



Gender and the Screenplay

Processes, Practices, Perspectives

Guest Edited by
Louise Sawtell and Stayci Taylor

Networking Knowledge

Special Issue

Gender and the Screenplay: Processes, Practices, Perspectives

Edited by Louise Sawtell and Stayci Taylor

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Gender and the Screenplay: Processes, Practices, Perspectives. An Introduction.

LOUISE SAWTELL AND STAYCI TAYLOR, *RMIT University*

While plenty has been written about gender representation on screen, much less has been written about gender in regards to screenplays. Emerging scholarly research around screenwriting practice often focuses on questions of the craft – is screenwriting a technical or creative act? – and whether or not the screenplay’s only destiny is to disappear into the film (Carrière, cited in Maras 1999, 147). Thus there might be room for further exploration into screenwriters and their practice – to ask who (in regards to gender) is writing screenplays, especially considering the assertion of Dancyger and Rush that the three-act structure (a dominant screenwriting practice) is ‘designed to suggest the story tells itself’ (2013, 38). Moreover, questions of gender representation on screen might be considered from the perspective of screenwriting practice, given this same ubiquitous structure means that barriers, including those related to gender, ‘are still presented as secondary to the transcendence of individual will’ (Dancyger and Rush 2013, 36). This special issue of *Networking Knowledge*, then, brings together a collection of scholarly perspectives on screenwriting theory and practice through the lens of gender.

KEYWORDS

screenwriting, screenplay, script development, gender, feminisms, masculinities

The issue begins with Stayci Taylor’s examination of how a screenplay might be ‘gendered’ through its representation on the page and within individual screenwriting practices. Dr Taylor considers the potential gender biases in mainstream screenwriting frameworks, recent gains made for female practitioners, representation and perspectives in the Australian context.

Following the first article is an exclusive interview with noted screenwriting scholar and practitioner Helen Jacey, within which she responds to our editorial queries on ‘bromance’ screenplays, gender-based industry quotas and memorable heroines, as well as offering reflections on her ground breaking text *The Woman in the Story* (2010), including its recently released [second edition](#). Dr Jacey also discusses whether (or not) there is such a thing as a ‘gendered’ screenplay.

As part of a wider study, the first of its kind in Ireland, Susan Liddy offers a snapshot of the views and experiences of Irish women screenwriters drawn from three in-depth and exploratory interviews. This comprehensive analysis incorporates discussions of motherhood and creative practice, limiting stereotypes and the notion of a female sensibility, concluding ‘creativity is not gender neutral’ and offering an indication of the way forward for the Irish Film Board and screenwriting landscape in Ireland more broadly.

Juliane Scholz addresses a gap in the history of German screenwriting, tracking female screenwriters’ contributions to early silent movies in Germany. Focusing, in particular, on the life and work of Ruth Goetz (1880 – 1965), Dr Scholz draws a parallel between the work of such female contributions to the emerging social and cultural discourse on the so called ‘new women’ in the Weimar Republic.

Making a singular study of the screenplay [The Long Goodbye](#) (1973), Kyle Barrett explores screenwriter Leigh Brackett’s approach to developing the script and collaborating with director Robert Altman. Through this investigation, the author examines extreme representations of masculinity in the contexts of film noir, the myth of the detective and the American New Wave of the 1970s.

Cath Moore makes a case study of Danish screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen's narrative construction. In doing so she explores the narrative function of gender within screenplays in the context of specific world views, asking if the limitations of the Hollywood model, which she argues divides narrative function along gender lines, apply in other cultural contexts.

Rosanne Welch, drawing from memoir, Hollywood anecdote and production diaries offers a broad overview of women screenwriters in the United States context from Anita Loos to Barbra Streisand. The central argument of Dr Welch's enquiry is that the participation of female screenwriters in the development process contributes to greater complexity of female characters. Ultimately, the article asks if 'more diverse writers will create more diverse material'?

Rounding off the issue is Radha O'Meara's analysis of how Hollywood screenwriting practices inscribe gender. Dr O'Meara draws from a sample of contemporary Hollywood screenplays (36 Academy Award nominated scripts from 2014-16), and takes her cue from the very recent (at the time of writing) widespread interest in the Twitter feed [@FemScriptIntros](#) (where American film producer Ross Putnam tweets descriptions of female characters from unproduced scripts) to make a comprehensive exploration of the gendered ways female characters are represented on the page.

In presenting this special issue, the editors acknowledge the skew toward female and feminist gendered concerns in screenwriting practice, representative of the response to the call for papers. The proposals received also indicated that the study of gender in *screenwriting* and *screenplays* may be underexplored (as distinct from gendered perspectives and representations *on screen*, for which we received many submissions, useful and interesting analyses in and of themselves, but not directly contributing to a special issue focused upon the page). The editors are also aware of the almost exclusive focus upon film (over television, gaming and online screenwriting for example) and, most regrettably, the absence of transgendered, intersexed or gender non-conforming perspectives. We hope this special issue might begin a conversation about gendered screenwriting (practices, processes and perspectives) beyond the binary.

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Hidden a-gender?: questions of gender in screenwriting practice

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the ways in which a screenplay might be ‘gendered’ or gender identified and, more specifically, how screenwriting *practice* is informed by, and performs, notions of gender. It asks, in what ways might screenplays be gendered? What is the role of gender in the individual screenwriter’s own practice? And how might cultural assumptions around gender be enacted by and within screenwriting practices (especially mainstream script development processes) and discourse? The article discusses the potentially gendered biases of mainstream screenwriting frameworks (and the how-to market disseminating the same), and then the ways in which this impacts, in particular, the practices, perspectives and representations of women coming to the page, and also briefly examines the tactic of writing for gender-blind casting, concluding that this liberal feminist strategy does not address the inherent cultural assumptions at play in script development processes. Ultimately, the article argues that in cultural system that are inherently gendered, then gendered assumptions may underpin the commercial mainstream script development process.

KEYWORDS

screenwriting, gender, script development, feminism, screenwriting guides

Introduction

In the ‘Notes on the text’ at the start of his highly regarded screenwriting guide *Story*, Robert McKee states ‘I use the non-exclusive “he” and “him” to mean “writer”’ (1997, xi). He explains:

I have avoided constructions that distract the reader’s eye, such as the annoying alternation of “she” and “her” with “he” and “him” the repetitious “he and she” and “him and her” the awkward “s/he” and “her/im” and the ungrammatical “they” and “them” as neuter singulars (1997, xi).

Recently, and nearly two decades since the publication of *Story* (at the time of writing), the use of ‘they/their’ as a stand-in for the absence of a gender neutral third person singular personal pronoun has found legitimacy with journalistic style guides and linguists (Guo 2016). But the point to be made here pertains to McKee’s assertion that masculine pronouns are non-exclusive (and, to a lesser extent, that any affordance of their feminine counterparts would only be distracting, annoying and repetitious). While unproblematically assuming a gender binary, and subsuming the ‘Other’ side of that dichotomy into the ‘Absolute’, McKee effectively (and affectively) excludes from the category of ‘writer’ anyone outside of a male identified subjective position.

Many of the screenwriting guides considered seminal will default to the masculine pronoun when discussing a screenplay’s protagonist – see, just for one example, Snyder (2005) – but of interest here is McKee’s specific ascription of the same to the *writer* who is, given the intended function of McKee’s text, also almost certainly the reader. In other words, the text is intended to speak directly to the aspiring (or, indeed, experienced) screenwriter who reads the book and if that reader is anything other than male identified, she finds herself performing acts of mental translation throughout that experience. Despite McKee’s claims to non-exclusivity, the very *experience* of his text then re-ascribes for the ‘othered’ reader (and ‘writer’) a hierarchical structure of gender whereby, as Susan J. Hekman points out, ‘In each of the dualisms on which

Enlightenment thought rests, rational/irrational, subject/object, and culture/nature, the male is associated with the first element, the female with the second' (1992, 5). This article argues that mainstream script development processes are their own creative and cultural systems, sometimes informed by the orthodoxies distributed by the types of screenwriting guide noted above and almost certainly underpinned by the wider social and political thought within which they sit.

Christopher Pullen, writing specifically about queer screenwriters and queer screen characters suggests, 'Whether directly or indirectly, screenwriters write about themselves; or at the very least, they frame their personal ideas, contexts and skills in the mediation of a narrative' (2014, 285). This article, then, is concerned with the ways in which a screenplay might be 'gendered' or gender identified and, more specifically, how screenwriting *practice* is informed by, and performs, notions of gender. As a screenwriting practitioner and researcher with a particular interest in the ways feminist paradigms inform my own practice and how these ideas might be interrogated through screenwriting scholarship, I hope to explore broader ideas around gender through the lens of screenwriting and screenwriting practice – or, at the very least, pose some questions as an invitation for future scholarship. Given screenplays are themselves invitations to collaborate ([Paul Schrader](#), cited by Hamilton 1990, ix), this article (and, indeed, this whole special issue) asks of screenwriting scholars: in what ways might screenplays be gendered? What is the role of gender in the individual screenwriter's own practice? And how might cultural assumptions around gender be enacted by and within screenwriting practices (including mainstream script development processes) and discourse?

