

Honey, You Know I Can't Hear You When You Aren't in the Room: Key Female Filmmakers Prove the Importance of Having a Female in the Writing Room

DR ROSANNE WELCH, *Stephens College MFA in Screenwriting; California State University, Fullerton*

ABSTRACT

The need for more diversity in Hollywood films and television is currently being debated by scholars and content makers alike, but where is the proof that more diverse writers will create more diverse material? Since all forms of art are subjective, there is no perfect way to prove the importance of having female writers in the room except through samples of qualitative case studies of various female writers across the history of film. By studying the writing of several female screenwriters – personal correspondence, interviews and their writing for the screen – this paper will begin to prove that having a female voice in the room has made a difference in several prominent films. It will further hypothesise that greater representation can only create greater opportunity for more female stories and voices to be heard.

Research for my PhD dissertation 'Married: With Screenplay' involved the work of several prominent female screenwriters across the first century of filmmaking, including Anita Loos, Dorothy Parker, Frances Goodrich and Joan Didion. In all of their memoirs and other writings about working on screenplays, each mentioned the importance of (often) being the lone woman in the room during pitches and during the development of a screenplay. Goodrich summarised all their experiences concisely when she wrote, 'I'm always the only woman working on the picture and I hold the fate of the women [characters] in my hand... I'll fight for what the gal will or will not do, and I can be completely unfeminine about it.' Also, the rise of female directors, such as Barbra Streisand or female production executives, such as Kathleen Kennedy, prove that one of the greatest assets to having a female voice in the room is the ability to invite other women inside. Therefore, this paper contributes to the scholarship on women in film and to authorship studies.

KEYWORDS

Anita Loos, Dorothy Parker, Frances Goodrich Hackett, Ruth Gordon, Joan Didion, female screenwriters.

Introduction

While readers have regularly assumed that the writer of a novel deserves full credit for her work despite the known assistance of editors, film viewers, critics and even historians seem less willing to grant screenwriters as much credit, continuing to refer to directors as the *auteur* of a film, rarely mentioning the names of screenwriters and when discussing scripts considering them nothing more than blueprints (Sternberg 1997, 11-20). One explanation of this disparity traces back to the *politique des auteurs* or the 'auteur theory' suggesting that directors are the sole authors of a film. In the 1950s, French film critics, including Francois Truffault before he became a director, created this concept in film analysis. When Truffault's films became popular in America so too did his writings in the French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinema*. He believed that French screenwriters wielded too much power over directors, who were in many ways collaborators on dialogue and plot points, and wanted them to be given more credit in the creation of their films. This led to the idea that since films were a visual medium, the artist directly responsible for those visuals should be considered the true author of the film. This *auteur* concept minimised the role of screenwriters, furthering the difficulty the average audience member has had in understanding writers' contributions, whether or not the writers were male or female.

Scholarship that leans toward treating directors as storytellers fostered this *auteur* theory and was enhanced by American directors such as Peter Bogdanovich, who conducted in-depth interviews with early directing pioneers and published them in 1997 in *Who The Devil Made It*. This made screenwriters the unsung heroes of Hollywood, a fact that is even more true for female screenwriters who even today are left out of most of the textbooks on the history of screenwriting. This is evident by a survey of three major texts on screenwriting, those by Marc Norman, Ian Hamilton and Tom Stempel all of which relegate women screenwriters of the silent era to one or two paragraphs when Cari Beachamp devoted a whole book to them. The need for more diversity in Hollywood films and television is currently being debated by scholars and content makers alike, but where is the proof that more diverse writers will create more diverse material? Since all forms of art are subjective, there is no perfect way to prove the importance of having female writers in the room except through qualitative case studies of various female writers across the history of modern film. By studying the writing of several female screenwriters – personal correspondence, interviews and their writing for the screen – this paper argues that having a female voice in the room when a film is being written – or rewritten (as in the case of the role of female producers and directors) has made a difference in several prominent films. Writers including Anita Loos, Dorothy Parker, Ruth Gordon, Frances Goodrich Hackett, Harriet Franks Jr., and Joan Didion were often vocal in their arguments for more honesty in the portrayal of female characters in their work – as was producer/director Barbra Streisand. Likewise, producer Kathleen Kennedy contributed most recently to gender diversity by hiring female writers and development executives, thereby shaping stories around female heroines. Short case studies of the work produced by these women will illustrate how important it is to have a female voice in the room to achieve the diversity necessary in the telling of three dimensional stories.

