the category “women” is a motif of the Phelps diaries as well as the film. One page of Eleanor’s diary, for examples, pastes under the heading “In Seool” a picture of presumably Korean women in headscarves and white dresses labeled “Typical Women” next to a picture of two white women in hats and fur coats labeled “‘Harry’ Pratt and CLP [e.g., Claudia Lea Phelps].” It is a bit difficult to tell from the photo, but it seems that “Harry” may be wearing a pantsuit under her fur coat, while Claudia Lea wears a jacket and skirt. The sense of gender difference is redoubled, it seems to me, in the relationship between contemporary viewers and the screen. Because both kinds of outfits now look like historical costumes, they indicate ways of being women that differ from present options almost as much as they do from each other. In any event, the cinema strikes me as most heteropian in this juxtaposition of chronotopically distinct women, in its blatant reminder that “women” does not contain a unity.

The slices of space-time containing these different women found their way to New York’s screen because our archive in South Carolina saved and selected them. It hardly saved everything. One searches in vain for example, for any information about the woman and child asked to pose as native Formosans. This comes as no surprise, given that the *Laconia* existed not to mobilize their dreams but to accumulate their traces. The Phelps Collection also withholds details about the sisters’ filmmaking practice, and in the process opens up a fertile ground for speculation. Importantly, most of what can be known about the process of making the *Laconia* reel must be inferred from the film itself. Although both sisters left diaries, neither records when the *Filmo 70* came into their possession or mentions filming with it. Since the footage probably begins with New Year’s Day in Kyoto, it is possible that the camera was acquired in Japan. Overall the collection provides evidence of vigorous habits of editing, titling, and reediting. Perhaps half of the reels duplicate material from others. There is evidence of material being recontextualized—effectively used as stock footage. For example, a shot identified by a title in another film as representing Mrs. Sheffield Phelps on the Adriatic in June of 1922, shows up at the beginning of the *Laconia* reel as a representation of their departure from New York in November of that year. It is possible, then, that some of the footage in the *Laconia* reel was not shot by Phelps sisters, but rather acquired, compiled, and edited by them later.

Silence on key questions of how, when, and exactly why the films were made encourages a particular kind of interpretation. We might relate the sister’s filmmaking habits to the conventions of amateur photography and scrapbook and diary making in which they were well versed. We might note that their framing and subject matter choices are informed by established iconographies of the foreign—footage of the Ghats at Benares and the Sphinx and pyramids at Giza seem especially familiar. In editing and particularly in titling practices, we might claim the inspiration of newsreels and travelogs. The lack of any clear statement



Detail from Eleanor Phelps Wilds, [*Around the World by the S.S. Laconia Book I.*](#)
Phelps Sisters Collection. University of South Carolina.

about what the sisters thought they were doing with their movie camera frees us to tell many stories about their work, stories that situate their practice in relation to norms of the time. If we were expecting amateur film to be more readily interpretable because somehow more personal, the Phelps Collection defies that expectation. Here, as always, the archive's accumulated "slices" of the past require a dynamic process of interpretation in the present, a process of interpretation that supplies them with a necessary context. This process requires films and their interpreters to leave the archival heterotopia and return to normal space.

The context of early-twentieth-century film culture that could be spoken about in normal space looked different in the bad old days, before a lot of archival work established that we would find interesting women filmmakers pretty much anyplace we looked. A biographical impulse informed much of that archival work, and here too, and finally, the Phelps Collection provides an opportunity to reflect on what we want biography to do. Thanks to the efforts of

Claudia Lea Phelps's grandnieces Stephanie and Ellen Wilds and to the socio-economic status their family enjoyed at the turn of the last century, stupendous amounts of information about the family are available, much of it online. A few basic details. Claudia Lea was born in 1894 followed by her sister Eleanor in 1895. They had a brother. They were born in Teaneck, New Jersey to Mr. and Mrs. Sheffield Phelps, the Mrs. being previously known as Claudia Wright Lea. Both the Phelps and the Leas were wealthy and politically prominent families. Around the turn of the last century, Sheffield Phelps, a journalist and aspiring politician, purchased an estate, Rose Hill, in Aiken, South Carolina and became part of the "Winter Colony" there. Shortly afterward, in 1902, he died of typhoid fever, before securing an independent fortune for his family. At the time of the Laconia cruise in 1923, the fatherless sisters would have been in their late twenties. Eleanor married in September of 1923. Claudia Lea never did. She was known to her nieces Stephanie and Ellen as "Aunt Bill." According to Stephanie the sobriquet comes from Claudia Lea's youth, when she adopted William the Conqueror as a role model. Anticipating what may be your desire to assign Aunt Bill a sexuality, Stephanie describes her as "nothing." The piles of photographs and papers, which Stephanie has lived with longer and examined more closely than I, provide evidence of close friendships with women when Claudia Lea was younger and of male horse and hound buddies when she was older, but no evidence of sexual entanglements. Modern sexuality being what it is, the archival silence on this point is more likely to incite than to limit speculation. What seems not to be in doubt, however, is Aunt Bill's deviance with respect to gender norms. By all accounts, she was an unusual woman. This discovery makes her interesting. More interesting even than her sister Eleanor, who married against her mother's wishes!

Aunt Bill is at home in the heterotopian space of the archives. She is a deviant among deviants, useless accumulators of details, twitchy transcribers of barely catalogued piles of paper, obsessive seekers after films doomed to rot or believed to have long since rotted, time wasters who want to know everything about pasts that may prove irrelevant. To be sure, Claudia Lea Phelps does not belong to the same category of deviant as the historians who study her. Rather, her archival persona is like ours because in departing from the norm she helps us recognize what the archive is there to do: not to "save" the past, but to pervert the present.

The archive's ability to do this, like the ship's and the cinema's, depends on its difference from and connection to the normal space outside it. Archival accumulation depends on entire fields of institutionalized practices, from the tourist industry, to film and camera equipment manufacture, to university training in film and media studies and moving image archiving. Similarly, if the archive provides safe harbor for piratical fantasies of data plunder, this is because its procedures miraculously release would-be thieves back into the world as law-abiding researchers. The archive's ability to launder its contents ranks high among its virtues. That said, the Laconia trip, in its cinematic and archival extensions, clarifies that heterotopias are as insufficient as they are necessary. The Laconia reminds us of a profusion

of heterotopias, of countless voyages, of multifarious cinemas, and of the world's many archives. It also reminds us that if heterotopias transform existing distributions of power they do so without radically undoing them. The point, then, of seeing the archive as heterotopian, is not only to praise its ability to produce deviations within normative practice, but also to clarify the way institutionalizing those deviations reorganizes, without revolutionizing, normal space.

Historiography provides a means by which it can do so. But only if we appreciate that history is a kind of archival work that requires writing, rather than a kind of writing that occults archival work. I take the former to be Steedman's position and the latter to be that of Jacques Rancière. In *The Names of History* Rancière credits Michelet with inventing for "the history of the age of the masses" "the art of making the poor speak by keeping them silent" (42, 45). On this account, Michelet directs the reader's attention to a massive pile of archival paper in order to explain that the many voices that speak there constitute a singularity—"the people of France"—that cannot speak for itself. Michelet rhetorically excludes the dissenting multitude under the name of France, Rancière contends, in the very process of establishing "the people" as the agent of revolutionary change. This narrative invites readers to forget the rhetorical feat of exclusion that established that agent as a unity in the first place. Modern historiography thus requires two exclusions: the name of the people excludes the speech of the multitude presumed to constitute it; the people as revolutionary agent covers-up this rhetorical slight of hand. In this way, historiography provides Rancière a symptom of the promise and the sickness of modern democracy: promise, in its acknowledgment of dissenting multiplicities, whose voices may ring in the archive, but are silenced within the imperative to name them as a unity; sickness, in creating the mistaken impression that history provides a scientific account of the people's role as agent. Because history requires a rhetorical myth-making activity that it must "forget," Rancière avers, those hopeful for the future would do better to read philosophy, which properly identifies and can explain its structures of inclusion and exclusion.

Steedman's Michelet, in contrast, allows us to see historiography's silences and inventions not as poor philosophy but as engines of inspiration. This is so precisely because she understands the archive as particular kind of workspace, and not as merely "an excess of words" (Rancière 43). Cold, detached, insalubrious, Steedman's archive harbors anthrax spores in the leather bindings of its dusty books, a contagion that—it seems plausible!—inspires Michelet's fevered encounters with the dead people of France. In place of Rancière's devious master rhetor, Steedman imagines an obsessive deranged by workplace contaminants. Her point is not, as she says with tongue firmly in cheek, to substitute a real archive fever for Derrida's metaphorical one. Rather, she aims to highlight the interpretative work the archive encourages in piling up papers for future generations. When the Trades Union Congress opened its file on "Dust—Rag Flock" it wanted to document the health hazards of the tanning trades. It could not have anticipated that it would help Steedman to establish an

alternative etiology for modern historiography. Yet it did, reminding us that the “excess of words” required the industry of leather workers—one among many reminders made possible by the juxtaposition of two space-times in one place. A heterotopian workplace, the archive can allow us to redescribe and begin to alter relations among a wide variety of institutions. Philosophy may be incapable of enjoying its perverse operations, which defy all utopian plans.

THE AUTHOR: Mark Garrett Cooper is Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of South Carolina. He is the author of *Love Rules: Silent Hollywood and the Rise of the Managerial Class* (2003) and *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change In Early Hollywood* (2010). From 2009 to 2013 he served as interim director of the University of South Carolina’s Moving Image Research Collections. To learn about his current, co-authored work-in-progress, visit <http://humanitiesafterhollywood.org>.

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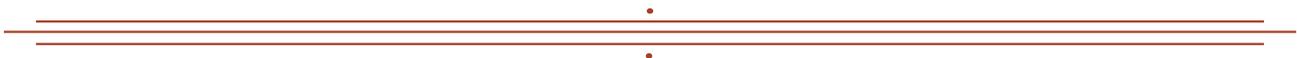
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PROLOGUE TO PART II



Christine Gledhill

**An Ephemeral History:
Women and British Cinema Culture in the Silent Era**

ABSTRACT: This essay examines select examples of British trade, fan and news press of the 1910s and 1920s in order to explore how the new visibility of women in cinema—both as audiences and in films—was registered. My focus is less how women themselves responded to cinema, than how these materials, in marking the relationship between women and cinema, reveal conflicts around shifting gender relations and identities. Starting by outlining some of the problems of using such material, I will highlight some key themes that emerged in British cultural discourses and imaginings across a range of print media circulating around cinema in this formative period. These include: women and cinema work; the English “girl” and “Americanitis”; sentimentality and “sob-stuff”; acting, “it” and sex-appeal; trans-valuation of the “true woman” in the new cinematic public sphere; femininity, class and representation; and gender contest.

Introduction: Some Preliminaries

My essay stems from a lengthy sojourn among materials of the British trade, news and fan press of the 1910s and 1920s, searching for what they reveal of the cultural and aesthetic history of that cinema. While not initially looking for women’s individual career histories, this presents a rich period through which to explore the shifting significances of gender in its interaction with cinema, highlighting its contribution to modernizing femininity. Returning to think about these materials in the context of *Women and the Silent Screen* foregrounds certain themes, which might prove signposts to future research. In particular it raises issues about how to approach such materials and what they can illuminate.

One problem haunting women’s film history is its duality: on the one hand a labor history of employment openings and closures and on the other, a history of films—representations, expressive and aesthetic achievements, spectatorial possibilities and audience responses. As feminist film historians, we would like to see the one impact on the other. But women’s filmmaking does not necessarily conform to today’s feminist expectations, nor do women filmmakers always want to be identified by gender. Feminist film theory has developed ways of bypassing this dualism through notions of discursive construction and women’s differential positioning in spectatorship, which is produced by both social gender and the unconscious operation of sexual difference. According to such perspectives, women must, almost by default, register a difference, whether they acknowledge their position as women or not. However, researching the cultural materials through which cinematic impact is registered suggests a different approach—one perhaps more attuned to the more complex conception of gender and femininity in our postmodern, postfeminist age. Notions of the intermittency, fluidity and discursivity of any social positioning might suggest that we move in and out

of such positions in different contexts and may, according to circumstance, imaginatively occupy positions not conventionally assigned to us.

Antonia Lant, introducing the diversity of writings of women across the decades, not only warns against monolithic constructions of audiences and textual spectatorship; she also notes that many of the concerns registered by women are shared by male writers too, and can be rooted in particular cultural currents of the time (Lant and Periz). Although much of the British material I have gathered is written by women, I have not deliberately targeted women's responses per se, nor attempted to separate what can be identified as feminist or progressive from what seems permeated by patriarchal ideology. Concepts of consciousness as formed by prevailing cultural imaginaries, perceptual horizons and fantasy formations take us beyond fixed ideological meanings as the goal of film analysis and fixed social identities as the focus of spectator response. This enables historical analysis to attend to processes of change, when thinking and feeling may be on the cusp of new perceptions (see Williams).

Ongoing thinking about film genre further supports this direction. The relationship of female authorship and traditions of genrified gender are central to the project of women's film history and I have found considerable help here in Bakhtin's generous conception of the speech act or utterance as generic: "Our speech—all our utterances—is filled with other's words, varying degrees of otherness and our-own-ness" (89). For Bakhtin all our utterances in whatever medium are grounded in previous generations' cultural uses of language forms. Yet we speak out of present circumstances, inflecting available communicative forms and practices through dialogue—external or internalized—with alterity: with the past meanings of others entrenched in the language forms at our disposal or anticipated in our internal negotiations with future users. As Raymond Williams argues, any historical period is intersected by emergent, residual and dominant frames of thinking and feeling. Equally helpful is the postmodernist, postfeminist conception of identity as partial, multiple, shifting. This, along with the notion of discursive calls on identity and constructive performativity, suggests that gender is not ever a consistent, enduring identity, but one that fluctuates, comes into being when circumstances demand we act in gender, but is frequently in abeyance while other identities are called up. Such concepts help bridge the gap between cinema's two histories, explaining how women may come to operate successfully in a world defined by men. On the one hand institutionalized practices and cultural shifts intersecting with discursive gender open up or foreclose career opportunities for women filmmakers or for more adventurous representations—as Mark Cooper has so perceptively analyzed at Universal in the 1910s and Sue Harper in the British context in the 1970s (Harper and Smith, Introduction and Part II 115–232). But in the movie theater, as Pam Cook persuasively argues, gender may work differently, as a series of imaginary identities, perspectives, feelings, styles, poses, open to male and female alike in diverse ways and with diverse effects.

In looking at the materials, then, in which British journalists, reviewers, essayists, fans, publicists, photographers, illustrators recorded their perceptions of the meeting of cinema

and gender, I wanted to explore what was at stake in the way cinema as emblem of the modern was associated with the shifting balance of gender relations towards twentieth-century modernity. Much of my analysis concurs with observations by Antonia Lant and others looking at similar materials culled from the America and European trade, news and fan press. But in my case historical-cultural situatedness gives a specific slant to the imbrication of (largely) English girlhood and manliness in reaching for, or in reaction against, powerful conceptions of the modern coming from Hollywood and in different ways from Europe. In an attempt to delineate intersecting cultural imaginaries axed on conceptions of gender I have sought to delay social or ideological evaluation. This is partly because what I have scanned for this essay is (in relation to the mass of material available) scanty, unsystematic, contingent. So this paper takes snapshots, pausing at points that seem particularly resonant in relation to themes that hold our imagination and thinking now. But more importantly, I want to pay attention to the doubleness of discourse suggested by Bakhtin: to attend to what holds writers and photographers to past meanings, even as they struggle to embrace new ideas and opportunities, examining how new perceptions impress upon them even as they defend their values against perceived threats.

Finally, there is the question of why particular pieces resonate so powerfully nearly a hundred years later. I would suggest here the value of hindsight. Many of these pieces re-activate perceptions we thought were our own, but, coming from earlier generations, register with renewed freshness and significance. Others reveal to us a struggle with entrenched meanings, constraining the imaginable, which we now have the terms to name; or they frankly give shape to fantasies and needs often derided for their old fashioned attachments and prematurely discarded, which now seem due for recovery in more contemporary terms—witness the current interest in affect, the sublime and aesthetics. In all such cases what the historical snapshot registers is not comprehensive explanation or fact but a way of engaging with the acculturated gender imaginaries of the past in order to repose our own questions. In this spirit I want to examine a number themes that represent nodal points in my trawl through a broad range of materials.

Women's Work

The cinema produced a range of new jobs—some of them arising from the call-up of men to the First World War—which led to a new public visibility for women and new gendered calls. For example, jobs discussed in the press include: film acting, film vetting for exhibitors, projectionist, producer, pay-box cashier, costume designer, scenario writer, orchestral musician, assistant director, editor, continuity girl, studio mother. Trade, fan and general interest press are curious about these jobs and the new male-female relationships involved. In the early 1910s much note is made of the physical skills required in filmmaking, most visible in the dangerous feats required of the screen actress—especially by the

American serial queens. In contrast to such female derring-do, articles by or about women on the production-exhibition side claim a more mature femininity, shifting conceptions of gender relations from female subservience to partnerships with men, even if these are perceived in traditional domestic terms. The call to labor draws on familiar female roles and experience: from mothering the workforce—providing expertise in domestic details, personal relationships, the decorative arts and fashion—to scripting or set and costume design, to a call on women’s supposed intuitive feeling for audiences in giving programming advice to exhibitors. In other words, skills and aptitudes learned in a gendered domestic arena are now, within the filmmaking partnership, put to professional use, without challenging public perception of male-dominated roles in the workplace.

Such challenges did occur, however, both in films—e.g. problem pieces about the impossibility of combining career and motherhood—and in the industry. Regarding the latter, the most notable challenger was Dinah Shurey who, forming a company in 1924 with the help of male backers and directorial expertise, not only increased her control over production but was bold enough to claim the roles of producer and director (Gledhill, “Reframing Women in 1920s British Cinema”). Her nemesis appeared in the form of another woman: the irreverent young journalist, Nerina Shute, of *The Film Weekly*, who under the heading, “Can Women Direct Films?” not only attacked Shurey for creating “several appalling pictures,” but used an interview with Mrs. Walter Forde, wife of a director of popular comedies, to prove her point. However, Mrs. Forde was also known as Adeline Culley—long-time participant in filmmaking, including working as film editor, assistant director and producer on her husband’s films.¹ While in Shute’s interview Mrs. Forde (aka Culley) does indeed suggest that women are incapable of the multi-tasking required of the male director, she also, in describing her own work in the film studio, clearly sees it as embedded in a different and collaborative mode of male-female partnership—something which film criticism has failed to find the language to explore (Shute, “Can Women Direct Films?”).

Elective Affinities: Trans-Valuing the Ideology of Separate Spheres

Women’s highly visible public presence in the cinema auditorium, and exhibitors’ frequent reference to the dominance of the female audience, whose tastes had to be considered, led to gendered conflicts over the nature of the new medium and its social impact. Before the arrival of Hollywood’s clearly established genres, there was some uncertainty whether cinema was a male or female medium. Because it depends on vision, writes one woman in 1920, it is necessarily action—and therefore male—oriented, while conversely female stories depend on talk (*Stoll’s Editorial News*, June 17, 1920 11). Contrariwise Grace Faulconer, writing in 1912 in one of Britain’s earliest general interest film papers, *The Film Censor*, argues that cinematic vision endows emotions with an intensity of impact undistracted by other calls on attention

¹ I am grateful to Bryony Dixon for making this connection.

(Faulconer, “Women and Cinematography: Its Influence on Our Emotions”). Since women are the emotional gender, this creates an affinity between cinema as a medium and women. This perceived affinity is taken in different directions in the succeeding decades, as gender definitions are reworked to suppress or open up new calls to male and female social being.

In one perspective, then, a romantic association of the female figure with beauty and fragile emotion is both projected as women’s special contribution to filmmaking—in their concern with decorative arts and their performance of charm and wistfulness—and analyzed as a particular quality of cinema as a visual medium. For many commentators, male and female, such a perception leads to what Ann Kaplan has argued was a trans-valuation of Victorian separate spheres ideology. John Ruskin in *Of Queen’s Gardens* had claimed that responsibility for the state of the world lies with women through their greater moral sensitivity and their power over men. Responding to cinema as a new arena of moral-emotional perception, Grace Faulconer in 1912, Michael Orm in 1925 in the trade paper, *Kinematograph Weekly*, and Iris Barry, as reported in the *Yorkshire Post* in 1926, all produce what is effectively a revision of Ruskin’s demand on women, who are now no longer confined to the home, but channeled into the new public sphere represented by cinema. “The cinema was made for women,” claims Iris Barry, “but they have made precious little use of it” (Iris Barry qtd. in Davey n. pag.). It is women’s task, these commentators suggest, to exercise their greater moral and aesthetic sensibility to ensure that cinema achieves its own best self, characterized variously as moral cleanliness, the creation of beauty for beauty loving eyes, winged imagination, spiritual fantasy, or the aesthetics of movement.

For a while in the early 1920s, the trade journal, *Kinematograph Weekly* provided an opening for female influence in columns headed “Through Women’s Eyes” or “The Woman Patron.” Thus Kathleen Mason, reviewing *The Broken Road* (René Plaissetty, 1921), a romantic adventure film of imperial India, critiqued in highly Ruskinian terms the implicit racism of the heroine, who, accepting an Indian lover in India, rejects him in England, so propelling him to join an uprising against the Raj: “Where peace and been hoped for and worked for, she brings only war as her contribution towards the building up of a great empire.” Such double standards, Mason argues, will be repudiated by a female audience who “realize that they have power for good and evil in the intelligent solution of these questions” (26). Michael Orm, on a somewhat different tack, but using a similar mix of convention and radicalism, slides into a female voice to speak outside his own gender:

The kinema is such a wonderful influence in the lives of women that I would implore *them* to keep it at its best . . . *I am weary* of these semi-nude vamps, whose marble bath-rooms vie with the swimming-pool orgies of their male companions . . . men who leer and women who lure grow very monotonous. (Orm 63)

This identification of women with guardianship of cultural and moral value could be reversed in an equally Ruskinian way. Lady Emmott, Acting Vice-President of the National

Council of Women in Great Britain, argues the bad influence of the female audience in a public address entitled “Do Women Cheapen Films?” While largely affirming that they do, she pleads the efficacy of citizenship: “Women who realize their responsibility to community . . . have no taste for artificial excitements . . . the quickest and surest way to abolish undesirable film is to arouse a deep and sincere interest in citizenship” (Lady Emmott).

Gender and Genre: Action Versus “Sob Stuff”

The widely perceived affinity between cinema and female emotion produced by the twenties a decided backlash in a gendered contest over what and whom cinema was for. The presumably male reviewer of the 1926 American remake of *The Better ‘Ole* (Charles Reisner), based on Bruce Fairbairns’s sardonic warfront cartoons, writes that given its success with an all-male cast he hopes “the women-and-children first principle of cinematography will be abandoned and that the mere man in a picture theater will no longer feel he has strayed to the lingerie counter” (*Daily Chronicle*, Oct. 29, 1926 n. pag). Recurrent complaints about “sickly sentimentality,” (a fifteen-year-old boy qtd. in Allen n. pag.) “moonfaced sentimentality appealing to romantic maidens” and “harmful ‘sob-stuff’” (Spenser n. pag.) suggest a gendering of genres and modes in contest between male and female viewers, with “sob-stuff” telling us just *how* women cheapen films.

But there were women writers willing to defend the apparently indefensible, sometimes pointing out that male dramatists and actors could be highly sentiment-prone. Edith Nepean, British studio correspondent for *Picture Show* throughout the 1920s, displayed an acute sensitivity to the emotional feel of screen images and audience responses. Noting that “betrayal of emotion” is currently considered an “expression of bad taste,” she declares: “it is extraordinary to watch the effect of “sob stuff” on audiences in the cinema,” and suggests it arises from recognition of one’s own “tragic possibilities.” Contrary to the derision that greeted women’s romantic fiction, “Love,” she argues, is “shown as a distinctly *disquieting* passion,” exemplified by her favorite exponent, Ivor Novello, as a “past master of ‘sob stuff’” (Nepean 9). Nepean’s empathy with popular responses was, however, up against a conundrum to which the intersection of class, national culture and emotion was central. In 1929 a doctor writes into *The Film Weekly* to decry “crude, degrading sentimentality” explaining that “it is bad for a nation to live on its emotions,” and that attachment to a “good cry” is related to hysteria (Jones 18).

“Americanitis”: Weeping Mothers and Sophisticated Flappers

The emotion-saturated nation that the doctor had in mind was America—where, as many had argued, pursuit of the dollar and therefore of a democratic mass rather than cultivated audience favored “the mushy ultra-sentimental story, sprinkled with erring children and

Film Booking Offices Ltd



The American Girl

The Great New West Serial
In Seventeen Two-Reel Episodes.
Marin Sais as the Intrepid Horsewoman.

THREE ADVANCE OPINIONS.

Marin Sais possesses a charming appearance, and performs feats which cause one to hold one's breath in amazement. . . . Seldom have we seen such a galaxy of adventure. A pretty love story runs through it. "The American Girl" should be popular.
The Bioscope.

Adventure, mystery, thrills enacted among scenery that breathes the very spirit of "do and dare"—a Kalem Serial that will more than hold its own, and with the certainty of the Sexton in the Ballad "gather them in"—the lovers of the serial of mystery untold episode by episode. The audience is never allowed to lose the grip of the main thread and it is wonderfully sustained — the complex mystery — right through the 17 episodes.
The Cinema.

Marin Sais is the heroine of this 34 reels of frills and thrills—a sensational serial full of horsemanship. It will be a popular soldiers' drama—there are comedy touches. If all American girls were as strenuous as this one, I should advise an Army at the front. It would not be all honey for the Huns.
Kinematograph Weekly.

Release Date



July 1st.

MANCHESTER: 4 CATEATON STREET.	SHEFFIELD: 174 NORFOLK STREET.	NEWCASTLE ON TYNE: BOLBEC HALL.	LIVERPOOL: 36 THE ARCADE, LORD ST.	22 SOHO SQUARE, LONDON, W. 1.
GLASGOW: 34 ST CLYDE STR.	BIRMINGHAM: 22 HILL STREET.	CARDIFF: 23 CHARLES STREET.	DUBLIN: 3 DAME STREET.	WIRES, ESSARUM, OX. LOND PHONE, RECENT, 277

"The American Girl." Advertisement. *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* 6 June 1918.

weeping mothers” (“What is a Good Film? Wynham Standing and Hugh Croise Debate” 38) and “a sentimentality that nauseates” (Agate 6). Such American “sob-stuff” in Britain, it was argued, appealed to the “unthinking classes” (“What is a Good Film? Wynham Standing and Hugh Croise Debate” 38)—to “the largest number of nursemaids, servant girls and errand boys” (Agate 6). However, it was the “girl” who offered a more inspiring imaginary alternative to the mature woman-as-citizen through whom to confront cheapening female sentimentality—a figure more compatible with American cinema’s modernizing, democratic appeals, capable of embodying changing conceptions of gender. As Sally Mitchell and Jon Burrows have shown, the “girl” was a pervasive and vital figure, emerging in late nineteenth-century girls’ fiction and magazines and in the chorus lines of musical theater, music hall and variety (Burrows; Mitchell). The Girl, as was said of Mary Pickford, stands on the threshold, a threshold between a Victorian past and twentieth-century modernity. In this respect, the Girl dramatizes the contrary gender-generic pulls of the cinematic, divided between the *action* of the American serial queens and the *affect* of an often ditzzy but wholly empathic femininity represented quintessentially by Mary Pickford (Gledhill, “Mary Pickford: Icon of Stardom”).

These twin calls from America put the Girl at the center of cultural imagination in which femininity was negotiated with the national, pulling in different class-performative directions. Aware of different audiences to be served, a kind of critical tongue-in-cheek jokiness greeted the exploits of Pearl White’s serial queen and later derring-do heroines, whether written by men or women (see, most recently, Dahlquist). This extended to a particular version of the Girl, *the Flapper*, understood as an American creation and, like the serial queens, fun, but not grown up enough to be taken seriously (see satirical piece “The Flapper and ‘It’”). More problematic, however, derring-do and the on-screen chorus girl had changed dress codes and the behavior that went with them. The result was an ever more public display of female sexuality that threatened the Victorian middle-class ideal of true womanhood, also blamed on America. James Agate, for example, speaking to the New Gallery First Nighter’s Club in 1923, declared that the American producer, “search[ing] for the eternal dollar,” pursued only one theme: “that chastity in a woman spelt idiocy” (Agate 6). In two ads juxtaposed in *Kinematograph Weekly* (June 6, 1918), “England’s Own Picture Girl” (40-41) is neatly pitted against “The American Girl” (39).

Nevertheless, the times were changing and trade critics were caught in a bind, keenly aware that “sex and punch” both paid *and* put the much-sought “better-class public” off. Central to this class-inflected antagonism and its solution was the value to English culture of “acting.” In a 1922 *Kinema Club* debate, the director, Hugh Croise, argued against America’s “sophisticated screen ‘flapper,’” declaring that “as an Englishman I believe [in] our own more natural women who, with their real knowledge, experience and stage technique, have not their superiors in the world” (“What is a Good Film? Wynham Standing and Hugh Croise Debate” 38). The contradiction here is acute, catching the English actress in a double-bind: required to be natural and display acting skill at the same time.

British
Studio
News

Are British Girls Wanted?

Pauline Johnson Loses her Part—Mabel
Poulton's Cockney Talkie—Lilian Hall-Davis
also to Speak—Roshier and the Art
of Film Beauty.

OH, let us be joyful! For I learn that British girls (despite their poker-faced acting and their sad reluctance in competing with foreigners for "undressed honours") are now the only desirables in the film world. They are to be given the chance of their lives.

Buy one and all the grey-beards in the British Studios, "English girls are stiff and reserved; it is difficult to make them emotional. We have always found that foreign women are a thousand times more



PAULINE JOHNSON

successful and easier to work with, but now that Talkies have come, foreigners are useless!"

Last week I bewailed the fact that Lya De Puyla is leaving us. But, after all, what lack of patriotism! Lya, and all those other unfortunate with defective tongues, must be shooed away from British films like dust before a broom. They must make way for British girls.

Amey Ogden is another sufferer, and I doubt not that Pola Negri will eventually follow suit, refusing, as she does, to make a Talkie. These people, no matter how

FILMA VOICE
PRODUCTION
STUDIOS

brilliant, are become practically useless as heroines. When the public understands that the words on their lips belong, not to them, but to mere doubles, there is bound to be revolt. One-time favourites will be condemned as "back numbers." Foreigners are only useful in occasional parts where broken accents are essential.

Without being impolite, I may say that Elstree has every reason to frown her brow with a large frown. The actresses she has on contract include Betty Balfour, who in the right kind of part should talk well, Estelle Brody, whose voice, fairly good in "Kitty," should improve, and Eugenie Prescott (alias Amami), as yet an unknown quantity. But are these enough? I think not.

The problem remains. How are they going to supply the demand for new artists? Are they going to select stage players—those ladies whose faces are marred by their wrinkles? Or are they going to scour England for unknown talent that is allied to the most important of all qualities, YOUTH?

Opinions

I talked to Norman Walker, the wise and respected director of "Tommy Atkins" and "Widcombe Fair." He should know what he is saying:

"Certainly English girls are in enormous demand. They are horribly reserved—both scenes and love scenes, turn them into shocked icicles—but their voices are wonderful. And voices are the only things that count nowadays. We shall have to get busy and find some really capable stars. Personally I believe that stage artists will have the monopoly of the parts. To my own way of thinking, youth doesn't matter so much. A beautiful voice is the main essential."

Much as I admire Norman Walker, I don't agree with him here. And nor, I am happy to say, does Graham Cutts, now directing the talking sequences for "The Return of the Rat."

Said he in a moment of confidence, "The voices of stage people are always a little affected. They roll their r's and play on their words in a way that annoys the sensitive microphone. The result is seldom so good as an untrained voice. And I think

by NERINA SHUTE

FILM WEEKLY

Studio Correspondent

camera angles, etc., before the picture starts. In "The Vagabond Queen," the film I've just finished with Betty Balfour, I arranged my camera in such a way as to make her face less round and wide. [That's Betty's failing, you know.] It was easily done, and they say it was very successful. Now I'm taking tests of a dozen applicants



LILIAN HALL-DAVIS

for the part of leading lady in Dupont's new picture, "Atlantic," originally called "The Beg."

One Foreigner Still with B.I.P.

Yes, in spite of everything, British



MONA GOYA, who has taken Poulton's part in "Goodwin's

that British films have no female And cultured voices will make the of all those dandies with sufficient to force an entry into British Studi

Mabel Poulton is Worried

Returning to Graham Cutts moment, he tells me that he intends a talking film of "The Wonderful his first production, you remember Hall-Davis will play her original leading lady and Lawson Butt is considered as the hero.

More important still, I learnt from little Mabel Poulton the news of her programme.

"I'm rather frightened of Talk confessed, "they're so—so differs taking a step in the dark, and no of it better. For the present I must myself with just synchronising m pictures. In that way one gains ex But in the future I am hoping to proper Talkie. Nothing is settled, of course, but if only it I shall play the part of a Cockney

Eve Gray a "Passion Can

I know of one very lovely the faced film actress, whose tongue is as her face, and who bids her t less anxiety than Mabel Poulton. Gray.

Here is an artist with consider rience in musical comedy, which confidence. But even so she is out of work, waiting and grumbles many others, until the ground is erected and the British film indu a new lease of life.

Eve Gray should not be forgotten first place her wistful beauty is fully belied by a very naughty

Nerina Shute, "Are British Girls Wanted?" *The Film Weekly* 17 June 1929.

English Actress, American Star

A debate that ran through the 1920s turned on the tension between acting and being, foregrounded by the rise of American film stardom and consequent arguments about why British cinema failed to match it. Since British acting was, and still is, considered by the British to be the best in the world, the problem was, contrariwise, laid at the door of the English girl. For while some critics and fans were allergic to "sob-stuff," it appeared that star performance required spontaneous expressivity. Thus in 1920, *Kinematograph Weekly* reported the claim of an—unnamed—leading producer that "English girls have not the necessary temperament

for screen work . . . (although a dash of Irish or Welsh blood makes all the difference). The English girl is too staid and unemotional.” The paper’s response is revealing: “What does he want them to do? Hula-hula dances in short grass skirts?” (qtd. in *Kinematograph Weekly*, April 8, 1920 84).

The debate that rumbled on through the 1920s highlights the way cinema refocused gender and class in their contribution to the aesthetic as well as social dimensions of a shifting cultural imaginary. For restraint, underplaying and understatement had become key British signifiers of a naturalism that divided male from female and middle from lower class.

The proponents of restraint claimed the greater power of implied rather than declaimed emotion, which remained the province of melodrama. However, restraint achieved its effect of power in combination with signifiers of middle or upper class authority. Melodramatic gesture, it was argued, belonged to female and working-class energies that refuse to submit.

Thus in diffusing the climactic oppositions of melodrama’s class confrontations, restraint put up protective barriers between protagonists differentiated by class and gender, thereby allowing a modern democratic extension of social contact while maintaining difference.

Restraint and the English Man

The aesthetic of restraint, however, worked well for masculinity, providing, it was claimed, “manliness” of a kind unavailable to Americans and Europeans. The actor, Miles Mander rejected his Italian, French and Swedish counterparts for their “unmanly gestures,” which, he claimed, were “not attractive to the English” (15). Apparently agreeing, Elaine Nicholson asked in *Motion Picture Studio*, “do female fans appreciate how much more manly the British hero is . . . a good-looking well-bred man of the . . . fascinating forties, who knows how to wear perfectly-cut clothes as if they belonged to him, and who reserves his smile for comparatively rare moments” (17). However, in comparison to the American star the restrained British film actress appeared simply “repressed.”

In 1926 playwright and theater critic, St John Ervine provoked a running debate in *The Morning Post* by claiming that English girls failed to become successful film actresses because of “the immobility of feature so fashionable among nicely-bred girls. Our young ladies betray so few of their feelings in their faces that one is tempted to believe they are wearing masks.” Nevertheless in replying to one of his correspondents Ervine reinstates class limits: “When we invite . . . [our young actresses] . . . to be vivacious in their manner, we are not asking them to behave like low-class barmaids” (Ervine n. pag.). Both social and aesthetic systems depended on a middle-class femininity to hold the line between private and public spheres, between performer and audience in order to maintain visible social differences. In this respect English femininity was exemplified by Alma Taylor, who *Pictures and the Picturegoer* had in 1917 proposed as the English Mary Pickford (“Is there an English Mary Pickford?”). Like “England’s Own Picture Girl,” the image is decorously contained and separated from



The illustration for May Edginton's "The 'IT-less' British Girl,"
The Film Weekly Dec. 17, 1928

the viewer. It was precisely this gap that the American star overcame. Writers in the trade and fan press frequently advised that the film industry should look beyond the legitimate stage to a different class of girl for star material. *The Bioscope* quoted Ervine himself saying, "it may be . . . that the English film-actress will come from the working class, where immobility of expression is not practiced" (Ervine qtd. in *The Bioscope*, July 8, 1926 49). The directors Sinclair Hill and Manning Haynes argued that the showgirls of variety and cabaret make good film performers because they can "get over" to an audience (Hill and Haynes 9-10).

English Girls, "It" and Sex Appeal

Along with the showgirl and cabaret dancer proliferating on English screens in American films, a new set of terms facilitated the crossing of such class-sexual boundaries: sex appeal and Elinor Glyn's electric term "It," coined in 1923, to define the personal magnetism connecting star and audience exemplified by the American star. In 1928 *Lady Eleanor Smith*—writer of romances featuring aristocrats and gypsies—complained of the English

actress's lack of "It" (Smith writing in *The Picturegoer* qtd. in Mannoek). May Edginton wrote from Hollywood on "The 'IT-less' British Girl": "English girls are considered in Hollywood to be at a discount because of their lack of emotion On the screen they are cool; they are chaste; there are no sirens . . . they photograph coldly" (9). Restraint, then, is now interpreted as sexual coldness. Thus Monty Banks wrote of the difficulties of getting English actresses to "unbend—to lose their coldness" (15). And Maurice Elvey was observed by Nerina Shute "in the gentle art of distributing sex appeal" as he urged his crowd of ball-room extras in the proto-feminist science fiction film, *High Treason* (Maurice Elvey, 1929): "Be more abandoned: Remember this is 1950 and you're not in Balham" ([*'High Treason'* review], *The Film Weekly*, June 3, 1929 5).

Representation, the Cultural Imaginary and Social Change

I want to end with a reflection on a final theme: the embrace of social change through shifting representations—a theme running throughout these materials that highlights the link between the imaginable, the aspirational, and changing cultural practices. Ibsen's *The Doll's House* functioned as a marker of growing awareness of the need to contest standard discursive calls on and representations of women, although arguably struggles with the "True Woman" began in nineteenth-century women's fiction from the moment of her inception. Thus in 1912 Grace Faulconer opened her column in the first issue of *The Film Censor*: "Let me plead the cause of my sex. In many films we are made to appear unimportant—a negligible quantity, mere dolls, the toys of men" ("Women and Cinematography: Her Position in the Photoplay" 4). Although, as I have suggested, Faulconer entered the fray within a nineteenth-century perspective that advocated the moral impact of women on the filmic public sphere, she saw Wilberforce's campaign to end slavery reduced by "the greater power of the cinema over the pen" in combating "the indignities and evils under which we suffer" ("Woman in Cinematography [sic]. Why We Like the Photoplay" 3).

In this respect, it was cinema's aesthetic and imaginary power that became the focus of gendered negotiation. The cinema's attention to real bodies in movement, its probing of personality and its display of female sexuality opened up a border which many women in Britain—especially the new generation who grew up with cinema—were eager to cross. As a threshold figure, the Girl had already been used in the theater by the Melville brothers to activate the moral boundary within an eroding Victorian moral framework. In the context of wartime, the Melvilles' play titles advertised under the heading "Pictures which will Make Money for You" (60) were frankly aimed at exhibitors now aware of a new audience of young women recently called to war work outside the home:

A World of Sin
The Shop-Soiled Girl
The Girl Who Took the Wrong Turning

By the early 1920s *Pictures and the Picturegoer* in “Bad Girls on the Screen” felt moral recuperation was no longer needed to justify pleasure: “Seven stars who specialize in screen viciousness . . . all gave this same reason: Because of the glorious acting opportunities such roles offer. So now you know” (J.L. 60). In 1928, *The Film Weekly* ran Margery Lawrence’s article, “I Love Wicked Heroines”:

To me, vitality—vividness, personality, the quality known as ‘pep’ in America . . . is worth all the negative colourless virtues in the world! . . . ‘Sin’ (so-classed) springs far more often than the virtuous will allow from sheer vivid, eager interest in life . . . I love and adore courage! Not merely brute male courage, but that finer courage of the woman that goes out to meet life, defiant of watching eyes, and insists on living it in the way that suits her best, regardless of either opinion or convention. (9)

Nerina Shute, under headings such as, “Are British Girls too Big for the Screen: Hints for the ‘IT’-less” or “Are British Girls Wanted?” campaigned for the sexualization of British actresses, writing scornfully of English actresses’ “poker-faced acting and their sad reluctance in competing with foreigners for ‘undress honors’” (“Are British Girls too Big for the Screen” 9). To “Flappers” convinced that sound cinema would require their English voices, she warned: “it remains for them to cultivate passionate tendencies . . . with a nice dose of ‘sex appeal’” (“Are British Girls Wanted?” 12). Turning the whole purpose of sex appeal to the advantage of the female audience, a reader writes in to *The Film Weekly*: “Sir, will you try and absorb the simple fact that we women, who form the vast majority of the film public, do not share your doll-worship. We want to see the men” ([reader’s letter], Jan. 21, 1929 12).

In Conclusion

In 1931 Alma Taylor, the putative English Mary Pickford of 1917, set out to answer, under the heading “How Films *have changed* Women” [original emphasis] the question: “Is the Modern Girl a product of the Screen?” (Taylor 9). Implicit in her question is the recognition of the passage through the imaginary that social change must travel. In tune with the tenor of the writings of the second half of the 1920s, she argues that if Mrs. Pankhurst won women’s political rights, the cinema had completed her work in “establishing the Modern Girl’s right to a good time, and to her capacity for enjoying one!” (Taylor 9). Most of the themes that I have highlighted converge in Taylor’s account of the symbiotic relation between women and cinema.

Central to her argument is a conviction—also expressed by others—that women, having so much more invested in the need for change, are less conservative than men. Their desires, she argues, drove cinema’s search for novelty so that “the screen became a mirror of all that was newest in life.” Stressing the democratic reach of the cinema to all classes of women, she acknowledges the value of the shocks experienced by many when confronted by “the

Bad Girls on the Screen



Jetta Goudan

Why Do Girls Go Wrong—in the Movies? Is it because they "would never dream of doing such a thing in real life?" Is it because it gives them "a chance to work off superfluous energy?" Or because they can thus "see what it's like" and then if they don't like it, leave it alone? No, Josephine, it is for none of these reasons. Fold back your ears and I will explain. Seven stars who specialise in screen viciousness, and one star who has had only one bite at it (Elsie Ferguson), all gave this same reason: Because of the glorious acting opportunities such roles offer. Now you know.

Daphne Wayne was serenely playing drug addicts and similar perverted specimens of femininity when she was barely in her teens. Daphne is a unique personality. Her tow coloured locks which won't keep tidy, her great blue eyes, and irregular but piquant features lend themselves admirably to delineating the emotions of good girls gone bad. And so in the beginning she gave us unforgettably depraved



Above: Marie Prevost and Kenneth Harlan trying to live up to the title of "The Beautiful and Damned." Circle: Anna O. Nilsson demonstrates in "What Women Will Do."



Stately Elsie Ferguson trying to look like a girl who took the wrong turning in "Outcast"

in her own Selznick productions she was about seventeen. She was allowed to choose her own stories, and she proceeded to pick out one "bad-hat" after another for her initial impersonations. Cabaret girls who'd seen the seamy side of things, tragic adventuresses, etc., etc., were the very breath of life to her. Norma doesn't shine in these roles, really. She's at her best as a modern girl in studies and problems of modern womanhood. She's not a good ramp; and she's too womanly and sweet to be a convincing adventuress. I think she knows it now. Not so Nazimova, who has never yet played a screen siren. Nazi is supremely endowed to create any of the great ancient or modern female "rotters." She did play Salome, but she converted her into a Byzantine flapper. If Nazimova ever stages a comeback into screenland let's hope it will be as a "girl who took the wrong turning."

The latest recruit to the army of screen sinners is none other than Mary Dickford, whose "Rosita" is (for her),

'goings-on' of Continental film sweethearts" and the "excessively broad humor of the early American screen comedians" (Taylor 8–9). However, anticipating by seventy years or so Patrice Petro's arguments about the aftershocks of the new, Taylor suggests that "being shocked is a process that becomes less painful as you grow used to it. It ends far more frequently by broadening one's mind and enlarging one's sense of humor than by undermining one's morals." And on this basis, while regretting as an English woman that her examples come from abroad, she argues the power of the serial queens, Pearl White, Ruth Roland and Grace Cunard, in "preparing the public mind to accept women in other roles than as wives and housekeepers" (Taylor 8–9). Contrary to the clamor over American cinema's "undress habit," she argues, "it was largely due to the "bathing beauties" of Max Sennett's creation that the unwholesome Mrs. Grundy has been banished for ever from our beaches and sports grounds," while films considered objectionable because they deal with sex, divorce, birth-control and illegitimacy have "exploded" the "indecent secrecy of Victorianism." "Against 'Americanitis,'" she graciously concedes that "the finest American women are not unworthy of being chosen as world examples" (Taylor 8–9). It is a soberly cautious, English-oriented, but generous assessment, which is aware that fantasy, laughter, as well as outrage and contest constitute the processes by which cultural imaginaries shift and are enlarged, without which no change can take place.

THE AUTHOR: Christine Gledhill is Visiting Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Sunderland (UK) and currently (Spring 2013) at New York University. She has written extensively on feminist film criticism, on melodrama and cinema, and on British cinema, publishing in 2003 *Reframing British Cinema, 1918-1928: Between Restraint and Passion*. More recently she has worked on early stardom and the actress. She coordinated the establishment of the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded *Women's Film and Television History Network* (UK/Ireland) and co-organized the first of the *Doing Women's Film History* conferences, held at University of Sunderland in April 2011. Her new anthology, *Gender meets Genre in Contemporary Cinemas*, was published by University of Illinois Press in 2012 and she is co-editor of University of Illinois Press series, *Women and Film History International*.

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II.
WOMEN AND THE CULTURAL DISCOURSE

Mary Desjardins

Fading Stars and the Ruined Commodity Form: Star Discourses of Loss in American Fan Magazines, 1914-1929

ABSTRACT: While it is a truism of film history that the arrival of sound film in the late 1920s quickly relegated certain stars to the past, fan magazines had been publishing articles since the mid-teens that focused on the careers, fade-outs, and current whereabouts of players of the motion picture industry's early years. These publications resurrect stars from the past in articles and photo displays that also evidence a deep investment in hailing the newest fashion in dress, hairstyle and personality. This investment is compatible with the industry's cycles, but also reminds the reader what or whom was left behind in the rush to newness. Fan magazines negotiated the tensions in giving voice to both fan desires and film industry's needs by recognizing that those desires and needs weren't always in sync. This essay explores how the fan magazine's juxtaposition of star-of-the-past with modernity's rapidly moving present suggests that the social imaginary of past cultures and societies is an affective landscape, as well as a disciplinary framework.

While it is a truism of film history that the arrival of sound film in the late 1920s quickly relegated certain stars to the past, fan magazines had been publishing articles since the mid-teens that focused on the careers, fade-outs, and current whereabouts of players of the motion picture industry's early years. Within a few years after Carl Laemmle's infamous 1910 publicity stunt that launched former "Biograph Girl" Florence Lawrence into stardom, fan magazines were already publishing sob-stories, tributes, and career-summations of stars who had been known to the public by name for only a short time and whose last appearances on screen could sometimes be counted on the fingers of one hand. Perhaps this shouldn't be surprising, as Laemmle's launching of Lawrence into stardom—or "picture personality" as she might have been more accurately understood at this time—had been achieved by reassuring the public that stories of her death were "lies." As Richard deCorova as argued, the Laemmle-Lawrence stunt took place in the context of other publicity stunts of the day, and it cannot be seen as *the* origin of the star system (DeCordova 50–92).¹

Indeed, by 1909-10 other companies had begun publicizing performers, laying the groundwork for a "star system" in a variety of ways. As for performers' potentially short career life-span, many players of the early teens, including Lawrence herself, were off the screen shortly after their ascent to stardom due to various reasons, from injuries and illnesses, to missteps and power struggles in contract negotiations and salary demands in the somewhat vicious boom and bust cycles characterizing the rise and fall of early film companies wanting the drawing power of stars without their salaries eating into profits. Yet the fan magazines' frequent recycling of the Florence Lawrence stunt as an "originary" event in the popular history of stardom should be of interest to historians because as a narrative

¹ See also Staiger and Brown, among others, for discussions of how the events of the IMP stunt have been analyzed or reported.

of origins it suggests that threat of loss was important to the production of affect around stars from early on in the history of film fame. In other words, the association of a star's rise with a threat of her death underscores the degree to which the industry-star-fan matrix was experienced as a kind of fort/da game in the silent film era.

Throughout the mid 1910s and into the 1920s, fan magazines published articles, ranging from melancholic to playfully sarcastic, on stars whose popularity was fading or whose careers were taking new turns. Many of these can be seen as examples of the fan magazines' use of star figures to negotiate a discursive terrain that explained major changes in film production. In this paper, I will examine four interrelated negotiations evident in the fan magazines' discursive strategies about dead, fading, or changing stars in the teens and twenties that reveal much about how these publications were negotiating not only broad, organizational changes in the film industry, but also some of the fundamental or constitutive processes of modernity. The fan magazines were negotiating 1) the paradoxes of commodity fetishism in the mass production and reception of star images, 2) their own status as giving voice to fans and being mouthpiece for an industry profiting from the commodification of star images, 3) the increasing "feminization" of movie fandom and movie magazine readership since the teens, and 4) the star body, especially the fashionable female star body, as signifier of the temporality/duration of stardom.

Early twentieth century modernity was dependent on a mature capitalism defined by a money economy, extensive industrialization, highly centralized manufacture, hired labor, organized entrepreneurial investment, and competitive free markets (Singer 20). Players in motion pictures were the exploited, but allegedly "free agents" who sold their labor as a commodity to the film industry, which by the twenties was characterized by vertically integrated organizations and highly centralized manufacture. With the development of the star system, players functioned not only as the seller of the labor-commodity, but also as the star image, which was a commodity contractually owned by the employer/company/capital. This meant star-players were not only subject to the industry's exploitation of labor and to its fluctuations in employment needs, but also subject to the fluctuating value of the commodity image as it was consumed by the public through the circulation of films and promotion (including fan magazines).

The value of the commodified star image fluctuates in a modern society characterized by discontinuity—discontinuity evident in the break with traditional religious and social beliefs and in the expansion of transportation and communication technologies that make the rapid migration of populations, ideas, and commodities possible. The discontinuity and rapidity of modernity fascinated many artists and cultural theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and for some, such as Walter Benjamin, the spectacle and the materiality of fashion and, most of all, its endless cycles were emblematic of the workings of modernity. As fashion's enveloping material form gave it a spatial proximity to the subject itself, its "ephemeral, transient, and futile character" coincides with the subject's experience

of the historical in modernity (Lehmann 201). In the words of Ann Hollander, modern fashionable dress, unlike folk or ethnic dress, has a “built-in contingent factor” (17). In relation to these terms, the film star is an apt emblem/survivor of modernity, both exploited labor and exchangeable commodity image. The star’s relation to fashion is over-determined—like fashion, she is made both possible and rendered obsolete by the rapid dissemination of ideas and products in modernity; furthermore, as a model of identity in capitalist, consumer culture, she performs the display of fashionable consumer items, from clothing to cosmetics and cars.

From the mid-teens onwards, the fan magazines contributed to the construction of stars as emblems of modernity by circulating them *as* fashionable commodities as well as *in* fashionable commodities. A number of film historians have established that by the 1920s the fan magazines were assuming a primarily female readership for their stories about the commodified star image, and they courted advertisers of fashion, cosmetic, and hygiene products for women.

Social and film historians have also argued that the key demographic for the film industry and fan magazines of the late teens and twenties was specifically young women—the teens and college co-eds that made up one half of the youth culture of the time. Cynthia Felando argues that as the decade wore on, the fan magazines made fewer and fewer references to stars associated with the early film industry. When they did, the articles either pictured them as hopelessly old-fashioned or described them in terms alternating between “reverence and insult” (103). Articles, such as *Photoplay*’s 1927 “Youth,” which rather gleefully proclaims the “complete downfall of the older dynasty in favor of one joyous in quality and bright with promise,” is probably one of the most blatant examples of how the fan magazines considered older stars within less than reverent terms (Waterbury “Youth”). *Silver Screen*’s 1929 “The Price They Pay for Fame,” which blames the stars’ own misguided ambition as the cause of their downfall or death, constructs excessive behavior of stars as inevitably leading to change (Busby rpt. in Levin).² Herbert Cruikshank, in his 1929 article for *Motion Picture* entitled, “Who Owns the Movies Now? The Empire of the Stars Goes Blooey,” goes so far as to announce the death of the star system itself—it is a “Frankenstein monster” with a “rapacious maw” that demands higher salaries and confused stars in “ways more devious than the monolithed mazes of the minotaur” (126). While the piece does not blame older high-priced stars for soaring salaries (instead it is the “rapacious maw” of the system), it does proclaim that as the system starts over with new faces (presumably from Broadway), it will produce better photoplays. In its somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the fading or transformation of older stars, this article and the others mentioned above could serve another transition of the industry of the late 1920s in its desire to curb star misbehavior and high salaries as it transplanted cheaper, stage-trained actors from Broadway.³

² Levin does not give month or year of article—I attribute possible years for the essay based on information in the text of the article.

³ Clark suggests that at the time of actor unionization and the transition to sound in the late 1920s the film

However, while the articles on faded or dead stars or stars trying to make a comeback do evidence an ambivalent attitude towards these figures, they don't use the plight of stars on the downturn merely as strong contrast to younger stars on the rise. In other words, these articles, especially from the teens to mid twenties, are something other than an appeal to a youth culture readership presumed to be interested only in young, "new faces." In fact, many of the articles point to the young chronological age of the faded stars, or ask their readers to "remember when," presuming that the stars of the past are of the same general age or generation of the magazine readers. In the 1921 *Photoplay* article, "The Return of Florence Lawrence" [fig. 1], Adela Rogers St. John discusses Lawrence's plans for a film comeback by reminding readers that Lawrence was "the first screen star, the first movie queen, 'The Biograph Girl.' Do you remember her? After six years, she is going to walk again the path she pioneered." Seemingly surprised, Rogers St. John adds, "She is still a pretty woman. And young—quite young" (33). In a *Photoplay* article from 1924, writer Frederick James Smith tracks down Mary Fuller, one of the early players in Edison films. As Fuller approaches Smith in the foyer of her secluded Washington, D.C. mansion, his first thought is "She was very little changed. I felt that time had passed her by, until I stopped to realize that she is still in her early thirties. . . . Ten years had passed—and yet there she was before me, almost exactly as I had last seen her" ("Photoplay Finds Mary Fuller" 58). In the July 1924 *Photoplay* article, "Unwept, Unhonored, and Unfilmed," Smith recounts his attempts to track down other former film players and stars, noting "most of them are young enough to be at the very crest of their careers." His melodramatically entitled piece begins with Florence Turner, the former "Vitagraph Girl" exclaiming, "I want so to work! . . . my work has been my very life; I have lived for it and for my mother, and it was taken from me before I am thirty years old!" ("Unwept, Unhonored, and Unfilmed" 64).⁴

The writer's surprised realization of the youth of faded stars is not a strategy employed only in the twenties; it is evident in articles from the mid-teens. For example, when Florence Lawrence was making one of her first comebacks, in 1914, *Photoplay* ran a four-part story detailing her career. Allegedly authored by Lawrence, the first installment is prefaced by a lengthy introduction by Monte M. Katterjohn, who, like Smith and Rogers St. John, has to rub his eyes on first meeting Miss Lawrence: "One's first meeting with Florence Lawrence is in the nature of a readjustment, but it is none the less refreshing. One rather expects to find a larger, more mature person than is Miss Lawrence. Yet at the same time you almost imagine her stepping right out of the screen toward you" (38).⁵ And in *Picture Play's* Sept. 1916 article,

industry used the fan magazine to aid in its "re-positioning" of certain highly-paid stars. Crafton has skillfully cataloged and analyzed the fan magazine articles that exemplify the ways the film industry negotiated the coming of sound with fans through attention to its star system. Anderson ("Hollywood Pay Dirt") has examined how fan magazines of the teens participated in the industry's attempts to curb high-salaried stars by positioning them as passé.

⁴ See also, for an earlier "comeback" for Turner, Peltret.

⁵ The byline says written by Florence Lawrence in collaboration with Katterjohn; section quoted is clearly by Katterjohn.



The Return of Florence Lawrence

The amazing story of
a great "come-back"

By
ADELA ROGERS ST. JOHNS

Do you remember the lines of the old English poet—

"There is a garden in her face,
Where roses and white lilies blow."

Were you one of the thousands who loved "The Biograph Girl"? This is a favorite picture of Florence Lawrence, the first motion picture star, as she looked eleven years ago in those famous two-reelers.

FLORENCE LAWRENCE is coming back to the screen. Florence Lawrence, the first screen star, the first movie queen, "The Biograph Girl."

Do you remember her?

After six years, she is going to walk again the path she pioneered.

And now that I have talked to her, I cannot help wondering whether her return is to be a triumph or a tragedy.

She is still a pretty woman. And young—quite young.

I cannot tell you why she struck me instantly as being such a sad little figure. But when I first saw her, I felt my heart stop and sink a little as it did when I first saw the vacant places in the ranks of the returned, marching regiments of Yankees.

She has in her blue eyes the same look I saw in Sarah Bernhardt's the last time she came to America—that look of brave, spiritual struggle against overwhelming odds, the look of a woman who knows what it is to fight a losing fight.

Yet she is quite gay, fluffy, blonde, and given to sweet and rather easy laughter. In no wise a gloomy person. She talks cheerfully, entertainingly, and you must read between the lines to patch together the story of her sorrows, but over and over again I felt a lump in my throat.

It is only that she has that soft, constant gentleness of manner, that unfailing kindness of speech and action that I have never seen except in people who have been hurt so much themselves that they wish above everything in the world never to hurt anyone else.

If there is a garden in Florence Lawrence's face, it is as full of little white crosses as Flanders Fields.

I found her in her room at a small hotel on a side street in Los Angeles. It was rather a shabby little room, but its windows looked out over the gray city roofs upon a western sky that nightly showed the glory of a California sunset.

There were flowers in a white pitcher, and a huge box of chocolates and a sweet, pungent smell of oranges from a big basket on the floor beside a couch-bed. On a chair was a cardboard box that frothed with pink silk and lace and ribbons. So it managed somehow to be quite cheerful and feminine in spite of the handicap of its drab wallpaper, and its ugly furniture.

But it was the last room where you would expect to find a motion picture star. Rather it was the room of a woman who



The comfortable home in Westwood, N. J., where Florence Lawrence still lives and raises asparagus. It was here that she spent her years of retirement from the screen.

33

1. Florence Lawrence's comeback from the country.
"The Return of Florence Lawrence," *Photoplay* 1921.

“Where are the Stars of Yesterday?” Will Rex provides numerous reasons why the fame of some stars has dwindled, but assumes the “stars of yesterday” are of the same generation of his readers today: “Unconsciously players have dropped from our minds to be forgotten, and we have seldom missed them. But just the mention of a name, and we recall immediately many pleasant hours spend in the semi-darkness, with their shadowy forms before us on the silver screen” (Rex n. pag.).⁶

These examples suggest that articles from the teens and twenties about stars rising and/or fading are more likely to be melodramatic, even melancholic meditations on the rapidity of modern life, the acceleration of fashion cycles, and the dramatic transformation of the film industry since the beginning of the star system in the early teens, rather than ridiculing taunts directed at stars who have been unable to adapt to changing fashion. The fan magazines give varying reasons, even sometimes within the same article, for the fading of some stars’ careers. These range from personal reasons (stars marrying and retiring), to professional re-orientation (such as stars switching from acting to directing), to the film companies’ manipulation of star labor and image (such as, companies miscasting them), to the fluctuating fortunes of companies in an aggressive free market environment (such as the rapid boom and bust cycles of early film companies).

Sometimes in the same article the fickleness of public—its adherence to fashion and fashionable ideas—will be invoked alongside the loyalty of fans, such as in *Motion Picture* 1929 article, “The Vanguard of the Old Stars” by Dunham Thorp: “In this country time is a moving thing. Yesterday is dead. We live in today and tomorrow. We snicker now at what would have made us weep ten years ago. Where are the bathing suits of yesteryear? . . . But no matter what they’re not wearing no [sic] longer, you can still get any group sentimental by singing old songs at twilight . . . the fact is that American fans are every bit as faithful as those of any other nation” (30).

Thorp describes the public’s response to stars in terms of dramatic reversals—cynical adherence to fashion cycles switching to sentimental fidelity. The article claims that Tearle was let go by his film company employer, which allegedly told the public that Tearle, having “made his pile . . . was quitting, regardless of how . . . [the fans] felt about it.” Thorp argues that this lie was the company’s calculation to “to make anyone who had ever liked him turn away in sheer disgust” (30). His fans couldn’t believe Tearle was capable of such behavior towards them and flooded exhibitors and producers with pleas to bring him back to the screen. The article announces with great pleasure that Tearle was recently called by Warner’s to act in a picture.

While some articles, such as the aforementioned piece on Conway Tearle, *Photoplay*’s 1926 “What Happened to Pauline Frederick?” [fig. 2] or *Photoplay*’s 1926 “Stars Who Came Back,” frankly accuse the film industry of lying to fans about their manipulation of star labor, or of producing bad pictures that ruin star careers, criticisms are rarely, if ever, attributed

⁶ Rex lists over one hundred names of players “forgotten” or voluntarily retired by this date.

What Happened to Pauline Frederick?

Why did this popular star at the very height of her success slip into screen oblivion? A great character sketch of a great actress, by Adela Rogers St. Johns



Pauline Frederick in her most famous film role, "Madame X." "There are too many angles to the motion picture business for a lone woman to combat," says Miss Frederick. "The smallest things turn your whole course one way or the other"

JUST a few years ago, Pauline Frederick was one of the really great and beloved stars of the screen.

Her fame was not founded upon mere beauty, nor upon a dazzling personality, though she had both.

Public and critics considered her one of the finest actresses the silversheet had ever known, many considered her the finest. And with reason. Some of the pictures Pauline Frederick made, directed by Robert Vignola, have never been topped by anybody.

From tremendous popularity and acclaim on the stage, she brought with her into pictures a breadth of training, a poised and distinguished manner, a warm love of acting, that no one else has ever given us.

Then, suddenly, at the very height of her success, in the very prime of her beauty and genius, she slipped into a series of unworthy and inadequate pictures and has practically disappeared from the screen.

The fans still clamor for her. In no way do they forget her. When such a great performance as she gave in that fine picture, "Smouldering Fires," reminds them of her anew, they pour in letters of demand upon us.

When I wrote a story calling Norma Talmadge the screen's one great actress among the stars, I did not consider Pauline Frederick as being any longer a motion picture star. Ninety-nine per cent of the letters I received disagreeing with me, did so in the name of Pauline Frederick.

What happened to Pauline Frederick?

So many people asked me that question that I decided to go

and ask Pauline herself. You can always ask Pauline anything. She is a straight-shooter. And she is too big a woman for any petty vanities. You don't have to fret and worry about what you say for fear it might be wrong and hurt her feelings.

Oh, the charm of that woman, off-screen!

I forget about it, not seeing her for months and maybe years, and it captures me all over again. She is so *real*. She is so *natural*. No posing, no affectation, no languid boredom about her. She sparkles with life. She glows with enthusiasm. Her voice is rich, vibrant, entrancing. And she has the nicest handshake of any woman I have ever known—strong, firm, cordial, sweet.

Let me say right at the very beginning that I have never seen her look so lovely. Her eyes were as blue as her sweater, and that was as blue as the sea. And the contrast of her hair, which would have been black but for the red threads and the bronze sheen through it, seemed more striking than ever. Her short white skirt and her plaited sandals and her summer tan, result of hours in the saddle, gave her a slim and boyish look, according to the present fashion for women.

We sat in a long, lovely sun-porch, and when I told her what I had come to ask her, and why, she looked [CONTINUED ON PAGE 128]

to systematically unjust labor practices (Rogers St. John, “What’s Happened to Pauline Frederick?”; Waterbury, “Stars Who Came Back”). Instead, these articles tend to resurrect stars from the past who have died, whose careers have faded, or who are making a comeback, within a more generalized resistance or affective response to aspects of modernity, such as rapid turn-over in consumption cycles that have seemingly thrown a wrench into the pleasures and identifications afforded by the public’s cathexis to star figures. Despite what was apparently the belief of the film industry—as well as some theorists of consumerism—that consumers become dissatisfied with the products that don’t deliver the happiness imagined in the daydreams they inspire, fan cathexis with a star as a model of identity doesn’t necessarily terminate in a final transaction of disposability, just as self-identities are not thrown out over night.⁷ These fan magazine articles seem to acknowledge with sadness and some refusal, as Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues about the fashion cycle that pushes us to buy new clothes every season, that discarding teaches us “that the self can expect to lose from living in time—lose selfhood” (36).

Walter Benjamin suggests the commodity operates as both a fetish and a wish image (Buck-Morss, “Dream World of Mass Culture” 315). The commodity as fetish is “the new as always-the-same.” *Photoplay*’s article “Youth” constructs the younger stars taking over Hollywood in 1927 as fetishes who replace the old in a never-ending “progression” of youth. The commodity as wish-image, on the other hand suggests a utopian potential. It is a commodity form that gestures back to industrialization’s utopian promise, but, cast off when it fails “to deliver,” it becomes a ruin. This ruined commodity, now a fossil, operates as a trace of “living history” (Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing* 56). Faded stars making a re-appearance in fan magazines or come-back in films carry with them past histories of how films were made and received, and how fans once found them models of a wished-for identity. Their re-entrance into the present, as exploited by the fan magazines, could certainly contribute to a number of responses from the fan-sadness or anger over loss, bemusement at a star’s anachronistic position, or the construction of the active fan whose skepticism could potentially extend to questions about how films and stars are produced and manipulated by free market forces embodied by the film industry.

Since the fan magazines bring, via stars, past and present into juxtaposition as a way to negotiate industry and fan desires, it is not surprising that utopian dreams carried by the ruined commodity may be invoked. We can see this perhaps most clearly in the magazines’ use of a melodramatic fantasy as a context for imagining faded female stars. Many articles documenting the whereabouts of former stars describe them as now living outside the forces that compel the rapid turnover characterizing commodity exchange. These stars are unearthed from rural or secluded locations. Florence Lawrence, in comebacks announced in 1913, 1914, 1916, and 1921, is supposedly leaving house and rose garden in rural New Jersey for returns to the screen. Former Kalem star Irene Boyle returns to films in 1920,

⁷ See Campbell for a discussion of theories of consumption cycles.

after having been in retreat in a “sheltered life” (Bruce). The old house in which Frederick James Smith found former Edison player Mary Fuller in 1924, “with its big rose trellised porch, was a quaint haven of seclusion” (Smith, “Photoplay Finds Mary Fuller” 58). By 1925, Marguerite Clark [fig. 3], is living a country life in rural Louisiana, complete with “Negro servants” who “need almost as much attention as children” (Washburn 132). Almost all these stars are self-described or described by the magazine authors as tired, exhausted, worn-out.⁸

Each star is pictured as emerging from, clinging to, or dying into a status of the unchanging, the existence beyond consumption cycles. Marguerite Clark assures the *Photoplay* author that her shingle-bobbed red brown hair is going to stay just that way, as it has for the last six years in her retirement. The only changes they are subjected to are the natural rhythms of life—Florence Lawrence writes in a 1916 *Motion Picture Magazine* article that she, her cat, and her dog “had been playing and hugging Old Mother Nature so tight” that she almost forgot about the world of plodding work (130). Most of the stars express a desire to return to films, to the excitement of picture making. The rural space of the stars’ retreats, as described in these articles, may exist in the present moment, but can only remain utopian to the degree that it seems outside time or reminiscent of some nostalgic past, a “time before.” This time and space “before” suggests the pastoral space of “innocence” that Linda Williams argues is fundamental to the melodramatic mode, or to the “golden age” anthropologist Grant McCracken argues functions as a time in which societies place their cherished ideals to keep them “within reach,” but protect them (106).

In establishing a melodramatic framework for how the past impinges on the present, these fan magazine articles offer a strange admixture of historiographic tendencies. The fading stars gained their first fame in a film industry of the early 1910s that, however exploitive, was not yet characterized by full vertical integration or fully rationalist, hierarchical divisions of labor. They were employed by companies that came and went quickly, many of which did not make the transition from New York or Chicago to Hollywood that took place throughout the decade. However, the fan magazines’ placement of these stars in feminized rural spaces transforms that filmmaking past into an (imagined) “old Hollywood”—not seen as an earlier mode of the aggressive free market capitalism and rationalized labor that characterizes “modern Hollywood” (of the later 1910s and 1920s), but as a lost world. It is a space in which the human events that transpire[d] there, and the temporal experience of them, can be imaginatively segmented off from the flow of time and recreated in wistful nostalgia. This wistful nostalgia, so common to fan magazine articles in from the mid 1910s to the late 1920s, could function to ameliorate the negative effects of modernity, perhaps even obscuring where these negative effects originate, whether in the industry’s profit-driven

⁸ Descriptions of stars’ “exhaustion” suggest that the phenomena I am describing here as part of a popular historiography of modernity, should be considered within multiple theoretical frameworks—not only within the Marxist take on labor exploitation to which I’ve alluded in this essay, but also within the existential terms of play and risk in early film star discourse as discussed in Bean, and within the terms of pathology discussed in Anderson, *Twilight of the idols*.

Mrs. Williams has changed very little since those enchanting days of "The Seven Sisters." She is still tiny and demure and her red brown hair is worn in a shingle bob just as it has been for the last six years. She assures you that it is going to stay that way. "One can't wear curls forever and it is so much more convenient this way," is how she expresses it. Her eyes are just the color of her hair and she still deserves the tribute of being one of America's best dressed women. Also, if she has left the screen it doesn't mean that she has lost interest in it.