Writing for and from sex and gender

While 'virtually every movie and TV show contains multiple, developed, relevant male characters who have some part in advancing the story' (Kesler 2010), the same is not true for female ones. In 2013 the University of Southern California released its fourth report commissioned by the [Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media](#)¹. Using data gathered since 2007, '500 movies and over 21,000 speaking characters [were] content analyzed for gender prevalence' (Smith et al. 2013, 1). From the 2012 sample of 100 top-grossing films, the study concluded 'Females are grossly underrepresented [...] Out of 4,475 speaking characters, only 28.4% are female' (Smith et al. 2013, 2) with '2012 reveal[ing] the lowest percentage of on-screen females across the 5-year sample' (Smith, et al. 2013, 3). Assessing the number of films where 'roughly half [...] of all on-screen speaking characters are girls or women [...] 6% of the top-grossing films in 2012 featured a balanced cast. Only two films had a higher percentage of females than males' (Smith et al. 2013, 3). It is probably not necessary to point out the report exposes a very real gender divide when it comes to on-screen representation in films coming out of Hollywood. The study was repeated in 2014, this time sampling popular films from eleven countries. It revealed 23.3% of protagonists to be female, with 30.9% female speaking characters (Smith, Choueiti & Pieper 2014, 4). As an Australian based researcher/practitioner, it is interesting for my purposes to note that Australian figures were slightly higher in the sample: 29.8% female characters, and 40% lead or co-lead characters (Smith, Choueiti & Pieper 2014, 3), and I will return to the Australian context shortly. For now, in the face of this evidence, it is reasonable to contend that if women are not present, then neither are their perspectives – an issue related to but not simply the same as representation.

Also, revealed in 2014 was a 7.5% increase in female representation 'with the inclusion of one or more female writers' (Smith, Choueiti & Pieper 2014, 23). The earlier study also reported an increase 'when at least one female is involved in the directing or writing process' (Smith et al. 2013, 7). By extension, these

¹ The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, founded in 2004, has a particular focus on family films in its quest to reduce stereotyping and increase representation of female characters. Rigorous with its research and awareness raising efforts, the institute is active in commissioning studies, it runs a biennial symposium and, off its success with raising awareness through social media, earned a Global Impact Award from Google in 2013.

small gains in representation might also skew the gendered perspectives, but obviously, this is not something a data collection can quantify. However, it is worth remembering ‘masculine values, attitudes, and aspirations remain intact, even as women become integrated into professional structures’ (Cordeiro 2010, 490).

Moreover, as Lisa French puts it: ‘the fact someone is female does not ensure a non-patriarchal view; women are as susceptible to having their world-view colonized by patriarchy as men are, and sex in itself does not ensure or suggest any differences of view’ (2007, 11). It would follow, then, as screenwriter and leading scholar in the field of gendered screenwriting practice Helen Jacey points out, ‘Producers and development executives, both male and female, might project their own experiences of women as well as their feelings about what women should be like onto the female character’ (2010, 182). In other words, gender issues in screenplays encompass broad notions of screenwriting practice, extending to the processes of script development. French has asked, ‘is there a difference in the subjectivity constructed by a woman, and that constructed by a man, in relation to representing female experience?’ (2007, 48), but whether or not those writing for and from their own gendered subjectivity offers increased and relatable representations and perspectives is reinforced and contested within the interview based scholarship of, for example, Marsha Mccreadie (2006) and Linda Seger (1996).

Television screenwriter [Suzette Couture](#) observes, ‘Of course men can write for women [...] but I have come to believe there is a secret language of women, which speaks more directly to me. Sometimes when I watch a film I say to myself, “Only a woman [...] would have written this”’ (cited in Mccreadie 2006, 121). Tele-feature writer [Susan Rice](#) has said, ‘[Women’s writing is] softer [...] I do believe women’s writing is more concerned with an interior life, with relationships’ (cited in Mccreadie 2006, 121). By contrast, feature screenwriter [Robin Swicord](#) maintains:

In all honesty, I’m not sure if a woman *can* write a woman’s part better than a man. I hate it when something arrives at the door with a note appended, ‘You write the girl’s role and [writing partner and husband [Nicholas Kazan](#)] can write the guy’s part’. We call it pink and blue thinking (cited in Mccreadie 2006, 4) (emphasis in original).

As noted earlier and explored elsewhere – see, for example, Taylor (2015, 2016) – writing representations, and writing *perspectives* of sex and/or gender are two different things. Though a liberal feminist ethos might suggest, as Tara Moss does here, that female under-representation can be positively addressed by casting women in roles written for men because ‘many characters can change gender without influencing any central aspect of the plot’ (2014, 116), this strategy unproblematically accepts a universal subjectivity and, in doing so, denies gendered subjectivities. Retrospectively attributing femaleness to a character conceived as a man falls well short of presenting the perspective of someone living in the world as a woman. While Moss makes a good point when she writes that such a tactic ‘may even add a valuable, previously unexplored dynamic’ (2014, 116) it may not be, as she suggests, such a ‘simple change’ (2014, p. 116). A move made popular by various online memes circulated on social media by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media since 2012, it might be said to contribute to feminist strategies that ‘want what men have got, rather than questioning its value in any thorough sense’ (Beasley 1999, 52). But if we were to question the value of a system that privileges the male perspective, we might suggest a new framework for developing female characters, rather than developing a strategy to include female characters within what exists already.

The casting of [Sigourney Weaver](#) as [Ellen Ripley](#) in *Alien* (1979) arose from a situation whereby screenwriters wrote all the parts for men - with an accompanying note advising ‘the crew is unisex and all parts are interchangeable for men or women’ (Torgovnick 2010). While this might be hailed as a win for meritocracy, Neda Ulaby points out that while director Ridley Scott attests ‘The idea of making the hero a heroine was a masterstroke’, he then continues ‘because we truly expected Sigourney to be the first one to go’ (2010). The masterstroke was not, it seems, putting the hero role in the hands of a woman per se. It was a

narrative trick to thrill an audience conditioned to seeing men as the conduits of the action. Jacey points out that in contemporary screenplays, 'It's as if we still want to give our heroes and heroines very different territory to roam in the worlds of our stories' (2010, 179) and Ulaby, interviewing commentator Alyssa Rosenberg (2010) about the casting of women in roles originally written for men (including the character of Kyle Pratt in 2005's *Flightplan*, reimagined as a woman by [Jodie Foster](#)), explains the significance of these movies' settings.

It's noteworthy that all the action in *Flightplan* and *Alien* takes place in tight, enclosed spaces [...] Rosenberg points out that in both movies, the heroines aren't out roaming around – they're defending a tiny, confined piece of turf. 'I do think women are allowed to have their backs to the wall', Rosenberg says. 'But not to go out and *conquer* things. With men, you're allowed to be expansionary (2010).

Drawing a parallel between this literal space and the virtual tiny, confined piece of turf that women occupy in other films, might be as simple as considering, let us say, the 23.3% of female lead roles in the previously outlined study. Or it might be more useful to think about the other confines for female characters, and their perspectives. As Jacey puts it, 'It is all too easy to narrow the scope of your story ideas and concepts when you have a heroine in mind [...] We are still risk averse in what we allow heroines to do and be' (2010, 179). Expanding that tiny piece of virtual turf available to female film characters, then, means thinking beyond the simple strategies of promoting gender diversity through inclusion via feminisms of equality. I take my cue here from Elizabeth Grosz who dissects Western Feminism into Equality (those feminisms that assert 'women should be able to do what men do') and Difference, or autonomy (feminisms concerned with recognising and valuing difference). As Beasley explains, the latter has 'no expectation that women should do what men do. Such feminists support conceptions of difference without hierarchy, difference without a norm, let alone a male norm' (1999, 42).

We might also consider that while such strategies use the term gender, what is really being discussed is sex. This, of course, opens up issues of essentialism, which are contentious even within the notion feminism itself, particularly around the sex/gender distinction, with various feminist theorists (and whole schools of feminist thought) concluding that while the concepts of sex and gender have 'the merit of stressing that gender is a social construction' they also have 'the demerit of turning sex into an essence' (Moi 2001, 4). While some feminisms reject the sex/gender distinction on that basis, others believe, to quote Toril Moi again, that an 'immobile, stable, coherent, fixed, prediscursive, natural and ahistorical' essence is exactly what the sex/gender distinction addresses (and negates) by 'distinguish[ing] between natural and cultural sex differences' (2001, 4-5). This is useful for feminists wanting to emphasize that 'while sex may be your anatomical type, gender brings with it a cluster of ideas to do with behavior, social status and expectations that are not natural or unavoidable extensions of those different bodily combinations' (Moss 2014, 130). Thus, strategies to increase female screen representation by casting women in parts originally written with men in mind, means redressing the balance of the sexes, but almost has nothing to do with the social influences that shape women (and men), or their gendered subjectivities.