Anita Loos

Academic focus on the work of early female screenwriters such as Anita Loos helps counter the standard narrative espoused even recently in self-proclaimed historian and screenwriter Marc Norman's opus *What Happens Next: A History of American Screenwriting*. While he does admit Loos' work on the first screenplay she sold, *The New York Hat* (1912) 'discovered the key to all good movie writing, a story to be seen rather than told,' Norman claims she made that discovery 'naively' (Norman 2007, 31). Norman denigrates the contributions of early female screenwriters and misses the fact that Loos gave *New York Hat* a particularly female perspective as a social satire highlighting the hypocrisy of how gossip destroys women's reputations, but has no effect on the men who are equally involved in the potential assignation.

Loos became one of the busiest writers of the silent period and by 1913 she had sold upwards of 40 scenarios writing for the biggest stars of the day. It is Cari Beauchamp's *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood* that sets the record straight, providing data showing female screenwriters out-earned male screenwriters throughout the Silent Era. Loos is known by film historians as the first literate screenwriter since she included dialogue in her silent film scenarios to make them more interesting for the directors to read and therefore more sellable (Hamilton 1990, 8). Loos worked nearly exclusively with director D. W. Griffith in her early career, but in later years, with other producers and directors, Loos frequently had to use her alcoholic husband, John Emerson as a conduit to communicate with directors and other executives who balked at dealing with a woman on equal footing. This worked well to promote the idea they were a writing "team" and a happy couple, when in fact Loos did most all of the writing, including writing her signature novel, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, alone (Carey 1988, 104). This novel concerns the romantic adventures of two nightclub singers traveling to Paris to perform and proved so popular it has never been out of print. Loos adapted *Blondes* as a film in 1928 on her own. She adapted it as a Broadway musical in 1949, then into the iconic film

musical starring Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in 1953, cementing Loos as the writer who gave Flappers respect as independent women.

Loos also worked behind the scenes to aid fellow females in their entry into the film world. For example, in 1920 *Vanity Fair* magazine fired their theatre reviewer, a young Dorothy Parker, for writing disparaging reviews of actresses whose producer husbands or boyfriends then threatened to pull advertising from the magazine. Loos and another highly paid female screenwriter of the day, Frances Marion, both suggested to actress and producer Lillian Gish that she hire Parker for a film she was currently supervising that starred her sister Dorothy. While her experience proved unsatisfactory for all the women involved with Parker briefly resuming her newspaper work (Beauchamp 1997, 119), she did ultimately return to Hollywood to become an Oscar-winning screenwriter whose most famous female character, Esther Blodgett in *A Star is Born* was independent and three-dimensional (Welch 2011, 125-133).

Dorothy Parker

Against societal norms, Parker, the wife of actor/screenwriter Alan K. Campbell, was the more famous and financially successful partner in the marriage because of her years as a member of the Algonquin Round Table and on *The New Yorker*, while Campbell was often referred to in friends' correspondence as the lesser talent of the team (Welch 2011, 114-118). Often these contemporaries felt that Campbell functioned as a caretaker to the alcoholic Parker and merely kept her up and operating so that paychecks could continue. Parker and Campbell divorced in 1947, which ended their writing collaboration, but they remarried in 1950. During the course of their separation, Parker continued to write for prestigious films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Saboteur*.

After their divorce in 1947 she worked on *Smash Up: The Story of a Woman*. For this semi-biographical tale of a female singer overshadowed by her husband, Parker was nominated for her second Academy Award for Best Writing, Original Story.

Notably, Parker's most successful film, *A Star is Born*, involved an artistic couple undergoing a similar set of issues as she and Campbell faced, and a similar downward spiral based on the female's legendary fame. The film's storyline followed rising starlet Esther Blodgett, who left her Canadian home for Hollywood, took the stage name Vicki Lester, and became famous with the aid of fading cinema idol, Norman Maine, whom she eventually married. Maine, who had trouble being snidely called Mr. Lester, mourned his past fame, and sunk into alcoholism. To save him and their marriage, Blodgett decided to quit making films. To retain her respect and save her career, Maine committed suicide by swimming into the Pacific Ocean outside their Malibu beach home. The final scene of the film, where Blodgett arrives at a film premiere in the wake of Maine's suicide and introduces herself not as Vicki Lester, but rather as Mrs. Norman Maine, has become a cinematic signature.

