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Behind the Great Man
Female Screenwriters and Collaborative Authorship in Early Hollywood

The predominance of the auteur theory in cinema studies has been a double-edged sword, each benefit attended by a disadvantage. While it mitigated the primacy of the Hollywood system, it posited in its place the equally problematic figure of the director as the sole source of meaning-making in filmmaking. While it has brought to light a worthy list of previously unappreciated films and directors, it has also been justly criticized for reinforcing the centrality of white, male directors, and exacerbating the marginalization of other voices. And while it has provided an invaluable identificatory and analytic framework for film theorists, it has also fostered an essentialist, and often ahistorical, conception of film authorship. The cult of the male director, for instance, has obscured the remarkable contributions of female screenwriters to the early cinema. Throughout the silent era, and into the thirties, a majority of the screen's foremost scenarists were women, with luminaries like Alice Guy Blache, Anita Loos, Elinor Glyn, Lois Weber, Francis Marion, Beulah Marie Dix, June Mathis, Jeanie MacPherson, Marion Fairfax, and Jane Murfin achieving a considerable measure of influence within the industry and celebrity without. These screenwriters constituted a network of powerful women who outnumbered their male counterparts ten to one, a ratio that was perhaps only possible in the infancy of the cinema, when filmmaking practice had not yet been consolidated under the patriarchal hierarchy of the Hollywood system. Certainly, the masculinist slant of Hollywood's "Golden Age" and its subsequent usurping of the public interest served to efface the impact of these women on the film industry, but their prominence at a time when the narrative language of the cinema was taking shape cannot be ignored.

This essay aims to excavate and reestablish the importance of the early female screenwriters, and to posit a model of authorship that is distinguished from traditional auteur theory by its displacement of the director and the “Great Man” figure, as well as its emphasis on collaboration as the locus of Hollywood film production. I contend that authorship remains an important concept in the study of film, but that our understanding of the term needs to be decentralized and expanded to give voice to a multiplicity of authors and develop a more true-to-life picture of the filmmaking process. My research takes the form of four cases studies, focusing on productive partnerships between female screenwriters and the stars and directors typically singled out as the source of meaning in their films: Frances Marion and Mary Pickford, June Mathis and Rudolph Valentino, Jeanie MacPherson and Cecil B. DeMille, and Zoe Akins and Dorothy Arzner. Drawing from primary and secondary accounts, extant scenarios and scripts, and the films themselves, I attempt to reconstruct an image of the creative landscape of early Hollywood, where the industrial division of labor often privileged the screenwriter, granting them power over the story throughout production, influence in casting actors and choosing directors, and an on-set presence that has been largely ignored in histories of the era.

In addressing female screenwriters, my goal is not to erect a parallel history of “women’s cinema” alongside the official history of “men’s cinema,” but rather to argue that the latter, at least in the case of early cinema, is a fallacy propped up by the willful neglect of the former. In her invaluable book, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women’s Cinema*, Judith Mayne writes:

The reluctance to speak of a “female tradition” has perhaps been most influenced [...] by the fear of essentialism – the fear, that is, that any discussion of “female texts” presumes the uniqueness and

autonomy of female representation, thus validating rather than challenging the dualism of patriarchal hierarchy.¹

In this essay, I propagate the notion of a “female tradition” as an intervention in, and challenge to, the patriarchal hierarchy. Mine is not an alternative history, but a corrective to traditional histories which have mistakenly posed the early cinema as a time of male-dominated creative production. In reality, early Hollywood was a place where industrial roles had not yet been stratified, authorship was particularly diffuse, and a diversity of viewpoints, male and female, were brought to bear on the creation of a text. Indeed, female voices were actively pursued during this time, in large part because of their understanding of, and ability to speak to, a predominantly female audience base.

While some have argued that the positions available to female filmmakers at the time were limited to, or at least aligned with, socially-prescribed “woman’s work” – the emotional expression of script writing, the aesthetic embellishment of production and costume design, and, perhaps most specious, the “sewing together” of films through editing – the truth is that women were exercising great authority over production, in some cases as directors and studio executives, and were not merely resigned to the capacities permitted by men in power. As the majority of the screenwriting corps, furthermore, women had a significant hand in the creation of the Hollywood system as we know it, through the systematic development of stars, types, and genres in their scripts. In my case studies, I search out female “signatures” amongst the multitude of signatures in the constitution of a given film, but I am equally concerned with examining the forces that have consigned these important filmmakers to the footnotes of history. In this sense, I am not merely invested in “rescuing” these women and the legacy, but in investigating how the

¹ Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women’s Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 93.

work of female screenwriters has been framed, in their own time and by subsequent historians, how and why our attitudes toward authorship have changed, and what is at stake in the historical negotiation of women's impact on early Hollywood.

Spontaneous Combustion: Frances Marion and Mary Pickford

When Francis Marion's partnership with Mary Pickford started, in 1915, the two were already good friends. Both women were tireless and strong-minded, and in the other each found an ideal collaborator. Together, they produced a string of box-office hits that established Pickford as America's Sweetheart and made Marion the most highly respected, and highly paid, writer in the industry. Marion is also likely the most well-known of the early female screenwriters today, thanks in large part to Cari Beauchamp's excellent biography, *Without Lying Down: Francis Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood*. Beauchamp's book (and documentary of the same name) has been instrumental in reviving interest in Marion, and in shining a light on the influential network of women working in silent-era Hollywood. It is crucial, though, that Beauchamp's is not taken as the final word on the subject; indeed, her book should be a point of departure for further critical interrogation of the work of Marion and her comrades-in-arms in the scenario departments.

Marion's collaboration with Pickford speaks in particular to the discourse of stardom, labor, and gender in early Hollywood. Their films, which include many of Pickford's career-defining roles, from *The Poor Little Rich Girl* (1917) to *Pollyanna* (1920), offer something of a primer on the construction of a star's persona through repetition and reinforcement, a process that would become standard practice in Hollywood. Indeed, although Pickford's popularity made her one of the most powerful figures in the film industry, she felt obliged to reprise again

and again the role that made her famous, and so she continued to play the plucky preadolescent girl with long golden curls well into her twenties. She cites this obligation as her reason for eventually leaving the industry in an interview with Kevin Brownlow:

I left the screen because I didn't want what happened to Chaplin to happen to me. When he discarded the little tramp, the little tramp turned around and killed him. The little girl made me. I wasn't waiting for the little girl to kill me. I'd already been pigeonholed.²

Pickford, like Chaplin, was acutely aware of the sacrifices that stardom required; both understood that the personae that made them the biggest stars of their time were equal part meal ticket and manacle. It is from this vantage point, at the intersection of business and art, that we must approach Frances Marion's writing for Pickford. Marion was tasked with breathing life into boilerplate stories for Pickford's little girl, to satisfy audiences' simultaneous and conflicting desires for familiarity and novelty. The themes, character traits, and situations that recur throughout Marion's scenarios gave form to the reified persona of Mary Pickford; if we, following Richard Dyer, approach the star image as a text, we can say that Marion was not only Pickford's writer, but that in fact she *authored* – or *co-authored*, to be more precise – “Mary Pickford.”³

Watching their films, or reading Marion's scenarios, it is not difficult to recognize the formula at work. In nearly every film, Pickford's young women become independent in the absence of one or both parents: in *The Foundling* (1916), *Stella Maris* (1918) and *The Love Light* (1921), she plays an orphan; in *M'liss* (1918) and *Pollyanna*, she becomes an orphan when her father dies; in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1917) and *Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley* (1918), she is raised only by her mother; and in *Poor Little Rich Girl*, she is neglected by her parents, who are preoccupied with their wealth. At the same time, Pickford is often posed as a maternal

² Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By...* (New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1968), p. 135.

³ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999).

figure, assuming, at her young age, the responsibilities of mothering the younger children in the orphanage, or her less self-reliant siblings. These circumstances, of course, inspire sympathy from the audience, establish Pickford as a precocious, plucky heroine, and often set the scene for an older man to come to Pickford's rescue by marrying her and reinscribing her character into a "proper" family.

They also resonate with Pickford's much-publicized life story; Pickford was raised by her mother, Charlotte, alone, and the Pickford matriarch's influence in matters personal and professional was well documented. The two lived together in Hollywood, so that Charlotte could ensure that her famous daughter remain grounded, a safeguard as well to Pickford's inviolability in the eyes of the moviegoing public. Pickford's income allowed her to provide for her mother as well as her siblings, Lottie and Jack, to whom Pickford became a "little mother," as Lottie describes it in a 1915 *Photoplay* feature.⁴ The affinities between Pickford's on- and off-screen personae assured fans that they were getting to know the *real* Mary Pickford; Marion's scenarios, aided no doubt by her intimate friendship with Pickford, develop those affinities expertly, maintaining Pickford's star image with a remarkable consistency.

Predictably, generating film after film in the same vein wore on both Marion and Pickford. Marion's description of the production of *Pollyanna* in her autobiography captures the fatigue:

At the studio, we proceeded with the dull routine of making a picture we both thought nauseating, *Pollyanna*, the Glad Girl. I hated writing it, Mary hated playing it, yet we managed to edge in some funny little scenes in spite of our indifference.⁵

⁴ Julian Johnson, "Mary Pickford: Herself and Her Career, Part I," *Photoplay* 3 no. 6 (November 1915), p 61. Interestingly enough, Mary Pickford uses the same language in her religious tract *Why Not Try God*, where she writes that she was, since the age of five "Mother's deputy, a kind of little mother" (28).