While it may be true that the case against biological determinism predates the sex/gender distinction (Moi 2001, 5), to ignore it risks conflating what is understood to be female and what is understood to be feminine, thus it is usually important to nominate distinguishing definitions. Film scholar Lucy Bolton, for instance, employs 'the term "female" to discuss the sexed body of women, and "feminine" to refer to the symbolic codes and representations of what is considered to be female' (2011, 3). For the purposes of this argument, the sex/gender distinction feels important because of the different ways this research engages with (and critiques assumptions around) what women (and men) are 'like'. Tamar Jeffers McDonald, discussing male-centred romantic comedies and women-behaving badly 'raunch culture' narratives, points out that while these

films ‘set out to insist the initial differences between the sexes can be overcome’ they trade on gendered assumptions whereby ‘all THEY (men) really want too is passionate sex in a committed loving relationship just like WE (women) do, and in the ‘bad girl’ ones, WE just want fun and sex and drink just like THEY do’ (2007, 110) (emphases in original). Therefore, as she goes on to point out, ‘Far from tapping in to a lessening of the gender divide [...] this insistence on the similarity of the sexes seems instead to underline a real fear that the differences between man and women are either getting worse or have always been ineradicable’ (2007, 110). While this article does not subscribe to fearful notions around sex-based difference, I do agree that attempts to universalise sexed and gendered experiences, as one might read the interchangeable casting project offered by liberal feminism, can serve to reinforce cultural assumptions and eradicate, or at least marginalise, ‘othered’ perspectives.

Gendered forms and cultural assumptions

There are, too, those arguments that the storytelling models to which screenplays perform, in the mainstream at least, are already gendered in their construction. Christopher Vogler acknowledges, of his own *The Writer’s Journey*, ‘There may be some masculine bias built into the description of the hero cycle since many of its theoreticians have been male [...] There may be a real difference in the form of men’s and women’s journeys’ (2007, xxi).² Both related and additional to this question of difference, is the potential resistance to its exploration, whereby the high ‘status of masculine discourse in our culture means that it is easier to alienate the male section of the audience than the female’ (Macdonald 1995, 59). In other words, the reluctance ‘to tell women’s stories [is] the assumption that while women can identify with both female and male characters, men can only identify with other men’ (Moran 2015) which can impact upon the script development process, given this ‘Usually occurs within pre-set parameters of norms, orthodoxies and institutions, and is subject to social and cultural conditions of production, including the exercise of individual power and of collaborative behavior’ (Macdonald 2013, 5). It might then follow that these processes, operating as they are within the same culturally entrenched gendered structures, tend to pull the narrative toward a default, ‘universal’ perspective. This ongoing aspect of gendered script development has the self-perpetuating effect of both informing and being influenced by a societal obfuscation of female perspective. As actor Meryl Streep told an interviewer, ‘The hardest thing [...] is to have a story that [has] men in the audience feel[ing] like they know what I feel like’ (Moran 2015).

But in terms of screenwriting forms, it is interesting to consider the ways in which these cultural and gendered assumptions might be embedded in the very tools by which we construct our screenplays. Of the pervasive three-act structure endorsed by most screenwriting discourse, Larissa Sexton-Finck writes:

The problem this didactic structure has for women is that it propagates the Enlightenment notion of a universal subjectivity, based on free will and reason, which neutralises the power structures of society (and film) and repudiates the influence of social positioning on our opportunity for agency (2009, p. 65).

Moreover, the three-act structure demands a ‘restorative final act [that] fixes female characters (and spectators) into a continuity of subjectivity by enforcing their reinstatement as an ‘acceptable’ semblance of femininity’ (Sexton-Finck 2009, 65). Arguments for persevering with familiar and dominant models have to do with accessibility whereby our screenplays, after all, offer an opportunity for ‘speaking to mainstream audiences about the context of their identity’ (Pullen 2014, 271). Robin Wood suggests that gendered discourses might speak through such models because ‘It remains unproven that the patriarchal language of

² It should be noted that research and publications specifically responding to Vogler’s work in this way include *The Virgin’s Promise: Writing Stories of Feminine Creative, Spiritual, and Sexual Awakening* (2010) by Kim Hudson and *The Heroine’s Journey: Woman’s Quest for Wholeness* (1990) by Maureen Murdock.

mainstream narrative film cannot be transformed and redeemed' (1990, 334). This is notable when considering 'Women go to the movies – it's one of the only demographics that is still growing at the moment' as Australian producer [Sue Maslin](#) (cited in Bizzaca 2015) has said recently (at the time of writing). She continued,

The audiences want it, so when you have a film, whether it's gutsy heroines in action movies like [\[The\] Hunger Games](#) or [the latest instalment of Mad Max](#), right through to [The Dressmaker](#) or comedies like [Trainwreck](#) or the [Melissa McCarthy](#) movies, right now there is a really clear appetite (Bizzaca 2015).

To write briefly then from within the Australian context it is interesting to note the building momentum around the production of more women's stories on screen. Hopscotch Pictures' producer and executive Troy Lum has said: 'I'd like to see Australian films more geared towards females to compete with the domination of the studios - we need to tell great female stories; we need female superheroes' (2013). Lum goes on to explain that he does not mean superhero in the conventional sense, suggesting: 'women want greater complexity. When I was thinking of what a great female superhero is now [...], she's kind of like an ordinary woman that, kind of, wins the day' (2013). In January 2016, as part of its five point, \$5 million-dollar plan over three years, Screen Australia's Gender Matters initiative announced the next step, which includes the Brilliant Stories funding program "for projects that satisfy the 'Three Tick Test' – ensuring that three out of four creative positions of producer, writer, director, and protagonist are female" (Screen Australia 2016). Notably, the protagonist – by definition, a fictional entity – is considered to be a 'creative position', alongside those of the producer, writer and director. It is not didacticism prompting me to point this out – after all, an actor would ultimately be engaged to depict this protagonist should the film go into production – but rather a wish to highlight the implied acknowledgement that a female character around which the narrative is centred is a significant consideration. Especially when moving toward a projection that 'by the end of 2018, Screen Australia aims to see [a significant amount of] production funding go to creative teams (writer, producer, director and protagonist) that are at least 50% female' (Bizzaca 2015). It is relevant for screenwriters of female protagonists, given that scripts inevitably enter a period of script development before being realised on screen, that this initiative acknowledges that there is a stigma to be overcome when centring a narrative upon a female character. As Maslin has said of seeking financing for *The Dressmaker*, 'I talked to a number of distributors and was constantly told that being a female skewed film limited its appeal' (cited in Bizzaca 2015).

Regardless, the screen industry includes those making a conscious choice to focus on women's experience in their stories, to better represent those perspectives. Screenwriter [Anna Hamilton Phelan](#) has said 'The question of responsibility is a balance that I struggle with all the time in my work. I have an enormous sense of responsibility to my gender' (cited in Seger 1996, p. 240). But there is no guarantee that such work will then go on to penetrate the mainstream. Maslin (cited in Bizzaca 2015) puts it this way:

you can't just approach it at the supply end, you have to look at the business end. That is, the marketplace that is dominated by male exhibitors, distributors, and broadcasters. We've got to get them into the conversation and into the solution.

This article is centred upon screenwriting practice and, as such, cannot offer an extensive investigation into exhibition and distribution. Nonetheless, it must be informed by these issues, because the gendered biases that resist female skewed stories in the mainstream market also underpin and inform script development processes. These biases persist even as female centred films prove themselves to be increasingly viable, as the local box office figures in Australia for *The Dressmaker* attest³. In the case of *The Dressmaker*, this is not

³ \$20,271,661 as reported on Screen Australia's list of the 100-top grossing Australian films of all time (Screen Australia 2016b).

necessarily a success matched critically, although it has been argued that it is its very ‘femaleness’ confounding reviewers. As Lisa Thatcher has written:

This is a film written by a woman, directed by a woman based on a book by a woman, that is so ferociously from a female perspective, clusters of previously unknown to each other women can be seen speaking in hushed, astonished tones at its conclusion (2015).

Much of the scholarship around romantic comedies has already identified a critical predisposition toward female centred narratives, with terms such as ‘chick flick’ contributing to a reductive bias against ‘popular women’s films’ which in fact ‘are one of the few widely enjoyed (if derided) cultural forms that explore the pleasures and burdens of female identity’ (Garrett 2012, 280). It might follow, then, that while screenplays may well be gendered in terms of perspectives, this is only made visible when these sit outside a ‘universal’ (male/masculine) referent. As the necessity for such initiatives as Gender Matters attest, gender gaps in screen stories evolve out of cultural biases inherent in script development processes and may even be built into the very structures of screenwriting practice.

Conclusion

‘The screenwriter’ according to Craig Batty and Susan Kerrigan, is ‘deeply positioned, both literally and theoretically, as an embedded and conditioned agent inside a cultural production and creative system’ (2016, 134). This article has argued that this ‘cultural system’ is inherently gendered, therefore if script development is ‘a process in which ideas, emotions and personalities combine [...] to create, refine and tell a story in the best way possible and *under the circumstances at the time*’ (2016, 132) (emphasis added), then there are almost certainly gendered assumptions always underpinning those circumstances, at least in the commercial mainstream.