The benefit of having a female screenwriter in the room is evident in *Star is Born* by placing Parker and Campbell's draft against an earlier version written by William Wellman and Robert Carson. That draft was an attempt to remake *What Price Hollywood?* (1932), itself credited to five writers, among them female screenwriters Adela Rogers St. Johns and Jane Murfin. The original script for the adaptation, by Wellman and Carson, focuses on Blodgett and the Hollywood experience while the final version, written by Parker and Campbell, focuses on Blodgett and Maine and how the Hollywood experience strains the relationship she tries hard to maintain. Nearly each major scene refers to their relationship or reflects that strain. Hence Parker focused the story on the more universal yet, to her, intimately personal, female fear of having to choose work over marriage or vice versa. Also, the theme of abandonment that flows through most Parker's short stories and poetry can be found in *Star is Born*, but past film analysts have focused almost exclusively upon the rags to riches

Cinderella genre. In doing so they have missed these other themes. Few critics note the spousal aspect of Blodgett's character and how important it becomes to her final decision. Pessimism is also apparent in Parker's version of *Star*. In his essay for *American Women Short Story Writers* Ken Johnson analyzes four of Parker's short stories and notes that she focuses often on the machinations of marriage and couples and the unhappiness experienced in the 'eternal perpetual motion that consigns the stories' characters to an endless experiencing of their own superficiality and emptiness' (Brown 2000, 252). Because Parker's female perspective turned the film into a classic that has been remade twice (with Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand) and is currently in development for a third remake, effectively she was the most important voice in that writing room. Due to her previous fame, Parker's name still resonates, whereas the name of her peer, Frances Goodrich Hackett, has faded.

Frances Goodrich Hackett

Arguably, one of the unsung female screenwriters of all time is Frances Goodrich Hackett. Films of the 1930s most often clearly defined the male and female roles within a marriage, but when Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett adapted *The Thin Man* novel into film they rendered Nora Charles more three-dimensionally than did novelist Dashiell Hammett. They also made Nick and Nora a couple clearly meant to be together as they never lost interest in talking to each other. Therefore having a woman in the room for the adapting of *The Thin Man* (1934) made a deep difference as will be seen in the discussion of differences between the novel and the screenplay. The original film and its five sequels (the series ended in 1947) became the longest running film series of any major studio. The married couple created by the Hacketts for *The Thin Man* rang so true that they cast a long cultural shadow. That shadow began when the stars known for portraying Nick and Nora, William Powell and Myrna Loy, placed their footprints in cement in front of Grauman's Chinese theatre in 1936. They were placed side by side, as if the actors were married in real life. The banter associated with Nick and Nora has long been considered the benchmark for romantic comedies, both in films such as *Romancing the Stone* (1984) and in television programs from *Hart to Hart* in the 1970s through *Moonlighting* in the 1980s and *Bones* in late 2000s. In 2008 Columbia Pictures released a film called *Nick and Nora's Infinite Playlist* (screenplay by Lorene Scafaria, based on a novel by Rachel Cohn and David Levithan). The relationship of Nick and Nora as it appeared in the original film is in fact more closely connected to the relationship Goodrich shared with Hackett, whose marriage lasted fifty-three years ending only in Goodrich's death in 1984. As a screenwriter, Goodrich wrote a relationship that mirrored the one she was in, rather than the one Hammett was in, making her presence mandatory when writing the adaptation.

The question is what part of the characterisation of Nick and Nora came from Hammett and what came from the Goodrich and Hackett? *The Thin Man* was the first text, novel or short story, in which Hammett involved a female character in detecting work, which in turn created space in the story for elements more typically seen in romance genre stories. But Hammett used this convention more for the opportunity for the two to snipe at or about each other as they became more deeply involved in the case whereas Goodrich and Hackett used the marriage as an opportunity for wittier, less mean-spirited banter that built up the relationship. For example, an exchange that appeared in the novel but not in the film had a policeman trying not to discuss the case in front of Nora by telling Nick, 'For Mrs. Charles's sake. I don't want to cause her any anxiety.' Nick dismissed Nora as silly by saying, 'Then out with it. She only worries about things she doesn't know' (Hammet 1992, 153). That exchange represented a lack of respect between the two married people, a possible reason Goodrich did not choose to use it in their script. While no record of all changes made during the adaptation process exists, a comparison between the novel and the screenplay does seem to indicate nothing insulting to the Nora character made it on screen.