⁵ Frances Marion, *Off With Their Heads!: A Serio-comic Tale of Hollywood* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 66-67.

The film, of course, would become one of Pickford's greatest box-office hits. If at times Marion's indifference to the formulaic Pickford scripts comes through – as it seems to, for instance, in *M'liss* when, in the midst of a murder trial, a title announces, “The plot curdles -- with the arrival of another stranger” – more often than not, the “funny little scenes” are what stand out. Marion wrote her scenarios to accommodate Pickford's comic improvisation, often including purposefully vague descriptions of the “business” in a given scene, which would be determined during filming. These unscripted episodes displayed Pickford's talent as a comedienne, and enlivened the adaptations of sometimes moribund source texts; Clarence Brown, assistant director on *The Poor Little Rich Girl*, marveled at “the Pickford-Marion spontaneous combustion” that occurred on set.⁶

Increasingly, Marion's scenarios for Pickford were structured to permit some liberation from the young girl role that audiences apparently favored. As Jeanine Basinger points out, “After [Pickford] defined her traditional persona, she generally found release from its youngster format in some way: by growing up, by having a dream or fantasy, or by playing a second, older character.”⁷ In *Stella Maris*, Pickford plays both the beautiful, young title character and the homely servant girl, Unity Blake. Stella is Pickford at her most lovely, all golden tresses and porcelain skin, while Unity, with stooped shoulders and awkward grin, gives her the opportunity to play completely against type. The result is perhaps Pickford's greatest performance, and a prime example of the brilliance of the Marion-Pickford collaboration to fulfill audience expectations while allowing Pickford to challenge herself with a new role.

⁶ Quoted in Cari Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down: Francis Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), p. 68.

⁷ Jeanine Basinger, *Silent Stars* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. 34.

The star-building collaboration between a writer and actor is not remarkable in and of itself; the same dynamic was at work in the partnerships between Anita Loos and Douglas Fairbanks, June Mathis and Rudolph Valentino, and even Marion herself with Marie Dressler and Wallace Beery, among many others. Nor was the collaboration between two women a rarity during a time when screenwriting and acting were female-dominated fields. The *extent* of Marion's writing for Pickford, on the other hand, certainly merits further discussion. Marion wrote twenty films for Pickford, but her contributions to Pickford's star persona were not limited to the screen. Beginning in November of 1915 and continuing for nearly two years, Marion ghost-wrote a syndicated column of Mary Pickford's "Daily Talks," distributed to newspapers nationwide, five days a week, by the McClure Newspaper Syndicate. Assuming the voice of her friend, Marion dispensed advice and anecdotes to Pickford's adoring fans, in the process authoring another dimension of Pickford's persona.

The amount of control that Marion was given to write Mary Pickford for the public imagination reveals exactly how much Pickford trusted Marion to create a credible and salable image that would bridge the actress' home life and the lives of her characters. Being so often "attached" to a star, the early screenwriter was in some sense a *de facto* publicist, tasked with molding audience perception of that star; Marion's ghostwriting for Pickford made this dual role official. The arrangement made business sense for Pickford, who could rely on her close friend for consistent and favorable depiction, but it required a considerable sacrifice from Marion, who earned next to nothing for writing the "Daily Talks."⁸ For a woman who was well known as the industry's most powerful and successful writer, an assignment that offered neither fame nor fortune was surely a labor of love, and it is no mistake that Marion's serving double duty for her

⁸ According to Beauchamp, Marion made fifty dollars a week for writing the "Daily Talks," while Pickford made a thousand dollars a week. Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down*, p. 53.

friend was the exception rather than the rule. Anne Morey points out another example of the same phenomenon, writing that famed novelist and screenwriter Elinor Glyn reputedly ghostwrote some of the “autobiographies” of Rudolph Valentino published in fan magazines, after having penned a scenario for the actor. In effect, Morey states, “Glyn was writing Valentino both on and off the screen by bringing representations of the man into line with the fictional role that she had created in *Beyond the Rocks* [1922].”⁹ The extent of Glyn’s and Valentino’s partnership was a single film and a few magazine articles. Over the course of twenty films and hundreds of “Daily Talks,” Marion had the opportunity to bring the two aspects of Pickford’s persona into line in a much more totalizing and meaningful way.

Touchstones of Pickford’s screen persona echo throughout the autobiographical musings in the “Daily Talks.” At times, Marion makes the affinities between real life and fiction explicit; in one story, a silk flag sent to Pickford in accordance with a dead soldier’s wishes inspires the scenario for *The Little American* (1917). More often, though, the connection is less explicit; instead, Marion leans on the same thematic tropes developed in her scenarios for Pickford. As in those films, the “Daily Talks” version of Pickford is constantly surrounded by animals, such as Muggsy, a “little trampo” transformed into a “a petted, thoroughbred fox terrier” after being adopted by Pickford, in a story that could have been lifted from *The Foundling*. The articles also emphasize Pickford’s love for children and her plans to open a number of orphanages across the country. A recurring story concerns Petey, a child factory worker who, through Pickford’s attention, is rescued from the emery wheel and sent to live in a home in the country, where he will no doubt find the same happy ending that Pickford does in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.¹⁰

⁹ Anne Morey, “Elinor Glyn as Hollywood Labourer,” *Film History* 18, no. 2 (January 1, 2006), p.115.

¹⁰ Mary Pickford, “Daily Talks,” *McClure Newspaper Syndicate* 17 Aug. 1917 [“The Silk Flag”], 16 Aug. 1917 [“Muggsy”], 22 Aug. 1917 [“A Letter from Petey”], n.pag.

As a whole, the “Daily Talks” make it clear that the values of Pickford’s beloved characters are those of Pickford herself: concern for the needy, love of nature, respect for her mother, patriotism, etc.

Marion is perfectly self-effacing in her ghostwriting of the “Daily Talks.” In a column advising readers on how to write a good scenario, Marion divulges some of the tricks of her trade – “You must think of four things, your audience, your star, your director and the message you are trying to send out to the public” – but at no point does she give herself any credit as Pickford’s writer.¹¹ On the contrary, the column poses Pickford’s *choice* of a script as the primary act of agency in the filmmaking process, while the actual writing could be as easily done by a novice as by a professional like Marion. Marion even goes so far as to deny outright that the “Daily Talks” are ghostwritten. Responding to a letter from a reader who had heard that Pickford “never even saw the articles, and made all kinds of fun of them,” Marion sells the lie with an entreaty to the sympathies of Pickford’s fans:

Dear friends, you to whom I talk every day, I think the pencil would falter and I should have to lay it aside if I believed there were such doubt in many minds. For it is untrue, every line of it. I write these articles, little rattling of my mind though they may be, but they come straight from me to you. And it has been my pleasure to give all my friends a peek into our colorful lives, a sprinkling of advice, a little gossip behind the scenes and also tell them of my own personal experiences.¹²

Marion’s willingness to sacrifice her own interests in service of Pickford’s fame, to become, with the “Daily Talks,” something of a house organ for Pickford explains in part why the collaboration between the two was so successful, but it also typifies the sometimes labyrinthine logic of authorship of collaborative work.

¹¹ Mary Pickford, “Daily Talks,” *McClure Newspaper Syndicate* 17 Aug. 1917 [“When You Write a Script”], n. pag.

¹² Mary Pickford, “Daily Talks,” *The Sun* (New London, CT) 25 Jan. 1916 [“My Disappointment”], p. 11.

Amelia Hastie addresses this logic in her discussion of Marion's ghostwriting, and the attendant "consolidation of persons and personas – the screenwriter and author of the columns Frances Marion, the silent film star Mary Pickford, and the persona of the columns' author Mary Pickford – into, simply, 'Pickford.'"13 Marion's work as a writer is subsumed under this "Pickford" umbrella, and that constructed persona becomes the author in the mind of her audience. Hastie maintains that Pickford's name, then, serves Foucault's "author function," that Pickford's status as an author is not a simple matter of attribution, but rather the result of a complex dialogue between texts. In the case of Pickford, she writes, "The position, or role, of the author is dependent also on the position of the woman as star or celebrity. Moreover, each one's writings as author refer back to her filmic output as actress. Together these various roles and the various texts attributed to each construct a multilayered figure."14 I have already described the mutually reinforcing myths propagated by Marion's scripts and columns for Pickford, the result of which is a star persona as *mise en abyme*, or as two-headed coin; from any angle, she appears the same. If Pickford has traditionally been understood as author, in name or in fact, perhaps it is time we emend our criterion for authorship.

Without a doubt, Pickford's films are "Mary Pickford films;" their primary reason for existence is to feature their star. It is important, however, to heed Richard Dyer's warning "not to elide the star-as-person with the star-as-text and assume that the former is the author of the latter."15 As I have demonstrated, Pickford was only a collaborator in the construction of her star image; Marion was equally responsible, to say nothing of the contributions of other frequent collaborators like director Mickey Neilan and cinematographer Charles Rosher. Marion's

¹³ Amelie Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 160-161.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁵ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 153.

influence in the simultaneous production of Pickford's films and persona stakes a twofold claim to authorship, and belies the image of Pickford as a solitary artist. Marion would continue to have success without her best friend, winning Academy Awards for her writing in *Min and Bill* (1930) and *The Champ* (1931), but Mary Pickford, star-as-text, must be counted as her defining masterpiece.