"The fans still write me by the hundreds," she confided. "Isn't it adorable? I still get letters from all parts of the country and from people of all ages. Most of them write me charming personal letters saying how glad they are that I am happily married and devoted to my husband. Many of them come from screen aspirants, both young and old, and to all of them I say the same thing—Don't try for the motion pictures unless you have money enough to wait for success and character enough to stand disappointment. To tear off to Hollywood without money and expect to burst into fame is a heartbreaking proposition, and to become famous without experience

"Everybody brings me perfume from all parts of the world. I must have nearly a thousand bottles"



"There really isn't anything picturesque about us. We live a quiet country life," she said, in talking about life with her husband in the little village of Patterson, La.

is almost unheard of. The fans see the honor and glory without realizing the months and sometimes years of hard work that lies behind it."

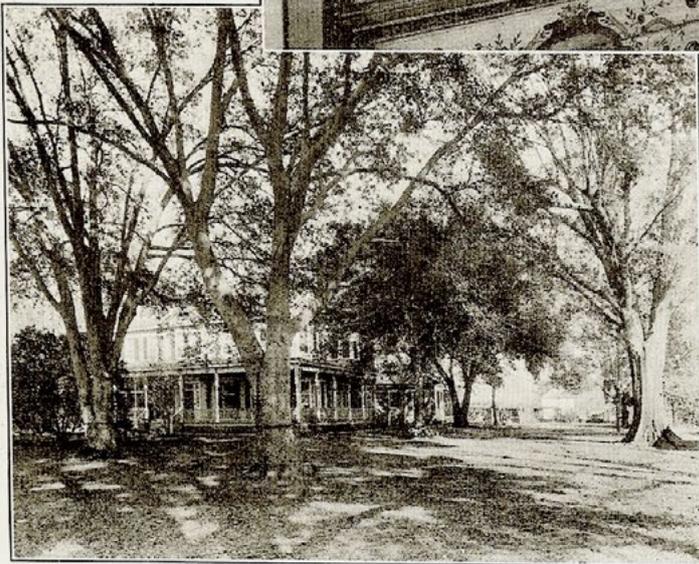
Mrs. Williams admits that she was offered the rôle of *Peter Pan* which Marilyn Miller is now playing in New York, and she also admits that some day she may return to the screen.

"I don't expect to," is all she can be induced to say, "but it is possible that I may."

The directors still send her scenarios and young authors still besiege her with manuscripts in the hope that she may tire of domestic life and return to the screen. To all of them she makes the same answer, either written or oral, that she cannot give her life to her husband and to the public too.

"When I first left the screen I thought it would be possible for me to do two pictures a year," she explained. "But I soon found that it could not be done. You cannot run two jobs at once, and Mr. Williams, like any normal husband, is not anxious to have me work again. Still I do keep up my interest in the pictures and am particularly interested in the strides made by historical pictures in the last few years. Such productions as 'The Sea Hawk,' 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame,' 'The White Sister,' 'Scaramouche,' 'The Covered Wagon' are of tremendous educational as well as artistic value. Mary [CONTINUED ON PAGE 132]

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The Williams estate covers square miles, but it fronts on the main street. The house contains twenty-five rooms and is a home rather than a show place

3. Marguerite Clark at her rural estate. "Marguerite Clark—Today," *Photoplay* 1925.

power dynamics, or elsewhere.

The emphasis in some of the articles on the surprise that the stars are still relatively young because they are of the same generation as their readers, suggests another understanding of history—one as an uninterrupted, endless flow of time. This approximates a mode of historiography in which time cannot be stopped and segmented. What the fan must realize in this experience of temporality is that the star and fan have *shared* time; what is potentially exposed to the fan via this realization is that the functional temporality of consumption is not age measured in human years, but according to a manipulative “newness” that benefits media and fashion industries to the expense of stars and their fans. However, neither historiographic mode is inimical to the articles’ tributes to dead stars or to the articles’ expressions of fears that some stars, especially female stars, may not be able to come back to the screen. In this way, they create a sense that “it may be too late,” what Williams has identified as the central temporal dimension of many narratives within the mode of melodrama. The fan magazines’ use of former stars to juxtapose the past with modernity’s rapidly moving present does not offer analytical or radical critique so much as the resistance of melodramatic pathos.

Fan magazines negotiated the tensions in giving voice to both fan desires and film industry’s needs by recognizing that those desires and needs weren’t always in sync. These publications, almost exclusively addressing the female reader by the start of the 1920s, resurrect stars from the past in articles and photo displays that also evidence a deep investment in hailing the newest fashion in dress, hairstyle and personality. This is a language of investment that is compatible with the industry’s cycles, but which also reminds the reader what or whom was left behind in the rush to newness. The fan magazine’s juxtaposition of star-of-the-past with modernity’s rapidly moving present should remind historians that the social imaginary of past cultures and societies is an affective landscape, as well as a disciplinary framework (Braidotti 384). What can be seen in these particular fan magazines’ expressions of the social imaginary is a continuing desire for a happiness once experienced, but also an acknowledgment that multiple forces—from transformations in consumer industries and fan tastes, to time’s movement itself—determine that happiness may not make the comeback.

THE AUTHOR: Mary Desjardins is an Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies of Dartmouth College, where she also teaches Women’s and Gender Studies. Her work on film and television history, feminist filmmaking, and stardom has appeared in a wide variety of essay collections, as well as in such journals as *Camera Obscura*, *Film Quarterly*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Vectors*, and *Cinema Journal*. Her book *Recycled Stars: Female Film Stardom in the Age of Television and Video* is forthcoming.

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Anne Morey

School of Scandal: Alice Duer Miller, Scandal, and the New Woman

ABSTRACT: This paper examines adaptations of *Her First Elopement* (1920) and *Are Parents People?* (1925), based on novellas by Alice Duer Miller, in order to explore how both the underlying texts and the films derived from them explore the heroines' desire for autonomy, which is achieved through their strategic cultivation and control of scandal. While the films met with widely contrasting receptions, their exploitation of Miller's interest in scandal that gratifies rather than punishes the heroine suggests a complex relationship between a best-selling female author and the film industry in the first half of the 1920s.

Alice Duer Miller (1874–1942) had a long career as screenwriter and adaptee, beginning in 1918 with *Less Than Kin* (Donald Crisp) and concluding posthumously in 1944 with *The White Cliffs of Dover* (Clarence Brown). In addition to being a suffrage campaigner and booster of women's higher education, Miller was also a writer of note, having produced more than sixty short stories and novellas, several novels, and several plays. This article examines two of her three surviving silent films, *Her First Elopement* (Sam Wood, 1920) and *Are Parents People?* (Malcolm St. Clair, 1925), to argue that Miller saw scandal as a tool to give young women both the erotic freedom and the knowledge (including self-knowledge) that might otherwise be denied them. While Miller's narratives often confront her young heroines with humiliations both sexual and practical, they also imagine these reverses as the means to accomplishing female desire.

Because Miller's relationship to the film industry was long and complex, and because she saw herself as novelist and short story writer first and scenarist or producer of texts for adaptation second, a brief sketch of her literary career may be helpful. Throughout her career, Miller's writing emphasized the contemporary, the commercial, and the demotic, although how that might be realized in stylistic terms changed from the late nineteenth century, when she wrote as one of Henry James's epigones, to the late teens, by which time her style had become more accessible. Indeed, modulation away from Jamesian periods was a conscious decision; Miller noted in an interview that "when [she and Henry Miller] were married we were very hard up. I wanted to help all that I could and continued writing. After a time I decided that I was too ambitious in my writing attempts—Henry James was the model novelist so far as I was concerned—and turned to lighter material" (van Gelder 2). [fig. 1]

This mercenary delight in writing for a living connects Miller to other successful female contemporaries whose works were frequently adapted by the film industry, such as Mary Roberts Rinehart. Unlike Rinehart, however, who came from a lower-middle-class background in Pittsburgh, Miller came from one of New York City's oldest and most distinguished families, albeit one that had suffered a significant financial reverse in the Barings



1. Portrait of Alice Duer Miller circa 1918, photograph by Campbell Studios, courtesy of Barnard College Archives

Bank collapse of 1890. Publication was consequently important to Miller as it brought the means to do unconventional things otherwise prohibited to a young woman of her class and generation. Miller's earnings enabled her to study mathematics at Barnard College, an experience otherwise beyond her family's capacity or perhaps willingness to provide; that Miller's desire for education exceeded that thought suitable to women of her class was itself mildly scandalous. Writing in 1945, Miller's husband observed that "today one is surprised by a girl having any difficulty in going to college, but in 1895 it was no joking matter. Alice Duer shocked society and alienated her friends. Mrs. Astor called on Mrs. Duer to explain how she felt about the matter, and her expression, 'What a pity, that lovely girl going to college,' has been treasured in the family ever since" (H. Wise Miller 30). As was also the case with her heroines, then, Miller found that her readiness to break the social rules resulted in both social disapproval and increased freedom.

While Miller retained many of the attitudes of her generation and class to the end of her life, her appreciation of the popular suggests why Hollywood appealed to her. The contrasting receptions of *Her First Elopement*, which was not well received, and *Are Parents People?*, which was one of the most admired films of its year, suggests that her appeal to Hollywood was more complex. Most obviously, Miller represented that great prize, the personality as pre-sold property, to Samuel Goldwyn, who brought her to California in 1920 to work on her own and other authors' projects. Like Rinehart (who was one of Goldwyn's Eminent Authors [Cohn 135]), Miller was a major contributor to the *Saturday Evening Post*, the most significant literary weekly of its day.

Goldwyn was, of course, a notorious lion hunter, and Miller's class position was itself an inducement to collect her; like yet another Goldwyn trophy, Elinor Glyn, Miller was expected to opine on social matters of which Hollywood—precisely because its denizens were typically not aristocrats—had only a shaky grasp. She claimed "that her most valuable function [in Hollywood] was as a kind of glorified Emily Post, able to tell directors and producers how people behaved in 'Society'" (Walcutt 539). Given Miller's willingness to declass herself in certain ways in order to have the increased scope for movement available to women a few rungs down the social ladder, however, this advice was doubtless offered tongue in cheek. Indeed, her unpublished short story "The Nice Little Girl," which retails the experiences of a debutante who runs away to a film studio to avoid her coming-out, suggests that Miller had no great expectation that the advice would be followed. Her heroine says, "You know it would be more natural if I said: 'Isn't the music divine—or even swell,'" to which she receives the reply, "Look here . . . you are supposed to be a society girl. I guess they don't talk like that. I guess the author knows more about how society girls talk than you or I do" (Duer Family Papers, folder 8.11). Miller was not above guying herself and her class on film, playing the ineffectual governess who cannot make either her charge or her employer any less vulgar in the 1936 Ben Hecht/Charles MacArthur film *Soak the Rich*, a performance in contrast to Glyn's self-important role as social and sexual arbiter in *It* (Clarence G. Badger, 1927).

Miller's considerable reputation doubtless explained the decision to film *Her First Elopement* in 1920; seven of her stories were adapted and released as films in the forty-eight months between July 1918 and June 1922. *Elopement* was nonetheless an odd choice inasmuch as it was first published in *Lippincott's* in 1905 and described a world and a set of social mores that had essentially disappeared in the intervening fifteen years. Had it been treated as the period piece it was by 1920, namely an examination of the prewar world of Edith Wharton's New York, it might have been more admired. As it was, *Variety* described it as "a polite comedy with a shopworn theme," which "runs through without a single 'kick.'" The sole words of praise were reserved for its photography and its *mise-en-scène*, "rich in its interiors and settings" (Step). The problem for director Wood and scenarist Edith Kennedy was how to create a contemporary heroine genuinely at risk from her own actions. Indeed, the shifts required to update the story, and to maintain the tension arising from the requirement that Christina Eliot's actions fit contemporaneous criteria for the scandalous, are actually what render the film "shopworn," which becomes clearer as one examines it as a problem in adaptation.¹

The novella insists that keeping a young woman attractively naïve may lead to sexual or social danger, which then requires all her ingenuity and nerve to repair. Privileged and self-important, Miller's heroine decides against her guardian's wishes to meet the woman with a past (represented to her merely as the daughter of a milliner) whom her cousin Gerald has just married. She arrives at the couple's Staten Island bungalow to find her quarry out; before she can leave, she encounters Adrian Maitland, who has come to prevent his brother from marrying the same woman; he mistakes Christina for the unacceptable match and carries her off on his yacht until the early hours of the morning, thus compromising her. When he realizes that he has kidnapped and ruined a wealthy, fashionable young woman who is, not coincidentally, the ward of his father's lawyer, Adrian contrives to keep the potential scandal dark by delivering Christina to her guardian's house in Newport and proposing marriage to her. Unfortunately, word of Adrian's escapade with the yacht, though not Christina's part in it, comes to her guardian's ears, making Adrian's marriage proposal unacceptable because Adrian is now a scoundrel in his eyes. Christina must be insubordinate and daring a second time to retrieve the fault, and elopes with Adrian since the marriage is prohibited.

The film updates this narrative by having Christina attempt to save her cousin from the blandishments of the unsuitable woman, Lotta, now a "snake dancer"; the abduction proceeds as above, with the reduced potential for ruination and compromise of 1920, although a scene in the cabin suggests Christina's growing anxiety. [fig. 2] Christina and Adrian marry secretly but do not live as man and wife; Lotta blows the gaff on the abduction to Gerald's family, at which point Christina and Adrian make all right by producing their marriage license, a shift that *Variety* particularly despised. Yacht notwithstanding, the fifteen-year gap between novella and film required a step down in class from the circles of Mrs. Astor's Four Hundred to the merely well-to-do upper middle class, and a considerable step up in the representation

¹ The film changes the spelling of Christina's surname from Eliot to Elliott.



2. Wanda Hawley as Christina Elliott and Jerome Patrick as Adrian Maitland in *Her First Elopement* (Realart, 1920), from the Core Collection, production files of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

of Lotta as sexually predatory. While Miller's greatest problem was to find ways of putting her heroine in harm's way by sending her to Staten Island in the sort of clothing that would allow her to be mistaken for the wrong woman, which she does through a plausible and minute discussion of Christina's taste, the film's greater difficulty is to present the heroine (played by Wanda Hawley) as an attractively modest "good girl" who could nonetheless be mistaken for a potential sexual menace in the context of 1920.

Christina's desire for adventure explains both her presence in the "wrong" place and her brief willingness to impersonate the "wrong" sort of woman; the attempts to prevent the ensuing scandal permit her to see her love interest as both exciting and upright [fig. 3].

In contrast to the relative lack of critical interest in *Her First Elopement*, *Are Parents People?*

was lauded by *Photoplay's* reviewer, who admired its “finesse of touches that are subtle and amusing” (qtd. in Slide 23). The *New York Times* praised Mal St. Clair for direction that “obtained the most out of this light story” (Hall 256), while *Time* admired the “light and whimsical varnish of direction” that permitted the film to “[stand] gaily up as one of the best of the recent films” (“The New Pictures”).

Are Parents People? may also have seemed fresher in part owing to the topicality of its exploration of divorce, which had doubled in frequency between 1910 and 1920 (Musser 264). While *Parents'* superior direction no doubt helped to establish St. Clair's reputation as a domestic Ernst Lubitsch (Dwyer 98), and favored St. Clair in contrast to Wood, whose story selection at more or less this moment Richard Koszarski characterizes as watered-down DeMille (295), the narratives of the two films are more similar than one might suppose,



Christina eyes Lotta St. Regis (on the phone, played by Nell Craig),
from the Core Collection, production files of the Margaret Herrick Library,
Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

hinging as they do on the play between scandal realized/scandal averted and the actions of a misprized heroine. What is more, *Parents* adopts a strategy from the film version of *Elopement* in order to ratchet up the potential scandal it explores.

Miller's story, published a year before the film was made, describes the experiences of Lita Hazlitt, whose parents have been divorced for some years. Each bids for her loyalty, causing the heroine to wonder, "wasn't it . . . that they needed her to fill the gap in their lives that their own separation had made? This . . . was the real objection to divorce—that it made parents too emotionally dependent on their children" ("Are Parents People?" 27). The first significant alteration made by the film to Miller's narrative is to change the divorce from a *fait accompli* that Lita must learn to manage to a tragedy that she must avert. In both story and film, Lita is expelled from school for apparently having written to an actor, although her roommate is the guilty party. Her mother's efforts to avert this unsuitable but nonexistent match cause Lita to think that "perhaps after all, it was not necessary to die in order to reconcile your parents; perhaps it was enough to let them think you were undesirably in love" ("Are Parents People?" 58). The film handles this moment by having Lita instead read a book entitled *Divorce and Its Cure*, which inspires her to take upon herself the romantic indiscretions of her roommate. [fig. 4] The second significant alteration that the film introduces, unexpectedly, is the analogue to the abduction scene in *Her First Elopement*. In the film but not the story, unbeknownst to her genuine love interest, Dr. Dacer, Lita spends the entire night in his apartment, thereby imperiling his reputation as well as her own. [fig. 5] Both story and film imply that the parents, who have acted rather worse than their child, will be reconciled upon their daughter's frank assertion of her own wishes. As Miller puts it after Lita's revelation that they have been less-than-ideal parents, "they clung together, feeling their feet slipping on the brink of that unfathomable abyss—the younger generation" ("Are Parents People?" 101).

Both Mary Celeste Kearney and Georganne Scheiner find Lita's transition from schoolgirl to young wife abrupt (Kearney 141n4, Scheiner 32). Scheiner comments of Lita's attachment to Dacer that "there is something insidious about an older man finding a child in his care sexually arousing" (32), suggesting a scandal that neither story nor film anticipated in 1925; Gwenda Young, however, somewhat undermines this point by observing that in this film the "youth generation . . . [is] the mature and sensible force, while the older generation is petty, materialistic, and whimsical" (152). Scheiner's concern appears unfounded when one also considers the considerable agency of Miller's heroines. But agency is exactly the problem when contemplating the translation of these stories from page to screen because the stories represent female agency linguistically while the films must represent it visually, which may be more ambiguous. Miller's fiction is characterized by the free indirect discourse of the actively strategizing young woman, to whose thoughts we are constantly privy, often in the words used to think them. Many of Miller's fictions might be described as *Bildungsromane* in which the heroine's thinking must both be accommodated to her circumstances and revised the better to adapt her circumstances to her desires, a survival from Miller's period as one



Betty Bronson as Lita Hazlitt reading *Divorce and Its Cure* in *Are Parents People?* (Paramount, 1925), from the Core Collection, production files of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

of James's acolytes. Scenarist Frances Agnew's treatment of the film, in contrast, strips as much language from the narrative as possible. William Everson, for example, discusses *Are Parents People?* in the same context as *The Last Laugh* as a film that dispenses with intertitles to the greatest extent possible, observing that in this case there is no title for the film's first five minutes (137), during which the complex social circumstances of Lita's family are laid out via exchanges of objects while the parents pack for their separation.

Scandal is, of course, both articulate and inarticulate, erupting often as a consequence of acting on desires that cannot be spoken, until those desires become themselves the objects of endless remarks addressed to the misconduct. The heroine caught between the romantic mores of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is similarly suspended between silence and speech where her desires are concerned. As Lita observes in Miller's story, "they had strange



Lita has overstayed her welcome with Dr. Dacer (played by Lawrence Gray), from the Core Collection, production files of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

old conventions about letting the advances come from the masculine side, or at least of maneuvering so that they appeared to. Subtle, they called it. Lita thought it rather sneaky” (“Are Parents People?” 81). In Miller’s world, scandal is the way in which a young woman comes to an understanding of what she wants when she cannot articulate it directly, either because she is not permitted to speak of it or because she does not yet know what she wants. This contention is perhaps best demonstrated by briefly glancing at Miller’s other surviving silent film, *Manslaughter* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1922).

Unlike the heroines of *Elopement* and *Parents*, the heroine of *Manslaughter* has considerable autonomy as a mature woman in possession of her fortune; yet even she experiences scandal, in this case a trial and imprisonment for the accidental death of a traffic cop, because she cannot bring herself to acknowledge her feelings for her love interest. The

crime and attendant humiliation are the necessary precursors to the heroine's articulation and understanding of her own emotion. Indeed, in a pattern we see in both *Elopement* and *Parents*, the scandal must also embrace or threaten to embrace the man the heroine discovers that she loves. In *Manslaughter*, the mutuality of the relationship between the proud, self-willed, and initially destructive heroine and her equally proud, self-willed, and destructive partner in attraction is manifest in their shared degradation and recovery. Thus, Lydia's crime, humiliation, and jailing are matched by O'Bannon's desire to see her humiliated and jailed, which is followed by his drinking, loss of position, and ultimate union with her. In the case of this couple, their interlocking scandals are the index of the sexual passion they share. Indeed, the pervasiveness of scandal in Miller's work suggests that she sees it as essential to female self-knowledge. Whether the heroine is powerless, merely naïve, or utterly unaware of her own desires, scandal can be a lever for the achievement of desire. As Henry Miller noted, Cinderella, that story of misprision and vertiginous social ascent, was Miller's ideal narrative template (69). That Miller's stories always end with a heterosexual pairing may obscure the female agency, assisted by scandal, that nonetheless goes into securing the right match.

Needless to say, Hollywood was alive to the utility of scandal in the creation and promotion of narratives to which scandal is central. Part of the lore of the making of *Manslaughter* is that Jeanie Macpherson, chief scenarist on the screenplay and assistant to Cecil B. DeMille, is purported to have arranged to have herself jailed for four days in order to collect atmosphere for her work ("Woman Goes to Jail"). Possibly more surprising is the suggestion that Miller herself spent time, although not as an inmate, at the women's prison in Auburn, New York in order to research the story, a piece of puffery more credible as Hollywood ballyhoo than as an accurate account of Miller's working methods in this particular instance (*Duluth News Tribune*, Nov. 20, 1921 9). Nonetheless, these accounts suggest that there is a shared frisson of delight for studio and audience in simultaneously claiming and disavowing scandal by presenting the experience of the scandalous as necessary background for the production of the narrative while at the same time insisting that scandal itself is not actually attached to the person of the scenarist/author. One might add that the exigencies of authorship, particularly the requirement of getting the atmosphere right, had by the 1910s become a kind of passport for women who wanted an entrée to social zones that sex and class might otherwise have barred them from. So, for example, Frances Marion conducted research at a prison for George W. Hill's 1930 *The Big House* (Beauchamp 256), and many female Progressive Era authors would have expected that their work required seeing the seamy side of life quite close up, an expectation they shared with female reformers during the same period (Morey, "Would You Be Ashamed?" 88).

Miller's novel *Ladies Must Live*, a film treatment of which was directed by George Loane Tucker in 1921 but which has not as far as I know survived, demonstrates the importance of the heroine's strategic creation, not merely experience, of scandal, in keeping with this pattern of female narrative agency in which we are to understand the heroine as author

of scandal and thus as author of her destiny. Christina and Riatt are stormbound alone in an abandoned house overnight; when they are rescued, Christina “had the choice between killing the scandal, or giving it such life and strength that nothing but her marriage with Riatt would ever allay it” (79-80), which is the course she chooses. *Ladies Must Live* also suggests the stakes of looking at Miller’s narratives as a group in relation to Hollywood’s story demands. In her important study of taste in film practice in the 1920s, Lea Jacobs uses a review of *Ladies Must Live* as evidence for the contention that moralizing taste was going out of style during this decade (80-81). Reasoning genealogically, Miller might be classed with other representatives of the genteel tradition in American letters, such as William Dean Howells, who are associated with narratives of moral uplift. Yet the success of *Parents* as “sophisticated” comedy, the genre that opposes the improving narrative, suggests a complicated relationship between original and adaptation, in which the same author, working in the same idiom, is nonetheless the progenitor of film texts as different as *Manslaughter*, which DeMille rendered into a cautionary tale for aggressive young women, and *Parents*, which St. Clair did not. I would argue that Miller’s narratives are not, in fact, as genteel as one might anticipate from her class position and generation. Her experiences as suffrage-agitator demonstrated for her that women’s demands for legal equality were by definition scandalous, a point suggested by the title of her best-known suffrage work, *Are Women People?* (1915). As I have argued elsewhere (Morey, “A New Eroticism”), Miller attempts to work out a new “erotics” that considers what difference legal equality might make to romantic interest between the sexes, a project complicated by her generation, which placed her between the original “New Women” born in the 1860s and what we might call the “New, New Women” born around 1900. In asking what female sexual desire looks like when women are neither supposed to be passive nor identical to men, Miller explores the risks of female agency while insisting on it. Sometimes, it seems, scandal can be a girl’s best friend.

THE AUTHOR: Anne Morey is an associate professor in English at Texas A&M University. Her book *Hollywood Outsiders: The Adaptation of the Film Industry, 1913-1934* deals with Hollywood’s critics and co-opters. She has published in *Film History*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, and *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, among other venues. She has published an anthology on Stephenie Meyer’s “Twilight” phenomenon (Ashgate 2012) and is presently at work on a treatment of Christian cinema as national cinema within the American film industry.

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Mark Lynn Anderson

The Impossible Films of Vera, Countess of Cathcart

ABSTRACT: This essay revisits the *cause célèbre* occasioned when a British novelist, playwright, and divorcée was denied entry into the United States in early 1926 on the grounds of “moral turpitude.” The Countess of Cathcart made international headlines after being detained at Ellis Island for admitting to an affair with a married man, but she was also quickly championed, feared, and ridiculed by various individuals, groups, and institutions that sought to exploit her short-lived notoriety toward different ends. The cinema was one determining context for some of these contestations over the significance of the Countess, and the Cathcart case raises important questions about how we might rethink women’s involvement in early motion-picture production outside a history of the titles that were actually produced. By attending to the regulatory concerns about the films that women such as the Countess of Cathcart might have made, this essay proposes a historiographical practice that refuses to limit women’s film history to a inventory of what we can safely establish as having occurred in the past.

In a short story written in 1944 by the Cuban poet and essayist, Virgilio Piñera, we encounter an unnamed countess in an unnamed country who, upon reading an account of an extravagant dance held a hundred years earlier, decides to restage the event as a centennial repetition of the original gala ball. Immediately, though, she encounters a seemingly intractable procedural difficulty, a difficulty that we historians often term “mediation.”

The situation was this: the reading of the account suggested the statement and development of the following seven phases:

First: the ball as it was actually held a century ago.

Second: the ball as described by the chronicler of the day.

Third: the ball as the countess imagines it, based on the chronicler’s description.

Fourth: the ball as the countess imagines it without the chronicler’s description.

Fifth: the ball as she imagines holding it.

Sixth: the ball as it is actually held.

Seventh: the ball as it is conceived based on the memory of the ball as it is actually held.

(Piñera 31)

The countess finds herself unable to decide upon which of these seven balls to hold since her consideration of any one of them always requires the mediation of a subsequent possible ball. In other words, any re-enactment of the ball would never be a re-enactment of the event itself, but instead a theatrical response to the various subsequent representations through which the ball comes to be known. The countess’ continual pondering of this historiographical problem becomes her all-consuming passion, eclipsing the original desire to mount a centennial re-enactment. As Piñera describes it, “Her life was a perpetual game

of the solitaire of possibilities” (34). Since rumors about the countess’ plan to hold a grand ball were circulating among the people, her inability to actually produce the centennial ball was calling into question her right to rule. The entertaining of possibilities is incompatible with the ability to govern, and the “metaphysical *soirées*” that the countess held with the other ladies of the aristocracy to contemplate further the conundrum provided no end of consternation for her husband, the count. As each ball is a possible ball that might be held, its mediation also makes it impossible, a demonstration that the possible and the impossible are never structuring contraries, but co-constituents of historical interpretation.

Of course, we might imagine that there remain today those historians who, much like the perturbed husband of Piñera’s tale, summarily dismiss any such claim about the ontological indeterminacy of the past as merely a rhetorical sleight of hand. Nevertheless, I would ask anyone who remains committed to the supposedly clear and impartial rule of the historical object to consider the motion picture career of yet another countess, Lady Vera, the Countess of Cathcart, a woman filmmaker in the silent era who apparently made no films. What evidence do we have for these films that never were? We might begin to envision the emerging traces of an impossible filmography for Vera Cathcart, but only after considering some of those possibilities and impossibilities with which historical facts are always inextricably bound. What follows is the story of a woman whose impossibility as a filmmaker only becomes visible when those details of her biography that remain scattered in the historical record are assembled so as to refuse the usual demand for a narrative that culminates with an estimation of the historical meaning and significance of that life. What follows is a sustained dwelling in the details of a woman’s adventures, details that were already parts of other stories about the Countess to be found in newspaper and tabloid reports, political speeches, government documents, and theatrical reviews. Of course, these various depictions of Vera Cathcart differ wildly in their accounts of the social, political, and artistic importance of her life and work. She is, like all historical subjects, an elusive figure, known to us only through the mediated testimony of those individuals and institutions who were charged with recording the facts of her life and establishing her worth. Because Vera Cathcart was repeatedly accused of being a “publicity-made woman,” she provides a useful example of how a historical inquiry might proceed to (mis)take the object as nothing but its mediation, to accept all this talk about the Countess—whether such talk is specious or not—as the terrain upon which the historian too might contribute to the talk about her in order create trouble. Here, the troubling of a truth-functional historical project is not an end in itself but placed in the service of making apparent how the often unquestioned reliance on filmographical citation and verification within feminist historical practice works to make invisible the contributions of women who never had a chance.

The biography

The only documented screen credit routinely attributed to Vera Cathcart is the 1926 British film *The Woman Tempted*, produced and directed by Maurice Elvey and starring Juliette Compton as the young, vampish widow who destroys any man foolish enough to fall helplessly in love with her. Warwick Ward played that part of the man lucky enough to get away, while Sidney Morgan adapted the film's script from the novel by the Countess of Cathcart. Though the film has survived, there is no evidence that the Countess was in any way involved in the actual production of this picture beyond supplying a literary source for the script.¹ Compton played the novel's main character, the headstrong Louise Harding, a wealthy sensualist who flits from dinner party to dinner party, amusing herself with the various soldiers, colonial administrators, and mine owners who constitute the patriarchy of white imperial society in British controlled Rhodesia. In the film, Louise is eventually shot and killed by a vengeful woman who had been the fiancée of a young man who took his own life because of Louise's cruel machinations. In the novel, it is the bereaved woman's native servant who, out of a secret loyalty to the white woman for whom he works, accomplishes this retribution by brutally strangling Louise in her bed.

The film did not open in the United States until April 1928, and it apparently had only a brief run at the Cameo Theater in New York without further bookings in North America (*New York Times*, Apr. 27, 1928 17). While promotions for the film sometimes made use of the Countess' name, very little attention was given in the popular press to either the film or its literary source. Indeed, in his review of *The Woman Tempted*, *New York Times* critic Mordaunt Hall spent well over half of his column praising the topical short film then playing at the Cameo, a series of views of an anteatr that had been recently acquired by the Bronx zoo, an animal that Hall found fascinatingly hideous enough to warrant comparisons with rough-hewn Hollywood stars Wallace Berry and George Bancroft (Hall, "The Screen"). As for the featured motion picture, Hall praised Compton's performance but saw the rest of the cast as more or less posed by the director in a production he deemed theatrical and too artificial. Apparently, Hall's hatred of this motion picture grew, for he mentioned its lack of realism again at the end of his column four days later, two days after the picture had already closed at the Cameo. Complaining of its irredeemable amateurism, Hall compared *The Woman Tempted* to "the oldest of films in its alleged technique. It is the sort of thing that will certainly not win patrons for the picture theaters, for it presupposes that the intelligence of those who are going to see it is little more than that of an infant" (Hall, *New York Times*, Apr. 29, 1928 X5). This attribution of primitivism to the film is instructive in that the critic see the motion picture as a sort of throwback, something superseded by more intelligent and relevant filmmaking, such as, perhaps, actuality footage of a giant anteatr at a nearby zoo. For Hall, *The Woman*

¹ *The Woman Tempted* survives in the BFI National Archive in London, as a viewing print produced from a 35mm fine grain master that was struck from the original 1926 negative.

Tempted was an out-of-date motion picture in which the attention of only the most foolish or unsophisticated audiences might be profitably maintained. Of course, however we might assess the film's relation to the reigning technical or aesthetic conventions of its own day, we might also ask why a motion picture that bore the name of "Vera, Countess of Cathcart," no matter how awful it might have been, warranted so little ink from a newspaper that only two years before was reporting on the activities of the Countess almost daily.

The New York Times was not the only newspaper to lavish such attention on Vera Cathcart during the early months of 1926. The Countess began making international headlines after US immigration officials boarded the ship on which she had sailed from Liverpool on February 9, declaring her an undesirable alien on the grounds of "moral turpitude," a category of exclusion that had been codified in the 1917 Immigration Act² (see "Countess of Cathcart Not Permitted to Land"; "British Countess, Admitting Divorce, Detained on Liner"; "British Countess Barred"; "Countess Cathcart Rejected"; "Countess of Cathcart Is Excluded from United States").

As the press never tired of explaining, government officials denied the Countess entry to the United States because she was a known adulteress and because she had admitted as much when questioned by government inspectors. While this may have been the first time that many readers had heard of Vera, Countess of Cathcart, those who had faithfully read the society pages of their newspapers already knew a great deal about her ("Lady Cathcart's Revenge on the Faithless Earl"; "Countess Who Eloped").³ The story goes as follows. Vera Fraser was born in Cape Town, South Africa. Her first husband was Major de Grey Warter, a British officer with whom she had two children before he perished in battle during the First World War. In 1919, she married the much older and much wealthier Earl of Cathcart with whom she had a son. Yet the latter union was quickly troubled when the Countess formally complained that the Earl was refusing to provide her with adequate funds to purchase the many dresses and other apparel she required. Reportedly, a magistrate concluded that the Countess was "a woman who made vulgar luxury the chief end of life," and he supported the Earl's contention that the allowance he regularly set aside for the Countess' wardrobe was more than sufficient for a woman of her station.

Meanwhile, the distraught Countess was enjoying the highlife by making the rounds of the most fashionable post-war London parties where she formed an intimate relationship with the young Lord Craven, a bon-vivant who had lost his leg in the war and who, upon his return from the front, had become alienated from his parents and his young wife. Bound, then, by their shared unhappiness in life and their mutual love of gaiety and the more bohemian pleasures, Lord Craven and Vera Cathcart eloped to South Africa in 1922. [fig. 1] While their romance was apparently tumultuous at times, with reports of heated arguments during which Lord Craven would remove and throw his artificial leg at the Countess, the

² US Immigration Act of 1917, sec. 19. See also Clark (161–214).

³ The details of her life and the quotation that follow in the next paragraph are largely taken from these sources, as well as the article cited in note 5.



1. A 1923 news wire photograph showing the Earl of Craven and the Countess of Cathcart sailing to South Africa during their elopement the previous year. Author's collection.

couple still represented a compelling example of two people willing to sacrifice almost everything, including their own reputations, in the name of love. Unsurprisingly, the Earl of Cathcart was immediately granted a divorce from the Countess on the grounds of desertion and alienation of affection; however, Lady Craven refused to seek a similar solution to her situation and, denying her husband the possibility of a divorce, she rendered Lord Craven and Countess Cathcart unable to wed. Purportedly Lady Craven sought to punish her rival by making it impossible for the Countess to become an honest woman (“Lady Cathcart’s Chance to Become an ‘Honest Woman’”). It was during this period that the Countess wrote and published her first novel, *The Woman Tempted*, which would become the basis of her sole screen credit. In 1925, Lady Craven finally consented to a divorce, whereupon Lord Craven had an abrupt change of heart, abandoned the Countess, and returned to his wife

who welcomed him back as the victim of a heartless seduction. The reunited couple then journeyed to the United States. Vera Cathcart's response was to write a semi-autobiographical play entitled *Ashes of Love* in which she sought to depict the treachery of men through a character based closely on her former paramour.⁴

Those who had kept up with society news would have known all these delicious details and more when the front pages of the world's papers began discussing Cathcart's detention at Ellis Island. The Countess' request for a judicial review of her case was delayed for nearly two weeks, until one of her attorneys eventually convinced a judge to issue a writ of *habeas corpus*, after which Immigration Department officials, reportedly at the explicit direction of the Department of Labor, allowed the Countess a ten-day leave from detention on a five-hundred dollar bond so that she might conduct business in New York City before returning to Ellis Island for a final decision on her appeal ("Countess Wins Point"; "Countess in New York"; "Plan to Surrender Countess Cathcart"). According to news accounts, the Countess maintained that she had traveled across the ocean to profitably dispose of her newly written play, as well as to be on hand for the North American publication of her novel. However, according to the transcript of the closed exclusion hearing that had taken place on Ellis Island on February 11, the Countess maintained that the principal reason for her travel was to visit friends in New York, with the production of her newly written play being more or less an afterthought. She also made no mention at the hearing of the forthcoming publication of her novel in North America. During questioning by inspectors, she stressed instead her financial independence and the continuing support she was providing to her two oldest children attending school in England, a son and a daughter from her first marriage who were almost never mentioned in news accounts of the immigration case.⁵ Portrayed by the press as neither an admirably dedicated parent nor a tragically fallen woman, Vera Cathcart's exclusion from the United States on the grounds of moral turpitude had become somewhat of a joke for journalists on both sides of the Atlantic who used the event to skewer American bigotry and hypocrisy. "Ridiculous" was the word most often used to describe the tenacity of the government's initial proceedings against the Countess, a term that would soon be used to describe the Countess herself.⁶

⁴ In response to the poor reviews the play received in both England and the United States, most of which seemed to suggest that her public notoriety could not compensate for her sheer lack of dramatic talent, the countess would later contend that the play was only loosely autobiographical, see "Lady Cathcart, 'Broke,' Goes Home Today."

⁵ See the transcript of the "Immigration Service's Board of Special Inquiry." As mentioned, the countess also had a child with the Earl of Cathcart, but the Earl maintained custody of that child after his divorce from the Countess in 1922.

⁶ For example, see the satirical cartoons reprinted in "America Saved from 'Turpitude'"; "British Views of the Cathcart Case."

Nevertheless, the plight of the Countess was also a very serious affair for civil libertarians, socialist politicians, and feminists. A group of “prominent New York women” hired the general consultant for the American Civil Liberties Union, Arthur Garfield Hayes, to represent the legal interests of the Countess in her fight to enter the country. Hayes had achieved notoriety the previous summer in Tennessee as one of the high-profile defense lawyers assisting Clarence Darrow in the Scopes Monkey Trial (“Deporting of Earl in Countess’ Case Is Being Discussed”; “Countess Wins Point”). The National Women’s Party made much of the Cathcart case, portraying the Countess’ exclusion as yet another example of the double standards to which men and women were officially subject, pointing out that the Earl of Craven, the other party involved in the adulterous relationship, had recently been admitted to the United States without incident. Alice Paul, leader of the Women’s Party, commented to the press that the government’s “action shows clearly the need for writing into the Constitution the principals of equal rights between men and women” (“If Hearing Is Held Woman’s Party Wants Recognition”). Similarly, Fiorello La Guardia, New York’s future mayor and then pro-immigration US Congressman from New York City’s largely Italian twentieth District, sent a somewhat tongue-in-cheek letter to Secretary of Labor James Davis demanding uniformity in the application of the immigration law since “we have one moral standard in this country, and the law is applicable to both men and women alike.”⁷ When a delegation comprised of representatives from the Women’s Party, the Lucy Stone League, the Housewives League, the Civic Club, and the Women’s Alliance visited Ellis Island on February 16, they questioned Immigration Commissioner Henry H. Curran as to why he had made such an erroneous and unjust decision, calling on him to immediately resign his post. During this same visit, Mrs. Harriet Stanton Blatch of the Civic Club told the Countess, “My dear, if you would put an act in your play showing those pinhead officials questioning you, it would be a wonderful play” (“Cathcart Case Ruling Delayed”). Attempting to defuse these repeated complaints about double standards, Commissioner Curran issued a summons for the Earl of Craven to appear for questioning, but the Earl immediately took flight to Canada to avoid any possibility of detention and deportation (“Countess Will Fight to Finish”). What began, then, as a somewhat laughable example of misguided puritanical officiousness started to take on increasing political and cultural weight.

The exclusion of Vera, Countess of Cathcart from the United States also quickly became the occasion for remembering other recent exclusions and deportations of prominent artists and radicals militants. *The Independent* placed a portrait of the Countess amongst those of famous deportees such as Isadora Duncan and Sergi Yesenin, Maxim Gorky, and Emma Goldman (“They Shall Not Pass!”). Newspapers also took note when the celebrated Hungarian film

⁷ Letter reproduced in Limpus and Leyson (208–209). Limpus and Leyson mistakenly identified the letter as having been written on January 12, 1926, a date that is at least a month too early since the letter explicitly references the Cathcart affair at Ellis Island.

actress Lya de Putti, then a twenty-six-year-old widow, entered the United States on February 21 in order to begin a contract with Famous Players-Lasky. *The Washington Post* noted that de Putti “had been the toast of central Europe for two years or more and has figured in stories of suicides and love affairs, many of them sensational. But she was not detained as was the Countess of Cathcart, although she was questioned as to her morals and her past in general.” Apparently, immigration authorities were satisfied with the exotic actress’ proclamation, “I have no lovers” (“\$312,000 Contract Signed by Countess of Cathcart”). De Putti entered the United States just two days after the Countess began her ten-day leave in New York City, and this was same day that the Countess signed a lucrative contract with theatrical producer Earl Carroll for exclusive rights to her recently written play, with an additional agreement that she would perform in the stage production herself (“Vera Finds Compensation”).⁸ Carroll had risen to prominence in 1923 by probing the limits of sartorial decency as the producer of *The Vanities*, a Broadway revue that, with its chorus lines of virtually nude showgirls, was regularly stealing audiences away from the Ziegfeld Follies and George White’s Scandals.

The Countess, happy with her successful business negotiations, had to continually defend herself against the charge that her detention at Ellis Island had merely been a pre-arranged publicity stunt in order to draw attention to her forthcoming dramatic production (see her reported denials of publicity seeking in “Judge to Permit Countess to Enter for Court Hearing”). Yet the event that had the most lasting significance for the Countess of Cathcart, as well as for Carroll, was not the Countess’ exclusion order and pending deportation for moral turpitude, nor the sensational theatrical agreement that she signed. The event that would garner the most publicity in the newspapers for the weeks to come was an after-hours, private party given by Earl Carroll at his Broadway theater. [fig. 2] Initial press reports had claimed that the party was given in honor of the Countess, and the news stories continually mentioned how she made there the acquaintance of Henry Thaw, the famous killer of Stanford White who shot his rival two decades earlier in retaliation for White’s previous deflowering of Thaw’s then wife, Evelyn Nesbit (“Vera Finds Compensation”).⁹ Thaw had just been released from a seven-year stint in a mental institution after a subsequent conviction for sexually assaulting a teenage boy. Another notable guest at the event was news journalist Irwin S. Cobb who had covered the Thaw-White scandal for *The New York World* in 1906 (“Carroll on Trial in ‘Wine Bath’ Case”). Because so many newspaper reporters and drama critics were present, accounts were quickly published detailing some of the more colorful festivities that took place at the Carroll party, including a bathtub full of libation in which a young chorus girl named Joyce Hawley submerged herself after a ceremonial disrobing upon the theater’s stage (e.g., “Girl’s Wine Bath Stirs Broadway”; for news about the various reporters at the party, see “Fed’l Grand Jury After Him for Perjury”). Some reports mentioned that the Countess of Cathcart sampled the contents of the tub just prior

⁸ Carroll is reported to have guaranteed the countess almost a third of a million dollars for her play and her performances (“\$312,000 Contract Signed by Countess of Cathcart”).

⁹ For a consideration of the Thaw-White scandal’s importance for film history, see Grieveson.

GIRL'S WINE BATH STIRS BROADWAY

Men Drink From Tub in Which She Sits at Carroll's Gay Party

NEW YORK, Feb. 24.—Broadway of the "Roaring Forties," where unconventional happenings are taken with a shrug of the shoulders, fairly buzzed today with the stories of the annual Hotel Carroll party at which Lady Vera Cathcart was a conspicuous guest. Festivities started at midnight Monday and lasted until exhaustion yesterday.

Not since Henry Barnum Seeley gave the historic "Seeley dinner" at Sherry's in 1896, has the fast-stopping set that combines Broadway and Fifth avenue, witnessed a party with so much "kick" injected into it as at Carroll's party.

To cap the climax of a night featured by ever increasingly amazing surprises, Carroll went young Seeley just one better. It will be remembered that Seeley delighted his guests by causing a girl to step out of a pie, clad for the part of Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Carroll had no pie, but he had a bathtub. During the early hours of the night the bathtub had been used as a container for wine, with spigot attached where the plug usually is placed.

There was a young woman at the party, Joyce Hawley. She has been trying to obtain a place in the "Vantiles" cast. So when the "big idea" struck Carroll he found Miss Hawley quite obliging.

Miss Hawley at this time had reduced her wearing apparel to a matter of a flimsy pink garment and a pair of slippers. The bathtub was hauled out into the center of the stage and Carroll called for a spotlight.

With thoughtful consideration for Miss Hawley, Carroll held a coat in front of the bathtub. Miss Hawley slipped behind the coat. Two slip-

PUBLICITY SHOPPING?



Released from Ellis Island under bond, Countess Vera Cathcart, accompanied by Mrs. Gordon Carr, smiles her way along New York's streets on a shopping tour. The countess is on the left.

TAXATION TALK AT ROTARY CLUB

C. Burgess Taylor Details History, and Effect of Levies

VALLEY FORGE PASTOR HERE

Rev. W. Herbert Burk Extols Life of Washington at B. and L. Meeting

2. This coverage from the front page of *The Chester Times* [Pennsylvania] for 24 February 1926 is typical of the treatment the Countess received from the press after she was allowed to enter the United States: "Publicity Shopping? Released from Ellis Island under bond, Countess Vera Cathcart, accompanied by Mrs. Gordon Carr, smiles her way along New York's streets on a shopping tour. The countess in on the left."

to the addition of Hawley and pronounced it “good champagne,” while Carroll invited the gentlemen present to form a line for drinks once the peeled chorine had become the garnish (“Wine Bath Depicted in Detail by Four”).

Such sensational news reports would eventually lead to a grand jury investigation of the late-night party at the Earl Carroll Theater for violation of the Volstead Act, with Carroll eventually serving a six-month penitentiary sentence for perjury. The ramifications were more immediate for Lady Cathcart (“Carroll Case Goes to Jury Today”). On March 6, William Sheafe Chase, the formidable censorship advocate, Episcopalian minister, and Secretary General for the ultraconservative Federal Motion Picture Council of America, Inc., sent a lengthy telegram to the US Attorney General protesting the reversal of the decision to prevent the Countess from entering the country, claiming that the “Cathcart decision increases widespread suspicion that vice business interests can corrupt American law enforcement” (“Telegram from William Sheafe Chase to the US Attorney General” 3). Clergymen were not the only ones expressing such concerns. Only two days after the fateful Broadway party, R. F. Woodhull, president of the Motion Picture Theater Owners of America, addressed a meeting of the American Motion Picture Advertisers, telling them that his organization had taken formal steps to bar from the screen any appearance by the Countess of Cathcart, and he asked all theater advertisers to take similar actions (“Theaters Will Curb Countess”; “Movies Would Bar Countess If Party Was for Publicity”; see also “Tent Mgrs. Denounce Earl Carroll Methods”). In reference to the Countess, Woodhull reminded his audience, “Just because publicity keeps an individual in the limelight of the daily press for several weeks or a month is no reason why that person should be heralded in the motion picture industry as a Barrymore or a Sarah Bernhardt. Remember that Barrymores and Bernhardts are born, not made” (“Picture Theaters May Bar Countess”). When Will Hays then sent Woodhull to Capitol Hill as an industry representative to address a Congressional committee considering proposed blue law legislation, the press reported that Woodhull demonstrated the motion-picture industry’s firm commitments to cleaner pictures by informing the committee “that the Countess Cathcart had been banned by the film magnates” (“Sidesteps Blue Law Fight”).

It is here, with the regulatory scrutiny of these bans, where the impossible films of Vera, Countess of Cathcart, begin to take shape. On what basis did Woodhull and others associated with the motion-picture industry anticipate a film career for Vera Cathcart? Or was this ban merely an efficient means for the industry to appear vigilant against infiltration and corruption from outside elements? Such bans of these so-called “publicity-made personalities” were nothing new, and they had been a regular and familiar feature of Hollywood public relations since the very early 1920s, well before the formation of the Hays office and before Arbuckle’s Labor Day party in San Francisco made front page headlines in 1921 after the famous screen comic was formally charged with the murder of the screen actress Virginia Rappe.¹⁰ It was

¹⁰ The murder charge against the star included the accusation that Rappe’s death resulted from a sexual assault purportedly perpetrated by Arbuckle at a party held in his suite at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco.

also entirely possible that a film featuring the Countess already existed, since testimony emerged in the grand jury investigation that at least one motion-picture camera had been present and operating at the Earl Carroll Theater during the infamous bathtub party.¹¹ If such a film or films existed, the ban may have sought to thwart any harmful exploitation of such footage by foolish renegade exhibitors. Additionally, it would have been reasonable to assume that a British novelist, who could claim a noble title (if only by marriage) and familiarity with aristocratic circles, might be profitably acquired as a scenario writer by an enterprising studio. Elinor Glyn, who was at the height of her popularity during the Cathcart affair, had successfully insinuated herself into Hollywood celebrity culture after marrying into English society, publishing a scandalous popular novel about an adulterous affair, and emigrating to the United States (Barnett). Finally, reports were circulating that MGM had just secured a contract with Queen Victoria's granddaughter, Queen Marie of Rumania, to write scenarios and to adapt some of her novels for the screen ("Queen to Write Film Play"; *Photoplay*, Apr. 1926 63). In short, there remains a great deal of circumstantial evidence that the Countess was visiting the United States in order to solicit Hollywood interest in her work as a writer, in her life as an adventuress, in short, in her compelling, modern personality. Whatever the case, once industry officials had announced the motion-picture ban, it put into place a context for imagining all sort of films the Countess of Cathcart might have been able to make. If the announced industrial ban on the Countess made such imaginings possible, these impossible films were subsequently constrained and made more remote by the vociferous attacks on her stage play, her performance in it, and the audiences who came to see it, almost as if to prove the film industry's argument that genuine and worthwhile celebrity is inherent and not conferred by arbitrary circumstance.

The Theatrical Career

Earl Carroll opened *Ashes of Love* for a single night in Allentown, Pennsylvania—a world premiere in a sizable working-class mill town that went virtually unremarked by the big city papers—and then immediately moved the play to the Shubert-Belasco Theatre in Washington, DC for a one-week engagement (Whelan). The performances in the nation's capital were widely characterized in the press as a sort of second trial for the Countess before federal representatives, and reviewers often noted the eager attendance of numerous members of Congress, including the Speaker of the House of Representatives. A secondary headline in *The New York Herald* read, "Countess Parades Incidents of Turbulent Life Before

¹¹ "Norman Harris, a Western Union Telegraph operator, testified he had assisted a friend who took moving pictures of the party and that he had seen on the platform near the camera in the back of the auditorium a book in which several guests wrote something" ("Wine Bath Depicted in Detail by Four" 8). Fox newsreel footage of the arrival of the Countess Cathcart in Washington, DC on March 14, 1926 survives in the Moving Image Research Collections at the University of South Carolina ("Countess Cathcart Arrives in D.C."), and stock newsreel footage of her shopping with her friend Mrs. Gordon Carr in New York City in late February 1926 is viewable online ("Jazz Age Retrospective - Countess Cathcart - HD").

Officials Who Held Her Guilty of “Turpitude,”” a piece that also reported how “[r]oars of laughter came from the audience as the curtain rose upon the first act” (“Lady Cathcart Opened ‘Ashes’ in Washington”). The play’s producers had requested that theater critics not attend the Washington opening or, if they did, not to write punishing reviews. Also, before the curtain was raised, the play’s director, George Vivian, instructed the opening-night audience to approach *Ashes of Love* as something quite different than the typical stage drama in that it dealt intimately with depictions of real life. “Lady Cathcart, you shall see, is playing a part that she has actually played in her own life and the characters with her play the parts of other, living human beings” (“Lady Cathcart Opened ‘Ashes’ in Washington”). Whether this instruction was a sincere attempt to prompt a respect for the documentary and autobiographical qualities of the performance, or whether it was merely an attempt by Carroll and others to further hype the sensational nature of the property, the press continually reported on a mode of reception at the performances that can only be generously described as mirthful derision. Such a reception was sometimes accounted for during its engagement at the Belasco Theater by remarking how the politicians in attendance were mostly interested in the topicality of the Countess as a “person in the news” and in the sheer ridiculousness of her recent ordeals.

After the engagement at the Belasco, Carroll and the Countess apparently disagreed about the future of the production, with the impresario wishing to take *Ashes of Love* on the road before opening on Broadway, whereas the playwright and headliner sought to return at once to New York. Carroll then sold the rights to the play back to Lady Cathcart for a reported twenty thousand dollars, after which the Countess and company promptly opened the play on Broadway at the National Theatre on March 22 (“Parts with Cathcart Play”; “Countess in Split with Her Backer”). The show ran only a week, and reviews of the play and the performances continued to amplify the now firmly established judgment that the play was utterly dreadful, though inadvertently humorous. A review of opening night that appeared in the *New York Telegraph* claimed that the play was nothing but cheap, outmoded melodrama and noted that the audience, “made up for the most part of typical ‘first nighters’ and the Countess’ friends, laughed heartily when they should have been serious, and were serious when they should have laughed” (“Countess Cathcart Sifts Her Ashes”).¹² A fairly typical strategy for most reviewers was to attribute the most disrespectful acts of mockery to a heartless audience, thereby displacing the harshest evaluations of the play and the performance onto a vicious public while the more humane journalist finds either pitiable or admirable the Countess’ ability to persevere through such a fiasco. Walter Winchell, writing in *The New York Graphic* as “the Earl of Winchell,” even remarked how the Countess appeared to uncontrollably weep on stage during the final moments of the play on opening night at the National. Yet he also commented on a palpable variance in audience reception

¹² The New York Public Library scrapbook mistakenly dates this review as appearing on 19 March, though it is clearly a review of the opening night performance at the National Theatre that took place on 22 March.

that was marked by social class when he observed how the amateur actress “seemed ill at ease, keeping her eyes focused on the upper floors, the patrons of which, strange to report, deported themselves with more dignity than those downstairs” (Winchell). Winchell may have been signaling that the Countess’ affective source of support was coming from the masses who were deeply interested in her life.¹³ Of course, it was also possible to read these same comments as depicting those in balconies as simply incapable of appreciating kitsch. Broadway cruelty masquerading as cultural superiority was a barely muted motif of most of the New York reviews, and some critics took pains to mention some of the more well-known sophisticates attending the performance, a list that included such notables as Ralph Barton, Noël Coward, John Emerson and Anita Loos, John Chipman Farrar, John Howard Lawson, Rebecca West, and Thyra Samter Winslow (e.g. “Countess Cathcart’s ‘Ashes’ Introduced to N.Y. Playgoers”; “Ashes of Love [review]”). It is now next to impossible to fully fathom what investments different audiences might have held in *Ashes of Love* in March of 1926. As a performance which the urbane critics pronounced an unintentional burlesque to be appreciated earnestly by only the stupidest of flappers, the play, its author, and its “star” performer clearly touched on deep-seated anxieties about gender, class, and the possibilities of mass celebrity. The punishment meted out to *Ashes of Love* was a response to conditions larger than the Cathcart affair itself, as it sought to discipline a mass audience and to regulate the possibilities of the mass media, particularly the cinema. As the ridiculousness of the Cathcart affair gave way to the ferocious ridicule the Countess endured as a public spectacle, the purported awfulness of both her play and her performance was ultimately used to satirize the attention and respect paid to her by masses of newspaper readers and the unschooled crowds who occupied the gallery seats. In the end, the joke of the Cathcart affair was on that large, unsophisticated sector of the public who had been deceived by a publicity apparatus into believing that the Countess was genuinely a woman living on the edge of the law, flouting moral convention, and challenging male privilege. Despite the fact that, at the end of his review, Winchell mentioned hearing rumors of “cinema rights” for *Ashes of Love*, the thorough cultural drubbing that the Countess endured at the hands of the East Coast critical establishment was far more effective than any official film industry ban in making the impossible films of Vera Cathcart practically unimaginable if not unintelligible.

The Industrial Situation

The Countess was only one of at least dozens of women who were sincerely feared by the American film industry during this period, feared ostensibly because their fame and popular appeal rested principally on their involvement in public scandals. The impossible films of Vera, Countess of Cathcart appeared, or failed to appear, at the end of a period

¹³ Those masses would have to rest content with a ten-part serialization of Vera Cathcart’s autobiography, published in Hearst’s *American Weekly* between March 21 and May 23 and included as a Sunday supplement to newspapers around the country. See Cathcart.

when women such as Clara Smith Hamon, Florence Leeds, Madalynne Obenchain, and Anne Stillman had either made, attempted to make, or were fear to be attempting to make motion pictures based upon their lives and their involvement with highly publicized adultery, divorce, and murder cases, but women's film history continues to pay these women filmmakers scant attention with one rare exception.¹⁴ That exception is industry-insider Dorothy Davenport Reid who was, perhaps, even as an insider, no real exception, since she too began her film authorship in relation to public scandal. A former screen actress and the wife of matinée idol Wallace Reid, Davenport Reid made headlines in late 1922 when, as Mrs. Wallace Reid, she became the public face and interpreter of her husband's narcotic addiction from which he died in early 1923.¹⁵ That scandal launched Davenport Reid's renewed motion-picture career as a cinema author when she participated in the production of *Human Wreckage*, a film about narcotic addiction generally viewed and promoted as her autobiographical statement on addiction and the suffering of drug addicts. We can quickly see the problems encountered by the type of cinematic authorship that women such as Clara Smith Hamon and Davenport Reid were pursuing in the early 1920s, by considering the changing industrial reception of Davenport Reid's three films made between 1923 and 1925, each dealing with a social problem through both narrative and extra-narrative contexts of public disgrace and scandal, the very terms upon which Davenport Reid's authority rested. A brief glance at the reviews and the exploitation advice dispensed for these three films by *Wid's Film Daily*, probably the tersest of the exhibitor trade journals, shows a decreasing tolerance for Davenport Reid's interest in sensational exposé. In 1923, *Wid's* found *Human Wreckage*, her narcotic picture, profitable propaganda, even though it might attract "the morbidly curious," (*Wid's Film Daily*, July 1, 1923 4) while a year later her picture about juvenile delinquency, *Broken Laws*, was deemed serviceable but only if very carefully handled (*Wid's Film Daily*, December 7, 1924 4). Finally, *The Red Kimona* of 1925 was pronounced suitable only for the grindhouse, with a stern warning to the adventurous exhibitor about possible police actions (*Wid's Film Daily*, February 14, 1926 9). While this latter judgment might seem a fairly unremarkable response to a film dealing with the long prohibited topic of white slavery, *The Red Kimona* was less connected to a Progressive Era cinema of reform than it was to modes of address in which media coverage of sensational scandals posed the possibility that some of the women associated with these scandals might use the motion picture to reach a public interested in their troubled lives. By the time Vera Cathcart was detained at Ellis Island in early 1926, the film industry, despite its loud rhetoric against state and local censorship, seemed more than willing to recommend law enforcement as an effective means of keeping such films from reaching their destinations, severely limiting the possibilities being explored by these important women filmmakers. [fig. 3] But what are we to do then with these impossible films?

¹⁴ For an extended analysis of the film historical importance of Clara Smith Hamon, see Anderson, "Tempting Fate." For a brief and unsympathetic discussion of Madalynne Obenchain see Brownlow.

¹⁵ An extended analysis of Dorothy Davenport Reid's relation to the scandal period of the early 1920s can be found in Anderson, *Twilight of the idols*.

Liberty, Ltd. -

By Nyberg
Moving Picture World
Staff Artist



3. Cartoon that appeared in *Moving Picture World*, 13 March 1926. An ironic and likely inadvertent commentary on the Cathcart case, appearing at the very moment the industry itself was swearing to ban Vera Cathcart from the screen.

A decade ago, Radha Vatsal called for a new feminist filmographic practice that would freight the filmographies of women filmmakers with all the nuance, complexity, incoherence, and indeterminacy of those seemingly interminable historical details that are typically relegated to the footnotes of film histories or elided altogether.

She writes,

Sacrificing orderliness seems to be a small price to pay for reference sources in which seemingly simple, but in fact vexed, claims such as attributions of directorship for silent-era titles are presented to the reader with all their attendant ambiguities and contradictions brought into the open. Such “nonauthoritative” filmographies would function not as repositories of incontrovertible fact, but rather as texts that prompt the reader to reach her own conclusions. Instead of being part of an entrenched mechanism underwriting claims of authorship, the filmography would then ironically destabilize that tradition. (124)

Of course, Vatsal still requires that there exist some indication that a motion picture was actually produced in order for a film-historical tradition to be called into question through filmographical citation. My posing of the question of Cathcart’s film authorship expands Vatsal’s project by bringing the valuable disturbance caused by footnotes into the writing of film history itself. However, unlike those women with whom Vatsal seeks to problematize the credits of silent-era films, Cathcart, because of the enormous publicity she garnered in 1926, has more in common with those boastful male *auteurs* who “boldly aggrandize their own authority” than with those retiring women who Vatsal describes as “undertak[ing] intensive production tasks without having to name themselves or their positions through a fixed system of credits” (Vatsal 136). While the Countess was prevented from making a mess of things through a cinematic presentation of the messiness of her fascinating life, that does not mean that as historians we should not attend to that life as a radically alternative conception of the cinema and to appreciate its possibilities as a determinative film-historical force.

The ruminative countess who inhabits Piñera’s strange tale ends up with the last laugh after all, demonstrating to her impatient husband that his desire to quell popular rumors by quickly mounting a grand ball that is singularly distinct from any of its possible seven phases is a sheer impossibility.

When the subject of reason was broached, the count, a living antithesis of an insane asylum, turned on his heels and discreetly left the metaphysical *soirée*. But his rude disappearance was hardly noticed, for the ladies were already leaning towards the countess to hear from her own lips that she had just discovered an eighth phase for a possible dance that would be the exact reproduction of one held exactly one hundred years ago. (Piñera 36)

Whatever sort of mediation is entailed by this newly discovered eighth phase, the countess

has established the principles of a historiography committed to an expansion of the possibilities and the impossibilities of the past. In other words, in taking our cues from this fictional countess we might today continue with the always unfinished business of that other Countess who sought to construct herself, her social relevance, and her historical importance through the perpetuation of talk about her.

Conclusion

Such films that we might well imagine having been imagined by others would have been part of a utopian project of the silent cinema that Jane Gaines, following Mary Ann Doane, has termed the total cinematification of the world. As a circumstance of modernity, cinematification joined melodramatic fiction to cinema's initial documentary impulse as a way of extending cinema's reach to the invisible realms of the world's people (Gaines). The notion of a highly visible but unspoken fiction that was world cinema at the beginning of the twentieth century is a conception of the motion picture, whether made or not made, as precisely a procedure in the service of making the impossible possible, or in Gaines' words, of "making unspeakable acts unspoken but expressed elsewhere in another register" (33). In a real sense, shame and the publicity given to scandals during the 1920s provided some women a "voice-that-was-not-a-voice" in the shaping of US public opinion, even as these same women were increasingly being banned from the nation's movie screens.

If as historians we seek to return to these films that were never made by seeking to establish what were in people's heads—to return to what they were thinking when they conceived of such films, when they worried about such films, when they censored such films—we run the risk of making the impossible once again singularly impossible by embarking on the impossible task of finding words adequate to the truth of these films that never were. As Jacques Rancière has maintained,

There is history because there is a past and a specific passion for the past. And there is history because there is an absence of things in words, of the denominated in names. The status of history depends on the treatment of this twofold absence of the "thing itself" that is no longer there—that is in the past; and that never was—because it never was such as it was told. Historical affect is bound to the personal absence of what the names name. (63)

Because the "condition of historical impossibility is none other than its condition of possibility," (Rancière 63–64) the previously vexing question of mediation is moot. It is no longer a question of constructing a language or method appropriate for apprehending a past in its truth and for selecting those objects and documents amenable to projects of reconstruction or reconsideration, that is, for the holding of a dance ball that adequately approximates a ball held exactly a hundred years ago. The historian's task is one of acknowledging the intelligibility of a past that never had a future, a past that cannot speak

because it has been already spoken for. Her words and her writing do not speak of (or speak for) those missing and those silent in the film historical past, but indicate a place in the world for them, precisely that place where they are no longer to be found.

THE AUTHOR: Mark Lynn Anderson is Associate Professor of Film Studies in the Department of English at the University of Pittsburgh. Anderson has previously published essays on film historiography, the star system, censorship, and early film education, and he is the author of *Twilight of the Idols: Hollywood and the Human Sciences in 1920s America* (2011).

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Anke Brouwers

**If it Worked for Mary. . .
Mary Pickford's Daily Talks with the Fans**

ABSTRACT: In the nineteenth century, advice literature (conduct, courtesy or etiquette books) was a popular non-fiction genre in America. In fact, advice literature actively invaded other literary genres, most notably sentimental literature, which used fictional characters and situations to dramatize and illustrate this advice. The popularity of the genre even pervaded the twentieth century phenomenon of the film star. This paper will focus on Mary Pickford's advisory texts and its relationship to nineteenth century advice literature. We will look at examples from Pickford's syndicated column "Daily Talks" published between 1915 and 1917. Pickford's texts contain similar rhetorical strategies to sweeten her didactic intent: metaphors, anecdotes, and aporia are put in the familiar and reassuring voice of the intimate friend mixed with the hortatory or inciting manner of the teacher. In terms of content there is also a striking overlap as the texts contain modernized ideas on female responsibilities, domesticity and love of the home, self-government, religion, education, courtship etc. Working from this familiar and effective literary tradition allowed Pickford to strengthen her star appeal and its consumption as well as to promote a particular "model of living" exemplified by the star's idealized, almost sanctified, embodiment of American womanhood.

Do you remember how you longed to have a party dress and when the dream came true and you were tricked out in ribbons and lace you decided you looked quite common-place and not so ravishing as you had imagined? Perhaps that was because the girl who lived next door came in an ever so much more elaborate gown—real lace and satin- and the dress you had dreamed of and planned for all those years was overshadowed and looked quite uninteresting by comparison. It wasn't the dress—that hadn't changed—but it was you who hadn't taught yourself contentment. And contentment is the key to happiness. (Pickford, "Penny Wise and Pound Foolish")¹

Thus ended Mary Pickford her column in praise of frugality and sensibility and with a key to happiness. This extract from her "Daily Talks with Mary Pickford" a syndicated column which appeared from 1915 until early 1917, is quite characteristic as far as style, tone, and content are concerned. Although Pickford was obviously foremost an iconic figure, "known" and consumed as an image through photographs and silent pictures, a great part of her star persona was sustained through textual rhetoric, adding to, amplifying or strengthening the image of the star as it was suggested by plots and characterizations in her films. Yet, a substantial part of her persona was created in the printed media: like other stars, Pickford was frequently interviewed or was the subject of articles, puff pieces or profiles in

¹ I will refer to the title of the "Daily Talks" cited in brackets. A complete list of all the directly cited "Daily Talks" can be found under the Works Cited section. They were published by McClure Newspapers between 1915 and early 1917. Where possible a complete date is given, otherwise I am only able to indicate the year of publication. The clippings I have been able to collect or consult (at the Margaret Herrick Library and from a private collection) included no reference for page numbers.

newspapers, general interest magazines, trade and fan magazines, but Pickford also wrote and published several articles and columns under her own name, directly speaking for the further positioning of her public self. During the course of her career, she authored a wide variety of texts, ranging from scripts, articles and columns to full-length books.² Like the films, these texts painted a “picture” of Mary Pickford, and offered a way to get closer to the star’s inner world. Read closely (and repeatedly, as most of her true fans did), these texts offered a model on how to live a “good” life. They often included explicit advice, tips or moral lessons, clearly inflected by a sentimental (and Protestant) ethos in stressing domesticity, morality, fellow-feeling, the merits of frugality, the virtue of hard work and devotion, the importance of character over personality and of substance over artifice, and a reliance on God. It is easy to see how the content of the advice was strongly informed by sentimental ideas and ideals but close inspection will show that the whole practice of wrapping advice or etiquette in pleasant forms of entertainment—such as anecdotes, short stories, and the epistolary form—was a common sentimental strategy. Specific to Pickford’s case, was the fact that the advice texts functioned as an efficient marketing tool, which affirmed and strengthened the Pickford persona, in itself the result of a careful balancing act of modern and sentimental suppositions and notions of ideal womanhood.

This paper will look at how these columns were constructed to strengthen the relationship between film star and her fans and how they were instrumental to the refinement of Pickford’s developing star persona. I will argue that both objectives were facilitated through the application of nineteenth century discourses and rhetorical traditions (such as conduct books, sentimental and Victorian literature) associated with predominantly female writers and audiences. Finally, the familiar, intimate and entertaining forms of these literary models facilitated another, additional effect (if not goal) of the columns: the effective dissemination and promotion of a model of living exemplified by the star’s idealized, almost sanctified, embodiment of American womanhood.

Funny Little Thoughts

Pickford’s “Daily Talks” were a series of syndicated columns, which were presented as the publicized result of Pickford’s personal correspondence with her fans. The fans, who wrote to their idol with questions and concerns were promised an answer either in the column itself, in the “answers to correspondence” section, or personally, though it was always stressed that given the heavy load of letters pouring in daily, patience was required. In an early “Daily Talks” from 1915, Pickford ends her column by saying, “[i]f I persist in being so talkative I

² Pickford has received writing credits for the following short films: *The Awakening* (D.W. Griffith, 1909), *Getting Even* (D.W. Griffith, 1909) and *May and December* (D.W. Griffith, Frank Powell, 1910). And for the following features: *A Girl of yesterday* (Allan Dwan, 1915), *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Marshall Neilan, 1919), *Garrison’s Finish* (Arthur Rosson, 1923, starring her brother Jack). (Source AFI) She herself always claimed she also wrote *Lena and The Geese* (D.W. Griffith, 1912).

won't have room for my letters and they are piling up fast" ("Aeroplaning"). Even if she was not exaggerating, she was at the same time underlining her sense of duty toward her fans. In another column she added: "I receive hundreds of letters asking for my advice, so I am giving it, ungarnished and sincere, from me to you, to accept it as you will" ("Borrowing").

As texts, the "Daily Talks" present an interesting amalgam of genres and traditions, and of rhetorical strategies that tie these columns to sentimental fiction, adolescent and girl's fiction, prescriptive literature, and (auto)biography. Sharing knowledge with her audience was an explicit goal, and most of the literary genres the columns show an affiliation to, were didactic to a certain extent. The "Daily Talks" were short daily columns filled with what



The heading for Pickford's Daily Talks

Pickford referred to as "intimate little thoughts" ("What Happened to Mamie Jones I") or as the "pages of her diary" ("Memories from Yesterday"), treating a variety of subjects from the trite to the serious. The columns appeared on the women's pages, as they would often be called, next to advertisements or columns falling under "women's interest."