In James Harvey's *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood* the author critiques the rest of the films in the series. Without explicitly realizing the weakening of the female character is what weakens the franchise, Harvey gives an example of just that. In Harvey's opinion *The Thin Man Goes Home*, a sequel written by Robert Riskin and Dwight Taylor from a story by Riskin, is a vastly inferior film to the original. He writes that of all the changes Riskin and Taylor employed, 'Most significant of all, however, is the way Nora's character has tilted toward the dizzy, lovable helpmate of domestic comedy tradition – cute but dim-witted' (Harvey 1988, 177). An example of this can be seen when Nora demands the sheriff arrest someone, to be informed that the man has to do something illegal first. 'He does?' she replies. 'Why?' This response insinuates that Nora is not smart enough to understand the simplest rule of law. As none of this came from an original source such as Hammett's novel, it can be attributed to the later screenwriters. This particular Riskin and Taylor change in the character of Nora Charles destroyed much of what Goodrich had helped create.

In fact, to study this dialogue with the eye of a writer, this Riskin and Taylor dialogue exchange was an instance where two male writers sacrificed the predetermined reality of a female character in service to a quick joke, something Goodrich never allowed when she was in meetings on a script. 'I'm always the only woman working on the picture,' she told an interviewer, 'and I hold the fate of the women [characters] in my hand... I'll fight for what the gal will or will not do' (Goodrich 2001, 40-41). In his work on romantic comedies James Harvey missed the subtlety of the contribution of this female writer completely. But he was not alone. Van Dyke's biographer, Robert Cannon, did the same when he wrote: 'Van, Myrna and Bill had caught the charm of married life and showed through these characters that the really important things in living don't cease after marriage. The affection, tolerance, love and the fears of these two people actually mirrored the lives, loves, tolerance and fears of millions of Americans' (Cannon, 1948, 290-291). Cannon is correct. The charm of married life had been captured, but not by Van Dyke and the actors alone, by having a married female in the room. The effect of having a happily married female writer in the room can also be seen in the work of writer and actress Ruth Gordon.

Ruth Gordon

Known more as a Broadway and Academy Award-winning film actress, Ruth Gordon was also a highly successful novelist, memoirist and screenwriter, collaborating on films in the 1940s with her director husband Garson Kanin. While they only wrote four films together, one was the iconic *Adam's Rib*, a movie about married lawyers on different sides of a case. The male lawyer, Adam, is assigned by his firm to prosecute a woman for shooting at her philandering husband and the female lawyer, Amanda, takes up the defense of the accused shooter. Stanley Cavell in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* believes the equality represented in the fictional marriage was essential to why the film worked. 'The sense of participation or partnership in their intimacy is essential to the way the film works, because it is exactly this intimacy that the woman puts on trial in taking her marriage to court. We will not understand her bravery (nor, hence, the man's) unless we know that for her their intimacy, their privacy, their home at home, is almost everything' (Cavell 1981, 192). Orit Kamir notes the gender transcendence in the piece when he writes, 'The ancient notion of "couple" takes on a new dimension when, in the context of Hollywood's conventions, the viewer is invited to identify with a symbiotic pair of male-female heroes. Gender roles – both on and off screen – are transcended when the man-woman couple is posed as the fundamental unity reconciling contradictory myth' (Kamir 2006, 152).

Daniel Kimmel, discussing which films he chose to analyze for his book on great romantic comedies, calls *Adam's Rib* 'arguably the best of the Spencer Tracy / Katherine Hepburn matchups', where as married lawyers

on opposing sides of a case, the question of sexism (a word not yet coined) could be addressed within in the conventions of a traditional 'battle of the sexes' (Kimmel 2008, 82-84). Later, in a chapter dedicated to the film, Kimmel reiterates that the film never became dated because the argument against sexism put forth by Amanda still exists. Amanda's idea that there ought not to be a double standard for men and women 'is born of not only Hepburn's (and Ruth Gordon's) independence and feistiness, but the dawning of a new attitude about women's roles after they had contributed so greatly to the recent war effort... Amanda's case that women should be subjected to the same expectations as men anticipates the debates that would take place in the 1960s and 1970s'. Finally Kimmel insists the major reason this battle of the sexes stays contemporary is because, 'this is a couple deeply in love, and part of their fun comes from their playful contention' (Kimmel 2008, 6).