As a point of contrast to Marion's working relationship with Pickford, and a lead-in to my next case study, it is helpful to briefly consider another of Marion's intimate collaborations, with her husband, Fred Thomson. Thomson, an army chaplain and champion athlete when he met Marion in 1918, was in the process of becoming a major western movie star at the time of his unfortunate death from tetanus in 1928. Marion was the driving force behind her husband's screen career (Thomson was dismissive of the notion at first), and, beginning with *The Wild Bull's Lair* in 1925, the majority of his films – eleven in total – had their stories credited to “Frank M. Clifton,” Marion's clever pseudonym. Beauchamp points out that Marion had worked on Thomson's scripts (without credit) since the beginning of his career, but that the pen name “allowed her to work on each production while publicly keeping a professional distance between their careers.”¹⁶ The reasons for keeping this distance are various, and bear investigating. As Marion herself pointed out, there were cases when her exclusive contract with a studio precluded her from writing for Thomson officially, though Lizzie Francke reasons that “it might also have been a case of Marion not wanting her star to eclipse her husband's star.”¹⁷ Most compelling is Beauchamp's claim that Marion denied any credit for Thomson's success “out of fear of

¹⁶ Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down*, p. 168.

¹⁷ Dewitt Bodeen, “Frances Marion,” *Films in Review* 20, no. 2 (Feb. 1969), p. 86. Lizzie Francke, *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (London, UK: BFI Publishing, 1994), p. 40.

appearing like his Svengali.”¹⁸ That Marion chose to write under a pseudonym, and under a *male* pseudonym at that, suggests that there might have been some trepidation about Thomson appearing as a “woman-made man” (a designation that, as I will discuss, became central to Rudolph Valentino’s image), that Thomson’s strong, western heroes would ring hollow if there was the sense that his wife was pulling the strings.

On the surface, there is some similarity between this arrangement and Marion’s ghostwriting for Pickford: in both instances, Marion writes under an assumed identity, and her name is withheld from the audience. But Marion was widely known as Mary Pickford’s writer; in publicity, she was always connected to Pickford, and their close friendship was intrinsically linked with their professional collaboration. In a sense, then, ghostwriting the “Daily Talks,” while somewhat self-abnegating, was building the Mary Pickford brand, on which Marion’s success largely relied. In the end, it was a working model that benefitted both women, trading on and strengthening their personal connection. Writing as Frank M. Clifton, on the other hand, was an act of pure sacrifice for the sake of her husband. Beauchamp writes that Adela Rogers St. Johns, a close friend, expressed concern that Marion was “putting her career second to Fred’s,” and Marion admitted that she was right.¹⁹ Articles on the couple made no intimations of creative collaboration between the two, and, while Thomson was ranking as the number two box office star in 1926 and 1927, Marion’s career was not benefiting from the partnership. The image of the dutiful wife sacrificing for her husband, working in silence to preserve his reputation and protect his pride, would be at home in one of Marion’s scripts, but in this context, it speaks to the gender dynamic at play in early Hollywood. Though women like Marion were able to rise to

¹⁸ Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down*, p. 158.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

prominence as screenwriters, their relationships with the men they wrote for or with were still more often than not the subject of some anxiety.

Making the Woman-Made Man: June Mathis and Rudolph Valentino

In June of 1923, an article in *Motion Picture Magazine* by Gladys Hall and Adele Whitely Fletcher announced: “We Discover Who Discovered Valentino,” revealing screen writer June Mathis as the visionary who saw in an undistinguished “heavy” the potential to be a successful leading man. Mathis’ decision to cast Valentino – to whom she had never spoken; as Valentino tells it, “her interest was only professional, or artistic, or prophetic, or what you call it...” – as the lead in *The Four Horsemen* (1921) catapulted the young man to superstardom, and inextricably bound the lives and careers of writer and actor.²⁰ At the time, Mathis was as successful and powerful as any woman in Hollywood. In addition to writing scripts, she headed Metro’s scenario department at age 27, and shortly after became the first female production executive in any studio. The production of *The Four Horsemen* was a veritable showcase for Mathis’ authority: Valentino was her choice, as was the director Fred Niblo. She was on set every day supervising the shooting of her script, making changes if she did not like what she saw. Her imperious will and yeoman work ethic were celebrated in her publicity, with one *Photoplay* writer reporting that she confronted Vicente Ibanez, author of the novel from which the film was adapted, by making “what was almost a forcible entry into his rooms to discuss mooted points with him.”²¹

²⁰ Gladys Hall and Adele Whitely Fletcher, “We Discover Who Discovered Valentino,” *Motion Picture Magazine* 25, no. 5 (June 1923), p. 93.

²¹ “The ‘Million Dollar Girl,’” *Photoplay* 24, no.5 (October 1923), p. 63.

After *The Four Horsemen*, though, Mathis' reputation as the woman who discovered Valentino would overshadow the rest of her remarkable biography. By 1924, she was being hailed in *Motion Picture Classic* (again by Gladys Hall) as "A Maker of Young Men," a title that ignores Mathis' acumen as a screenwriter and filmmaker, instead positioning her as a sort of studio fairy godmother, magically conferring stardom upon hopeful young actors.²² For Valentino, his discovery by and reliance on Mathis, who would go on to write six more scripts for him, and would remain his most trusted advisor until his death in 1926, contributed to his image as a "woman-made" man. As I will show, these complimentary personae – Mathis as maker of young men, Valentino as woman-made man – speak to the construction and performance of gender, as well as to the mechanisms by which the film industry sought to diminish the perceived power of "othered" filmmakers.

Whereas Marion's collaboration with Pickford was informed by their relationship as friends and peers, Mathis' writing for Valentino reflects her maternal attitude toward the star. Mathis would counsel Valentino throughout his short career, appearing on the sets of his films even when she hadn't written them, and interceding on his behalf when he had trouble with directors. As Thomas Slater, who has written extensively about Mathis, points out, her scripts for Valentino often recreate this dynamic, as "women attempt to gently guide his character as he suffers from irresponsible choices and the evils of the world."²³ Indeed, this figuration of the star as a child in need was apparently part of his appeal to female audience. Miriam Hansen, in her study of Valentino and his audience, quotes from one female columnist, who claims:

The cold, hard truth of the secret of his charm is that Rodolf
Valentino appeals to the Maternal Instinct of EVERYWOMAN...
What a woman really wants to do for Rodolf is to bandage his

²² Gladys Hall, "A Maker of Young Men," *Motion Picture Classic* 19, no. 1 (March 1924), p. 22.

²³ Slater, Thomas J., "June Mathis's Valentino Scripts: Images of Male 'Becoming' After the Great War," *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 1 (Fall 2010), p. 106.

wounds, comfort him, stroke that well-brushed hair, spank him,
proudly show him off.²⁴

Valentino's characters are often immature and emasculated, failed by fathers and father figures, and ultimately reliant on female wisdom and influence for salvation, making him an unconventional matinee idol, to be sure, but one who reflected an image of masculinity in crisis to post-World War I audiences.

Mathis makes Valentino's untraditional maleness apparent in her script for *Blood and Sand* (1922). Valentino plays Gallardo, a champion bullfighter whose wielding of phallic power in the bullring is contradicted by his inability to do the same in his romantic life. On the night of his wedding to the virtuous Carmen (Lila Lee), the consummation of the marriage is staged ambiguously; as Mathis' scenario describes it, "there is a great timidity – he is humble before her innocence and the realization that they are alone together for the first time."²⁵ His sexual reticence and immaturity are reinforced in a later scene, as Carmen watches Valentino playing with two young children, happier and more natural than he appears at any point in the film, and feels what a title calls the "constant reproach" in the fact that he has given her no children of her own. Gallardo's failure as a husband is compounded by his affair with Doña Sol (Nita Naldi), a seductress who embroils him in a sadomasochistic relationship, at one point inviting him to beat her with his "strong hands." However, Gallardo cannot fulfill Doña Sol's need for machismo and violence, and she humiliates him by exposing his childish obedience in front of his wife and mother before ending their relationship. At this ultimate emasculation, Gallardo's mother voices

²⁴ Mae Tinee, "Come to Mother!" cited in Hansen, Miriam, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 262.

²⁵ June Mathis, *Blood and Sand*, scenario (Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA), scene 214.

an impulse perhaps shared by female audience members, telling her son, “I wish I could take a broomstick to you just as I used to!”²⁶

Miriam Hansen and Gaylyn Studlar have detailed the manifold ways in which Valentino’s offscreen persona was equally shaped by the influence of women. Hansen writes that stories of Valentino’s pre-Hollywood career characterized him as a “tango pirate,” a sexually ambiguous dancer who earned his living from female patrons. The implication incriminated both Valentino and the women who supported him, and, in turn, this portrayal “became emblematic of his career as an actor whose stardom depended on millions of female fans.”²⁷ That Mathis initiated his career established Valentino as a “creation of, for, and by women,” a reputation that was compounded by his marriage to the notoriously strong-willed Natacha Rambova.²⁸ Rambova, a successful designer with her own wealth, mystique, and sexual ambiguity, dominated the relationship and, by most accounts, was pulling the strings in her husband’s business dealings. Her management of Valentino’s career led to conflicts with directors and other actors, legal clashes with studios, and reports that she was making “unreasonable attempts to control all aspects of his film productions, including his leading ladies.”²⁹ Given the various forces framing Valentino – star and husband, character and actor – as a passive, submissive young man, subject to the desires of the women in his life, it is natural that Mathis, his closest mentor and collaborator, would be cast as a mother figure. After all, according to the popular narrative, a mother is exactly what Valentino needed.