The knowledge the "Daily Talks" wanted to share with their audience, included domestic advice, presenting a how-to on cooking, cleaning or grooming, but it also included moral or personal advice, referring to the private sphere of character building or spiritual enlightenment. I should stress how unusual it was for an actress, even one of Pickford's stature, to be allowed to give this kind of advice. Traditionally, those deemed fit to give advice on both conduct and matters of the soul, had been mothers, doctors, educators, ministers or their wives, e.g. those conventionally held in high esteem by society. The genre of prescriptive literature had been booming business in the United States throughout the nineteenth century, but the

authors had never before been associated with any form of mass entertainment (Newton 3). Still, Mary Pickford got away with educating and moralizing, and in her “Daily Talks” covered subjects as varied and topical as education, frugality, emancipation, racial prejudice, patriotism, domesticity, and the road to happiness. Pickford not only made it acceptable for an actress to hold such a morally esteemed position, the columns were also instrumental for her own personal image building, as they carefully narrated (introduced, repeated, emphasized) various aspects and qualities of “Mary Pickford,” who was by 1915 both a star and respectable role model. During the mid-1910s, Pickford and her main rival, colleague and business partner Charlie Chaplin, actively reshaped their public personae to appeal to more inclusive audiences. Pickford worked to perfect her balancing act between her sentimental-pathetic and dramatic credentials and a more light-hearted and comic personality, an exercise she undertook in both her writings *and* in her films. In the films she produced under the Artcraft banner (a seal of quality especially created to handle to more prestigious product of Famous Players-Lasky) she mixed pathos with slapstick, conservative ideals with modern ideas and traditional femininity with tomboyish charms and liberties (Salt 113; Brouwers 89-90). Charlie Chaplin on his part, as Charles Maland has shown, used his years at Essanay and Mutual to adjust and refine his originally rather vulgar comic character through an emphasis on his pathetic and “romantic” side (20).

Despite their success, the “Daily Talks” only lasted for two years, probably because their ghostwriter, Frances Marion, had collapsed under the heavy workload and grief over her sister’s suicide and could no longer write at such high tempo (Beauchamp 63). If not for Marion’s collapse, Pickford might have continued to publish these “thoughts” for a long while. After the column’s end, Pickford would irregularly contribute articles or columns in magazines during the 1910s and 1920s about the motion picture business or about the eternal question whether or not to cut off her blessed curls. When she retired from acting in the early thirties, she picked up writing again more seriously, contributing articles on demand for general interest or women’s magazines like *Liberty Magazine*, *Colliers*, *Christian Science Monitor*. In the early 1930s, she even published two short semi-philosophical tracts, titled *Why Not Try God* (1934) and *My Rendez-Vous With Life* (1935), which we would now catalogue as self-help books. In 1935, she published her first novel, *The Demi-Widow*. In 1938, she started another column, this time for the *New York Journal*.

The Question of Voice

Because of the nature of the medium, not many fans had ever heard Pickford’s voice until her first talkie, *Coquette* (Sam Taylor), in 1929, unless they had seen her perform on stage or had attended the Liberty Drive and heard her public speeches in 1917. To make up for this lack of actual voices, intertitles reflecting idiosyncratic speech had been in general use since the mid-1910s; some of them give us a good idea of what Pickford, or at least her characters,

were supposed to “sound” like. There is continuity in the way the titles were phrased in that they often have an insouciant, know-it-all quality to them, with a touch of the vernacular. As Judy Abbot in *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Marshall Neilan, 1919), Pickford pleads rather insolently, “Please Mr. God, we want some food” (in the book by Jean Webster, Judy had actually addressed the deity as “Goddy,” analogous to “daddy”). As Amarilly in *Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley* (Marshall Neilan, 1918) she asks the (unintentionally) rhetorical question: “Don’t you know a lady when you sees one?” As Mavis Hawn in *Heart of the Hills* (Joseph De Grasse, Sidney Franklin, 1919) she sounds as follows: “I’ve never knowed who done the shootin’, but I promised pap I’d git him—an’ I’m a-goin to keep my promise” (by the end of the film she has mastered her grammar and has learned to speak like a lady). These kind of lines made the silent film characters “talk.” Of course, in the case of popular material being adapted, they had to sound close to how the public had imagined them, but more importantly, they had to fit the star’s persona. Pickford’s written texts give a good indication of how she wanted to sound. Despite the fact that she did not write this material herself and that she hired different ghostwriters at different stages of her career, there is a striking continuity of tone as well as thematic concern in all these texts “written by” Mary Pickford.

So although we know that Pickford did not write these texts herself, I shall treat them as her own creation and refer to their voice as Pickford’s. In her excellent study of female authorship emerging from an expanded historical archive (including memoirs, cookbooks, scrapbooks etc.), Amelie Hastie notes that this tendency to speak of “Pickford” when talking about her written texts, reveals our easy “consolidation of persons and persona” (160). This is not so surprising, as star personalities are typically the combination of those qualities that the star projects and those which the public assumes to be true of the real actor’s personality (Basinger 161). As fans, we are quite eager to consolidate both, even if we do not actually believe them to be “truly” or “truthfully” congruent. The artificially created background of Fox star Theda Bara, is a good and well-known example of the public’s (press and audience) awareness of the discrepancy between star persona and personal biography and willingness to smooth them over in favor of a unified public and private person (Golden). The “Pickford” we hear in the “Daily Talks” is in fact an amalgam of many different voices: that of the private (biographical) Mary Pickford, of Mary Pickford the movie star, of Mary Pickford as she appears in the texts of her ghost writer Frances Marion, and possibly of other interested parties in the creation of the star image, like “Daddy” Zukor or Mom Charlotte Pickford. If her career was indeed as “planned” as she claimed in retrospect, the written output, especially of the early years when her star image was still forming, should be revealing. If we can be sure of one thing, it is that they were thoroughly quality-checked, ensuring that no inferior Pickford-related product would get out there and possibly harm her reputation or market value. If Pickford was concerned about a purely managerial concern like “block-booking” (giving the exhibitor the rights to the star’s product only if he agreed to show the rest of the studio output in bulk) and the detrimental effects it could have on her career, then surely

she had to be concerned about the words that were supposedly issuing from her typewriter.³

Pickford's biographer Eileen Whitfield suggests that the consolidation of her persona was accelerated by the star's excellent ghostwriters—"apt impersonators," she calls them—who knew and were able to imitate her voice to the extent that sometimes, "Pickford's tartness sparks off the page" (153). Although they were clearly contributing to an elaborate fiction ("sustaining a created self"), some of the stories in the columns ring true, either factually or experientially, even if they were ghostwritten. Amelie Hastie argues convincingly on the matter:

As such texts [advice columns] seek to conjoin the stars' words to their cinematic images, they are at least affected, if not infected, by fiction. At the same time, however, these works are also autobiographical: they tell authentic stories of the women's lives, and the knowledge they inscribe therein is based on the women's lived experiences and beliefs. (161)

So, despite having been inserted into a dramatic framework congruent with the star's image, the stories of life can nonetheless be "true" or "authentic." (Even the genre of autobiography, which at least in principle will try to tell the "real story," is essentially constructed as a coherent narrative with dramatic arches and climaxes and moral lessons learnt). Finally, the importance of Pickford and Frances Marion's close friendship during the column's run should not be underestimated. Cari Beauchamp notes how, from 1916 to early 1917, Pickford and Marion rented houses in Hollywood a street apart, wanting to be in close proximity to create the "Daily Talks" (Beauchamp 53). For the two women friends, the "Daily Talks" were clearly part work, part fun. As someone who would come to write thirteen features for the star, Marion undoubtedly used the "Daily Talks" to get to know her friend and employer, and, in the process, add certain elements to her star persona. To a certain extent, the "Daily Talks" can be seen as "scripts." No doubt because of their intense collaboration on the "Talks," Marion was the one capable of writing the most popular version of the Pickford character.

Sound Advice from a Friend

To get back to Whitfield's comment: whether or not it is actually "tartness" we hear in some of the answers to readers is hard to assess, although Pickford occasionally does sound somewhat curt and impatient—mostly in response to queries that display a high degree of

³ Correspondence between Pickford and the editor of Liberty Magazine, for which she was submitting an article in 1936, on the occasion of Mother's Day, illustrates her nitpicking and perfectionism. Although the magazine cover had already been printed, Pickford could not bring herself to "okay" the intended article. In a wire to editor David Hampton, she wrote: "Could not possibly approve Liberty Story therefore had it entirely rewritten using no part of Collins material of course I wish [sic] to settle with him and leave that to you deeply regret I could not share your enthusiasm stop."

ignorance, or a lack of decorum or tact which was still an issue in the early years of silent film reporting or star profiling. Indeed, the “Daily Talks” corresponded with the discourse about stars in fan magazines. In her study of fan discourse and fan culture, Samantha Barbas notes that the shift from a focus on the films and their plots to a focus on the actors happened gradually throughout the 1910s. *Motion Picture Story* (which had started out printing novelizations of well-known film plots) eventually dropped the “Story” from its title, focusing henceforth on providing personal details about stars’ lives to an inquisitive audience. Marsha Orgeron notes that

[t]his tacit and reciprocal encouragement of publicity stood in direct contrast to the late nineteenth-century belief that curiosity about personal affairs of others—even public figures—was rude and improper. But by the 1920s curiosity had been institutionalized, and in effect normalized, at least in relation to the movie industry, whose studio and fan magazines fed the public information (however fabricated) about stars’ lives. (76)

Of course, as Barbas, Robert Sklar and Richard De Cordova have argued, during the 1910s the fan magazines had already printed personal stories about the lives of actors and actresses; it was the amount of kind of information deemed appropriate to share with the audience that changed. Images of actors (slides, postcards, calendars, posters) were in wide circulation and increased the popularity of the magazines. Shelley Stamp observes that the film camera moving in to ever more closer views during these years, was mirrored by the audience’s desire to come ever closer to these faces and people they were starting to feel increasingly invested in (141). Pickford met her fans’ expectations and desires for (seeming) intimacy and proximity in allowing them to share in her thoughts on a daily basis and thus encouraged this increasing appetite for the private, but the “Daily Talks” were also a powerful tool to control her own star persona’s narrative. Through this direct line with her audience she could respond immediately and with authority to possible unpleasant or dissident stories circulating about her, her films or the film industry in general. By signing her name underneath every new installment, she both authenticated the content of her “talks” and tethered it to her persona.

Pickford’s annoyance with the snoopy fan was not out of place in the mid-1910s and it would perhaps be more accurate to say that some of her answers sound like the ennui or slight annoyance of an otherwise patient teacher. For example, to one reader (who had posed an undisclosed question on her marital status) she answers, “Yes, I’m married,” but offers no further information. Another reader assuming Pickford was a little bit older than she claimed to be, is scolded: “Would you have me send you the family Bible to prove it, Miss Inquisitive Maid?” (rpt. in Whitfield 153). To reader M.N.F. she replies practically: “Yes. Mabel Normand once played with the Biograph Company.” To G.W.T. she preaches: “There is no easy way to ‘break into the moving picture game’ that I know of. The only way is to start at the bottom and work yourself up. If you have ability and deserve success, you will

get ahead.” To Helen S. S. she simply replies: “Look in the telephone directory.” A mother writing in about her freckled daughter wanting to go to drama school, fearing the freckles and a career in pictures would be hard to reconcile, get the reply: “This letter would be funny, were it not pathetic. [...] Tell your daughter to forget her freckles and devote herself to her studies” (“Patriotism”; “Old-fashioned Homes”; “We Eat Spaghetti”; “Ghosts of Yesterday’s Mistakes”).

Possible tartness aside, Whitfield further astutely notes that “[m]uch of ‘Daily Talks’ reads like a cross between Louisa May Alcott (as presented in the column, Little Mary bore a striking resemblance to Alcott’s Polly in *An Old-fashioned Girl*) and a fan magazine” (153). Indeed, the “Daily Talks” harmonize with the sound, strategies and some of the content of Alcott’s fiction, blending qualities of the sentimental novel with children’s literature or the adolescent novel and aimed at female socialization. Polly from *An Old-fashioned Girl* (1869) or Marmee from *Little Women* (1868-1869) or the grown Jo March from *Jo’s Boys* (1886) are the rational (and quite pragmatic) but never stern or unfeeling voices of moral authority in stories that were meant to present models for living right. As in the sentimental novel, growing up is here presented as internalizing life lessons. Whitfield’s comment is quite useful but does not fully pursue the interesting notion that sentimental literature and children’s or adolescent novels shared a connection with or indebtedness to the tradition of prescriptive literature, a collective term for all literature intent to advise. Sentimental rhetoric reveals the desire for their works to be more than “ephemeral” and to have readers benefit, morally, personally, from reading (Baym 16-17). Baym notes that the didactic intention always shines through without being “at cross-purposes with entertainment” and that “[t]he lesson itself . . . [becomes] an entertainment in that the heroine’s triumph over so much adversity and so many obstacles is profoundly pleasurable to those readers who identify with her” (17). Pickford’s “Daily Talks” read like sentimental short stories, complete with moral fabulating, didactic intent, author’s asides, pathetic appeals, and the pleasure of reading of “Mary’s” personal trials and successes. Whatever the subject of the column, there is always a lesson to be learned, often by the author herself in the form of a fictionalized “little Mary” from the past, and sometimes by “a friend” of the author, who probably, the text implies, is not unlike the reader herself. The fact that the columns appeared in short, daily installments also parallels the experience of sentimental and Victorian literature, which was likewise consumed serially and counted on the pleasurable experience of accumulating knowledge and a growing familiarity with a fictional heroine and supporting characters and the recognizable rhetorical style of a particular authorial voice.

In her book-length study on conduct books, Sarah Newton subdivides the whole of prescriptive literature into 1) advise literature (including cookbooks and domestic manuals), 2) books on etiquette and 3) conduct literature (providing models of how to be or live). Thematically many of Pickford’s “Daily Talks” fit in these subcategories and even formally they resemble literature’s preferred formal presentation, as “letters” or “talks.” Examples

are Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Young Ladies* (1837), *Letters to Mothers* 1838, Lydia Maria Child and Clara de Chatelain's *The Girl's Own Book* (1834), Madeleine Leslie's novel *Trying to be Useful* (1855), a serial published in 1869 called *The Lady's Friend* and published by Deacon and Petersen or Gail Hamilton's 1872 *Woman's Worth and Worthlessness*. Most of these publications combined fiction or poetry with sermons or straightforward maxims or dictums and they were not ephemeral in their intentions.

In the "Daily Talks" Pickford's voice mimics that of the concerned friend or moral guardian in prescriptive texts, often explicitly taking up the role as mentor without ever becoming distant or impersonal: the advice she wants to give is "from me to you," at one point she proposes to act as a discrete "confidante" for one of her readers ("Our Souls and Our Work"; "Pickanninies"). She adopts the friendly and familiar tone applied in prescriptive literature, which suggests the tone of the personal friend, acquaintance or parent, who is both likely and entitled to gently critique or advise on matters of conduct. Next to the more "dry" tone of straightforward advice, the columns use different literary forms like the anecdote or allegory to style the message, all strategies common for prescriptive literature in general. Newton notes that, "[t]hese more literary modes sweeten the didacticism yet convey conduct lessons effectively and often dramatically" (77). The moral lesson of the day, "don't idle your time away," or "it is as much a mistake to give too much as it is to give too little," for instance, become much more attractive when told by means of an anecdote from Mary's own life or when we are reassured of the fact that Mary too needs to overcome character flaws and work hard to polish her character ("The Girls and I"). Audiences are given the sense they share in Pickford's personal life by reading about her recent and past experiences, and the realization that Pickford's experiences are not so different from their own. Her tone and use of the anecdotal form assumes that her readers are familiar with the type of experiences she describes, or that they will be capable of imagining them. This "recognition of shared knowledge," increases the intimacy between the spectator/reader and star, as well as enable a coalescence of female identity (Stacey). The act of "sharing" itself was just as important as what was being shared, and contemporary female stars have continued sharing similarly intimate knowledge and experiences on the vicissitudes and joys of a woman's life. Like Pickford, this is done to sustain (as well as expand upon) their star image as well as to capitalize on the commodity value of their knowledge. In doing so, contemporary stars still rely on traditional forms and formulas—letters, diaries, columns, and advice books.⁴

The female fans addressed by these prescriptive texts did not only belong to a newly created community of cinemagoers but to the legacy of American "women's culture" from

⁴ In current celebrity self help and advice (in print or online) the form in which the advice is poured and the rhetorical strategies applied have not changed all that much from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, or from Pickford's texts. For example, Gwyneth Paltrow's digital newsletter, *Goop*, has a modern carrier but retains a very traditional form and rhetoric: it is still a "letter" and Paltrow sounds as concerned, intimate and superiorly informed as the writers of advice and conduct literature of earlier days. Other contemporary forms of "sharing" as an important strategy to effect strong affective ties between fan and star are provided by social network applications such as Facebook and Twitter.

the nineteenth century, who had been addressed similarly through explicit prescriptive texts or through sentimental literature. As Lauren Berlant has theorized, American woman's culture is one of many "intimate publics" that exist (and have existed for a long time) in American society. She writes: "An intimate public operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires" (Berlant 5). Celebrity's self-help books or columns or manuals or philosophical guides (like Pickford's later books) encourage participation and identification, the personal tone and address of the texts increase the perceived intimacy, the idea that what the books contain is the knowledge that is somehow what was missing in a woman's life. The books or texts stress the commonality, not just among stars and fans, but among women. Emanating from a shared historical past is the sense that there is a "fundamental likeness" among women, star or layperson alike, and that emotional as well as domestic, moral and spiritual expertise is a marker of femininity. (A decidedly sentimental supposition and a benchmark of nineteenth century feminine ideals.) Through the careful following of stars' prescriptions, suggestions and living examples, in any form they provide it, their lives (all of our lives) can be intimately shared, relived, owned. Additionally, the partakers or consumers of the intimate public "trust the affectionate knowledge and rational assurance more than the truths of any ideology" (Levander 30) or of the impersonal, non-intimate knowledge available through science. When scientific sources are consulted and referred to, its impersonal, alienating language is personalized or feminized through the use of more gentle fictional forms such as anecdote, the imagined conversation ("talks"), or the interview. Pickford occasionally turns to lofty and traditionally trustworthy references such as "scientists" and "philosophers" (especially in her later books *Why Not Try God?* and *My Rendez-Vous With Life*) but ultimately the power and authority of her argumentation rests with the sentimentally accepted validity of her personal experiences and affective judgments. In fact, in the nineteenth century, scientific language of biological evolution was often very sentimental in its descriptions and assumptions (Levander 30) an illustration of the fact that the imbrication of a rational and emotional rhetoric in both scientific and fictional texts was not uncommon.

Another strategy often employed in prescriptive literature as well as in sentimental fiction—as we have already seen—is the dramatic use of "contrasting types." In the "Talks," Pickford constantly compares the good girl with her bad sister, the right kind of behavior with the wrong, "Miss Foolish Maiden" (who gossips, rambles on, exaggerates, lives too fast...) with "Miss Wise Maiden" ("Maidens, Wise and Foolish"). In her talk on the "Moral Conditions of Studios," she concludes her argument by saying, "A good girl who is clever is the only one who stands a chance, while the bad girl who is not clever, soon loses out." According to Lynne Vallone, recounting the story of the bad girl is a strong "impulse" characteristic of texts for girls, where the bad girl becomes the "negative emblem," even a "compulsive addition" (9). Creating ethical significance through contrasting the good and

the bad, the “Talks” also drew upon the contrast narratives or contrasting agents from the progressive cinema of the early 1910s, in which for example the good sister was paired and contrasted with the bad sister (*The Painted Lady* [D.W. Griffith, 1912]; *The Easiest Way* [Albert Capellani, 1917]) in which rich and poor households would be confronted with the same or similar moral dilemmas (e.g. *The One is Business the Other Crime* [D.W. Griffith, 1912] *The Kleptomaniac* [D.W. Griffith, 1905]) or in which the toil of the poor is bitterly contrasted to the debauchery of the rich (*A Corner in Wheat* [D.W. Griffith, 1909]; *Children Who Labor* [director unknown, 1912]).

Questions for Readers

Another direct echo from sentimental fiction and the intrusive authorial voice from conduct literature, is the fact that Pickford often addresses her audience directly through rhetorical questions, semi-philosophical pondering or small asides, like: “I believe in this fairy lore, don’t you?” or “Don’t you think it would be wiser to do that?”; and “To each month of the year and to each epoch of ones life belong separate memories and various flowers. How may one chose a single one?”; “Aren’t mothers darlings?”; “Don’t you always have to control the little stifling yawns behind the palm of your hand when you are forced to listen to some one telling why he cannot accomplish his desires because his ideals are so high it is hopeless ever to try to reach them?” (“When the Robins Nest Again”; “My First Day in Pictures”; “My Favorite Perfume”; “Mr. Tucker’s Secret”; “Chasing Moonbeams”). The questions invite personal reflection and again invite the reader to compare the star’s observations and experiences to one’s own.

The column offered other perks: it shared actual, imitable advice on practical and spiritual matters and held the promise of direct and positive results for the careful reader. Of course, actors sharing tips, especially beauty secrets, with their fans was not a new phenomenon. Broadway actress Lillian Russell, for instance, had shared her beauty secrets with her fans in the *Chicago Tribune*, occasionally also digging a little deeper (Leslie Midkiff Debauche to author, 2010). Movie stars, however, always seemed to link tips on improving your personal appearance with suggestions on how to improve behavior (Barbas 49). Leslie Midkiff Debauche has shown that, next to Pickford, silent movie actresses like Beverly Bayne, Anita Stewart, Ruth Stonehouse and Billie Burke (for example “Billie Burke on Beauty” from 1912, or “Billie Burke in Paris. Tells all about the Coming change in Feminine Hair and Hats” from 1913) had similar columns in newspapers or trade papers, although none reached an audience as large as Pickford’s, whose “funny little thoughts” appeared in over a hundred-fifty newspapers across the country.

Not only the female stars produced these kind of prescriptive texts. The market for the female spectator and magazine reader was the larger one, but there was room for advice columns aimed at for men (or at least a mixed audience). During the 1910s and early 1920s,

Douglas Fairbanks and Wallace Reid had pages in *Photoplay* in which they spoke to their audience on matters of life; several movie stars also appeared as guest editors, contributing articles on subjects they supposedly had something to say about (Valentino published on how his ideal woman would behave on their first dates. He also published a booklet in 1922, *How You Can Keep Fit*, a workout guide with pictures of Valentino's scantily dressed athletic body.) As both Larry May and Gaylyn Studlar have noted, Fairbanks extended his "character



ONE should never, never comb the hair while it is damp. When I am sure my hair is thoroughly dry I comb it lightly to remove any tangles. To curl it I dampen with cold soft water and then twine the locks one by one about my finger, combing the while. I do this with every curl. I do not use Marcelle wavers or curling irons of any kind; hot irons ruin the hair by scorching it. Nor do I use ointments and patent hair tonics. Good health is the best hair tonic I know of.

Beauty Tips from Mary Pickford
(Ladies' Home Journal 1919)

building” persona through these publications in ways noticeably similar to Pickford. His articles appeared in general interest magazines such as *Ladies Home Companion*; he also had a monthly column in *Photoplay* and he wrote several short tracts on “the art of living happily and healthily” published as booklets (May; Studlar). Like Pickford’s, Fairbanks’ texts—including *Live and Let Live* (1917), *Laugh and Live* (1917) and *Youth Points the Way* (1924)—were ghostwritten, in his case by his personal secretary Kenneth Davenport. These self-help manuals are filled with do’s and don’ts and promise the reader a happy, healthy, peppy, dynamic life, much like the one led by Fairbanks himself. The booklets were decorated with promotion stills of Fairbanks’ film successes or glamour photographs to make them all the more appealing to fans. The overwhelming success of Pickford’s and Fairbanks’ conduct columns and self-help books, started what would soon become a national trend (Barbas 52). Midkiff Debauche, however, points out that some time before Pickford and Fairbanks, Billie Burke, who played roles not unlike those of Pickford and who similarly balanced the contrasts of ideal American girlhood, had already published columns on beauty and fashion, with advice explicitly directed at girls in 1912 (150). Like Pickford, Burke packaged opposites in a believable, wholesome whole: she represented youth and maturity, innocence and knowingness, excellence and run of the mill-ness, exclusiveness and neighborliness. On matters of conduct, however, Pickford was clearly much closer to official prescriptive literature. Pickford’s advice was noticeably more out to educate her readership on a more abstract, less concrete ideal of well-being, whereas Burke’s columns were more to the point (e.g. what colors to wear or use in home decoration) and quickly evolved into testimonial advertising such as for Pond’s facial cream (Midkiff Debauche 149-150). Also, when Burke first started writing her columns she was still a stage actress (she made her screen debut in 1916), making Pickford the first movie star to publish public advice in the US.

Categories of Advice

Thematically the “Talks” addressed five broad categories: 1) domestic and practical advice, 2) personal and spiritual advice, 3) political and social causes, 4) public relations (acknowledgment of fans, patriotic messages) and 5) veiled publicity (behind-the-scenes anecdotes to plug the films or defend the industry’s reputation). All of these were presented in often strongly sentimental terms. In the type of “Talk” belonging to the first category, Pickford instructs, sometimes a tad snootily, her reader on how to deal with a particular type of situation, ranging from advice on how and on what to spend money, to beauty tips and tips on etiquette.

In response to A.P.P., Pickford wrote:

“It is all right to carry your slippers in a bag when you go to a dance. A dance card is used to keep track of your engagements for each dance. It is customary for a young lady to permit

her escort to have the first selection; after that she may allot her dances as they are requested, first come, first served. It is all right to reserve one or two dances; you should so mark them on your card.” (“Penny Wise and Pound Foolish”)



Pickford opens up about washing her hair
(*Ladies' Home Journal*, 1919).

To “Business Girl” from York, Pa., she wrote: “It is true that some one has decreed that letters of friendship should not be written on a typewriter, but it must have been some one less busy than yourself. If you haven’t time to write letters any other way, use the typewriter” (“The Relatives I Do Not Have”). In another column she warned “the girls” not to use too much cosmetics, because it merely made one look older and only rarely helped bring out the natural beauty. The same installment also features a detailed description of the star’s newly remodeled dressing room and reads like a piece on interior decorating (“Don’t Use Cosmetics’ Film Star Tells Girls--- ‘Tends to Add on the Years’”). In “Mothering Mother,” Pickford narrates how she learned to be responsible for her family from an early age on (the story of her life she loved to repeat *ad infinitum*): “. . . as my incessant work on the stage left little time for dolls, my maternal instinct, denied a doll, a baby brother, or a baby sister which to sprout and thrive, I turned to mothering my mother.” The texts’ constant warning is that one can never be silly about money and that one is never too young to be responsible. Most of the immediate, practical advice can be found in the answers to letters from the correspondents’ section, and in many cases the column was inspired by a direct query. The questions Pickford received ranged from the professional (where to submit a script or how to become a movie star), to the silly (were her curls real? how did she wash them? what caused them to shine as they did?), to the behavioral (how to respond in such and such an event.)

An example of the second category, is provided by “To-morrow Land.” In this “Talk,” Pickford muses on happiness and how to achieve it. The trick is not to think happiness is always ahead of you, to not lose yourself in fantasies of tomorrow. Dwelling on the past or living for the future makes us forget that happiness is to be found in the here and now. In sum: “The key to happiness...is living in ‘To-Day.’” At the close of “School Days,” in answer to an undisclosed letter, Pickford advises “Blondie” from Chicago, Ill.:

The matter of controlling your temper can only be decided by yourself. If you have the habit of losing your temper very readily you will have to strive unceasingly to overcome this, and it can be done if you lose your will power. Eight hours of sleep is considered the right amount of sleep for an adult.

In another column a (cautionary) anecdote illustrates her advise to always “treat your parents right”: a girl always haughty towards her parents and impatient about their old-fashioned values and beliefs, breaks down when she hears her mother and father have died in a tenement fire. We are warned that our parents and where we came from should always be honoured (“Our Debt to the Living”).⁵ “The Girls and I” promotes female solidarity and friendship; in it Pickford regrets the “petty jealousy” and hopes for more loyalty among women. In general, what is stressed, are the similarities among women, the collective nature of their experiences.

⁵ This sounds a lot like the plot of a Biograph film starring Mabel Normand, *Her Awakening* (D.W. Griffith, 1911).

In the “Talks” concerned with social or political issues, various topical subjects are addressed. On one occasion, Pickford defends working women and insists they are not “abnormal” (since she was after all a working woman herself). Like the homemaker, the working woman works for the home, only she does it by joining the workforce. Pickford ends up re-domesticating the working women by closing with, “in their hearts there is a keen desire to leave furnished rooms, boarding houses and hotels, and to ensconce themselves in their own individual niches in the universal ‘home, sweet home’” (“Homes and Working Women”). In another column, she defends the “nursery movement,” giving working women a place to leave their children with someone who will look after them instead of having to lock them up in the apartment all day (“Day Nurseries”). In the same “Talk,” Pickford makes the case for reading fairy tales to young children. She sees no harm in postponing an introduction to the great literary works of the world and instead supposes that “the imagination of children would be colored and ripened by their mental voyages into fairyland” (“Fairy Stories for Children”). She closes by asking for advice from mothers who have read fairy tales to children. The influence of particular kinds of stories (both in literature and film) on the minds of children was the subject of various sociological and psychological studies in the 1910s and 1920s.⁶ The fact that scholars of different disciplines paid so much attention to the fairy tale, shows that it was a topical subject, and Pickford’s own take of the subject suggests a more popular concern as well. Perhaps Pickford felt the urge to address the matter because in 1914 she had starred in a fairy-tale adaptation herself (*Cinderella* directed by James Kirkwood). The effects of filmgoing on the minds of the young was the subject singled out for moral concern and the topic of several sociological studies. Jane Adams and E. Margery Fox, for example, both wrote essays in which they voiced their concern with the influence of moving pictures on young children especially (Lant and Periz 297–303, 308–312). In “Pickanninies,” Pickford explained that many black women needed to work out of necessity (and as a result seemingly neglecting their children), because in many cases their husbands could not get proper jobs. She asks her readers to consider how they are forced to leave their children behind and face the racism of white people. In her attempt to be progressive and open-minded, Pickford comes across as patronizing and unwittingly racist when she writes:

It seems to me we might remember that this people, the world’s child race, has many virtues and endearing qualities—cheerfulness, the love of music and the ability to interpret it artistically in many cases, loyalty in service—and that no human being can bear continued and unearned hatred or ridicule without becoming embittered and hardened. (“Pickaninnies”)

From this example we can judge that Pickford’s politics were emancipated but not necessarily progressive. Ideologically speaking, the “Daily Talks” are moderately conservative.

⁶ Charlotte Buhler published *Das Märchen und die Phantasie des Kindes* [fairy tales and the child’s fantasy] in 1918. Sigmund Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* [*Die Traumdeutung*] in 1900, *Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl* [the theme of the three caskets] in 1913, and *Märchenstoffe in Träumen* [the occurrence in dreams of material from fairy tales]—in which he connects the symbolic language of fairy tales to the human subconscious—in 1913.

Pickford was always careful not to alienate part of her audience by making unpopular claims or judgments that might even offend. For instance, upon glorifying the sacrifices and skills of the professional homemaker whom she also advises to be truly professional in her domestic duty because “cheap labor” of any kind *always* humiliates, she makes sure to add:

Of course I, who have lived among professional beavers all my life, don't hold that every woman's only place is in the home—that is impossible for the woman with a career or fired by the divine accident of genius. But many of these professional women find time for homemaking and the raising of a beautiful family. (“June Brides”)

Women who feel that a career outside the home is what is best for them, should have this choice. Here the opinion splits between the two halves of Pickford's persona, as ideal of Victorian domesticity and as embodiment of integrated modernity.

A number of the “Talks” were designed to acknowledge the importance of the fans to her career. Pickford published many “thank yous” in which her audience is praised for its unfailing support. This support manifested itself not only through buying tickets to see her films but also through sending the star gifts of every kind. In “Gifts and Letters I Receive,” Pickford thanks her fans for the self-made sketches, poems, embroideries, Kodak photographs, candied fruits, cough syrup, and in particular for the letters and souvenirs from soldiers fighting in the war. She cites one soldier's letter: “My girl back in England wouldn't have got jealous, for she loves you, too” (“Gifts and Letters I Receive”). Elsewhere, in a direct address soliciting more letters from her fans, she professes to rely to a great extent on the ideas of her public. She writes:

As soon as we are ready to start, I will tell you all about our play, for if you follow the pages of my diary, you will have to read often of the activity of my studio days. Do not forget you have promised to write and to tell me the subjects you are interested in—it will be a great help to me. (“Memories from Yesterday”)

The final category concerns those texts that provide a brief look behind the scenes of movie making. They are meant on the one hand to deglamorize the profession, in order to scare away hopefuls who would give up everything to make it in the movies, and on the other to highlight the professional and fundamentally ethical nature of the business. She gently tries to dissuade those who think that, by doing as Pickford did, which they assume is “going on a diet” or “growing a wealth of curls,” they will be able to become big movie stars themselves. Apparently, the letters of hopefuls came in such large numbers that in one case Pickford writes how “refreshing” it is to receive a letter from a girl who does NOT want to become a movie actress or to write photoplays (“School Gardening”). In texts from this category, she also talked about how to best submit scenarios and gave tips (via ghost-

writer Frances Marion's experiences) on how to write them ("Movie Madness"; "Sunlight and Shadow at the Studio"; "Love, Reel and Theatrical"; "Rolling Stones"; "Moving Pictures and the Working Girl"; "For Amateur Scenario Writers").

Certain favorable character traits or moral positions of past or upcoming movie characters were cited by Pickford as coinciding with her own. On occasion, Pickford would even go back into character and addressed her fans as either Tess from *Tess of the Storm Country* (Edwin S. Porter, 1914) or from *Hulda from Holland* (John B. O'Brien, 1916). Of course, the reference to her screen characters was pure publicity, but it once again closed the gap between actress/person and fictional characters. Pickford writes how the audience often seemed to forget that Tess was a fictional character in that they saw her "as a real Tess in which Mary Pickford was submerged" ("When Tess Washed Her Hair"). Sometimes she seemed to be forgetting the distinction herself, taking on the identity of one of the characters and speaking in the voice of Hulda, for instance. She opens her column:

Mine feet's in a muddle, mine head's in a whirl. Ven I starts to dance like a leetle Dutch girl. So I am introducing myself to my friends now as Miss Hulda from Holland – that is what the picture we are working on is called, and, as you can guess, I stumble noisily through my part in large wooden shoes. ("Hulda From Holland")

In their totality, the "Daily Talks" can be read as a synthesis of the most salient and well-liked aspects of the developing Pickford star persona. We have seen that Pickford and Marion cleverly drew on familiar and effective literary models from the nineteenth (and early twentieth) century, continuing a tradition of women writers whose literary legacy was connected to the general emancipation of American women. Pickford and Marion thus implicitly validated this tradition of female self-searching, self-definition and self-improvement, but they also made this literary model and its effects comply with the commercial demands of a quickly professionalizing and increasingly star-oriented film industry. The familiar tone, the anecdotal content, the almost whispered secrets and the presumed integrity of the advice all worked to establish and uphold the sense of a "fundamental likeness," of a "unique" intimacy between the star and her readers, even within widely disseminated, mass-produced and mass-consumed medium like the printed press. As the suggested "likeness" could collect her fans into an intimate public of consumers, there was a commercial advantage to this rhetoric of intimacy and the encouragement of feminine solidarity. Fans themselves could also experience the advantages of this suggested likeness: if they followed the star's prescriptions and suggestions, their lives were likely to improve, a promise which again strengthened their attachment and loyalty to the star.

Amelie Hastie has shown that the repetition or imitation of spiritual, practical, financial advice from a star can lead to a special relationship of advanced identification and prolong the experience of stardom (182–193). "The Daily Talks" definitely facilitated such an advanced

identification but in addition to prolonging the experience stardom, they also intensified and encouraged the experience of a shared spiritual bonding, the experience of an almost ritualistic act of glorious commitment with a sanctified star. Tellingly, from the mid-1910s onwards, Pickford (in a curious oxymoron to her girl-next-door image) would frequently be associated with the sacred and spiritual; she would be described as “divine,” “cherubic,” “angelic,” and “above sin,” as well as exalting “Madonna-like” quality. The “Daily Talks” was the crucial site where the more complex aspects of the Pickford persona—the balance the sweet and approachable “Little Mary” and a more austere and untouchable “Our Mary,” worthy of a shrine—was crafted. Mary Pickford would rely on this this well-scripted persona until the end of her career.

THE AUTHOR: Anke Brouwers (1980) studied English Literature at the Free University of Brussels and the University of Antwerp. She has written a PhD. on sentimentalism in the films of Mary Pickford and Frances Marion. She teaches at the University of Antwerp and KASK Ghent. Her current research interests include American silent cinema, film narration, film and emotion, children’s cinema, and adaptation and intermediality.

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Claus Tieber

Mary Pickford—as Written by Frances Marion

ABSTRACT: Mary Pickford's star image consists of her on-screen persona of "little Mary" and her off-screen image as Mary Pickford, the successful actress and businesswomen, co-funder of United Artists. Both parts of her image, the sentimental, Victorian, female ideal and the modern woman of the 1910s and 1920s were to a large part written by Frances Marion. Marion did not only write the screenplays for Pickford's most successful films, she also helped to construct her off-screen image in ghost-writing Pickford's newspaper column "Daily Talks." In analyzing some of these columns the article examines Pickford's off-screen image and compares it with her screen persona. The result is an insight in the specifics of the construction of silent era star images.

The composite Pickford character was considerably less simple than she is generally supposed to have been. (Wagenknecht 158)

In dealing with a historical public figure, it is usually worthwhile to look up that person in an encyclopedia—in this case I consulted the *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*. Its entry on Mary Pickford reads:

The trade press published articles as early as 1910, noting that her fans called her "Little Mary." By 1912, illustrated magazines, such as McClure's, as well as newspapers, spread the word of her high salary. (Abel 520)

These two statements constitute a perfect starting point for my paper. In the most concise way they refer to the two sides of Mary Pickford: to her on- and off-screen image, to her screen persona as well as to her public image, or, in other words: to the "Little Mary" on screen and to "Mary Pickford," the actress, as an image "constructed in extra-textual discourse" as Gaylyn Studlar puts it (202).

Pickford was one of the very first film stars in silent cinema; she was able to define the very essentials of the term "star." More than most stars Pickford completely controlled her image both on and off the screen. She was able to do so with the help of screenwriter Frances Marion—Pickford's personal "public relations agent," so to speak—who literally wrote the roles for her, on screen and in "real" life.

My aim in this paper is to sketch the work of these two extraordinary women of silent cinema and to point out the modernity of their work. The question of modernity, feminism or progressive content in the films of Pickford and Marion is a heavily discussed one in the context of these women's work (see Ruvoli-Gruba; Basinger, 15-64).



With a coat covering her *My Best Girl* costume, Pickford stands with a battery of Mitchell cameras. She bought the first Mitchell for her cameraman, Charles Rosher. Third from left is a Bell and Howell 2709.

Mary Pickford and her battery of cameras.

Public Image

The first role that Marion wrote for Pickford was Gwendolyn in *Poor Little Rich Girl* (Maurice Tourneur, 1917). In 1915 Pickford was asked to write a daily column—entitled *Mary Pickford's Daily Talks*—distributed by the McClure Syndicate and published in many newspapers such as *The Detroit News* or *The Day*. This column, which was published until 1917, was ghost-written by Frances Marion. This film and the column were equally important for the construction of Pickford's image at this crucial point in her career (see Tieber, *Schreiben für Hollywood* [writing for Hollywood] 108).

Despite her image as the star that mostly played little girls, *Poor Little Rich Girl* was the very first film in which Pickford played a girl throughout the whole film, not a girl who grows up. But Pickford's public image was anything but a naïve little girl. Her status in the industry was well known, she was seen as a very successful businesswoman, a “modern woman, before such a concept was fully understood” as Jeanine Basinger writes (16).

As early as 1913, only a few years after it became customary to announce the names of film actors and actresses who then became known to the public, Pickford left Biograph to play for theatre producer-director David Belasco. Her salary in the movies was already noteworthy in 1913. The *Des Moines News* wrote about her comeback to the stage: she “went into the moving pictures to make money, and she left them to make more money” (qtd. in Keil and Singer 20).

Pickford's image as “America's sweetheart” was always connected with as well as contradicted by her image as a successful businesswoman. So much so that Charles Chaplin famously called her the “Bank of America's sweetheart” (Whitfield 146). Not only because of her extraordinary salary, but also because her films made money. Her image within the film industry was that of a tough, savvy businesswoman. A reflection of “the sexism of the time” can be detected in the remarks of her colleagues—both male and female. Ernst Lubitsch said: “She talks money, discusses contracts and makes important decisions with disconcerting speed.” Linda Arvidson adds: “That little thing with yellow curls thinking of money like that!” But as Lubitsch astonishingly stated: “nothing of this prevents her from playing scenes filled with sweetness and passion.” (See Whitfield 145).

At this crucial point in her career—*Tess of the Storm Country* (Edwin S. Porter, March 1914) “made” her the first film star in feature films and consequently her public image began to take shape—Pickford once again had a hand in steering her public image by “writing” her newspaper column “Daily Talks.”

The Column

Pickford's daily column shows a character that consists of different roles. Eileen Whitfield writes that Pickford/Marion “talks about life, movies, and morals” (152). One can divide

the content of her columns into three categories along these lines, presenting her to the public as a star, a woman, and an advisor. Each of these categories draws on a specific role Pickford performed in public. Each of them could be analyzed in their own right and in their appropriate contexts. The point of this paper however, is to point out the manifold identities that Pickford represented.

For the interpretation of these columns it is essential to know that they were based on fan letters. The header of each column read:

Miss Pickford invites readers of *The Globe* who desire her opinion or advice on any subject to write to her through this paper.

In her column she answers questions and discusses issues raised in the letters. Topics included the film industry, being a woman and morally correct behavior. By the way, at this time Pickford is twenty-six-year-old! Of course it also is remarkable which topics were left out of these columns (her marriage to Owen Moore, for example); but for the sake of sheer methodological pragmatism, I shall be concentrating on the issues that were discussed.

The Star

A large number of these columns deal with the entertainment business. Pickford tells some anecdotes from her life on stage and many more about her work in the movies. She allows her readers to peek behind the studio walls and get a glimpse of the life of a star.

A subgroup of this category concerns her advice on how to get into the movie business. In these pieces she mostly concentrates on screenwriting. This is understandable for several reasons. First of all, the real author of the columns is a screenwriter. Second: At the time when the columns were published, a craze called “Scenario Fever” was ripping through bigger American cities. Books and magazines about the craft of screenwriting were published in large numbers; screenwriting contests were held constantly. The industry was looking for new stories. Pickford’s column played its role in this search for screenwriters and encouraged its readers to write. The column only became judicial with regard to correspondence schools, “which take your money and give you nothing,” as Pickford/Marion writes. (“Scenario Writer Duped”) This is exactly the position of the first screenwriting societies, the precursors of the Writers Guild of which Marion became the first vice-president (see Tieber, *Schreiben für Hollywood* [writing for Hollywood] 202). Screenwriting was the only field of the film industry in which the column gave practical advice (“send your scripts to . . .” and so on). These columns (as well as similar texts by stars and industry insiders) helped the film industry to structure and regulate fan activities (see also Morey). Pickford offered her readers intimate insights and thus also made her work less glamorous and more real.

Pickford/Marion is much more detached and critical when it comes to acting. She also

finds practical answers for people who want to meet film stars. (“Don’t be disheartened, but most of the handsome leading men are very happily married to dear little wives,” “Love, Reel and Theatrical”). She tries to disillusion anyone who believes that she could marry a film star or become a star herself. Pickford/Marion is reasonable and realistic in a way that must have cured at least some of the “foolish, sentimental girls,” as she calls that share of her fans (“Letters from the Lovelorn”).

The columns also function as advertisements for her films as they frequently refer to her most recent productions. In 1915 eleven Pickford-films were released. The number dropped to five films in 1916 and to six in 1917 as a result of the transition to features.

The columns in this category render an image of Pickford as an ordinary person who just happens to be in the film industry (“I am an average woman”). The character that is supposedly writing the lines is presented as a sensible and experienced woman and not at all like the naïve and sentimental girl one would expect if one identified Pickford with her screen characters.

The Woman

A small number of the columns Marion wrote for Pickford contain stories putatively from the star’s childhood, advocating for the importance of fairy tales and Santa Claus in children’s lives. They depict the author as a good-hearted, optimistic young woman, expanding the actress’s otherwise rational and successful off-screen image. These columns correspond to Pickford’s more Victorian roles, which represent her as an old-fashioned, child-like woman (see Studlar). Though these pieces add a poetical, sensitive and altogether younger side to Pickford’s public image, they do not present her as simply a naïve girl since every sentence is ostensibly written by a mature woman looking back to her childhood in a nostalgic mood.

The Advisor

The greatest number of Pickford’s columns consists of moral advice to young women who ask her advice on love troubles, “real and imaginary.” She also gives advice on issues of personal appearance such as hairstyles and fashion trends. The authorial persona put forward in these columns is that of someone to be regarded as an authority on these topics by younger readers.

Pickford/Marion’s Daily Talks could and should be analyzed further (as Anke Brouwers does in this volume). For the aim of my paper it is sufficient to conclude that the public image of Mary Pickford in the mid-1910s as constructed by her films and in these columns is that of a character with varied and sometimes contradictory traits. She is rational, reasonable, experienced but also optimistic, poetic and sensitive. Pickford definitely was seen as a successful, grown-up twenty-six-year-old woman and not as a child star.

This means that she was not identified exclusively with her film roles. Her fans admired her not only for her screen persona, but also for being a skilled actress, whose stunts—playing children, playing childish scenes—they relished as much as those of Chaplin. A juvenile or childish aspect is not part of Pickford's public image, at least not in these columns.

The Films

Critics who have analyzed Pickford's screen persona fall into two camps. The first one argues that Pickford was trapped in her "Little Mary" image and that every attempt she made to break out of her typecasting as "America's Sweetheart" failed at the box office (see e.g. Studlar). Other scholars emphasize the variety of Pickford's screen characters, pointing to the fact that the films in which she played a girl from start to finish only represent a minor part of her *œuvre* (see e.g. Basinger). The first position focuses on a male, patriarchal society where women are stuck to their traditional roles. The second focuses on the role of a female agent, who is able to determine her own destiny. I want to look beyond these two positions and point out an often-neglected aspect of Pickford's screen persona.

The crucial aspect of Pickford's image is that she is *not* Little Mary, she only *plays* this character. Little Mary is a collaborative creation by Pickford and Frances Marion. In order to clarify this point, Pickford and Marion added various facets to Pickford's on- and off-screen persona. I have already sketched out how they created Pickford's public image through the "Daily Talks." In the second part of this paper, I want to give a similar sketch of how the two women attempted to vary and widen the character of "Little Mary" in order to make its construction visible.

But in order to expand a formula like that of Little Mary, it needs to be constructed in the first place. On the basis of her former screen characters and her already developed on-screen image, Pickford and Marion "re-launched" Little Mary in *Poor Little Rich Girl*. Here Pickford portrayed an eleven-year-old girl, the youngest character she ever played up to this time in her career. She also added humor to what was primarily a serious, melodramatic narrative; these comic scenes were included against the will of the film's director, Maurice Tourneur (Beauchamp 68). Thereafter, such humor became an essential ingredient of Pickford's screen persona. As Kevin Brownlow writes, Pickford was first and foremost a *comédienne* (119).

Frances Marion wrote adaptations of sentimental and melodramatic "growing girl" literature, (see Tibbetts, Ruvoli-Gruba, Tieber "Not Quite Classical"), but she changed the source material to create a heroine who was funny. "Nothing got her down. Whatever grim turn of the plot presented itself, she exhibited no self-pity and kept on trucking. . . . she offered hope and escape," Jeanine Basinger writes (15). Pickford's screen persona connects to the ideology of "American-ness" conveyed by this spunky figure and is the reason why the Canadian-born actress was called "*America's sweetheart*."

Comedy

JoAnne Ruvoli-Gruba reads the comic elements in the Pickford-Marion films as a sign of modernity. But even more than the comedy, the most modern element of the Pickford-Marion films is the opportunities they create for the display of performance-centered comic numbers, which reveal the fact that Pickford was indeed just acting. The mud-throwing scene in *Poor Little Rich Girl* or the circus sequence in *Rebecca of Sunnybrock Farm* (Marshall Neilan, 1917) are only two examples of these signature moments, which can be found in many of Pickford's films.

No screenwriter knew Pickford's acting skills better than Frances Marion. She was able to sketch such a scene with just a few lines, knowing what Pickford could make of it. In a scene from *Rebecca of Sunnybrock Farm* the Pickford character is confronted with two opposing moral mottos. The scene is very short and efficiently written. When looking at screenplays of that time, it is rare to find such a short description for a much longer scene on film.

Scene 89.

Int. Kitchen – Sawyer Home (FULL VIEW)

Rebecca enters with dishes – puts them on sink, rocks back and forth, picks up pie – licks a little juice from edge of dish – reaches up to cupboard for knife to cut pie – sees sign-reads:

34. Insert: (Old Fashioned Motto)
“Thou Shalt Not Steal.”

Rebecca is startled – puts knife back – starts to go out of room.

Scene 90

Int. Kitchen Sawyer Home – (FULL VIEW)

As Rebecca walks toward dining room – Stops, sees another motto by the door – reads:

35. Insert: (Motto as follows):
“God Help Them Who Help Themselves.”

Rebecca reading sign.

Scene 91

Int. Kitchen .- Sawyer Home – (FULL VIEW)

Rebecca marches back – starts to eat pie.

Scene 92

Int. Kitchen – Sawyer Home – (CLOSE UP)

Rebecca's face – smeared from ear to ear with pie. (FADE OUT) (Marion, *Rebecca of Sunnybrock Farms*. Scenario.)

Such moral epigrams were standard in the silent era, especially in the 1910s. The film is making explicitly fun of this morality in melodramatic films of that time. The self-consciousness and intertextuality of this scene is an unequivocal sign of modernity.

Duality

Jeanine Basinger writes about Pickford's status in 1918: "[s]he had developed a screen character of her own; and she was already attempting to expand the boundaries of that character" (34). One way to achieve this was via dual roles: "[t]hroughout 1918, she appeared successfully in movies that presented the public 'two Marys': *Stella Maris*, *Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley*, *M'Liss*, and *Johanna Enlists*. In each film she played her traditional character and a better-looking, better-dressed version of herself" (Basinger 34).

It is no coincidence that all these films were written by Frances Marion. The possibilities to play two different sides of a character were the following: "by growing up, by having a dream or fantasy, or by playing a second, older character." (Basinger 34).

In this way Pickford emphasized the fact that she was acting—she exposed her acting in an almost Brechtian sense. One should not forget that Pickford's films had relatively high production values, that the shots, which show her in two roles in one frame were technically demanding special effects. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Alfred E. Green, Jack Pickford, 1921, not written by Marion) she even kisses herself.

Another way of "expanding the boundaries" of her screen persona was to play both male and female characters, sometimes within the same film, as she does in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

Gender Play

In terms of gender roles Pickford mainly appears as an old-fashioned ideal, in contrast to more progressive contemporary female types, like the "new woman" or the "flapper" (see Studlar). Yet the gender identities of Pickford's characters are usually very ambiguous. Her roles sometimes include cross-dressing, and she often plays characters who are tomboys.

Pickford's predilection for cross-dressing is well illustrated in a scene in *Poor Little Rich Girl*, which shows her character Gwendolyn being punished. She has to dress like a boy. When she looks into a mirror, however, Gwendolyn quite likes herself as a boy: "I am Gwendolyn, and I am a boy" the intertitle reads. Nowadays, if a pop star like Anthony from *Anthony and the Johnsons* sings the following lines, he is being praised for enhancing the boundaries of traditional gender roles in popular culture:

One day I'll grow up, I'll be a beautiful woman
One day I'll grow up, I'll be a beautiful girl
But for today I am a child, for today I am a boy.
(“For Today I am a boy”)

In the case of Mary Pickford the same lighthearted play with gender roles has been largely ignored by her critics.

In *Little Lord Fauntleroy* Pickford plays a boy throughout the whole film. But she more commonly plays a tomboy. In many cases the sex of these characters has been changed from the source material to enable such a portrayal, for Pickford's growing girl narratives depict a process which begins with a child who plays with gender roles and concludes with a woman, "who in the end marries a lover waiting in the wings for Mary's character to grow up" as Kevin Brownlow writes (157).

Conclusion

I have argued that Mary Pickford cannot be reduced to just one single image or identity. "Little Mary" was complemented by the public image of Mary Pickford, the successful businesswoman and columnist. In her films, too, Pickford complicated her screen persona. She played characters at different age stages. She played dual roles. She played girls, boys and women and therefore was able to raise questions about gender roles in at least some of her films. "Mary Pickford" was constituted out of a number of complex and contradictory elements, which Pickford put on display both on and off screen. Most of these identities were developed in concert with her closest collaborator: Frances Marion. In this way Pickford was able to control her image both on and off screen to an extent still rarely encountered in film history. In the end it was her own decision to "kill" "Little Mary," to cut her curls, bob her hair and play an almost flapper-like character in *My Best Girl* (1927). Needless to say: the film was written by Frances Marion.

The modernity of Mary Pickford cannot be found by looking solely at the issues raised in her films. Rather, her image is better understood as a composite of the multiple identities she assumed both on and off the screen. Further, by letting movie audiences perceive that she was only acting rather than just "being herself": in many of her films, she encouraged her fans to view gender identities as roles which could be changed. In all of these projects, her friend and collaborator Francis Marion was a crucial partner.

THE AUTHOR: Claus Tieber is research assistant at the department of musicology, University of Salzburg, lecturer at the department of theater, film and television studies, University of Vienna. He has been guest lecturer at universities in Kiel (Germany) and Salamanca (Spain) and leader of several research projects, the most recent about silent film music. He has published among others in: *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, *Film International*, and *Montage A/V*. His most recent monographs are: *Schreiben für Hollywood. Das Drehbuch im Studiosystem* [writing for Hollywood. the script in the studio system], Münster et al: Lit Verlag 2008, *Stummfilmdramaturgie. Erzählweisen des amerikanischen Feature Films 1917 – 1927* [silent film drama. narrative forms of American feature films 1917-1927]. Münster et al.: Lit Verlag 2011.

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Kristen Anderson Wagner

Silent Comediennes and “The Tragedy of Being Funny”¹

ABSTRACT: Articles in fan magazines of the 1910s and 1920s with titles such as “Is it Tragic to Be Comic?” and “The Tragedy of Being Funny” often situated comediennes as victims—of their circumstances, their talents, or their looks—and films such as *Show People* and *Ella Cinders* to some degree supported the idea that being a funny woman was cause for pity as well as praise. Longstanding cultural stereotypes held that women could be either feminine or funny, and as a result female comics were frequently labeled as unsuccessful women as well as comedians. Despite the fact that many women had lucrative careers in film comedy, comediennes were frequently depicted in the popular press as uncomfortable with building their careers in comedy, uneasy about performing physical comedy, or afraid of looking ridiculous. Paradoxically, fan magazines and trade journals generally acknowledged, and even promoted, women’s humor, although traces of pervasive stereotypes about the incompatibility of comedy and femininity are evident in these discourses, and reflect broader concerns in American society about appropriate behavior for women. This paper traces some of these complex discourses and debates surrounding funny women that played out in the press and onscreen in the early twentieth century.

In 1934 Louise Fazenda, one of the most popular and acclaimed comediennes of the silent era, was asked by *Movie Classic* magazine to explain what it takes to become a comedian. Her response revealed a profound uneasiness toward comedy:

The making of a comedian—a woman comedian, at least—comes from hurt feelings. No woman on earth wants to be funny. No woman on earth wants to be laughed at. In fact, the last thing on earth any woman wants is to be considered funny. I believe that every comedienne is the child of an inner tragedy. I don’t know if all of the funny men are “clowns with aching hearts,” but I do know that all funny women are, if they’ll be honest about it. (Hall, “Have YOU Got the Makings of a COMEDIAN?” 30)

Fazenda’s feelings of pain and disappointment about performing comedy were well documented throughout her career, and her image as a reluctant comedienne became an important part of her off-screen persona. But Fazenda was not the only comedienne who was said to be ambivalent about her profession. Articles in fan magazines with titles such as “Is it Tragic to Be Comic?” (Hall) and “The Tragedy of Being Funny” (Talmadge) situated comediennes as victims—of their circumstances, their talents, and their looks—and films such as *The Extra Girl* (F. Richard Jones, 1923), *Ella Cinders* (Alfred E. Green, 1926), and *Show People* (King Vidor, 1928) to some degree supported the idea that being a funny woman was cause for pity as well as praise. This dynamic is perfectly illustrated in a *Motion Picture Classic*

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profile of Polly Moran:

Is it tragic to be comic? Would *you* like to be laughed at everywhere, all the time?
No matter what you might say or do? No matter how you might feel?
Mustn't there be moments when a comic would like to be taken seriously?
And especially if the comic in question is a woman. Like—well, like Polly Moran.

What do you suppose it does feel like to have the whole world know you as a ridiculous individual who can make it split its sides, but never break its heart? (Hall, "Is It Tragic to Be Comic?" 48)

These discourses highlight some of the contradictions and complexities surrounding women's performance of comedy in silent films. Longstanding cultural stereotypes held that women could be either feminine or funny, but seldom both, and as a result female comics were frequently labeled as unsuccessful women as well as unsuccessful comedians. Despite the fact that a great many women had long and lucrative careers in film comedy, and comediennes were very popular with silent-era audiences, comediennes were frequently depicted in the popular press as uncomfortable with building their careers in comedy, uneasy about performing physical comedy, or afraid of looking ridiculous in public. This tension shows up in interviews and articles in which comediennes describe their uneasiness with comedy, relate their initial dismay at discovering their comic tendencies, and discuss their desire to "graduate" to drama or move away from "vulgar" slapstick. But rather than avoiding the genre altogether, comediennes negotiated a comic space for themselves in myriad ways. Some advocated a more refined, "feminine" comedy as an alternative to the rough-and-tumble slapstick that many felt was unsuitable for women, and some—acquiescing to prejudices against funny women—spoke of their desire to leave comedy for more respectable dramas. Other comediennes unapologetically embraced comedy, even lowbrow slapstick, to the delight of their fans and the consternation of their critics. At the same time, fan magazines and trade journals generally acknowledged, and even promoted, women's humor, although traces of pervasive stereotypes about the incompatibility of comedy and femininity are evident in these discourses. Most often, however, these stereotypes appear in these publications only to be disproved and dismissed, a shrewd strategy for trade journals trying to market their stars, and fan magazines whose largely female readership would likely be interested in stories of women breaking boundaries and defying expectations.

Are Women Funny?

Public debates about whether women have a sense of humor and the nature of women's humor date to at least the nineteenth century and continue to the present day. Throughout

the nineteenth century the “cult of domesticity,” as defined by Barbara Welter, reinforced the image of women as emotional, rather than intellectual beings, and as a result “womanly wit had difficulty maneuvering around the image of ideal womanhood—an image that denigrated woman’s intellect in favor of her emotional and intuitive nature” (Welter; Walker 27). Writers who debated the issue of female humor often used her perceived capacity for emotion, rather than intellect, as justification to deny her the aptitude for humor. Writing in 1842, a contributor to *Graham’s Magazine* claimed that “there is a body and substance to true wit, with a reflectiveness rarely found apart from a masculine intellect . . . The female character does not admit of it” (qtd. in Jenkins 526). French philosopher Henri Bergson, in his 1900 essay on comedy, declared that “laughter has no greater foe than emotion . . . [H]ighly emotional souls, in tune and unison with life, in whom every event would be sentimentally prolonged and re-echoed, would neither know nor understand laughter” (63). Given the popular conception at the time of women as “highly emotional souls,” it would follow that in Bergson’s view women are excluded from laughter.

The inherently aggressive nature of comedy was also thought to be diametrically opposed to the cultural ideal of femininity as defined at the turn of the twentieth century, with its emphasis on submissiveness, deference and passivity. For many critics and writers, humor was at odds with perceived notions of how proper middle- and upper-class women should behave. Comedians deliver *punch* lines and *kill* their audiences. They call attention to society’s idiosyncrasies and failings rather than quietly accepting the world as it is, and in so doing they often expose truths that would otherwise go unspoken. In vaudeville, the aggressive nature of comedy was apparent in the fact that comedians frequently addressed the audience directly, actively engaging and confronting spectators, while singers, dancers and other performers were more submissive, positioning themselves as recipients rather than bearers of the gaze. This dynamic can also be seen in Keystone comedies of the 1910s, as the comic actors (both male and female) engaged in violent knockabout routines and gags, while the bathing beauties (always female) stood quietly on the sidelines and observed, but seldom participated in, the chaos.

Despite the depth of popular sentiment that femininity and comedy were incompatible, the increasing numbers of women making a living as comediennes in the early twentieth century prompted some to allow that women could, perhaps, have a sense of humor. However, even those writers and critics who conceded women’s humor argued that women’s sensitive and emotional, rather than intellectual, nature meant that they were capable of understanding and appreciating only the most subtle, delicate humor (see Coquelin). And if women were more inclined toward gentle, subtle, and emotional comedy, it follows that “low” types of physical comedy, such as slapstick, were too coarse for women’s sensibilities. One writer claimed that when women are confronted with wit and humor “in the form of what is boisterous and broad and rough, she does not recognize them,” and another explained that women’s humor “is delicate, sympathetic, refined to the highest culture. True humor delights

her, while buffoonery, if it be brutal, shocks her” (Coquelin 68; Burdette qtd. in Kibler 59). *Moving Picture World* echoed this sentiment, saying that “Slapstick comedy with man-made laughs, and broad masculine humor seldom please the woman patron. . . .” (Brown). These writers allow for women’s appreciation of humor, as long as the humor is suitably ladylike.

The idea that slapstick and “low” comedy were inherently unfeminine was especially problematic for female comedians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as this type of comedy was becoming prominent on the stage, and later on the screen. “New Humor,” a popular new type of comedy that reflected the energetic and chaotic modern world, was violent, anarchic and fast-paced, and served as the basis for slapstick and unruly performances on stage. Based in inversion and disorder, New Humor was a decidedly lowbrow break from earlier forms of comedy that tended to be slower-paced and more thoughtful. However, traditionally defined femininity did not allow for enjoyment of New Humor and low comedy, as women were supposed to be too sensitive, too refined, and too “ladylike” to enjoy comedy based on visceral humor and laughter based on shocks (Glenn 43). Still, many female comedians, including Eva Tanguay, Sophie Tucker, and Charlotte Greenwood made use of this type of low comedy in their vaudeville and burlesque performances. These performances served to contradict the popular notion that women were either uninterested in low comedy or incapable of performing it, and would inform the types of comedy performed by film comediennes in the 1910s and 1920s.

“I Had the Idea I Could Act”

Reflecting this longstanding cultural ambivalence toward women performing comedy, comediennes were sometimes described as feeling shock and anguish when they first discovered that they were funny, as if admitting the presence of a sense of humor was tantamount to admitting the absence of femininity. As one writer phrased it, “It took Charlotte Greenwood six years to learn that she was funny. It took another year to reconcile herself to the idea” (“Unidentified Clipping” ca. 1916). The idea that Greenwood would have to “reconcile herself” to a trait that was the key to her fame and fortune indicates the extent to which women could have internalized negative stereotypes about being funny. Rather than seeing a sense of humor as a positive trait, it’s presented as something that a woman must reluctantly come to terms with. As such, certain press discourses argue that women only turn to comedy as a last resort, like Greenwood, who “didn’t start out in life to become a comedienne. Few comediennes do” (“Unidentified Clipping”). Similarly, Louise Fazenda describes her early attempts at drama, and their disastrously comedic results:

When I started into pictures I had the idea I could act; you know what I mean, highbrow stuff and dramatic things, and romantic pictures. The director gave me several bits in straight dramas but I always managed to ball things up. I was so awkward I was always falling over my

feet or somebody else's feet, and once I ruined a whole scene by falling down a flight of stairs.

Things like that happened right along, until it got to be a joke that I'd mess up any "bit" that was given me and turn it into comedy—unconsciously. At last I was kindly but firmly told that I had missed my vocation, which might be comedy, but which assuredly was not drama. (Squier 4)

These stories about Greenwood and Fazenda share a common narrative of the comedienne's dismay over the discovery of her humor, and eventual reluctant acceptance.

This idea of comediennes as naturally, but reluctantly funny shows up in several films. Mabel Normand in *The Extra Girl*, Colleen Moore in *Ella Cinders* and Marion Davies in *Show*



A portrait of Louise Fazenda.

People each plays an aspiring actress hoping to make a name for herself in dramatic roles. In each case, the character is clearly better suited to comedy, and this fact gets in the way of her dramatic ambitions. The inherent irony of these films lies in the fact that while the characters long to play dramatic roles and stumble upon comedy inadvertently, the actresses themselves were celebrated comediennes who worked hard to develop their comic technique. And so the trait—humor—that stands in the way of the characters realizing their goals is the same trait on which the actresses built their careers.

In *The Extra Girl*, Sue Graham (Normand) sees Hollywood as an exciting escape from a small-town existence and a pre-arranged marriage to a man she doesn't love. Sue's predilection for drama is evidenced early in the film when she acts out melodramatic scenes involving sheiks and exaggerated swoons, but Normand's, and by extension Sue's, talent for comedy overshadows her attempts at drama. When Sue is given the opportunity to make a screen test for a drama, she is consistently, albeit unintentionally, funny. After stepping in gum she gets a brick stuck to her shoe, and then she sits on a workman's dirty glove, leaving a black handprint on her white bloomers. Entering the scene for another take she bends over, causing her hoop skirt to fly up and flashing her bloomers—complete with the handprint on her rear—to the assembled cast and crew, who howl with laughter. Sue's unintentionally comic performance is reminiscent of the press accounts of Louise Fazenda's beginnings in Hollywood; like Sue, her attempts to join the ranks of serious actors are thwarted by her irrepressibly comic personality. Unaware that she is the source of the comedy, Sue is nevertheless encouraged by the reaction to her screen test, gushing to her beau that "the director said I was just naturally funny."

Like *The Extra Girl*, *Show People* centers on an aspiring dramatic actress—Peggy Pepper (Davies)—who is better suited for comedy. Peggy's first experience before the camera resembles Sue's, in that the comedy she creates is inadvertent. Although Peggy's first film is a slapstick comedy, she believes she's appearing in a drama, and even recites some lines from a stage melodrama for the director before he begins shooting. When she enters the scene, however, she's sprayed in the face with seltzer water; outraged, she responds by throwing anything within reach at the other actors. As everyone laughs at her bravura performance she begins to cry and runs off the set, and when her friend Billy follows her she sobs, "I came here to do drama. Why didn't you tell me it was this?" Billy gently helps Peggy reapply her makeup as he comforts her, reminding her that "all the stars have had to take it on the chin—Swanson, Daniels, Lloyd—all of them." Peggy's sense of shame is palpable, and Billy's attempts to console her and prepare her for the next take are both tender and mildly unsettling, as he paints her face while reassuring her that "it'll be easy from now on," and urging her to engage in a bodily activity that she finds both distasteful and humiliating. Despite her reservations, Peggy decides to "take it on the chin" and continue in comedy, eventually making a name for herself as a comedienne. However, when the chance comes to leave comedy and move to drama she jumps at the opportunity. But while Peggy Pepper is



Mabel Normand in *The Extra Girl* (F. Richard Jones, 1923).

uncertain about comedy, *Show People* is not. From the film's beginning it's clear that Peggy was meant for comedy, and, as with Sue Graham, even when she's engaged in "serious" drama she's funny. Furthermore, the film can be seen as a comment on Davies' own career, as she alternated comedies with historical dramas despite the fact that many critics thought she was a natural and very talented comedienne—the year *Show People* was released *Photoplay* called Davies "a superb comedienne," and *Variety* said that she "does some really great comedy work" (York; "Untitled" *Variety*, Apr. 1928). The film's happy ending doesn't just involve the romantic union between Peggy and Billy; it also involves Peggy abandoning her highbrow dramas and embracing her comic nature—"the *real* Peggy Pepper" that the studio head lamented was lost in her high-class pictures.

Ella Cinders features another take on the trope of a woman whose natural humor stands in the way of her dramatic ambitions. In a retelling of the Cinderella tale, Ella (Moore) is abused by her stepmother and stepsisters and lives a life of drudgery. Ella enters her photo in a beauty



William Haines consoles Marion Davies in *Show People* (King Vidor, 1928).

contest hoping to escape her life by winning a trip to Hollywood and a movie contract, but unbeknownst to her the picture submitted by the photographer was taken at the moment a fly landed on her nose. Instead of the glamorous portrait Ella had hoped to submit, her contest photo instead features her scrunching up her face and looking cross-eyed at the fly. Despite this, she wins the contest—as the fire chief/judge tells her, “Beauty means nothin’. We firemen see the best-lookin’ wimmin at their worst. The movies needs newer and funnier faces.” She is initially hurt by the thought that people are laughing at her, but is reassured when her beau reminds her, “Not everyone can make people laugh, Ella. It’s a great thing—making people happy.” Although Ella worries that her outdated clothing and plain appearance would handicap her in the beauty contest, her natural humor—demonstrated earlier in the film when she’s seen clowning around to entertain children that she’s babysitting—is what sets her apart from the more conventionally attractive but humorless contestants and sends her to Hollywood. And while Ella eventually finds success in dramatic pictures, not comedies, Colleen Moore turns in an exceptional comedic performance in this and many other films, a fact that complicates the message of the film. Ella’s natural flair for comedy—whether intentional or not—leads to her success as a dramatic actress, a plot point that would seem to privilege drama over comedy within the diegesis. However, Colleen Moore’s extradiegetic commercial and artistic success as a comic actress provided a clear example for fans of a funny woman who preferred to make a career in comedies.