An analysis of major Gordon/Kanin scripts illustrates how much the writing team helped invent Katherine Hepburn's popular culture reputation for female empowerment, a reputation she seemed to have earned more from the power of her dominant fictional characters than the events of a real life lived as the more submissive partner in her relationship with the married Spencer Tracy. Upon Gordon's death in 1985 New York Times writer Mel Gussow wrote in his appreciation of her work: 'Every time you enjoy Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn sparring in *Adam's Rib* and *Pat and Mike*, remember who created their characters and wrote their witty dialogue. Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin's contribution to the symbiosis of the Tracy-Hepburn team is inestimable' (Gussow 1985). Biographers and critics of Hepburn often claimed that she based her independent woman persona and characters on a combination of her mother and of Eleanor Roosevelt. I speculate that being a mistress and not a married woman herself, Hepburn was not sure of the differences in such relationships but witnessed the Gordon and Kanin marriage so closely that she also, subconsciously, based the wives in her Tracy/Hepburn films on Ruth Gordon. Gordon's ability to balance her personal and professional lives attracted comment from many other women in show business. As actress and writer Elaine May once observed to Garson Kanin about his wife, 'She really is about the only person who gives you the feeling that maybe it *could* be a woman's world' (Ware 1998, 129). While Gordon's fame as an actress kept her name alive in film histories, another prominent female screenwriter of the 1950s had her fame overshadowed not by her husband, but by her daughter.

Phoebe Ephron and Nora Ephron

Due to the great success of Nora Ephron (*Silkwood*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Julie and Julia*) her mother, Phoebe Ephron is often times forgotten for having been a successful screenwriter in her own right in collaboration with her husband, Henry. Hired to come to Hollywood in 1943 on the success of their stage play, *Three is a Family*, the couple later shared writing credit for *Belles on Their Toes* (the sequel to *Cheaper by the Dozen*). In 1954 the Ephrons wrote the screenplay to the movie musical *There's No Business Like Show Business*.

They adapted the hit Broadway musical *Carousel* in 1957, which became Henry's first credit as a producer as well as writer. Next they adapted the William Marchant's play, *Desk Set*, into a film. The story involves computerizing the research department at a television network and stars Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracey. Yet the work of the mother is often overshadowed by the legacy of the daughter, Nora Ephron, which may mean that the rooms where she made the most difference were the ones she shared with her daughter, imparting ideas about writing that the younger Ephron turned into her own film classics.

Phoebe Ephron often incorporated her motherhood into her work, such as another play-turned-film about Nora's college and post college life called *Take Her; She's Mine*. The Ephron family also stood apart because all four of

their daughters became writers later in life and used personal experiences in most of their dramatic work. In his memoir of their partnership and marriage, Henry writes that he felt their choice to have a child gave them the fodder to finally become writing partners since their first successfully produced play, *Three's a Family*, tells the tale of new parents overwhelmed by the experience in World-War-Two-era America.

The concept that 'everything is copy' served as a legacy the daughter writers inherited. Any doubts on the amount of their real life this family of writers included in their fictional work were erased by studying Nora Ephron's first novel turned screenplay, *Heartburn* together with the myriad interviews given by the various Ephron sisters over the course of their careers. A simple example is the way Nora most often describes her mother in interviews compared to how she describes the mother character in *Heartburn*. Of her mother, Nora writes, 'If sympathy was in short supply, what was valued was a writer's cold objectivity'. Ephron remembers her mother telling her, 'Everything is copy'. Even on her deathbed, years later, Phoebe Ephron told her daughter to take notes. In *Heartburn* Nora writes, 'Even in the old days, my mother was a washout at hard-core mothering; what she was good at were clever remarks that made you feel immensely sophisticated and adult and, if you thought about it at all, foolish for having wanted anything so mundane as some actual nurturing. Had I been able to talk to her at this moment of crisis [her fictional husband leaving her], she would probably have said something fabulously brittle like "Take Notes"' (Ephron 1983, 29). In dozens of interviews across her career, Nora uses this 'take notes' quote quite often, offering her mother a backhanded compliment for being less of a mother than a professional role model.