The mother-and-child image projected onto Mathis and Valentino reflects the result of a broader institutional effort to disarm two particularly threatening figures: the sexualized

²⁶ Ibid., scene 493.

²⁷ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 259.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 261.

²⁹ Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 188.

foreigner and the powerful woman. Valentino, who attracted female fans like no movie star before him, represented a challenge to the traditional model of rugged, American masculinity, which was already flagging in the wake of World War I. While stars like Douglas Fairbanks (something of a “woman-made man” himself, by virtue of his long-standing collaboration with Anita Loos) sought to reaffirm that sort of masculinity, Valentino’s exotic, androgynous sensuality – and its hypnotic effect on female viewers – made him a danger to the natural, or national, order. As such, he was systematically feminized, represented as a dandy obsessed with his own appearance and dress, and infantilized, portrayed as submissive and woman-made, until he was defanged as a dangerous “other,” becoming as much a pitiable child as a Latin lover.

Mathis, a woman who exerted considerable influence over the mechanisms of filmmaking, likewise posed a threat to the studio patriarchy, a threat the studios mitigated by describing her primarily as a maternal figure and discoverer of talent. Her designation as a “maker of young men” highlights her nurturing nature rather than her creative talent or business savvy, and reinforces Shelley Stamp’s claim that “women powerful in the early industry were often depicted in role of helpmate to beautiful stars in order to downplay their own authority.”³⁰ Stamp, writing about the groundbreaking director Lois Weber, notes that the term “star maker” was employed in Weber’s publicity to “circumscribe her stature within very strict parameters, limiting her power largely to an appreciation of beauty.”³¹ The same could be said of Mathis, whose discovery and development of Valentino – the male beauty object who joins the ranks of actresses cast in “wholly passive roles, simply waiting to be noticed and appreciated” in this star maker narrative – came to overshadow her pioneering work as a screenwriter and studio

³⁰ Shelley Stamp, “Lois Weber, Star Maker,” in Vicki Callahan, ed., *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), p. 142.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

executive.³² The image of Mathis supporting and encouraging Valentino from the sidelines served to obscure, and to domesticate, the actual power that Mathis wielded as an author of Valentino's greatest stories.

Mathis did far more than simply inscribe her own maternal relationship to Valentino into his film scripts; indeed, she embedded her own vision for each film, and her own world-views, into the scripts she wrote. In the process, she changed the way that scripts were written; Lewis Jacobs credits Mathis for conceiving of the script as a means of organizing and streamlining the filmmaking process, asserting that "she originated the writer-director combination which was to plan the film's action before any shooting began."³³ This made the construction of a film smoother and more efficient, and also guaranteed her imprint on the final product. Her scripts for Valentino reveal myriad examples of these directorial cues, traces of Mathis' unrivaled ambition as a screenwriter and filmmaker.

Camille (1921) is perhaps most readily approached as a collaboration between Alla Nazimova (who chose the story and starred) and Natacha Rambova (Nazimova's protégée, and the film's art director), as it features some of the avant-garde aesthetic sensibility on display in other Nazimova-Rambova productions like *A Doll's House* (1922) and *Salome* (1923), but Mathis' script represents an essential third variable. In light of her notoriously controlling collaborators, Mathis' script assumes a remarkably authoritative tone, offering her recommendations for performance, direction, editing, and production design. Her notes exhibit a nuanced sense of the effect of camera placement on the mood of a scene: an emotional moment for Nazimova's heroine calls for an "odd shot upward of Marguerite and the comte - narrow vignette of iris to just Marguerite's face," while a bit of comic relief is accompanied by a note

³² Ibid., p. 137.

³³ Lewis Jacobs, "Writers and Photographers," in Richard Dyer MacCann, ed., *Films of the 1920s* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1966), p. 15.

reading: “Recommend that this scene be also photographed in straight shot in case comedy loses in odd shot.”³⁴ Exhibiting the attention to detail usually reserved for auteur directors, Mathis demands realism in every aspect of the film, even stipulating in her script that the characters’ “trouser legs are uncreased as I understand they do not crease them in France.”³⁵ Even *Camille*’s Hasard D’or nightclub set, which most evidently bears the Rambova signature, was, at least in part, Mathis’ brainchild; her script describes the room as “Bizarre and elegant in the extreme – a large round set built in tiers showing roulette being played – tables for cards – a peculiar glass effect in back and two rooms on each side of this large window suggesting some extravagant novelty.”³⁶ The set, as constructed and shot, evidences Rambova’s modernist approach to Mathis’ conceptualization of the space, the shared vision of two formidable collaborators.

Donna Casella distinguishes Mathis from her colleagues, commending her commitment “to ‘artistic’ filmmaking as opposed to the formulaic films turned out by many women writers in Hollywood.”³⁷ This artistry is perhaps more evident in her extant scripts than in the films themselves, as many of her scripted ideas – narrative conceits and cinematographic techniques alike – never found their way to the screen, the unfortunate chaff of a filmmaking process marked by financial parsimony and creative compromise. In this light, Mathis’ thwarted ambitions bear an affinity to the popular perception of the auteur director, whose distinctive artistic signature has always been seen as a triumph over the budgetary constraints and censorious oversight imposed from above by the studio hierarchy. In her script for *Blood and Sand* – which acknowledges the practicalities of productions in its numerous suggestions to use

³⁴ June Mathis, *Camille*, scenario (Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA), scene 35, 94. In the parlance of early filmmaking an “odd shot” was one taken at an angle.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, scene 86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, scene 149.

³⁷ Donna R. Casella, “Feminism and the Female Author: The Not So Silent Career of the Woman Scenarist in Hollywood, 1896–1930,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23, no. 3 (2006), p. 232.

footage from travel films or European releases to accomplish the establishing shots of Seville and the bullfighting scenes – Mathis exhibits her high-art aspirations; in describing the final exchange between Gallardo and Carmen, as Gallardo lay dying, she notes, “There is a very famous painting called the DEVISA that gives the idea of this scene.”³⁸ Indeed, *The Devisa*, painted by the French portraitist Eugene Giraud in 1869, depicts a fatally-wounded bullfighter as he hands his devisa, or ribbon, to his lover, while an unsuspecting crowd continues to cheer in the background. The image succinctly captures the mood established in Mathis’ story, and its mention in her script betrays her vision of the film as transcending the usual cinematic fare, and of Valentino in particular as a tragic hero and an object, like the reclining figure in the painting, of anguished beauty. That, ultimately, the melodramatic staging suggested by the reference to *The Devisa* never appears in *Blood and Sand*’s climax, that Mathis’ painstaking research and high-minded ideas at times came to naught in the finished product, should not diminish the impact of the screenwriter’s work. Rather, it should serve as a reminder of the sacrifices inherent to the collaborative nature of filmmaking, and the dangers of ascribing the multitude of voices present in a film to a single author. Mathis was an author of undeniable talent and ambition, but her shrewd negotiation with the oftentimes confounding push-pull of studio film production was equally central to her remarkable rise to power in the industry.

In October of 1926, a mere nine months before her untimely death (less than a year after Valentino’s), a *Photoplay* article by Ivan St. Johns, misleadingly titled “Fifty-Fifty,” announced that Mathis had, after a lifetime of searching, found the perfect collaborator in her new husband, Silvano Balboni, a cinematographer who was now to apply his talents to film directing. The article is revealing in its problematic framing of Mathis’ work, and its insidious recasting of

³⁸ June Mathis, *Blood and Sand*, scenario (Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA), scene 641.

Mathis' fruitful collaborations with men like Valentino, Albert Capellani, and Rex Ingram as a woman's quest to find the perfect man. St. Johns – no stranger, incidentally, to marital collaboration, as his wife, Adela Rogers St. Johns, was one of *Photoplay's* star reporters – peppers his piece with backhanded compliments, each declaration of Mathis' talent accompanied by an undercutting qualifier. He pronounces: "Given the proper man to interpret her work for the screen, June Mathis is a genius. In collaboration with the right man, she has risen to heights achieved by no other woman writer in pictures."³⁹ The implication is clear: Mathis' genius is the direct result of male intervention, without which her ideas have no form or function. As proof of this, St. Johns points out that the only film Mathis made "by herself" (it is not clear to what film St. Johns is referring) was "terrible," and concludes that, as a rule, "women cannot direct pictures," as they are unable to cope with "the hard, physical work, the tremendous weight of detail, the necessity of executive organization."⁴⁰ Thus, the contributions of Mathis and her female colleagues to the cinema is strictly circumscribed, their role in the filmmaking process resigned to providing quixotic scribblings for the prosaic hand of male directors to elevate to the level of art. Collaboration between the male director and the female screenwriter, then, is not a "fifty-fifty" partnership, but rather an industrial process whereby the women deliver the raw material to be crafted into the legible text by the men.