“A Stepping Stone to the Heavier Dramatic Roles”

Not surprisingly, given the prejudices against women performing comedy, many actresses who began their careers as comediennes were only too glad to “graduate” to drama. As it was for Sue Graham, Peggy Pepper, and Ella Cinders, comedy for some comediennes was seen as a sort of generic ghetto, a starting point that must be abandoned as soon as possible if one had any hopes of becoming a legitimate actress. Fay Tincher was quoted as saying, “Screen farce has never appealed to me. Comedy is, at best, a transitory entertainment that seldom lingers in a person’s mind after it is over. Drama is a different matter. Drama affects—for drama is life” (“Fay Tincher – An Ingenuish Vampire”). *The Morning Telegraph* let readers know that Bebe Daniels “accepted less money than she was getting with [Pathé] in order to get away from comedies and get into the serious side of picture making” (“Untitled,” *The Morning Telegraph*, Feb. 3, 1924). And a 1924 article on Dorothy Devore spelled out the strategy of many actresses who started in comedy, by describing her as “another of the young women film stars who is going to use her training in the comedy school as a stepping stone to the heavier dramatic roles in the silent drama” (“Comedienne Sighs For Other Worlds”). This disdain towards comedy certainly wasn’t limited to female comics, as comedy in general was seldom taken seriously, both literally and figuratively, whether it featured the work of men or women. But when understood alongside the existing belief that most women were naturally

more emotional and therefore suited to drama, and that drama was a more fitting genre for properly feminine women, one can see that the stakes for women performing comedy were higher than for men. The supposed incompatibility of femininity and humor, coupled with the general perception of comedy as lowbrow, led to the uncomfortable possibility of comediennes being regarded as lacking in both femininity and class. Along with reporting on comediennes' desires to leave comedy, the press often implicitly passed judgment on the genre through the language it used, referring to Constance Talmadge's pictures as "mere refined comedy" and Gale Henry as "just a comedienne," and describing dramatic films as "important pictures" and "more ambitious things," and a dramatic performer as "a real actress" ("Two Weeks"; "A Look at Mehitabel Lactea"; "Coiffure Note: Louise Fazenda Still Wears Those Old Pigtails"; "Unidentified Photo Caption"; Cheatham).

"The Comedy of Ideas"

The ambivalence that many comediennes felt towards performing comedy was not always evidenced by their high rate of defection to dramatic films. Many comediennes built their entire careers around comedy films, making few, if any, dramas. However, just as some saw comedy as a whole as a sort of generic ghetto, most perceived a hierarchy among different types of comedy, with light comedy viewed as far more respectable than slapstick. Women had a complicated relationship to slapstick—although physical comedy was considered lowbrow and at odds with proper feminine behavior, slapstick comediennes such as Louise Fazenda and Polly Moran were popular with audiences. Until the mid-1910s slapstick was by far the predominate mode of comedy found on-screen, but by the late 1910s longer film lengths and the growing reliance on intertitles for jokes allowed for more complicated plots, and comedy based more on situation than on gags and stunts. Both male and female comics continued to use physical comedy in their films throughout the 1920s, but by the late 1910s comediennes were increasingly vocal about their desire to leave slapstick for what was termed "comedy-drama."

Comediennes frequently referred to "refinement" and "dignity" when discussing their preference for comedy-drama over slapstick. Mabel Normand explained in 1916 that,

She wants to be a trifle more serious and dignified than they have allowed her to be in the Keystone comedies. She says comedy does not altogether consist of falling downstairs and throwing custard pies, and she believes that she can be just as funny in more dignified situations. ("They Will Not Remain in Comedy")

Dorothy Devore echoed this sentiment when she explained that "A starring comedienne cannot afford to be anything but a perfect lady," and "the kicking, punching and slapping which an audience 'eats up' when a man is the purveyor or recipient just doesn't go with a

leading woman on the screen” (“The Big Four of Educational”). Both Normand and Devore position slapstick comedy as undignified and unladylike, recalling debates about whether physical comedy was appropriate for women and whether lowbrow humor had a place in refined cinema. This line of thinking represents a compromise of sorts for female comics. By denigrating slapstick as lowbrow and coarse and simultaneously praising comedy-drama as dignified and refined, comediennes could continue to perform comedy while retaining an acceptably feminine appearance. For comediennes wary about slapstick’s link to suspect femininity, light comedy and comedy-drama offered a more refined alternative.

While those comediennes who were closely linked to slapstick had a more difficult time leaving their old antics behind—Gale Henry sighed that she was “trying to get away from the pie-throwing type of picture . . . but it seems as if the comedy fan never tires of an artistic fall off a cliff, or a good free-for-all chase” (Webster)—others were able to easily transition to what Anita Loos called the “comedy of ideas,” and ultimately situation-based comedy-drama would become the dominant mode of comedy.

“Comedies, Always Comedies”

As writers, critics, social conservatives, and even some comediennes were debating the range and value of women’s humor, many female comics made it clear that they liked making comedies. Newspapers and fan magazines often described comediennes’ pleasure in performing comedy and in making people laugh, and paradoxically, even comediennes who reportedly wanted to abandon comedy in favor of drama were, at times, said to be delighted with comic work. While the most obvious reason for this contradiction has to do with the needs of press agents and studio publicity departments when promoting a new film—an actress’s relative love of comedy or drama would certainly rise or fall depending on the genre of her latest picture—it also reflects the broader societal ambivalence surrounding women and comedy. Very few, if any, comediennes were said to be entirely comfortable with comedy throughout their careers. Instead they were generally depicted as conflicted in some way, whether uneasy about performing physical comedy, uncomfortable with their character makeup and costumes, or afraid of looking ridiculous in public, none of which is surprising, given how controversial the discourses surrounding women’s humor were. If simply having a sense of humor raised doubts about a woman’s femininity, then actively engaging in comic performances could be seen as an affront to and unraveling of traditional gender roles. For the press, fans and comediennes to show a certain degree of ambivalence or unease about female comics, then, is understandable. At the same time, the fact that many comediennes embraced comedy can be read as an act of rebellion, however minor. Even if their stated love of comedy was followed up, on the release of their next dramatic film, by lengthy discussions of their preference for drama, and even if they were depicted as “clowns with aching hearts” longing to have their dramatic talents discovered, when comediennes

were said to enjoy performing comedy they were publicly declaring that women could be unapologetically funny, actively creating humor rather than being the passive butt of the joke.

The image of the “tragic comedienne”—the performer who longs to trade the indignities of comedy for the refinement of drama—was repeated in the press so often that it became a sort of stereotype. As such, the press was quick to draw attention to comediennes who contradicted that stereotype in claiming that they were happy with comedy. Colleen Moore’s reported preference for comedy over drama was said to be “reversing the familiar situation which has robbed the comedy concerns of so many of their leading luminaries” (“Untitled” *Photoplay Journal*, c. 1920). In explaining her affinity for comedy, Moore referenced the notion that women were inherently more emotional than men:

I would rather play comedy than anything else, even if it is more difficult. Practically all women are emotional. They can cry and pound the door and create a rumpus, but few can make people laugh. That is what I want to do. A genuine comedy scene must be studied and worked and felt. (“Colleen Moore Likes Comedy Best”)

Rather than acquiescing to her “feminine” emotions, Moore embraces the challenge that comedy supposedly presents, and in so doing she implicitly questions the need for women to abide by societal restrictions regarding what women can and can’t do.

This is reinforced by other comediennes who similarly expressed a preference for comedy over drama. At the conclusion of a 1920 interview with Gale Henry, a *Photoplay* writer “realized with amazement that the interview seemed to be nearing an end and Miss Henry hadn’t said a word about how she longed to make really big, serious pictures. . . . Gale Henry was content to stick to comedy” (Webster). Another writer noted that Constance Talmadge “refused to live up to the tradition that all motion picture actresses long to make massive productions of the classics,” and that she was, as she herself put it, “pretty satisfied with the parts I have” (“The Coming Film Comedy of Ideas”). Certainly these stories about comediennes who were satisfied with their line of work were complicated by the many stories of comediennes who couldn’t wait to leave the genre behind. Much of the discourse surrounding women who “graduated” to drama involved consideration of external factors—whether comediennes would be regarded by others as unrefined or unfeminine if they stayed in comedy or slapstick. When the press described women who were content to play comedy, however, they often wrote of their personal satisfaction with the genre, an approach that makes sense given the claims of many fan magazines that comedians, both male and female, were “born funny.” Comedy, in this viewpoint, was a logical and fulfilling mode of expression for people with an innate sense of humor, a view that perhaps seems obvious today, but which was at the time somewhat revolutionary given the very vocal critics who felt that women couldn’t and shouldn’t be funny. A declaration by Charlotte Greenwood, then, that “I love my work because I love to hear my audiences laugh and I love to laugh myself” or

by Constance Talmadge that the films she wants to make are “Comedies, always comedies” (“Unidentified Clipping”; Vogdes) confirms that women could unapologetically enjoy and engage in comedy, despite concerns about dignity or femininity. In fact, humor could be an effective way for women to face challenges and adversity. Fan magazines encouraged female fans to take their cues from comediennes and similarly see humor as a valuable asset. In a profile of Marie Dressler *Photoplay* told its readers, “If you get depressed because there are wrinkles just beginning to show around your eyes take a look at Marie. Sure, she has wrinkles. They got there from laughing,” and *Motion Picture Classic* assured fans that Polly Moran “is a woman who may find it, now and then, tragic to be comic, but who is wise enough to know that it is a good deal more comic to be tragic” (Albert; Hall, “Is It Tragic to Be Comic?” 93). By highlighting the fact that many comediennes enjoyed performing comedy and appreciated humor, fan magazines and comediennes themselves were contradicting pervasive sexist discourses about women and comedy, and showing fans that a sense of humor could be a welcome, and even admirable, quality.

Conclusion

Although many comediennes were said to be ambivalent about comedy, their ambivalence reflected broader concerns in American society about appropriate behavior for women. The fact that so many actresses chose to stay in comedy, despite any concerns they many have had about the genre, would have sent a strong message to fans that women didn’t have to restrict themselves to appropriate behavior as defined by others, or try to conform to an idealized and outmoded conception of femininity. By performing, enjoying, and succeeding in comedy, comediennes showed that women could safely step outside the confines of traditional femininity and find a new definition of femininity that suited their own individual proclivity and talents.

THE AUTHOR: Kristen Anderson Wagner received her Ph.D. in Critical Studies from the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, and currently teaches film studies in Northern California. Her dissertation, *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*, explores the often-overlooked work of silent-era comediennes. Kristen’s recent publications include chapters in *Not So Silent: Women in Cinema Before Sound* and *The Blackwell Companion to Film Comedy*, and an article in *Velvet Light Trap*’s Fall 2011 issue on comedy.

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Qin Xiqing

Pearl White and the New Female Image in Chinese Early Silent Cinema¹

ABSTRACT: Considering the synchronism between the screening of American serials in China and the production of the first few Chinese feature-length films, this paper traces the interaction between Pearl White and Chinese actresses in the early 1920s. It demonstrates how Pearl White was absorbed into Chinese vernacular cinematic culture through the mediation of Chinese film actresses in the early years of Chinese filmmaking. Taking *The Shun Pao* [Chinese Daily News], one of the most influential newspapers in the 1920s, as its main resource and reconsidering Chinese film history in terms of modernity and gender, this paper reveals how American serial movies, especially “serial queens” such as Pearl White, created a new female image for Chinese movie-goers. It further explores how Yin Mingzhu (1904-1989), a Chinese actress known for her Pearl White-style attire in off-screen life, links Pearl White with the transformation of femininity of modern Chinese women and their search for a new self-image.

American serials enjoyed huge popularity in Shanghai throughout the 1920s, and played a very special role in Chinese early filmmaking. Less sophisticated in terms of both technique and narration style than the later films made in the first half of 1930s, the early Shanghai production bear discernable traces of an American influence—the cultural influence of the American silent serial, one of the favourite film genres at this time in China. Not only did American serials inspire Chinese filmmakers to shoot crime films, but some of the typical devices of this genre were assimilated into the melodrama genre as well, where fight scenes were often intentionally added as a hook to attract Chinese audiences. In the late 1920s, the craze for the *wuxiapian* genre [knight-errant film], also bore trace of the Chinese fascination with the foreign chapter plays.

This influence, however, has been given little domestic academic attention, partly because the Chinese intellectual discourse on cinema has been traditionally very critical of the silent serials. A moralistic judgement about such silent American productions persists even today in one of the most authoritative textbooks of Chinese film history, *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi* [history of the development of Chinese cinema] (Cheng, Li, and Xing).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Zhang Zhen's and then Weihong Bao's publications have reoriented the historical and theoretical research in this field. Together, these scholars have initiated a rewriting of Chinese early film history in terms of modernity. Their work is anchored in Miriam Hansen's concept of “vernacular modernism,” which understands American classical cinema as a “sensory reflexive horizon” of the modern experience and relocates Chinese early cinema in a larger cultural context of heterogeneous media and urban cultural forms. According to Hansen, by the late 1920s and the early 1930s,

¹ I wish to thank Professor Kay Armatage for all her advice and help without which this paper would have been impossible.

Chinese culture had modernized in ways that exceeded the purview of literary and intellectual modernism. It had developed responses to modernization in a wide range of media and on a mass scale, spawning a vernacular form of modernism. This modernist vernacular may not always have tallied with the ideals of national culture formulated in literary and political discourse at the time, but it clearly represented an idiom of its own kind, a locally and culturally specific aesthetics. (19)

To rethink Chinese silent cinema in terms of modernity also provides a new approach to the function of women's presence on screen, especially because the female images are considered in both studies as being so many early "embodiments" of vernacular Chinese film culture. For example, Zhang Zhen argues that the figure interpreted by Xuan Jinglin (1907-1992) in *Yin Mu Yan Shi* (an amorous history of the silver screen, 1931) embodies the vernacular experience of modernity in early twentieth-century China. Hansen points out that the female characters re-enact the contradictions of modernity, arguing that the figuration of the woman through a masquerade-like performance multiplies the films' meanings and undermines the traditional gender binary code. Following Hansen, Weihong Bao further explores the encounter between the American serial queen genre and a subgenre of the Chinese martial arts cinema, the *nü-xiapian* [female knight-errant film]. She traces the reception of Pearl White's films and their impact on a particular configuration of the female body in Chinese silent cinema, the *nüxia* or "female knight-errant," a character that appeared in Chinese martial arts films in the 1927-1931 period. The female vernacular bodies discussed in these studies, however, are mainly confined to examples emerging in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Keeping in mind this synchronism between the release of the American serials and the productions of the first few Chinese feature-length films, I intend to trace the interaction between Pearl White and the actresses of Chinese cinema further back to the early 1920s, to show how Pearl White's image and performing style were absorbed into the early Chinese vernacular film culture through the mediation of female film acting. Taking the *Shun Pao*—one of Shanghai's more influential newspapers in the 1920s, also known as the *Shanghai News*—as its main resource, and reconsidering Chinese film history in terms of modernity and gender, this paper will reveal the other side of the story: that is how American serials, and especially such beloved "serial queens" as Pearl White, created a new female image for Chinese filmgoers.

The first section outlines which serials were shown and how they were received by Chinese audiences, touching on their presumed negative effects on Chinese early crime genre films. The second part of the paper focuses on Pearl White, undoubtedly the most popular serial queen in Shanghai at that time. The third section takes Yin Mingzhu (1904-1989), a Chinese actress known for the Pearl White-style attire she displayed even in her off-screen life, as a

case study to show what Pearl White meant for Chinese women in their search for a new self-image, and how her films opened up new possibilities for a transformation of the female image on Chinese screens.

American Serials and Chinese Crime Genre Films in the Early 1920s

Due to the inaccessibility of most historical documentation on the subject, studies on the American silent serial have not drawn much attention from Chinese film scholars, despite the fact that these films came to China in great numbers and dominated the Shanghai screening market from the late 1910s, when the supply of French and other European productions was cut off because of WWI. Serials made up a dominant part of all of imported American film production. According to the *Shun Pao*, films featuring stars as Pearl White, Ruth Roland, Marie Walcamp, Grace Cunard, Jack Dempsey, Elmo Lincoln, Eileen Sedgwick, Eddie Polo, Warner Oland, William Duncan and Edith Johnson were all widely screened and very popular (Qin 16-17). The dramatic action, the story twists and the spectacular visual effects created by speeding trains, motorcars and other modern inventions were great attractions to Chinese audiences. Moreover, films such as *Plunder* (George B. Seitz, 1923), *The Red Glove* (J.P. McGowan, 1919), *The Black Secret* (George B. Seitz, 1919), and *Elmo the Mighty* (Henry MacRae, J.P. McGowan, 1919) were released in conjunction with original novelisations by Chinese writers (Qin 16-17).

At the same time, moralistic commentaries about the *waiguo zhenqianpian* [foreign detective movies], the Chinese expression to indicate the serials, were frequent among critics. For example, one critic wrote,

When wondering why there are such things as the hijack gangsters in *Lincheng jian*, and kidnapping and robberies in the streets, any person of insight would say they are the results of the screening of foreign detective movies. People know how bad this kind of film actually is and the wise person would certainly object to it. (Chen n. pag.)²³

Provoked by the repeated occurrence of urban crime, critics began to blame serials as the cause for this. This morally-oriented attitude was upheld and developed by a later generation of Chinese film historians in the 1960s. In *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi* [history of the development of Chinese cinema], the most authoritative book in this field, the serials and their influence are commented upon according to similar moral standards:

Charles Chaplin's and Buster Keaton's comedies were quite interesting and entertaining, but most of the imported American movies are tomfoolery and even harmful productions,

² *Xiyi Shaonian* (a young gallant man, 1924) was an early martial arts film with many action and fighting scenes. It shows the great influence of American serials. All the quoted Chinese texts in this paper are translated by the author.

especially the serials that were very popular at the time and exerted an extremely bad influence on society. In the notorious Yan Ruisheng murder case in 1920, a killer of a prostitute confessed he had committed the crime under the influence of the American serials. Daytime robberies, shooting against arrest, kidnapping in Shanghai concessions were as many imitations of the behaviors and situations shown in films like *The Iron Clan*, *The Exploits of Elaine* and *Red Circle*. These hideous movies and their influences aroused huge antipathy among the Chinese audience. (Cheng, Li, and Xing 12)

It is important to point out, however, that the Chinese audience was not the monolithic figure indicated in this quotation. Chinese audiences were dichotomized by their divergent educational backgrounds and tastes. The well-educated English-speaking Chinese audience did not have any sympathy for the serials. They found them morally unjust and artistically primitive, because they closely resembled each other and the characters were mere stereotypes. Moreover, holes in the plots' development were often remarked upon. Despite the huge success of the American serials, the high-brow criticism seldom lowered its voice.

On the other hand, however, serials were extremely popular among the less educated spectators who found them easier to follow than most foreign feature films, which required an audience to be able to understand intertitles in order to follow and appreciate a story. After 1924, American serials were mostly shown in cheap and poorly-furnished theatres patronized by ordinary Chinese filmgoers. The massive production of Chinese martial arts films in the latter part of 1920s responded, to a large extent, to a taste that had been nurtured by the American serials. And similarly, the production of films of this particular genre was met with harsh criticisms too.

Chinese feature-length film production got underway in the early 1920s, when the exhibition of American serials was at its peak. As Chinese filmmakers, especially the locally-educated ones, had no learning resources other than the films themselves, the narrative and performing style of the American serial affected both their taste and their genre choice. In recollecting the early days of Chinese film production, Guan Haifeng—a Chinese filmmaker who made his first feature-length fiction film in 1916—said,

The first issue was to decide what kind of a film to shoot. The type of story was very important because the screenplay would influence directly the investment and profit. Studying the mentality and the taste of the audience in Shanghai, we could see that the most popular films were the best-selling detective fictions. This is why I decided to choose this genre, but I intended to make it unique and original. (Guan Haifeng 21)

Guan Haifeng's recollection explains how and why the crime genre films became the first choice in Chinese early film production.

The first Chinese crime genre film was *Yan Ruisheng*, a film based on the real murder case mentioned above. The case was widely known in Shanghai because of the wide coverage

local newspapers had given Yan's murder. Its fame had been further increased by a stage play with the same title that had aroused great interest among the audience (Qin 39). The crime itself was said to have been the result of a direct imitation of foreign detective movies, as Yan himself confessed during the trial, declaring that his knowledge of killing techniques was drawn from American serials. The film was shot and screened in July, 1921, and was unexpectedly successful at the box office, earning up to some 4000 *yuan* in its first week screening. Another example of a film based on a real-life murder trial was *Zhang Xinsheng* (1922). This film was finally banned apparently because of some shocking scenes, including a couple involving strangling and an autopsy (Cheng, Li, and Xing 59). *Hong Fen Ku Lou* (ten sisters, 1921) was based on a foreign detective novel. The settings, make-up, black headgear, uniforms and skull and bones mark were all copies from a popular American chapter play, *Hidden Dangers* (William Bertram, 1920).

Catering to the taste of Chinese audience of this period, these crime genre films were targeted at a market dominated by foreign serials. Not surprisingly, critics immediately warned that they would be harmful to the construction of a common sense of social morality. Some critics argued that the function of Chinese cinema should be to show the greatness of Chinese culture to the world, in such a way that other countries might be able to learn about oriental customs. This was a concept thought to be important in the early stages of communication between China and the foreign world.

The early Chinese crime films were considered the results of the American cinema's negative influence on national mores. But putting moralism aside, today we can see how American serials created an unprecedented public sphere where Chinese spectators could imagine what western culture looked like and how Chinese culture might assimilate it in its way to modernity. As an extreme example, *Yan Ruisheng* evinced the transformative influence of American cinema both on and off screen. Although colonizing in approach and exploiting an "unmoral" imagination, American serials represented an important passageway to modern culture for many Chinese people.

Most importantly, however, the traditional negative comment on the influence of American serials simply overlooks issues of gender, as the films discussed were typically "masculine movies," with most of the female characters involved in the standard role of the crimes' victims. What is missing in this account is the similarly significant but "positive" influence that American serial queens exerted on Chinese women, offering them a new female image that could stand as a model of modernity.

Serial Queens in China

As mentioned above, female serial stars were particularly admired in Shanghai. Alongside Pearl White, whose films were always triumphantly acclaimed, several more actresses had their films screened in this city during the 1920s. There was Marie Walcamp in *The Red Glove*

and *The Dragon Net* (Henry MacRae, 1920), Grace Cunard in *The Broken Coin* (Francis Ford, 1915), Eileen Sedgwick in *The Great Radium Mystery* (Robert Broadwell, Robert F. Hill, 1919) and *The Terror Trail* (Edward A. Kull, 1921), Eileen Percy in *The Third Eye* (James H. Horne, 1920), and Ruth Roland in *The Red Circle* (George Ridgwell, 1915), *The Tiger's Trail* (Robert Ellis, Louis J. Gasnier, Paul Hurst, 1919), *The Adventures of Ruth* (George Marshall, 1919), *Ruth of Rockies* (George Marshall, 1920) and *Ruth of the Range* (Ernst C. Warde, 1923).

An advertisement on *Shun Pao* on May 5, 1916 informs on a screening of Pearl White's *The Perils of Pauline*. The title is listed in the program of the Ai Lun theatre, a venue that was the first to exhibit serials in Shanghai. Since then and to around 1920, all of White's following serials were screened in Shanghai, including *The Exploits of Elaine* (Louis J. Gasnier, George B. Seitz, Leopold Wharton, 1914), *The New Exploits of Elaine* (Louis J. Gasnier, Leopold Wharton, Theodore Wharton, 1915), *The Romance of Elaine* (George B. Seitz, Leopold Wharto, Theodore Wharton, 1915), *The Iron Claw* (Edward José, George B. Seitz, 1916), *Pearl of the Army* (Edward José, 1916), *The Fatal Ring* (George B. Seitz, 1917), *The House of Hate* (George B. Seitz, 1918), *The Lightning Raider* (George B. Seitz, 1919) and *The Black Secret* (George B. Seitz, 1919) .

Interestingly, in all of her serials Pearl White was known as *Baolian* (an original transliteration of Pauline, meaning “precious lotus”). Following Bao's understanding of Miriam Hansen's notion of the vernacular, the global impact of Hollywood cinema depended both on its translatability and its worldwide subjection to local practices of translation. Bao observes that the translation of Pauline as *Baolian* resonated in popular memory with the *Baolian deng* tradition [lantern of the precious lotus] that was revived in the 1910s on the stage of the *gailiang jingxi* [reformed Beijing Opera]. The rendition of White's last name as *Bai* evokes an association with the White Lotus image, and even with a religious sect called *Bailian jiao* [white lotus]. Bao argues that this rendition further removed the actress's proper name from its original model (Bao 194). Integrated into a new local socio-cultural context, Pearl White's cinema naturalized itself as a familiar part of the Chinese entertainment's landscape.

Moreover, popular practices of free translation, in contrast with the rigid transliteration codes more commonly practiced by intellectuals, were preferred in cultural forms like the *yuanyang hudie pai* [mandarin duck and butterfly literature], as well as in the cinema since the late Qing dynasty (1636-1912). Aiming at a wider reception, the translators adapted the originals according to the tastes of Chinese working class readers and spectators. In most cases, this activity involved a considerable work of rewriting. The translation of American films—including titles, star names, and genre definitions—was accomplished in such a way that it could help bridge the gap between the tradition and the new cinematographic form of entertainment. For example, all the serials and the feature films that contained dramatic fight and action scenes were characterized as “errantry spirit” and labeled as *wuxiapian* [martial art films], whereas melodramas were more commonly referred to as *yanqingpian* [film of amorous feelings] or *aiqingpian* [film of sad feelings] (both *wuxia* and *yanqing* or *aiqing* are

extant categories or genres in traditional Chinese literature and drama).

Like Pearl White's, Ruth Roland's name underwent a similar rendition. Almost as admired as White among Chinese audience, Roland was known as *Luo Lan* (where *Luo* is a very common Chinese family name, and *Lan* means "orchid," a name that is also widely given to Chinese girls). Such practices of localized rendition undoubtedly played a role in the popularity of both Pearl White and Ruth Roland. At the same time, however, the same translation strategies did not work well with other stars such as Marie Walcamp, Eileen Sedgwick and Eileen Percy, although their Chinese names also sounded quite like traditional Chinese female names. In any event, Pearl White was indisputably the queen of the serial queens on screen in Shanghai.

This non-standard translation practice does pose problems to the researcher today when she tries to identify the serials that were shown in Shanghai. Although we know that all of White's serials were shown in Shanghai, it is difficult to match the Chinese titles with the original ones. After tracing the films' release date, distribution company, exhibition date, characters, story plots, and (sometimes) images published in the *Shun Pao*, I want to suggest here that *Heiyidao* [the thief in black], one of *Baolian's* most successful serials in China, most likely derives its Chinese title from the cloaked figure known as the Clutching Hand in *The Exploits of Elaine*. Newspaper ads referring to *Guai Shou* [strange hand], might present an alternative translation of the same title, since the wording "strange hand" recalls closely the evil character of the Clutching Hand in the Elaine trilogy, especially if one considers that *The Iron Claw*—following immediately after in White's filmography—was translated as *Tieshou* [the iron hand]. I would also argue that *Shifeiquan* [the circle of trouble], which Bao mentions in her paper, was likely to translate *The Fatal Ring*, as *quan* [circle]; this suggests the "ring" in the original title. *The New Exploits of Elaine* was translated as *Zhongguo juesidang* [Chinese gang fears no death] because of the character of Wu Fang (played by Boris Karloff in one of his first roles) and other figures of Chinese gangsters shown in the film. The rendition of *Pearl of the Army* into *Baolian Congjunji* [the story of Baolian in the army] was very close to the original. Likewise, *The Lightning Raider* was translated as *Feidianniang* [flying lightning lady] and *The Romance of Elaine* as *Nüxiadao* [the female errant-thief]. The Chinese title for *The House of Hate* is still unidentified.

In May 1920, *The Black Secret* reignited the Chinese audience's enthusiasm for *Baolian* when it was released in Shanghai. Some of White's former serials were rerun for the occasion, and theaters published promotional texts and comments as a way to advertise *Baolian's* new appearance on screen. For instance, in the "motion picture news" section of the *Shun Pao*, an anonymous reporter commented, "the most world-wide renowned stars in the motion picture world are just two people, one is the comedy king Chaplin, the other is the famous female movie star *Baolian*" (*Shun Pao*, May 28, 1920 n. pag.) Another ad said, "Madam *Baolian's* serial movies are at the top in world's cinema because of her beauty and performing talents." (*Shun Pao* May 31, 1920).

In 1921, the first issue of China's first film journal *Yingxi zazhi* [shadow play magazine] featured a photograph of Pearl White just beside one of Chaplin, once again demonstrating that they were considered to be the most popular American films stars among Chinese audiences. According to Guan Jian, a screenwriter who worked in those days, not only Shanghai audiences:

are familiar with the names of *Baolian*, *Meibaier* (Mabel Normand), *Quebolin* (Chaplin), *Feidi* (Fatty Arbuckle) and *Luoke* (Harold Lloyd), but they can recognize their faces immediately when they appear on screen. Among these stars, *Baolian* and Chaplin are particularly popular. I once heard a woman spectator saying that she would dearly love to pay ten *yuan*³⁸ to see *Baolian* in person if anytime she wanted to come to visit Shanghai. (Guan Jian; China Film Archive 1314)

In January 1923, a news item in the paper about *Baolian*'s "new work" announced that "the English title of the new movie is *Plunder*, meaning *dao* [robbery or loot] in Chinese. A more proper translation is expected to be found when the film is screened" (*Shun Pao* Jan. 18, 1923). Any news connected with *Baolian* was considered to a big scoop for both the media and the audience.

White's celebrity also further extended itself into the world of popular fiction when *The Iron Claw*, *The Exploits of Elaine* and *The Black Secret* became the subjects of as many novelisations, all written by Lu Zhanan around 1920.

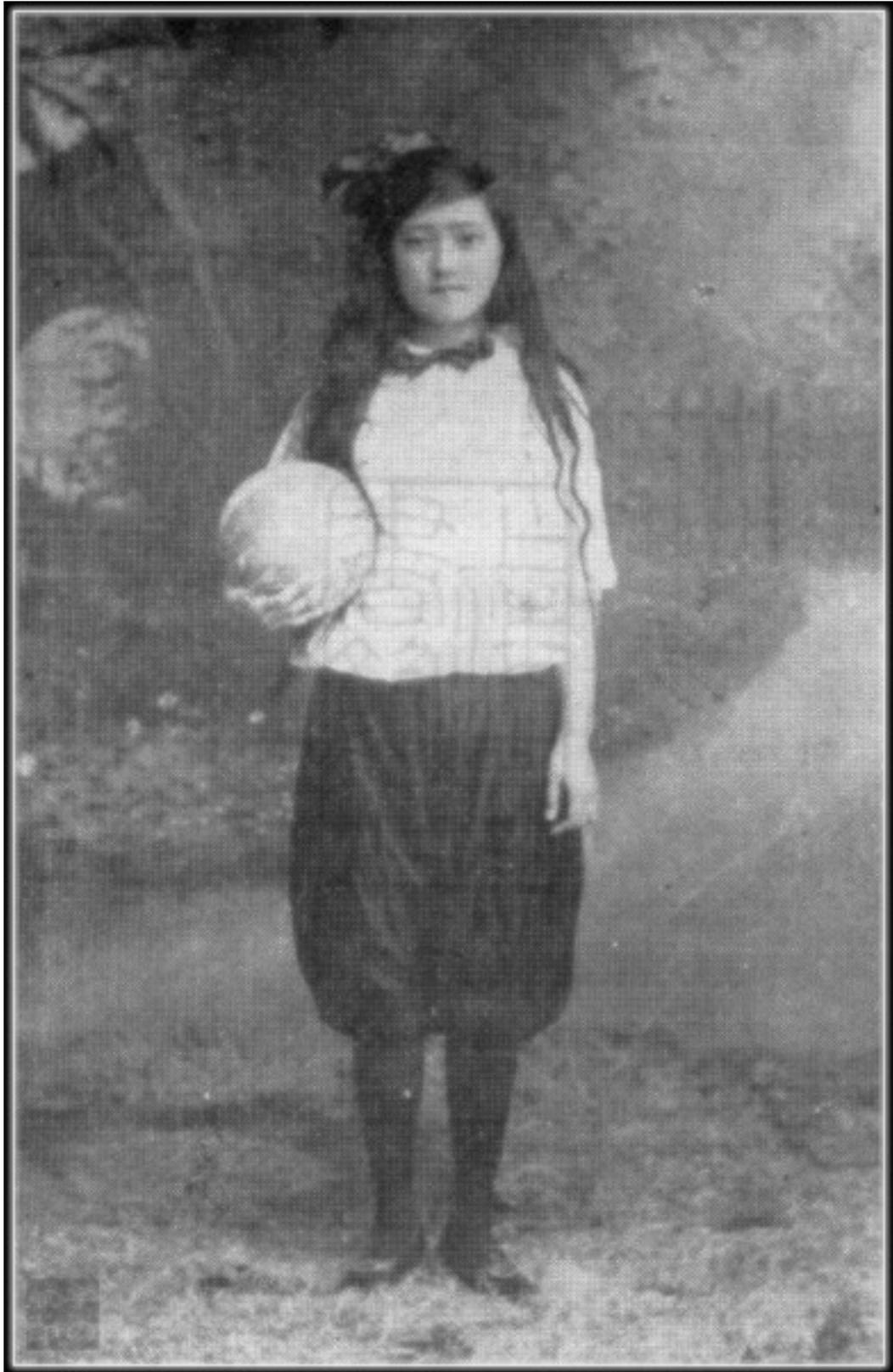
Yin Mingzhu and the New Female Image

When the last emperor was driven out of the forbidden city in 1911, China bade farewell to the Qing-dynasty, an imperial power, and established a nation-state with a republican political system. Greatly pushed by the republican government's decrees, "queue-cutting and dress-changing" and the abolition of foot-binding became an important part in the formation of a new national identity. These changes were an expression of both an aversion to the imperial system and a strong desire to be connected with the outer world, especially the more advanced western countries. Obviously, modernity in China was closely related with westernization.

As is well known, foreign concessions began to appear in Shanghai in the late nineteenth century. They brought western technology, arts, education and ways of life, and made this city culturally hybrid. This heterogeneous cultural environment nourished a more open-minded, flexible and tolerant attitude towards non-Chinese, non-traditional cultural elements. Serial queens, therefore, were easily adopted as models into the lives of women more quickly in Shanghai than in other cities.

The image of the daring, athletic heroine created by the serial queens contrasted sharply

³ Ten *yuan* roughly equals twenty times of the regular price of one ticket at that time.



Yin Mingzhu.

with the traditional Chinese representation of women, who are often characterized as reserved, depressed and confined to a very limited domestic space, not only because of the dominant Confucian morals, but also due to their physical liability—bound feet. Zhou Shoujuan, a film critic and a prefacer to Lu Zhanan's novelisations, wrote in a review:

Bai zhu niang [Pearl White] is a famous American actress who starred in *The Exploits of Elaine*, *The Iron Claw* and other films where she always impresses the audience with her loveliness, braveness and uprightness. She is known in Shanghai as *Baolian*. Here all *Baolian*'s movies are welcomed by most of the audience. The shows are already sold out before the screen turns bright. Recently *The Black Secret* has caused a huge sensation. In the movie, *Baolian* played the role of a secretary in an American scout troop on the war front . . . Being a beautiful female secretary, she should supposedly stay behind a desk, doing letter writing for her husband. Instead she throws herself into a scout troop and goes to the front. In the middle of a bloody war, she tries to spy out the enemy's military secrets in spite of infinite difficulties. How incomparably strong-willed, determinate and brave she is. Looking back at our own country, women have long been far away from this heroic spirit, only burying themselves under rouge and powders, makeup and dresses, only to end up as trophies of vanity. Would any of them be willing to fight as boldly and resolutely for the interests of our country? *Baolian* simply does her job as an actress, a performing artist, but her brave exploits on screen are something that goes beyond what an ordinary women can reach. I would like to ask, Are there any sisters in our country [who] can do that? (Shoujuan n. pag.)

Here Pearl White's screen image is highly appraised both for her beauty and her heroic behaviors. Her image prompted a comparison with Chinese women who, in this critic's opinion, did not have anything to match. He explicitly invited the female audience to be as brave, heroic and patriotic as *Baolian* in her films, suggesting that Chinese women should model themselves after the screen image created by White. A physically free and spiritually bold image such as that of *Boalian* was indeed very encouraging to those many Chinese women who were then striving to step out of the shadows of traditional culture. Some Chinese women, especially those who were exposed to western education, were extremely eager to keep pace with the modern world.

In this heady environment, a very young Yin Mingzhu became a woman of the hour in Shanghai for her western style dresses and her imitation of Pearl White's attire. When Yin Mingzhu's gentry family moved to Shanghai in 1918, she was sent to an English high school where she became one of the best students, learning to speak English fluently. As one commentator recalls, "She had very new ideas and new manners, she was good at dancing, swimming, singing, horse-riding, bicycling and driving. In a society that is still confined to its traditional way of living, these are the new activities that most celebrity ladies would not even dare to try" (Zheng Y., *ying Tan Jiu Wen* [memories of the past] 15). In a photograph taken at the age of fifteen, Yin is seen wearing a western horse-riding outfit while she holds a ball

in her right hand, creating a daring and sporty image of a young girl. Very interestingly, the name Yin Mingzhu itself presents an implicit relationship with Pearl White, as *ming zhu* means “bright pearl” in Chinese. It is not clear if this linguistic connection may have subconsciously induced Yin to identify with Pearl White, but the identification itself seems unmistakable. Nicknamed Miss FF, i.e. “foreign fashion,” because of her western dressing style, Yin was also famous for dressing in *Baolian*-style attire. Cutting a new modern figure in Shanghai, her photographs were often seen in newspapers and magazines. In one of these, we can see that her hairstyle, make-up and jewellery were all extremely westernized. Leaning against a motorcar, Yin indicates a modern way of life for Chinese women, outgoing, independent and free-spirited. Influenced and even enchanted by the film world, Yin had a tremendous interest in the cinema. Her fame and beauty attracted the attention of an early filmmaker, Dan Duyu, who became acquainted with Yin through his relatives. Dan asked Yin to star in his first film *Hai Shi* [swear by God] (1922), one of the three first Chinese feature-length films. With only one other amateur actress playing a supporting role in *Yan Ruisheng*, Yin’s appearance on screen as protagonist was a real breakthrough.

The plot of the film is very similar to John Griffith Wray’s *Lying Lips*, which was exhibited in Shanghai in November 1921. In *Hai Shi*, Yin plays the role of a young girl (Yin Fuzhu) who is rescued by a poor artist after being robbed in the street. She falls in love with the man but later on she can’t avoid being forced by her family to marry her wealthy cousin. At her wedding, Yin Fuzhu suddenly recalls how she and the poor artist swore to love each other forever. Overcome by sorrow, she goes to the seaside and kills herself.

Although it is not confirmed that *Hai Shi* was a Chinese version of *Lying Lips*, the influence of American cinema is clearly visible in this film, which displays a typical westernized form of narrative pattern. Cheng Bugao, a filmmaker who was active between the 1920s and the 1940s, wrote in his memoirs that “*Hai Shi* was a new style movie, a modern love story, which started a new trend. A new plot, new costumes, new settings, new ideas and feelings, new ways of living, all never before shown in Chinese cinema; it was called “modern-costume” genre. Essentially, it represented a kind of westernization” (Cheng, 61–62). Considering that arranged marriage was still prevalent in China at this time, the love story portrayed in this film between two young people was very non-traditional and non-Chinese. Unfortunately, the film has been lost and the only visual document we have about it is a single still photograph, a blurred image of a woman bearing a sweet and self-confident smile.

Due to Yin’s popularity as a *modeng nüxing* [modern girl], the film was quite appealing to Chinese audiences. In fact, Dan Duyu intentionally exploited Yin’s off-screen fame in the protagonist’s name Yin Fuzhu (*fu zhu* means “lucky pearl” in Chinese), an allusion to Yin Mingzhu herself. Yin’s performance in the role of a lively young girl was moderately approved by critics.

Hai Shi initiated the *shizhuangpian* [modern-costume films], a new film genre that exploited women’s attraction for fashionable dresses. As Zheng Yimei, a writer and historian recalls,



Yin Mingzhu in one of her modern young girl outfit.

the modern-costume genre was especially welcomed by women in the inland cities of China who were willing to adopt the Shanghai dressing style, considered to be the ultimate one. Sometimes they even asked their tailors to go to the theatres with them to learn about the new styles (Zheng Y., *Ying Tan Jiu Wen* [memories of the past] 40). Movie stars like Yin Mingzhu were in the position of fashion leaders who offered a new image to young Chinese women. The American serial queens, and Pearl White in particular, became a model for change even through the mediation of Chinese actresses such as Yin Mingzhu.

Fu Wenhao, one of Yin Mingzhu's schoolmates was also well known as a fashion leader and she too was connected with cinema for a brief period of time. Nicknamed Miss AA (a shorthand for her English name Anna), Fu Wenhao was the first Chinese woman to get a driver's license in Shanghai. She was asked by Dan Duyu to star in his second film, *Gujing chongpo ji* (the widow wants to remarry, 1923), a love story between a widow and a young man. Regretfully, Fu gave in to family pressure and was unable to pursue her career as Yin did.

The modern, westernized new Chinese female image represented by Yin Mingzhu was also seen in other films. *Dayi mieqin* (aka *Xiayi Yuan*, for the sake of justice, Ren Pengnian, 1922) was produced by the Motion Picture Department of Commercial Press, and told a western-style love story. A young girl was rescued by her lover in a last minute race to secure an amnesty from the president. The story was perhaps inspired by *Orphans of the Storm* (D.W. Griffith, 1921), whose last-minute rescue scene had left a deep impression on the Chinese audience. The image and performance of young Chen Lilian was described as very westernized: one critic found she was "very lively and graceful, her walking, jumping and running appeared quite similar to how western ladies behave" (Zhou n. pag.). Special attention was given to the protagonist's ease of movement, indicating an implicit contrast between the westernized female image and the traditional culture of binding women's feet. This physical liberation would again resonate again in the late 1920s in the heroines of the *nüxia* genre, as discussed by Weihong Bao in "From Pearl White to White Rose Woo."

After persuading her mother to support her choice, Yin went back to cinema and married Dan Duyu in 1926. Yin's next starring role was in *Chuanjiabao* (family's heirloom, 1926). According to the extant synopsis (Zheng and Liu 490-494), the film was perhaps a Chinese version of the 1915 American serial *The Broken Coin*, in which the reunion of two half-broken coins would help people to get a precious treasure box in a haunted house. Several groups of people were involved in this narrative of seeking and fighting for treasure. Yin was cast as the daughter of a deceased man, owner of one half of the broken coin. Being a brave girl with a "knight-errant spirit," she boldly searched the house herself and even throws a sword at an enemy at one critical moment. When *Yang guifei* (concubine yang, 1927), in which Yin couldn't star due to her pregnancy, suffered a huge failure at box office and put Dan's Shanghai Shadow Play Company in a very difficult situation, Yin pawned all her jewellery to support the following shooting projects which did save the company (Zheng Y., *Ying Tan Jiu Wen* [memories of the past] 41).

Unlike other Chinese actresses—such as Wu Suxin (1905-?) (discussed by Weihong Bao) or Fan Xuepeng (1908-1974), another well-known *nüxia* star—Yin Mingzhu was never promoted mainly as a *nüxia* star, not even during the martial arts film craze. Carefully crafted by Dan Duyu—a painter-turned-director who had a particular interest in the expression of female physical beauty through artistic cinematography—Yin's screen image was given more sensuous color through the aesthetic display of the female body. It was a radical alteration of the "sensory reflexive horizon" (Hansen) of the Chinese vernacular culture, one that implied

a revision of the traditional Confucian concept of the female body as a property that had to be closely constrained.

Yin starred in several more films directed by Dan, such as *Huanjinji* (repayment, 1926), *Pansidong* (spiders, 1927), *Jingangzuan* (the diamond case, 1928), *Meimei Wo Ai Ni* (sisters, I love you all, aka *Feixingdadao*, the flying thief, 1929), *Meijianxia* (ogles of a knight-errant, 1930), *Huashiqian* (the case in the studio, 1930), *Gumuguairen* (stranger in the old house, 1931), and *Dongfangyetao* (oriental story, 1931). Yin ended her acting career after shooting her single sound film, *Taohuameng* (peach-blossom dream, 1935). In one of Yin's most successful movies, *Pansidong*, partly based on a classic Chinese novel, *Xi You Ji* [journey to the west], the power of female physical beauty was represented through the half-nakedness of the actresses, with Yin in the leading role. No wonder that her movies were often criticized for being too "westernized" and too "sexualized," largely because the practice of admiring beautiful female figures on screen contradicted the traditional Chinese suppression of sexuality. This inevitably led to disapproval and criticism among audiences and critics.

Presenting a westernized and fashionable female image on and off screen, Yin embodied and mediated the transforming influence of Pearl White on Chinese women. Her glamour as a film star and a fashion model brightened the rosy imagination of an alternative, modern way of life decidedly far from the traditional one. As one of the early film actress in mainland China, Yin's pioneering screen presence became an example of liberation from traditional sex roles, from the restrictions of the domestic spheres, from a bounded life. Her representation of female sexuality was an important breakthrough in Chinese cinema that deserves further exploration, analysis and discussion.

THE AUTHOR: Qin Xiqing is a research fellow at the Institute of Film &TV, National Academy of Chinese Arts, Beijing. She is the author of *European & American Movie and Chinese Early Cinema 1920-1930* (2008) and *Western Feminist Film: Theory, Criticism and Practice* (2008) and a co-author of *History of Chinese Film* (2006).

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Ansje van Beusekom

Getting Forgotten. Film Critic Elisabeth de Roos and Dutch Culture Before World War II

ABSTRACT: Elisabeth de Roos (1903-1981) was one of the most intelligent Dutch film critics of her time. From 1925 onwards, she published on French cinema and she contributed regularly to the *Filmliga* journal. *Franse filmkunst* [french cinema] was published in 1931. She lost her professional fascination with cinema with the coming of sound. In 1932 she married writer Eddy du Perron. “How could de Roos’s work be so entirely forgotten?” and “How exactly has this process of disappearance and oblivion taken place?” were the leading questions. Elisabeth’s life and reputation can be studied through the biographies and correspondence of her husband and his best friend Menno ter Braak. They were aware of their strategic positions, while de Roos did not care about her position in the literary landscape. Though, her personal relationship to cinema and literature and her search for authorship is very consistent, De Roos never felt the urge to anthologize or reflect on her own writings. She dedicated herself to du Perron’s work and to raising their son. Financial troubles forced her to write as much as she could for money. Not even those women who were so active in history are granted an ongoing renown.

Who Was Elisabeth de Roos? A Brief Background

Elisabeth de Roos, one of the most intelligent film critics of her time, was born in 1903 and studied at the Gemeentelijke Universiteit van Amsterdam (today Amsterdam University). She started writing on film in 1925. As a Ph.D. candidate in French literature she was interested in French cinema and in avant-garde French cinema in particular. She published in several Dutch literary magazines (*De Stem*, *Rhytme*, *De Vrije Bladen*) and from 1927 onwards she contributed regularly to the *Filmliga* journal. Although she was invited to join the *Filmliga* society, as head of the department in The Hague, she never accepted this post.

In 1931 de Roos published *Franse filmkunst* [french cinema] in the series “Monografieën van de filmkunst” [monographs on cinema], one of the first Dutch attempts to write the history of silent film as an art form. While she was writing this book in 1930, she was living in London and frequently attended the screenings of the Film Society. In 1931, she completed her thesis on *Het Essayistisch Werk van Jacques Rivière* [the essayistic work of Jacques Rivière]. After 1931, when it was clear that the talking pictures would dominate the field, she lost her professional fascination for cinema and wrote instead about modern literature.

In 1932 she married writer Eddy du Perron, a cosmopolitan intellectual, residing in Amsterdam, Bruxelles and Paris.

A Female Writer

During my research for my book, *Kunst en Amusement. Reacties op de film als een nieuw medium*



The book cover of *Fransche Filmkunst* [french cinema], published in the series “Monografieën van de filmkunst” [monographs on cinema] in 1931.

in Nederland, 1895-1940 [arts and entertainment. comments on film as a new medium in the Netherlands, 1895-1940], I gathered a modest collection of writings by Elisabeth de Roos on film from 1926 to 1931 that I studied at the time, but never actually highlighted. In the book I mention her mostly in connection with other critics who had been more actively and practically involved in the struggle for film as art. The Women Film Pioneers Project offered an opportunity for me to single Elisabeth de Roos out as the only Dutch female intellectual film critic of the silent period. Clearly, she merits closer study. It is my aim here to contextualize her work, bringing to the foreground a remarkable female presence in the predominantly male landscape of early Dutch film criticism.

In this paper I take a closer look at de Roos's writings on film. I ask if we can detect a female approach in her work, and explore what this means in the context of the "film as art" debate.



Elisabeth de Roos (1903-1981), ca. 1930.
(Foto: Studio Wagram Bruxelles).

“How Do You Proceed to Get to Know More About Her?”

“How do you proceed to get to know more about her?” was the question posed by a friend when I seriously started digging into Elisabeth de Roos’s life and work. When you look for Elisabeth (du Perron) de Roos, in environments such as academic libraries, newspaper databases, websites and so on, it is remarkable how little emerges. There is some correspondence at the Letterkundig Museum in The Hague, but it takes some effort and diplomacy to see this material. There is one article on her literary criticism (Snoek, “De kennis van het menselijk hart: Elisabeth de Roos als criticus” [knowledge of the human heart: Elisabeth de Roos as critic]) and one Master thesis that significantly defines her as a “writer in the shadow” (Mars). We also know from Snoek (*E. du Perron* 599) that she had an affair with the Dutch poet Hendrik Marsman around 1925, before she married Eddy du Perron seven years later. And that is all.

Film is still marginalized in literary historiography, so the lack of research on de Roos in this field might seem not so surprising. We need to remember, however, that Elisabeth de Roos wrote about a lot more than film: she also wrote about theater as well as French and English literature. The paucity of information makes researching her work and life difficult. This produces the emergence of new questions such as, “How could de Roos’s work be so entirely forgotten?” and “How exactly has this process of disappearance and oblivion taken place?” Careless as I am about my own career, this is by no means a comfortable enterprise.

There is a lot to learn indirectly about Elisabeth’s life and reputation from studying the biographies and correspondence of her husband and his best friend Menno ter Braak, also a major Dutch writer and a cinephile, who had co-founded the Filmliga society in 1927 and who was a good friend of de Roos too. We can peep into their lives and thoughts through their opulent writings and other documents from within their circles. With thousands of pages of published texts (the correspondence of ter Braak and du Perron between 1930 and 1940 alone amounts to over two thousand pages), these writings offer the most extensive resource about de Roos in Dutch literature, (ter Braak and du Perron, *Briefwisseling 1930-1940* [correspondence 1930-1940]). The correspondence of both authors was (tellingly) preserved, archived and published thanks to their widows, du Perron-de Roos herself and Ant ter Braak-Faber. Other published studies of their life and work are similarly extensive. In order to find out more about Elisabeth’s working and living conditions one consequently needs to explore sources such as Snoek’s *E. du Perron: het leven van een smalle mens* [E. du Perron: the life of an ordinary man], Hanssen’s *Sterven als een polemist* [die as a polemist: 1930-1940] and *Want alle verlies is winst: Menno ter Braak 1902-1940* [for every loss there is a gain: Menno ter Braak 1902-1940]. Recently a website on Menno ter Braak, *Menno ter Braak 1902-1940*, gave access to a few unpublished letters of Elisabeth du Perron-de Roos that are held in privately owned collections (“Menno ter Braak | Elisabeth du Perron-de Roos – 1927-1938”).

Initial Findings

The friendship between Menno ter Braak and Eddy du Perron began in 1930. After they met, ter Braak's life and career took a decisive turn. He changed from being a cool, distanced, and polemical (film) aesthete into a passionately engaged intellectual essayist. A truly cosmopolitan personality, du Perron had grown up in the Dutch Indies before moving to Paris, Bruxelles and The Netherlands, where he had become an active member of the Dutch literary circle of the so-called "young critical dogs." He had introduced himself into those circles through his polemic writings against aestheticism, and had found ter Braak at his side in this battle. Yet even more decisive than this collaborative friendship was du Perron's encounter with Elisabeth de Roos, during a dinner at ter Braak's place in Amsterdam in 1931. The two fell in love and they got married shortly after in 1932. Du Perron already knew of de Roos and had read her articles. In a letter to a friend he describes her in February 1931 as "the only lucky combination in Holland of brain and dress, of culture, both inside and outside." (Snoek, *E. du Perron* 595) While de Roos's intellectual work was important to du Perron, she gave up an eventual academic career in literature in order to live with him abroad. The couple moved to Paris in December 1932 and after a six week stay in the Netherlands, to the Dutch Indies, from October 1936 to 1939.

"Vorm of Vent": Form or Personality?

Despite their short lives, both ter Braak and du Perron are considered very important in Dutch culture. They represent the good side of intellectual life before World War II: by 1933 they had both criticised Hitler, national socialism, fascism and communism, emphasizing the cultural value of "good" thinking and the "good genre" (*le bon genre*) in the making of a good individual person. Neither form nor aesthetic style would mean anything, they believed, without a sense that they are also "good" or truthful at the same time, otherwise they may even be dangerous.

Their vision of life and art is labelled *Vorm of vent* [form or personality] and did, in many ways, set the agenda for Dutch intellectual life before, during and after the war. Unfortunately, ter Braak and du Perron did not live to see this happen: they both died at the age of forty, just at the onset of the war, apparently without being aware of each other's death, on May 14, 1940. Ter Braak committed suicide, while du Perron died of a heart attack.

Although the mountain of publications on the illustrious duo ter Braak-du Perron may suggest otherwise, their struggle to earn their keep through writing was hard. Ter Braak worked as a teacher, and later as a journalist, but the du Perrons had no job other than writing. The number of subscriptions to *Forum*, the journal founded by ter Braak and du Perron in 1931, amounted to about one thousand, and the print runs of their books were even smaller. How could they become so famous, when during their lives they could hardly

survive on what they wrote? Today they are celebrated as two of the most influential Dutch writers of the early 1930s, but this is indeed a retrospective consideration that does not take into account the real conditions under which they wrote. While struggling to make their living, the two men were nevertheless aware of their strategic positions in the Dutch literary landscape and manoeuvred accordingly. In short, they knew the rules of the game, in Bourdieu's term *les règles de l'art*, and were passionate players. Already in his adolescent years ter Braak had been on the editorial board of a students' magazine named *Propria Cures*. Later, he was the founder, editor and a major contributor of the *Filmliga* journal. Fighting for a new art was an ideal manner to gain entrance into the field of art and literary criticism, which happened shortly afterwards when ter Braak became the editor of the literature section of *Het Vaderland*, a national newspaper. All of these activities can be regarded as training for the "real thing": a career in the cultural world of the Netherlands, not only as a novelist, but also as a journal editor and a literary critic. Du Perron, in his turn, was the son of a rich planter's family, which had lost its wealth at the beginning of the economic crisis of the 1930s. He was a dedicated modernist, and later an engaged polemist and critic who referred to Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker) as to his chosen cultural model.

Managing Differently: The Career of de Roos

Like du Perron and ter Braak, de Roos was also publicly recognized during her active years. In the second half of the 1920s she was known as the "Muse of the Free Press" (from the name of one of the literary journals in which she published, the *Vrije Bladen* [free pages]) and a woman who was able to combine elegance and intelligence. Regarded as a model of class, she was celebrated by many. These sentiments may have amused her, but she certainly did not mint them. She instead followed her own particular interests, and they were varied. De Roos began writing on theatre, flirted with film, and finally became serious about both French and English modern literature (exploring such authors as Louis Ferdinand Celine, Aldous Huxley, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf).

De Roos's style was very different from that of "the boys": she did not fight or slander (as her husband did) and tried instead to maintain a balanced and sophisticated view of things. Her texts were usually short, but made of long and difficult sentences with a very accurate and precise use of language. She held firm opinions, and stood by them, but these were never uttered in strong language, and never meant to dominate those of other people. She gave her own opinion, but was no polemicist. To the contrary: she was quite self-confident and apparently did not feel like she needed to engage debate.

To keep within the *Vorm of vent* vocabulary, de Roos can indeed be considered an *avant-la-lettre* "personality." Her personal relationship with cinema and her search for authorship in the films she was critiquing is very consistent. Her ideal film directors were Pudovkin and Dulac, because in her eyes their films gave a personal vision of reality. On the opposite, she

considered Autant-Lara to be only a *schrunken*, a limited personality. She found that Buñuel had a sick mind, and wrote against what she perceived as the rudeness and cruelty of *Un Chien andalou* (1929). She had great impact as a critic in the Filmliga. Where else in the world was *Mother* (*Mat*, Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926) more admired than the *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potyomkin*, Sergei M. Eisenstein, 1925), and *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (*La Coquille et le clergyman*, Germaine Dulac, 1928) favoured over *Un Chien andalou*?

De Roos never felt the urge to anthologize or reflect on her own writings. She wrote for herself about what was interesting to her in a specific moment. This could be film, theater or literature, or even a mix of the three. Although her personal views were highly appreciated by her friends and colleagues, she did nothing to attract a readership. Her articles appeared scattered in too many different magazines.

According to Snoek, she published regularly; during her Parisian years (December 1932 through October 1936) she wrote some 120 articles as a foreign correspondent for several regional Dutch papers, but few of those texts appeared under her own name (Snoek, *E. du Perron* 653). Most of all, she did not focus on one single issue in her work. In other words, she did not have a strategic attitude with regard to her career. She wanted to have her say because she felt it had to be said and published, but she never emphasized her person in doing this. Also, she hardly engaged publicly with other writers. She responded to films, books and exhibitions but never purposefully opened a discussion. Those who cared could listen, those who did not could easily pass by. Unfortunately, this is exactly what historiography has done: passing by Elisabeth de Roos, acknowledging only the existence of Elisabeth du Perron-de Roos, the famous writer's dedicated widow.

Questions of Legacy

How to proceed then with this woman who did not care about her own intellectual legacy and even actively erased traces of her opinions from the published correspondence of her husband? In my view, de Roos' work on film is extremely interesting, just as is her dissertation on French essayist Jacques de Rivière. Maybe her writing was a little old fashioned in style, but it was often very specific and close to the point. Her writing is much clearer than that of many of her male contemporaries. However, from her letters to ter Braak we can detect that writing was a struggle for her. I found no signs of satisfaction with her own work. Although ter Braak was admittedly her fan, he recognized that what she wrote was too difficult even for her intelligent readers ("Menno ter Braak to Elisabeth De Roos. Rotterdam, November 15, 1931").

Young de Roos emerges as an independent woman, treated by her friends as "one of the guys." Unlike ter Braak, du Perron cannot be suspected to be responsible of inhibiting de Roos' writing on film due to his criticism. Indeed, she had already shifted to literature before they met, and she had been living abroad—in London, writing her dissertation—

even before their marriage. During her stay in London, she quitted writing regularly on film because she became more interested into other arts, probably also because the film avant-garde movement she had supported in the previous years was losing its momentum. After the marriage with du Perron, it was de Roos who insisted that they moved to Paris (where du Perron had a few prestigious friends, such as André Malraux, his wife Clara, and Pascal Pia). De Roos continued to write essays on Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence for *Forum*, *Groot Nederland* and *De Gids*, book reviews for *NRC*, plus her “Letters from Paris” as a correspondent (Snoek, *E. du Perron* 635). While du Perron was busy composing his masterpiece, *Country of Origin (Het land van herkomst, 1935)*, dedicated to Elisabeth, she maintained them both financially by writing relentlessly.

Why, one could ask, didn't she write her own masterpiece? The answer, or a hint to a possible answer, can be found in the above quoted du Perron's novel, where the character of Jane represents Elisabeth. In a conversation with the Malraux reported in the book, Jane explains what it means to live with such a personality as her husband for twenty-four hours a day in the following terms:

Sometimes a woman can feel as if she betrays her man by losing her personality. The stronger she chooses that of her husband, the more she feels attached to him and the more she gets from him, the more she loses her sense of self. . . . The worst moment arrives when she becomes aware that the woman whom she wants to be for him and the woman she is, no longer are the same. It is a sad thing. . . . Why isn't he jealous of the part of her that is lost? (du Perron, 454).¹

Of course one must not jump to conclusions here, but this quote suggests that it is very possible that de Roos did not care much about her own public voice. For example, in 1932 she wrote to ter Braak: “For quite a while I have had a feeling that interesting conversations, on art or other matters, are like an accompanying noise (counterpoint if you like!) of an actual conversation that takes place back and forth under one's breath!”² (“Elisabeth De Roos to Menno ter Braak. January 30, 1932”).

Having your own, soft, intelligent and convincing voice for those who care to listen, is clearly not enough for a woman to survive in historiography. After her marriage, however exciting it might have been in relation to her work, de Roos's own voice dimmed. She dedicated herself to du Perron and to raising their son (Alain, born in 1935). Moreover, financial troubles forced her to write as much as she could for money, and to accept every

¹ “Een vrouw, zegt Jane, kan soms voelen dat zij haar man verraadt door het verlies van haar eigen persoonlijkheid. Hoe sterker zij die van haar man kiest, hoe meer zij zich aan hem hecht, en hoe meer zij krijgt zelfs, hoe meer zij soms verliest wat haar in zichzelf interesseert. . . . maar het ergste moment komt als zij merkt dat de vrouw die zij geven wil en de vrouw die zij is, niet meer dezelfde zijn. . . . Waarom wordt hij niet jaloers om het deel van haar dat verloren is gegaan?” (translated by the author).

² “Bovendien heb ik al heel lang het gevoel dat de conversaties die de moeite van het houden waard zijn, over kunst of andere dingen toch vooral een begeleidend gedruisch zijn (contrapunt als je wilt!) van de eigenlijke conversatie die over en weer binnensmonds gaat!” (translated by the author).

possible job. Both had been raised in well-to-do families that had allowed them to follow their interests and talents, but after the death of their parents during the economic crisis of the 1930s, they had little to live on, aside from the freelance work provided by their friends. This hand-to-mouth existence was largely maintained by Elisabeth. The untimely death of du Perron at the onset of war in Holland in 1940, when their son was just five, made living conditions even harder for de Roos. She subsequently (and courageously) worked hard to publish her husband's late work: thousands of letters, critiques, essays, novels and stories were sampled and published in a "Collected Works" series, while her own writings (she kept on working as a literary critic and a translator, as usual to earn her living and that of her son) remained overlooked. What is most shocking about the historiographical oblivion of de Roos is that she appeared to have everything on her side not to be forgotten: she wrote extensively, she was acknowledged, praised and widely admired in her time. Clearly, not even those women who were so active in history are granted an ongoing renown.

THE AUTHOR: Ansjé van Beusekom teaches Film History at the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University. Her Ph.D. dissertation research was published as *Kunst en Amusement. Reacties op de film als een nieuw medium in Nederland, 1895-1940* [art and entertainment. responses to film as a new medium in the Netherlands, 1895-1940] (Haarlem: Arcadia 2001). She has contributed to several essays on film and art history in encyclopedias, journals and edited collections. Recently, she has published on Asta Nielsen in the Netherlands.

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Luca Mazzei

The Passionate Eye of Angelina Buracci, Pedagogue

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the contribution of Angelina Buracci, a young feminist and pacifist pedagogue, to the early discourse on film in Italy. Published in 1916, her book *Cinematografo educativo* [educational cinema] is a brilliant counter to the contemporary representation of women filmgoers in the writings of several Italian male modernist intellectuals. Their construction, between 1908 and 1930, of a new canon of spectatorship centered on the figure of the male cinephile and bears traces of a gendered discourse. In the minds of these intellectuals, the “new spectator” was evoked as an alternative to an earlier, female model of spectatorship. Yet, despite their dismissal of women’s significant presence in the early discursive field, a few women writers had already begun carving out their own space in reflections on cinema. Buracci’s essay is an exemplary document in this respect. Not only does it demonstrate the author’s familiarity with the experience of cinema, but it also reveals an extraordinary independence of thought.

Prologue: When was Cinephilia Born in Italy?

The word cinephilia is literally defined as a “love for the cinema,” a kind of passionate relationship with the screen and the experiences it generates. It can also be defined as a ritual practice of spectatorship whose privileged form of expression is writing. Its beginnings are usually associated with the emergence of the film-club phenomenon in the 1950s (Hagener 11; De Baecque 8–16). However, recent literature has debated the question of its origins, tracing its appearance back (at least in France) to as early as the 1930s (Jullier and Leveratto), 1922 (Gauthier 236–255), 1911 (Gili 397–416) and even 1895 (Elsaesser 28). If the cinephile is essentially a writing spectator, it seems logical that an historical canon of cinephilia would consist in a listing of the most significant articles and essays written to praise the cinema for its aesthetic, moral or social values. Therefore, to look for historical documentation of this peculiar form of expressive spectatorship means in large part to research the field of the history of the discourse on film.

As in France, a primitive form of cinephilia emerged quite early in Italy. An important occurrence appears as early as 1908, in the December 25 issue of the Florentine paper *Il Nuovo giornale* [the new journal]. It was on that date that Ricciotto Canudo, later known for his enthusiastic support of the French avant-garde, published his first article on film. Entitled “Trionfo del cinematografo,” [the triumph of the cinematograph] the piece welcomed the cinema as a foundational phenomenon in the building of a new modern, secular and progressive society. Canudo describes the act of participating in a movie screening as a collective experience of social regeneration; cinema is seen as a substitute for churches with their religious rituals. *Il Nuovo giornale* had long been following a laical and anticlerical political

line, and perhaps the publication date of Canudo's article was not haphazard¹: the article extended an invitation to a secular Christmas, spent in the urban habit of reading papers and the public ritual of watching a movie.

Apart from Canudo, a chronology of early cinephilia in Italy would include at least the following items:

1) "Max Linder muore alla Guerra" [Max Linder dies at war], published in October 1914 by Lucio D'Ambra. The article is an emotional portrait of Max Linder, the acclaimed French comedian believed to have been fatally wounded on the frontline. For D'Ambra, the indestructible power of Linder's cinematographic work could break down national barriers even in war times, uniting people from both the Austrian-German and the French-Italian side around the shared film.

2) *Cineamore* [cinelove], 1914, a Futurist graphic and visual poem by Carlo Carrà. The composition equated the pleasure of spectatorship to that of an orgiastic ritual: subjective identities and objective impressions (the film) merged into a new visual and tactile experience, the audience itself became a single organic entity that "lived" the film.

3) "Buio e intelligenza" [darkness and intelligence], 1916, by Emmanuele Toddi. In this article, the Roman columnist returns to the traditional distinction between crowd and audience, adapting it to the content of the movie theater: he differentiates between an *indistinct* audience (one that is oblivious to its spectatorial condition) and an *intelligent* audience (one that is instead aware).

4) "L'arte delle immagini" [the art of images], an essay written by Floriano Del Secolo in 1916.² This writer was a journalist influenced by Benedetto Croce's school of thought. In the final part of this article, Del Secolo interprets the experience of spectatorship in terms of a conscious and blissful surrender to the logic of dreams.

5) The articles written from October 1923 to June 1924 by Alberto Savinio for the daily newspaper *Corriere Italiano* and its weekly magazine *Galleria*. Savinio defines cinema as a "mythology in progress," comparing the film audience to the crowds of the Late Roman Empire and the film theatres to the temples dedicated to the worship of the god Mithras.

6) *La donna di ieri* [yesterday's woman] by Corrado d'Errico, and *Avventura cinematografica* [movie adventure] by Mariani dell'Anguillara. In these two short stories published in 1926, the world of cinema merges with daily reality, replacing it entirely.

7) "Iniziazione alle delizie del cinematografo" [invitation to the delights of the cinema], by Antonello Gerbi, 1926. Here spectatorship is presented as a device to discipline passions and is linked to the theme of sexuality.

8) In the second half of the 1920s (between 1926 and 1929), the creation of the first film

¹ Because of an editorial mistake made in 1973, when Canudo's writing was first historiographically referenced (Mossetto 358–365), "Trionfo del cinematografo" has been long reported to have been published on November 25, instead of December 25, 1908. The article was the fifth installment in the series of *Lettere di vita* [letters about life] and *Lettere d'arte* [letters about art] he had submitted to this newspaper in Florence.

² The same article was curiously republished three years later in another journal, *L'arte muta* [the silent art], with a different title and under the name of a different author, Angelo Piccioli.

clubs in Italy takes place in parallel with the creation of a “national” film canon. For some scholars, this corresponds to the beginnings of Italian cinephilia (Tosi 15–17).

9) *Il cinema e le arti meccaniche* [film and the mechanical arts], a book by Eugenio Giovannetti, published in 1930. This is the first Italian book based entirely on viewing records, which, in turn, were destined to generate further annotations pertaining to aesthetic and economic topics.

10) The behind-the-camera debut of Alessandro Blasetti and other people revolving around him. These new entries marked the arrival of a new generation of filmmakers that had formed themselves by watching and discussing movies from inside a movie theatre, rather than practising on sets (Gili 398–399).

Is Cinephilia a Male-Only Passion?

As the above points illustrate, only male names are mentioned in the canonical reconstruction of the origins of cinephilia in Italy. In fact, the one thing that the earlier generation of *cinematophiles* (Gili 398–399) seem to share with the cinephiles of the 1950s and 1960s is that they are all men.³ The need for a “defeminization” process of the Italian film audience was in fact theorized in several texts of the 1910s and 1920s, including some of the titles cited above. While the emerging attitude of cinephilia was represented by a small number of young male intellectuals, the general, non-writing audience that crowded the early film theaters was perceived as an anonymous mass of uncultured working-class women and children. Reconsidering the history of film theories in Italy from this perspective shows that the definition and fine-tuning of the medium according to gender characteristics did not come as a bolt out of the blue. On the contrary, the bias towards the male spectator and male cinephilia appears to have been accurately shaped within the scope of a theoretical reflection.

A good representative of this line of thought is Eugenio Giovannetti in his book of 1930, *Il cinema e le arti meccaniche* [cinema and mechanical arts], which promotes the ideal of a cultivated and rather intellectual film audience that in his view would have to be constituted mainly by men. The formation of a prevalently male audience is welcomed by Giovannetti as a sign of a rebirth, of or at least as a chance for a kind of cinema Renaissance on both the aesthetic and the socio-cultural level.

Consider, for instance, this passage:

The history of feminine aesthetics is, therefore, in the shadows, monotonous and unmentionable; the masculine theory of aesthetics, on the other hand, is the dominant model, with a rich history full of splendors. Men are the only ones who have been able to speak of

³This is clear when one looks at the list of the women working in the field of cultural film programming in the 1950s and 1960s, recorded by Virgilio Tosi in his volume on the history of film clubs in Italy, *Quando il cinema era un circolo* [when cinema was a club]. As important as they certainly are, the names of these women can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

male beauty in a worthy manner, because only men have been capable of recognizing it and loving it throughout time. No woman would ever be able to write about masculine beauty like in the notorious page in which Winckelmann describes the Vatican's torso. And no woman would ever be able to speak of a man's charm with the enthusiastic simplicity that, according to Gorky, was typical of Leo Tolstoy, the most sound and unsuspected author among the great modern ones. Gorky writes that Tolstoy said he preferred one of his friends for his masculine beauty: 'because seeing a handsome man is always an exquisite pleasure.' For thousands of years, men have been the only creators and the sole judges in terms of beauty. Nowadays, we can therefore consider with calm impartiality the cinematographer's uprisings against the dominant masculine aesthetics; these rebellions are becoming increasingly daring, since filmmakers have a powerful and extremely original autonomy, and therefore an enormous direct influence on tastes and culture. (Giovannetti 106–107)

According to Giovannetti, then, the masculinization of the viewing experience and the emergence of a male-gendered type of visual pleasure are both key elements in the aesthetic improvement of film production. Moreover, such aesthetic improvement would represent a modern resurgence of a classical standard of beauty, historically established by male consensus.