The Ephrons had married in 1934 and shortly thereafter they began writing together after encouragement from famous playwrights George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, who employed Henry as a stage manager. In Henry's words:

For a long time I had been propagandizing to Phoebe that we write a play together. She was smart and funny, and, though it doesn't make a playwright, she'd majored in English and been at the top of her class at Hunter College. Also, Kaufman and Hart, who had met her, seemed to be very impressed. Whenever we came down to dress rehearsal, one of the other would ask me to bring Phoebe. After the play they would have a brief conference with her, always asking her what she didn't like. They never wasted time on what she liked – the important thing was to know the parts that weren't right (Ephron 1977, 4).

After her mother's death, Nora gave a eulogy in which she read a condolence letter from her college roommate that praised Phoebe for dazzling Nora's friends with her career, 'by working with her husband, by the four children, by the approach to life' (Ephron 1977, 211). In Phoebe Ephron's case, the power of her presence as a screenwriter in a Hollywood studio office might be matched by the power of her presence in the life of her daughter.

Another female who struggled to balance work and family, Joan Didion came from the world of New York publishing, rather than Broadway.

Joan Didion

Joan Didion came to fame as a writer in the New Journalism wave of the 1960s, then as a novelist and finally, by her own admission, as a screenwriter in collaboration with her husband, John Gregory Dunne. Dunne chronicled their experiences as writers in Hollywood in *Monster: Living Off the Big Screen* where he noted:

Hollywood is largely a boys' club. The presence of a woman at a studio meeting tends to make male executives uneasy. Whenever Joan and I were at a script conference, the questions are invariably directed at me; for years Joan was tolerated only as an "honorary guy," or perhaps an "associate guy," whose primary function was to take notes. This mind-set is prevalent even to this day (Dunne 1997, 16).

Giving a direct example of the importance of having a female writer in the room, Dunne wrote about some rewrite notes they received from director Jon Avnet for the film *Up Close and Personal*. Didion deeply disagreed with the notes. "The next day, an inclusive sampling from a fax to Avnet himself:

We think it is a mistake... this scene has been rewritten per your instructions, but JDD (Joan Didion) wishes to re-register her most vehement objection... JDD says this is deeply offensive to her, reinforcing the notion that women who are 'successful' at what they do 'don't want children,' i.e. are selfish, self-centered, and thwart the nurturing wishes of the men with whom they are involved..." (Dunne 1997, 130).

The character was adjusted per Didion's note.

The experience of acting in this remake of *Star is Born* brought another female filmmaker into a position of power, director/producer Barbra Streisand. Her experiences as a producer and director help prove that having a woman in the room is valuable not only to female centered narratives but to screenplays in general.

Barbra Streisand

After her films proved financially successful at the box office, Barbra Streisand was able to direct and produce her next few films, including *Yentl* and *The Prince of Tides*. For both she earned Golden Globe nominations as Best Director and Best Picture, awards she won for *Tides*. That film was also nominated for an Academy Award in 1991, but rather than praise, Streisand received a great deal of negative press. One can sense that Streisand grew so tired of the negative narrative surrounding her supposed perfectionism that she established her own online archive to preserve the history of her work in Hollywood.

For *Tides*, Becky Johnston adapted the Pat Conroy novel for the screen with the novelist as a co-screenwriter, so when Streisand gave notes there were two female voices in the writing room. Together, these two women illustrate that the female voice is equally necessary in the telling of male-centered narratives. According to Streisand they worked to make *Tides* the story of 'a man's journey, a man who has to learn to grieve. It's a film about forgiveness, about saying, "I need to love my mother and father in all their flawed outrageous humanity." I chose to put that line at the end, because I felt this is the lesson of the movie' (Streisand archives). In a discussion of why she cast Nick Nolte over more even more powerful box office stars such as Robert Redford and Warren Beatty, Streisand gave an answer deeply connected to her female point of view. 'Nick was the one who would allow himself to be most vulnerable and still be macho, and he is macho—and sexy. The challenge was getting him to trust and be whole and be vulnerable' (Streisand archives). Casting is the ultimate power of a director and can often make or break a film's success. Only the highest ranked screenwriters are able to include casting approval in their contracts. Most often their only power over this important step in the storytelling is to write character descriptions to entice particular actors. It is of interest that many casting directors are female, but the final decision on which person to cast always falls to the director, who is often not a female. In the case of *Prince of Tides* they were both female.