This article set out to ask some questions and explore some of the ways in which screenplays may be gendered, particularly how the language of screenwriting guides can serve to perpetuate the entrenched cultural assumptions built into the dominant formats. The role of gender in the individual screenwriter’s own practice deserves its own study, however, this article has drawn from the interview-based work of Seger, McCreddie and others to briefly examine this from the female perspective, whereby women in the screenwriting industry have a range of perspectives on how their ‘femaleness’ might contribute, or not, to their writing practice. Couture believes, ‘No woman wants to admit that [...] we may be that different from men. Besides, if you say that you may be losing some work by limiting yourself that way’ (cited in McCreddie 2006, 121). French likewise identifies ‘a long history of women resolutely resisting labels, insisting on equality and on being regarded as people, rather than as women – perhaps for fear that acknowledgement of gender will prevent them from claiming a place as a creative person on their own terms’ (2007, 42). In other words, while male screenwriters do not have to deny their subjectivity as men, but it is something women must negotiate frequently. Of female filmmakers who resist the very notion of being ‘female’ filmmakers, French observes that among the factors leading to this resistance is ‘a profound boredom arising from having this question repeatedly directed at them [...] and a desire not to be creatively limited by being regarded as only being able to express one point of view’ (2007, 43). These positions, then, leave women feeling they have to deny their female subjectivity, and therefore work to negate female experience. As Moi points out, the issues that give rise to this resistance are still very feminist concerns. She proposes that ‘Because male subjectivity is not “hailed” [...] in this way, this alienating choice in fact defines women’s situation under patriarchy’ and that ‘a genuinely feminist position would refuse either option and insist, rather, that women should not have to choose between calling themselves women and calling themselves writers’ (2001, 206).

Asking how cultural assumptions around gender might be enacted by and within screenwriting practices and discourse, this article touched on recent gains made (at the time of writing) for female practitioners, representation and perspectives in the Australian. It also critiqued the tactic of writing for gender-blind casting, concluding that this liberal feminist strategy does not address the inherent gender biases at play in script development processes, rather paying off increased representations by erasing female perspectives and subjectivities. This article raised and explored some questions about screenwriting and gender from a female/feminist standpoint and eagerly anticipates further research from broader notions of gender. That said, while the discussion centred upon the effects and *experience* of script development and screenwriting practice from a female perspective, this article offers the argument that wider gendered biases defaulting to so-called 'universal' perspectives inflect the development of screenplays in gendered ways. Within the creative and cultural system that is 'script development, in terms of the mainstream processes drawing upon doxa disseminated by dominant screenwriting models and conventions, are potentially inbuilt biases, reflecting those enacted in the wider social and cultural sphere – and creating screenplays that feed right back into it.

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An interview with Helen Jacey

ABSTRACT

Dr Helen Jacey is a screenwriter and script consultant, and teaches scriptwriting at Bournemouth University, UK. Her research interests include creative and critical approaches to screenwriting, screenwriting and gender, and screenwriting genre theory. Her book *The Woman in the Story: Writing Memorable Female Characters* (2010) was the first screenwriting guide for writers developing female driven projects. As a professional writer, she has written numerous film, television and radio projects for UK, US and European production companies and is currently developing a series of crime fiction novels, *Elvira Slate Investigations*. She is a story consultant for international filmmakers and film agencies.

Editors Louise Sawtell and Dr Stayci Taylor asked Dr Jacey a series of questions relating specifically to the themes explored by the special issue: gendered practices, processes and perspectives in screenwriting. The following are the insights generously offered by this leader in the field.

KEYWORDS

screenwriting, gender, Helen Jacey, interviews, Jungian feminism, The Woman in the Story

What was it about the screenwriting discourse at the time that saw a need for you to write *The Woman in the Story* (2010)?

On an international level in industry, organisations like Women in Film were obviously active and keeping the pressure on, showcasing female writers and directors. As a writer in early 2000s, Linda Seger's book *When Women Call the Shots* (1996), had a big impact on me as practically the only available, specific, industry-focused resource that spoke to feminism and writing/directing for women, as well as factors in the industry that influenced their stories. Otherwise, there was little mention of gender in most screenwriting guides. Some screenwriting guides had different objectives, perhaps equally motivated by the authors' experiences of a lack of useful and accessible resources for screenwriters. As a screenwriter who routinely chose female protagonists and whose stories were obviously affected by their experience of gender, as perhaps my career was, I wanted more. So, with my professional hat on I'd spotted a gap in the market, as I would be the first to buy a screenwriting book on female characters. When I pitched the book to [Michael Wiese](#), he said he had wanted to publish a book like this for many years, which felt serendipitous.

Kind of in parallel, my critical mind wanted to look in depth at a subject area I was interested in, Jungian Feminism. With a firmly practice-led hat on, I embarked on my own PhD in 2004, to undertake an exploration at the broadest level through practice about paradigms, and evolved into a focus about Jungian paradigms and feminist intentions. It was the Jungian Feminist psychologists (Maureen Murdock, Linda Leonard, and others) who offered a counter-narrative to the Hero's Journey model. Their work argued for gender considerations in the whole 'archetypal' mythological approach but they weren't adapted to screenwriting.

When writing *The Woman in the Story* (2010), I avoided giving a journey model that was based on archetypal principles (which is not to say they aren't valid for aiding creativity – they most definitely can be). I wanted to trigger thinking about gender and representation in the creative process of screenwriting with a more holistic and wide-ranging approach.

Can you tell us about those screenplays that have used the strategies suggested in your book and/or seminar? For instance, how have screenwriters employed concepts such as layers of union or feminine superthemes?

The book appears to be useful for all kinds of writers at all levels across the world, which is very gratifying.

I can see the approaches having an effect during my *Writing the Heroine's Story Seminar* with professional writers, because they workshop their projects during the two days. In the *Writing the Heroine's Story Seminar*, there can be big 'aha!' moments when doing the Metaphoric Wound exercise. It appears to be a useful model for linking character arc and theme to the deepest inner conflicts of a character. Regarding the Superthemes, these have generated some debate in Internet forums and professional writers have written to me, even using the SuperTheme system as a way of introducing their project's protagonist to me. Role-Choices have also proven useful as a way for writers to define their character's identity. Layers of Union is also eye-opening to writers because it shows the equally important flipside to conflict and stakes. In my experience, writers like exercises that help them brainstorm, and we also like typological systems as they present a framework that creative brains can dance between. Male writers have contacted me to say it has really helped them understand their female characters better.

Colleagues in academia across the world have told me the book helps many of their students, not only on their own student scripts, but also in critical and reflective dissertations where it has been used as a paradigm to discuss the reading of scripts and films but also to aid reflection on their own writing. Again, SuperThemes and Metaphoric Wound come up as favourite exercises with students.

As you know, this special issue is called *Gender and the Screenplay*. Do you think, though, that screenplays *can* be gendered? What might they look like? How might they read differently?

I'd like to ask the question what does an ungendered screenplay look like! We all carry around our own gender baggage in life and in our writing. A lot of writers think they aren't influenced by gender and that there is no difference in how they treat the characters. But often a gender bias does play out in storytelling principles and how we use them. Most feminist writers can spot what they feel is misogyny or double standards at work in characterization. Since my book is based on the premise that gender plays out quite powerfully in female character representation (and ditto male characters), I'm of course fairly committed to the principle that screenplays can be gendered. At the most basic and obvious level gendering operates in character and representation choices made by the writer. The character's journey, how they speak, how they feel, how they behave, the choices they make, the agency and POV they have, can all be influenced by their gender and the values the writer attaches to gender. We may be unconsciously playing out, as writers, how we affiliate to certain genders, or not. You only have to examine characters from a typological perspective to see how gendering is functioning at the level of character – what roles is the writer giving to which characters? Defining creative and dramatic elements, such as Journey models, and conflict and its counterpart 'union', as masculine and feminine can be useful for writers because it can help them work out any insidious or unconscious attitudes they might have about gender which are playing out in their screenplay.

Overall, I feel the gendering of the screenplay reflects the writer's vision and aspirations for the project, i.e. artistic imperative meets worldview meets industry positioning. Writers who question key creative and

dramatic elements from a gender perspective are more likely to subvert and disrupt convention and cliché. Who, in terms of characters, we give point of view, agency, charisma, darkness and even the nebulous concept of 'triumphant' arc resolutions, can be very gendered issues!

Frequently, writers tell me that they have the most issues with female protagonists in development because of the likeability factors affecting agency, traits, speech, sexuality, age, etc. When the screenplay is read, developed in collaboration, the gendering of the screenplay evolves as the writer makes sense of the notes of those who may project their own attitudes and values that shape gender assumptions. The consideration of audience something that effects the screenwriter and the process, in terms of the gendered audience liking or not liking certain ways of being in characters, is another factor.