As several other male writers explain, the woman who loves going to the movies, entering a dark theater to share an experience of exuberant emotionality with other spectators and spectatrices, is unable to appreciate a film in terms of its aesthetic values.⁴ In Giovannetti's text, this figure is evoked in opposition to the new spectatorial model represented by the male *cinéphile*, a cultivated middle-class man who takes cinema as a serious aesthetic affair, whose emotions never supersede his rationality, but are instead shaped by it. I will call this figure the "early female film buff" and I will try to track her traces throughout the silent period, 1898-1930.

The gendering of spectatorship as an innovation within the boundaries of an entirely male cultural perspective first became a matter of public debate on 18 May 1907, when *La Stampa* (a daily paper) published an essay entitled *La filosofia del cinematografo* [the philosophy of the motion pictures]. Its author was the renowned intellectual, Giovanni Papini, who wrote:

Although the philosopher is by nature a person who lives a secluded life, generally opposed to noise and fuss, it would be a mistake on his part to ignore these new leisure establishments, leaving them for the curiosity of the young, the ladies, and the common man. (Papini 1-2)

The logic behind statement is clear: women and children are too prone to emotions, so

⁴ Other authors expressed similar concepts during those years. See in particular Gerbi, D'Errico, and Mariani Dell'Anguillara. But the list also includes less obvious names, like that of Luciano Doria, the author of a disturbing short story on the fascination of cinema based on a sexist theme, *Io, Riri e l'amore in pantofole* [me, Riri, and love in slippers].

they lack the ability to appreciate the film according to its true aesthetic values. To accept that the film going audience be mostly made of women and children, would mean to accept the impossibility of any sort of reflection on the phenomenon of cinema. Consequently, it was important to introduce into the audience a great deal of adult, and preferably intellectual, men.

A History to be Rewritten

This sexist view was incorrect, even back in 1907. We know today that a number of remarkable articles and fictional stories on cinema were written by women authors such as Anna Gentile Vertua (1898), Luigia Cortesi (1905), Matilde Serao (1916)⁵, Annie Vivanti (1917), and Ada Negri (1928). These were all respectable writers, but no doubt they were as many passionate moviegoers too (Ada Negri most certainly was).

In 1916, Angelina Buracci wrote a remarkable essay entitled *Cinematografo educativo* [educational cinema]. In many ways, this long-forgotten piece of writing challenged the snobbish certainties of contemporary male discourses on the cinema.

Though the existence of this sixty-page booklet was not unknown (Raffaelli, “Il cinema per la scuola dei primordi” [cinema for primary school]; Raffaelli, “Sul primo scaffale del cinema italiano” [on the first shelf of Italian cinema]; Spinosa), the essay itself has never the subject of a study. And yet it holds many surprises. In my view, it should be returned to the place it deserves in the international debate. This is a place that it has so far been denied, perhaps also because of the serious difficulties one has to face in finding copies of the volume. In what follows, I will compare Angelina Buracci’s reflections on the cinema with the basic assumptions underlying the Italian male discourse on film and film spectatorship between 1907 and 1930.

Aside from the considerable length of her study (sixty pages) and the wide range of topics examined, the most interesting feature of *Cinematografo educativo* is the significant number of the films reviewed by Buracci. She considers about fourteen titles.⁶ They span from the classic *Il fuoco* (the fire, Giovanni Pastrone, 1915), to an obscure western entitled *Il testamento del cercatore d'oro* (the gold-digger’s last will, 1915), to action thrillers like *Marvelous Maciste* (*Maciste*, Luigi Romano Borgnetto, Vincenzo Denizot, 1915), to slapstick comedies, not to

⁵ On Matilde Serao’s complicated relationship with cinema and cinema going, see Annunziata.

⁶ This is the list of titles ordered by citation: *L’ebreo errante* (the wandering jew, 1916) by Umberto Paradisi; *The Wedding March* (*Marcia nuziale*, 1915) by Carmine Gallone; *Marvelous Maciste* (*Maciste*, 1915) by Vincenzo Denizot and Luigi Romano Borgnetto; *Passano gli Unni* (the huns pass through, 1916) by Mario Caserini; *Il mio diario di guerra* (my war diary, 1915) by Riccardo Tolentino; *Alla bajonetta!* (to the bayonet!, 1915) by Edoardo Bencivenga; *Giardino zoologico di Roma* (Rome zoological garden, 1910) by Cines productions; *Il testamento del cercatore d'oro* (the gold-digger’s last will, 1915) by Savoia productions; *Il Fuoco* (the fire, 1915) by Giovanni Pastrone; *Falena* (the moth, 1916) by Carmine Gallone; *La Gorgona* (the gorgon, 1915) by Mario Caserini; *Cuore di De Amicis—Dagli Appennini alle Ande*, (heart by De Amicis—from the Apennines to the Andes, 1916) by Umberto Paradisi; and finally the films played by the child star Cinessino (1913-1916), and certainly among them *Cinessino is Lucky* (*Cinessino ha fortuna*, 1914) and *Bloomer and Cinessino’s Easter* (*La Pasqua di Cinessino*, 1914).

forget the *dal vero* genre (non fiction films). In writing about these films, Buracci always gives the impression of having seen them all firsthand; the titles are never mentioned as echoes of banal hearsay or through word of mouth. Moreover, several of the films in the book are the object of specific analysis and in-depth study. Some reviews may be shorter than others, but they are generally quite sharp. Such an analytic approach was truly groundbreaking at the time for a country like Italy, where theory was largely based on abstract and often obtruse concepts.

Another surprising aspect of Buracci's work is the careful description of the theatres in which the films discussed in the book were screened. In the opening, Buracci dares to express something that no other intellectual mentioned until the 1930s: that she had been going to the movies regularly since she was a young girl, ever since she first saw a motion picture show put on by an itinerant company (most likely that of the Roatto's Brothers) in Venice in 1904 (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 11). Therefore, Buracci was not only a female film buff, but also a long-standing witness of the emergence of the motion pictures and its audience in Italy.

Additionally, all of Buracci's observations are accurate and precise. They range, for instance, from the gender of the worker assigned to sell admission tickets (a job performed only by men in the beginning), to the type of seats (both in the hall and in the stalls), to the furnishings of hygiene-related innovations that were introduced in the theatres during the period (ventilators and disinfectant sprays vaporized in the air). Buracci also writes lengthy descriptions of the audience (commenting on its variety, its social composition and modes of expression), the wall decorations (which she often admires for their modernist style), and the musical repertoire that was played in the hall (which, she notes, never included classical music) (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 11–15).

Unlike most of the other commentators on cinema, Buracci never indulged in futile observations, especially when she wrote about audiences. Her descriptions are concise and precise, and always functional to the development of her argument. While she was a regular filmgoer, her observational method was, first and foremost, that of a woman of science.

Cinematografo educativo was not aimed to either present or praise the virtues of modern movie theatres. Instead, its purpose was to make an accurate analysis of the socio-psychological dynamics at work in these places (9), with particular regard to the role played by women spectatrices within the realm of what we would today call the "cinematic device" (on this topic, see also Lant and Perez; Alovio).

The Role of Women in the Critical and Theoretical Debate

One major aspect of Buracci's interest in film theatres is the bond between women and the cinema. Not only does she acknowledge that women and children constitute the majority of the audience, but she also provides a useful sociological framework to explain this evidence.

She writes:

Why do people bring children to the movies indifferently, without getting any prior information on the shows being screened? Why, on certain days, do we see in the movie theatres such a great number of fidgety little heads, exasperating their mothers and nannies, but then also giving the environment a cheerful tone with their laughter? The answer is that mothers want to enjoy themselves, but they don't know who to leave their children with; so they drag them along, since they know the kids will enjoy themselves too, and, even if there are some *risqué* scenes, they won't understand anything anyway. This is why you often see women barge into movie theatres followed by a swarm of lively, rowdy children. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 27)

These sociological considerations can best be understood by keeping in mind the book's opening sentence:

The antiquated idea that movie theatres are a pastime for children and for the mediocre and below-average minds . . . has now faded. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 11)

Countering Papini's misogynist view of the film theatres as leisure places for an uncultured, mostly female audience, which the male intellectual would have to ennoble, Buracci welcomed the composite structure of the film audience as a sign of modernity, making the film theater a place where "a businessman, a blue-collar worker, or a lady can go . . . in their spare time from work" (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 6).

A talented pedagogue, Buracci was also a supporter of the women's movement. She explicitly acknowledges her position as a moderate feminist in a 1913 booklet, *Il pensiero educativo di Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci e la moderna cultura femminile* [the educational thinking of Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci and modern women culture], dedicated to Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci, a nineteenth century writer who was also a patriot and an educator. Ferrucci had fiercely advocated in defence of the right of teenage girls and women to attend live performances, regardless of whether they were plays or vaudeville (Buracci, *Il pensiero educativo* [the educational thinking] 30–34; 51–53). There was no reason, then, why the same principles should not be applied to cinema, Buracci maintained. Her feminist and, perhaps, academic formation saw her contest the alleged mediocrity attributed to the average filmgoer because they were (for the most part) women.

Buracci also paid careful attention to the contemporary debate on film spectatorship. Some brief but relevant reflections reveal a possible knowledge of some important articles and essays that were published in this period. In *Cinematografo educativo* (50) a clear reference can be found to the work of Emilia Santamaria, a feminist and a pedagogue (Formiggini Santamaria 253). Moreover, one passage of the book shows emotional analogies with Gozzano's article *Il nastro di celluloido e i serpi di Laocoonte* [the celluloid strip and Laocoon's

snakes], a beautiful essay published in May 1916 in *La Donna* [the woman], a moderately feminist magazine that was issued for a brief period during the war. These analogies emerge particularly with reference to Gozzano's interpretation of the cinema as a show that allows its bourgeois viewers to free themselves from the formality of social conventions. He states:

There are some empty evenings, when you look through the list of theatres in vain: there isn't anything worth watching for three consecutive hours, because otherwise you would be watching the same production for the umpteenth time. In those evenings, your tired brain cannot pay attention to anything; it refuses to watch either a good comedy or a good actor, just as it refuses to read a book. These evenings are denied to both the brain and the arts. So you try to come up with something else to do: something light, not tiresome; something that isn't as heavy as a play; but something that is more stimulating than just going to a café or to the club, with its magazines and your bored friends, or the pitifully fowl vernacular of the music halls. Movie theatres offer such an entertainment option. (Gozzano 10)

Likewise, Angelina Buracci states:

Movie theatres are a convenient creation indeed. They provide a form of entertainment that doesn't last too long, doesn't tire you out, and it isn't boring; it welcomes spectators at any time of day, without etiquette and without making them feel uncomfortable. A businessman, a blue-collar worker, or a lady can go to the movies between business deals, between assemblies, between sessions, or in spare time from work; or, surprised by a sudden downpour, they can find shelter in a movie theatre and wait for the rain to desist.

People go to the movies because, when they pass by one, they always see a program they find interesting. There is no need to change shirts or to wear white gloves; and, mostly importantly, this form of entertainment is relatively inexpensive.

Why not take advantage of it? (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 10)

One year after the publication of Buracci's book, her considerations resonate in an article by another gifted writer of this time, Annie Vivanti. Vivanti's single, witty description of the experience of film viewing appeared in April 1917, again in *La Donna*:

Examine your conscience, oh gentle readers. When you attend an elegant dinner, or a classical music concert, or an exhibition of ancient paintings, or the somber conference of a speaker in vogue; as you wear your Semenza-Sorelle coat with its collar reaching up to your nose, as you nervously fasten the delicate buttons of your pearl-colored gloves, and as you head tip-toeing (as your dainty shoes impose) toward that magnificent and majestic duty. In those moments, look deep inside your hearts and tell me: wouldn't you rather be going to a movie?

Some might ask: why specifically the movies? Why not the theatre or some other place? The reasons are many.

First and foremost, because movie theatres represent a source of ineffable joy for us women. We are slaves to fixed duties at fixed times: pre-arranged amusements in places booked in advance, visiting certain people and having conversations on the same compulsory topics. Hence, amid all of this, thinking: ‘We can go to any movie theatre, at any time, and see any show’ is of great source of delight.

What a relief for our nerves this impartial decision left to chance, such soothing . . .

Sitting in the movies, you find complete intellectual repose.

At the theatre (during the intervals) or at concerts (during the most important pieces of music), as women we are morally obliged to make clever and lighthearted conversation. We have to give our opinion on the value of the performance that was played in front of us, to demolish its author, to draw comparisons, and to unveil plagiarism. And finally, because of the loud unflattering lights of the interval, as ladies, we also have to worry about the details of our hairdo.

There is none of this at the movie theatre.

You can just sit there in peace and quiet sunken into your seat, under the comforting shadow of your cloche hat, without having to talk or dazzle: there’s no need to be funny or caustic, witty or sharp. No. At most you become part of the whispering chorus of people watching the film, as you read the intertitles preceding each frame,

‘... and Duke Gustavo realized that Elena had become indispensable to his happiness...’ (Vivanti 24)

Children are Intelligent Spectators as Well

Buracci’s principal interest, however, concerned the process of visual comprehension and awareness in growing children. She argued that teenagers and children were not to be treated like little creatures devoid of intellect; on the contrary, they deserved to be considered as subjects capable of “making associations, remembering, summarizing, analyzing, imagining, judging, and reasoning” (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 28). Therefore, they were also to be deemed able to attend film screenings in a discerning way.

In terms of spectatorship, the differences between adults and children were described by the author in relation to 1) timing, and 2) different phases of understanding and reaction to the visual stimuli on screen. Children, Buracci argued, display the same phases of understanding a film as adults, only with a slower timing. As a result, rather than explaining the lack of narrative connections with magic (as they were generally believed to do), children seemed to enjoy the possibility offered by their perception of disconnected stimula to produce personal articulations of the images and events they perceived on screen, creating unexpected mental collages. According to Buracci, this was particularly the case for the youngest filmgoers.

She continued to explain that younger boys and girls deploy an emotional strategy that consists in the “theft” of other people’s feelings. Because of this particularly strong relationship to the screen, children can experience true pain when put in front of images of suffering and sorrow. Buracci writes that this process of identity development puts children

in a delicate condition. She argues that the huge emotional power of the filmic experience can open a dangerous passageway into their evolving personalities, easily overwhelming internal emotional processes (*Cinematografo educativo* 28–29).

In what appears to be an anticipation of the debate on the psychological implications of the star, Buracci argues that the film hero plays an important role in the creation of a positive relationship between the child and the screen (on the same topic, see also the coeval essay by Bellonci). Buracci explains that because of the limitations of the younger mind in seizing all the details in a film, the figure of the hero stands out and, when recalled, tends to become larger than life. She states:

Oh! The heroes from the movies outshine Hercules and Samson. Children dream of their adventures at night, they light up with enthusiasm and wonder. In their fantasies, Maciste becomes their friend, their savior. He rescues them when the monster is about to eat them; he saves them from the fury of the waves; and he catches them as they are about to fall from a cliff. And, little by little, Maciste becomes bigger and bigger, until he becomes a giant that could fill an entire room. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 21)

Buracci's attention to the representation of the hero also surfaces in her discussion of war films. She complains about the way national heroicism was portrayed in contemporary productions, where isolated and harmless Austrian soldiers were attacked and humiliated because they were labeled enemies (*Cinematografo educativo* 59). Buracci believed that this kind of representation was grotesque and would have terrible repercussions in the years to come.

In *Cinematografo educativo* Buracci also briefly describes one of the first reported educational experiments with war films. She addresses the reactions of some children who were exposed to footage shot in Lybia during the Italian-Turkish war in 1911-1912. The topic had already been touched on by Gisella Chelini, another pedagogue, in 1915. But unlike Chelini's celebrative attitude—particularly with regard to the reactions of a group of elementary students in Florence to the screening of *La gloriosa Battaglia delle Due Palme. Bengasi 12 marzo* (the glorious battle of the two palms. Bengasi 12 march 1912) by Luca Comerio (Chelini 5-6). Buracci reveals an awareness that even when the war ends, the memory of the films remain: the hero's attitudes persist in the children's imagination outside their original context, out of place, like an image of violence in times of peace. Buracci explains:

Our children will be tomorrow's generation. They have to learn that you cannot extinguish hate with hate; you cannot wash blood away by shedding more blood. War is a necessity of people still affected by primeval barbarism; it shouldn't extinguish our compassion and mercy. I am aware that, nowadays, my words may sound dissonant given the current political context: but I treat the topic from the perspective of a professional educator, and as such I have to dissociate any notion that does not comply with the purest and highest forms of morality. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 49–50)

Buracci's ostinate will to preserve an accurate, professional approach as a scientist—even in a confused context as was then the Italian culturale debate, particularly during the war years—is perhaps her most important legacy to the cultural history of Italian cinema. She was a pedagogue and a feminist, a scientist and a spectatrix who, countering the rethoric of so many male authors, attempted to resist the impetus of male passions simply by means of her intellect.

THE AUTHOR: Luca Mazzei (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor at the University of Rome “Tor Vergata.” His research focuses on the relations between film and documentary materials in the history of Italian cinema. He has published numerous essays in such journals as *Bianco & nero*, *Studi novecenteschi*, *Comunicazioni sociali*, *Cinema & Cie*, *Immagine. Note di storia del cinema*, *Panta*, *Ágalma*, and in several collective volumes. He is the author, together with Federico Vitella, of the volume, *Geometrie dello sguardo. Contributi allo studio dei formati nel cinema italiano* [patterns of vision. contributions to the study of formats in Italian cinema] (2006). In 2011 he codirected with Giovanni Spagnoletti an international conference on early Italian war films, *The Imagined War. The Rise of Media Culture and the Libyan War*, as part of his ongoing research on a newly discovered archival footage of the Libyan war of 1911-12.

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PROLOGUE TO PART III

Jane M. Gaines

Wordlessness (to be Continued)¹

ABSTRACT: This is the first part of some thoughts toward how to open up again the question of the theoretical issues around the expressivity of the body, especially given the example of silent cinema. It is an old semiotic problem of what meanings words convey and what the body without words can be said to “express.” After deciding that “silence” is not the operative concept we want I return briefly to the no-word advocates like Béla Balász, and “pure cinema” theorists Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, and Louis Delluc, as well as to Christian Metz who was highly dismissive of what he called the “gibberish” of the silent screen. Peter Brooks comes in for some scrutiny for coming so close in his “Text of Muteness” chapter in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, but I find that he still sits on the fence, wanting to give the day to silent expression, but then signaling a preference for words. So I keep asking what is meant by the phrase “words cannot express,” wanting to know if this means that they fall short or that other signs must take up the slack, or that words will never substitute for gestures. Concluding with Lillian Gish’s essay on “Speech Without Words” and Asta Nielsen’s position that the American cinema had too many words, I call this an exercise in defining a problem although I do not consider this project anything more than “to be continued.”

It has been almost thirty years since Molly Haskell told us that silent film condemned female characters to speechlessness. In her breakthrough book on women in Hollywood films, *From Reverence to Rape*, she took a position in tune with the feminism of the time when she wrote that the strong heroine of the Woman’s Movement could not be found in the silent cinema:

There was little possibility of such a heroine emerging in silent film, where the very instrument of her emancipation—speech—was denied her. By definition, silent film is a medium in which women can be seen but not heard. The conversational nuances of an intelligent women can barely be conveyed in a one-sentence title; an emancipation proclamation cannot be delivered in pantomime. (175)

I cite Haskell here to gauge the distance we have come in the last three decades in our assessment of women in the silent era—both before and behind the camera. But Haskell’s position also reminds us of what has not changed and that is this—the academic bias against forms of expression that we could call “all body and no words.” In the comparison between silent enactment and spoken conversation in Haskell, bodily expression is by implication a low, inarticulate form, and the rich traditions of theatrical pantomime and stage melodrama would appear to have been forgotten. Important developments might suggest that there is

¹ In this first of two parts I only line up the most basic sources and begin to sketch out the parameters of an argument that may very well take another direction in the second part, making this another experiment in online publishing: a theoretical problem set up and to-be-engaged-with in a second part. So this is just to warn readers that the following is intentionally incomplete, only introductory, and ends abruptly.

new academic acceptance in the humanities, most notably in studies of theatrical melodrama, in the new media emphasis on embodiment, and elsewhere in what has been called the “affective turn.”² This vanguard, however, has not necessarily transformed the mainstream, considering that it has been eighteen years since Brian Massumi, reworking Gilles Deleuze, first wrote that “the skin is faster than the word” (*Parables for the Virtual* 25).³ Because this bias in favor of the spoken and written word based on the word’s presumed superior capacity for expressivity continues to work against the academic study of cinema—not to mention theories of the image—we can put off our confrontation with it no longer. And, if I may be so bold, this bias is everywhere, especially in the critical theory upon which film theory has been built, and therefore it should not be surprising that it can be found even within the very literature on melodrama that we have taken as foundational.

Wordless Mimesis

Where do we find in all of our critical literature the elaborated defense of *wordless mimesis*? And why urge this concept of *wordless mimesis* over either “silence” or “speechlessness”? First, to correct Haskell, because it isn’t that the silent screen took articulate speech from female characters, leaving them expressionless, because, as we now understand, the silent cinema had many more kinds of expressive systems at its disposal, from color to camera movement, to the full gestural continuum. As Mary Ann Doane once described the production of meaning in the silent film, directly countering Haskell, all of the expressivity is taken from the spoken word and given to the whole body: “The absent voice re-emerges in gestures and the contortions of the face—it is spread over the body of the actor” (33). We would not, however, stop there, but say that expressivity is spread over the whole of the *mise-en-scène*—not only spread over bodies but landscapes and, most certainly objects, as Germaine Dulac, reminds us—especially, thinking back to the Lumières, objects like the train arriving in the station, as we will see (391, 396). Yet even if we start to think about the silent cinema *mise-en-scène* as comprised of sound substitutes we start to go down the wrong track and begin to think of the so-called “non-verbal” as second order signs. Further, as we know, silent cinema was never exactly without sound, a condition irrefutably established by important historical work on silent film musical and sound accompaniment (see Abel and Altman; Altman).⁴ The

² See Buckley, special issue of *Modern Drama* on melodrama; for the theoretical foundations upon which some new media theory builds, as well as some of the first elaborated application of Gilles Deleuze to the question of affect see Massumi (ch. 1). I would argue that all of these developments have been slower to take hold than one might think and although they may be perceived as the vanguard in critical theory and women’s studies circles they have yet to change the humanities mainstream where it most counts—in departments of literature. As for the “affective turn,” the literature is growing as evidenced in overviews as well as collections: see Hemmings; Clough; Koivunen; Leys; Frank and Wilson.

³ The reference is to the fact that chapter titled “The Autonomy of Affect” first appeared as an article by the same name in *Cultural Critique* in 1995.

⁴ Abel and Altman, urging us to think beyond the cliché that “‘silent cinema’ was rarely silent,” establish that sound was not only “ubiquitous,” it was “diverse,” changing from year to year and from site to site (xii–xiii).

theoretical work on music as carrier of meaning has been important here as well, establishing sound as a full “enrichment” of the image (Chion 5).⁵ So we might better say that silent cinema was wordless without ever being soundless. With the exception of intertitles and actors’ silent mouthing of words, silent cinema’s on-screen motion photographic *wordless mimesis* of the world carried the burden of expression, standing to the spectator in place of the word portrait of novelistic realism. Of course, the concept of *mimesis* has been historically developed with reference to literary and theatrical forms, but historically it has never functioned as a centerpiece in film theory. Although both Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin could be seen as still impressed by the mimetic capacity that had thrilled early cinema observers, both effectively subsumed *mimesis* within their respective theorizations of “realism.” Ernst Bloch, of all of the theorists aligned with the Frankfurt School, was the only one to weigh in on the power of silent cinema in these terms, praising its “incomparable mimic power” and crediting it with having brought forward an “until then unknown treasure of the clearest gestures.” He wrote about the necessity of a “micrologically developed intonation...not of the word, but of the gesture.” What was his inspiration when in 1918 he began to conceive of the work that would become *The Principle of Hope*? On screen at that time in Germany one could see everywhere Bloch’s inspiration, Asta Nielsen, who “with a flicker of the eyelid, a raising of the shoulder, possessed the art of expressing more than a hundred mediocre poets put together . . .” (Bloch 405–407). In retrospect, one wonders if, in the 1970s—film theory had started here, just with the legacy of pantomime—it could have averted the long detour through the analogy with language, a theory that, while protesting that it was only a structure that was being borrowed, secretly esteemed the essence of spoken and written language—the word.

Not only was *mimesis* never really central to film theory, but 1970s film theory in particular eschewed the concept of *mimesis* altogether. Thus it is that until relatively recently *mimesis* has not been part of the critical vocabulary of film theory (see however, Gaudreault).⁶ Yet *mimesis* is still the only concept that circumvents the thorny concept of “realism” and allows us to compare the two incommensurable sign systems at issue. I say incommensurable thinking of Foucault’s observation that “It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted with the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms: it is in vain that we say what see; what we see never resides in what we say” (9).

Two Mimeticisms

Literary realism and cinematic realism might better be understood as two mimeticisms,

⁵ For another application see Bhaskar (163), who refers in her discussion of song in 1940s and 1950s Bombay film melodrama as the “language of the ineffable.”

⁶ Gaudreault is especially useful as he explains that for Plato *mimesis* was not opposed to *diegesis* as it was more recently in Gérard Genette whose distinction between imitation and narration (*diegesis*) set the terms for 1970 film theory (8). Also see the “Mimesis Now” conference held April 5–7, 2012, at the University of Rochester.



ASTA: NIELSEN

K. 1311

Photochemie, Berlin.

A handsigned publicity postcard of Asta Nielsen. Photochemie, Berlin.

one difficult, the other apparently easy.⁷ Christian Metz, thinking of cinema, gave the lie to this ease: “An easy art, the cinema is in constant danger of falling victim to its easiness. It is so easy to create an effect when one has available the natural expression of things, of beings, of the world! Too easy. The cinema is also a difficult art: for, Sisyphus-like, it is trapped under the burden of its facility” (77). Think here of the moving image as having not only the representational inadequacy or noncorrespondence difficulty, in that it works by rough metaphoric symbolics, but it has

the opposite problem—photographic excess. To be more precise, it is plagued by what Tom Gunning once called the “excess of mimesis over meaning” of the photographic image (17). Everything before the camera, as Metz once said, is “trapped in the frame.” Do we need to make a case that this “everything” is a problem? For one thing, as a consequence of this extra expressivity, in the analysis of cinema, more theoretical work is required, extra theoretical steps, really, because there are more kinds of signs—the iconic and the indexical at least, not to mention the combination of the two kinds of signs exemplified by the photographic, plus the motion photographic, not to forget, in the later sound cinema, the acoustic sign. What then is the antidote to the false obviousness of these signs, or, as Metz has it, the apparent “ease” of the cinematic expression?

Still, while grasping literary mimesis, as we know, requires language-learning and word knowledge, apprehending cinematic mimesis requires no such knowledge, or, as it has been said, requires no more than cultural knowledge, the knowledge of lived experience. This is the knowledge that elites have often considered *no knowledge at all*. And yet there is a notable exception to this. Critical theory has afforded wordless expression a small opening, seen, for example, in deconstruction’s appreciation of the pre-linguistic (Derrida).⁸ Yet, as we know, the pockets of resistance to deconstruction in the humanities disciplines runs deep. It remains to be seen whether the “affective turn,” as it is called, will open up a wider comparison of the carriers of affect, as I earlier said. This is because experiential knowing, the facility requiring feeling, intuiting, and reacting (without translation into words) is still held in such relatively low esteem among the literati. And in this regard, let us be more skeptical of the oxymoronic concept of “visual literacy” and even that other concept that has done so much to help the field of cinema studies toward respectability—textual “reading.” Think further of the numerous ways in which “reading” words that attempt to describe a scenario on a page is totally unlike the experience of watching pantomimic action or enactment on screen, not to mention viewing the scenic pan over landscape or seascape. Why is “viewing” thought to be a less serious pursuit than “reading”?

This question of the hierarchy of sign-systems in which the word is esteemed over the mimetic gesture is most dramatically illustrated in melodrama theory, as I promised to

⁷ See Scarry (5) for one of the few literary discussions of the paucity of expressive signs in literary representation, in which she says that “verbal art, especially narrative, is almost bereft of sensuous content.” The only visual features offered readers, she admits, are “monotonous small black marks on a white page.”

⁸ See especially Derrida’s discussion of Rousseau (203–209, 232–242).

show, and here my example of bias toward word culture and its more “literate” expressivity may surprise some as it comes from the “Text of Muteness” chapter in Peter Brooks’s *The Melodramatic Imagination* (56-80), so influential in the study of cinema. Some may wonder at the objection because this chapter has for so long stood as a crucial academic validation for silent film melodrama studies.⁹ Many scholars have taken Brooks’s chapter as a theoretical core, and it is indeed because of its seminal status and, as a consequence, repeated use, that I came to notice a crucial term that slipped into this chapter, a verb used again and again to explain what it is that, in Brooks’s terms, “mute” signs convey. Note that it is not the adjective “mute” to which I raise objections, although we should recall that in Brooks “muteness” appears as a speech deficit, even a disability in the way it reference inability to command articulate expression.¹⁰ It is not the central concept of “muteness” but rather instead a less important term, one that easily escapes notice. My interest is instead in Brooks’s use of the word “recourse,” a term he uses no less than eight times in a twenty-four page chapter. What is the problem with the word “recourse” which is in English a rather colorless, unassuming noun? The problem is indeed with its commonness. For Brooks has rather uncritically dropped in a common sense idea, the idea that when words “cannot be found” we *fall back* on “nonverbal” means of expression. Thus, for instance, we find in “The Text of Muteness” chapter the following: “*recourse* to non-verbal means” (56); “*recourse* to tableau” (61); “constant *recourse* to silent gesture” (62); “*recourse* to gesturality” and “*recourse* to muteness” (64); “*recourse* to the immediacy of expression” (66), and “The habitual *recourse* of Romantic drama and melodrama to the gestural trope of the inarticulate....” Finally, however, he offers what might seem to be a rehabilitation of gesture: “*Recourse* to mute gesture is a necessary strategy in any expressionistic aesthetics” (79). But the damage is done. If embodied signs are those that novelistic characters use as a fall back, they are second order, inferior signs. *Wordless mimesis* is the expression of last resort, the antithesis of erudite and cultivated speech. Now we should note that Brooks could have used “recourse” in the more established sense, that of the source of help or strength, a refuge of sorts. But instead of a helpmate, the expressive gesturality or, as it might be called, “bodily emotivity,” becomes a prop for the preferred word-language. Meaningful language is thus here opposed *not even to* an alternative “language” of a gestural code but to the inchoate and consequently incomprehensible. What stands revealed here is the real apprehension in the cultural attitude towards wordless expression—the fear that it would dissolve into an incoherent meaninglessness.

Now this worry about incoherence has a corollary which while it appears to give the day to the pantomimic (still the fall back mode of expression), may only be giving *wordless mimesis* a back-handed compliment as it were. The reader will recognize this corollary immediately because it has such broad circulation in the wider population as well as in the critical literature of melodrama. Think of the many times we ourselves may have conceded to the idea that

⁹ The introduction of Brooks can be traced from Gledhill’s Introduction (5–39).

¹⁰ See for an interesting theorization of cinema as deficient or as having disabilities Abigail Salerno’s dissertation, “The Blind Heroine.”

“words cannot express.” If words “cannot,” it may not, however, be because there are some conditions, some states of heart and mind that will always elude words. Words may be thought to fail because the right ones could not be found or that they were tried and they failed to adequately convey meaning. Then, as we might suspect, “words cannot express” may be just another way of dismissing feelings. Therefore, “words cannot express” is not necessarily an endorsement of an alternative mode of expression, of wordless mimesis as potentially fuller and more nuanced.

“Words Cannot Express”

To be fair, the inability of words to express what we mean can be explored in more than one direction. In film theory alone, this idea has been deployed in at least two ways, if not more, so here we might separate the “pure cinema” no-word advocates like film critics Bela Balász, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, and Louis Delluc from ambivalent literary critics exemplified here by Peter Brooks.¹¹ The “pure cinema” theorists could be found to disdain the word. Yet all of these critics require much closer scrutiny because it may be that in each can be found traces of the phantom word, rather like the phantom limb. Metz strikes at both systems, not quite willing to elevate the wordless yet blaming the verbal structure for the very inarticulateness of wordless expression in silent cinema, saying, for instance, that “old verbal structures, although officially absent from film, were nonetheless a haunting presence” (Metz 50). So, too, the “pure cinema” theorists are revealed as conflicted and ambivalent. Jean Epstein, for instance, writes in explicating Sessue Hayakawa’s *The Honor of His House* (1918), “What sadness can be found in rain!” and sees Hayakawa’s stiff back as like a face, with shoulders that “refuse, reject, renounce.” But then Epstein goes on to say that, “The words are lacking. The words have not been found,” as though to say that words “could” but have although they have not, as yet, risen to the task (243). Perhaps *photogénie* in its very undefinability is sitting on the fence between word and wordless gesture (see Wall-Romana 53-54). It could be that Germaine Dulac, of all the “pure cinema” advocates, in her dedication to abstraction, had divorced herself the most thoroughly from the word. Certainly she chastens artists who considered “the art of written thoughts and feelings” to be “adequate forms” of expression before, as she says, they were surprised by a cinema for which they were perceptually quite unprepared (Dulac 390). And it even seems that Dulac advocates the wordless mimesis of, above all, the first screen train entering the station, especially as it exemplifies the way “pure movement” created emotion (391). Then, there is this interesting passage in which she suggests that there is a social class-based receptivity or non-

¹¹ On the animosity toward words on the part of early film theorists see Christian Metz, for instance, who singles out the “pure cinema” critics Bela Balász, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, and Louis Delluc for their exemplary “contempt for the word” (49).

receptivity to non-representational signs of emotion: “The intellectual elite, like the masses, obviously lacked some psychological capacity indispensable for any correct assessment that would have enabled them to consider movement from another angle: namely, that a shifting of lines can arouse one’s feelings” (Dulac 390). Finally, we wonder if Balász’s language of microphysiognomy, instituted in lieu of words but in what we might call “word’s terms,” is not an appreciation of wordless mimesis. Or does microphysiognomy lay the foundation for the very analogy between cinema and language which the field so stubbornly forced for so many decades?¹² Consider that before his explication of two especially moving scenes featuring silent actors Asta Nielsen and (again, of course), Hayakawa, Balász explains of early film close-ups that “more can sometimes be read in a face than is written on it” (*Bela Balász: Early Film Theory* 103). Perhaps we can finally say that the cinema-as-language analogy, in borrowing the established prestige of the word, postponed the critical acceptance of *wordless mimesis*.

Inarticulate Expression

What, then, has neither ontological standing nor literary pretension? What comes out of the actor’s mouth, issuing from deep in the body? The sigh, the gasp, the moan, and the shriek. Here is the wordlessness that the language analogy cannot necessarily rescue. Thus Metz, dedicated as he is to the language analogy cannot find a way to accommodate silent film expressivity: “Thus there came into being a kind of silent gibberish, simultaneously overexcited and petrified, an exuberant gabbling whose every gesture, every bit of mimicry, stood with scrupulous and clumsy literalness for a linguistic unit, almost always a sentence whose absence, which would not otherwise have been catastrophic, became abundantly obvious when the gesticulated imitation so clearly emphasized it” (Metz 50).

Our last hope is Lillian Gish who, in an unpublished essay, “Speech Without Words,” places great value in the actor’s contribution to emotional articulation.¹³ Looking back, Gish writes that “The main concern of actors in the silent films was simply how to be articulate without words.” Apparently Gish did not believe that she was striving to be articulate with gestural signs that she thought of as themselves “inarticulate.” However, it is also clear from Gish that she did not mean to portray silent acting as at all wordlessness since she tells us that the silent actor depended upon words, certainly in the technique of “mouthing” (see Raynauld 70). As she describes the silent mouthing upon which silent actors relied as a technique, it was a constant stream, and during rehearsals actors “talked constantly, saying anything that

¹² “In the sound film the part played by this ‘microphysiognomy’ has greatly diminished because it is now apparently possible to express in words much of what facial expression apparently showed. But it is never the same—many profound emotional experiences can never be expressed in words at all” (Balász, *Theory of the Film* 65).

¹³ I want to credit my former student Annie Berke with discovering the typescript of this essay in the Gish Papers recently deposited at the Center for the Performing Arts of the New York Public Library.



A photo portrait of Lillian Gish. Photographer: Hartsook, c. 1915.
(Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons).

fitted the action.” Since director D.W. Griffith’s secretary took down the actors’ words, their improvised dialogue was often used both as a guide for the editor in assembling the film and as the basis of the intertitles written later. Thus it could be said that written intertitles could translate words in the form of vocalization, like the silent mouthing of words, could come to the rescue of the inarticulate cry. Since silent mouthing is here shown to be predicated on words what Gish describes is not exactly total wordlessness but something more like another case of word “ghosting.”

But Asta Nielsen, it should be recalled, objected that there were too many words in the American silent photoplay. Her position was that the practice of filling the screen with words did not leave enough to either the skilled actress or to the active audience (Engeberg 18). How appropriate, then, that Heide Schlüpmann, Nielsen’s most insightful analyst, writes in the afterward to the English translation of *The Uncanny Gaze: The Drama of Early German Cinema* that what is now required after the feminist strategies for analyzing “the gaze” in cinema is instead “an attention to all those instances in films that reveal the involuntary and graspable by means of light, color, movement. Early narrative film, with its rarely logically coherent narrative, determined more by lucky chance than by systematic planning, has made this especially evident” (220).

THE AUTHOR: Jane M. Gaines is Professor of Film at Columbia University. Author of two award-winning books, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law* (1991) and *Fire and Desire: Mixed Race Movies in the Silent Era* (2001), she is completing a third with the working title: *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?*

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III.
GENDER ON STAGE

A Pendulum of Performances: Asta Nielsen on Stage and Screen

ABSTRACT: Asta Nielsen turned to filmmaking in June 1910 because she was dissatisfied with the minor parts that the Danish theatres were offering her. She aspired big dramatic roles and hoped to convince theatre directors of her talent. Instead, her striking film performance launched her prolific career as a film star who virtually personified screen acting. The focus on Nielsen's work in the cinema, however, has often obscured the significance of the stage performances for her career. This article explores and contextualizes Nielsen's actual stage acting as well as references to the theatre within her films. Nielsen's pantomime performances in the 1910s informed a discussion how variety shows and cinema could benefit from one another; her adaptations of plays in the early 1920s revitalized the debate how to adapt theatre to film; and her star performances in popular plays in the late 1920s, when she toured all over Germany, were an alternative for film parts she deemed inapt for her intense physical and mimic acting style. Asta Nielsen employed the cinema to develop her unsurpassed acting style and to establish her sovereignty as an actress, but the stage ultimately enabled her to maintain her art and position.

Asta Nielsen turned to making films in June 1910 because she was dissatisfied with the roles that the Danish theatres offered her. She wished to play *große dramatische Aufgaben* [grand dramatic endeavors], but instead was given minor parts, mostly comic characters or aged women in which she was unable to display her talent for dramatic acting. It was immediately evident to the film trade as well as to audiences that her acting style was made for the camera, and that her ideas about cinema could help the development of a young medium that was seeking improvement and expansion. The thirty-three films that Nielsen made between 1910 and 1914 together with Urban Gad, a set designer and artistic advisor to the same theatre to which Nielsen was engaged (the Ny Theater [new theater] in Copenhagen), set new standards. Their characters and subjects were new and engaging, their films were longer than the average production of the time, they produced and released their works at a pace that outstripped all others (they made eight films each year, which meant that from August to May a new Asta Nielsen film was released every month) and the quality of their dramatic and comic acting was uniformly high. Further, their films were the subject of much publicity and press coverage, and, finally, circulated internationally. It is amazing for us to discover how a trade paper like the *Lichtbildbühne* praised these initiatives as they occurred. I will illustrate this below. What I want to underline at this opening point, however, is that Nielsen's entrance into film was not a case of replacing one career (the stage) with another (the cinema), and nor was her success on screen seen by audiences as an impediment to her return to the stage. Instead, Nielsen negotiated both forums; avoiding typecasting she allowed her own professional choices to determine when she shifted between stage and screen. In 1911, in the first year of the German production that was publicized as the "Asta Nielsen Series," the

trade paper *Lichtbildbühne* published an article that appointed Nielsen as the first *dramatic* film star. As it explained: “all of a sudden came *The Abyss*, and the popularity of Asta Nielsen occurred overnight.” The anonymous reviewer noted that *The Black Dream* (*Den sorte drom*, Urban Gad, 1911), “with its lengths of 1381 meters and in its dramatic effect, ought to be considered an exceptional masterpiece of film art and technique”¹ (*Lichtbildbühne*, Sept. 2, 1911 8). A few weeks later, *Lichtbildbühne* covered the press screening of *At The Big Moment* (*In dem großen Augenblick*, Urban Gad, 1911). With representatives from all daily and art presses as well as nine hundred literary, theatre and art personalities in attendance, the event had resulted in thirty-two reviews in Berlin’s one hundred newspapers: “This is a success, and practical evidence, that in the papers the Kinematograph is equivalent to the theatre . . . Asta Nielsen and her *Big Moment* have inspired art critics to serious and respectfully elaborate contemplations about the modern art of film. We mention this with great pride”² (*Lichtbildbühne*, Sept. 30, 1911 22). In November that year, *Lichtbildbühne* assessed an “Asta-Nielsen magazine” published by the production company as “a novel and original form of publicity for film appearances,”³ mentioning that every film was viewed by at least six million spectators (*Lichtbildbühne*, Nov. 11, 1911 12).

These citations illustrate the unforeseen impact of Asta Nielsen’s and Urban Gad’s activities on the German film trade. But this is just a backdrop to the theme proper of this paper, which is Asta Nielsen’s stage career in Germany and its intersections with her film career. In 1910, acting for the camera was not equivalent to stage acting, so Nielsen took quite a risk. With *The Abyss* (*Afgrunden*, Urban Gad, 1910), moreover, she and Gad did not intend to enter the *film* trade, but to show to *stage* directors what they were capable of. It was the film’s instant critical and international success that encouraged Nielsen and Gad to continue filming.

In her first film role in *The Abyss*, Nielsen played a modest piano teacher with a gentleman fiancé, who is suddenly overcome by lust for an itinerant performer and follows him to the world of the circus and the variety show. She ends up a pianist and prostitute in a beer garden. This role is about yearning, jealousy, humiliation, revenge and faithfulness. In fact, it is about a woman’s body and soul caught in what we today would characterize as a sado-masochistic relationship. This is most graphically and physically expressed in the famous gaucho dance, set in a variety show that Nielsen and her partner (Poul Reumert) act out in the film. David Mayer has noted in an unpublished article the “cluster of theatrical roles” that may have motivated Gad’s script: the dance echoes Nora’s frantic tarantella in Henrik

¹ “Da kamen plötzlich die ‘Abgründe’ . . . und die Popularität von Asta Nielsen war mit einem Schlage da”; “die in ihrer Länge von 1381 Meter und dramatischen Wirkung als ein außergewöhnliches Meisterwerk der Kinokunst und –Technik bezeichnet werden muß” (All the quoted texts in this paper are translated by the author).

² “Dies ist ein Erfolg, und gleichzeitig ein praktischer Beweis dafür, daß der Kinomatograph seitens der Zeitungen mit dem wirklichen Theater sich getrost auf eine Stufe stellen kann . . . die Asta Nielsen und der ‘Große Augenblick’ [gab] Anlaß zu ernsten und würdevoll durchdachten Betrachtungen über die moderne Lichtbildkunst seitens der Kunst-Kritiker.”

³ “eine neue und originelle Art der Reklame für Film-Erscheinungen.”



Asta Nielsen in *The Abyss* (*Afgrunden*, Urban Gad, 1910).

Ibsen's *A doll's house*, while Nielsen's characterization as a tragic victim of her own passions may have been inspired by, among others, Wedekind's *Earth Spirit* (*Erdegeist*), Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (*Fröken Julie*) and *There are Crimes and Crimes* (*Brott och Brott*, in Germany entitled *Rausch* or *Intoxication*), and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. Asta Nielsen will, indeed, play later on the starring role in the cinematic adaptations of these four stage pieces. We may assume from the choice of these roles and pieces that these were among the stage parts that she had wished to act in Denmark. The scenarist and director Gad most likely was familiar with these plays as well, because he had grown up in a cultured family and his mother was a playwright herself (according to Schröder 206).

References to the live stage can be found in many of Nielsen's subsequent films. Indeed, about one third of the seventy-five films interpreted by Asta Nielsen contained references to a form of theatre. Either the films were cinematic adaptations of plays such as the ones mentioned above, or the characters that she played worked as stage performers. As

Nielsen maintained a policy of playing the largest variety of characters as possible in order to preclude typecasting, quite an array of stage performers are sprinkled throughout her oeuvre. They include dancers, singers and actresses who, moreover, perform in a range of theatres, from the high-class opera and the legitimate stage to popular entertainment venues like the circus, the cabaret and the variety shows. Much like *The Abyss*, many of these stories, were tragic love dramas that emphasized Nielsen's ability to dramatically and graphically act a range of emotions and so consolidate her status as an eminent tragic star. The continuous and manifold references to the stage in Nielsen's oeuvre suggest that she aspired to keep working in both film and theater. I therefore argue that it was her circumstances and working conditions that drew her primarily to the cinema.

One circumstance, which prevented her from performing on the stage, was her command of the German language. It took Nielsen years to become fluent, and even when she achieved this, she was never able to get rid of her Danish accent. Even as late as 1926, when resuming her stage career by touring the German provinces, she told a reporter of *Kurier* that her command of the language was not good enough for acting in German classic plays (*Der Film-Kurier*, Jan. 9, 1926 n. pag.).

Prior to this, Asta Nielsen had in fact occasionally performed in variety shows (more precisely in pantomimes, a theatrical genre that was another form of acting without using words). As I have been able to gather so far, these performances concerned at least three pieces: *Prince Harlekin's Tod* (the death of Prince Harlequin) written by Urban Gad and performed in Vienna in March, in Budapest in May and in Frankfurt in October 1913; *L'enfant prodigue* (the lost son) in 1918 in unspecified European cities; and *La main* (the hand) in the Dutch cities of The Hague, Scheveningen, and Rotterdam in November and December 1920 (Streit; Seydel and Hagedorff 141; Beusekom 396-397).

While Asta Nielsen's live performances were very popular with audiences, the press was rather critical. In Austria, this difference was explained by the *Wiener Montagblatt* in the following manner: "This performance is almost too delicate for a variety show . . . its poetic subtleties would be better relished in the context of a cabaret"⁴ (*Wiener Montagblatt*, Mar. 10, 1913 qtd. in Streit 394). The *Österreichischer Komet* of 8 March 1913 similarly concluded: "After all, the stormy applause that she earns in the Variété Ronacher every night, is the result of the cinema. People attend to finally see with their own eyes the famous Asta, who has made the cinema so popular, and they will prefer to go to the cinema in the future, whenever Asta Nielsen films are on the bill . . ."⁵ (W. St. 2 qtd. in Streit 395).

This explanation resonates with the German trade press's ongoing discussion about the intersection of cinema and variety shows. Prevalent during 1913 and 1914, it culminated in

⁴ "Diese Darbietung ist beinahe zu Zart für eine Variétébühne, die doch auf derbere Effekte gestimmt ist, an man würde ihre poetischen Feinheiten im Rahmen eine Kabarets vielleicht besser Goutieren."

⁵ "Immerhin, die rauschenden Beifallstürme, die ihr jetzt allabendlich im Variété Ronacher gespendet werden, sind der Erfolg des Kinos. Man kommt, um endlich einmal persönlich die berühmte Asta zu sehen, die das Kino so populär gemacht hat, und wird in Hinkunft umso lieber ins Kino gehen, wenn man Asta Nielsen-Films geben wird."

the establishment of a weekly insert in the *Lichtbildbühne* in June 1913 called the *Kino-Variété* [cinema-variety show]. Editor in chief Arthur Mellini argued on May, 3 1913 that the new form of entertainment, in which cinema and the variety show are combined, was a happy one that had a future. He observed: “The variety show has first offered hospitality to the cinema, soon it will be the reverse, . . . and the development will be like this: Variety show—Variety show with Cinema—Variety shows and Cinemas—Cinemas—*Kino-Variétés*—*Variété-Kinos*”⁶ (Mellini 7). Mellini’s prediction was based upon phenomena abroad: in Russia, New York and Italy, such *Kino-Variétés* were booming. Also in Berlin, however, more and more variety show stages were including films in their programs in order to survive. (In my dissertation, “Histories of Fame and Failure,” I have shown that in the pre-war years the mixing of live and screened performances was embraced as a new and potentially productive programming practice in France and the Netherlands too).

To support the thesis that the variety show was being productively combined with the cinema, the German trade paper listed an increasing number of global *Kino-Variétés* in each weekly issue. In October 1913, for example, the list ran up to five columns naming some one hundred and thirty theatres (*Lichtbildbühne* Oct. 17, 1913 66-67) The *Lichtbildbühne* also discussed the professional and technical problems and benefits that resulted when the two modes of entertainment were joined. In January 1914, the consequences for actors were instead the issue. Commenting on Max Linder’s combined live and screened shows in France, Hugo Schwab observed that similar mixed presentations were being planned by several more international film stars throughout Europe, and recalled that both Asta Nielsen and Henny Porten had made their debuts in variety shows. The article ends with a warning: “Despite the proven successes of his performances, it cannot be denied that Linder lost much of what has made his popularity, his specialty and personal note, because his role in the live sketch could have been acted by any gentleman comedian, whereas in his films Linder remains unequalled”⁷ (Schwab 63). Linder’s partial failure was explained by two reasons: firstly, the details of facial expression got lost in the spacious auditorium, and secondly, the spoken word had an alienating and distracting effect on the audience. While Asta Nielsen also experienced the first of these problems in her pantomimes, she circumvented the second by not using the spoken word at all. Still, the general consensus was that the cinema would benefit from the live appearance of film stars in variety shows, because this would give audiences evidence that their favorites were better seen on screen than on stage.

I will now jump ahead in time, to the post-war years when Asta Nielsen acted in the films inspired by (or based upon) the stage plays that I mentioned earlier. Her acting in these films

⁶ “Das Variété hat zuerst dem Kino Gastrecht gewährt, jetzt wird es umgekehrt, und . . . wird der Werdegang folgendermaßen zu registrieren sein: “Variété—Variété mit Kino—Variété und Kinos—Kinos—Kino-Variétés—Variété-Kinos.”

⁷ “Trotz der erzielten Erfolge bei diesem Auftreten war aber nicht zu verkennen, daß Linder auf der Bühne viel von seiner Eigenart und der persönlichen Note, der er seine Beliebtheit zu verdanken hat, verlor, denn die Rolle in dem Sketch in dem er auftrat hätte ganz ohne Zweifel mangel elegante Humorist eben so gut ausfüllen können, wären Linder im Film in seiner Art konkurrenzlos ist.”

earned her superlative tributes, which are worth quoting for the eloquence of the authors who praise the physiognomy and physical skills of the actress, whom they called *Seelenmalerin* [soul-paintress]. For example, in a review of *Rausch*, based on a play of August Strindberg—a film that is no longer extant directed by Ernst Lubitsch in 1919—it was explained that: “Her eyes have turned ever more demonic, . . . her body ever more supple and snakelike, the sensitive play of her hands ever more expressive”⁸ (Hb. 37). Another author wrote:

The demonic look in her eyes, which clearly look sideways to her temples in the wildest states of her soul, has turned downright devastating, criminal . . . and this is the highest possible praise. The play of the fingers, evil, intense, extremely sensitive and blood-conscious, is unparalleled among film actresses. . . . She is a heap of rustling, suffocating sulphur fumes, she wins because she hates, is evil down to the lowest and meanest, a bitch cut out of Strindberg’s fanatic vision. How does she do it? Asta Nielsen knows no embarrassment about herself, she allows her lowest elements to surface, she tears the clothes off her soul-ego without any scruples, her laughter is ugly, her seductiveness is ugly . . . and in its achievement this is just overwhelmingly, devilishly wonderful.⁹ (*Neue Hamburger Zeitung*, Aug. 26, 1919 n. pag.)

Similar remarks were made about *Hamlet* (Svend Gade, Heinz Schall, 1920). Based on the traditional saga that had inspired Shakespeare’s masterpiece, the film presented Hamlet not as the *prince* of Denmark, but as a princess raised as a boy in order to secure the throne:

She succeeds thanks to the charm and the spirited grace of her appearance: she looks very slim and slender in her tight black outfit and is not just fully the melancholic Danish prince whom we love thanks to Shakespeare, she also has in every gesture the enchantment, in each look of her dark glowing eyes the womanly attractiveness that the secret girl of the saga . . . ought to have: she is simply also *princess* Hamlet, and as such she is really dramatically gripping in her double tragic destiny—her stature is already poetic.¹⁰ (*Film-Kurier* Feb. 15, 1921 4)

The changeability, the expressivity of her face is truly unlimited. No, this is not the right way to put it. Because the unshaped raw material of her physiognomy takes shape from part

⁸ “Noch dämonischer sind ihre Augen geworden, seit wir sie nicht gesehen, noch schlangenweicher der Körper, noch beredter das nervöse Spiel der Hände.”

⁹ “Die Dämonie der in den wildesten Seelenmomenten deutlich nach den Schläfen auseinanderschielenden Augen ist geradezu entsetzlich geworden, verbrecherisch, . . . und das ist hier das stärkste Lob. Das Spiel der Finger, verrucht, gespannt, ungeheuer nervös und blutbewußt, findet unter den Filmschauspielerinnen nicht seinesgleichen. . . . Sie ist ein Haufen knisternden, erstickenden Schwefelqualms, siegend aus Haß, zerfressend bis zum Niederträchtigsten gemein, ein Weib, wie aus Strindbergs fanatischem Gesichtsfeld geschnitten. Woher kommt dieses Können? Asta Nielsen kennt keine Scheu vor sich, sie läßt ihre Elemente durcheinanderbrodeln, sie reißt ihrem Seelen-Ich rücksichtslos die Kleider vom Leibe, ihr Lachen ist häßlich, ihre Verführung häßlich. . . . und das Ganze als Leistung überwältigend, teuflisch schön.”

¹⁰ “Daß sie siegt, dankt sie letzten Endes dem Charme un der beseelten Grazie ihrer Erscheinung: sie ist, sehr schmal und schlank in den knappen schwarzen Habit, nicht nur ganz der melancholische Dänenprinz, den wir von Shakespeare her lieben, sie hat auch in jeder Geste die sie betörende, jedem Blick der dunkel glühenden Augen den frauenhaften Reiz, den das heimliche Mädchen der Sage . . . haben muß; sie ist eben auch Prinzessin Hamlet, und als solche wirkt sie in der Erfüllung ihres nun doppelt tragischen Geschicks auch wirklich tragisch ergreifend—ihre Gestalt allein ist Poesie.”

to part, from scene to scene, even from second to second, from nothingness into something, [it shows] at each moment the clearest, the most self-evident and highest possible expression of the state of her soul.¹¹ (*Film-Kurier* Feb. 5, 1921 2)

In these years, the German trade press maintained a discussion about whether it was possible to adapt stage plays cinematically and, if so, under what conditions. Both Nielsen's *Rausch* and *Hamlet* were subjects in this discussion—*Hamlet* from the very moment it was announced, and this, needless to say, generated a lot of free publicity. Nielsen herself also gave her opinion on the topic, to which I will turn. We must bear in mind that Nielsen was herself responsible for *Hamlet*, since the work was produced by her own company, Art-Film. In the following years the company would produce two more films, namely *Fräulein Julie* (Felix Basch, 1922), from Strindberg, and *The Fall* (*Der Absturz*, 1922), from an original scenario by director Ludwig Wolff, in which Nielsen plays a former operetta diva. The references to the stage are thus obvious in the films that Nielsen intended to (and did) actually make.

In the pre-war years, the discourse addressing the relation between film and theatre created the consensus that film adaptations of stage plays were not desirable. This was because of the differences in the respective acting techniques, and because of the centrality of the spoken word in the theatre. On the other hand, stage directors and actors were beginning to show that they were capable of making stylistically impressive films, like Max Reinhardt with *Die Insel Der Seligen* (1913) and Paul Wegener with *The Golem* (*Der Golem*, 1915), both of which were based on original scenarios, not stage plays. So the involvement of stage professionals with film was not considered a problem.

In the early 1920s, the consensus shifted to the idea that filmic adaptations of stage plays were acceptable if the intrinsic differences between the two forms of expression were respected. The influential stage critic Herbert Jhering stated that “human spiritedness is to the stage what physical magic is to film”¹² (Jhering 398). And Leopold Jessner, the stage director who had worked with Nielsen in his film *Erdgeist* (earth spirit, 1923), was convinced that while theater offered an idea, film offered an illusion. In terms of style he believed that “the film thrives on the movement, which has to become telling, whereas the theater thrives on the word, which has to become movement”¹³ (Jessner 67).

Nielsen's defense of her *Hamlet* ought to be read in the light of this debate. In a 1920 interview she stated:

¹¹ “Die Wandlungsfähigkeit, Ausdruckfähigkeit dieser Maske ist völlig unbegrenzt. Due zwei Begriffe sagen eigentlich nicht das Richtige. Diese ungeformte Rohmaterial von Physiognomie formt sich nämlich von Rolle zu Rolle, von Szenen zu Szene, ja von Sekunde zu Sekunde aus dem Nichts in ein Etwas, das von Sekunde zu Sekunde das Einfachste, Selbstverständlichste, Höchstmöglichste an Ausdruck der jeweiligen seelischen Situation ist.”

¹² “. . . was auf der Bühne menschliche Beseelung, im Film körperliche Magie heißt.”

¹³ “Der Film lebt von der *Bewegung*, die *sprechend* werden soll; das Theater vom *Wort*, das *Bewegung* werden soll.”



Asta Nielsen in *Hamlet* (Svend Gade, Heinz Schall, 1920).

Our *Hamlet* is by no means a filmed Shakespeare. I would have objected against that with all my power. We are filming an old Nordic Hamlet-legend, which was Shakespeare's source as well, and we keep very close to it. . . . It is impossible to film Shakespeare.¹⁴ (Steinthal 42)

Nielsen also mentioned her wish to bring Strindberg on screen, for "the sense and inner meaning in Strindberg's dramas is not outside the action, but directly inside, in the events and the sensations. This is why Strindberg can be filmed, and I like the idea very much. . . . but only if the scenarist and the director are prepared to leave his due to the playwright."¹⁵

¹⁴ ". . . unser 'Hamlet' ist überhaupt keine Shakespeareverfilmung. Dagegen würde ich mich mit allen Kräften gewehrt haben. Wir verfilmen eine alte nordische Hamlegende, die auch Shakespeare als Quell benutzt hat, an die wir uns aber ganz eng halten. . . . Zu verfilmen ist Shakespeare nicht."

¹⁵ "Der Sinn und der seelische Gehalt steht in den Strindbergdramen nicht neber der Handlung, sondern ist ganz direkt in ihr, in den Ereignissen und Sensationen. Deshalb ist es möglich Strindberfilme zu machen, und es ist eine meiner Lieblingsideen. . . . aber nur wenn Bearbeitung und Regie die Gewähr bieten, daß dem Dichter

This last sentence was annoying to Ernst Lubitsch, who had directed Nielsen in *Rausch*, a work that was based on Strindberg. In an open letter to Asta Nielsen in *Lichtbildbühne* he protested: “Please allow me to tell you, grand Asta Nielsen, that the real Strindberg cannot be filmed! Strindberg’s art is housed in the mind, the art of film in the optical! Mental problems cannot be filmed!”¹⁶ (Lubitsch 31). Many critics found themselves in agreement with the director’s view, such as this reviewer: “There was no Strindberg at all; mostly admirable was what the film was able to make of the plot, how it actually succeeded in transforming it by means of film technique”¹⁷ (Hb. 32).

Nielsen’s interview offered another interesting point made by the actress. It concerned the relation of what she called “the artistic” to technique, meaning the importance of acting in relation to the *mise-en-scène* and editing. In a statement that she later repeated throughout the 1920s, she said: “The artist is no longer allowed the time to fully develop the acting. Or, if he is allowed the time during shooting, then the director’s scissor cuts the best out afterwards”¹⁸ (Steinthal 42). This remark indicates Nielsen’s serious dissatisfaction with the developments in post-war German filmmaking, which saw the directors competing with the stars in a struggle to determine who was to be deemed responsible for the artistic quality of the film. Or, as Lubitsch wrote in his open letter to Nielsen: “The artistic quality of a film does not depend just on the acting, as you wrongly assume, but on a thousand other things that you seem to dispute”¹⁹ (Lubitsch 31). Asta Nielsen sadly concluded in 1928, in a series of autobiographic articles in the *B.Z. am Mittag*: “The film in general has changed from being an actor’s work to being a director’s work, and it is no longer able to create great actors or to offer them adequate and attractive tasks” (Nielsen, “Mein Weg im Film” [my way in film]. *B.Z. am Mittag*, Oct. 24 1928 rpt. in Seydel and Hagedorff 214).

In the German expressionist cinema of the 1920s, symbolic set props, atmospheres and archetypes were more prominent carriers of meaning than what Jessner used to call *menschliche Darstellungskunst*, the art of human representation (244). A similar concern was repeatedly expressed by Nielsen with regard to what she referred to as the “Americanization of German cinema.” The action-centeredness and restless cutting of the American films allowed no acting study and no characterization, but just the use of average types: “What was a necessity for American cinema, which mainly work with types, has resulted in an assault on the European actor”²⁰ (Nielsen, “Mein Weg im Film” [my way in film]. *B.Z. am Mittag*, Sept.

gelassen wird was des Dichters ist.”

¹⁶ “So lassen Sie sich denn von mir gesagt sein, große Asta Nielsen, daß der eigentliche Strindberg gar nicht zu verfilmen ist! Strindbergs Kunst liegt im Gedanklichen, die Kunst des Filmes im Optischen! Gedankliche Probleme lassen sich nicht verfilmen!”

¹⁷ “Strindberg war es nicht; um so bewundernswerter aber, was der Film aus der Handlung zu machen wußte.”

¹⁸ “Zu schauspielerischen Vollenwicklung wird dem Künstler keine Zeit gelassen. Oder, wird sie ihm bei der Aufnahme gelassen, so nimmt die Schere des Regisseurs hinterher das beste weg.”

¹⁹ “Das Künstlerische im Film hängt nicht nur vom Schauspielerischen ab, wie Sie irrträglich annehmen, sondern noch von tausend anderen Dingen, von denen sie anscheinend nichts halten.”

²⁰ “Was für die amerikanischen Filme, die vornehmlich mit Typen arbeiteten, eine Notwendigkeit war, führte zur Vergewaltigung des europäischen Schauspielers.”

29 1928 rpt. in Seydel and Hagedorff 102). If one considers that Nielsen had long enjoyed autonomy and prominence in the choice and performance of her roles, it is no surprise that she rejected these conditions and styles. Her intense acting style required both a character with a large range of emotions and the time to evoke it in its multi-layered nuances.

In a letter to the *Film-Kurier* published in September 1925 she explained: “The highest art is and remains the clear, vivacious and deeply internalized portrayal of a stirring human fate”²¹ (Nielsen, “Wie ich die Zukunft des Films sehe” [how do i see the future of film] n.pag.). This was just two months before her switch to the German stage, this time not with a pantomime, but with a stage play and a text. Although she kept repeating that she wished to continue making film, her criticism of German cinema and her refusal to give up her autonomy resulted in a boycott. This was also despite of the fact that influential critics such as Siegfried Kracauer (Seydel and Hagedorff 216.) and Herbert Jhering kept arguing that the trade should be ashamed if it wasn’t able to give work to a genius actress like Nielsen. She indeed appeared in five more films in 1927, but had to wait until 1932 to act again in what would be her only sound film, *Unmögliche Liebe* (impossible love, Erich Waschneck).

Instead of making films, then, Nielsen toured the German provinces with her own theatrical ensemble, whose director was her then-lover Grigori Chmara, a Russian actor. This was a constellation in which she was able to reclaim her autonomy and her own acting style. In November 1925 and from October until December 1926 the company took an adaptation of *Rita Cavallini* (based on *Romance* by Edward Sheldon) to at least twenty cities and towns. In March and April 1928 they performed *Kameliendame* (based on *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils) in twenty-three different theaters. From 1929 until January 1936, Asta Nielsen acted in four more plays and two variety-sketches. Her last stage role in Germany, opposite her dear friend Paul Wegener, was in *Gentlemen*, by Sidney Phillips, pseudonym of the playwright Hans-José Rehfisch (1935). She also performed this play in Switzerland and Austria. In this way, Asta Nielsen’s stage acting formed a substantial part of her career in Germany.

According to the theater historian John Willett, German theater enjoyed wide attention from both the audiences and the press in the second half of the 1920s (which was a relatively stable economic and political period). Heavily subsidized and extensively decentralized, it consolidated the high standard it had developed in the previous decades. In particular, it maintained its non-hierarchical structure in terms of high and low culture. Cabaret and *revues* were taken as seriously as the classic stage, there was no distinction between margin and mainstream, and the provincial theaters were surveyed by the press as closely as the ones in Berlin. Admittedly, it was the heyday of Brecht and Piscator as well as of the commercial *revue*, and the general climate was one of tremendous productivity on all fronts. Although this changed dramatically between 1929 and 1933, it may explain how it was possible for

²¹ “Die höchste Kunst . . . ist und bleibt immer die einfache, blutdurchströmte, tief verinnerlichte Gestaltung eines erschütternden Menschenschicksals.”

Asta Nielsen to choose her plays without any interference and tour the German provinces so extensively (Willett).

Although the press considered *Rita Cavallini* and *Kameliendame* to be sentimental and outdated, the plays offered Nielsen the big tragic roles that she had sought. But most importantly, critics also agreed that Nielsen's acting on stage was no less effectual than her screen performance:

The story is what it is, but Asta Nielsen creates a human being with a gripping fate. . . . Asta Nielsen told me afterwards that she had played exactly as in a film. . . . She apparently retained only great improvements from film technique: an excellent graphic delicacy, an extraordinary precision and expressive confidence in every movement, an admirable, never failing mimic discipline and a constant interaction with the ensemble. But the language of her eyes, the silent eloquence of her lips, her entire stirring sincerity are her very own artistic property, beyond style and technique, the artistic power of expression of a great tragic heart.²² (Bloßfeldt 566)

Asta Nielsen often said that, for her, acting before the camera did not fundamentally differ from acting on the stage. As she stated: "In my opinion, the difference between theatre and cinema is not the lack of words. Film is not, as people used to say, a different art. An actress has to control her body to the same extent. Moreover I often speak out the words belonging to my role when I make a film. The differences concern, of course, the proportions, as the totality of the stage offers a completely different sense of space, while film close-ups offer a unique possibility of mimic playing"²³ ("Gespräch mit Asta Nielsen" [a conversation with Asta Nielsen] 5). Another important difference noticed by Nielsen was that film scenes were not shot in the same order of the plotline, which required that the actress would be able to immerse herself in scraps. In any event, Nielsen maintained, both these two types of acting depended on the actress's ability to internalize her character as well as on the veracity of her physical and mimic expression.

One may or one may not share Asta Nielsen's views on cinema, but I believe that her turn to the stage was a logical consequence of the developments in her career as well as her acting style. It was undertaken in much the same vein as her turn to the screen in 1910. In both cases, her performance was not subjected to technical rules; stories and action were

²² "Die Geschichte mag sein, wie sie will, aber Asta Nielsen macht daraus einen Menschen von rührendem Schicksal. . . . Asta Nielsen sagte mir später sie hätte ebenso gespielt, wie im Film. . . . Von der Filmtechnik sind anscheinend nur große Vorzüge geblieben: eine große Zeichnerische Delikatesse, eine außerordentliche Präzision und Ausdruckssicherheit jeder Bewegung, eine bewundernswerte, nie versagende mimische Disziplin und der stetige Kontakt mit dem Ensemble. Aber die Sprache ihrer Augen, die stumme Beredtheit ihrer Lippen, ihre ganze erschütternde innere Wahrhaftigkeit sind ihr eigenstes Künstlerisches Eigentum, jenseits von Stil und Technik, die künstlerische Ausdrucksmacht eines großen tragischen Herzens."

²³ "Der Unterschied zwischen Theater und Film liegt, meiner Ueberzeugung nach, nicht im Fehlen der Worte. Es ist nicht, wie man immer sagt, eine andere Kunst. Man muß seinen Körper als Schauspielerin genau so beherrschen, un wenn ich filme spreche ich die Worte meiner Rolle doch vor mich hin. Unterschiede bestehen natürlich in den Größenverhältnissen, zwischen der Totalität der Bühne, die ein ganz anderes Raumgefühl vermittelt, während der Film die Möglichkeit mimischen Ausspielens durch Großaufnahmen gibt."



Asta Nielsen as Marguerite Gauthier in *Die Kameliendame*, Berlin 1930.

less important than characters and emotions, and directors did not compete with actors in claiming credit for the artistic result of the final work. It was on the stage that Asta Nielsen found an opportunity to keep performing in the minute, intense physical and mimic style she had developed in and for the cinema. Indeed, critics and audiences now came to watch her on the stage, not because they liked her better on the big screen, but because it was here that she could still portray “stirring human fates.”

THE AUTHOR: Annette Förster (Dr.) is an independent film scholar and film curator based in Amsterdam and a specialist in histories of women’s filmmaking and acting in the silent cinema and the popular stage. She received her PhD from Utrecht University in 2005, where she in 1999 initiated the Women and the Silent Screen Conferences of which Bologna 2010 was the sixth edition. Her current research is on the work of the German scenarist, film director and actress Rosa Porten.

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The “Voix d’Or” on Silent Film: The Case of Sarah Bernhardt

ABSTRACT: Sarah Bernhardt is a paradigmatic case study for the joining of voice and silent film. This is because she was famous for her “voix d’or” on the theatrical stage and because she was highly visible in the nascent period of the cinema’s development. Traditionally considered an example of an actress in the early cinema who was “silenced” by film, she has also been considered an anachronistic and ineffective on-screen performer. I argue instead that Bernhardt’s films were not mute records of her live stage action but works that further promoted and developed her polymorphous body at the opening of the twentieth century.