These case studies are offered to illustrate the argument that having a women's voice in the room – from conception of story to thematic focus to characterization of the females within the story to final casting – affected the screenwriting process and ultimately the outcome of these classic films. A much larger study is in order, and

is in the works, but for now the final word comes from Lucasfilm President Kathleen Kennedy, a woman who combines the work of a writer with the power of an executive. The most heralded film premiere of the new century, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, offers an up to date example of the importance of having female voices in all the rooms. Created by a male screenwriter in the 1970s – George Lucas – the *Star Wars* franchise was reborn in 2015 under the direction of Kennedy. She spoke often about what the Los Angeles Times called her ‘not-so-outlandish-idea of putting women in the writing and development room’ (Woerner 2015, 1). Of the six members of her story department, Kennedy hired four women, so that ‘there were as many women sitting in the room having those discussions as there were men. I think that in and of itself is what really began to help [the character of Rey] take shape in a way that was relevant to us’ (Woerner 2015, 1). Fans, reviewers and scholars agree.

References

- Beauchamp, C. (1997) *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood*, Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Brown, J.M. (1962) *The Worlds of Robert E. Sherwood: Mirror to His Times*, New York: Harper & Row
- Cannon, R. C. (1948) *Van Dyke and The Mythical City of Hollywood*, Culver City: Murray & Gee, Inc.
- Cavell, S. (1981) *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Dunne, J. G. (1997) *Monster: Living Off the Big Screen*, New York: Random House
- (1967) *The Studio*, New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.
- Ephron, P. and H. (1977) *We Thought We Could do Anything: The Life of Screenwriters*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company
- Ephron, N. (1983) *Heartburn*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- Goodrich, D. L. (2001) *The Real Nick and Nora: Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, Writers of Stage and Screen Classics*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press
- Gordon, R. (1980) *Ruth Gordon: An Open Book*, Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- Gottfried, M. (1984) *Jed Harris: The Curse of Genius*, Boston: Little Brown and Company
- Gussow, M. (1985) ‘Grit And Wit Made Ruth Gordon A Star’, [online], 8 September. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/08/arts/stage-view-grit-and-wit-made-ruth-gordon-a-star.html>. Accessed July 22, 2009
- Hamilton, I. (1990) *Writers in Hollywood, 1915 – 1951*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers
- Hammett, D. (1992) *The Thin Man*, New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc.
- Harvey, J. (1988) *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood: From Lubitsch to Sturges*, New York: De Capo Press, Inc.
- Kamir, O. (2006) *Framed: Women in Law and Film*, Durham: Duke University Press
- Kimmel, D. M (2008) *I'll Have What She's Having: Behind the Scenes of the Great Romantic Comedies*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee

- Norman, M. (2007) *What Happens Next: A History of American Screenwriting*, New York: Harmony Books
- Schwartz, N. L. (1982) *The Hollywood Writers' Wars*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- Stempel, T. (1988) *FrameWork: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company
- Streisand, B. (1991) 'Streisand & Nolte Talk Tides', [online]. Available at http://barbra-archives.com/films/prince_of_tides_1.html. Accessed 7 December 2016
- Sternberg, C. (1997) *Written for the Screen: The American Motion-Picture Screenplay as Text*, Germany: Stauffenburg Verlag.
- Ware, S. (1998) *Letter to the World: Seven Women Who Shaped the American Century*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company
- Welch, R. (2011) 'Married, With Screenplay: A Study Of Married Screenwriting Teams And The Films They Wrote', Doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University
- Woerner, M. (2015) 'An Empire of Women: New Turns in *The Force Awakens* stir up the Galaxy', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June, 1

Dr Rosanne Welch teaches One-Hour Drama Writing and History of Screenwriting for the Stephens College low residency MFA in Screenwriting. As a television writer/producer her credits include *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Picket Fences* and *Touched by an Angel* and *Bill Clinton and the Boys Nation Class of 1963* for ABC NEWS/Nightline. She is the Book Reviews Editor of the *Journal of Screenwriting*; has a chapter in *Torchwood Declassified: Investigating Mainstream Cult Television* (I.B.Tauris) based on a paper she co-presented at the Torchwood Symposium, University of Glamorgan in Wales, UK; and an essay in *Doctor Who and Race: An Anthology*. In 2016 Welch published *Why The Monkees Matter: Teenagers, Television and American Pop Culture* (McFarland), co-edited *Women in American History: A Social, Political, and Cultural Encyclopedia* (ABC-Clio) and delivered her TEDx Talk on [*The Importance of Having a Female Voice in the Room.*](#)

Email: rosanne@welchwrite.com