Near the end of his article, St. Johns opines:

I believe that June Mathis will gladly give up her important position, and her tremendous salary, and everything else, if she and her husband can work together and make great pictures. That is her dream. That is her real ambition – to make great pictures, to write them, see them directed, stand by and collaborate.⁴¹

³⁹ Ivan St. Johns, "Fifty-fifty," *Photoplay* 30, no.5 (October 1926). p. 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

The marriage, personal and professional, between Mathis and Balboni apparently necessitates the woman's sacrifice of her hard-earned success, as the underlying threat of Mathis' power and wealth are mitigated by the domesticating collaboration with her husband. His prognosis that Mathis will "stand by and collaborate," with the internal contradiction between the passivity implicit in "stand by" and the activity of "collaborate," betrays a fundamental misrepresentation of Mathis's role. For Mathis, collaboration was an opportunity to expand and enhance her authorial vision; while she would collaborate, she would never merely stand by.

Early Cinema's Fallen Woman: Jeanie Macpherson and Cecil B. DeMille

While Marion and Mathis have found their recent champions in Cari Beachamp and Thomas Slater, respectively, no such reclamation project has materialize around Jeanie Macpherson, a figure who has become, perhaps more so than any of her contemporaries, a victim of history. Cecil B. DeMille's head screenwriter for fifteen years and over thirty films, Macpherson had a hand in some of the most important films of the era, including *The Cheat* (1915), *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919), and *The Ten Commandments* (1923). Hailed as a "literary dynamo" in the press, Macpherson was credited with many of the ideas behind DeMille's great successes, but more recent historians and critics have qualified her contributions by questioning her writing talent, and by foregrounding her long-standing affair with DeMille.⁴² In this case study, I will interrogate the ways in which Macpherson's career has been articulated, and how we might expand our understanding of the screenwriter's role to recuperate Macpherson to her proper place in film history.

The body of literature surrounding Macpherson's career tells the story of a fallen woman, akin to the ambitious, aggressive "vamps" and "gold-diggers" in the films of the twenties and

⁴² Barbara Beach, "The Literary Dynamo," *Motion Picture Magazine* 21, no.6 (July 1921), p. 54.

thirties who use their sexuality for material gain, and who are, as a matter of course, punished for their sins by a compulsory and systematic denunciation. The films of the fallen woman cycle betray a real anxiety over female agency and social mobility, an underlying fear that women might wrest money and power from susceptible men by exploiting their feminine allure.. Janet Staiger puts the core message of the fallen woman film in simple terms: “women can be actively aggressive so long as they do not usurp the power of the prudent men naturally in charge.”⁴³ Similarly, Macpherson’s claim to authorship threatens DeMille’s own auteur status, and her critics have devalued that claim by dismissing her abilities as a writer and attributing her success instead to her romantic relationship with the director. One can track Macpherson’s melodramatic trajectory, her rise and fall, through the historical texts that recount her career, from glowing profiles in fan magazines to the trivializing remarks of DeMille’s biographers.

If June Mathis’ film career has been framed around a narrative of discovery, Macpherson’s begins with an anti-discovery. Macpherson was already well-established in the film industry by the time she met DeMille in 1914; she had acted in a number of D.W. Griffith’s shorts for Biograph, and had been granted her own company at Universal to film her scenario, *The Tarantula* (1913). Accounts of DeMille hiring Macpherson vary, but in each one DeMille cuts the headstrong young woman down to size before taking her under his wing. The kindest depiction comes from an October 1916 *Photoplay* article, which holds simply that DeMille “persuaded her to quit acting and devote all of her time to scenario writing, directing and film cutting.”⁴⁴ A *Motion Picture Magazine* story from 1924 adds some detail to the story, reporting that Macpherson offered DeMille the “opportunity of directing her,” but:

⁴³ Janet Staiger, “*Les Belles Dames sans Merci*, Femmes Fatales, Vampires, Vamps, and Gold Diggers: The Transformation and Narrative Value of Aggressive Fallen Women,” in Vicki Callahan, ed., *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), p. 42.

⁴⁴ Alice Martin, “From ‘Wop’ Jobs to Bossing the Job,” *Photoplay* 10, no.5 (Oct 1916), p. 97.

Mr. De Mille didn't jump at the offer. Instead, he advised her to give up acting altogether, and confine herself to scenario writing. He topped this suggestion with the handsome offer of a twenty-five-dollar weekly salary.⁴⁵

Macpherson, insulted by the offer, stormed out of DeMille's office, but later returned, tail tucked between her legs, to accept the job.

Phil A. Koury's 1959 biography of DeMille more or less corroborates this version of the story, but extends Macpherson's humiliation at the hands of the director. As Koury tells it, Macpherson, "a funny little tornado with a nose that turned up, and hair that curled up, and a disposition that turned up, too," stormed into DeMille's office and offered to work for him in return for a massive salary.⁴⁶ DeMille ignored her entirely, and after ten minutes she stormed back out of the office, returning two days later to demand an apology. In lieu of an apology, DeMille offered her twenty-five dollars a week to take dictation, which Macpherson took as an insult. He finally relented and gave her a small role in his film, and at the end of her day of shooting, she was handed ten dollars. Outraged once again, she threw the money on DeMille's desk and demanded a hundred dollars or nothing. Without a word, he took the ten dollars from the desk and left Macpherson to storm out yet again. It was only on her fourth visit to DeMille's office that he persuaded Macpherson, now entirely humbled, to attempt writing scripts for twenty-five dollars a week.

This story receives a brief preamble in Charles Higham's 1973 DeMille biography. Higham writes that Macpherson, in an effort to attract DeMille's attention, and knowing that he enjoyed a fight, scheduled her shoot for *The Tarantula* to conflict with DeMille's preparations for *Rose of the Rancho* (1914) and demanded that he vacate the area. He told Macpherson, by note, "Go chase yourself," and when her production unit arrived at the site, "he had his men

⁴⁵ Helen Carlisle, "They're Not Afraid to Fight," *Motion Picture Magazine* 27, no.1 (Feb 1924), p. 86.

⁴⁶ Cecil B. DeMille, quoted in Phil A. Koury, *Yes, Mr. DeMille* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 79.

chase them off with shotguns.”⁴⁷ The rest of Higham’s account recalls Koury’s story, though Higham takes pains to emphasize Macpherson’s misguided self-importance, writing that “[S]he behaved rather as though DeMille were a butler whom she was considering for a job.”⁴⁸ Nearly every version of Macpherson’s origin story frames it as DeMille’s taming of a wild woman, each successive telling reveling all the more in Macpherson being put in her place. The dynamic, increasingly patronizing and sardonic, between DeMille and Macpherson established by these stories is recreated in the authors’ treatment of Macpherson, a tendency which betrays an uncertainty as to how to accommodate her involvement in the auteur’s canon.

Early accounts of the screenwriter tend to celebrate Macpherson’s contributions to, and influence over, DeMille’s films, some even going so far as to suggest that she, not DeMille, is their true author. Alice Martin begins her *Photoplay* profile of Macpherson by averring that “[t]he left half of Cecil De Mille’s brain would have been famous anyway.”⁴⁹ In this formulation, even though Macpherson is a part of DeMille, the left half of his brain, her success is not contingent on her partnership with him. The idea that she “would have been famous anyway” contradicts the arguments of later critics who assert that Macpherson was lucky to catch DeMille’s eye, as he elevated her to the status of an important screenwriter without the talent to justify that position.

Barbara Beach, in a *Motion Picture Magazine* article about Macpherson, does Martin one better, writing that “[f]rom her brain has sprung the Big Ideas for all the Cecil B. de Mille features.”⁵⁰ No long merely a fragment of DeMille’s brain, here Macpherson’s own mind is now the point of origin for the DeMille films. What is missing, however, is what happens between

⁴⁷ Charles Higham, *Cecil B. DeMille* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), pp. 38-39.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁹ Alice Martin, “From ‘Wop’ Jobs to Bossing the Job,” p. 95.

⁵⁰ Barbara Beach, “The Literary Dynamo,” p. 54.

Macpherson's "Big Ideas" and the finished DeMille films. The specific responsibilities of screenwriter and director are elided, and the details of production cast aside in favor of a direct leap from inspiration to manifestation. Ironically, this framing of Macpherson as a contributor of ideas, in this article meant as a compliment, would later be turned against her, as I will demonstrate.

The greatest tribute to Macpherson's authorial faculty appears in a brief survey of "Women's Work in Motion Picture" by *Motion Picture Magazine's* Frederick Van Vranken. In his quest to shed light on the women working behind the scenes in Hollywood, he asks:

How many persons realize, when they sit enjoying a photo-drama by the famous Cecil deMille, that the entire foundation of their pleasure was laid by a woman? Yes such is literally the case; and that woman is Jeanne McPherson [sic]. It is she who first takes the idea for Mr. deMille's picture, develops it, injects its dramatic values, sustains its suspense, works out its effects, arranges its narrative, indicates each scene and setting, and gives it life, homogeneity and appeal. It is really her handiwork – her vision and her ideas – which Mr. deMille presents to the world, acting as middle-man between her brain and the public eyes.⁵¹

Van Vranken's declaration is remarkable, clearly hailing Macpherson as the principal author of what are widely understood as DeMille's films. Relegating DeMille to the status of go-between flips the logic of the auteur film director on its head, and suggests (perhaps unwittingly) a radical rethinking of the roles of screenwriter and director. Viewing these films as reflecting Macpherson's vision, and DeMille as a technician tasked with committing that vision to film, opens the door for a reading of the scriptwriter-as-auteur, a door that subsequent critics were quick to close.