Ultimately, gendering of the screenplay is a fluid and context-driven process that commences at the point of conceptualisation and evolves through the project's development. I'm really interested in the choices we make as writers in creating characters.

What drew you to the work of [Ida Lupino](#) in your recent chapter in *Women Screenwriters: An International Guide* (2015)?

I first discovered Ida Lupino through Lizzie Francke's book *Script Girls* (1994) and my own research into the 1940s for my forthcoming crime fiction series (*Elvira Slate Investigations*). Lupino was talented, very driven and a trailblazer, working to make a difference in Hollywood as she was fed up with the roles offered to her as actress. Wider research on the 1940s brought her back into my orbit, and I studied some films that she produced/co-wrote/directed with her company The Filmmakers. I found them emotionally compelling and enjoyed their intensive depiction of life spiraling out of control. Lupino's characters feel fresh and original with a big focus on internal conflict; they have relentless point of view and undertake somewhat dark journeys where self-empowerment or mutual support are the only way out of misery. For Nelmes' and Selbo's Guide, I mapped her characterization against the Role-Choice system in my book. I am very interested in how reading scripts from the position of writer opens up new possibilities for exploring storytelling. As a writer, I felt I could connect with Lupino's work for its contemporary relevance to emotion and empathy.

Given the theme of this special issue, what gender-related issues have come up for in your role as a script consultant?

I don't think there are any 'regular' issues; every project is different. However I'm frequently offered female driven stories to work on, because writers or teams simply want a new set of eyes at key stages on the whole project, or they like the approach in the book and would like my input as part of development. Sometimes there can be a focus on strengthening the identity of the protagonist or secondary female characters. Helping writers to avoid stereotypes; generally encouraging the writers or team to let rip when it comes to dimension, personality, agency, POV, and pushing the boundaries of female characterisation in general.

In your chapter on 'bromance' in *Screenwriters and Screenwriting: Putting Practice into Context* (2014) you propose, 'Whilst critical discussion of male identity and narrative is well established, there has been far less transfer of these ideas to the creation of male characters in bromance films, specifically within a screenwriting context' (p. 240). Can you tell us about the different challenges in writing the man, and the woman, in the story?

That's a pretty big question! As far as I know, there isn't a guide for writers yet on how to create memorable male characters, or avoid masculine stereotypes in male characters. Male characters have still got plenty of new places to go in story, as gender roles are increasingly mixed up and subverted. These places aren't the same as the open fields of female characters, but they are as interesting. For instance, explorations of male vulnerability, emotional neediness and helplessness on screen are still quite rare - likewise, different types of failure and inadequacy in males and females. Some writers feel female characters carry most of the gender baggage, because women are still defining their roles and identities as carers, mothers, wives, earners etc. and often feel pressured to make them nicer and less potentially threatening to the audience. The male character can feel easier to write because he travels lighter, because we still don't have the same expectations of men and women, even today. Male characters can often have more fun. A big challenge for writers is finding the unique human being behind all the gender baggage, which can get in the way of character development - we can get hung up on it. At the same time, writers try to be aware of sex and gender double standards, so there are a lot of competing processes!

At the time of writing [2017], here in Australia, funding bodies are currently debating quotas for women in key creative production roles in filmmaking, including screenwriters. Some believe this is a good initiative and others are concerned that this does not address the ingrained systemic challenges. What are thoughts about quotas and gender equity?

Ideally we wouldn't need quotas but while statistics point to perennial inequality then they seem like an effective and practical measure to increase opportunity, alongside other interventions that support systemic changes such as education and training; from my position as a writer and someone who works with writers on character, if quotas directly improve the chances of female and BAME [Black, Asian and minority ethnic] in getting commissioned leading to more positive and diverse role models on screen, then I can't really see a downside of trying them out.

We eagerly anticipate reading the very recently released [second edition](#) of *The Woman in the Story*. What changes or additions can we expect?

Thank you! As female protagonists are getting more numerous, bigger and better, the book has been completely revised. It has some fresh approaches, case studies and new topics such as developing female protagonist biopics, thinking about heroes and heroines journeys for all protagonists, applying the Metaphoric Wound to TV series, and I've also added a few new SuperThemes, such as 'Felonious Femininity', to mirror the changing faces of femininity on screen. Likewise, I've added new case studies throughout based on some great female characters I have loved. It has a new Foreword by Hollywood producer Susan Cartsonis, and will be published in February 2017.

In the seven years (at the time of writing) since the publication of *The Woman in the Story*, which produced screenplays, in your opinion, have successfully incorporated 'memorable heroines'?

From TV, [Orange is the New Black](#) [2013], the US prison series is full of brilliantly complex female characters who are unforgettable as individuals and as an incarcerated sorority. I'm also a big fan of [Insecure](#), with its complex study of female best friendship. [Norma Bates](#) in [Bates Motel](#) [2013] is a fascinating and complex character, the overprotective and over-attached mother who ironically fails to protect her son. In film, [Eye in the Sky](#) reveals a compelling military female under intense pressure. In film, a completely different mother is found in Amelia, in [The Babadook](#) [2014]. In general, the rise of fascinating mother protagonists and mother-daughter relationships in stories from [Brave](#) [2010] and [Maleficent](#) [2014] to [The](#)

[Dressmaker](#) [2015], [Wadjda](#) [2012] and [Wild](#) [2014] heralds a new dawn of female-centric storytelling. The feminist vigilante mission of the vampire in [A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night](#) [2014] is refreshing.

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In her own voice: Reflections on the Irish film industry and beyond

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ABSTRACT

International research highlights a paucity of female screenwriters and directors in contemporary cinema. The consequences, in terms of employment equality and on-screen representations, have been well documented. However, few studies interrogate the film industry from the point-of-view of the female practitioners themselves. Certainly, these issues have not been comprehensively explored in an Irish context; something which this paper, as part of a wider study on Irish women screenwriters and writer/directors, sets out to address.

An analysis of three in-depth, exploratory interviews with produced female writers of film and television is presented here. The purpose of the interviews is to tease out the experiences, work practices, perceived barriers and narrative preoccupations of this underrepresented group. Although generalizations cannot be made on the basis of three interviews, many of the views expressed by these practitioners correspond to theoretical and empirical work emerging in the field. Other insights shed new light on aspects of women's creative labour in the Irish film industry.

KEYWORDS

Female voice, Irish film industry, female protagonist, motherhood, creative practice

Introduction

The Irish Film Board (IFB) is 'the national development agency for Irish filmmaking' (IFB website, 15 April, 2015) with a self-proclaimed brief to 'invest in the development of Irish talent in front of, and behind, the camera'; to keep Irish culture 'at the heart of Irish life' and to put 'Irish stories on film' (IFB 2015, 6). Despite these admirable aspirations the Irish film industry remains strongly male dominated. Between 1993 - 2013, only thirty three produced screenplays (13%) written by Irish female screenwriters were awarded production finance by the IFB; a state agency funded by the Irish taxpayer. This puts female writers/directors at the margins, rather than the heart, of Irish filmmaking (Liddy 2015 b).

This paper is a small part of a wider study, one of the first in Ireland¹, focusing on the experiences, perspectives and narrative interests of Irish female screenwriters and writer/directors, as articulated by the practitioners themselves. An analysis of three exploratory semi-structured interviews with produced Irish female writers will tease out some of the issues relating to women and filmmaking in Ireland; issues that the larger study will engage with more fully.

International Overview

It is self-evident that the underrepresentation of women in the film industry internationally has significance as an employment equality issue. For instance, Darnell Hunt et al. found women and minorities 'woefully underrepresented among the corps of directors, show creators, writers and lead actors' in 2011 US film as well as television produced in Hollywood in the 2011/12 season (2015, 28). But there are other, arguably more serious, consequences that relate to the production of culture. International research highlights links

¹ The only other work that looks specifically at Irish women screenwriters and their work and experiences is a fascinating, but unpublished, MA thesis by Nicola Depuis in 2010. This current study is more wide reaching and will direct greater attention to an exploration of a distinctive female perspective or sensibility.

between women in senior positions *behind* the camera and the inclusion and treatment of female characters on-screen (e.g. Bhavnani 2007; Lauzen 2015; Smith 2009; British Film Institute 2012; Smith 2013; Liddy 2015).

Martha Lauzen's 2015 report shows that in US films with at least one female director and/or writer female characters comprise 37% of all speaking characters; 39% of all major characters; 39% of protagonists and 26% of male/female ensembles. Compare the statistics when there is an exclusively male creative team: in that scenario just 28% of all speaking characters are female; 28% of all major characters; 4% of protagonists and 9% of male/female ensembles. The overwhelming majority of protagonists (87%) are male when the directors/writers are also male (2015, 2).

In an Irish context, just 24% of all Irish films produced between 1993 and 2013 and written by a male writer have a female protagonist. A further 7% had both a female *and* a male character at the heart of the narrative. In comparison, over the same twenty year period, 64% of films written by an Irish female writer lead with a female protagonist (Liddy 2015b). It would appear that the majority of Irish women writers opt to put the spotlight on female characters (Liddy 2015b). Additionally, an analysis of a small number of Irish female-authored films produced between 2007-2013 point to a (limited) ideological challenge to hegemonic discourses about femininity, motherhood, aging and power (Liddy 2015).