Recent scholarship has addressed the misunderstandings, problems and paradoxes that the term “silent film” raises, detailing the rich and changing ways that sound accompanied early film and was, in fact, central to its emergence, exhibition and reception (See e.g. Altman; J. Brown and Davison; Marks). Theater historian David Mayer, sensitive to the centrality of music and sound in theatrical performance, has long argued that actors never performed in silence, even when they were rehearsing or performing for “silent” film. It seems reductive, therefore, to speak today of silent film or to suggest that the cinema can be historically reduced to a capacity to animate the visual image. The idea that film recorded a theatrical performance that was destined to mechanically repeat itself is similarly reductive. Certainly, silent film presents the indelible image of a single live performance, but from a pragmatic point of view, the public apparatus of film confirms that the cinema was performative in rich and changing ways. In other words, film did not merely record performed gesture, but was an expressive and co-extensive media that engaged other medias and modes of expression.

It is from this dual perspective that I explore Sarah Bernhardt’s engagement in early film. She is a paradigmatic case study, not just because she was famous for her “voix d’or” on the theatrical stage, but because she was highly visible in the nascent period of the cinema’s development. Traditionally considered an example of an actress in the early cinema who was “silenced” by film, she has also been considered an anachronistic and ineffective on-screen performer. I argue instead that Bernhardt’s films were not mute records of her live stage action but works that further promoted and developed her polymorphous body at the opening of the twentieth century. Before she entered film, Bernhardt was not just famous for her voice, but had already been reproduced on the phonograph and extensively reproduced by many of the nineteenth century’s most famous photographers—by Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon), his son Paul Nadar, Melandri, and W & D. Downey. Film carried with it this history of Bernhardt’s diffusion through reproductive media. It also drew upon her status as an internationally famous actress, one who was renowned for her vocal skills and pantomimic mastery. In this context, Bernhardt’s body on film traversed and incorporated the theater as

well as new media and technology.

Polyphony and Performance

When Bernhardt entered film in 1900 she did so with *Hamlet* (*Le duel d'Hamlet*, Clément Maurice), a film that formed part of Paul Decauville's program for the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre at the Paris Exposition. Her film was accompanied by a phonograph (Henri Lioret's Idéal phonograph) playing the clashing of swords (Sadoul 100–102; Manoni). It was shown alongside other stars drawn from the opera, comic, and variety stages in Paris. *Hamlet* was therefore part of the promotion of film as a multi-media technology that was broadly eclectic. As Laurent Manoni has detailed in the 2012 catalogue for *Le Giornate del cinema muto*:

Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre is an attraction which mingles several different genres: sound films synchronized with the phonograph (songs, monologues, extracts from plays), but also dances and pantomimes which were simply accompanied by a pianist or orchestra. There is also a sound effects man and possibly a *bonimenteur* (narrator). (26)



Sarah Bernhardt in *Hamlet* (*Le duel d'Hamlet*, Clément Maurice, 1900).

The publicity for the event advertised the association of film with sound in a two-page poster that featured, on one page, an array of international flags. Across each flag a phrase (translated into its respective language) read: “Celebrated artists to be seen and heard.”

This capacity to be seen *and* heard on film was integral to Bernhardt’s engagement with the narrative film industry roughly a decade later when she made *Camille* (*La Dame aux Camélias*, André Calmettes and Henri Pouctal, 1911) and *Queen Elizabeth* (*Les Amours de la Reine Elisabeth*, Henri Desfontaines and Louis Mercanton, 1912).¹ Each role that Bernhardt brought to film was not only accompanied by sound but was already familiar to audiences through photographs, phonographs, paintings, books, articles and so on. In this way, her films were polyvalent works that presumed that an international public was capable of expanding (rather than reducing) the horizons of film.

A Brief Background: Establishing Vocal Fame

Born in 1844, Bernhardt was accepted into the elite school of acting, the French Conservatoire, in 1860, at the age of fifteen. The Conservatoire was the leading school of dramatic declamation, established in France in 1786. In August 1862 she made her debut, to little success, at the Comédie Française in the customary performance of three roles. As theater historian Gerda Taranow relays (and she is referencing Bernhardt’s autobiography, *My Double Life*), “So unexceptional was her performance in the first two roles that by the time of her third *début*, [theater critic Francisque] Sarcey had forgotten the role of the first” (182).

Bernhardt left the Comédie Française in 1863 and by 1866 had joined the Odéon theater. This was a theater that was second only to the Comédie Française in Paris. It was here that her acting began to be noticed and applauded by audiences. According to Bernhardt it was in the *travesti* role of Zacharie in Racine’s *Athalie* (1691) that she was first “rewarded by three rounds of applause” by an audience “charmed with the sweetness of [her] voice” (*My Double Life* 127). In this work—which used Felix Mendelssohn’s incidental music composed for the play in 1845—she was given the unusual task of saying all of the spoken choruses alone. Two years later, in 1868, she famously revived the role of Anna Danby in Dumas père’s *Kean* (1836). While *Le Temps* spoke of her “charming” voice that presented in “a most touching and lovely way one of those most interminable dialogues in which old Dumas took pleasure,” it was the students and young workers in the audience who began to actively cheer and support Bernhardt’s performances in the theater (Bernhardt, *My Double Life* 131).²

¹ I realize that Bernhardt also made *La Tosca* in 1908. *La Tosca* (André Calmettes, Charles le Bargy) is a difficult case as we have lost the film and it was released after *Camille*. (see Blaisdell; “Madame Sarah Bernhardt Pour La Première Fois Au Cinématographe [Mrs. Sarah Bernhardt for the first time at the cinematograph]”; “Bernhardt Conquers New World”).

² Sarcey (“Chronique Théâtrale” [theatrical review], Feb. 24 1869 2) also confirms Bernhardt’s enthusiastic reception. Note that Bernhardt’s success in this role was such that over two decades later, in 1891, reviewers of the play would hold her performance as something of a benchmark, stating that her “hit” as Anna Danby marked the “greatest revival of the play” (F.K. n. pag.).

It was not until the following year, however, that Bernhardt enjoyed major popular success. Playing another *travesti* role, that of Zanetto (the wandering Florentine minstrel) in François Coppée's play, *Le passant* (1869), alongside Agar (the actress Marie Léonid Charvin), she captivated a Parisian public. The work was a verse poem between the two characters that lasted roughly twenty minutes. It was not just vocally melodious but actually incorporated song: Coppée's directions specifically introduce Zanetto arriving, singing a verse. We know that this opening verse was put to music by Jules Massenet in a short piece of 1869, called *Sérénade du passant* [serenade of the passer-by]. While Massenet dedicated this piece to the then famous soprano opera singer, Miolan Carvalho, the play's success was ascribed to Bernhardt's vocal skill. As Francisque Sarcey explained in his review of her performance: "With what delicate and tender charm has she said this delicious verse! . . . She was celebrated, given curtain calls, cheered by a delighted public" ("Chronique Théâtrale" [theatrical review], Jan. 18, 1869 1).

Suze Rueff, Bernhardt's biographer, reiterates that it was Bernhardt's unique voice that in these early years founded her theatrical success. It drew a new audience composed of students, workers, and young women to the legitimate theaters of Paris. This audience would soon be known as the "Saradoteurs." Rueff states:

Le passant counts as one of the most important landmarks in the career of Bernhardt, for it revealed for the first time to the general public her incomparable gift for the speaking of French verse, never rivaled before nor since. It drew to the Odéon the students, the midinettes and the artisans of the *rive gauche* . . . [who were] attracted by the strange music of that voice. (Rueff 48–49)³

When Sarcey reviewed Bernhardt's performance as Doña Maria in Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas* (1838) in 1874, he stressed the play's musical qualities. Calling Hugo a "composer" and a "librettist" in order to underline the use made of music and voice in the performance of this work, he states:

[Bernhardt's] voice is yearning and tender and well arranged, her diction is of such perfect clarity that not one syllable is lost, even when words flow like a caress from her lips...Never has delicious poetry been so deliciously spoken. ("Chronique Théâtrale" [theatrical review], Feb. 26, 1872 2)

Bernhardt consciously developed this use of melody in the pronunciation of verse on the live stage. Reynaldo Hahn, Bernhardt's friend and contemporary who was a student of Massenet and a noted conductor and composer of operas and operetta's, explained in his book *La grande Sarah. Souvenirs* that Bernhardt appeared to be obsessed with "spoken opera"

³ See also Bernhardt's comments about the "Saradoteurs" in *Ma Double Vie: Mémoires de Sarah Bernhardt* [my double life: Sarah Bernhardt memoirs] (290).

and wanted to play *Orphée* in this style (158). While Hahn does not elaborate what Bernhardt meant by spoken opera, he does suggest that Bernhardt's voice was very important to her stage performance. Esmé Percy (who studied in Paris with the actress) reiterates this point, describing what it was like to attend a live performance:

Well, it was astounding . . . I felt that her voice was the only voice. I felt that something extraordinary had happened, that I had been taken out of myself completely. A fascination came over me This was justly called "la voix d'or": golden. And on the assumption that colour has its immediate counterpart in sound, I imagine that the deaf might see the colour of her voice. It was the gold of sunset, the silver of the harvest moon She brought something to the language which had never been there before. She made it (if possible) more beautiful, more musical, more illuminating. (*The Legend of Sarah Bernhardt*)⁴

There is evidence that Bernhardt was not alone in realizing the musical potential of her voice on the live stage. As Louis Calvert explains in his book, *Problems of the Actor*, Henry Irving also developed the melody of his voice on stage. Recounting a rehearsal for Lord Byron's *Werner* (1823) where Henry Irving asked to give a speech to music, Calvert recounts how Irving gradually omitted the accompanying instruments that were providing the incidental music for the play (the flute, cornet, trombone and finally the violin were silenced). As he states:

Loudly did the orchestra leader expostulate with Irving, pointing out, with many flourishes of his bow, that if the violin were cut out there was nothing left of the music, since the melody was gone. But Irving turned a deaf ear to his lamentations. And Irving knew what he was about. He knew that the secret of writing music to accompany the voice is that the voice takes the place of the melody. It was a bit of a blow to the musician in this case, for he had grown attached to his little melody, but it had been out of place. If it had been used it would have fought Irving's voice for first place, and thus would have defeated the end for which it was composed. (Calvert 222-223)⁵

Moving Abroad: Vocal Fame and Pantomimic Mastery

In 1879 Bernhardt toured with the Comédie Française to London. Here she was first celebrated (or, rather, was "followed, mobbed, and applauded wherever she appeared") by the English public (see "Visit of the Comédie Française: A Recollection of Sarah Bernhardt in London" 8). Her acting, given more attention than the rest of the French cast at the Gaiety theater, was lauded for both its physical legibility and its range of vocal expression. As a review in *The Observer* explained, in the role of Doña Sol (in Victor Hugo's *Hernani* [1830])

⁴ No date is give for this performance. I would like to thank David Robinson for bringing this recording to my attention.

⁵ I would like to thank David Mayer for this reference.

Bernhardt displayed “picturesque gesture and statuesque attitude” in the opening scenes. Finally, about the last scene, the critic wrote:

Rarely has there been heard on the stage any utterance more charged with varied emotion than Mdlle. Bernhardt’s delivery of Doña Sol’s appeal to Ruy Gomez for Hernani’s life. More rarely still is there seen any picture so touching as her sudden expression of triumphant content, when, having drunk the poison, she nestles her head against her husband’s shoulder To do justice to Mdlle. Sarah Bernhardt’s rendering of such a passage as this, in which the whole gamut of love, despair, and resignation is touched, might well baffle us . . . we must be content to note that its effect upon its audience exceeded all that had been anticipated for it, even by those whose recollections of Mdlle. Mars enabled them to anticipate the probable course of the representation. (“At the Play” 3)

When Bernhardt left the Comédie Française in 1880, spurred on by such praise, she began a series of tours that took her to Europe, America and Australia. She toured nine times to North America between 1880 and 1917 and it is especially here, on long and demanding tours where she performed in a variety of venues before popular audiences, that she developed a performance style that was visually pantomimic. Taranow explains that Parisian audiences, when they welcomed Bernhardt back to Paris, were therefore thrilled to see “the pantomimic mastery of an *ex-sociétaire* [of the Comédie Française]” (38). As Sarcey stated in his review of Bernhardt’s *La Tosca* in 1887, the play was made not for Parisian audiences but for audiences (mainly “les Yankees”) abroad; it was “above and before all, a good commodity for export” (“Chronique Théâtrale” [theatrical review], Nov. 25, 1887 1). This was because Bernhardt no longer expressed psychological developments in her theatrical play through long conversation and vocal monologue but instead relayed facts that are “blindingly obvious.” Moreover, she played “furious pantomime” in scenes that were visually spectacular. There was no longer, in his opinion, even “a shadow of poetry” since after her tours “her golden voice is now a brassy one” (Sarcey, “Chronique Théâtrale” [theatrical review], Nov. 25 1887 2).

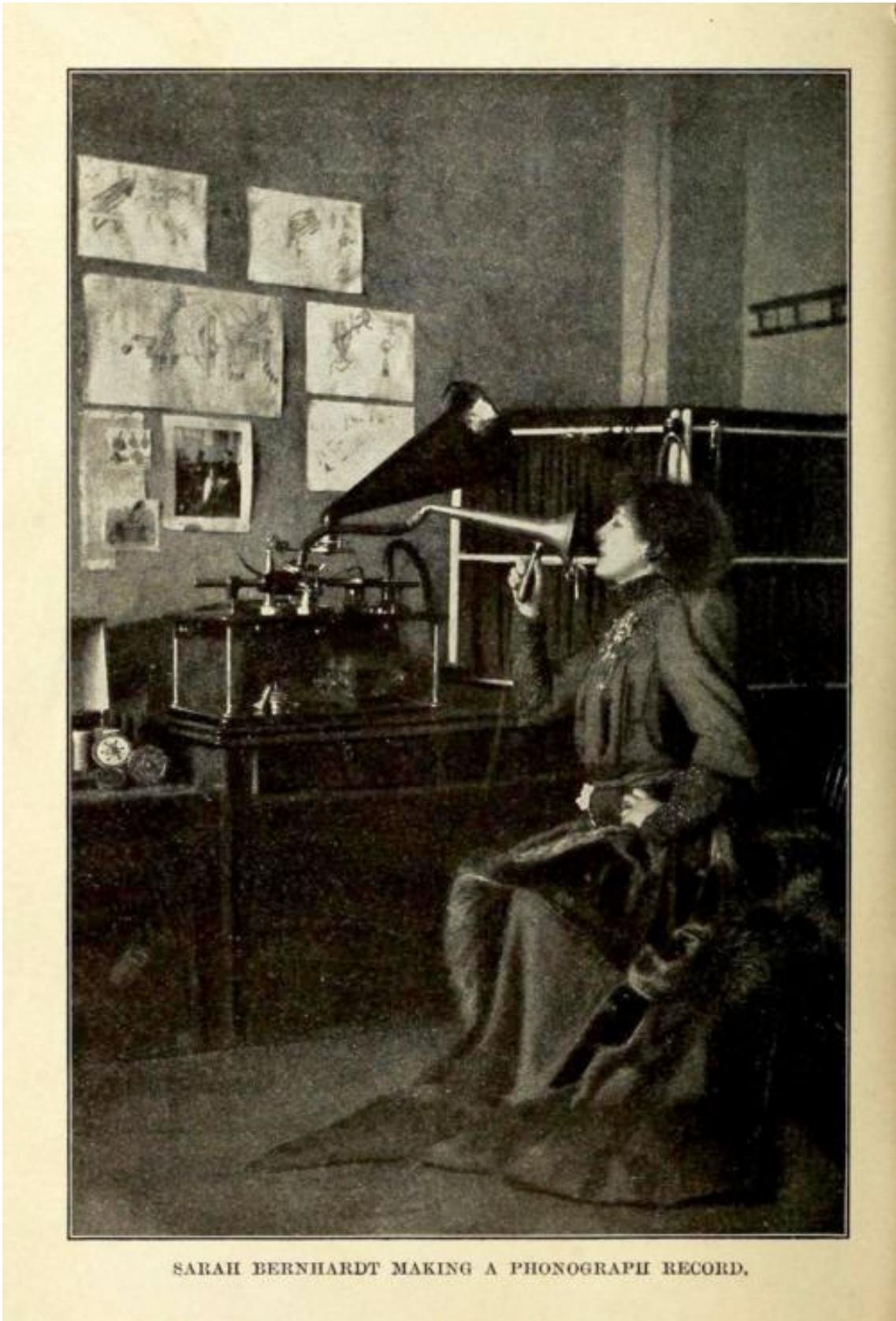
Critic Jules Lemaître would go so far as to say that Bernhardt’s acting unwound “solely through gestures, wringing hands, disheveled hair, knees dragged along the ground, or even by nothing, by the immobile silence of Niobe” (qtd. in Taranow 88-89). Although Bernhardt refuted this criticism,⁶ they indicate that roughly a quarter of a century before Bernhardt entered narrative film her acting was regarded in terms of an international language that required no knowledge of French or even prior knowledge of a play to be understood.

⁶ See the retort in “Sarah Bernhardt et La Tosca” (18): “Des historiens sévères ont imagine de la classer dans la categorie des pieces de pantomime. C’est une malice plaisante, autant que la qualification de pieces d’exportation. N’est-il pas preferable de prendre l’oeuvre nouvelle de M. Sardou pour ce qu’elle est, pour ce que l’éminent écrivain a voulu qu’elle soit, sans dépasser son imagination et sans chercher surtout à imposer de cruels remords à sa conscience d’académicien?” [some severe historians imagined to rank it under the pantomime category. it is an amusing malice, as well as the qualification of the export plays. it is not better to take the new work of Mr. Sardou for what it is, for what the eminent writer wanted it to be, without exceeding his imagination and without trying to impose cruel remorse to his academic conscience?].

While Bernhardt might have developed a physical style of acting before international audiences, her voice nevertheless remained part of her ongoing renown. This was developed and sustained through her engagement in the nascent phonograph industry. Indeed, during her first tour to North America in 1880, Bernhardt was recorded on Edison's tin foil phonograph. In 1896 she made two cylinders for Gianni Bettini in New York. This was followed, in 1902, with five Pathé cylinders. In 1903 she made records with the Gramophone and Typewriter Company as well as the American Zonophone Company. She continued to record her voice until 1918 (see Menefee, *Sarah Bernhardt: Her Films, Her Recordings* 130–133). Caruso's first needle-cut recordings were made for these same American companies in 1903. Significantly, the same dynamic that was described above in terms of her acting developing before American audiences and then being returned to a French public occurred with her recorded voice. Indeed, Bernhardt heads the list of famous vocal talents cited in the Zonophone's French advertisements of 1903. Returned to the French public through these "New American Speaking Machines," she endorses the brand with the statement that "This is the first time that I have heard the perfect reproduction of my voice. Thank you Zonophone."⁷ Hence, while Bernhardt's pantomimic acting on the stage was important to her international fame, this was just one aspect of her expanding fame.

What do we hear, however, in these recordings? From those that are available online or collected in the CD entitled *Sarah Bernhardt in Performance*, we hear short excerpts (generally between three and four minutes long) of Bernhardt in roles which were never brought to film, but which nevertheless contributed to the development of her theatrical career: Phedre, La Samaritaine, Izail. Each excerpt is drawn from a thrilling theatrical moment, one that also displays the range and extent of Bernhardt's vocal skill. In the 1910 Edison recording of *Phèdre* (Jean Racine, 1677) (*Sarah Bernhardt in Performance*), for example, we hear Bernhardt admit her illicit love for her stepson Hippolyte (played by Lou Tellegen). Her voice is plaintive but then passionate, song-like in the way it changes tone. It is also unusual in the way it rises and falls in order to accentuate and develop the emotional charge of her words. Irrespective of the fact that individual words are often hard to distinguish, the tracks give evidence of the passions that are present within each scene. Within a phrase, sometimes even within the rhythmic pronunciation of a single word, there are intonations and cadences that reveal

⁷ With an advertisement featuring Bernhardt stating that it was the first time that she has heard "the perfect reproduction of her voice." Under the heading "Enfin! C'est la Perfection!! INNOVATION GÉNIAL—ZONOPHONE est une Nouvelle Machine parlante américaine, extraordinaire, incomparable! EN VOICI des TÉMOIGNAGES tout chauds, signés d'hier" [finally! this is perfection! brilliant innovation—zonophone is a new American talking machine, extraordinary, incomparable! here some hot testimonials from yesterday], Bernhardt's "C'est la première fois que j'entends la reproduction parfaite de ma voix. Merci donc au Zonophone" [it is the first time that I hear the perfect reproduction of my voice. so thank you to the Zonophone] appears. All the other endorsements follow Bernhardt and are from people associated with "l'Opéra" (this is a fact spelt out by this reference following their names). See Marty 110.



SARAH BERNHARDT MAKING A PHONOGRAPH RECORD.

Sarah Bernhardt recording her voice with a phonograph.

Bernhardt's expressive and singular use of her voice. There are no other sounds on these recordings apart from the noise of the record itself. Unlike on the live stage, there is no music to develop the emotional depth and meaning of a given scene. It is Bernhardt we hear, isolated as a murmuring, speaking, sometimes even a shouting voice. As an advertisement for the Edison Phonograph Company explained in 1910, the phonograph gives Bernhardt "the widest possible latitude for the display of her God-given talent" (qtd. in Musser 159).

The phonograph did not only allow Bernhardt to display her vocal skills before audiences who might only hear her in a single play, it also allowed her to enter the middle class home as a portable and audible object. No longer was Bernhardt only a reproduced photograph, a theatrical program, or even a remembered performance, but someone who could be heard in the comfort of a living room. As the Gramophone's publicity of 1903 stated (expressly listing Bernhardt as its first "star" in featured attractions): "Going to the theater entails catching the last train. On the Gramophone you can hear in your own garden Sarah Bernhardt's sympathetic and dramatic voice" (see the advertisement reproduced in R. Brown and Anthony 237). Furthermore, the phonograph was marketed as a record of physical attendance at an otherwise fleeting theatrical performance. As the Edison Phonograph Company boasted, "Everyone who saw Bernhardt would buy her Records, if only as a souvenir of her farewell tour" (Musser 161).

Charles Musser has recently argued that this expanding fragmentation of Bernhardt's self through reproductive technology correlates with early twentieth century modernity. It resonates with the development of cubism in painting just as it mobilizes interrelationships in cultural forms that (as he states) "had certainly existed, but not in that way or to that degree" (166–168, quote on 168). In other words, Bernhardt's theatrical performances were just one part of her growing renown. Already adapted, changed, fractured and mediated before an international audience well before her entrance into narrative film, her polymorphy disavows the possibility of constructing a simple teleological history of theatrical transfer between the nineteenth-century stage and the twentieth-century screen. Performing before foreign audiences in a variety of venues at the same time that she recorded her voice on the phonograph, Bernhardt was a multi-media actress *par excellence* whose body was continually adapted, reconfigured, and reproduced as a shifting and above all mobile cultural construct.

The Divine Sarah

Known as "the divine," Bernhardt was accorded a title in the late nineteenth century that had earlier been applied only to singers (Nectoux 5).⁸ Not only was she a performer with a remarkable voice, she was also a star whose interpretation of a role gave substance to a theatrical text. In this way, Bernhardt can be considered akin to the *prima donna* in the Italian

⁸ See also, e.g., "SARAH BERNHARDT": "The elite of Paris have applauded the splendid projections of the Divine Sarah in her greatest role" (27).

bel canto, where individual vocal agility determined theatrical success.

Many of the roles that Bernhardt went on to play on the theatrical stage indicate that her performance could literally be associated with the *bel canto* tradition. Her Doña Sol in Victor Hugo's *Hernani* (played at the Comédie Française to much success in 1877) and Lucrece in Hugo's *Lucrece Borgia* (1911), as well as Andromaque in Racine's *Andromaque* (1903) had already appeared on the nineteenth century stage as (respectively) Giuseppe Verdi's *Ernani* (1844), Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833), and Gioacchino Rossini's *Ermione* (1819). Further, the roles Bernhardt brought to silent film—*La Tosca*, *La Dame aux Camélias*, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (Henri Desfontaines, Louis Mercanton, 1913)—also came largely out of the *bel canto* tradition of Gioacchino Rossini and Gaetano Donizetti.

Why did Bernhardt choose to bring these roles to film? In the first place, opera allowed her films to be promoted as middle class entertainments, thereby expanding her possible audience. Opera also allowed her films to be associated the traditional arts and so capitalized on her established renown. Bernhardt's "operatic" film was also a clever response to the medium's silence. It ensured that vocal absence did not suggest a linguistic or instrumental failure. Instead, film was a new artistic hybrid, which was uniquely able to join vision, sound, industry, and art. It is precisely because she was already established as a significant "singer," a diva with a famous voice, that she was able to have her works reconstituted as silent screen performances and brought before audiences she would never actually see. Further, film enabled Bernhardt to expand her public, particularly at a point in which her live voice was beginning to be described as "broken" and "bruised" (see Taranow 46 citing theater critics Adolphe Brisson and Henri Bordeaux in 1912 and 1913 respectively). And, finally, opera indicated that a media which had, until this point, been viewed as a popular entertainment might instead be seen as a modern manifestation of music (which was itself considered the newest of the traditional arts).

As Martin Marks argues in *Music and the Silent Film*, the opera film was appealing to audiences precisely because it guaranteed the quality of the cinematographic product. Even without synchronized sound, it was a cultural coup for the nascent industry. It was also one that implicitly ensured opera a growing mass audience. Marks states:

A silent film of an opera seems an oxymoron. The mute medium robs such a work of its dramatic essence; and even if the accompanying score were to include vocal as well as instrumental parts (which does not often seem to be the case), the original theatrical balance has been lost. In the minds of film producers and audiences, however, these problems of adaptation probably counted for less than the fact that operas were popular works possessing glamour and prestige—qualities that most silent films of the period lacked. (72)

While Marks cites Sadoul's discussion of Georges Méliès's reproduced arias for *Faust and Marguerite* (*Faust et Marguerite*, 1904) and *The Barber of Seville* (*Le barbier de Séville*, 1904) as

examples of these “opera films,” Bernhardt’s films could very well be discussed here. In the first place, they were marketed as unique works of art, which were accessible to all. As a 1912 double-page spread in *Ciné-journal* would explain, Bernhardt was “the most celebrated artist” interpreting “the most celebrated drama” in the Film d’Art’s *La dame aux Camélias* (*Camille*) (*Ciné-journal*, Jan. 6, 1912 30). In America, the film was at once “a merit of the highest class” and also “an entertainment for all classes” (“Sarah Bernhardt in *Camille*.” Advertisement 596). Bernhardt was publicized as a *prima donna* of the stage; her “actual” silence on silent film in no way mitigated the quality of the product on offer. Indeed, in an advertisement for the Canadian paper *The Saint John Globe*, reproduced in David W. Menefee’s *The First Female Stars: Women of the Silent Era*, Bernhardt’s *Camille* is sold as “A GLORIOUS RECORD OF GENIUS” screened in the “OPERA HOUSE” (32).

This focus on film as a “record” was quite an effective way to promote the fame of Bernhardt, one that recalls the strategy employed by Edison to promote the phonograph through the trace of Bernhardt’s voice, by presenting it as a souvenir of the actress, a record of an otherwise fleeting and ephemeral performance. With film, however, “a glorious record of genius” is a shared public event, something that is realized only when a public comes together to watch Bernhardt in the Opera House. In my view, our difficulty today in appreciating Bernhardt’s skill on screen is related to our incapacity to see her films in this expanded context, as one inter-related development of her developing publicity and performance.

Back to Beginnings

In Paul Decauville’s programme Bernhardt was prioritized among the performers who could “sound.” In the posters publicizing the event, she either heads the programme before the other actors and singers (who are culled from such prestigious theaters as the Comédie Française, Opéra, Opéra-Comique, and La Scala) or she is the last attraction, featured in the biggest and boldest print.⁹ What is important about these posters is not only that Bernhardt headlined a bill that included famous singers, but that it is her dressed in the yellow gown of *La Tosca* who introduces the “Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre” programme (see Duckett, “Investigating an interval” for a discussion on this). Evidently, film was not silent, but an expressive multi-media venture. It included and referenced the voice and the record, just as it included and referenced the live stage. While there is a great difference between the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre and the narrative film industry that Bernhardt entered some years later, we would do well to remember that spectators did not go to watch silent film but to see a performative event. Bernhardt’s films, in this sense, do not record a vocal absence. They are paradigmatic examples of early cinema itself.

⁹ See the cover of Robinson. See also the poster reproduced in Sadoul 101 and in *Image & Magie Du Cinema Francais: 100 Ans de Patrimoine* [image&magic of French cinema: 100 years of heritage] 153.

PHONO-CINÉMA-THÉÂTRE

SOUVENIR
DE L'EXPOSITION
DE 1900

VISIONS ANIMÉES
des Artistes
Célèbres

M^{lle} SARAH-BERNHARDT
M. COQUELIN Aîné
M. Victor MAUREL
de l'Opéra-Comique
M^{lle} Rosita MAURI
de l'Opéra
M^{lle} REICHENBERG
de la Comédie-Française
M^{lle} FÉLICIA MALLET
M^{lle} J. CHASLES
de l'Opéra-Comique
M. COQUELIN Cadet
de la Comédie-Française
M. DE FÉRAUDY
de la Comédie-Française
M. Jean COQUELIN
M^{lle} Mily MEYER
M^{lle} Mariette SULLY
M^{lle} VIOLAT
de l'Opéra
M^{lle} MANTE
de l'Opéra
M^{lle} CLÉO DE MÉRODE
M. POLIN
de la Scala et de l'Alcazar d'été
M. Louis MAUREL
de la Scala
M. Jules MOY
M^{lle} RÉJANE

FRANÇOIS-FLAMENG

RUE DE PARIS
Porte 43, (Pont des Invalides.)
(Téléphone 536-60.)

Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre - Souvenir de l'exposition de 1900 - Visions animées des artistes célèbres.
[Souvenir of the 1900's exposition - animated visions of famous artists].

THE AUTHOR: Victoria Duckett teaches film history in the Centre for Ideas, Victorian College of the Arts. She has held posts in the University of Manchester (Department of Drama) and the Università Cattolica, Milan (Department of Communication and Performing Arts). She has published broadly in early cinema, has programmed films for *Cinema Ritrovato*, Bologna, and been involved in Women and the Silent Screen since its founding in Utrecht, 1999. Research interests include feminist historiography, film's relationship to the other arts, and performance on film. She is currently completing a book that explores Sarah Bernhardt and early film (*History Fed By Fiction: Sarah Bernhardt and Silent Film*, University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

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Elena Mosconi

Silent Singers. The Legacy of Opera and Female Stars in Early Italian Cinema

ABSTRACT: Although opera has undoubtedly been an important point of reference for the silent film industry, it didn't leave a conspicuous amount of traces that could allow us today to carry out wide-ranging research. This paper aims to fill this gap trying to reconstruct the relationship between opera and the silent cinema in a particular country, such as Italy, where the culture of melodrama in the early twentieth century was not only widespread among the cultural élite but also familiar to a large section of the population. My contribution explores different items: the technological perspective; the involvement of the main Italian composers into the emerging movie industry; the role played by music publishers and film companies in order to reinforce integration between these media; finally the key role of the singer-actress. This last item is really significant. Indeed the character of singer-actress reaches on a profound symbolic meaning, and at same time reveals both the potentials and limitations of silent movie. Finally, I will show how the paradoxical status of "silent singer" is a very fruitful item to depict the identity of both silent cinema and opera in the well-known home of "bel canto."

Opera was in many ways an important point of reference for the emerging motion picture industry.¹ There have been numerous examples of films accompanied by music played on records (as those of the German Tonfilm), shortened film versions of operas sometimes accompanied by small orchestras, or even films that were generally based on the story of an opera or its literary origin, where the main characters of both film and opera shared the same experiences (*opera parallela*, Simeon 110). In a different way, the theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* has been an important methodological benchmark for film dramaturgy as a whole (Paulin; Garda). Furthermore, it can be seen that the organization of early cinema was affected by opera: the shows were itinerant and the star system was similar to the one experienced by the *prima donnas* of opera (Cowgill and Poriss).

These relationships may seem quite obvious. However, apart from a few case studies, they have failed to leave traces that could allow us today to carry out more wide-ranging research.² We must note that Paul Fryer's book, *The Opera Singer and the Silent Film*, was successful in highlighting the contribution given by the major opera singers who have been working in the motion picture industry.³

The following essay aims to lay the foundations for carrying out historical research in a particular country, such as Italy, where the culture of melodrama in the early twentieth century was not only widespread among the cultural élite but also familiar to a large section

¹ I wish to thank Cristiano Balma for providing invaluable film sources for this study, which is part of a larger ongoing research.

² Research is limited on focusing on individual performers or on the cinematographic fortune of certain individual works such as *Carmen*. See Perriam and Davies.

³ As a framework on these issues see also Rosselli; Beghelli (814–841).

of the population.

Opera became popular in different ways: through amateur performances, bands, folk groups, mechanical instruments, and also through publishing and recordings that increased opera's domestic consumption (Leydi). If in the United States the explicit use of opera by the budding film industry served to increase the legitimacy of cinema as a cultural form, in Italy—home of the “bel canto”—the relationship between national cinema and opera, in the same period, appeared more uncertain (Simeon 108-110). Secondly, my paper raises a methodological problem. Which perspectives have to be taken in order to bring to light, in addition to names and things, the cultural significance attributed at the time to the complex relationship between cinema and opera? From this point of view, the key figure of the singer-actress takes on a symbolic meaning, as an articulation of both the potentials and limitations of the new form of expression.

The Technological Perspective

Rick Altman's research has revealed the importance of a technological perspective to identify, in the thirty year history of silent cinema, different phases based on the type of equipment used (5–23). His proposal allows a periodization concerning the role of stardom at the different stages of technological development.

However, such an approach is insignificant for Italy, a country in which technological progress proceeded in a discontinuous way. The use of technical equipment to promote a star's image never actually succeeded to become an industrial practice and results were casual, dependent on individual creativity and often even on luck. For this reason it is difficult to link the process of technological development to the history of stardom. The various synchronization methods that emerged at this time in Italy did not highlight the role of the singer—the emphasis was rather on technology than on the singers' voices.⁴ The poorly defined position of the operatic *prima donnas* in Italian silent cinema also marginalized women's role.

The first system for synchronized sound that was used in Italy—operated between 1906 and 1909 by Pagliej, Pineschi and Pierini—allowed the reproduction of arias on records that were played simultaneously with the film. Sometimes there were abbreviated reproductions of an entire opera (as with films like *Manon Lescaut*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Il trovatore* by Azeglio e Lamberto Pineschi, all released in 1908). The press reviews mentioned the actors' names only in the case of *Il trovatore*, which was praised for being the “ultimate and most detailed reproduction of Verdi's score” (Redi, *Cinema muto italiano* [Italian silent cinema] 52–56). Recordings were of the soprano Eugenia Burzio, the famous baritone Antonio Magini

⁴ In France the experiments on synchronized sound made by the major film companies, particularly Pathé and Gaumont, appear to have been more structured and effective, with regard to both the technology and the marketing strategy, than what can be observed in Italy. See Barnier (176–183 and 189–257), who however doesn't give any clue about the possible role played by the interpreters.

Coletti and the choir of Milan's Scala. We also know that when it was shown in Livorno, two singers went on stage to thank the audience at the end of the film. Their physical presence in the movie theater following the recorded performance was proof to the audience that their voices, previously deprived of a body (or acousmatic, according to Michel Chion), were in fact real presences that faced a real audience. It must be remembered, however, that the actors of film-operas were not necessarily the singers of the records. In the case of the film *Il trovatore* some of them had taken part in the theatrical performance of the same work at the Quirinale theatre in Rome in 1907 (without having recorded any synchronized disc).⁵

Pagliej, Pineschi and Pierini's synchronization system was often criticized by the press for the poor quality of voice reproduction, which at certain points sounded "shrill, guttural, hoarse, not always clear and mellow"⁶ (Eldea [Francesco Butteri] 56). On the other hand, some critics appreciated its potential for improving the circulation of opera culture among popular audiences, especially in provincial areas. As *Il Café-chantant* and *La Rivista fonocinematografica* stated, "With the new attraction represented by the Italian Pineschi Company, we have strong evidence that cinema can be effective in increasing the importance of all the arts, facilitating their diffusion and providing immense and useful teaching"⁷ (qtd. in Redi, *Cinema muto italiano* 55). Between 1910 and 1920 the technology of synchronized sound did not gain much ground in Italy, despite the new system patented by Rapazzo and Zeppieri.⁸ Its meager traces reveal that commercial and advertising strategies as well as the film-operas' reception did not emphasize the women singers' role, nor their gender.

Investigating the Authors

A different approach to an understanding of the relationship between film and opera might consider the connections existing between some of the major Italian opera composers and the rising motion picture industry. As noted earlier, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, opera became an increasingly widespread phenomenon in Italy, even among the popular classes, at least with regard to arias and romances. At the same time, it should also be noted that several Italian composers (such as Giuseppe Verdi, Pietro Mascagni, Ruggero Leoncavallo and mainly Giacomo Puccini) were famous the world over. For this reason, they often came into contact with an international culture that enabled them to express a more modern sensibility, inspiring them to give shape to female figures that often became the focus of the melodrama (see Mallach; Vittadello; Martino). They also approached a relatively

⁵ Among them, Amedeo Besi and Maria Antonietta Albani.

⁶ "Stridula, gutturale, rauca, non sempre limpida, chiara, pastosa" (All the quoted texts in this paper are translated by the author).

⁷ "Con la nuova attrazione della Società Italiana Pineschi si ha una delle prove più convincenti dell'utilità del cinematografo e del concorso che porta a tutte le arti, facilitandone la diffusione e riuscendo di immenso e utile ammaestramento."

⁸ The two systems were patented in 1921 and 1922, but were both used also before, approximately from 1914 and 1918, respectively.

new and wider public.

A similar taste was often seen in diva films too, whose heroines lived absolute passions—generally concerning love and death—as uncontrollable natural forces (see e.g. Dalle Vacche). In fact, as noted by Gian Piero Brunetta, the title of the film that gave birth to the Italian diva genre, *Love Everlasting* (*Ma l'amor mio non muore!*, Mario Caserini, 1913, starring Lyda Borelli), was taken directly from Manon Lescaut's cry before her tragic death.

However, the relationship between opera composers and the early Italian motion picture industry is neither obvious nor immediate. It is instead quite indirect, and it flows underground, causing Gian Piero Brunetta to claim that Puccini is the “hidden muse” of Italian cinema of the 1910s (*Il cinema muto italiano* [Italian silent cinema] 102–103; “Giacomo Puccini, madre/madrina e levatrice del cinema del Novecento” [Giacomo Puccini, mother/godmother and midwife of nineteenth-century cinema] 39).

If we try to explore the contribution given by the opera composers to the silent screen, we find a limited number of clues.

The dean of Italian opera, Giuseppe Verdi, died in 1901 and was unable to see the development of cinema. The single film document concerning Verdi is the footage that was shot in Milan during his funeral (*Funerali di Giuseppe Verdi a Milano* [the funeral of Giuseppe Verdi in Milan], attributed to Italo Pacchioni, 1901).

Giacomo Puccini, who had a strong cinematographic imagination (Leukel; Girardi 326–327)—as can be seen particularly in *La fanciulla del West*—always refused to compose music for the screen. Yet he appeared in a few amateur films and in a cameo role in *Cura di baci* (kiss therapy, Emilio Graziani-Walter, 1916), where, in a humorous frame of mind, he played an impolite gentleman (De Santi; Bovani and Del Porro). It is known that he showed an interest in the futurist film *Story of a Little Check* (*Il Re, le Torri, gli Alferi*, Ivo Illuminati, 1916) (Soro 136), but he declined the offer to write a musical accompaniment for D'Annunzio's play *La crociata degli innocenti* [the innocents' crusade] that became a movie in 1917 directed by Gino Rossetti and Alessandro Boutet (later Alberto Traversa) (Gambacorti 61). Puccini also turned down an offer to write music for a drama by Fausto Maria Martini (Brunetta 42).

In contrast to this, Pietro Mascagni, another famous composer, worked actively for the cinema. In 1914 he was asked to compose the score for a film project on Giuseppe Garibaldi, which had been put in production by the Cines company in Rome. The project never came to completion but Mascagni got involved in the making of *Satan's Rhapsody* (*Rapsodia satanica*, Nino Oxilia, 1917, starring Lyda Borelli). This film represented a point of convergence for the symbolist taste that was then developing in various fields of modern art and culture (as shown on various levels: the story plot, the acting style, the set design, etc.). It is worth noting that the music was not added until the shooting was almost finished (Raffaelli; Piccardi; Licursi). Mascagni worked with great care and dedication and was given the authority to introduce a few changes in the scenes. His eclectic score can actually be considered to be a true musical accompaniment to the film, as opposed to his conception of an opera. In 1914

(perhaps for financial reasons), he authorized an adaptation of his 1905 work *L'amica* [the friend], which was directed by Enrico Guazzoni in 1916. The film, however, was not a great success.

Finally, Ruggero Leoncavallo approached film through the intervention of his publisher Sonzogno, who brought to the screen his *Queen of the roses* (*La reginetta delle rose*, 1912); the film version was directed by Luigi Sapelli (known as Caramba) in 1914. Leoncavallo also received credit as the author of *Zingari* (gypsies, Ubaldo Maria del Colle), a 1916 film adapted from his 1912 drama, as well as for both the plot and music of *L'alba* [the dawn], a translation of his opera *Mameli* (1916) for the screen (Amoroso 50-58) and *L'anima redenta* [a soul redeemed, 1917), with Francesca Bertini (see Palmieri 138), that both remained unfinished projects. I believe that further research into this author will provide further interesting insights in his attitude towards the cinema.

We could go on, passing through the work of all of the composers active between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, but I think that the problem is clear. Different opera styles such as the Wagnerian model, Verdi's romanticism, the *verismo* of the so called "young school," best represented by Mascagni and Leoncavallo, the psychological-symbolist model, and so forth, gave nourishment to many Italian silent films, especially because of a common literary matrix. Yet, despite this shared cultural background, institutional contacts between the two forms of expression remained sparse and sporadic.

One aspect that is waiting to be brought to light concerns the role played by the music publishers on the one side, and the film companies on the other. The whole set of these subjects' economic and commercial strategies is yet to be investigated. In this context, attention should be given to the problem of copyright, since the fear of legal action limited the exploitation of operatic arias. We know, for example, that in 1908 the publisher Ricordi gave permission for the music of Verdi's *Il trovatore* to be used as an accompaniment to the film of the same title, but he later withdrew authorization and initiated a lawsuit against the film company, the Società Italiana Pineschi (Prolo 99). Similarly, in 1916 Mascagni sold the rights of *Cavalleria rusticana* to Flegrea Film, while experiencing legal problems with Tespi Film. This latter company had produced a version of this opera without the composer's authorization, only mentioning that it was inspired by Giovanni Verga's novel of the same title, which was indeed the literary source of Mascagni's work.

Sonzogno publishing house represented an example of a modern publisher that tried to present opera as a popular "multimedia" project. Lorenzo Sonzogno, nephew to the founder Edoardo, created the Musical Film company in 1913, with the definite purpose to produce film adaptations of the operas whose copyright he held. Among the titles that were put in production are *La reginetta delle rose* (adapted, as I have mentioned, by Leoncavallo), *La crociata degli innocenti* (from D'Annunzio) and other titles including some vernacular Milanese comedies interpreted by Edoardo Ferravilla and Eduardo Scarpetta (Martinelli, *Il cinema muto italiano 1917* [Italian silent cinema 1917]).



Cavalleria Rusticana, 1916. *Cinemagraf 12* (1916).

Generally quite sensitive to the commercial aspects and the marketing of operas, both the publishing houses and the film companies paid a considerable attention to the role of female stars, particularly for advertising purposes.

The Mute Singers

In my opinion the female star is the best way to collocate the relationship between opera and film culture at the onset of the twentieth century since it allows us to bring to light the hidden sides of this relationship. It is well known that at this time in Italy many actors made the transition from the theatrical stage to the cinema, in the hope of better financial conditions. Film actresses came mainly from the theatre, where they had done their apprenticeship. But despite the surprising number of theatrical actresses who made their debut on screen between 1910 and 1920—sometimes appearing in just one film—the singers who came from the lyric stage were very few.

The first operatic singer to ever enter the Italian motion picture industry was Matilde di Marzio. In 1913 she was asked by Guazzoni to perform the role of a slave in *Antony and Cleopatra*, produced by Cines (Camerini 38). Her filmography includes many parts in historical dramas and *pepla*, as well as a highly suggestive exotic role in *Kalida'a, storia di una mummia* (Kalida'a, the tale of a mummy, Augusto Genina, 1917). As Tito Alacci observed in his book on Italian female film stars, not only Di Marzio was very attractive, but she had a “perfect miming technique and charm,” although sometimes her expression could seem a little severe (*Le nostre attrici cinematografiche studiate sullo schermo* [our cinema actresses studied on the screen] 90–91). She played in twenty films, and yet she never appeared in a film-opera. Her previous career as an opera singer was never mentioned in the reviews, and critics found she was spontaneous in front of the camera (Fasanelli).

Olga Paradisi was dubbed “the duchess of the Tabarin” since her role in Léon Bard’s (Carlo Lombardo) operetta *La duchessa del Bal Tabarin* [the duchess of the Bal Tabarin] (1917), transposed on the silent screen by Nino Martinengo in 1917. Paradisi played in several films; although critics agreed on the merits of her acting (Alacevich, “Cronaca di Roma” [roman chronicle] 7), her experience in the cinema was brief and she never reached the status of a film star.

Soprano Carmen Melis was hired in 1917 by Caramba-Éclair to perform in *Volo dal nido* (flight from the nest), directed by Luigi Sapelli (Caramba), with a screenplay by the playwright Giuseppe Adami. Critics dismissed her performance on screen with these words: “She is to be preferred as a lyric artist of great value” (Fandor qtd. in Martinelli, *Il cinema muto italiano 1917* [Italian silent cinema 1917] 321). Moreover, Gabriella Besanzoni played the main character in *Stefania* (Armando Brunero, 1916), while Rosina Storchio played the title role in *Come morì Butterfly* (how Butterfly died, Emilio Graziani-Walter, 1917).

Opera singers were involved in several important films, dramatized by illustrious writers

such as Fausto Maria Martini and set in the world of opera. This type of borrowing gave birth to what has been called *opera parallela*, a film whose protagonist was usually an operatic singer who happens to experience in her own life the same scenes she performs on stage (Simeon 110). The plots of famous operas were thus reenacted and recalled to the audience's minds. For example, *Come morì Butterfly* replicates the epilogue of Puccini's melodrama. An opera singer, neglected by her fiancé, brings to her theatrical performance the intensity of her sorrow, until she finally dies while playing the part of Puccini's unlucky heroine. Unfortunately, the performance of Rosina Storchio in the leading role left critics cold. As Bertoldo stated in *La Vita cinematografica* [the cinema life]:

Rosina Storchio, the famous singer, becomes an average silent actress: correct, measured, composed, but nothing exceptional or special can be found in her interpretation. Rather, we must note a serious problem. Cinema is a discipline where the eye is master, and Storchio does not visually correspond to the character she embodies: her persona is so rancidly sentimental that it becomes unaesthetic and loses all shades of drama, passion and feeling. (Bertoldo qtd. in Martinelli, *Il cinema muto italiano 1917-70*)⁹

While appreciating the singer's acting style, Bertoldo then underlined her inability to master the new requirements of the cinematographic scene, particularly with regard to the expression of emotions and feelings. Unfortunately it is not possible to confront such opinion with the film itself, since no copy of it is extant. Anyway this critical position seems important, in that it attempts to establish a canon of good cinematographic acting which is emphatic, expressive, and therefore very close to the style of so many Italian divas, such as Bertini and Borelli. The critic also shows his wish to break with a kind of operatic acting style that he considers too measured and functional to be of any value for the screen. In other words, Bertoldo seems to believe that the technique of opera singers, while commendable, did not respond to the needs of the screen, which required a new way of being on scene that had to be focused on the representation of feelings. We might surmise that the author was willing to legitimize the new art of the moving image by contrasting it against the celebrated tradition of the lyrical stage, so as to emphasize the modernity of the new medium. Perhaps in pursuing this objective he underestimated the consummate professionalism of a famous lyric singer such as Rosina Storchio.

The cold critical reception may have been a reason why the film career of so many lyrical stars was usually quite brief before they went back to the operatic stage. Clearly they did not consider their cinematographic experience to have been particularly significant.

⁹ "Rosina Storchio, celebre cantante, riesce appena una discreta attrice muta: corretta, composta, misurata; ma nulla di eccezionale e di speciale notiamo nella sua interpretazione. Anzi dovremmo notare un difetto grave, trattandosi di una esecuzione scenica in cui l'occhio è quello che ne coglie la maggior parte: Storchio plasticamente non risponde al personaggio incarnato; la sua persona, cioè la sua figura, non ci persuade in una parte così rancidamente sentimentale; riesce inestetica ne perde in efficacia ogni aspetto drammatico e ogni commozione passionale."

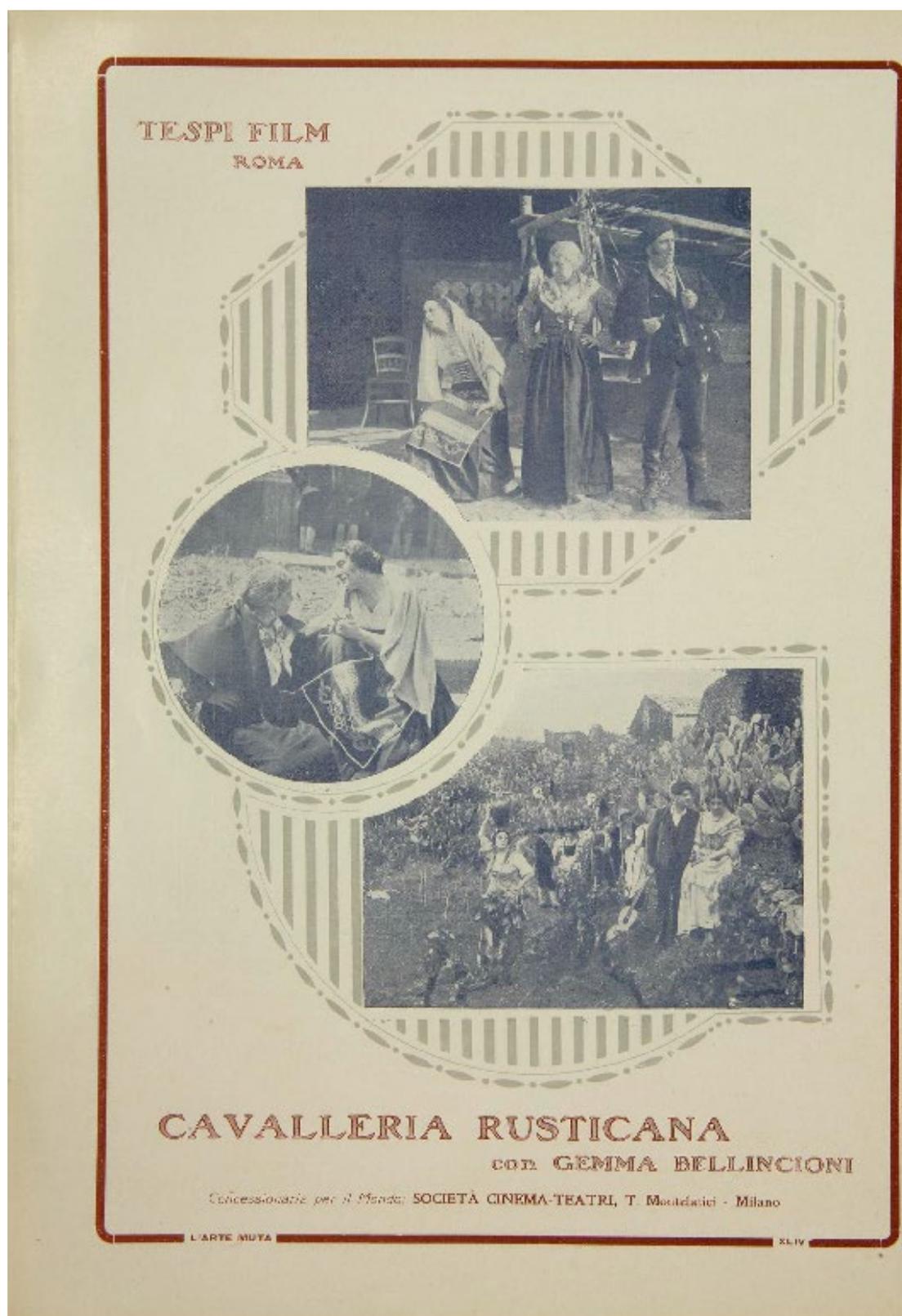
In general, it is possible to say that opera singers performed better on stage than on screen, where their presence was occasional. Additionally, it is worth noting that when they moved to the cinema permanently (as in the case of Di Marzio and Paradisi), they tended to hide their previous operatic activity.

A similar adverse fate in the world of motion pictures did not spare another celebrated *prima donna* of the time, Gemma Bellincioni. Born in 1864, Bellincioni was an icon of operatic *verismo* and was loved for her modernity. Her fame was associated with the prototype of the *melodramma verista*, Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, which in turn was closely inspired by the nineteenth century Southern Italian culture and folklore described by Giovanni Verga in his novels. In her stage performance of *Cavalleria rusticana*, Bellincioni brought an unprecedented freedom, truth and passion to the leading female character, Santuzza. After retiring from the stage, Bellincioni started a new career in the cinema, not only as an actress, but also as a director and a producer. Not surprisingly, Bellincioni's first role for the screen as an actress was in the 1916 adaptation of *Cavalleria rusticana*, again as Santuzza, the character that had made her famous.

Directed by Ugo Falena at Tespi in Rome, the film could not be advertised as an adaptation of Mascagni's melodrama because, as mentioned above, the author refused to cede the copyright. The hurdle was then overcome by referring the film to the author of its literary source, Giovanni Verga, who on his part had given permission to use his work. The marketing strategy of Tespi was astute: the name of Gemma Bellincioni, considered to be the ultimate Santuzza, was enough to provide a direct reference to Mascagni's opera.

But cinema also required a certain *physique du rôle*. After all, Bellincioni was already fifty-three when she first appeared on the screen and her performance was judged unbelievable. As a critic stated: "Bellincioni shows all her magnificent intentions in acting, but the film audience wants younger and more charming actresses. Therefore we have to note that her interpretation was of no interest to the public" (Vice qtd. in Martinelli, *Il cinema muto italiano 1914* [Italian silent cinema 1914] 87, vol. 2). Today, when watching the surviving copy, the viewer is more inclined to attribute the limits of the film to a lack of camera mobility—which reveals its theatrical origin—than to the acting of the *prima donna*, which seems suitable to the role.

In 1917 Bellincioni created the Biancagemma Films, a production company that went on to produce twelve films. At first, these were mainly *opere parallele*, whose plot revolved around an opera's storyline, or were focused on figures characterized as musicians. For instance, *Donna Lisa* (Gemma Bellincioni Stagno, 1917) was a passionate drama about the love between two singers; in it Bellincioni played alongside her colleague, baritone Mattia Battistini. *Vita traviata* [strayed life] (Gemma Bellincioni Stagno, 1918) was loosely based on Verdi's celebrated melodrama, *La traviata* (1853). In the following years, Bellincioni directed several other films, all of which were badly received by the press. The titles include *La baronessa Daria* (baroness Daria, 1918), *Il prezzo della felicità* (the price of happiness, 1918,



Cavalleria Rusticana con Gemma Bellincioni, Tespi Film, 1916.
Arte Muta [silent art] 5 (1916).

with Eric Oulton, another lyric singer) and *Satanica* (1923). The plots repeated the trite cliché of the *femme fatale*, and their hackneyed motifs were increasingly perceived as antiquated expressions of an old cinematographic style that lacked the fresher language of American narrative cinema.

In 1917, Bellincioni's daughter Bianca—born from her marriage with Tito Stagno, a famous tenor, and herself a singer—began performing for the screen too. Her principal sponsor was in fact her mother. It is worth noting that Bianca used the double-barreled surname “Bellincioni Stagno” in a time when matrilineal surnames were virtually unheard of.

Bianca Bellincioni Stagno's acting style did not appeal the critics, who found her gestures too frantically expressive to be suitable to the screen. Her status as a *prima donna* was constantly threatened throughout all of her career. Eventually, fame began to slip between her fingers and she rapidly lost her position as a leading lady.

It is known that Bianca experienced serious problems in 1920 with Giuseppe Barattolo, a lawyer who was then the head of the Unione Cinematografica Italiana, the major Italian film company of the period. Barattolo refused to pay her, adducing as a motivation that she had been unreliable and negligent at work (Redi, “Bellincioni Stagno contro Barattolo” [Bellincioni Stagno versus Barattolo]). Bianca's contrasted experience in the motion picture industry is well representative of a time when the divas' negotiating power was in steep decline.

Documentation provided by Redi (“Bellincioni Stagno contro Barattolo”) shows that her salary amounted to about 65000 liras per year, a pittance compared to what a *prima donna* of the lyrical stage would earn in the golden age of operatic stardom. One need only to compare her earnings with those of her mother, who in her memories recalls a 1882 tour across Spain that brought in a monthly salary of 1300 liras plus travel expenses, quite a healthy sum for a girl of sixteen. Three years later, a South American tour gave her a salary of no less than 12000 liras a month (Bellincioni 19, 74).¹⁰ On the contrary, the status of Bianca as a star must have been in sharp decline if, in a letter, she felt the need to complain about being like a “slave” to the production company: “I can tolerate the fact that they are ruining me artistically, but I cannot accept that they ruined my health” (Redi, “Bellincioni Stagno contro Barattolo”).

Perhaps we now have a better understanding of why the cinema was so unproductive for opera singers: it provided neither economic nor artistic advancement.

Further evidence that operatic stardom was more important than a possible career in the cinema is found in Gemma Bellincioni's autobiography. Published in 1920, while she was still active in the cinema as a producer and a director, the book only covers the triumphs of her operatic career and never makes any reference to her involvement in the cinema, albeit it certainly cost her a significant financial investment.

This survey of the contribution given by the female opera singers to Italian silent cinema

¹⁰ The amounts should be normalized by taking inflation into account.

cannot neglect the figure of Lina Cavalieri, who should be recalled as being not only “the most beautiful woman in the world” and a light entertainer, but also an opera singer performing since 1900 (see Fryer and Usova). Cavalieri’s fame was international, but she was always proud of her Italian origins. After her performance at the Metropolitan theatre in New York in 1906, she was offered the main role in an American film adaptation of *Manon Lescaut*. Her career on screen continued in Italy where she appeared in *The Shadow of Her Past* (*Sposa nella morte*, Emilio Ghione, 1915) and *The House of Granada* (*La rosa di Granata*, Emilio Ghione, 1916), both of which were distributed internationally. Later she performed in other films in the United States (*The Eternal Temptress*, Emile Chautard, 1917; *Love’s Conquest*, Edward José, 1918; *A Woman of Impulse*, Edward José, 1918; *The Two Brides*, Edward José, 1919; *The Crushed Idol* [*L’idole brisée*], Maurice Mariaud, 1920).

While Cavalieri’s American films emphasized—both in the plots and the advertising campaign—her identity as an operatic star, the Italian trade press tended to avoid speaking of her as a singer, and preferred instead to present her as the ultimate charming woman, or even a goddess, an icon of beauty wrapped in stylish clothes designed by Paquin (Di Tizio 391; Martinelli, “L’avventura cinematografica di Lina Cavalieri” [the cinematographic adventure of Lina Cavalieri] 291-292). Such approach appears largely reductive, since Cavalieri’s Italian films also show strong connections to the operatic world. The film she interpreted in 1916, for example, was based on the plot of Joaquin Valverde Sanjuán’s *La rosa de Granada* (1901), an operetta written by Jean Rameau. The project to produce an adaptation of this work had been suggested to director Ghione by Cavalieri’s husband, tenor Luciano Muratore. The film included—as a show within a show—the staging of a recently composed opera, Riccardo Zandonai’s *Francesca da Rimini* (1914).¹¹

The case of Lina Cavalieri can help explain the complex relationships between opera and silent cinema within the broader context of cultural identity in different countries.

In the United States, the motion picture industry had reached a more advanced industrial and technological stage, and was supported by the recording industry. Within this framework, the connections between opera and film-operas were highlighted. The names of the stars who had been triumphally enshrined at the Metropolitan Opera House, and who were now perceived almost as a “brand” (e.g. Enrico Caruso, Geraldine Farrar, Lina Knights), increased the cultural legitimacy of the films they interpreted. Moreover the American film-operas were addressed to an audience that was mostly unaware of any operatic culture.

The Italian situation was the opposite. A certain knowledge of the main operas—though often restricted to the arias—was common among the audiences, as was the knowledge of what an opera performed on stage looked like. For this reason, there was also a wide awareness concerning the limitations of the filmic adaptation of an opera, which often seemed of an inferior value compared to the original.

Audiences also considered the actors’ performance to be an essential part of the show.

¹¹ See Ghione’s interesting account of the making of his film in Lotti (80–85).

The *prima donna*, in particular, was recognized as a major artistic presence, the embodiment of a complex synthesis of voice, gestures, facial expressions, stage presence and charisma. Mechanical reproduction threatened this unity of subjectivity that was typical of the performing arts.

The early contacts between the two media took place during a period of great industrial progress. The emerging cultural industries offered a whole new range of opportunities to women, both on the professional and the creative level. For the first time, between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the evanescent and transitory figure of a famous woman could be eternized by media such as photography and film. The great literary heroines could now be rendered in “flesh and blood,” taking shape in actual psychological and physical forms.

But the unity of the opera singer, exclusive to live performance, could not be transposed to the screen: silent cinema forced the lyrical star to renounce using her principal expressive mean—her voice—to become a mere image. Therefore the star was compelled between two options: to turn into a mute actress (which implied the loss of her integrity as an artist, as in the case of both Cavalieri and Bellincioni, who were perceived more as actresses than as singers),¹² or to go back to the operatic stage, where her expressive possibilities could be displayed at best (as in the cases of Melis and Storchio).

There are many indications that suggest that Italian operatic *prima donnas* lived the disintegration of their star persona imposed by film technology in a problematic way. Their appearances on the screen were therefore occasional. It wasn't until the introduction of sound at the beginning of the 1930s that the unity of the star's voice and body could be recreated, albeit in a mechanical way. Operatic stars would then return more successfully to the screen, finally releasing their song.

THE AUTHOR: Elena Mosconi is Associate Professor at the University of Pavia at Cremona (School of Musicology). Her research focuses on cultural history and historiography. It addresses the institutionalisation of film and the historical relationship between film and the other arts. She has worked on the cultural context of early and silent film (photography, theater, opera and stage melodrama, popular shows), giving particular attention to Italian cinema. She is the author of the award-winning *L'impressione del film. Contributi per una storia del cinema italiano 1895-1945* [the impression of film. essays on Italian film history 1895-1945] (2006). She has co-edited *Moltiplicare l'istante. Beltrami, Comerio e Pacchioni tra fotografia e cinema* [the multiplied instant. Beltrami, Comerio and Pacchioni as photographers and movie directors] (2007), *Spettatori italiani. Riti e ambienti del consumo cinematografico 1900-1950* [Italian audiences. rites and places of film consumption 1900-1950] (2006), and *Cinema e sonoro in Italia (1945-1970)* [cinema and sound in Italy 1945-1970] (2011).

¹² On this issue see Lagny (119).

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A Tribute to Her Creativity: Maria Gasparini in *The Stage*

ABSTRACT: If we accept that the practice of filmmaking is based on the pleasure and desire to appropriate and control an image, it seems hardly surprising that film directors can fall in love with film stars, and vice versa. In the collective imagination, the actress is malleable material in the hands of her male partner-creator. This rigid definition of gender roles within the creative process has been surprisingly challenged and explored in an Italian melodrama of 1912, *The Stage (La Ribalta)*. In it, a noblewoman who has been prompted by an actor (her lover) to step on the stage for fun reveals an uncanny talent for acting. Unable to deal with the humiliation of coming second to this talent, her mentor becomes envious and causes a tragedy. The leading role was played by Maria Gasparini, one of the most appreciated intellectual actresses of Italian early cinema. More interestingly, the film was directed by Gasparini's own husband, Mario Caserini, who treated the subject as a delicate, sincere homage to his partner, focusing on her character as the true creative genius within the fictional couple.

If we accept that the practice of filmmaking is based on the pleasure and desire to appropriate and control an image, it seems hardly surprising that film directors can fall in love with film stars, and vice versa. The myth of the Muse adds to the fascination that such couplings hold for the public. In the collective imagination, the actress is a malleable material in the hands of her partner-creator. She is the bearer of natural cinematic genius, or *photogénie* (Delluc).

The concept of *photogénie* implies that the talent of an actress-muse depends on a kind of instinctive and spontaneous magnetism, rather than on expressive awareness or technical ability. Viewed from this perspective, the director is a Pygmalion-like figure, casting a spell over the force of Nature that the female face and body represent, and channelling her energy into a coherent and structured work of art. Undoubtedly, this concept owes much to the *clichés* that structure the creative process according to traditional gender roles.

This rigid definition of gender roles within the creative process has been surprisingly challenged and explored in an Italian melodrama shot in Turin in 1912, *The Stage (La ribalta, 1912)*, a fragment of which has been recently found and seen after many years.

Traditionalist Italy in the early 1910s, the age of prime minister Giovanni Giolitti, had not yet fully accepted that a wife might combine the roles of a respectable woman and stage actress. As most people believed, a woman's place was still in the home. In 1919, for example (and remember that this was a few years after the advent of the great Italian divas on screen) a poem dedicated to the ménage of nobleman-director Baldassarre Negroni (1877-1945) and his partner-actress Olga Mambelli—also known as Hesperia (1885-1959)—appeared in the pages of *Il Sor Capanna* [mr. Capanna], a satirical magazine. The verse read:

Hesperia: Oh my Sarre, if you love me,
your housewife I will be.

Baldassarre: Oh my Hesperia, this would be better for me,
for you I'll forget the stage and the screen.

Hesperia: I want to leave the art and all allurements,
for you I'll become the lady of the house.¹

In Italy in this period there was no place (for a woman!) like home, even for an elegant and successful actress like Hesperia, who was married to a count. But antecedent even to the cases of Baldassarre Negroni and Hesperia, or Soava and Carmine Gallone, or even Emilio Ghione and Kally Sambucini, the most famous director-actress couple of Italian cinema was Mario Caserini and Maria Gasparini.

Mario Caserini (1874-1920), the doyen of Italian film directors, had been working in the cinema from the very beginnings of national film production. He had tried to instil into the minds of the better classes, especially the rich and respectable bourgeoisie, the notion that the new medium was an art form.² His somewhat bizarre appearance—he was short, with a round face and an imposing pomaded moustache—encouraged many a caricature in the trade press.³ His impeccable manners and amiable character nevertheless, attracted respect and affection from fellow directors, journalists and investors. Not to mention the feelings of Maria Gasparini, a young actress he had met in Rome while shooting at Cines.

Maria Gasparini (1884-1969) came from Milan, where she had studied for several years at La Scala Opera House school of ballet, frequently appearing as a solo ballerina. Various photos are preserved at the archives of La Scala and at the photo-archive of the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin. These depict Gasparini at different stages of her life and in the costumes she wore in different performances.⁴ In some cases the roles she interpreted were the same that she would later perform in some early silent films. In one photo, for example, we see her dressed as the heroine of Fernand Bessier's *L'Histoire d'un Pierrot*. The same pantomime was adapted by Mario Caserini twice.⁵

It is not clear why Gasparini abandoned a promising career on the stage in Milan. Possibly an accident prevented her from continuing dancing—however, this is only a surmise.

¹ “Hesperia: Oh Sarre mio, se mi vuoi bene, / la tua massaia esser vogl'io. / Baldassarre: O Hesperia mia, ciò mi conviene, / e scena e schermo per te oblio. / Hesperia: Voglio lasciare l'arte e ogni lusinga, / sarò per te una donna casalinga.” (“La Mascotte. Duetto sentimentale fra Hesperia e Baldassarre” [the mascot. sentimental duet between Hesperia and Baldassarre], translated by author).

² Not by accident “Ars vera lex” was the motto of the Film Artistica Gloria, the production company founded in 1912 by Caserini and, as an investor, Domenico Cazzulino.

³ A caricature, for instance, appeared in *La vita cinematografica* [the cinematographic life], June 15, 1913 (79).

⁴ Many of these photos bear the stamp of Luca Comerio's photography studio. Before becoming an internationally renowned documentary operator, then, Comerio (1878-1940) did not reject the possibility of portraying young ballerinas posing in front of painted backgrounds, at La Scala.

⁵ Mario Caserini first directed *Il romanzo di un Pierrot* [romance of a Pierrot] in 1906 for Alberini & Santoni; he restaged the same script in 1909 for Cines. Of course, the most famous version of the pantomime is *Pierrot the Prodigal* (*Histoire d'un Pierrot*, Baldassarre Negroni, 1913), performed *en travesti* by Francesca Bertini.



Maria Caserini Gasparini

Even stranger is the fact that an elegant and well-educated woman could decide to devote her life to being a film actress, a profession that the public opinion scarcely considered in a kindly light. At the same time, Gasparini's dance training is an important biographical element that may have contributed to her distinguished air, carriage and elegance, while forging a strong, disciplined character. This is despite the fact that her figure hardly strikes our contemporary eyes as being suitable for romantic roles. Indeed when she aged Gasparini shifted without any visible nostalgia to secondary parts, typically that of a noble mother, leaving the leading roles to younger actresses. This was the case with Leda Gys, a promising star who appeared in many films directed by Caserini between 1915 and 1916.

In his memories, director Enrico Guazzoni describes Maria Gasparini as *soave come una Madonna* [gentle as a Madonna]. Indeed some publicity photos show her exhibiting an exaggerated pathos, which today appears a little over-the-top. This does no justice, however, to Maria Gasparini's remarkable acting skill. She possessed techniques that raised her high above the melodramatic excesses exhibited by most actresses of her day. Her restrained tone and careful attention to psychological detail were widely praised, both nationally and internationally.

Almost forgotten today, Maria Caserini Gasparini was a key figure in introducing cinema as an art to the Italian society. In her case, the cinema was felt as an art that was nearer to the legitimate theatre, the opera and the classical painting, than to the avant-garde art of her time. In this sense, she promoted art as poise, good taste, elegance and subtle detail.

In 1912 *The Stage* premiered on Italian screens. A highly ambitious, intellectual melodrama that was made on a tight budget, it forms part of the Golden Series produced in Turin by the Ambrosio film company. The script was adapted from Henri de Rothschild's *La Rampe* (1909) by the most renowned of Italian screenwriters, Arrigo Frusta, and brought on screen by Mario Caserini. Gasparini played the leading role supported by Febo Mari, then a mere novice.