Macpherson's legacy underwent a small-scale reexamination as a wave of historians, biographers, and memoirists turned their attention to chronicling the silent era in the sixties and

⁵¹ Frederick Van Vranken, "Women's Work in Motion Pictures," *Motion Picture Magazine* 26, no.1 (August 1923), p. 90.

seventies. Evelyn Scott, the daughter of Beulah Marie Dix, another of DeMille's writers, remembers her mother's indifference towards her female colleagues – particularly those who “traded on their relationships with men” – and of Macpherson she writes:

Mother never thought of her as a *writer*, but as an exceptional collaborator for an exceptional man. Uncle Cecil, with his past experience in writing and acting and his unsurpassed showmanship, knew not only what he required in every story directed, but in every scene. Jeanie had a genius [...] for putting this on paper.⁵²

Though couched in laudatory terms like “exceptional” and “genius,” the designation of Macpherson as a “collaborator” here is a diminutive, the position little more than that of a glorified stenographer. As I will illustrate, Macpherson reputation as a screenwriter who could not write, deserved or not, has stuck, and become an unavoidable aspect of her biography.

No assessment of Macpherson's career is more damning than Charles Higham's, in his biography of DeMille. Despite describing her moments before as “in every way a remarkable woman: courageous, forceful, fierce-tempered, dominating, the very exemplar of the qualities DeMille most admired in anyone,” Higham credits Macpherson's success to entirely different qualities.⁵³ He writes:

The suggestion she gave of a school marm who underneath pulsed with the vitality of a real woman, of a perennial virgin asking to be relieved of her virginity, earned her immediate professional success.

This was fortunate, because her talents were extremely limited. When she met DeMille, she decided to capture him with all of the considerable skill at her command.⁵⁴

Where Scott is backhanded, Higham is explicit; he accuses Macpherson outright of seducing DeMille, in the absence of any practical ability. The picture he paints of Macpherson, the

⁵² Evelyn F. Scott, *Hollywood When Silents Were Golden* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1972), pp. 69-70.

⁵³ Higham, *Cecil B. DeMille*, p.37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

pleasure he seems to take in describing her sexual appeal, again recalls the construction of the tragic heroines of the fallen woman films. Higham poses Macpherson at once as an object of desire and as a treacherous maneater, her innocent allure merely a disguise put on to “capture” her prey. Lizzie Francke rightfully points out in her response to the “travesty” of Higham’s characterization that “[s]uch a portrait reveals more about the way some critics have obscured the contributions to film history of women like Macpherson.”⁵⁵ Indeed, Higham’s flippant dismissal of Macpherson seems more than anything to signal an unhealthy investment in the image of DeMille as a solitary genius, and a discomfort with and distrust of a woman’s infringement on his claim to authorship. Unfortunately, the authority of Higham’s biography, at the time the definitive study of DeMille, gave credence to his slanderous depiction of Macpherson, and remnants of Higham’s attitude surface in later portrayals of the screenwriter.

One such portrayal, embedded in a review of Tom Stempel’s book *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film*, provides a striking example of how easily such an attitude can ossify into presumed fact. The reviewer, Pat McGilligan, criticizes Stempel for being uncritical of Macpherson’s career, writing:

Stempel tells us that Jeanie Macpherson, one of Cecil B. De Mille’s corps, “had herself arrested and spent three days in a Detroit jail” in order to write *MANSLAUGHTER* in 1922. He notes, without further comment, “She later told friends she had tried to escape, but was caught.” Stempel might have added that Macpherson was on De Mille’s payroll seemingly forever because she served more amorous purposes.⁵⁶

McGilligan’s distressingly casual non sequitur at the end of this passage holds as self-evident that Macpherson’s relationship with DeMille effectively invalidates any of her writing bonafides. McGilligan goes on to classify Macpherson, along with Mathis and Marion, as “[t]he

⁵⁵ Lizzie Francke, *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (London, UK: BFI Publishing, 1994), p. 14.

⁵⁶ Pat McGilligan, review of *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film*, by Tom Stempel. *Film Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (Summer 1989), p. 51.

writers who could not write!” using an ill-advised comment from George Cukor as his justification and concluding condescendingly, “they should be a part of a history of Hollywood script-writing as well.”⁵⁷ This unfounded attack on Macpherson and her female contemporaries does not only damage their reputations, it discourages real interrogation of their work, condemning them to the margins of history.

DeMille’s own comments on his screenwriter, unfortunately, seem to validate her critics, particularly in his disparaging assessment of her in a 1957 interview:

She was not a good writer. She would bring in wonderful ideas but she could not carry a story all the way through in writing. Her name is on many things because she wrote with me. I carried the story and she would bring me many, many ideas.⁵⁸

A quote from Scott Eyman’s recent biography makes a similar point, if somewhat more generously: “She was more of an inspiration in conversation than she was in the writing [...] but she was a very, a very brilliant woman.”⁵⁹ Later in the same biography, however, DeMille expresses the frustration of working with Macpherson, declaring, “[i]f that woman doesn’t drive you screaming, raving insane – if you can keep from strangling her with your bare hands – she occasionally comes up with something useful.”⁶⁰ DeMille’s ambivalent attitude towards Macpherson could be taken as corroboration that Macpherson lacked the talent to justify her success, or as evidence that DeMille was threatened by his screenwriter and wanted to assert his dominance. I believe, though, that changing the terms of this conversation results in a more productive interpretation of Macpherson’s career.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

⁵⁸ Cecil B. DeMille, quoted in Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. 93.

⁵⁹ Scott Eyman, *Empire of Dreams: The Epic Life of Cecil B. DeMille* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p. 97.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 330.

Although Macpherson has had her defenders, there has been very little discussion of how best to frame her contribution to the DeMille canon in a way that recuperates her to her proper place in film history while also addressing the criticisms leveled against her. The paucity of hard evidence of Macpherson's contributions to any given film, and the conflicting first-hand accounts of her role in the filmmaking process, make it difficult to truly evaluate her influence on the finished films, while pithy pronouncements like Cari Beauchamp's that "DeMille would have many mistresses, but few scenario writers,"⁶¹ while succinct, offer little in the way of nuance. I propose that an interrogation into the role of the screenwriter in early cinema can assimilate many of the valuations, good and bad, of Macpherson into a more comprehensive understanding of her collaborative function.

Central to the ambivalence surrounding Macpherson is the perceived opposition of "writing" and "ideas." To her detractors, Macpherson's lack of writing talent reduces her to a contributor of ideas, which DeMille in his alchemical genius synthesizes into a great film. To her defenders, Macpherson's worth as a writer is predicated on her ability to generate the big ideas without which DeMille's films could not function. The truth is not so black-and-white: as DeMille's scriptwriter and scenario supervisor, Macpherson's responsibilities extended beyond the finished script. She was an enthusiastic researcher, as the story of her being jailed in order to write the script for *Manslaughter* in 1922 attests, and she worked before and during shooting to eliminate any anachronisms in the costumes, sets, and other details of DeMille's famed historical epics. As DeMille shifted from these epics to his cycle of modern marital comedies, it was Macpherson who, in her scripts, appointed characters with the trappings of 1920s material culture, from modish attire to elegantly decorated homes. Like many of the scriptwriters of the day, Macpherson was a fixture on set, overseeing the filming "to ensure that her script was shot

⁶¹ Cari Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down*, p. 74.

as written,” and to ensure that any changes made during production were done with her approval.⁶² The screenwriter’s work, then, involved much more than just writing; it was a sustained process of collaboration with directors, stars, and the rest of the cast and crew which required flexibility, creativity, and decisiveness. If Macpherson’s prose was weak – that is to say, if she was not a good writer in the traditional sense – this should not suggest that she was not a good screenwriter. It is not through her writing, necessarily, that Macpherson co-authored what we know as the DeMille films, but through her protean capacities as a collaborator.

One of the great obstacles to ascribing authorial power to early screenwriters is the difficulty of locating the distinctive “signature” that is so essential to auteur theory. Particularly in light of their collaboration with a director who ostensibly has a more direct influence on the on-screen product, the screenwriter’s work is obscured and can be difficult to disentangle from the web of influences that make up a film production. In Macpherson’s case, it is possible to detect her influence as a counterbalance to DeMille’s own signature in some of the films they co-authored. *Joan the Woman* (1916), for instance, is structured as two distinct halves, the first a melodrama centered around Joan of Arc’s romantic life, the second a historical epic addressing the more familiar story of Joan of Arc’s heroism and subsequent burning at the stake. The decision to bifurcate the plot was proposed by Macpherson as a means of humanizing the character of Joan of Arc; for the same reason, Macpherson also chose the title *Joan the Woman* as a replacement for the less provocative *Joan of Arc*. Given Macpherson’s hand in these decisions, it is easy to read the film’s two parts as reflecting the sensibilities of the two authors, Macpherson contributing the human-scale woman’s film and DeMille supplying the large-scale epic. This division of labor is overly simplified and reinforces problematically gendered notions

⁶² Francke, *Script Girls*, p. 16.

of genre, but it serves to isolate the usually unheard voice of the screenwriter and shine a spotlight on Macpherson.