The British Film Institute stresses the importance of diversity in film because of its power 'to reflect changing attitudes, people, landscape' (BFI 2015). Moreover, the consequences of cultural invisibility can be grave: 'when marginalized groups in society are absent from the stories a nation tells about itself' inequality can be normalized (Hunt et al. 2015, 5). For a range of reasons, then, it is crucial that the voices of women screenwriters and writer/directors are heard.

Methodology

Women writers and writer/directors have been side-lined since the establishment of the Irish Film Board with funding and support overwhelmingly directed towards male filmmakers. Their experiences are the 'untold story' (DeVault and Cross 2012, 206) in the context of a male-dominated Irish film industry. I adopt a feminist research methodology which explores and challenges the marginalization of women's experience though, as Maynard and Purvis caution, experience must be a starting point for a feminist analysis rather than an end in itself (1994, 4).

Qualitative methods are central to, though not necessarily a prerequisite for, feminist research. Mindful of the fact that knowledge can be produced in structured encounters organised around 'talking about experience' (DeVault and Cross 2012, 209) I conducted three semi-structured interviews with produced Irish female screenwriters/directors. Interviews were an hour and a half to two hours in duration and the range of questions placed the lives of these women 'at the center of social inquiry' (Hess-Biber, 2012, 3). Questions elicited demographic information and both objective and subjective answers (see Rogers 2007, 13) about their experiences as practitioners in the Irish film industry.

The three interviewees are urban and rural, new and established, writers of film and television. Generalizations are, of course, impossible based on such a small number of interviews. However, my purpose here is not to produce data from which to make such generalizations but, rather, to begin to tease out the experiences, work practices, insights and narrative preoccupations of this underrepresented group.

The Writers

Two screenwriters and one writer/director agreed to be interviewed. These are Harriet O Carroll whose credits include the BBC drama *Aristocrats* (1999) an adaptation of Stella Tilliard's book of the same name; episodes and storylines for *Glenroe* (RTE 1983-2001) and episodes for *Fair City* (1988 - present), two of the longest running TV serials on Irish television. As a 'writer for hire', O Carroll has developed countless television and film projects for production companies in a long career and has also written short films and numerous (produced) radio and theatre plays.

Ailbhe Keogan is a relative newcomer with one produced feature to date, *Run and Jump* (2013). Keogan won a Zebbie award in 2013 for Best Script; a nomination for Best Screenplay at the 2013 Irish Film and Television Awards and the film won Best Feature at the Galway Film Fleadh in the same year. Keogan's second feature is in the process of attaching a director.

Finally, Rachel Moriarty is an experienced freelance television writer and director whose credits include a children's animation series, a range of lifestyle television programmes and a number of short films. Her first feature film, *Traders* (2015), co-written and co-directed with Peter Murphy, premiered at the Galway Film Fleadh in 2015. Moriarty and Murphy are recipients of the 2015 Irish Screen America *Rising Talent Award*. They are currently developing their second feature.

Emergent themes

A number of key themes surfaced repeatedly during the interviews, only some of which can be discussed here². The themes that will structure the discussion below are motherhood, limiting stereotypes and a female perspective or sensibility; all of which play a part in shaping the creative output of these three writers.

Motherhood

Domestic responsibilities, motherhood and caregiving represent a formidable challenge for women struggling to balance the social role of homemaker and mother with their creative aspirations. Indeed, as in other fields, 'unpaid care features strongly among women artists and professionals as a cause for abandoning their creative pathway' (UNESCO 2014, 82). Moriarty and O Carroll are mothers of adult children. Domestic responsibilities and childcare do not feature at all in Moriarty's accounts and only in recollection by O Carroll. In contrast Keogan has two small children (aged 3 yrs. and 4 yrs. at the time of interview) and she references the conflicting demands of motherhood and career many times throughout the interview.

The demands of young children is not something Moriarty reflects upon, even as a feature of her past experience. With 'the skill of juggling things' you simply 'make it work' she suggests. There is little acknowledgement in Moriarty's analysis of 'the enduring inequalities that still mark out the relations between men and women' (Tasker and Negra 2007, 35). However, she does acknowledge that personal problems can impinge on professional life:

Well I have a daughter and I have a partner who was very sick the last year. But everybody has that type of, you know, normal human life stuff. It impacts in that it takes some of your time but at the same time if you're writing something a lot of the time it's part of what you're writing about.

² Other themes that emerged during the interview but which cannot be included because of space restrictions are: confidence issues, feminism, gender in Irish society and affirmative action strategies.

O Carroll recalls the challenges she faced in developing a writing career while working part-time as a physiotherapist and caring for small children:

I would sort of work out how to find the time. You know, if they're going playing with friends I'd say ok I'd have that hour and a half or two hours. I was always looking for little spaces which would work for being able to think. Going into physio even, all that in the car you would be thinking. And it wouldn't be time taken away from anything.

Keogan's working life is inexorably interwoven with her identity as a mother- 'I don't want to miss out on any of it' - and the demands and responsibilities of motherhood, as she experiences it. Women's care responsibilities 'are often perceived as in 'conflict' with their professional activities' (UNESCO 2014, 82) and this is very much the case here:

My children are in crèche five mornings a week. I actually have 9-1 available to me but I stop at 12 and I try to go for a walk or something because I need to go to transition from writer to Mum. It's actually more trouble to try and half-think about your projects. You might as well go in full mum-mode. I work four mornings a week and that's when I do my commercial projects. Friday I take to do the big shop. It's very unusual for you to be free enough of them to be able to think about something completely different. I mean I hear crying children when I'm in the shower – there's no one crying at all, like. I'm permanently on.

Keogan stresses the equal partnership between herself and her husband and points to the 'evolved' households of their friends in creative careers where everything is equally shared - 'down the line, fifty: fifty'. Yet it is clear that her 'full mum mode' requires enormous reserves of energy and commitment to both her role as a mother and her role and a writer. Indeed, all three women tend to 'privatize' gender and reaffirm the *status quo* 'to create the appearance that the social order is as it should be, because feminism has been transcended' (Budgeon 2011, 24).

At a wider societal level in Ireland domestic responsibilities and childcare still fall disproportionately on women's shoulders, irrespective of a supportive partner. This often has an impact on women's careers at a material and/or a psychological level. The Irish workforce is characterised by high levels of gender segregation; exorbitant childcare costs and declining numbers of employed women after the age of 35 years (National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) 2015, 12).

The comments made by Keogan and O Carroll are instructive in that they illustrate how women can internalized a sense of guilt about 'stealing' personal time from the perceived duties of motherhood; a socially constructed role which varies across time and place. The current reality is that women often have to choose between having children and having a career. If women have children, as Natalie Wrayford observes, they will likely be required to make 'personal and professional sacrifices that their male colleagues are not required to make' (2013, 16).

Motherhood and Creative Practice

Motherhood can impinge on creative practice as can be seen in the accounts offered here by O Carroll and Keogan. O Carroll devised a strategy of working through her creative ideas while doing mundane tasks like ironing or driving, which proved effective for her:

So I mean driving to pick up the kids after school I would have been listening to a radio play. A lot of people used to do the ironing and listen to the radio play. I think, that when you try to force solutions your brain just doesn't give them to you. When you stop they seem to be released.

However, she acknowledges that by the time her career as a television writer took off ‘the children were older’. Given her response, it appears unlikely that the ‘wear of working’ that she experienced when called to Dublin for meetings, sometimes at very short notice, would have been manageable if coupled with the demands of small children.

Keogan’s current working arrangements are rigorous and almost punishing. In order to contribute financially to her family (both partners are freelance in the film industry) she must keep two creative balls in the air; her own authored work and projects from which she could earn a living as a ‘writer for hire’:

So what I do now is I get up at half five to half seven so I can have those two hours where I work on projects that are important to me. They’re not necessarily commercial or paying projects but they’re projects that I want to develop because I feel they represent who I am. What I want to say.

However, even putting yourself forward for a writing job requires a lot of effort. ‘I do an awful lot of work for pitches’, Keogan concedes. ‘I do an awful lot of work to get work’.

In contrast, Moriarty is immersed in a life in which her time is willingly devoted to the pursuit of creative projects. She describes her working arrangements with her writing partner:

We would be dipping in and out of projects and because of that feature script, we put a lot of time into writing. And I think if you just kind of embrace that. I think if you fight it and try and go - oh I have to dedicate x hours to this or x hours to that, no. There’s a bit of going with the flow.