The Stage does not rank among Caserini's major triumphs and soon faded from the annals of cinema. Of its presumed length of 754 metres, only a few dozen metres of blue-nitrate film, preserved at the Cineteca di Bologna, have survived.⁶ However, time and misadventure, which destroyed a large part of the film, have (in a certain sense) been lenient with it: the surviving fragment is the drama's grand finale, one of the best examples we have of Gasparini's acting style as well as a touching homage paid by Caserini to his partner's talent. The final scene of *The Stage* displays an unexpected modernity, illuminating the risks involved in gender relationships when they become hard and inflexible.

But let us take discussion step by step. We can piece together details about the film thanks to documents preserved at Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin: two publicity booklets ("2 Publicity Booklets [1 Incomplete] Serie d'Oro"), some set-photos ("17 Set Photos"), and the

⁶ The fragment underwent preservation work in 2010. The preservation was carried out by the Cineteca di Bologna and the Museo Nazionale del Cinema.

original screenplay by Arrigo Frusta.

From these materials we learn that the heroine, Magdalena, is a noblewoman who rejects the norms of her social class, abandons her depraved husband and escapes with her lover Claudio, who is a famous actor and theater director. In the climate of the Italian cinema of the 1910s there was no escape for an adulteress: retribution was death, and this case proved to be no different. However, the fact that the viewer was invited to sympathize with an adulteress, capable of leaving her husband with a simple note reading: “Sono una moglie infedele. Che importa?” [I’m an unfaithful wife. so what?], can certainly be described as eccentric, to say the least.⁷

The narrative continues: one day Magdalena, who is content with her new lifestyle, decides to try some acting, just for fun. Claudio catches her rehearsing in front of a mirror and, moved by the scene, encourages her and offers guidance. It seems to be just another variation of the Pygmalion myth, except that, when the woman obtains more success on stage than was expected, the man feels threatened and insecure. The power of her acting talent establishes itself beyond her lover/teacher’s expectations. With the sentimental momentum that is so typical of Italian silent melodramas, Claudio declares that he can no longer love Magdalena because (as the intertitle reads): “L’invidia ha ucciso l’amore” [jealousy has killed love],

Magdalena is in despair. Once again, while the man is able to accomplish and realize his potential, a woman is told that she would be better being one half of “the happy couple.” But Magdalena is a highly gifted actress. Striving to win back her man, she pretends to focus on the quality of her acting rather than personal matters, and sends a note in which she invites Claudio to attend a private rehearsal at her home: “Se per te l’amore è morto non puoi negarmi i consigli del maestro” [although love may be dead for you, you cannot deny me advice as a teacher]. Here, cunning feminine flattery reaffirms Magdalena’s dependency on her lover. Claudio goes to see Magdalena and the finale begins.

The room is bleak, with only a few props: a couch, a chair, a table holding a water jug, a folding screen and (in the background) a window with heavy curtains. Magdalena has to act the desperation of a desolate woman who has decided to poison herself from grief. Script in hand, Claudio shows his pupil the movements, gestures and pauses that she will have to imitate. His performance is accurate but mechanical, cold and without emotion. She watches him carefully. Now they exchange their roles: Magdalena rehearses her director’s gestures, but she is soon overflowing with passion and driven by genuine despair. Not surprisingly, during the scene she really does poison herself.

The two characters perform in front of each other. Magdalena has merged the borders between fiction and reality. Unlike Claudio, the audience can see her while she drinks the poison, experiencing the same narrative device that would be later illustrated by Alfred Hitchcock as being the essence of suspense: the audience knows something unknown to one of the characters and sees him/her heading towards possibly tragic consequences without

⁷ The intertitles are taken from the original screenplay (Frusta).



Maria Gasparini e Mario Caserini.

being able to intervene (Truffaut). Claudio therefore encourages Magdalena to drink the poison while, despite his initially dry and superficial pose, he watches her performance with absorption.

[Maddalena] is rehearsing the scene, as Claudio sits down prompting her. She hesitates repeatedly before drinking.

- Good! Good! Well done... your hesitation is perfect... but drink! Drink!

He insists. She drinks, casting a long glance in his direction. He keeps prompting:

- Raise your glass like this, walk towards the window, stagger a little...not like that, too much...

it gets suffocating, yes, good, like that, like that... do you understand? Well done! It's wonderful!

Like a great star! Good! Good! (he claps).⁸

Just as he cannot understand the depth of Magdalena's feelings, Claudio is no longer able to distinguish between what is true and what is false.

We should not forget that in this scene Gasparini is being directed by her husband. The *mise-en-abime* is truly staggering: Maria has to act out the scene pretending to pretend she's acting, guided by her real-life husband-director, who has a fictional double in the character of the lover-director. Caserini plays consciously with this intricate tangle of interconnections, reserving a rather unflattering role for his own alter ego. As a director, Claudio has the technique, but the one who experiences and truly expresses art is Magdalena, the actress. She does not need to be told by the director how to channel her natural strengths, she fills his technical suggestions with real meaning: without her inspiration, the acting would remain sterile and void. In depicting the story of Magdalena, Caserini celebrates the talent of Gasparini, even to the detriment of his own role.

Two years later, in 1914, Caserini was assigned to create for his wife—at enormous expense and using monumental sets—the most ambitious and expensive “block buster” of his career, *Nero and Agrippina* (*Nerone e Agrippina*, 1914). Notwithstanding the scale and ambition of this work, his most sincere tribute to Gasparini remains *The Stage*, one of his early low-budget melodramas. This comparatively modest work celebrates the superiority of feminine creativity by staging an ambiguous and ambitious relationship: that between a man and a woman where the man has technical ability but the woman has creative genius.

THE AUTHOR: Stella Dagna received a Ph.D. in “History of Visual and Performing Arts” from the University of Pisa in 2010. She later attended a postgraduate course in “Communicating Film,” run jointly by the Catholic University of Milan and ALMED (Milan). She has been working as an archivist at the Museo Nazionale del Cinema (Turin) since 2005, specialising

⁸ “[Maddalena] ripete la scena di Claudio, mentre lui, che s'è seduto, suggerisce. Al momento di bere, esita a più riprese. Claudio applaude: - Brava, brava... benissimo, l'esitazione.... Ma bevi! Bevi! Insiste. Ed ella con uno sguardo lungo a lui, beve. Seguita a suggerire: - Porta il bicchiere così, cammina verso la finestra, barcolla un poco... non tanto, non troppo.... Viene l'asfissia, sì, così, così... Capisci? Ma brava! È meraviglioso! Da grande attrice! Brava! Brava! (applaude)” (Frusta, translated by author).

in the restoration and promotion of its silent film collections. She has published numerous essays and articles in Italian and foreign periodicals and has given several lectures on silent film.

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Michele Leigh

Alexander Khanzhonkov and His Queens of the Screen

ABSTRACT: The role of women in silent era cinema has become increasingly important in recent cinema scholarship. One aspect of this current scholarship is the appearance of the female star and the social, industrial and ideological forces that contribute to the construction of the star system. The Khanzhonkov studio, founded and directed by Alexander Khanzhonkov, Khanzhonkov & Co., was one of the leading studios in Russia prior to the Revolution. Taking a cue from recent scholarship on the variety of women's roles in the cinema, and building on the work of academics such as historian Denise Youngblood and film scholar Yuri Tsivian, this paper will explore some of the practices and policies of Alexander Khanzhonkov and his studio.

The role of women in silent era cinema has become increasingly important in recent cinema scholarship. One aspect of this current scholarship is the appearance of the female star and the social, industrial and ideological forces that contribute to the construction of the star system. This avenue of cinema scholarship has been complicated by the fact that many of the silent films no longer exist and/or supporting evidence is difficult to find. Luckily, however, the films are not our only source by which to base discussions about the growth of the star system, we can also look to newsprint and trade journals. Many studios in Russia during this period, roughly 1910-1917, published trade journals that provide insight into how they wished to frame their films to exhibitors and viewers.

One such company was the Khanzhonkov studio, founded and directed by Alexander Khanzhonkov. Khanzhonkov & Co. was one of the leading studios in Russia prior to the Revolution. One of the few studios to be vertically integrated before the Revolution, the Khanzhonkov studio was also well known for its rampant commercialism and self-promotion, which makes the study of its business practices a little easier. Another important factor is that many of its films, about twenty percent, still exist, aiding in the study of star performance. Most important, however, is that the Khanzhonkov Studio published two journals: *Vestnik Kinematografii* [the cinematographic herald] from 1910 to 1917 and *Pegas'* *zhurnal isskustva* [pegasus: journal of art] from 1915 to 1917. *Pegas'* was a trade journal that was also released for general consumption and provides us with some insight into one of the many ways in which Khanzhonkov & Co. framed their product and also contributed to the institutionalization and commodification of the star system in Russia in the 1910s.

Taking a cue from recent scholarship on the variety of women's roles in the cinema (see Bean and Negra), and building on the work of academics such as historian Denise Youngblood and film scholar Yuri Tsivian, this paper will explore some of the practices and policies of Alexander Khanzhonkov and the Khanzhonkov Studio. The Khanzhonkov studio poses an interesting case study, due in part to the large number of women employed

by the company and the variety of positions offered to women. I am particularly interested in teasing out the studio's potentially progressive policies in Russia towards female employment; primarily, the hiring of women not only to perform, but also to write scenarios, edit and direct films; and how those policies were geared towards increasing female spectatorship. Through a reading of *Pegas*, I will examine how Khanzhonkov & Co. mythologized his stars, intertwining the actresses with the roles they played. The journal provides us with much needed insight into the evolution of the star system and the studio's relations to its spectators in early Russian cinema.

Aleksandr Khanzhonkov was an extremely savvy businessman and a quick study on what appealed to the viewers of his films. His production company started as a small commission agency in 1906, selling films and projection equipment, and quickly developed into one of the most successful production companies in Russia before the revolution. Khanzhonkov was one of the first producers in Russia to understand the drawing power of the star, not just actors, but also writers and directors. A. Khanzhonkov & Co. made every effort to hire the most well known actors and actresses, but he also sought out additional marketable figures, including experienced directors and crews, along with some of the most popular Russian writers.

That said however, the studio was remarkable for the many actresses that it hired and the level of success they achieved: Vera Kholodnaia, Emma Bauer, Zoia Barantsevich, and Vera Karalli, among others. Unlike other Russian studios, many of the actresses employed by Khanzhonkov played multiple roles within the company, often starting out as actresses and then writing, editing and even directing films for the studio. Denise Youngblood notes that the rise in Russian film production during the 1910s greatly expanded the opportunities for Russian film stars. While there may not have been a Russian Asta Nielsen, Mary Pickford or Lillian Gish, Youngblood does list a few actresses who garnered significant success, noting such top-tiered stars as Olga Gzovskaya, a classically trained actress, who garnered an unprecedented twenty thousand rubles, to make three pictures with the Robert Perskii Studio—still far less than the forty-eight thousand rubles a year offered to Vladimir Vasilevich Maksimov by the Kharitonov Studio (Youngblood 50-52).

Khanzhonkov & Co. may not have had the highest paid actors in the business, however they produced more films *per annum* than any other Russian company. The studio employed renowned directors like Vassily Goncharov, Vladimir Gardin, A. Chargonin, and Evgenii Bauer, who, in addition to being the best paid director in all of Russia, was also referred to as the “woman's director” due in part to his overwhelming success directing urban based, female melodramas. Khanzhonkov's studio made everything from scientific films and public service films discouraging the use of alcohol to comedies, serials and what the studio did best, melodramas. The subjects of these primarily female centered melodramas range from a jaded café singer to naïve young schoolgirls, and from domestic servants to young socialites. For the most part these women were independent, working or upper class girls who navigated

urban space with confidence, curiosity and ingenuity.

By addressing the full range of Russian society in their films, Khanzhonkov & Co. created a space where there was someone for female audience members to identify with in any given film. Film scholar Heide Schlüpmann remarks that, “On an international scale, early cinema responded to the erosion of familial patriarchy precipitated by modernity and, in retrospect, often displayed a remarkable affinity with the female perspective” (2). Khanzhonkov & Co’s productions in particular display a marked “affinity with the female perspective,” capitalizing on melodramatic themes that appealed to women, and on plots that featured sophisticated women in urban settings, caught up in sex, scandal, and even murder. Film companies like Khanzhonkov, the bulk of whose films could be considered “women’s films” struggled not only to legitimate cinema as an art form, but also to legitimate female driven melodrama as a respectable genre. The concept of “women’s films” is further complicated because it also implies the power of women as consumers, in other words, these films are a result of the industry recognizing and addressing the needs of its consumers.¹

The roles portrayed in Khanzhonkov films were played by some of the most popular actresses in Russian cinema, among them, was Vera Kholodnaia, often considered the first star of Russian silent cinema. According to Khanzhonkov, Vera was hired by the firm in 1915 (at the age of twenty-two) after she was discovered by Evgenii Bauer among a crowd of extras. Though she was young and had little theatrical experience, Bauer chose to place her in the lead in his film *The Song of Love Triumphant* (*Pesn torzhestvuyushchey lyubvi*, based on a Turgenev novel). Khanzhonkov goes on to note that “with her beautiful gray eyes and classic profile she made such a sensation that she is at once a ‘kino-star,’ rising on the Russian film horizon” (86). By the time of the Russian revolution, a new Kholodnaia film was being released every three weeks. Khanzhonkov paid the young star very well; by 1916 she was one of the highest paid actresses in Russia during the 1910s, receiving in one month what a theatrical actor earned in a year.

Unlike Kholodnaia, Vera Karalli had a successful career before making her debut on the silver screen. She danced with Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballet Ruse and became a prima ballerina for the Bolshoi Imperial Theater. Despite prohibitions against members of the Imperial Theater acting in films, Khanzhonkov was able to broker an unprecedented deal where she would work for both. Karalli was one of the rare Russian film actresses to garner both critical and public acclaim, and to be defined a “true artist of the screen.”

When Khanzhonkov hired her in 1914, he engaged in a previously unheard of promotion, he took out a two-page advertisement, with letters three inches high, in the trade journal *Vestnik kinematografii* [cinematographic herald], announcing that prima ballerina Vera Karalli had joined the studio (Youngblood 28). In 1916, Khanzhonkov & Co. lost Kholodnaia, one of their highest grossing actresses to rival film studio Kharitonov. When that happened, it

¹ Historian Jeffrey Brooks talks about this specifically (e.g. how the publishing industry addressed the desires of female consumers, a growing customer base, and increased publication on topics of interest to women in the boulevard presses) in regards to the publishing industry in *When Russia Learned to Read*.

was Karalli's performances in films like *Vozmezdie* (retribution, Evgenii Bauer, 1916), *Sestry Bronskie* (the Bronskii sisters, Evgenii Bauer, 1916), and *The Dying Swan* (*Umiraiushchii Lebed*, Evgenii Bauer, 1917) which contributed to keeping the company solvent. Khanzhonkov notes that thanks to her choreographic talent (many of her films utilized her dancing ability) and her talent as an actress, soon there was not a single little town in all of Russia that wasn't waiting for a picture featuring their favorite ballerina (70).

Lina Bauer, née Anchorova, also began her career as a dancer. She danced and acted in Charles Aumont's theater group at the Winter Garden in Moscow. It was here that she met her husband Evgenii Bauer who at the time was, among other things, working as a set designer for Aumont. When Evgenii Bauer began his career in film in 1913 with the Khanzhonkov & Co. studio Lina followed him and became one of his lead actresses. Lina came with an established career and the name recognizability. She acted mainly in her husband's films, but also occasionally made appearances in other Khanzhonkov pictures. Like Karalli, several of Lina's films included sequences that featured her dancing. However, unlike many other actresses working for Khanzhonkov & Co. Lina was a crossover star, acting in both serious melodrama and comedy. In the four-year period prior to the Revolution, the majority of Russian actresses were acting in dramas. A survey of extant films shows actresses appearing in dramas ninety-nine times as opposed to thirty-two appearances in comedies over the four-year period, with only a handful appearing in both genres. Lina Bauer not only performed in both genres, she is also the only actress to utilize a pseudonym, Emma for her dramatic roles and Lina for her comedies.²

Like many other actors and actresses employed by Khanzhonkov & Co., Zoia Fiodorovna Barantsevich began her career as a stage actress but transitioned to cinema in 1914, when she was just eighteen years old. She worked both as a film actress and a scenario writer from 1914 to 1928, with almost half of these films being made between 1914-1917. She is credited with having written at least eight screen scenarios (four of which feature her in a main role).³ At least two of the films for which she wrote the scenarios, were noted as having been based on her own previously published work: *Kto zagubil?* [who spoiled it?] (1916), for instance, was based on her novella *Lesnaia storozhka* [the forest lodge], and *Umiraiushchii lebed* [the dying swan] (1917) was based on her novella of the same title. According to Russian historian Louise McReynolds in *Russia at Play*, Barantsevich was perhaps more popular as a screenwriter than she was as an actress (264). In addition to her role as screenwriter/actress, Zoia Barantsevich was also a frequent contributor to the Khanzhonkov Studio magazine, *Pegas'* which was published from 1915-1917 (only available to 1916). After 1928 it appears that she left the film profession and served in the administration of the all-Russian theatrical

² The reason for using two names, is that at this point comedy is still not considered a serious artistic endeavor and by using two names Lina is able to go back and forth between comedy and more artistic dramas without any repercussions.

³ There are, however, possibly nine films, as she mentions a film entitled "The Procurator's Wife," that I have not yet found mentioned anywhere else.

society (“Zoia Barantsevich”).

Through the studio’s representation of these four talented, successful, and independent actresses on screen and in print we begin to see how they were positioned as stars. Lauren Rabinovitz’s *For the Love of Pleasure* addresses many of the problems (e.g. lack of audience studies and first person accounts) of discussing spectatorship, in particular female spectatorship, in early cinema in the United States. Rabinovitz notes that “what is most important about cinema as *history* is how audiences were taught to make sense of such a spectacle” (3). The Khanzhonkov studio’s monthly publications, *Vestnik Kinematografii* and *Pegas’*, provide us with some examples of how audiences, particularly Russian female audiences, were taught to make sense of the cinema and Khanzhonkov’s films about women in particular.

The invention and propagation of the film industry coincided with a rise in women’s consumer culture in Russia. As industrialization spread throughout Russia, it marked the increase of consumable goods in the Russian markets that was accompanied by the need to promote these goods. More often than not, these goods were marketed to women as the decision makers in household purchases. Advertising agencies, a surprising number of which were run by women (West 35), learned early on that in Russia because of widespread illiteracy, the power of the image exceeded that of the printed word. The connection between the image and advertising directed at women continued even in early cinema.

The Khanzhonkov studio illustrated a decisive understanding of advertising and occasionally used the covers of its film magazines to promote its films and its stars to distributors, exhibitors and to the general public. By including a film still or poster from an upcoming film, or the photograph of a popular actor or actress, Khanzhonkov increased name and face recognition for his films and stars, thus creating a recognizable commodity.

Khanzhonkov & Co. was the first Russian studio to publish a non-trade journal on film that was intended, primarily, for the general public, or more specifically for a middle-class moviegoer, which as film critic Arkadi Bukhov noted “[was] now evolving its own tastes, even beginning to have its favorite actors and actresses . . .” (Bukhov 9 qtd. in Tsivian, *Early Russian Cinema and Its Public* 111). Khanzhonkov named this new journal *Pegas’*: *zhurnal isskustva* [pegasus: journal of art], drawing on the company’s already well known established brand, the Pegasus. Film fans would associate the winged horse on the cover of *Pegas’* as a Khanzhonkov publication without having to open the journal.

The journal tries to assuage a film viewer’s guilty pleasure by associating film with more elite art forms like literature, painting, and opera. Middle-class moviegoers could justify their cinephilia through connections to socially acceptable art forms. In her article “Gendering the Icon: Marketing Women Writers in Fin-de-Siècle Russia,” Beth Holmgren notes that in literary journals, the names and portraits of women writers began to be placed alongside names and portraits of male writers. By figuratively placing Anastasia Verbitskaia next to Lev Tolstoy, it served to validate her as an authentic writer, Verbitskaia’s writing was now desirable as something one should own and display (322-326). Borrowing from the publishing industry,

Pegas' follows a similar tactic with the images placed on the cover of the journal.

The inaugural issue of *Pegas'* was released with a photograph of Lev Tolstoy on the cover, commemorating the anniversary of his death. Subsequent issue covers feature: Russian stage actor V.I. Kachalov, Italian stage actor Tommaso Salvini (also commemorating his death the month before), film actress Lidiya Koreneva, film actress Vera Kholodnaya, film actor Vitol'd Polonskii, and the original Italian Diva, stage actress Eleonora Duse. The journal covers not only serve to equate cinema with classical arts, especially literature and theater, but they also elevate film actresses and actors to "cultural" star status. Just as Tolstoy was a literary star in Russian culture, by virtue of such reverential treatment, Koreneva and Kholodnaya attained the status of stars of Russian culture, as well as stars of the silver screen. Zoia Barantsevich has the honor of being the only other writer/actress to be featured on the cover of *Pegas'*. The journal privileged female film stars and also further appealed to women by the fact that the cover pictures of the actresses were featured before the one male film star.

In *When Russia Learned to Read*, Jeffrey Brooks comments on how women became the primary readers of boulevard literature—stories about intrigue, sex, scandal and debauchery (xiii-xvii). While Brooks was discussing the audience for popular pulp fiction, he could just as well have been discussing the bulk of the Khanzhonkov & Co. productions and their audience. Capitalizing on success of boulevard literature, *Pegas'* appealed to female readers on several levels. First, rather than giving the story synopses for all the studio's films, the magazine instead chose to highlight films that would appeal to female readers—stories with urban settings, tragic love stories, middle class melodramas, etc.—or as Laura Engelstein notes, the types of stories that "provide ordinary women with the stuff of dreams" (40). A sampling of titles from the pages of *Pegas'* illustrates that Khanzhonkov knew how to provide his female readers/viewers with the "stuff of dreams." For instance, he includes literary retellings of such cinematic stories as: "Mistake of the Heart," "Narcotic," "Optical Illusions: Tragedy of a Beautiful Girl," "Love Tornado," "The Dance of Life," "Lunar Beauty," and "The Heart of Lina." Thus, the Khanzhonkov studio increased their readership as well as their viewership by including stories that would specifically appeal to women.

The images included within *Pegas'* itself were even more important than the images contained on its covers. Khanzhonkov featured his star players in an interesting and subtler manner. Among the core of about forty actors and actresses, the actresses are more prominently featured throughout the run of the magazine. Photographs that display women outnumber those of males by about two to one. In addition to this, more actresses are given solo shots. Aside from the director Evgenii Bauer and actor V.A. Polonskii, no other males were given that much space. The actresses that are highlighted include Vera Kholodnaya, Zoia Barantsevich, Ada Shelepina and Lina Bauer, and Vera Karalli.

The images feature thoughtful, proud, independent and desirable women. The stills give the reader virtually no clues about the type of film she will be seeing; instead the focus of the image is on the woman herself, her personality, her posture, her makeup, and her clothing.

In this, the actress becomes someone to emulate as well as someone to view, and therefore a recognizable/consumable product.

The connection between the image and advertising directed at women is perpetuated in early cinema and in the pages of *Pegas'* through among other things, a focus on women's fashion. In her dissertation, *A Cut Above: Fashion as Meta-culture in Early-Twentieth-Century Russia*, Elizabeth Durst discusses the convergence of contemporary fashion with cinema, in particular she mentions an early Khanzhonkov production entitled *Behind the Drawing Room Door* (*Za gostinnoi dveriami*, Ivan Lazarev, Petr Chardynin, 1913) in which the "references to fashion inform the narrative . . . fashion operates as the film's primary attraction with the narrative stalling on occasion to allow the actress to overtly model a dress" (72). Despite the fact that most studios during this time did not have costume houses from which to choose wardrobes, actresses were still expected to dress in the most current fashions. Khanzhonkov's actresses were no exception, examples can be seen in films such as *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* (*Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*, Evgenii Bauer, 1913), *Child of the Big City* (*Ditya bolchogo goroda*, Evgenii Bauer, 1914), and *Silent Witnesses* (*Nemye svideteli*, Evgenii Bauer, 1914), which all were made after the Tango craze hit Russian and of course all the leading women are wearing the latest in Tango fashion, from their headdresses to their shoes, all supplied at their own expense and one way in which the actresses and the characters they played were conflated, both on screen and in print.

Even when the Khanzhonkov's actresses are shown in the same frame with male actors, they are somehow prefigured and highlighted; most often, this was accomplished by placing the women more prominently within the frame. Figure 1 shows a still found on the pages of *Pegas'* from the Khanzhonkov production *Burning Wings* (*Obozhzhennyya kryl'ia*, Evgenii Bauer, 1915). The lead actress, Vera Karalli, is the focal point of the frame. Karalli holds the position of power over her male counterpart, who is not even identified in the caption. The male actor is in a position of submission/supplication, kneeling and pleading with the female character. Vera Karalli on the other hand is standing, turned away from the man in rejection (and disgust, judging by the look on her face). The woman has the power of choice; does she stay with the man or does she abandon him? This is yet another way in which *Pegas'* reinforces the predominance of the actress over the actor.

Often stills were included that show several actors in the frame, when two of them are women they are shown to form a triangle with the male actor. The focal point of the image is then split between the two women and the male seems lost in the back of the frame. In a still from one of Bauer's films, *Schastye vechnoy nochi* (happiness of eternal night, 1915), we see Ol'ga Rakhmanova, Vera Karalli and Vitol'd Polonskii. The framing of the characters sets Vera Karalli up as the central figure in the frame as well as in the film. The whiteness of Ol'ga Rakhmanova's blouse and Vera's face draws a connection between the two women (who are mother and daughter) and unites them as central figures in the frame. The male character is significantly smaller within the frame implying that, while he is central to the plot,



1. A still from *Burning Wings* (*Obozhzhennyya kryl'ia*, Evgenii Bauer, 1915), *Pegas*.
The caption reads “V.A. Karalli in the picture ‘Burning Wings’.”

he holds a lesser position than the two women. This can also be seen in Figure 2, yet another still from a Bauer film, entitled *Vozmedie* [retribution], starring Vera Karalli, Lydia Ryndina and Vitol'd Polonskii. The center of the frame and main focal point of the photograph are the female characters played by Karalli and Ryndina. Polonskii and another unnamed male are ostracized to the periphery of the frame, weakening their power as agents of the action in the film. Finally, in other cases the stills are shot in such a way that even when a male does hold the predominant space in the frame, there is always something (the use of white, skin, looking at the camera, etc.) that draws one's attention away from the male towards the female character.

The images themselves encourage the reader to become a viewer, to feel free to look at the film star. According to Anne Friedberg, “As an object is transformed in a commodity system, the film star is marketed not for pure use, but for his/her exchange value. The film



2. A still from *Vozmedie* [retribution], a Bauer film starring Vera Karalli, Lydia Ryndina and Vitol'd Polonskii.

star is an institutionally sanctioned fetish” (Friedberg 43). In all of the images, the actresses are glamorously dressed in contemporary urban fashion; this is surprising because despite the vast range of genres produced by the Khanzhonkov studio, the magazine features very few historical or rural films. The actresses become attractions of a sort, something for the female readers to take in, emulate and consume, they become a commodity in themselves. The film stills function as advertisements selling sophistication, independence, sex and, of course, tickets to the films. On the pages of *Pegas'* the Khanzhonkov studio mastered the art of selling a product, by creating and promoting the studio's female stars to female viewers. *Pegas'* provides contemporary scholars insight into how Khanzhonkov placed many of his actresses (not just Kholodnaya and Karalli, but also Barantsevich, Bauer, Shelepina, Rakhmanova, etc.) in the firmament, and in doing so Khanzhonkov ensured name and face recognition for his stars, an audience of female viewers and a healthy box office draw.

The notion of a “woman's cinema” or of a “woman's director,” especially one who is a male, is fraught with all sorts of misogynist associations and undertones. Mary Anne Doane's

early career assertion that the instant the camera is pointed at a woman is equivalent to a terrorist act, points not only to the extremes of feminist scholarship but also to the difficulty feminist scholars have had in reconciling male authored texts with female spectatorship. Such an extreme avenue takes us nowhere in understanding the popularity of certain films, the work of certain directors, and the business policies of certain studio heads.

When read within the contemporary cultural context, the appellation of Evgenii Bauer as a “woman’s director” and Khanzhonkov & Co. as the producer of “women’s films,” was both negative and positive. When one takes into account what that meant for women in Russia at the time, however, I think the positive effects prove stronger. This is especially true when one considers, as we have, the role of the Khanzhonkov studio’s publication *Pegas’*. The nature of the journal, the fact that once a reader purchased it, she would have the freedom to peruse it at her own leisure, allowed spectators (women) to take their time looking over the images, paying attention to detail in such a way that is not possible to do when watching a film. Women were given permission to look and instructed in the art of the gaze throughout the pages of the journal. The magazine indoctrinated women into commodity culture at the same time that it addressed their needs and desires with stories they were interested in reading.

While women were granted full and equal rights immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, ushering in the era of the New Soviet Woman, a super mythic figure of sorts, who juggled these newly earned rights and privileges with work and family, films made by Khanzhonkov prior to the revolution already showed spectators strong independent female characters. By tracing the ways in which Khanzhonkov created, marketed and sold their stars on the pages of *Pegas’*, we can see how the studio acknowledged and encouraged the empowerment of women as protagonists, as audiences and as consumers. A full transformation of the Pre-Revolutionary Russian woman into the New Soviet Woman would not have been possible if Khanzhonkov & Co., directors like Bauer, and *Pegas’* hadn’t been pushing the boundaries of patriarchy and provoking women to look and answer questions for themselves.

THE AUTHOR: Michele Leigh received her degree in Critical Studies from the School of Cinematic Arts at University of Southern California in 2008. Her dissertation, *Dangerous Beauty: Representation and Reception of Women in the Films of Evgenii Bauer, 1913-1917*, explores the filmic construction of the feminine in the urban centered films of Russian director Evgenii Bauer. Her research focuses on pre-revolution Russian cinema and women in the silent film industry and takes into account the social, historical and cultural influences that determined the forms of female representations in that production. In addition to her work on silent film, she has recently researched and written about animation. She presented a paper on the television series *Archer* at the 2012 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in Boston.

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Amy Sargeant

However Odd—Elsa Lanchester!

ABSTRACT: The article is concerned with Elsa Lanchester as an anti-star figure in British Cinema in the 1920s. It makes a comparison with the performance style of Alexandra Khokhlova in films made with the Kuleshov Workshop in Russia, suggesting that both actresses drew on a similar range of sources (notably, Bode, Duncan, Jaques-Dalcroze and Chaplin). While both seem willing to parodize themselves, embracing ugliness, their eccentricism simultaneously provides something of an ironic commentary on the ideal feminine “types” presented by Hollywood and Hollywood’s commodification of particular notions of feminine beauty.

In 1926, the Soviet cinema journal, *Kino*, published Sergei Eisenstein’s polemic appraisal of the actress, sometime director and muse to Lev Kuleshov, Aleksandra Khokhlova, possibly best known to present readers for her appearance in Kuleshov’s *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (*Neobychniye prikliucheniia Mistera Vesta v strane bol’shevikov*, 1924) or *Dura lex* (*Po zakonu*, 1926). On the one hand, Eisenstein contrasted her appearance with the “touching little girls in ringlets” familiar from imported American films—Khokhlova was no child-woman, no Mary Pickford or Carol Dempster in the service of Griffith. Nor was she of the type employed by Sennett: “America is possessed by the ideal of the petty- bourgeois ‘Bathing Girl,’” Eisenstein commented (72). On the other, he criticised Soviet Studios for the lack of imagination deployed in their construction and casting of a comparable set of female ideal “types.” “The artistic councils of the studios look at a woman through the eyes of a primeval cattle-breeder,” he said (Eisenstein 71). In contrast, Khokhlova’s “firm grip of her bare-teethed grin tears to shreds the hackneyed formula of the ‘woman of the screen’” (72). Eisenstein complained that the studios were under-using such a unique and original talent. Here, I want to investigate what Eisenstein meant by his designation of Khokhlova’s style as “grotesque” and “eccentric.” I want also to argue—contrary to Eisenstein’s assertion that European cinema could not match her—that British cinema, in the 1920s, was to have something modestly approaching her—in the form of Elsa Lanchester. I am not suggesting that there was any direct influence of Khokhlova on Lanchester, rather that they may have both drawn from a particular set of sources and, perhaps, shared a particular attitude towards performance. Possibly best known to a general audience from her casting as both Mary Shelley and the monster’s mate in *émigré* James Whale’s 1935 *The Bride of Frankenstein* (or perhaps from René Clair’s 1935 *The Ghost Goes West*—in which, in a cameo role, in a matter of minutes she entirely steals the scene), Elsa Lanchester established herself with her various contributions to British Cinema in the silent period. Finally, I want to suggest that Khokhlova and Lanchester, in delivering performances which self-consciously invoked other performers and performative modes, allowed irony “to

happen” for their audiences.

Elsa Lanchester

Politically and artistically, Elsa Lanchester came from an interesting background. Her mother was a science graduate of the University of London and had been secretary to Eleanor Marx. When she decided to live with a railway clerk, her middle-class family incarcerated her in a lunatic asylum in the hope that she would see sense: she did not (Bland 159–161). Elsa was trained as a dancer, and enjoyed the rare privilege of being selected for Isadora Duncan’s school in Paris. As a “Duncling” she later toured, demonstrating Raymond Duncan’s Greek dances, a much-commented upon craze of the 1910s and early 1920s which found itself suitably mocked by Richmal Crompton:

Weedy males and aesthetic-looking females dressed in abbreviated tunics with sandals on their feet and fillets round their hair, mostly wearing horn spectacles, ran and sprang and leapt and gambolled and struck angular attitudes at the shrill command of an instructress and the somewhat unmusical efforts of a very amateur flute player. (Crompton 179)

But Elsa too remained healthily sceptical towards the disciplinism and mystique surrounding the Duncans and Jaques-Dalcroze, and was not in any way in awe of “artistic” dancing, “interpreting the music” and eurhythmics:

If I had stayed longer at Isadora’s school, I would probably have become a classical dancer in the worst sense of the term, backed by no knowledge of life and with no sense of responsibility. I was fortunate not to have been caught up in that particular art eddy. After all, bare feet are no longer naughty and nobody can make a living today by imitating rose petals. (Lanchester, *Elsa Lanchester Herself* 30)

Her 1938 autobiography duly contains self-parodying photos of herself in bare feet and chiffon: “very very graceful and madly artistic” (Lanchester, *Charles Laughton and I* plate 4).

Elsa was not only a performer but an admirable hostess, bringing together friends and acquaintances from various informal social and cultural groupings and various interests in cinema. She knew Evelyn Waugh through the club she ran in Charlotte Street, in London, in the 1920s, The Cave of Harmony. It staged one-act plays, revue items, songs and pastiche Victoriana. It features in Aldous Huxley’s 1923 parody, *Antic Hay*, and in Waugh’s own diaries and autobiography (Huxley 213–231; Waugh, *A Little Learning* 209). James Whale appeared in a number of sketches (Lanchester, *Charles Laughton and I* 57). Elsa also mixed with the bohemian set at Soho’s 1917 Club, where the clientele included Dope Darlings and aesthetes cross-dressed or, notoriously, not dressed at all. In 1924, Waugh and Terence Greenidge, founder of Oxford University Film Society, invited Elsa and other friends and relatives to



A portrait of Elsa Lanchester.

appear in the film *The Scarlet Woman: An Ecclesiastical Melodrama*, in which the Pope, Cardinal Montefiasco and the Dean of Balliol (played by Waugh) conspire to convert the English monarchy to Roman Catholicism. Father Murphy (played by Greenidge) falls in love with the actress Beatrice de Carolle (played by Elsa). Like Waugh's novels *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *Vile Bodies* (1930), the film includes some cruel lampooning of individuals then known to the author. Waugh, it should be observed, did not embrace the Scarlet Woman (that is to say, convert to Catholicism) until 1930.

The film is very much a home-movie, filmed on Hampstead Heath, in Oxford and Golder's Green, and in Waugh's father's back garden with his brother's children gawping and laughing at the camera. Waugh confessed himself disappointed with the outcome and, heavily in debt, regretted the expense (Davie 169–170; Hastings 118). It has something of the character of an Adrian Brunel burlesque, incorporating travelogue footage of the Vatican and employing literary pastiche: "This is a far, far deeper hurt than I have ever felt before," says the Dean to the Prince of Wales, in the style of Sidney Carton in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*; "To sleep, perchance to dream—aye, there's the rub," says Beatrice, writhing in bed, recalling Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Gledhill 159–160). The cast send themselves up as Bright Young People: "Beatrice de Carolle, the cabaret queen' at her Bohemian flat"; "Bills, dear me', says Borrowington', 'and cocaine, surely not . . ." Elsa goggles, shock-haired, in the manner of the monster's mate in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (where she is *not* the Brigitte Helm of Fritz Lang's 1926 *Metropolis*) and poses *a la* Duncan in suitably diaphonous drapery.

Elsa knew Ivor Montagu and Brunel through an informal lunch club and The Cave, and with them made the short films *Bluebottles*, *Daydreams* and *The Tonic* (Brunel 141; Wykes 59). *Bluebottles*, like *The Scarlet Woman*, delights in caricaturing. Cartoon burglars engage in rough-and-tumble fighting. Elsa, in Chaplinesque mode, is the innocent confronting authority, inadvertently apprehending the burglars in a state of dazedness and confusion. Unaccustomed to handling a gun, she holds it gingerly, with her little finger crooked. At other times her gestures are wildly exaggerated, contorted, even grotesque, grimacing and throwing out her arm to acquit herself from police interrogation. In *Daydreams* (opening with Elsa as a fellow lodger of Charles Laughton in a London boarding house), Elsa as the "Countess" elaborately prepares herself for an elegant dive . . . then belly-flops from the board. As with Chaplin, there is much stage business around props and costume. As the "Countess," Elsa removes layer upon layer of cardigan before a game of tennis at Wimbledon, while the "Count" (complete with parodic waxed mustachios) looks on. Elsa herself said that *Bluebottles* originated with the simple image of her blowing a whistle; H. G. Wells (an old acquaintance of Montagu) began work on the scenario with his son, Frank, with the intention of providing a role for a female Chaplin (Lanchester, *Elsa Lanchester Herself* 187; Montagu 153–155). It also includes a number of "in" jokes: Elsa parts from "Mabel" in front of a poster for Brunel's *The Constant Nymph* (1928), starring Ivor Novello and Mabel Poulton as the film's child-woman heroine, with Elsa Lanchester cast as an archetypal "greenery-yallery" highbrow. Elsa imagines Spiffkins, "the



Elsa Lanchester in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935).

promising young constable” whose life she has saved as Douglas Fairbanks (who appears also as a pin-up in *Daydreams*) or Adolphe Menjou (star of Chaplin’s 1923 *A Woman of Paris*) and *not* Charles Laughton, whom Elsa Lanchester married in 1929.

In *The Tonic*, Laughton is cast as a member of a family intent upon inheriting from a wealthy, elderly, supposedly sickening aunt. Bossy and cantankerous, the aunt has seen off three maids in as many weeks. The family decides to dispatch their own servant (Elsa) whose clumsiness and incompetence, they assume, will finally put an end to the aunt. Obediently, Elsa bows a courtesy and, retreating, trips over a bucket. At the aunt’s house she is confronted by a bewildering array of medicine bottles and an onerous itinerary of daily tasks, including the care of the aunt’s pet parrot. A flask is broken but, unperturbed and maintaining the same wide-eyed innocent expression, Elsa indiscriminately substitutes another and resourcefully snips fake grapes from the decoration on her hat to satisfy her charge’s demand for tablets. At the sight of a caterpillar, the aunt faints and Elsa, fearing the worst, telephones for the doctor. Spying a household manual on a shelf, she meanwhile seeks advice: smoke from burned feathers can be used to revive a patient, she reads. Again unperturbed, Elsa plucks the parrot until he is quite bald and duly sets his plumage alight (more slapstick). The doctor arrives and gingerly (as in *Bluebottles*) Elsa hands over a fearsome battery of surgical instruments—only to be informed that the aunt is simply a hypochondriac. Elsa resolves to cure the old woman of her imaginary illness, wheeling her onto a railway line in her bath chair as a train approaches. The sudden shock proves effective. Much to the family’s disappointment, not only is the aunt (a travesty role) restored to rude good health but she also determines to adopt the maid as her daughter. Elsa herself is the eponymous tonic, incongruously never registering humor in the face of the farcical situations in which she finds herself.

Laughton biographers—most recently Simon Callow—have tended to take Elsa at her own word and dismiss her as a mere light vaudevillian, in the shadow of a great actor (Callow 274–275). However, we could, instead, take Elsa’s estimation of her talent as modesty, even generosity. On the other hand, we could set her preference for revue and cabaret in the light of the authorities to whom Eisenstein appeals in his article on Khokhlova. Eisenstein explicitly cites the FEKS [factory of the eccentric actor] (and, thereby, the 1922 Trauberg, Kozintsev, Yutkevich and Kryzhitsky manifesto) and tacitly quotes the teaching programme of his mentor, Vsevolod Meyerhold (Eisenstein 73). Under the enlightened patronage of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, Boris Lunacharsky, Duncan and Duncan’s technique proved enormously popular in Russia and Isadora was briefly married to the poet, Esenin (Schneider 23–26). Amidst an eclectic and erudite range of references, Meyerhold encouraged his students to investigate the musical interpretations of Duncan and Fuller. He taught his students to adapt their movements to the area available for performance, to take control of the body in space and to involve the whole body in every gesture (by way of Rudolph Bode)—skills, one might argue, more readily associated with the stylisation of dance than with naturalistic acting.

Amongst Meyerhold, Kuleshov and Trauberg there was general agreement that the performer needed to work on him or herself—specifically in training the body—before embarking on any role. Furthermore, Meyerhold and the FEKS manifesto called upon popular traditions—vaudeville, the fairground booth, the circus, even sport—not only as training methods but as effective models in confronting an audience. For one production, Meyerhold brought a troupe of Chinese jugglers on stage as an interval attraction; for another Red Fleet sailors and Komsomols performed biomechanical exercises, acrobatic dances and played football as a demonstration of Soviet vigor. Meyerhold and the FEKSy enthused over cinema’s inheritors of music hall performance styles—Chaplin and Linder—with Meyerhold devoting an essay to Chaplinism and the FEKSy memorably declaring in 1922 “We prefer Charlie’s arse to the hands of Eleanor Duse!” in a rousing appreciation of popular and American modernism across all artistic activity—including the graphic arts of typography and the poster (Taylor and Christie 59).

However, what I want to suggest here is that Khokhlova and Lanchester are worthy of attention for more than just their preparedness to look ugly on screen, setting themselves apart from the “types” presented by Pickford and Poulton. Both are capable of gawky and abrupt angularity, but their delivery of such movements and gestures are the product of control over the body in space. In the case of Khokhlova’s work for Kuleshov, apparently large gestures were accommodated to a strictly constricted screen space and blocked for orthogonal framing, sometimes further emphasized by a closing iris—akin to another graphic art, the comic strip. Lanchester’s apparent awkwardness is counterposed against a dancer’s balletic grace. We could say that she confidently embraced ugliness whereas Laughton was painfully aware of his corporeal irregularity even while repeatedly accepting studio roles that capitalized on his bulky face and figure.

In 1912, Meyerhold wrote a concise definition of what he understood by “grotesque” style, a term originally applied to fantastical zoomorphic motifs in decorative art:

It is the style which reveals the most wonderful horizons to the creative artist. ‘I,’ my personal attitude to life, precedes all else The grotesque does not recognize the *purely* debased or the *purely* exalted. The grotesque mixes opposites, consciously creating harsh incongruity, playing entirely on its own originality . . . the grotesque deepens life’s outward appearance to the point where it ceases to be entirely natural . . . the basis of the grotesque is the artists’s constant desire to switch the spectator from the plane he has just reached to another which is totally unforeseen. (Braun 74)

Khokhlova’s ungainly bare-toothed grimacing (as the “Princess” in *Mr West*) is contrivedly ugly to serve a particular purpose. To say, simply, as does Lindley Hanlon, that Kuleshov’s models deliver “very exaggerated performances” is rather to miss—or at least to underestimate—the point (Hanlon 213). Mr West himself is played as an *ingénu*, with child-like mannerisms like dropped-jaw gawping. His *naïveté* is underscored by his inability to recognize

in the ostentatious pretence of the Princess and her fellow conspirators, the falsity of their story. Assuming that the audience sees what the audience sees simultaneously, one is amused that he could be so readily duped by the frenetic lip-biting and popping eye-balls of the Princess. American cartoon types (the cowboy, Jed) and American fantasies of Soviet Russia are set against another Moscow, presented by archive footage of the Red Army and a smiling leather-jacketed officer with a mauser at his hip. Khokhlova's performance undermines and satirizes Mr West's gullibility. The film oscillates playfully between an enthusiasm for American popular culture and its rejection of American politics. Khokhlova's fluffy-haired, exaggerated parody of English evangelism, in *Dura lex*, receives due retribution in the ominous return of the victimized object of her obsession: again, marked by a distinction in his style of acting, before and after his hanging.

For Linda Hutcheon, "irony is the superimposition or rubbing together of meanings (the said and plural unsaid) with a critical edge created by a difference of context that makes irony happen" (Hutcheon 18–19). It takes an audience to interpret the performances of Khokhlova and Lanchester as ironic, by way of reference to *Bathing Belles*, *Duncan* and (in the case of Lanchester's Anne of Cleves in Alexander Korda's 1933 *The Private Life of Henry VIII*), Elisabeth Bergner. These are ludic performances which act up to the camera, which are turns in the sense intended by Eisenstein as "attractions." The target of their irony, I suggest, is the cinematic apparatus—in which the audience is implicated—and the cinematic system—which capitalises on particular "types" of women—in which the audience is complicit.

THE AUTHOR: Amy Sargeant teaches the London Program for Tisch School of the Arts, NYU. She has written extensively on British cinema of the silent and sound periods, being author of *British Cinema: A Critical History* (BFI, 2005) and co-editor, with Claire Monk, of *The British Historical Cinema: History, Heritage and the Costume Film* (Routledge, 2002). She has also contributed a number of entries to the Women and Silent British Cinema website (including Elsa Lanchester, C. A. Lejeune and Dorothy L. Sayers).

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Laraine Porter

A Lass and a Lack? Women in British Silent Comedy

ABSTRACT: This chapter considers the role of women in British silent film comedy from 1895 to the end of the 1920s and their legacy into the early sound period. It argues that women comedians became increasingly marginalized as cinema developed into an industry, with the codes, form and style of the “mature silent cinema” restricting women into a narrow range of stereotypes that negated female agency and prioritized looks and glamour over personality or character. The dominance of a few male directors in British cinema, particularly Asquith and Hitchcock, narrowed opportunities for comedic women with their preponderance for objectifying women. It commences with a resume of women performing slapstick and physical comedy, using the Edwardian Tilly Girl comedies as case studies, arguing that women enjoyed relative comic freedom until the Great War, despite the plethora of stereotypes—coy young ladies, “old maids,” suffragettes, domineering wives etc—that characterized their representation in early cinema. Florence Turner is presented as a key figure in the pivotal period immediately following World War I, before falling victim to one of British cinema’s periodic recessions. Betty Balfour’s ingénue “Squibs” is emblematic of the early 1920s, but even her star wanes as she outgrows her youthful persona, becoming the butt of jokes around ageing in *A Little Bit of Fluff* (1928).

This chapter considers the significance of women performers in the development of British film comedy before 1930, and briefly their legacy into the 1930s, of which very little specific study has been made. The progress of film comediennes through this period can be described as one of overall decline, from relative prominence, success and power in the British film industry at the start of the 1900s to a diminution of roles and opportunities as the film industry consolidated by the mid-1920s. The main assertion here is that women comedic performers had considerably more scope and creative freedom to perform physical and anarchic comedy in the 1900s and 1910s, but after the Great War and by the mid to late 1920s this freedom gradually diminished, as women found themselves increasingly constrained and objectified by the language and form of the “mature” silent film. Other contributory factors to this decline in women’s creative comedic agency included the development of the longer feature film; a national preponderance for literary adaptations and performance styles developed in “respectable” theatre; the dominance of a few powerful male directors and producers, and the consolidation of film genres with specific character types and roles allocated to women. All of which will be considered below.

The framework for charting the decline in female comic agency between 1900 and 1930 is paradoxical to the progress being made elsewhere towards women’s suffrage. The Great War saw women experiencing social and economic freedom and the rise of the increasingly independent, sexually and socially confident New Woman through the 1920s. But women’s social progress is circumscribed by cinema’s consolidation into an industry, which largely

prioritized masculine agency at the expense of female autonomy and subjectivity at all levels of production, performance and creativity. Additionally, as it has through successive waves of feminism, cinema in the 1910s created a minor backlash to first wave feminism with the figure of the Suffragette parodied in films from the beginning of the twentieth century. Films such as Bamforth's *Milling the Militants: A Comical Absurdity* (1913) in which suffragettes are outwitted by a henpecked husband or *The Suffragettes and the Hobble Skirt* (1910) where a male character gives a group of women tight hobble skirts which then lead to their captivity, are typical (see also Bamforth's 1899 film *Women's Rights*). These "suffragette punishment" comedies, many of which are told from the perspective of the hapless husband, form part of the "henpeck" tradition, later popularized in British seaside culture by Donald McGill's postcards featuring the diminutive cartoon husband and his larger-than-life, overbearing wife.¹ These films, many of which result in female punishment or captivity, can be understood as reflections of male anxiety at the threat to Edwardian patriarchy posed by the emergence of economically and socially independent New Women.

At the start of the twentieth century, representations of independent women in cinema would have been understood alongside a range of pre-existing comedic stereotypes; suffragettes, "old maids" and harridans, mistresses, domineering wives, working women and saucy young servant girls, present in other forms of popular culture. Many of these became the butt of early cinema jokes and subject to some cruel comedy such as George Albert Smith's *The Old Maid's Valentine* (1900), in which Laura Bayley plays an older woman who is overjoyed when she assumes she has a love interest only to become totally dejected when she discovers her Valentine's card to be a joke. However, films in the pre-war period in which women and by definition, female desire, were punished were largely outnumbered by the ones in which their desires were allowed expression.

A broader survey of the changing roles of women in British popular entertainment between 1900 and 1930 would form a useful paradigm for understanding women's roles, representation and reception in film comedy, but such a survey is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, we do know that during the Great War over fifty five per cent of cinema audiences were women, and a further ten per cent were children, with men a clear minority and that women moved into essential positions as cinema operators during this time (Barry claimed that cinema existed for women during this period). In terms of source material, popular female writers provided considerable impetus and stories for film adaptations with authors like Elinor Glyn, Elizabeth von Arnim, Ethel M. Dell, and Edith M. Hull among many, producing a wealth of popular fiction that placed women at the centre of the drama. The British silent feature film was populated with adaptations from popular female writers whilst the Edwardian theatre up until the end of the Great War had a highly developed female culture, an Actresses' Franchise League and around four hundred female playwrights

¹ Denis Gifford uses the term "henpeck comedy" to define this sub-genre of British silent comedy short films. The comedy invariably revolves around a husband taking revenge on his wife in retaliation for being forced to undertake domestic duties or for being subjected to suffragette-related power-struggles.

providing material (see Holledge).

In terms of antecedents for female comedians in cinema, we can look to the influence of music hall and the variety theatre where women flourished in almost equal numbers to men as comedic performers between the mid nineteenth and early twentieth century. Successful female music hall stars won fame and notoriety for their robust delivery of popular songs combined with a larger-than-life physical presence, able to engage an often raucous audience. Male impersonators like the cigar-smoking, cross-dressing Vesta Tilley; Ella Shields and Hetty King; “hard done by” working-class women such as Jenny Hill also known as “The Coffee Shop Gal;” Bessie Bellwood, Vesta Victoria and Nellie Wallace and serio-comedic performers such as Marie Lloyd, were as popular as their male counterparts Dan Leno, Little Tich and Harry Lauder. Many of these women were born around 1870 and their career maturity was contiguous with the emergence of cinema. It is perhaps surprising then, that only a handful of women or men made the transition between music hall into cinema and only a few phonophone films, survive as records of their performances from this period (see Fletcher). For example, there is only a very short extant film featuring Marie Lloyd the so-called “Queen of the Music Hall,” the 1920 Gaumont film *The One and Only “Marie Lloyd.”* This lack of attention from cinema is partly due to the fact that the heyday of music hall was already over by the end of the nineteenth century and from 1896 onwards, the Bioscope was increasingly infiltrating the kaleidoscopic programmes of the variety theatre. By the end of the 1920s, the women and men who had formed the backbone of the music hall had already slipped into nostalgia, invited to participate in various cinematic cavalcades marking the belle époque of the “Old Time Music Hall.”²

Coinciding with the infiltration of cinema into the music hall was the transition of music hall itself, from uncensored, largely unlicensed cheap entertainment to the increasingly middle-class, variety theatre; a transition that also coincided with the gradual decline of unbridled female performance. Women like Marie Lloyd and her “vulgar colleagues” were considered too risqué for Oswald Stoll whose increasing grip on the entertainment sector, from his arrival in the UK in 1902, steered the programme content towards fully-licensed and increasingly censored, family entertainment (see Mander and Mitchenson). Stoll inaugurated the first Royal Command Performance in 1911 and set out to attract more affluent, middle-class audiences by featuring the likes of serious theatre stars, Sarah Bernhardt and Helen Terry in his programmes. Such highbrow aspirations marked the death knell for working class eccentricity, the anarchic and suggestive comedy that had once characterized both male and female performance. But throughout the transition from music hall to variety in the 1910s, female artistes flourished in their own right and several female cinema stars such as Florence Turner and Betty Balfour, began their careers in this way.

The various forms of popular entertainment, music hall, pantomime, theatre, variety

² See the feature film *Elstree Calling* (1930) directed by Andre Charlot et al.: an early British sound film and compilation of variety sketches.

and cinema, were simultaneously converging and diverging around the Great War. This was also the period of mass cinema building and the development of cinema into a distinct institution with the concurrent shift towards longer film narratives. Feature films required a more concentrated attention span and therefore a different relationship with audiences. The short comic “turn” did not integrate easily into new film programming structures and the comedic sketches performed on the stage did not always translate easily into silent cinema. Music hall was a medium dominated by vocal expression and a larger-than-life physicality whilst cinema required an increasingly finely-tuned and specific mimetic performance; hence the difficulty in defining a clear set of transitions from theatre to cinema in relation to female (or male) performers.

Nevertheless, the earlier “cinema of attractions” had embraced short, self-contained comedic turns and character studies. Women such as Mrs. Albert Smith (wife of George Albert Smith and a former variety actress herself) featured in early films such as *Mary Jane’s Mishap, or Don’t Fool with Paraffin* (George Albert Smith, 1903), in which the eponymous victim vanishes in a puff of smoke; and women worked alongside their male partners in almost equal numbers in early pioneer film comedies. Florence Turner’s “facial” sketch film *Daisy Doodad’s Dial* (Laurence Trimble, 1913), which derives comedy from exaggerated facial expression would have been equally appropriate to live performance. By the arrival of the Great War, music halls were already well in decline and along with them, opportunities for anarchic female performance of eccentric, working class characters for whom looks and glamour, which would later define their roles in film, were not the most important considerations for their comedic personas. By the end of the war and the inevitable dominance of Hollywood on British cinema, glamour and physical perfection, emphasized through increasing use of close-ups on faces and body parts, created new figures for identification and stardom and placed increasing pressure on female glamour and beauty.

Women, Comedy and the British Film Industry During the Great War.

Significant to the trajectory of women in British silent comedy are the changes brought about in the British film industry as a result of the Great War when ninety-five per cent of screen time was occupied by imported US films. The war effectively threw the British industry into a form of suspended animation, curtailing investment and infrastructural development, which inevitably had a knock-on effect in terms of opportunities for women performers. But if British women were looking for roles models and identification figures, then they had them in abundance from the emerging Hollywood star system with its vastly superior output of highly proficient and popular silent comedies featuring comediennes whose combination of glamour, lifestyle, looks, and sophisticated comedic acting abilities, offered more attractive role models than their domestic equivalents. Women like Mabel Normand who combined looks and comedy and the Bathing Beauties who formed a glamorous backdrop to the main

action in Keystone comedies. By the end of the war, the contracts made with American distributors during the conflict, ensured that Hollywood product continued to dominate the British market with comediennes such as Chaplin's leading female, Edna Purviance; Keaton's sidekicks Sybil Seely who co-starred in *One Week* (Edward F. Cline, Buster Keaton, 1920) and fellow co-star Phyllis Haver in *The Balloonatic* (Edward F. Cline, Buster Keaton, 1923). This first wave were followed by women like Ruth Hiatt in *Saturday Afternoon* (Harry Edwards, 1926) and Marion Byron and Anita Garvin, a female Laurel and Hardy duo who starred alongside Max Davidson in *Feed 'em and Weep* (Fred Guiol, Leo McCarey, 1928) before becoming the stars in Leo McCarey and Hal Yates' *A Pair of Tights* (1929). Not to mention funny women like Viola Richards, Edna Marian, Bebe Daniels, Colleen Moore and Clara Bow who had significant box office power and roles in slapstick, sex and flapper comedies, the likes of which were simply not being produced in Britain. Hollywood excelled at the global export of silent comedies dis-incentivising the development of the genre in Britain.

Personalities and Stars: Case Studies and Career Trajectories.

From the 1900s to the late 1920s, the progress of female performers in British comedy can be characterized by a series of chronological case studies. In the 1910s the anarchic Tilly Girls, Chrissie White and Alma Taylor, were given free reign with their youthful, physical slapstick in a series of nineteen or so comedies produced by the Hepworth Company. During the war, Florence Turner emerges in feature films, with a pivotal performance in *East is East* (Henry Edwards, 1916), which fuses an expository comedic acting style, developed on the variety stage, with a more nuanced style adapted the exigencies of the camera and the demands of a full-length film narrative. Turner herself had arrived in the UK to take advantage of the opportunities for work on the variety theatre and music hall circuits and *East is East* marks a shift between the use of music hall stars in filmed comedic sketches and a subtle and engaging feature film character study. Betty Balfour, the "Queen of Happiness" is Britain's exemplar female comedian during the early 1920s with her trademark cheeky attitude, dimpled, smiling face and vivacious mimicry. Balfour's career trajectory is also interesting as she shifts from street-girl and cockney flower seller in her early Squibs films to exotic dancer and flapper in later films such as *A Little Bit of Fluff* (Wheeler Dryden, Jess Robins, 1928). Balfour's career also reflects the aspirations for narrative control and agency of the 1920s comic actress, pitted against the increasingly circumscribed roles for women in silent feature comedies, which put constraints on female comic performance. The career paths of these comediennes are indicative of the shifts that take place for women in film comedy across the first three decades of the twentieth century; from significant comic agency to comic objectivity; from women being able to create their own comedy to increasingly becoming the butt of the joke. This is reflected by an attendant loss of female autonomy and control in the comedic narrative as cinema becomes increasingly concerned with looks and glamour

and displaying women as passive objects for masculine attention in the 1920s drawing room and sex comedies.

The Bad-Girl, Madcap Tilly Comedies 1910-1915: Alma Taylor and Chrissie White

If funny women can be considered the canaries of equal opportunities in the film industry, then the Tilly Girls thrived when the industry was at its most oxygenated. The Tilly comedies of the 1910s do not position women as passive objects designed for consumption, and the speed at which Chrissie White (1895-1989) and Alma Taylor (1895-1974) perform, defies their sexual objectification. They never remain stationary in the frame for long enough to be consumed by the cinematic gaze and their physical comedy is equivalent to male slapstick performance in its speed and agility. They are, by turns, amoral and innocent, committing acts of often surprising cruelty and overturning Edwardian codes of good behavior for young women. Their mischief knows no bounds and they usually escape unpunished and self-satisfied at the havoc they have created (see *Cento Anni Fa*).

Both White and Taylor were born in 1895 and were around fifteen years of age when they joined Hepworth's company and produced the first of the Tilly comedies in 1910. Both were attractive young women, as evidenced by their photographic portraits at the time, but director Lewin Fitzhammon and producer Cecil Hepworth do not concentrate on their faces. Instead they capture the totality of White and Taylor's comic performances by filming in mid and long shot rather than fragmenting their bodies or faces. The Tilly comedies offer a glimpse of the possibilities for female physical comedy, which are largely curtailed after the Great War. Such female anarchic comedy will not re emerge in Britain until the St. Trinians cycle of anarchic schoolgirl films in the 1950s, starting with Launder and Gilliat's *The Belles of St. Trinians* (1954). However, the latest manifestation of this franchise, *St Trinians* (Oliver Parker, Barnaby Thompson, 2007) and *St Trinians 2: The Legend of Fritton's Gold* (Oliver Parker, Barnaby Thompson, 2009) has replaced the asexual grubby-kneed protagonists of the 1950s with highly-sexualized, suspender-wearing teenagers, designed to evoke sexual responses.

The Tilly Girls were also a phenomenon of cinema as an emerging art form. Their madcap anarchic comedies were located within a cinematic aesthetic of continuity editing, the creative use of space, framing, action and movement. The plots of their films may have roots knockabout music hall sketches, but their realization is entirely cinematic with producer Cecil Hepworth and director Lewin Fitzhammon's talents clearly in evidence. The Tilly's performances are unabashed, physical and anarchic; drawing on some of the earlier trick films, which delighted in corporeal punishment such as Hepworth's *How it Feels to Be Run Over* (1900) and George Albert Smith's *Mary Jane's Mishap*. They also tap into early comedies involving out-of-control children such as Clarendon's eponymous *Did'ums* series (1910-1912) and Williamson's *Our New Errand Boy* (1905), which present a riposte to Edwardian ideals of well-behaved childhood. The Tilly films invariably involve acts of anti-social behavior



Tilly Girls publicity image. Author's collection.

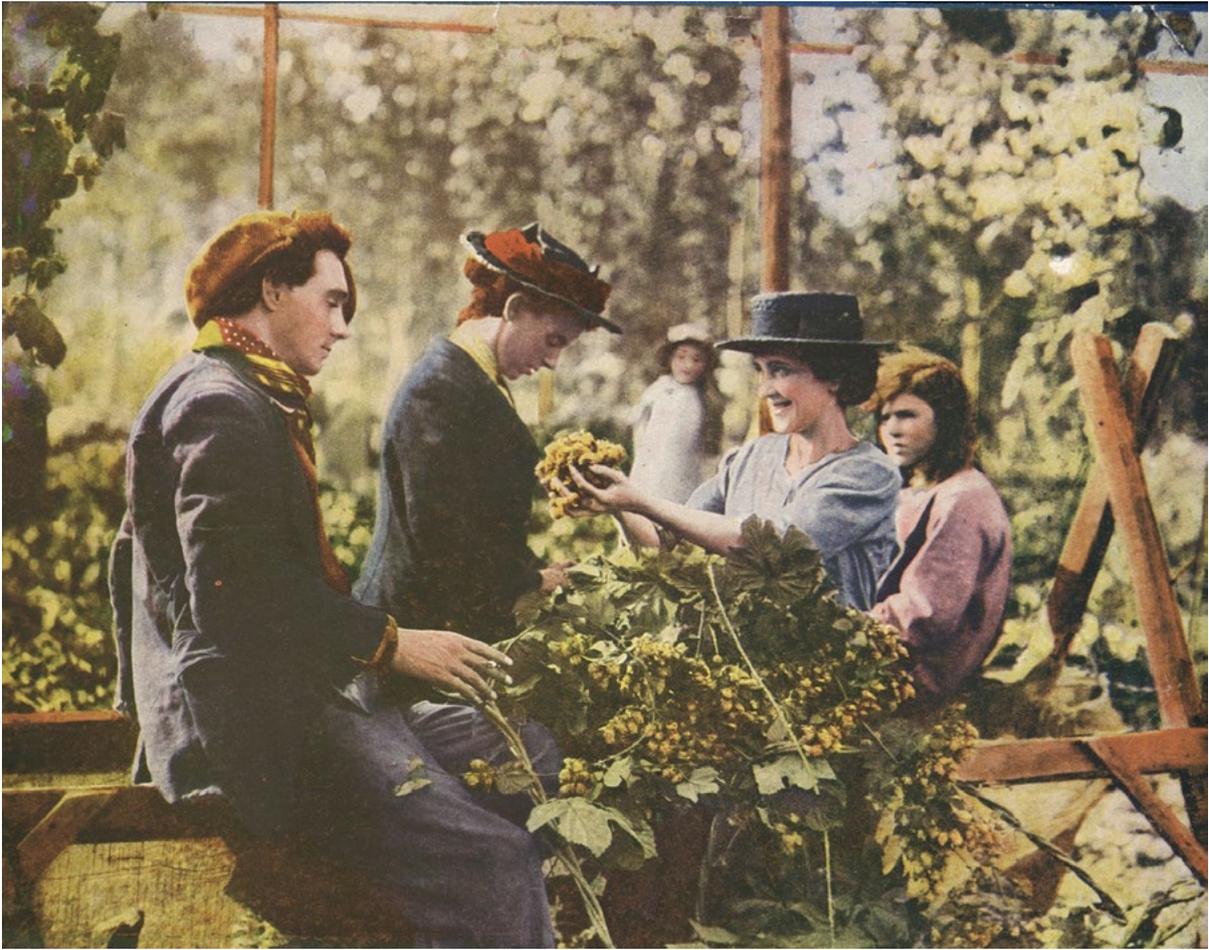
with the girls causing havoc with objects at their disposal including fire engines, bicycles and boats. They delight in cross-dressing and their victims include an eclectic cast of largely innocent bystanders; a long-suffering uncle, hapless fire fighters, boarding house lodgers, their governess, a local politician, fishermen, a football team, elderly convalescents and a Mormon missionary.

After the war both White and Taylor abandoned their tomboy alter-egos in favor of dramatic and romantic roles in British feature films that favored more demure and mature female personas. By the early 1920s their screen personas were a far cry from their comedy roots, instead epitomizing the “English Rose” and occupying roles as society hostesses and wealthy country ladies in a film industry that now sought to represent idealized women as demure and middle-class (Bamford 43). Clearly, White and Taylor could not continue playing madcap tomboys as they matured, but so too the industry was changing around them. Alma Taylor married producer Walter West and pursued a patchy film career, a high point of which included the 1923 Hepworth film *Comin Thru the Rye* where she played a nobly-suffering heroine denied marriage to the man she loves by another woman. Chrissie White married actor/director Henry Edwards and abandoning her earlier comic persona, appeared in several of his films including *The Bargain* (1921) and *Lily of the Alley* (1923) until retiring from the screen in 1933.

Florence Turner in Britain from 1913–1916 and 1922–1924

The Vitagraph Girl, Florence Turner (1885–1946) came to England in 1913 to set up her own company, Turner Productions with Vitagraph colleague Larry Trimble as Head of Production and British actor, Henry Edwards as her leading male. Turner was lured to Britain by opportunities offered in the British music hall and variety theatres where her style of comedy and earthy charisma chimed with British producers and audiences across the country. She related to ordinary people by portraying the English working class, particularly the Cockney East Ender, and kept in touch with her roots by performing in regional music halls. Her return to the US in 1916 was mourned by Rachael Low as leaving a noticeable gap in British Film Production

Turner’s classic facial comedy, *Daisy Doodad’s Dial* referred to earlier, in which she practices gurning for a face-pulling competition, was essentially a vehicle for Turner to display her facial dexterity and comedic acting abilities within a loose narrative structure. This kind of comedic performance transferred from music hall sketches to the cinema via the comic sub genre of “facials” which became popular with the development of the film close-up in the early part of the century and was rooted in the cinema of attractions rather than narrative cinema. Turner’s feature film *East is East* directed by Henry Edwards, is one of her defining roles in which she plays Victoria Vickers, a working class East Ender who inherits a fortune from her estranged uncle, but for whom the delights of the posh and sophisticated West



Florence Turner and Henry Edwards in *East is East* (Henry Edwards, 1916).
Image courtesy of BFI Stills and Posters

End cannot match the simple life working in the Kent hop fields with her faithful mate Bert, played by Henry Edwards. The film is part celebration of the English pastoral landscape, which features very prominently, and part comedy of class and manners. The characters are photographed in relation to their *mise en scène*, largely in full or mid shots, which allow full expression of their abilities for miming cockney mannerisms. The acting style is characterful and expository, but never exaggerated, and Turner's comedy in particular is delivered through a range of subtly changing facial expressions, arms-akimbo stances and a sophisticated use of body language. She utilizes her costume and props; hat, pinafore and worn old coat, with a finely tuned comic grace which would be recognizable to her working class audiences without alienating them through excessive mockery. Her down-at-heel shoes and her stockings, full of holes, are parodied in an intertitle describing them as "of an open weave that comes

from long wear.” Throughout the film, Turner and her co-star Edwards, share equal screen space and their relationship is developed through subtle gestures, body language and facial expression which mirror one another in a well-balanced double act. Turner’s comedy lies on the cusp between music hall performance, the early comic filmed “facials” which Turner developed into her own popular brand of impersonation films, and other representational forms of Victorian and Edwardian visual culture with echoes of Jenny Hill performing her “Coffee Shop Gal” in the 1860s music halls. Turner and Edwards effectively mime the Cockney accent and modes of speech by twisting their mouths and jaws into particular shapes and Turner also creates comedy with her eyes. As such *East is East* represents the apogee of a comedic performance style that simultaneously looks back to the nineteenth century music hall and forward to 1920s cinematic expression.

Turner’s film comedy is arguably more finely tuned in Manning Haynes’ 1924 film *The Boatswain’s Mate* where she co-stars with Victor McLagen as Mrs. Walters, a widowed pub landlady being wooed by local men who see the opportunity to “marry a pub.” Here, she is an independent, pragmatic and feisty woman living alone, running her own business and dealing with the unwanted attentions of her would-be suitors. She goes to bed reading *Frankenstein* and handles a shotgun like a Wild-West heroine. The comedy lies in the interplay between Turner’s performance, in which she portrays a combination of physical strength and resourcefulness with a more nuanced facial expression than her earlier films with witty proto-feminist intertitles that comment ironically on the action. Her large, expressive eyes and distinctive facial features that served her stage career are also very photogenic, communicating a range of emotions from fear to anger and resignation. Scriptwriter Lydia Haywood; Haynes’ co-producer on *The Boatswain’s Mate*, deserves recognition for her adaptation of British suffragette and composer Ethyl Smith’s 1916 one-act opera of the same name, in which the character of Mrs. Walters is loosely modeled on leading suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst.³

Turner made around thirty films in Britain whilst maintaining her music hall career, and included show reels of her popular filmed “impersonations” as part of her live act. But popular, indefatigable and talented though she was, Turner was a victim of the fragility of the British film industry. Her British career faltered during the Great War and she returned to the US in 1916 only to find that the industry there had outgrown her. She moved back to Britain in 1922, and continued to be massively popular, but returned to the US in 1924 when the British industry hit another of its periodic crises. Back in Hollywood in the mid-1920s, Turner, now aged forty, discovered that she was considered too old for the kind of roles in which she had once excelled and over taken by the new generation of young female starlets. She finished her career working as an extra in Hollywood and died in 1946. The following newspaper comment from 1932 is a tacit reminder of the lack of longevity for female stars and the ephemeral nature of cinematic fame, particularly for women.