A thoroughly modern woman, Macpherson's hand can also be perceived in her updating of DeMille's timeless aesthetic. Nowhere is this more evident than in *The Ten Commandments*. DeMille imagined the film as a typically grandiose biblical epic, but Macpherson tempered his vision by framing the story of Moses with a modern framing narrative illustrating the applicability of the commandments to contemporary life. Again, Macpherson's intervention helps to make DeMille's grand design accessible to the individual viewer, a reliable formula for box-office success. Macpherson's grasp of modern social life would leave its imprint on DeMille's filmography, as it allowed him to branch out into new genres. The cycle of "sex comedies" produced by DeMille, Macpherson, and company – consisting of *Old Wives For New* (1918), *Don't Change Your Husband*, *Male and Female* (1919), and *The Affairs of Anatol* (1921) – represented a departure for the director, and it is hard to imagine him making such a leap without a writer like Macpherson, who understood the concerns of their Jazz Age audience. These films, ironically about the testing and ultimate reaffirmation of modern marriage, gave a second wind to DeMille's career, and evidence the effect that Macpherson's versatility and insight had on their collaborations.

Barbara Beach writes in 1921 that Jeanne Macpherson "has no time for play, very little for recreation – she has sacrificed all the little personal touches of home life that mean so much to most women."⁶³ The sacrifices Macpherson made for DeMille are central to her fallen woman narrative. Father Daniel Lord, the official church advisor who oversaw the production of *King of Kings* (1927), wrote of his experiences on set:

⁶³ Barbara Beach, "The Literary Dynamo," p. 54.

I became aware of the slavery that attached to the office of an author in Hollywood. Jeanie Macpherson was the scenarist, swiftly killing herself with an intensity of work and a passion for precise detail that kept her on a sixteen-hour-a-day schedule during the long months of production. In a welded devotion to her work she had no time for anything: friendship, correspondence, hobbies, or care of her health.⁶⁴

As these comments make clear, Macpherson's professional and personal devotion to DeMille were helplessly intertwined. The prospect of a "normal" or "healthy" home life was impossible, a sacrifice doubly guaranteed by her long, arduous hours and her affair with DeMille. If, as her critics suggest, Macpherson acted as a kept woman during her time with DeMille, she would receive her punishment as their affair, and her career, came to an end.

After her tenure as DeMille's writer had ended, and despite the remarkable success of their collaborations, Macpherson found herself alone and barely scraping by. Chronically spendthrift, Macpherson was reduced to begging DeMille for money, and she would remain on the director's payroll well after her services as a writer were terminated. In true melodramatic fashion, she fell into despair and illness, the fearless and indomitable young woman who had demanded DeMille's attention supplanted by a woman who, in Charles Higham's characteristically maudlin description:

had grown hard and dry with the years; it is doubtful whether, after the collapse of their sexual relationship in the late teens of the century, any other man had entered her boudoir. She burned a sacred flame which was never extinguished until her death.⁶⁵

In the weeks leading up to her death from cancer, DeMille visited her in the hospital every day, sitting by her bedside for an hour or more. In the deathbed scene that culminates Macpherson's fallen woman story, DeMille promised his longtime lover and collaborator that he would be with

⁶⁴ Daniel A. Lord, *Played by Ear: The Autobiography of Father Daniel A. Lord, S.J.* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1956), p. 268.

⁶⁵ Charles Higham, *Cecil B. DeMille*, p. 238.

her in the next world. For Macpherson, stripped of her personal life, her reputation, and her dignity, her reward would come in heaven, a veritable martyr of the church of the auteur.

Working Girls: Zoë Akins and Dorothy Arzner

A brief discussion of the partnership between Zoë Akins and Dorothy Arzner makes a fitting epilogue to this study, representing at once the high-water mark of, and last gasp for, collaborative female authorship in early Hollywood. Arzner has been widely celebrated as the only female studio director during her tenure in Hollywood from 1923 to 1947, and in this vacuum has become a cause célèbre of feminist film theory. Neglected by the first wave of auteur theorists, Arzner was embraced in the seventies, most notably by Claire Johnston and Pam Cook, as a filmmaker whose films undercut the patriarchal order of the Hollywood cinema. The discourse which emerged from these attempts to, in Cook's words, "take from Arzner's films some ideas which will open out the problem of the place of women" within the Hollywood system of representation, has reestablished Arzner's place in film history, but also placed undue stress on the work of one woman.⁶⁶ This narrow focus runs the risk of reinforcing the exclusionary practices of auteur theory, simply reframing the "Great Man" as the "Great Woman," when an analysis of the films directed by Arzner should be a starting point for the redistribution of authorial credit. Indeed, opening our aperture only slightly reveals a director not in a vacuum, but surrounded by a vital group of (often female) collaborators, some of whom – including actresses Ruth Chatterton and Billie Burke, editor Jane Loring, cinematographer Charles Lang, choreographer Marion Morgan, and production supervisor Elsie Janis – worked with Arzner on multiple productions in the early thirties. Breaking into the industry as a writer

⁶⁶ Pam Cook, "Approaching the Work of Dorothy Arzner" in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988), p. 46. See, in the same volume, Claire Johnston, "Dorothy Arzner: Critical Strategies," pp. 36-45.

and editor (she cut *Blood and Sand*), Arzner understood and appreciated the many moving parts involved in creating a film, and she held her co-authors in high regard, particularly her screenwriters.

Arzner has been vocal in her praise for the writers she worked with – a group which included Doris Anderson, Mary C. McCall, and Tess Slesinger, in addition to Akins – in one interview stating: “No director will have a good script or a good picture unless he has a good writer. I bow to a writer at all times. In fact, I have tried to always keep a writer on the set with me. That’s how much respect I have for them.”⁶⁷ No other screenwriter worked as closely with Arzner as Akins, who penned four scripts for the director: *Sarah and Son* (1930), *Anybody’s Woman* (1930), *Working Girls* (1931), and *Christopher Strong* (1933). Akins, a successful Broadway playwright, had experience producing stories that appealed to large, mostly female audiences, and the themes addressed in her plays, particularly her concern that “society has no acceptable way for women to express sexual passion outside the bo(u)nds of marriage,” dovetailed propitiously with Arzner’s own thematic interests.⁶⁸

By displacing Arzner as a solitary auteur and focusing instead on the collaboration between director and writer, the futile search for the unifying signature of the author recedes in favor of a more pragmatic consideration of the collaborative process of filmmaking. This approach also shifts attentions away from decoding the film text and instead draws from production records which represent the multiplicity of voices that culminate in the finished object. In this study, I will examine two drafts of Akins’ script for *Anybody’s Woman* (1930), tracking the changes between versions as indications of the collaborative labor underlying the film. Although the lack of contextual information makes it impossible to attribute these changes

⁶⁷ Dorothy Arzner, quoted in Judith Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 51.

⁶⁸ Alan Kreizenbeck, *Zoe Akins: Broadway Playwright* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), p. 73.

to specific contributors, it suffices to presume that they reflect a conversation between the various creative and industrial forces (including Akins and Arzner) brought to bear on the construction of the plot. Significantly, the film was produced in the pre-code era (as were the rest of the Akins-Arzner films), so these changes can be easily read as fine-tuning from within, not censorship from without.

Two scripts for *Anybody's Woman*, written just twelve days apart, take noticeably different approaches to the story of chorus girl Pansy Gray (Ruth Chatterton), who catches the eye of high-society drunk Neil Dunlap (Clive Brook) and marries him in a ceremony the groom does not remember. The two scripts evidence a negotiation over the portrayal of male-female dynamics and the institution of marriage. An early scene in both scripts has Neil bemoaning the fact that women have become “too smart,” but in the earlier script he continues: “The married ones might as well be single, and the single ones might as well be married. And the great idea is to be hard-boiled about the things they were meant to be soft about.”⁶⁹ This opinion is excised from the later script, but it gives vent, perhaps, to the script writer’s misgivings about the characterization of women by way of a restrictive single/married binary and the attendant behavior deemed appropriate to those roles. Interestingly, the later script presents a much more “hard-boiled” depiction of Pansy, and a far more jaundiced vision of her marriage to Neil.

The first meeting in the film between Pansy and Neil occurs at an impromptu party at Neil’s friend’s apartment. In the earlier script, Pansy walks directly up to Neil and the two have an earnest, intimate conversation in which Pansy reveals that she knows Neil, that he defended her in an indecent exposure case, and that she has always looked up to him. Neil is clear-headed and thoughtful, and Pansy is touched by his wisdom, as in the following interaction:

NEIL

⁶⁹ Zoë Akins, *Anybody's Woman*, White script, 5/15/1930 (Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA), scene A-8.

You don't click because you've never even had a chance to try for something you really wanted – something more than eating and sleeping and clothes. Isn't that true?