The difficulties for women in reconciling domestic duties and childcare or ‘love labour’ (Lynch and McLaughlin 1995) can result in limited time to invest in economic activity or creative work. Women are still responsible for more than 80 per cent of the tasks of family life, e.g. childcare, eldercare, cooking, cleaning and so on so the reconciliation of private life and working life ‘is a prerequisite for fostering women’s advancement’ in the public arena (NWCI 2013, 32). Of interest here is the suggestion that motherhood can impact so negatively on women’s working lives in a segment of the industry that is often deemed quite flexible. Keogan describes the way in which she manages to meet deadlines:

What happens is coming up to a deadline when I’ve to deliver I need a fully immersive period so I would check into a B& B down the road. I go to the same one and I do a 24 hour period where I’m allowed get as obsessed as I want with the screenplay without – I mean I would literally do eleven hours in a row. The time flies because I’ve been denying that. But you can get obsessed and you’ve no one calling on your attention. You don’t have to talk to anyone.

In Keogan’s assessment of her current responsibilities and O Carroll and Moriarty’s differing recollections of past ‘juggling’ the problem is internalised as an individual one rather than the operation of a patriarchal, capitalist society. In the day-to-day reality of these women’s lives such difficulties are/ were overcome with exhaustive personal manoeuvring. As sociologist Pat O Connor notes, ‘the lack of structural consistency in the mapping of gender across institutions and the related cultural tensions have tended to be seen as private troubles rather than public issues in Irish society’ (2006, 8).

Limiting Stereotypes

Film can be said to both reflect and create society; as Bhavnani argues, it has the capacity to challenge stereotypes but it can also ‘perpetuate social prejudice and inequality’ by fostering stereotypes both on-screen and off-screen (2007, 110). Interviewees reference a number of ways that stereotypes pertaining to women can surface in the industry. These range from implicit assumptions about the capabilities of female directors;

perceived appropriate genres for women and limitations on the construction of female characters and narratives.

Moriarty works with a writing and directing partner, Peter Murphy. Research suggests that commissioners are 'risk averse and are culturally bound as to what may be a commercial product' (Sinclair et al. 2006). Moriarty and Murphy's first feature, *Traders*, is a thriller with an original concept that Moriarty is aware was likely to have swayed funding in their favour. However, she admits there were raised eyebrows not from the Irish Film Board but from other industry people along the way who told her: 'it's very unusual, isn't it, a woman writing about people killing each other?' A suggestion that Moriarty emphatically rejects:

Think of all those Queens of Crime, or whatever you want to call them! It's only when you transpose it into the world of film that people go – oh, that's unusual. Because you're going to be directing a fight scene and somebody's going to be hit!

It is true that there may be a genre difference between male and female written/directed films, with women 'more concentrated' in drama (Rogers 2007, 35). Yet David Steele suggests that, in 2010/2012 more women had greater box office success compared to men in the fields of animation, family, horror, music/dance, romance and thrillers (2013, 1); a reality, like many other realities, that individuals in the industry may be slow to register.

Moriarty is also aware that she does not match the image that many people have of the film director:

I think of male directors I know, that I really like. But they go around and they are being directors the whole time. It's a persona! Now, it's not all men, of course not, but I just see men being able to do that whereas women tend to be dropping a kid off to a crèche! You have to be singular and selfish – the project, the project, the project. And I think it is of course women still do, you know, other things in their lives and they find maybe to exclude those other things.

But when it came to seeking funding from the Irish Film Board, she believes a male director on the team implicitly offered the film board the assurance it needed: 'I think it helped to reassure people, yes, I do.' She adds:

People tend to gravitate to people who are like them [...] men find it easier to get on with men who are on their wavelength and who are talking the same language, especially when it comes to genre and thriller.

Moriarty's observations are echoed in a recent analysis of women's progression as writers and directors in the British film industry. If there is a way to reduce risk, producers and funders are likely to take it; 'one of these is to commission writers and directors who are a known "pair of safe hands"'. In an environment where most established writers and directors are male, this desire to reduce risk will therefore lead to a continuation of the under-representation of women' (Steele 2013, 2).

Stereotypes held by development executives can also impinge on the kinds of female characters that individual writers wish to spotlight. Keogan was startled to learn that her creation of a 40 year old female protagonist was greeted with such scepticism:

Older women especially are seen as something to be avoided or something of non-commercial appeal. You feel that when you're writing an older woman character. You can feel the resistance from money - men, you can. I think it's a commercial type response so I think even women working in the commercial sector have that resistance to it. I've been in meetings where I've been literally stunned by

the way they talk about 40 plus women characters. And actresses. And these are all women in the meeting.

Moriarty is challenging perceptions about women's entry to a traditionally male genre like the thriller, particularly when she has a directorial role. In contrast, Keogan recognises that female writers can also be encouraged to reprise a particular kind of drama again and again. As the writer of *Run and Jump* she finds:

I get asked to bring a certain thing to a table and it a lightness; it's not grim. I know what they're looking for from me. And it's very specific, it's like I don't want you to go to the dark place but you (don't) have to avoid the issue altogether. But just keep it attractive and palatable and nice. I could go way more serious but the appetite isn't there for it.

In this context, stereotyping serves as a form of ideological policing and bolsters the status quo.

A Female Sensibility?

In order to tease out the concept of a 'female sensibility' (McCreadie 2006, 47) it is instructive to unpick the approaches to narrative themes and the inclusion and creation of female characters as identified by the interviewees.

Attributing particular writing styles and genre competences to women writers as a whole is a contentious issue. In Seger's study she found that women want to tell different stories; that their writing could be characterised as more interior and concerned with personal issues; stories tended to be character-led and foregrounding emotions, behaviour and relationships, as opposed to male writers who prefer stories of action, conflict and heroism (2003, 116). In contrast to Seger's findings many of the female screenwriters interviewed by McCreadie rejected the notion of a distinctive female 'sensibility' (2006, 47).

Script editor Mark McIlrath does see some differences in approach between male and female writers. While not suggesting that female writers are any less focused on structure than their male counterparts McIlrath observes: 'I would say that, yes, female screenwriters do place more emphasis on character – that their scripts do show more of an interest in the complexity and idiosyncrasies of character' (2015). The three interviewees here identify thematic interests and approaches to the writing of female characters that, although not always articulated as such, does tentatively point to the existence of a female perspective or sensibility. O Carroll points to the different life experiences of men and women.

Our life experience is slightly different and your voice is really dependant on your life experience. I mean nobody born on the equator is going to come up with the same sensibility as somebody born in the artic. That I suppose the big thing about being female is you can be a mother [...] the way you deal with life and love and people and caring and all that is, you know, is of major importance... and the detail of that.

In contrast, Moriarty rejects an automatic link between certain perspectives and gender suggesting a post-feminist position:

It's very hard to assign it to gender and I'm not sure that it's kind of constructive to do it. Because I think that writers bring a lot of their own selves. It's such a big diverse world out there of people's experience... you'll find so many different intersections between people.

The 'commonality' that was at one time thought to comprise women's experience is challenged here 'by an understanding that the category is more contingent and variable than was previously assumed in

approaches that took feminist consensus as the starting point for a feminist politics' (Budgeon 2011, 25).

Narrative Themes

Moriarty is drawn to issues around masculinity identifying 'blokey bullshit' as a theme running through *Traders*:

I love that masculinity in crisis. I think that a very, very interesting rich area to look at. I'm very much about obsession with money, is money the only currency? So that is a theme that I think is very interesting. I think that is something we will revisit because it's like that absurdity and that hardness of the capitalist system.

When recalling what female writers brought to the table in the television series she contributed to in the 1980s and 1990s O Carroll references aspects of family life.

Baby growing up .and the need for being babysat all the time. What impinged on your life. I think we brought small detail of what life is like. That thing about the pressure on your time - you are the back-up in the family. [...] I think they (women writers) did bring more detail and a kind of reality. For female characters particularly.

Keogan's genre preference is directed towards drama though her narrative interests within that genre range straddle a wide range of stories. Her 'pet' project is a political thriller set in Western Sahara. But the script that has been developed and is currently edging towards production is about 'a forty year old woman and motherhood'. She reflects:

I think the best thing I would ever write would be about my family. Not my new family, my own family. And is that because daughters are more involved in family life? I don't know, I don't know. So family would be a massive one. Like the intricacies of sisterhood, of daughterhood, of all of that I find fascinating. Maybe men don't find it as fascinating, I don't know. The picking up of every nuance in the room.

Female Characters

Sinclair et al. have suggested that the social effect of women's under-representation as screenwriters may result in films being made that 'lack the female perspective and instead are dominated by a male view of the world. Even where female characters are used, these may be presented from a male perspective and be stereotypical' (2006, 16).

The greater inclusion of female characters and a resistance to stereotyping is shared by all three writers. Moriarty recalls her response to watching two recent Hollywood releases:

And you're kind of watching- who are these female characters? You still see appallingly badly drawn - and look, having gone through the script process, I am going - how the hell is nobody challenging this?