³The opera was written in 1913-14 but first performed on 28 January 1916 at the Shaftsbury Theatre in London.



Press book for Betty Balfour in *Squibs MP* (George Pearson, 1923).
Image courtesy of Steve Chibnall archive.

Old Timer's faces are seen daily on the sets where extra and bit-work are giving the once famous their chance to earn their daily bread. Paramount seems to have more than its quota of former favorites. I discovered both Florence Turner and Florence Lawrence working in "Sinners in the Sun." Carole Lombard and Chester Morris, two players unheard of in the days when Florence Lawrence was the toast of the screen, were the leads (Merrick).

Betty Balfour: "The Queen of Happiness"

Born almost a generation after Florence Turner, Balfour's career exists entirely in the age of the cinematograph, but she too began her career in the theatre as a child entertainer, working with Karno and hosting her own revue. Balfour (1903-1978) was already a well-established and popular entertainer by the time she made her feature film debut in Welsh-Pearsons' production of *Nothing Else Matters* (George Pearson, 1920). Here, as seventeen year old actress, she plays a hapless but faithful servant girl with a comedic performance style derived from her early stage persona with funny walks, ungainly postures and her trademark facial expressions ranging from comedy to pathos. Director Pearson exploits Balfour's talent for physical comedy by photographing her in full-frame shots that gives her full mobility within the *mise en scène* and allow her to dominate the screen. As such, her performance is neither fragmented, to emphasize her face or a particular part of her body, nor sexualized. The four Squibs films, that develop her ingénue working-class, Cockney flower seller from 1922 to 1923, represent the highlight of a film career that spanned twenty-five silent features, a period working in Europe and eight sound films made between 1930 and 1945.⁴ Producer/director Pearson had himself offered to divorce his wife and marry Balfour on the set of *Blinkeyes* in 1926, which effectively ended their working partnership when Balfour rejected him.

Despite being Britain's only truly international star, and the closest that the British industry produces to Hollywood's flapper comedienues such as Clara Bow and Colleen Moore, Balfour's career diminished rapidly from 1930 and she eventually attempted suicide in 1952 after a failed return to acting. Her film career follows a very telling trajectory, which starts to decline as she herself grows out of her gamine Squibs roles in the mid 1920s. By 1928, in Wheeler Dryden's Syd Chaplin vehicle *A Little Bit of Fluff*, she's become Mamie Scott, an exotic dancer described in an intertitle as "the actress whose head has been turned by press agents and peroxide" and who is "celebrating the tenth anniversary of her twenty fifth birthday." Already, aged twenty-five and playing a twenty-five year old character, jokes are being made at the expense of Balfour's character in terms of her fading looks and her age. This is indicative of British cinema's preponderance for very young women in ingénue roles, as Balfour had performed in her Squibs films. But now she has become the butt of the joke; the comic object rather than the comic subject. She is no longer allowed to create

⁴ *Squibs*, (1921) *Squibs Wins the Calcutta Sweep* (1922), *Squib's Honeymoon* (1923) and *Squibs MP* (1923)

KINEMATOGRAPH WEEKLY October 4, 1928.

Hundreds refused admission says **PERCY V. LUNCH** of the **CENTRAL CINEMA EASTBOURNE**

"EVERY DAY WE WERE IN THE EXTRAORDINARY POSITION OF HAVING TO REFUSE ADMISSION TO HUNDREDS. THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT THIS FILM BEING A MONEYMAKER TO ANY EXHIBITOR IF HE TAKES THE TROUBLE TO PROPERLY EXPLOIT IT. I AM PERSONALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE RETURN BOOKING OF THIS PICTURE, AS WE HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT IT WILL REPEAT ITS FORMER SUCCESS."

THESE D.C. POSTERS CAN BE SUPPLIED AT 25/- per 10

Tie up with your local booksellers

Exhibitors—Capitalise on the Nation-Wide Publicity given by the sixpenny novel of **"A LITTLE BIT OF FLUFF"**

Tell you're whole town with this attractive double-crown Poster

WARDOUR FILMS LIMITED
Head Office—173, Westour Street, London, W.1

London Release Date ~ October 15th 1928

Press book for Betty Balfour in Wheeler Dryden and Jess Robins' *A Little Bit of Fluff* (1928).
Image courtesy of Steve Chibnall archive.

and perform in her own autonomous comedic space, as she had in her earlier films, and the audience is encouraged to consider her as a slightly disingenuous, ageing female, unaware of her own diminishing looks but intent on remaining a party-girl. Her co-star, the forty three year old Syd Chaplin is, by contrast, given considerable screen space to perform rather clichéd, overlong and repetitive comedic routines which impede the film's narrative progress, but emphasize his dominant persona. this indulgence, which marginalizes Balfour at the expense of Syd Chaplin's second-rate comedy.⁵

It is not Balfour's skills as a comedienne that are diminishing by the late 1920s, but the changing narrative opportunities for women in British film comedy. In Hitchcock's 1928 film, *Champagne*, Balfour plays a vivacious society girl who defies her father and flies out to join her lover on his cruise, running into bad weather and carelessly ditching her airplane in the Atlantic Ocean en route. Balfour's role would have offered significant identification pleasures to female viewers with her combination of glamour, fun and social status. However, despite an energetic and spirited comedic performance, her comic objectification is evident from the start of the film when she is introduced disembarking the airplane with her aviation goggles having left her with two white circles around her eyes and a very dirty face. She is unaware of this, but the audience on the cruise ship that rescues her and in the auditorium, are aware of her predicament and encouraged to laugh at her. It is a small, but telling point and prior to her arrival, the tone of the film is also set as Hitchcock establishes a series of lascivious looks from a menacing and predatory male who eyes the young women in the room and starts to stalk Balfour's character as soon as she disembarks. There is also a fantasy moment, filmed through a champagne glass, where Balfour imagines herself sexually assaulted by her voyeur, adding to the film's uneasy combination of comedy and sexual threat revolving around Balfour's character.

In *Champagne*, as in her later roles, there is a certain tension between the narrative containment of Balfour's performance and her own attempts to transcend her comic objectification. By 1928, the consolidation of particular codes of film form and style in the mature silent cinema meant that the ways in which women were represented in classic film narratives were firmly in place. Female audiences were obliged to adopt particular spectatorial positions in identifying with the objectified status of female characters on screen or becoming complicit with their objectification. For female comedians working in British cinema during the 1920s, the shift to feature-length narratives and the dominance of particular genres also limited the range and nature of roles available to them and proscribed a particular set of desirable physical features and performance styles, considerably more so than it did for their male counterparts. The dominance of melodramas, literary adaptations and middle-class romantic comedies in British cinema tended to position women as dramatic and comedic objects, noble victims or quietly suffering wives and mothers, daughters and sisters—depending upon the genre.

⁵I discuss Balfour in relation to British silent comedy in Porter, "From Slapstick to Satire." Some of the above is reprinted from this chapter.

These roles demanded a demure, restrained acting style which Christine Gledhill describes as requiring a considerable amount of “body draping” to facilitate the more static, *tableaux vivante* performance where the female character remains stable and more static within the *mise en scene*, displaying costume, styling and passive sexuality to the best advantage. The industry was also sensitive to media accusations that British stars were not sufficiently attractive to compete with their Hollywood counterparts and the trade press, in particular, picked up on the inferior attention to looks and glamour in the British industry. These qualities, particularly in its female stars, were not always compatible with comedy, which required unrestrained and characterful performance rather than glamour and beauty. Gracie Fields stands alone in the early 1930s as a British star who traded on her lack of physical grace and sophistication, echoing her silent cinema predecessors Florence Turner and Betty Balfour, but it would be television that later opened more opportunities for characterful and older female comics.

The arrival of sound cinema in 1929 also curtailed the careers of many British performers, men and women, whose accents, voice pitch or vocal delivery did not respond well to the new microphone technology. British cinema’s initial preference for the kind of upper-class, educated accents and “received pronunciation” developed in the theatre, also marginalised stars whose screen voices did not correspond with their screen images as envisaged by their fans and audiences. Anny Ondra, the female lead in Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* (1929), famously had her Austro-Hungarian accent replaced by British actress Joan Barry’s clipped upper-class tones in the sound version, for example; a voice which now seems at odds with Ondra’s spirited and lively performance.

Comedy and Class

Central to the comedy that Turner and Balfour performed was the mimicry of working class characters through a lexicon of mannerisms and values and the mockery of “airs and graces” and arriviste lifestyles. Class was, and still is, fertile ground for British comedy. Working class eccentricity offered an attractive space for female performers to mimic and exaggerate and their characters could be eccentric, anarchic and physically unattractive, unlike their middle-class counterparts in feature films, for who looks, glamour and deportment were pre-requisite. For women performers in particular, this initially freed them from the pressure to be sexually alluring, passive objects of male desire and patriarchal protection. But as British cinema increasingly strove for middle class patronage and acceptance as a valid art form, roles for women became limited to stereotypical English Roses and heroines of literary adaptations. Put simply, it became more important for the female lead to look good, than to be funny or anarchic. The next generation of female comic performers, such as Beatrice Lillie, Cicely Courtneidge and Gertrude Lawrence, were able to pursue stage careers in revue and variety well into the 1930s, whilst British cinema was largely eschewing the kind of comedy that allowed women to display their physical comedic talents, with the

notable exception of Gracie Field's shrill, northern working class songstress. There was a re-emergence of working class female characters in theatre and TV variety acts in the 1940s and 1950s with people like Elsie and Doris Waters as Gert and Dais', Revnell and West, The Houston Sisters, Tessie O'Shea, Kitty McShane, Hylda Baker and Dora Bryan et al performing a variety of eccentric female comedy characters, but women would struggle to rival their male counterparts in film comedy as they had in the early twentieth century. For the most part, the kind of physical, working class comedy so popular in the music halls and earlier cinema now sat uneasily with British cinema's aspiration for Hollywood glamour and middle-class legitimacy.

British silent film comedy flourished briefly in the early to mid-1920s with the sophisticated short satires of Adrian Brunel, the situational slapstick of Walter Forde and his incompetent "Walter" character and Betty Balfour's Squibs series alongside the gentle observational comedies of Manning Haynes and Lydia Haywoods' adaptations of W.W. Jacobs' short stories. However, comedy ceased to be a major force in British feature film production by the late 1920s and the industry's comedic impulses become diffused across a range of genres. The dominant tendencies that emerged from this period were the comedies of sex and manners epitomized by Harry Lachman's *Weekend Wives* (1928) starring Estelle Brody and Monty Banks and Anthony Asquith's Ruritanian romance *The Runaway Princess* (1929) starring Mady Christians, both of which offered key roles for female performers. Alongside these were Alfred Hitchcock's comedic excursions in films like *The Farmer's Wife* (1928) and *Champagne* before his own darkly comic impulses translate more broadly into explorations of sexuality and female vulnerability.

THE AUTHOR: Laraine Porter is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at De Montfort University in Leicester, UK. Since 1998, she has directed the annual British Silent Film Festival, and associated conferences, organised in conjunction with the British Film Institute. Her research interests include British silent film and the film industry, silent film music, the transition between silent and sound film and the role of women in the British film industry. She has published several edited volumes on British cinema before 1930.

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The Leatrice Joy Bob: *The Clinging Vine* and Gender's Cutting Edge

ABSTRACT: Zelda Sears' 1924 Broadway play *The Clinging Vine* mocked male stereotypes of women. In the play, businesswoman heroine Antoinette (A.B.) is both chagrined and amused to find she has become a man magnet after she adopts an ultra-feminine "clinging vine" persona in order to test its effects. But when the play was adapted for film in 1926, with actress Leatrice Joy playing the lead role in a very short haircut, "Antoinette" disappears into her initials (A.B.), and her pre-transformation character appears masculine in both dress and demeanor. The character's masculinity is accentuated by the silent film medium, as there is no female voice emerging from A.B. to counter her masculine impression. The result that in the film version, A.B.'s feminine transformation reads more like drag queen than clinging vine—a performative, hyper-feminine camouflage of a naturalized masculinity. Archival research into Joy's career, coupled with interview transcripts and notes from Kevin Brownlow's Hollywood series and discussions with Joy's daughter, Leatrice Joy Gilbert Fountain, sheds light on the movie's transformations and their consequences, both for Joy and for gender. The film version of *The Clinging Vine* movie reflects a historical moment that was surprisingly open to playful interpretations of gender. Such explorations were cut short with the coming of sound, as the attachment of actors' voices to their bodies enabled a firmer anchoring of sex to gender.

In playwright Zelda Sears' *The Clinging Vine*, a successful businesswoman, Antoinette—known primarily as "A.B."—learns that she can only be successful in love if she adopts a stereotypically feminine persona around men: the "clinging vine" persona of the title. On this point, Sears wrote that there was no limit to how "imbecilic" a pretty woman could be and still attract a man ("A Woman Playwright's Secret" 58). Both audiences and critics responded enthusiastically to the play, which had successful runs on Broadway in 1924 and later on the road. Critics welcomed the 1924 play's satire on masculine expectations of women, expectations which were starting to become as outmoded as the "clinging vine" gender definition evoked by the title (Addison 341). That audiences were comfortable with Sears' attack on the sexism of the day is indicated by the fact that one girls' school performed the play at a fundraiser, with schoolgirls cast in the male roles ("Girls to Give Play" 21).

According to critic Kim Marra, Jewish immigrant Sears "passed" for what she was not by constructing an idealized white, middle-class femininity for her characters. This depiction of Sears is fair, to some degree. However, if Sears has constructed idealized female characters at odds with her own identity and experience, she has at the same time exposed the ideal as dependent on performance: the satire in *The Clinging Vine* comes from how well the lead character's very hastily adopted feminine charade works on the men around her. Throughout the play, A.B.'s charade exposes the male dominance of the workplace as illegitimate, and her character chooses as a mate someone who is ill-equipped to join the patriarchal order without her help. As a woman and as a cultural outsider, Zelda Sears had to play similar

games herself (Marra). Sears' other plays suggest that machination lies beneath the behaviors of successful outsiders, machination that is entirely necessary to American definitions of success. For example, a year before *The Clinging Vine* was produced, Sears' musical *Lady Billy* featured an Eastern European female protagonist who passes herself off as a boy soprano in the United States, and marries an American at the end ("Mitzi Back in 'Lady Billy'"). Sears' work upholds class mobility as a fundamental part of the American social order, but with a caveat: audiences who accept that order must, like the characters in her plays, be willing to be hoodwinked by those outsiders who are capable of exposing the naturalized surfaces that uphold it.

In *The Clinging Vine*, A.B. runs her own paint company and has been too busy and happy doing so to think that her overall competence might hurt her in the marriage market. She visits her grandmother, with whom she has always had a strong connection, and admits that if she were ever to get married, it would be to the childhood friend (Jimmy) who understood her best. (Sears, *The Clinging Vine*). A.B. first appears in the play wearing a paint-covered smock with paint in her hair, more interested in testing a new product for her paint company than in whether men find her attractive. A few years later, in 1926, a movie version of *The Clinging Vine* was made and this is the version of *The Clinging Vine* we are familiar with today. In the movie version, directed by Paul Sloane, the paint company belongs to A.B.'s boss, who takes credit for her ideas, and—in a marked difference from Sears' play—A.B.'s initial appearance is decidedly masculine. The grandmother becomes her boss's wife, and the love interest, Jimmy, is the boss's nephew. Both Jimmy and A.B. need to be married off to each other in order for the company to continue successfully, and "Grandma" (played by veteran vaudeville comedienne Toby Claude) masterminds a feminine transformation for A.B.—a transformation that A.B. embraces for the sheer joy of its performance.

A.B., played by silent film star Leatrice Joy, is presented as a male executive in the first few shots of the movie. She is shot at a desk from behind in medium range, so that what is visible of her in the frame is only the back of her closely cropped head, a man's collared shirt, and a pinstripe vest. She holds a phone in one hand and signs papers shoved before her with the other. A close-up shot shows her hand decisively marking a budget with her initials: "A.B." Only an intertitle several shots into the movie, introducing the character and Joy's name, suggests the character is in fact female. After the intertitle, Joy is shown from the front, her small breasts completely flattened inside the male vest. Ensuing shots show her in close-up, her eyebrows thick and her skin porous and shiny [fig. 1], or from the waist up, her gestures sweeping and preemptory. Joy was no stranger to male impersonation. She frequently teased Cecil B. DeMille and entertained actors on his sets by imitating DeMille's long, mannish stride (Fountain), and DeMille called her "young fellow" (Brownlow, "Rough notes from Leatrice Joy Interview"). In addition, she had previously played a tomboy raised by her ship captain father in *Eve's Leaves*. Publicity for *The Clinging Vine* drew attention to the role's masculinity by announcing that Joy was forced to appear in several scenes with an un-powdered nose,



1. With her “unpowdered nose,” Leatrice Joy portrays the masculine “A.B.” in the opening scene of *The Clinging Vine*. The woman in the frame’s top left corner provides feminine contrast.

and that she was much relieved to move on to subsequent scenes where she could powder it (“Clinging Vine, The.” Press Kit). It is unlikely that Joy was actually distressed either way; this announcement was probably intended to titillate a curious audience. Since the film was silent, viewers would not have heard Joy’s female voice counter her male image. With only her appearance and her behavior to go by, an audience member unfamiliar with Joy from her previous roles would assume she was male.

Why was A.B. presented as decidedly masculine at the beginning of the film version of *The Clinging Vine*, when Sears’ play indicated that her character’s “problem” was merely her lack of understanding that her marriageability depended on meeting male expectations of women? The answer lies in part in actress Leatrice Joy’s decision to get a man’s haircut, and to keep it that way over the course of several movies, of which *The Clinging Vine* was one—a haircut so short that it became known as the “Leatrice Joy bob” (“Vanity.” Press Kit). Leatrice Joy’s long career in movies began in 1915 and included starring roles in *Her Fractured Voice* (1917) and Maurice Tourneur’s *A Girl’s Folly* in 1917. It took off in the early twenties when she starred in *Manslaughter* (1922), *Saturday Night* (1922), and *The Ten Commandments*

(1923) for Cecil B. DeMille. Like her predecessor Gloria Swanson, Joy was generally cast as the frivolous but independent “modern woman” who would showcase DeMille’s lavish costumes (Addison). She was so successful as DeMille’s *protégé* that her career presented a constant threat to her husband, romantic screen idol John Gilbert, whose career was less secure than her own at that time. By September of 1925 they were divorced, in part because of his insecurity, but during a later reconciliation attempt, Joy had followed Gilbert into a barbershop and asked the barber to cut her hair just like Gilbert’s (Drew 74–75). The new man’s haircut made her unfit to play traditionally feminine leads, and because she was by this time contracted as the star of Cecil B. DeMille’s new production company, Producers Distributing Corporation (PDC), roles were developed to exploit her haircut, as wigs did not photograph convincingly (Brownlow, “Leatrice Joy Interview”).

Joy’s decision to get this haircut was based on impulse. According to her daughter, Leatrice Gilbert Fountain, Joy was in the middle of a picture when she cut her hair. Publicly, she referred to her cut as chic; privately she confessed she found it empowering (Fountain). The haircut became a big story, perhaps giving a shot of temporary publicity to her career. (Joy later stated that her career began its downhill slide when she was forced to move to PDC, which suffered from poor promotion, lack of Los Angeles releases, and shoddy production values.) (Drew 81–82). She would have known there would be some repercussions from the haircut, regardless of the reasons behind her decision, as it was widely publicized at the time that Jobyna Ralston and Mary Pickford’s contracts stipulated that they could not bob their hair. DeMille was furious that Joy had deprived herself of her femininity (“This Is the Bob”; “In Spite of Her Ultra Boyish Bob...” Photo; Brownlow, “Leatrice Joy Interview”), and this reaction on his part may have helped publicize both Joy and her haircut. In its 1926 review of *The Clinging Vine*, *Film Daily* says that Leatrice Joy “makes good use of her mannish bob” (“Clinging Vine.” Review). Whether for publicity or self-empowerment, Joy kept her hair short through a total of five movies: *Made for Love* (Paul Sloane, 1926), *Eve’s Leaves* (Paul Sloane, 1926), *The Clinging Vine* (Paul Sloane, 1926), *For Alimony Only* (William C. de Mille, 1926) and *Vanity* (Donald Crisp, 1927). She kept it short until early 1927, when fashion trends decreed that Hollywood women were growing their hair again.

In Sears’ version of *The Clinging Vine*, the message A.B. and her audience are to glean from her successful feminine masquerade is ruefully stated by A.B.: “It is very difficult to be business-like and lady-like at the same time.” A.B. has adopted a childish brand of femininity that is meant to stand in negative contrast to the self-possessed adult the audience knows her to be. Commenting on the fact that the men around her “eat it up,” she says, “I’m so simple I’m silly, and so childish I need a teething ring.” To emphasize this point, Sears’ stage directions dictate that the dress A.B. wears to debut her new femininity should be “so youthful it is almost childish.” The childlike version of femininity Sears criticizes is carried into the movie. A.B. wears mostly white, including stockings and shoes, and two long hooped skirts, one with flowerpot *appliqués* (the latter specified in Sears’ original play).



2. “A.B.” affects the style and manner of a Victorian “clinging vine” femininity.

Particularly incongruous is a large shepherdess bonnet that hides Joy’s short—but now curled—hair [fig. 2].

However, with Joy’s haircut firmly established as a signifier of masculinity in the opening scene, A.B.’s transformation in the film version of *The Clinging Vine* takes a decidedly queer turn away from her transformation in the play. Rather than changing A.B. from a woman to a childlike girl, as in the original stage play, the movie reveals gender—both femininity and masculinity—as drag: a performance constructed from costumes and behaviors. A.B. is transformed into a lady by Grandma, who reveals the secrets of femininity to her—secrets that consist of plucking her eyebrows and learning how to bat her eyelashes [fig. 3]. The childlike costumes Grandma picks for her to wear in her new embrace of femininity serve only to further emphasize A.B.’s flat chest and short hair. These costumes read as a hyper-feminine camouflage of a supposedly more “natural” masculine identity. Joy’s shifting gender performances bear out this impression. When she is dressed in male garb, A.B. plants her feet apart and faces the camera and her fellow cast members in a direct and frontal posture. Her movements are forceful and direct. When she is angry, she juts her jaw forward and jabs her fingers at people, or she constrains her violent impulses by clenching her fists and snapping pencils. When she is distressed or puzzled, she grimaces or scratches the back of her head.



3. With one eyebrow plucked and her short hair in curling papers, A.B, practices batting her eyelashes at a horrified butler.

After her feminine transformation, however, these gestures are replaced by fluttering or wringing hands, batted eyelashes, and coyly twisted postures. It is only when she is alone and unobserved that she returns to the assertive gestures and postures of before, leaving the impression that these are more “natural” for her [fig.4].

Men performing as women in cross-dressing farces have traditionally pointed up the element of construction in their impersonations by reverting to unladylike behaviors when they are alone (see, for example, Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot* [Billy Wilder, 1959]). Contrasts like these suggest that femininity is masquerade and masculinity is the natural state. When a cross-dressing man conveys the message that masculinity is a natural form of behavior by adopting it when he is alone, femininity is revealed as an artifice, albeit one necessary to maintain gender difference. But if a woman conveys the impression that a masculine self-presentation comes more readily to her than a feminine one does, the notion that certain gender performances are more “natural” than others loses credibility. Intertitles in *The Clinging Vine* suggest the film’s performative understanding of gender as well. For example, femininity is described as a commodity that can be bought, sold and worn. After A.B.’s transformation at Grandma’s hands has the desired effect of attracting all the men around her, an intertitle appears that states, “Oh, what a magician was Grandma! She



4. Alone, A.B. scratches her head and grimaces, in gestures that recall her masculine behavior in the scenes prior to her transformation.

crossed a lemon with a dressmaker's bill and produced a peach!" Metaphors of botany and alchemy are mixed in this intertitle, suggesting that money is a medium which produces transformations that are genetic, as opposed to merely cosmetic. (The term "peach" was commonly used in this time period to refer to attractive women, and "lemon" refers to anything defective.) Simply by paying for new dresses, Grandma has become a trader in a commodified femininity.

A.B.'s boss is dubious about her feminine transformation, seeming to prefer her as she was. "Who dressed A.B. like a girl?" he asks irately, refusing to believe she would have put her new costume on voluntarily. Reviewers of her day did not buy Joy's transition either, and it left some with an uneasy impression that they were watching a man impersonate a woman, even after A.B. had adopted female clothes and mannerisms. A 1926 reviewer from *Variety* magazine stated there was "too much stress laid in the masculine side of the heroine early in the picture. An impression lingers . . . that a female impersonator is playing the girl . . . it persists in the mind as the picture unreels" (Schrader). The reviewer continues that he "cannot, while looking at the picture, disassociate the idea that [Joy] is doing an 'Eltinge'"—a reference to Julian Eltinge, a popular female impersonator of the day (Horak 160). Eltinge had, in fact, done a female impersonator turn the previous year for the same DeMille company

(Producers Distributing Corporation), in a cross-dressing farce movie called *Madame Behave*. Reviewers of today experience a similar dissonance when they compare A.B.'s character pre- and post-transformation, but they are likely to explain the problem in a different way. For example, one reviewer from Internet Movie Database finds her transition to femininity unconvincing, and sees this lack of believability as a fundamental flaw in the movie:

“Ms. Joy is simply too unattractive and looks like a guy...they should have made her a lesbian after all” (Planktonrules). Kevin Wentink of Digital Silents remarks that Joy's haircut works in her male guise, but actually works too well: “When we first see ‘her,’ I had to pause the DVD to make sure ‘she’ was really a ‘she’. . . and after her transformation [she looks] like she's in drag, making the love scenes with Jimmy particularly interesting.”

Heather Addison has written that *The Clinging Vine* “constructs [A.B.'s] masculinity as something freakish” (335). It is certainly true that other characters in the movie react negatively to A.B.'s mannish appearance and behavior, including, initially, her future love interest Jimmy. However, the movie itself appears to have a different aim than Addison suggests: it is gender itself, rather than A.B., that is revealed as freakish. This is revealed most explicitly at the end. Jimmy has fallen in love with the feminine A.B., unaware that she is the same person who fired him by telegram from his uncle's paint firm. After she saves him from a bad business venture, he learns that she works for his uncle and was responsible for firing him. A.B. has been taught by Grandma to recite two stock phrases to men in order to bolster their sense of masculine superiority—“Aren't you wonderful” and “Do go on!”—and she repeats them frequently in the company of men. When she sees that Jimmy has discovered who she is, she braces for Jimmy's rejection of her. Instead, he turns the tables on her and says “I think you're wonderful!” thereby playing the female part in the performance that gender has constructed. A.B. happily responds, in the movie's last line, “Do go on!”—implying that, like a man, she would be happy to hear herself talked about all day. Jimmy has embraced the possibilities of fluid gender boundaries and has become worth the trouble A.B. has taken to get him. In the end, the movie shows, we are all the dupes of gender, but the wise ones are those who can perform it with a difference.

The press had already begun to spell doom for Joy's career by the time *Eve's Leaves* was released in June 1926. The July *Photoplay* review of *Eve's Leaves* said “Poor Leatrice Joy! A couple more vehicles like this and she'll have to go into vaudeville” (“Poor Leatrice Joy...” Photo). A month after this review (in August 1926), *Photoplay* featured a photo spread of an array of female stars with bobbed hair and warned “side whiskers are the newest peril from Paris...watch out for the bald-headed rage!” (“Going, Going...GONE” 66-67). As a dire warning to the Hollywood set, lest they go too far, the last shot of this spread shows a photo of Leatrice Joy with mutton-chop sideburns painted in below her short male hair [fig. 5]. The release of *The Clinging Vine* served only to cement Joy's doom. Joy made films sporadically after *The Clinging Vine*, well into the sound era, but her popularity declined, and she did indeed go into vaudeville for several years (Drew 61; Fountain and Maxim).

..... GONE!

Side whiskers are the newest peril from Paris. Watch for the bald-head rage!



Came Aileen and her Pringle Shingle. Came ears. Came "beau-catchers." Came fame to Aileen



Followed the Beverly Bob presented by Marion Davies. Hairer shorter than short. More daring than Dad's



The crowning glory goes the way of other crowns. How could you, Billie Dove?



Virginia Valli's bob is one of the newest revenges on the Seven Sutherland Sisters

Paris orders hair on the cheeks. Look what side-whiskers would do to Leatrice Joy!



5. *Photoplay* depicts Leatrice Joy as the tipping point in an American femininity threatened by Paris fashion.

Joy's ex-husband John Gilbert made a weak transition into the sound era, perhaps, like Joy, for reasons having to do with gender performance. A long-standing rumor held that Gilbert's career failed because, with the coming of sound, his voice was revealed to be high-pitched and decidedly un-masculine. Leatrice Fountain, the daughter of Joy and Gilbert, later noted in her biography of her father that there was in fact nothing unusual about Gilbert's voice (Fountain and Maxim). However, Joy herself noted that his screen voice did not come across well. She hinted that the problem had less to do with his actual voice and more to do with an emotional range and latitude that had been afforded to male silent film stars—in particular the matinee idol—but that had stopped being seen as acceptable after the coming of sound. In an interview with Kevin Brownlow for his *Hollywood* series, Joy stated of Gilbert's performance that

I never heard that voice because it wasn't his voice, it was the medium of sound in those days. . . and you know another thing, you see Jack was an emotional lover, [he] could breathe those heavy passionate words with meaning in them . . . it's himself coming out with those words and [the female lead] listens to them but the screen was a sensitive instrument at that time and the people in the audience weren't ready to hear those expressions with such meaning coming from a shadow . . . a man's soul being bared to the woman he loves. (Brownlow, "Leatrice Joy Interview")

Prior to the sound era, performing for film meant engaging in highly stylized forms of acting that developed from live theater, in particular vaudeville. With the arrival of sound and dialog, the voice was expected to anchor the photographic image in a pre-existing reality, securing the authenticity of both the image and the reality from which it was supposed to have emerged. Joy, like Gilbert, enjoyed a certain flexibility of gender roles during the silent era, a flexibility that became constrained once voices were added to images and expected to conform to the gender ideals of the day. A movie era had passed with the advent of sound. Films involving cross-dressed characters continued through and beyond the arrival of sound—in fact, John Gilbert played opposite a cross-dressed Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian) in 1933. But voices were now attached to the bodies of those characters. And those voices were identified with the actors who possessed them—and thereby with the gendered bodies of those actors. In 1926, *The Clinging Vine* was able to play at the boundaries of gender and performance. After the arrival of sound, there was less room for such play.

THE AUTHOR: Johanna Schmertz is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Houston-Downtown, where she teaches courses in film and gender studies. She has applied feminist and queer theory to a range of popular culture texts, publishing in *Pedagogy*, *Rhetoric Review*, and *Postscript*. This is her first foray into archival research.

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Viktoria Paranyuk

Riding Horses, Writing Stories: Josephine Rector's Career at Western Essanay¹

ABSTRACT: Josephine Rector's fleeting career in cinema is inseparable from the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, specifically its outfit in Northern California. This paper traces the contours of Rector's involvement with Essanay, in particular her contribution as a scenario writer to the western genre. As head of the scenario department from 1912 to 1914, she was responsible for both writing and selecting suitable material for two-reel adventure stories, most notably the Broncho Billy series, which inaugurated the first cowboy star played by Gilbert M. Anderson. Due to the loss of the majority of Essanay films and the absent writing credits in the extant ones, a listing of Rector's entire output is difficult if not impossible to compile. Building on the previous research about Western Essanay by the historian David Kiehn, this paper brings to light Rector's career as that of a young woman who seized the opportunity offered to women by the burgeoning film industry in 1910s United States.

Josephine Rector's career in cinema as scenario writer and actor was brief, amounting, given the evidence, to about four years, from 1911 to 1914. Due to this fact, as well as to the loss of the majority of the pictures she worked on and the absence of writing credits in the surviving work, assembling her professional profile proved elusive.

What follows is the result of my research, which draws on contemporary newspaper accounts, trade press, fan magazines in addition to several publications and archival material concerning the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company and the figures Rector was closely associated with. When one begins researching Essanay, it does not take long to realize that articles and books tend to be mostly about "Broncho Billy" Anderson, the "A" of Essanay and the legendary film cowboy. These materials are also, to a considerable extent, about Charlie Chaplin who spent less than one year, just about six months, making films under the company's lucrative contract. There is virtually nothing about Josephine Rector, whose presence at Essanay, although short-lived, coincided with the peak of the studio's success, its western outfit in particular.

As already implied, Rector's stint in the motion picture industry is inseparable from the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company. Essanay was founded in Chicago in 1907 by George K. Spoor, renter of films and distributor of screen equipment, and Gilbert M. Anderson, actor, director, and producer, who is best known for bringing to the screen the rugged western outlaw in the Broncho Billy series (Kiehn, *Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company* 1). Convinced that western adventure stories should be filmed in the real West, Anderson left Chicago, and with a small crew set off in the direction of the Rockies sometime in 1909 (Kiehn, *Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company* 10-11; Bell, *The Golden Gate and the Silver*

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I would like to thank David Kiehn who has generously provided the images that illustrate this article.



Josephine Rector.
Courtesy of Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum.

Screen 41).

In April of 1912, Anderson and his production unit, after short sojourns in Colorado and several towns in California, settled in Niles, just east of San Francisco, building a film studio and bungalows to house the company's personnel (Smith 135).

Rector's first encounter with Essanay occurred before the company's move to Niles. In late 1910 or early 1911, when Anderson's crew was filming in Los Gatos, California, the young woman, vacationing nearby, was introduced to Jack O'Brien, actor and Anderson's secretary. In conversation, Rector mentioned some story ideas to him who then encouraged her to submit them to Essanay ("Daze of Studio Days Back in Niles" 14). Evidently O'Brien and Anderson were impressed by her stories, as shortly thereafter Rector was hired to write for the company for fifteen dollars a week and occasionally get in front of the camera for three (Strobel 8–9). Soon after this incident, however, Anderson and the crew moved south for the winter while Rector stayed behind in San Francisco where she lived with her two sons. Around this time, a personal tragedy struck: her oldest son died. When the company returned to northern California in the spring of 1911, they set up shop in San Rafael for seven months, and Rector was rehired. She began to commute to San Rafael to write as well as act. *Across the Plains* (Gilbert M. Anderson), her first film written for the western Essanay, was released in April 1911. It was advertised in the *Bioscope* as "a dramatic picture that will arouse your fighting blood" ("Popular Essanay Photoplays" suppl. xxii). The story concerns father and daughter driving a prairie wagon, being pursued by Indians, and eventually saved by a cowboy. *The Moving Picture World* claimed, "[a]n audience will be pleased with this picture" ("Comments on the Films" 842). One print of the film survives and is presently at the British Film Institute.

Rector's background seems to have prepared her well for acting in and writing for westerns. Josephine Pickel (her maiden name, 1885-1958) grew up on a ranch in Montana and was no stranger to riding on horseback and the rough-and-tumble, outdoorsy way of life. In the late 1890s she trailed her father, a miner, a long way over the Chilkoot Pass, to scramble for gold in the frigid waters of the Yukon (La Roche 85). In a May 1914 profile for the *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, Rector talked about realizing that she had wanted to learn how to "speak" those things she knew" by virtue of her adventurous background, a desire that prompted her move to San Francisco where she participated in amateur theater (La Roche 85).

This 1914 *Motion Picture* article, "A New Profession for Women," profiling women scenario writers, was advertised as "life stories, pictures, and the daily work of leading photoplay editors" (155). The author describes Rector as "the little lady who presides at the Essanay desk" and for whom "[h]alf the time a chair is too tame a saddle . . . and she is out in the open—riding, posing, climbing, 'bucking' her cheeks up to the color of Oregon apples. For Miss Rector is also one of G. M. Anderson's leads, and plays before the camera when she isn't writing or editing" (La Roche 85). The interviewee confessed that she had equally liked doing both, writing and acting. In a much later interview, only several months before her death,

the former scenario writer and actor reminisced about the scars she had acquired during her movie days, since “there were no doubles then,” she noted (Strobel 8-S). Rector could have very well been one of the women actors that Gertrude Price enthusiastically wrote about on the pages of many Midwestern newspapers in the early 1910s—“an athletic girl who runs, rides and rows with all the freedom and agility of a boy” (Abel, 143).

The *Motion Picture Story Magazine* profile evidently came out a month after Rector had already left Essanay, for in the same issue under the rubric “Greenroom Jottings,” it is announced that “Miss Josephine Rector has resigned from the Western Essanay Company and is now at Haywood (sic), Cal.” (La Roche 125). Although most recent histories suggest that she acted only occasionally, the contemporary press accounts unequivocally indicate that Rector was one of the leads often playing opposite G.M. Anderson. “Her acting,” says the already mentioned profile, “shines out from ‘most every Western Essanay release’” (La Roche 85). In a 1958 interview for the *Oakland Tribune*, Rector mentioned that as head of the company’s scenario department, she “either wrote or selected the scripts for more than 100 westerns” (Strobel 8-S). As an actor, she appeared in about sixty shorts between 1911 and 1914 (Wiersema 2).

The majority of the films produced by Essanay at Niles during Rector’s tenure were one- and two-reel western adventure stories with “Broncho Billy” Anderson at the helm, as well as comedies featuring such characters as Alkali Ike and Slippery Slim. It is certain that it was the former, western adventure reels, with their gripping narratives, strong heroes living by a code of moral values, and magnificent setting of the real West that particularly captured nickelodeon and theater audiences of the early 1910s across the United States and made G. M. Anderson a celebrity (Bell, “Making Films in the Old West” 4; Smith 133–153).

While, allegedly, Rector did not have, or need, a double in her onscreen exploits, Anderson had several because the horsemanship of the famous cowboy star left much to be desired. Gilbert M. Anderson is credited with establishing the prototype of the movie cowboy in the character of Broncho Billy, a rugged western outlaw with a heart of gold who almost always in the conclusion of the film returns to or rediscovers the integrity of middle-class values (Smith 142). Andrew Brodie Smith has pointed out that although cowboy characters “figured in cinema since the medium’s inception, Anderson’s ‘Broncho Billy’ was among the first film audiences could readily identify” (133).

The first reels of the Broncho Billy series appeared in 1910 with *Broncho Billy’s Redemption*, prior to Rector’s arrival on the scene. However, the years she worked at Essanay coincided with the enormous popular success garnered by these films. In March of 1913, *The Bisbee Daily Review* proclaimed: “It is safely said that more Broncho Billy pictures are used than any other production on the market and over 100 copies of this famous brand are sold each week in the United States alone” (“Prime Attraction Is This Card at Lowell” 5).

Many who worked with G. M. Anderson spoke of his difficult, autocratic personality on the set. In a candid interview in the *Hayward Daily Review*, Hal Angus, Essanay actor and

Rector's second husband, remarked that while "Anderson was a production genius," he was a difficult boss, who "drove his people just like he'd drive his automobile" (Wiersema 2; Bell, "Making Films in the Old West" 7). Rector's professional relationship with the screen outlaw was stormy at least on one occasion. In January of 1912 Anderson decided to move the company south, to Lakeside, seeking better weather conditions. When he asked Rector whether she would join the unit, she replied, "No, I've had enough of you" (Wiersema 2). However, when three months later Anderson and the group came back to the Bay Area, settling in Niles, Josephine went to work for Essanay once more.

Whatever difficulties their professional relationship endured, Anderson clearly valued the young woman's contribution, writing her from Lakeside: "Send all the stories you have and also let me know how your account stands I appreciate your work and realize you are a great help to us. Let me hear from you" (Kiehn, "Those Essanay People" 8). This time, upon rejoining Essanay at Niles, she was appointed chief of the scenario department—a one-person operation—for a salary of 25 dollars a week. Together with her son Jem, Rector moved to Niles (Kiehn, *Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company* 97).

During her tenure as head of the scenario department, from April 1912 until her departure in April 1914, Rector wrote original scenarios as well as selected and edited suitable material for them. Anderson shot quickly, at a rate of about one or two films a week—at times more—keeping the scenarist busy. Four decades later, in an *Oakland Tribune* interview, Rector—then Mrs. Hal Angus—confessed, "a good portion of our best scripts came from pulp magazines and the shelves of the Oakland Public Library" (Strobel 8-S). No scenario penned by her has been found as of yet and nothing seems to have survived in her family, but The Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum in the Bay Area has a collection of stories and scenarios by Amanda Buckham, who worked at the Chicago Essanay studio from 1911 to 1913 and freelanced afterward. Buckham's stories are generally about two pages. These scenarios consist of numbered scenes of up to forty-five and describe the set and action in a few sentences each (Kiehn, personal interview via email). My assumption is that Rector's scenarios were somewhat similar in format.

The *Oakland Tribune* interview refers to *The Dance at Eagle Pass* (Lloyd Ingraham, 1913) as Rector's crowning filmic achievement (Strobel 8-S). She both wrote and starred in it. Unfortunately, as a great majority of the Essanay films, it is not extant. The story is interesting for its use of forensic ballistics that in the end helps apprehend the real villain. Anderson did not much care for sophisticated plots, being more concerned with conveying immediate action—be it a fistfight or a chase on horseback—romanticized notions of the Old West, and the triumph of a valiant hero. Rector, however, seems to have injected more ingenious narrative lines when she was involved in the writing process as was the case with *The Dance at Eagle Pass* (Lundquist 41). It is worthwhile to point out that following Rector's departure, Anderson frequently recycled Essanay plots from the previous years in order to continue to turn out the Broncho Billy series (Bell, "Making Films in the Old West" 7).



The Dance at Eagle Pass (Lloyd Ingraham, 1913).
Courtesy of Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum.

Due to the reasons described in the beginning of this paper, a list of Rector's complete output is impossible to compile. The presence of her name in film books devoted to early American film is sporadic at best. One of the principal reference sources on silent cinema, Spehr's *American Film Personnel and Company Credits, 1908-1920*, has no mention of her. *A Guide to Silent Westerns* credits Rector for the following three films: as a scenario writer and cast member in *Broncho Billy's Reason* (Gilbert M. Anderson, 1913), actress in *The Dance at Silver Gulch* (Arthur Mackley, 1912) and *The Cast of the Die* (Jess Robbins, 1914) (Langman 57, 74, 102). *The Braff Silent Short Film Working Papers* lists her as an actress also in *The Cast of the Die* and *A Gambler's Way* (Lloyd Ingraham, 1914). Anthony Slide, in his book *Early American Cinema*, in the chapter titled "The Role of Women," acknowledges the significance of women in the early American film industry and profiles a group of forgotten characters involved with all aspects of cinema, including writing; unfortunately, Rector's contribution escapes these pages. Her involvement with cinema was fleeting, nonetheless her work played

a key role in the success of the western Essanay studio, as well as in championing the genre of American film that was to realize its full potential several decades later in Hollywood.

David Kiehn, film historian and author of the book *Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company*, extensively researched the company's history and people. He compiled Rector's filmography, which consists of twenty-two titles—where her credit has been decidedly established—accounting both for her writing and acting output. Five of these are extant. Through my research I was able to augment the filmography slightly.

During Rector's work at Essanay from 1911 to 1914 the studio produced just over 200 films in San Rafael and Niles. Knowing that she was in charge of the scenario department for the last two years, it is unequivocal that her contribution significantly exceeds the twenty-two or even fifty films during this period as either writer or editor of scripts.

From my research it is clear that she was at the height of her career when she left Essanay



Josephine Rector in her office at Essanay.
Courtesy of Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum.

in 1914 and very likely intended to move to Hollywood, as did several of her colleagues. As mentioned above, that year she was profiled in the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* as head of the scenario department and actor. The *Anaconda Standard* announced in March 1914, less than a month before Rector's departure, that assistant scenario writer had been hired due to Rector's growing ambition to become "a real motion picture actress," which seems to contradict her pronouncement in the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* profile of liking both writing and acting in equal measure ("The Stage. Theatrical Calendar" 8). Another newspaper account, under "Gossip of Film World," announced: "Miss Josephine Rector, who has been with the Essanay company for four years, has severed her connection and expects to join another company soon" (15).

Her move to Hollywood, however, never came to pass. A few months later she married a fellow actor Hal Angus, and together they attempted to start their own film outfit, the Pacific Motion Picture Company, which was short-lived, and as far as can be ascertained, it released no films. The Anguses ran a flower shop in Hayward, California, until 1926, and in the subsequent years it appears that Josephine Angus became a homemaker (Kiehn, "Those Essanay People" 9).

Notwithstanding the brevity of Rector's career, this research contributes, however infinitesimally, to filling the gap that has been steadily closing with recent scholarship on women's early contribution to the motion picture industry. It also places her alongside such important women figures as Frances Marion, Lois Weber, June Mathis, Jeanie Macpherson and others like them who dominated scenario departments in the 1910s. Rector entered the scene during the moment when the American film industry was undergoing profound transformations on a number of levels. As Shelley Stamp remarks in *Movie-Struck Girls*, "[c]inema's visual grammar, its narrative paradigms, its industrial structure, its social standing, and its audience base all solidified" between 1908 and 1915 (3). Embodying certain aspects of the "new woman" in the beginning of her professional adventures—a single mother living in the urban environment of San Francisco, striving for economic independence—Rector belongs to a generation that was testing the waters of a nascent industry, which at the time offered women a range of exciting opportunities, including creative self-expression and financial self-reliance.

Most challenging about this research project was the incompleteness and fragmentary character of found evidence coupled with the inevitable sense of discontent that often accompanies historical inquiry. To let go and realize that what I discovered might be all there is was a hard but important learning experience. Perhaps in the future additional bits and pieces will surface as more material enters the digital universe, but the "complete picture," in any case, can never be put together. While it is impossible to determine the exact quantity of Josephine Rector's contribution—and in the end it may not be that crucial—her role in the success of one of the most prominent motion picture companies at the time is unquestionable and must be acknowledged.

THE AUTHOR: Having graduated with an M.A. in Film Studies from Columbia University in 2011, Viktoria Paranyuk is currently in the joint doctoral program Film Studies and Slavic Languages & Literatures at Yale University. Her research interests revolve around Russian visual culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including interaction between various image making practices and science. Her other academic pursuits involve Russian *émigré* cinema in 1920s France, early transnational stardom, and women in silent film.

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Luciana Corrêa de Araújo

Movie Prologues: Cinema, Theater and Female Types on Stage at Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro

ABSTRACT: Between 1925 and 1926, film exhibitor Francisco Serrador built four new movie-theaters in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). Large and luxurious, they took as their model New York's movie palaces. Also inspired by successful North American film exhibition practices, Serrador introduced to audiences the novelty of movie prologues. These were stage presentations based on the theme, characters, dialogue or scenes from the film that was about to be screened. This article investigates how movie prologues established a close relationship with Brazilian culture, especially by adopting much of the structure, types and attractions from teatro de revista (a Brazilian variant of the vaudeville). It also analyzes the female types portrayed in such attractions: the maid, the modern woman, and the mulata.

Between 1925 and 1926, movie-theater owner Francisco Serrador's long-cherished project of building the Cinelândia film theater complex in Rio de Janeiro finally became a reality. Serrador was a Spanish born businessman who already had an established career in the field of entertainment. The project involved large-scale investment to build several cinemas in the area of Praça Floriano Peixoto. It also involved real estate business, since the upper floors of the buildings were for sale or for rent. With the opening of the Capitólio, Glória and Império theaters (respectively in April, September and November 1925), and then of the Odeon theatre (in April 1926), the city of Rio de Janeiro for the first time had luxury movie houses. But Serrador's "white elephants," as they were called, initially met some resistance from audiences, who, for the same price, could buy tickets to the more popular theaters of the region or to movie houses where they could see a feature film with stage presentations in the intervals. To overcome this resistance and to attract audiences to his new movie palaces, Serrador introduced a novel attraction imported from the United States: the movie prologue.

Movie prologues were stage presentations that preceded the screenings. Although it is difficult to give a precise date when prologues stopped being produced—by the end of 1926, or mid-1927 at the latest¹—they are important, in that they reveal the ways in which local theatrical and performative practices developed a satirical, and often even critical reading of North-American film production and culture. Taking the form of brief sketches accompanied by song and dance numbers and referring to the theme, characters, or dialogue of the forthcoming feature film, they open up a critical space for a historical reflection on gender, as well as on the dialogue between film and theater.

¹ The production of prologues at the time of the transition from silent films to talkies in the United States is the subject of Lloyd Bacon's *Footlight parade* (1933).



Rio de Janeiro, Praça Floriano Peixoto.

Local Content

This novelty of the movie prologues that were set-up at the Cinelândia theaters reproduced a type of stage performance that had already proved a success in North American movie palaces. Indeed, Serrador's inspiration for both the Cinelândia project and the prologues came from New York, where movie palaces as the Capitol, the Rialto, and the Strand enjoyed the contribution of such an inventive theater manager as Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel. From 1911 to the end of the silent era, as Ross Melnick points out, Rothafel "was heralded for his achievements in producing live entertainment and musical accompaniment for the feature films he presented, often in aesthetic or thematic tandem to the motion picture" (18).

However, while the idea of the prologues was imported from the United States, their content was not. To produce the sketches, Francisco Serrador contracted Luiz de Barros, a filmmaker, along with a group of publicity employees, from Paramount's Brazilian office.



1. Prologue to *Orphans of the Storm* (D.W. Griffith. 1921).

Photographs of some of the settings, reproduced in the *Cinearte* magazine, show impressively large-scale scenery, elaborate decorations and extensive casts. For the opening of the Odeon theatre in 1925, for example, around a dozen artists performed in the prologue before the screening of *Graustark* (Dimitri Buchowetzki, 1925). For D.W. Griffith's *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), a palace hall was set up on the stage of the Glória theater, with ten artists adorned with hooped dresses, stockings and wigs. These figures portrayed the French aristocracy in the midst of the French Revolution [fig.1]. Also at the Glória, Moorish scenery was put up for the prologue to Raoul Walsh's *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924).²

Because the producers had to submit the scripts to censorship, the prologues's texts have been preserved, and today they can be accessed at the Arquivo Nacional in Rio de Janeiro.³

² See the "Cinema e cinematographistas" column in *Cinearte*: Apr. 28, 1926; Aug. 18, 1926; Aug. 25, 1926.

³ Censorship visa collection of the 2nd Delegacia Auxiliar da Polícia do Rio de Janeiro [subsidiary Rio de Janeiro police department]. The research for this study involved consulting the text of sixteen prologues, all of which were submitted to censorship between April and July 1926. More documentation is available that require

The sixteen prologues I investigated (see Araújo, “Prólogos envenenados”) include dramas and comedies, most of which were accompanied by song and dance numbers. A suspenseful ending was not unusual—this would provide a hook for the main feature, which began shortly afterwards. The prologues of a comic type took the films’ plots as their inspiration to create sketches that closely resembled the popular *teatro de revista* (a Brazilian variant of the vaudeville), with the appearance of stock types and the use of colloquial, humorous and sometimes licentious dialogue, double meanings, allusions to politics and current affairs, in addition to the song and dance numbers, which almost all prologues have in common.

Parody is stronger in those prologues that were written by the publicity employees of Paramount’s Brazilian office, all of them featuring Brazilian men: Annibal Pacheco, Benjamin Fineberg and Celestino Silveira. *Vaqueiro estilizado* (stylized cowboy, Pacheco, Silveira, 1926), the prologue to Buster Keaton’s *Go West* (1925) stages a comic dialogue between a Portuguese milkman, Manuel, and one of his customers, a maid called Henriqueta. Having visited “the Americas” the milkman now wants to be called “Buster Keaton” and claims he is the spitting image of the artist. The double meanings and humorous misunderstandings revolve around the word “mulata,” referring to both the woman the milkman lives with and his cow. Boasting that he met Rudolph Valentino in the United States, the milkman remarks: “Look how much milk Randolpho Banselina drank from my *Mulata*.” (“Banselina” is a pun for “vaseline” and makes fun of the actor’s impeccably smooth and glossy hair). At the end, the *mulata*, his wife, appears in person, catching the Portuguese man when he makes advances towards the maid. The sketch is a parade of character types (the Portuguese immigrant, the *mulata*, the maid) from the *teatro de revista*, in a parody that contrasts Hollywood’s representation of the Old West with the typical everyday life of a Rio de Janeiro suburb.

One of the prologues that received the most savage attacks in *Cinearte* was the accompanying piece for *The King on Main Street* (Monta Bell, 1925), a comedy starring Adolph Menjou. In this prologue, entitled *Se Augusto Annibal fosse rei...* (if Augusto Annibal were king..., Pacheco, Fineberg and Vieira, 1926), the king is unable to decide whether to marry a princess, who has just arrived, or to take out a loan from a South American country in order to save his country from bankruptcy. The king asks to call the princess’s maid. The dialogue between the two is exactly in the same style of the later big screen *chanchadas* [musical comedy films], a genre that would be flourishing in Brazilian cinema across the following three decades. The sexually explicit double meanings appear to have overstepped the mark, leading to a section being cut out by the censors [fig.2].

The prologue continues with the king urging the maid to give up her work for the princess and come to live in his castle. Finally, after the first chords of the overture to the opera *O Guarani*, the song “Maria Antonieta” and the triumphal march from *Aida*, the arrival is announced of Princess Ignacia de Loyolla, of the Kingdom of Carvonía.⁴ The stage directions

further research.

⁴ A crasis of *carvão* [coal] and the Latin suffix *onia* [property], meaning “the land of coal.”

COMPANHIA PELLICULAS DE LUXO
DA AMERICA DO SUL

- SE AUGUSTO ANNIBAL FOSSE REI... -

Prologo

do "film" "LE ROI S'AMUSE" (S.Magestade Diverte-se...)
pela
Secção de Publicidade Paramount.

Salão do throno real, vendo-se, praticavel, em dimensões exageradas, o throno.

Scena vasia, ao abrir da cortina. Escuta-se uma ligeira marcha. Rufo de tambores. Clarins.

MORDOMO

(Entra, perfila-se, frente para a platéa) Sua Magestade El-Rei Alexis Petrovitch Estrokoff, Grão-Duque de Broca-Verrumasky, Sergio IV, Imperador da Molvania e todos os dominios annexos, pela graça de Deus - e as suas bellas qualidades!

(Clarins.Rufo de tambores. Entram dois arautos, seguidos pelo Rei.

S.MAGESTADE

(compenetrado, cerimonioso, dirige-se para o throno) Então, pessoal? que ha de novo na zona?

MORDOMO

Saiba V.Magestade que esta noite as ruas da cidade fôram theatro de diversos disturbios, conflictos e até mesmo de uma tentativa de apedrejamento ao palacio. O povo, em altos brados, reclama os seus direitos...

S.MAGESTADE

Ingraçado! Eu não ouvi nada! Dormi como um anjo. E que querem, afinal, esses pobres diabos?

MORDOMO

O povo da Molvania exige a abdicação de Vossa Real Magestade, caso não

848

Supervis

*Resistor n. 312.
22. de abril. 1924*

27/1/1926

2. Front page of the script *Se Augusto Annibal fosse rei...* [if Augusto Annibal would be king...], prologue to *The King on Main Street* (Monta Bell, 1925), with a censored dialogue.

describe the character as “a pitch-black negress, quite ludicrous.” When he sets his eyes on her, the prince “falls in a faint onto his throne” (*Se Augusto Annibal fosse rei...* Censorship visa 312 8).

A Mixed Reception

Sometimes the description of the prologues' plots in local magazines emphasize their ridiculous side. The *Selecta* and *Cinearte* magazines (which regarded themselves as staunch defenders of morality and good manners) criticized the licentiousness of the prologues and adopted a pejorative and recriminatory tone in their assessment of them. The articles often stirred up deep-rooted prejudices regarding skin-color, class and gender. An editorial in *Cinearte*, for instance, attacks the supposed “misrepresentation” of some prologues, which fail to establish any relation whatsoever with the film, as in the case of a film about “the thrilling issue of divorce.” The prologue, we are explained,

was about the discovery of Brazil by Pedro Álvares Cabral or something like this. With talking, singing and dancing! But that's not the worst of it.

To welcome Cabral, a mulata from the favela appears on scene and the two begin a dialogue in coarse slang, with clumsy gestures, obscure phrases, double meanings, and even outright obscenities, which may well be the ingredients of an outstanding success in certain seedier parts of the city, but which, thrown in the face of the ladies and gentlemen who frequent these new entertainment establishments, are nothing more than a veritable insult to their good taste and education.⁵ (“Segundo prologo ou siga o prologo” 3)

Consolidated as a “national symbol” in the 1920s, the *mulata*—e.g. the mulatto woman, defined by historian Tiago de Melo Gomes as someone “characterized as having some degree of African ascendance, visible in her appearance, but also distinguished by a performance that suggested a remarkable sexuality to observers”—appears to welcome Portuguese navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral when he discovers Brazil. Critical of a carnivalesque scene that is built over the same irreverent, almost nonsensical humor that will inspire countless Brazilian sound film comedies as well as popular Carnival songs, *Cinearte* presents itself as a defender of educated ladies and gentlemen.⁶

⁵ “O prólogo referia-se à descoberta do Brasil por Pedro Álvares Cabral ou coisa semelhante. E isso falado, cantado e dançado! Mas isso não é o pior. Para receber o Cabral aparecia logo uma mulata do Favella e começavam os dois a dialogar em gíria das gentes malandras, com gestos do maior desgarre, frases de calão obscuro, de duplo sentido, ou antes de sentido torpe, que podem ser elementos de grande, excepcional sucesso em certas zonas escusas, mas que atirados à face do público fino que constitui a clientela dos novos estabelecimentos de diversão constituem verdadeiros ultrajes à sua educação e ao seu bom gosto” (translated by Paul Webb and the author).

⁶ As in the song “História do Brasil”: “Quem foi que inventou o Brasil?/ Foi seu Cabral!/ Foi seu Cabral!/ No dia vinte e um de abril/ Dois meses depois do carnaval” [who was the one who invented Brazil?/ it was Mr. Cabral!/ it was Mr. Cabral!/ on April 22/ two months after Carnival].



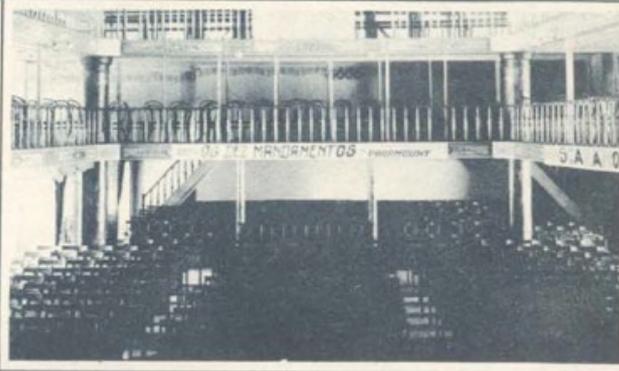
FACHADA DO CAPITOLIO, DO RIO, NO DIA EM QUE EXHIBIU A "IRMÃ BRANCA", DA M. G.



Abriu-se no Rio de Janeiro mais um Cinema, o Batuta, instalado á rua Senador Pompeu.

CINEMAS E CINEMATOGRAFISTAS

"Cinearte" publicará toda e qualquer photographia de fachadas, prologos e outros detalhes de "réclame", publicidade e apresentação.



FACHADA E INTERIOR DO RIO BRANCO, DE ARACAJÚ, NO DIA EM QUE APRESENTAVA "MADAME SANS-GÊNE", DA PARAMOUNT.



FACHADA DO PATHÉ, DO RIO, QUANDO EXHIBIA, "MÃE É SEMPRE MÃE", DA UNIVERSAL.



FIGURAS QUE TOMARAM PARTE NO PROLOGO DE "AMOR DE PRÍNCIPE", NO ODEON, DO RIO.

3. "Cinemas e cinematographistas," *Cinearte*, 28 Apr. 1926.

Throughout 1926, both *Cinearte* and *Selecta* continued to publish editorials and commentaries that were harshly critical of the prologues' content. At the heart of the controversy, there was an ingrained prejudice against popular theater. This was considered a lower form of entertainment, scarcely adequate to introduce first-class Hollywood productions to the respectable audience that was the target of the American films programmed at the new movie palaces. The journalists who wrote against prologues expected the Cinelândia complex to attract Rio de Janeiro's social elite, while film exhibitors showed a different approach, choosing to strengthen ties with other forms of popular entertainment in order to attract a broader and more diverse audience.

Although they were all great admirers of the Hollywood industry, these journalists did not advocate (and perhaps were not aware of) similar exhibition practices in the North-American motion picture market. According to Richard Koszarski, from 1915 to 1928 "exhibitors considered themselves showmen, not film programmers. The feature motion picture was only one part of an evening's entertainment" (9). Taking that into account, Melnick stresses that the original theatrical silent film experience, "with its live performances and (sometimes improvised) musical accompaniment, is in fact largely irreproducible, like any live performance, based both on its unpredictability, its spontaneity, and the physiological realities of liveness" (15). Melnick adds that "the interpolation of live and recorded media could be found from coast to coast and overseas" (12).

In England, for instance, mixed-media exhibition enjoyed a boost in the 1920s. Analyzing the cultural interpenetration of theatre and film during this period, Christine Gledhill covers not only movie prologues but also filmic projections employed in live drama and other examples of integration of cinema and live performance. She mentions, for instance, the cases of the American actor George Beban and the British star Ivor Novello, who both successfully performed at the same time on stage and on screen, interacting with their own projected images during the presentation of their films. Gledhill observes that "such practices met with varying approval from different audience groups, distinguishing the broad popular audience from an intelligentsia concerned with the potential of film as a distinctive form" (13).

Movie prologues (as, more generally, the interaction between cinema and stage) aroused similar, mixed and sometimes contradictory, responses in Brazil too, as again we can observe in the pages of *Cinearte*. While, as I mentioned above, it continued to attack the prologues, the magazine also took a position favoring them in the column "Cinema e cinematographistas" [moving pictures and movie-makers] [fig.3]. Although not a trade periodical, *Cinearte* used this section to address professionals, and especially exhibitors. The column called for "any photograph of movie house façades, prologues and any other 'promotional' features, publicity and presentation" ("Cinema e cinematographistas," *Cinearte* Apr. 28, 1926 31). Here, unlike in other sections, prologues had a space of encouragement and appreciation.

Female bodies and female characters played an important role in the movie prologues. Famous women artists (actresses, singers, dancers) allowed the prologues to take advantage of the star system already established by other recent popular stage traditions, such as the *teatro de revista*. From the *teatro de revista* also came most of the structures, characters and attractions deployed in the movie prologues. The sketches, especially the comic ones, borrowed traditional characters from popular stage entertainment, including female types such as the maid and the *mulata*. Both of these types were sexually charged characters. The fact that they belonged to a lower class means that all kinds of malicious dialogues and flirtations were allowed. The reference to their sexual accessibility was constantly repeated, although this does not mean they were always portrayed as subservient. In *Vaqueiro estilizado*, for example, the maid maliciously mocks the milkman who tries to make advances towards her (Censorship Visa 331 7).

When it comes to the *mulata* characters, the issue of race is ambivalent. The *mulata* is often represented as a sexual object, as a “symbol of the intensified sexuality usually associated to African descendants” (Gomes 44). At the same time, however, the exuberant sexuality is just one aspect of this emblematic, contradictory figure. Both *Vaqueiro estilizado* and *Se Augusto Annibal fosse rei...* expose, in different degrees, the negative cultural stereotype embodied by the *mulata* and the afro-descendant woman characters. This is illustrated by the way in which these figures are reduced to animal-like caricatures, ridiculous types that reject the subjects they represent by reducing them to merely grotesque images. As the anthropologist Mariza Corrêa argues:

I believe that the figure of the *mulata* as built in our social imaginary contributes, in terms of racial classification, to expose the contradiction between an assertion of our racial democracy and the flagrant social inequality between whites and non-whites in our country. . . . However, in terms of gender classification, as she embodies in such an explicit manner the White Masculine desire, the *mulata* also reveals the rejection that this embodiment hides: the rejection of the black negro woman.⁷ (49–50)

Even if the prologues reinforced a considerable amount of prejudice and stereotype, it is evident that they promoted an interesting mixture of subjects, characters, foreign and national elements, highbrow and lowbrow culture. They were in a vivid dialogue with the audience’s cultural repertory, combining elements of both tradition and modernity. They did not ignore, for instance, the changes that were affecting women’s habits. In particular,

⁷ “Acredito que a mulata construída em nosso imaginário social contribui, no âmbito das classificações raciais, para expor a contradição entre a afirmação de nossa democracia racial e a flagrante desigualdade social entre brancos e não brancos em nosso país. . . . Mas, no âmbito das classificações de gênero, ao encarnar de maneira tão explícita o desejo do Masculino Branco, a mulata também revela a rejeição que essa encarnação esconde: a rejeição à negra preta” (translated by Paul Webb and the author).

two prologues by Luiz de Barros present modern women characters. *Mulheres modernas* (1926) takes place in a cabaret, where old Madame X dances with her gigolo, mocks her old husband and sniffs cocaine, while the Austrian ballerina Valery Oeser performs a “futurist dance.” (*Mulheres modernas*. Censorship Visa 304 2). *Parisina* (Luiz de Barros, 1926), maybe the prologue to *Mademoiselle Midnight* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1926), presents some typical Parisian characters, including the *femme fatale* and the *garçonne*. The first one just crosses the stage, while the *garçonne* introduces herself by means of a song: she is the *garçonne chic*, who has turned habits upside down; she has shortened her hair and her skirt; she borrows everything from men, except trousers (*Parisina*. Censorship Visa 345 1-3).

How did Brazilian film culture deal with and represent changes in women’s habits? The movie prologues react with both fascination and criticism. On the one hand, the modern woman is seen as a powerful sign of an increasingly cosmopolitan, mundane lifestyle, connected to the world’s latest trends. As the country’s capital city at the time, Rio de Janeiro would have to embrace the modernity portrayed in these prologues. On the other hand, it was not easy for the traditional, patriarchal Brazilian society to cope with the deep changes related to modern women’s new lifestyles. While, as we have seen, the representation of characters associated to the lower classes—the *mulata* and the maid characters—turned them into sexual objects, the sketches that revolved around figures of modern bourgeois women tended to emphasize the masculine aspects of their attitude (hair, clothes, sexual behavior), in such a way so as to criticize changes in gender roles.

Although the treatment of these characters (the maid, the *mulata*, the modern woman) reaffirmed traditional views on gender, race and class through the use of stereotypes, the representation of types already repeatedly exploited in other forms of popular entertainment also contributed to the development of a unique, locally produced reading of the foreign films that were screened at Cinelândia. Quite importantly, this reading was not subordinated to the meaning of the original, imported film. In the prologues staged in the cinemas of Rio de Janeiro, the prevailing Hollywood model was given a reinterpretation through parody, as well as through the incorporation of characters and situations that were already familiar to theater audiences—the same audiences the new movie palaces wanted to attract.

In their analysis of early cinema’s representation of the female figures as “regularly coded” and “recognizable types,” Pierre Chemartin and Nicolas Dulac point out that such stereotypes ought be considered also with regard to their effectiveness (*efficacité*): “since they always carry a simplification, stereotypes must be immediately intelligible, relying heavily on schematization, caricature and spectacular devices” (155).⁸ Moreover,

This strategy is part of a certain movement that appears in different institutions of popular entertainment, institutions that do not give any particular importance to such values as the

⁸ “. . . les figures stéréotypales, puisqu’elles procèdent toujours d’une simplification, se présentent de manière à être immédiatement intelligibles, en misant beaucoup sur la schématisation, le caricatural ou le spectaculaire” (translated by author).

plot's originality or its edifying character, as advocated by the representatives of the "belle lettres" and the naturalistic theatre, but favour instead the spectacular dimension, the simple variation of familiar situations, which belongs to traditional folklore and popular rituals. Moreover, the situations described above are by no means exclusive to the cinema, but can also easily be found in the roman-feuilleton, the vaudeville theatre, the comics etc.⁹ (148)

Despite the historical and geographical distance, it is possible to refer these remarks to the case of Brazilian movie prologues too. The use of stereotypes that were instantly recognizable to the local audience articulated an appealing attraction based on local interpretations of foreign (and especially Hollywood) films. Stereotypes work as invaluable tools for the movie prologue genre, helping it to "find its audience"—and "to find an audience" has always been a challenge to Brazilian cinema. It is not surprising that prologues—in particular the comic ones, with their exuberant predilection for parody—reveal a close affinity with representational strategies which would become the stock-in-trade of Brazilian popular cinema after the introduction of the talking pictures, from Luiz de Barros' comedies of the 1930s and 1940s, to the popular *chanchadas* produced between the 1940s and the early 1960s.

The short season of the movie prologues preceded the arrival of the talking pictures in Brazil by only a few years. The first Brazilian feature film with synchronized sound, *Acabaram-se os otários* (gone are the morons, Luiz de Barros), was released in 1929. Two years later, Luiz de Barros directed *O babão* (the slobberer, 1931), a musical comedy that, like so many satirical prologues, was also a parody of a huge Hollywood hit, *The pagan* (W.S. Dyke, 1929), starring Ramon Novarro.

The use of a colloquial language style, the double meanings, the everyday situations and popular types, the recourse to song and dance routines to punctuate the main plot, the parodistic approach to imported foreign models are all major features of both the Brazilian movie prologue genre and the Brazilian film comedies and *chanchadas* of the talking era.

THE AUTHOR: Luciana Corrêa de Araújo is an Associate Professor of Theory and History of Film and Audiovisual Media at the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar), Brazil. Her research interests revolve around Brazilian cinema history, focusing on Brazilian silent cinema, and film criticism. She is the author of *A crítica de cinema no Recife dos anos 50* [film criticism in Recife in the 1950s] (1997) and *Joaquim Pedro de Andrade: primeiros tempos* [Joaquim Pedro de Andrade: the early days] (2013).

⁹ "Cette stratégie s'inscrit dans une certaine mouvance qui apparaît dans différentes institutions de divertissement populaire, institutions qui ne valorisaient pas tant l'originalité du récit et son caractère édifiant—preconisés par les 'belles-lettres' ou le théâtre naturaliste, par exemple—que la dimension spectaculaire, la simple variation de situations bien connues, faisant partie du folklore ou des croyances populaires. D'ailleurs, les situations décrites ci-dessus ne sont en rien exclusives au cinéma, mas se retrouvent également dans le roman-feuilleton, le vaudeville, le *comic strip*, etc" (translated by author).

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