PANSY (Deeply moved)

Yes. That's true, maybe.⁷⁰

In the later script, the conversation is struck up between them as they dance with different partners; she interrogates him, but her attention is divided. Neil is visibly drunk, and Pansy responds to his mawkish advances with cynical ripostes. The script recasts the above-mentioned exchange in a far more ironic light:

NEIL

And you've never even had a chance to try for something you really wanted – something more than eating and sleeping and clothes. Isn't that true?

PANSY (Bluntly)

Look – you got troubles of your own – you don't need to worry about me.

NEIL (Turning a speculative gaze on her)

You're one of those women who don't whine, Pansy.

PANSY (Jeeringly)

Oh, sure – I'm swell, I am.⁷¹

Neil's subsequent proposal to Pansy is, in the later script, framed as a drunken decision as opposed to a spontaneous one, as the earlier script interprets it, and Pansy's reaction is fearful and embarrassed. Just the same, Pansy accepts his proposal, a decision which, given the tone of the preceding scene, calls into questions the motives of the bride, for whom marriage seems to

⁷⁰ Ibid., scene A-18.

⁷¹ Zoë Akins, *Anybody's Woman*, White script, 5/27/1930 (Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA), scene A-19.

offer the only opportunity for mobility. The wedding ceremony that follows is a dour, formal affair, the religious solemnity of their vows undercut by Neil's profane inebriation, whereas in the earlier script, the wedding is lighthearted and jocular, in keeping with the breathless couple's high spirits.

In both versions of the script, the marriage quickly (and predictably) falls into disrepair, as Neil's drinking threatens his personal and professional well-being, but the differing attitudes toward marriage in the two scripts – the first hopeful, the second cynical – inflect how these problems are addressed. The earlier script stages a conversation between Neil and Pansy about how to make their marriage work; Neil proposes that they both give up drinking, and he begins waking up at five in the morning to do his work. The couple settles into a boring life, the only conflict arising when Pansy's friend Dot (Cecil Cunningham) visits Pansy expecting the revelry of their days in the chorus line. Finding instead a devoted housewife and teetotaler, Dot accuses Pansy of being prim, and the two have a falling out. Here we find evidence of what Donna Casella describes as Arzner's characteristic depiction of both “the instability of male/female bonds and the impermanence of any viable alternative such as female friendships.”⁷² The friendship between Pansy and Dot, foregrounded at the outset of the film, is abruptly severed with the imposed isolation of heterosexual marriage; Pansy's and Neil's home becomes a sort of solitary confinement for Pansy, cut off from the possibility of female companionship.

In the later script, Pansy is holding up the household as a nursemaid to Neil, who is constantly drunk, neglecting his work, and delinquent in paying their servants. When confronted by Pansy, Neil explains his grim outlook on their marriage, telling her: “It won't work, I tell you

⁷² Donna R. Casella, “What Women Want: The Complex World of Dorothy Arzner and Her Cinematic Women,” *Framework* 50, no. 1-2 (2009), p. 236.

- - there's not a hope of it working.”⁷³ Unlike in the earlier script, where Neil makes the decision to quit drinking, here Pansy beats him into shape, forcing him to bathe and drink coffee, actively compelling her husband to change his ways. While Pansy is granted more agency in this version, her power is undercut by the script's representation of marriage as an inequitable, untenable institution.

The primary threat to Neil's and Pansy's marriage, in both scripts, is Neil's most important client, Gustave Saxon (Paul Lukas), who falls for Pansy at a party. In the first script, his advances are limited to a few suggestive comments at the dinner table, but in the second, he visits her the next morning to proposition her with a promise of marriage and the comforts his wealth can buy, which Pansy rebuffs. Neil overhears their exchange, and sides with Saxon, blaming his wife for playing the tease. Pansy, furious at the realization that she has been the object of exchange between Neil and Saxon, leaves them both, but not before admonishing Neil, “Where I come from we've got a name for a man who gets his money through a woman.”⁷⁴ Clearly, the later script (and the finished film) puts a much finer point on the commodification of women and the mercantile nature of marriage. For Pansy, who viewed marriage as her best (and only) opportunity to “get somewhere,” the realization of what she has sacrificed to take her place in the marriage economy spurs her return to the workforce, to a more legitimate means of earning money.

In the later scripts' dénouement, after an unspecified amount of time has passed, Pansy is working, appropriately enough, in a flower shop. Neil finds her there and tells her he has stopped working with Saxon, stopped taking clients, and started fresh, working as a factory

⁷³ Zoë Akins, *Anybody's Woman*, White script, 5/27/1930 (Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA), scene C-14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, scene H-6. In the film, the line is changed to “There's a gutter name for men who aren't too choosy about the way they get their money.”

watchman and then as a law clerk. He wins her over with the same lines he told her when they first met, this time promising her he is sober, and they embrace. In the earlier script, Neil and Pansy reunite at a Christmas party, surrounded by friends (suggesting, perhaps, a gift economy), but the later script conspires to stage their reconciliation in her workplace, portraying it as another in a series of business transactions. By finding an alternative source of income, Neil accumulates the capital needed to attain his love; he is effectively buying Pansy, and in a flower shop, the very place one would expect to buy pansies.

Judith Mayne writes that, in Dorothy Arzner's films, "[t]he working girl is portrayed through and against the conventions of romance, and the connection of 'work' and 'romance' is often awkward."⁷⁵ The abrupt happy ending to this script evidences this awkwardness; the happiness of Pansy's and Neil's obligatory coupling is given the lie by its performance in a marketplace. The issue of work is presented ambiguously throughout *Anybody's Woman*: Neil's wealth makes him an eligible bachelor, but his unwillingness to work for it ruins his marriage; it is only when he finds honest work that he proves himself worthy of Pansy. Pansy, on the other hand, shows her independence as a working girl, but her work is only a placeholder, to be dispensed with as soon as she can find a husband. As I have demonstrated in my comparison of the two scripts of *Anybody's Woman*, the filmmakers modified the plot to increase Pansy's sense of objectification and destabilize the marriage built on that objectification. If this theme can be found elsewhere in Arzner's oeuvre, however, it should not be taken as indication of her authorial signature; such a reductive reading merely reinscribes the problems of auteur theory. Rather, we are better served to focus our attention on the space *between* the scripts, as the site of creative collaboration between Arzner and her associates.

⁷⁵ Judith Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*, p. 94.

The impulse to isolate Arzner as an auteur is certainly understandable given her unique position as a female director in golden age Hollywood, but this case study proposes approaching Arzner as an opportunity for expanding and complicating our understanding of film authorship. If, as Mayne suggests, Arzner's films put an emphasis on communities of women, it is important to acknowledge the production context of the films, which constitute their own woman-dominated communities. By investigating multiple versions of Akins' scripts – a similar study could be made of *Sarah and Son* (1930) or *Working Girls* (1931), both of which have multiple scripts at the Margaret Herrick Library – an idea of the outcomes, if not exactly the nature, of her collaboration with Arzner and her fellow producers begins to form. By shifting focus away from the film text as the expression of a single author and considering intermediate texts, like these scripts, which give form to the multivocal conversation of collaborative filmmaking, we introduce new authors and new forms of authorship to our construction of the history of cinema.

Conclusion

At stake in this essay is more than the reputation of the female screenwriters in question. I have highlighted four creative partnerships which shaped the early years of Hollywood cinema, but at the heart of my investigation is the question of how film history is written. The women in these case studies are the victims not only of gender bias, but of a curious brand of tunnel vision that privileges either the directors as sole creator, or the star as vital center of a film. Despite the now-widespread reaction against auteurism, the attitude of director idol-worship it bred is still perceptible in the way that we classify, study and consume films. While the director's name is habitually included in any parenthetical identifier of a film's origin, the screenwriter takes her place alongside the cinematographer, editor, producer, and production designer in the amorphous "crew." Similarly, the marketing of a film using the star's name – e.g., a "Valentino picture" –

may properly capture the film's primary appeal to its audience, but it also effaces the work of the production team responsible for building the film around that star.

I am not arguing that every film must be described by a full inventory of its cast and crew, but that the assumption that the director is the primary creator of any and any film is a potentially damaging misconception, particularly in the case of early Hollywood, whose division of labor was often, in the words of Giuliana Muscio, “not centered on the director but rather constituted by the relationship between screenwriter and producer.”⁷⁶ This dogged devotion to the director, a historically male figure, fosters an image of early Hollywood as the dominion of men. In reality, as I have shown, before the vertical integration of the Hollywood system, roles within the industry were less fluid, authorship more diffuse, and women far more prominent. Thus, my focus here on the contributions of Frances Marion, June Mathis, Jeanie MacPherson, and Zoe Akins is *not* an alternative history, or a feminist intervention; at least, it should not be. This essay has suggested four inroads for the inclusion of female screenwriters in the popular narrative of the silent and early sound eras, each an opportunity to right the historical record. My intention is to raise awareness of and appreciation for these forgotten women of early cinema, and in doing so, to encourage reflection on what our histories – and especially the stories not told – reveal about our stake in the creation of a monolithic “official” account of Hollywood's past. By looking past the “great man” erected by auteur theory, marginal voices come to the fore, and a clearer, fuller, manifold image of early Hollywood comes into view.

⁷⁶ Muscio, Giuliana, “Clara, Ouida, Beulah, et. al.: Women Screenwriters in American Silent Cinema,” in Vicki Callahan, ed., *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), p. 292.

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