Interestingly, despite being sensitive to the blandness of many female characters on-screen, Moriarty does not have a female character at the centre of the narrative in *Traders*. Neither does she echo O Carroll's innate towards female characters. That said, she has definite ideas about not creating female characters merely to serve the male protagonist:

There's a lot of expectations sometimes, around script, that the protagonist has, or starts, a relationship. That woman is either Lady McBeth who goes in on it or she's a kind of a support. We

were very conscious that she has her own life. She (Orla) is looking after her dying father, she has her own life. But I suppose I'm conscious of it, I hope, in a more subtle way. The protagonist's relationship ('love interest') does not have to serve the protagonist. I just think there are subtle ways of doing it as well.

Moriarty stresses that the needs of the story determines the characters within. *Traders* foregrounded male characters but another of the screenplays she and Murphy are developing is headed by a female protagonist. While Moriarty concedes that she does not set out to challenge limiting representations of women on-screen she believes that female writers are 'more conscious of women in the world'. She explains:

Maybe without really being on a mission it's much more natural for us to put - to say - well where's the woman in this story? I suppose maybe as a woman you balk at those things. You're more sensitive, you bristle. You bristle more at those stereotypes.

When it comes to writing male and female characters O Carroll distinguishes between the insight that she, as a female writer, can bring to the writing of female characters and the professionalism that she can call upon to construct male characters:

I suppose what I feel is I don't have anything really fresh and new to say about male characters cos I don't know them from the inside. Except I'm a professional writer, I can create the illusion of a male character but I can't be as strong-mindedly contributing something new. I'm interested in both male and female but I probably have more to offer in the female because I am female!

O Carroll reflects on her interest in writing female protagonists and makes the point that she had not realized it was not a widespread practice:

Mostly I think the protagonists of my pieces were female and I didn't even realize that. I mean I didn't even realize it wasn't happening all the time. Like in *The Aristocrats* I made all the women articulate and with a point-of-view. Acting rather than acted upon. And it was great to be writing women and these four women were really interesting and they all had a logic. They weren't just being blown here and there even if they did crazy things.

However, there were times in the past when her character choices and those of her script editor diverged sharply; 'What I would have considered was that he would think they were more dependent than they would really be'.

This resonates with Helen Jacey's observation that 'heroine softening' is widespread. Female writers are encourage 'to generate huge levels of sympathy for a heroine in order to justify any difficult choices she might make' (2010, 25).

The Way Forward?

This snapshot of the views and experiences of Irish women screenwriters offer some interesting, though partial, insights into the working lives of these three very different women writers. The interviews yielded an abundance of rich material, only a fraction of which is drawn upon here. While there are differences in the views expressed a number of common threads did emerge, particularly around stereotypical and potentially limiting gendered assumptions.

Where narrative preoccupations are concerned Moriarty's interest in the thriller genre arguably foregrounds plot over character. In contrast, Keogan and O Carroll lean towards drama. Their accounts appear to support Mcillrath's (2015) observation that female screenwriters 'tend to have character as the reason for action

rather than the reverse'. All three, in varying degrees, display a sensitivity toward the inclusion and the portrayal of multifaceted female characters. In the context of creative practice, it would seem that motherhood has the potential to disrupt creative work to a significant extent when children are very young. Keogan acknowledges: she is 'not at full throttle as a writer' and has, for now, resigned herself to that fact. Based on these accounts, women with adult children may have greater freedom to pursue a working life on a more equal footing with male writers.

One of the problematic assumptions of postfeminist discourse is that women can 'have it all' if they try hard enough. Women who support an individualistic and liberal agenda and operate 'on a mantra of choice' tend to assume that the political demands of feminism have been met' (Genz 2009, 20). This has the effect of positioning women's struggles and accomplishments as purely individual, thereby clouding the social and material constraints faced by women (Lazar 2007, 154). These interviewees have only a passing knowledge of how inequality operates in society and in the film industry. Hence, they are all, perhaps, operating in 'the bubble' that Keogan identifies. This resonates somewhat with Lisa French's findings, in the context of an exploration of female screenwriters in the Victorian film and television industries in Australia: 'one reason gender is not receiving higher priority is that individuals are not aware that inequality exists; in order to support efforts to correct an inequality, they must first recognise the existence of an inequality' (2012, 5).

Creativity is not gender neutral. It is not adrift from wider socio-economic and political concerns. Inequalities within the creative sector mirror the structural barriers found in other economic sectors and in society at large (UNESCO 2014:14) and is unlikely to be rectified without intervention. During interviews with key IFB decision makers in 2014/2015 (Liddy 2016) the question of affirmative action measures to increase the number of women in the Irish film industry- specifically writers and writer/directors in the first instance – had a mixed response: tentative support for 'soft' initiatives, scepticism, or outright rejection. However, a seismic shift was to occur with a year.

While a comprehensive discussion on the place of affirmative action in reconfiguring a gendered landscape is beyond the scope of this paper a number of events are notable. In November 2015 the highly influential *Waking the Feminists* campaign kick-started a public debate about the side-lining of women in Irish theatre.³ That the underrepresentation of women was not confined to theatre but also characterized the Irish film industry was highlighted in the press during the peak of the campaign.⁴ Lobbying for gender equality in film was formalized with the formation of the Equality Action Committee (a combined pressure group representing the Writers Guild of Ireland and the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland) and the activation of Women in Film and Television Ireland, both of which continue to keep the equality agenda in the spotlight. On 22nd December 2015 the Irish Film Board's gender initiative, the Six Point Plan, was announced by the then Acting Chair (now the Chair) Dr Annie Doona. It includes the potentially radical target of a 50/50 gender split in funding over three years.⁵ While, arguably, progress has been slow and concrete action less robust than many would have hoped, the Six Point Plan is now part of Irish Film Board policy which offers a degree of hope that change is at least on the horizon.

Nearly one hundred years ago Virginia Woolf lamented the absence of 'literary mothers'; the role models needed to inspire current and future generations of women writers. This has a resonance for

³ www.wakingthefeminists.org

⁴ See, for example, a letter on this subject published by *The Irish Times* (S. Liddy) on November 11, 2015, the day before the cathartic *Waking the Feminists* event in the packed Abbey Theatre in Dublin and the announcement by the Irish Film Board that they had concerns about the underrepresentation of women in film. <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/women-and-the-irish-film-industry-1.2424444>

⁵ www.irishfilmboard.ie/news/Statement_from_the_IFB...Six_Point_Plan/2975

women filmmakers today. The lack of female visibility can act as a deterrent for younger women who cannot see the possibilities in a film industry in which so few women are writing /directing feature films. In such a landscape it is arguably more difficult for women to believe their stories and their vision is valid, important and worth fighting for.

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Re-Configuring the *New Women* - Female Screenwriters and *Street Films* in Weimar Republic

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the history of early female screenwriters in Germany and highlights the influence of professional female screenwriter Ruth Goetz and her movie *Die Dirnentragödie* (also: *Women without Men*, 1927). It shows how the movie represented certain political, cultural and legal debates on the *New Woman* and reconfigured the myth by implementing ambivalent gender roles in the plot. Furthermore, the representation of the role of female sex workers in Weimar society in Weimar *street films* is described and the way of transforming cultural and political discourses about gender equality into silent movies is discussed. Ruth Goetz and her professional screenwriting work is revisited through the lens of *New Film History* and the importance of the early professional female screenwriters' contribution in Weimar cinema is underlined.

KEYWORDS

Ruth Goetz, Germany, screenwriting, film, New Woman, Weimar

Introduction

Weimar era was an embattled period, where conservative, social democrats and socialist political fractions questioned traditional and progressive political movements. It was also a time of several cultural and legal debates about gender appearance, emancipation, women's rights and female sex crimes. Weimar Republic initiated the establishment of groundbreaking women's rights, such as the right to vote and the idea of a re-evaluation of gender roles by a newly expressed image of femininity through the image of an emancipated, so called *New Woman*. In addition, several legal reforms allowed women to attend universities and start to work in several male-dominated professions (Huerkamp 1996, 28-45, 274). By the end of the 19th century, women could be well educated, self-sufficient and able to choose a lifestyle they preferred.

Due to the overwhelming success of the film industry and its commercialisation and rationalisation since the First World War, many women entered the field of screenwriting where they helped to shape the professional craft from an early stage in the mid-1910s (Scholz 2015, 17-25). The discourses surrounding the *New Woman* influenced filmmakers and their ideas of representing female characters through the aesthetics, narrative and structures of their screenplays.

This article tracks early female screenwriters and their contributions to silent movies in Germany, highlighting the influence of professional female scenarist Ruth Goetz. Along with other female writers, Goetz contributed to various genres, which were not limited by 'women' tropes. The various professional stereotypes and roles of women behind and on the screen will be outlined in this article. The films and accompanying screenplays, which reconfigured Weimar society's discourses on the idea of a *New Woman* in the *street films*, including plots focused on female sex workers, will be discussed. Furthermore, the reassurance of both the gender roles and bi-gendered normative sexual stereotypes will be argued and questioned through an analysis of Ruth Goetz's screenplay for the movie *Die Dirnentragödie* (1927). Also the movie reflects fights and issues of the heterogeneous first women's movement and legal, political and cultural struggles on quality (Wager 1999, 25-35; Scholz 2016, 180-192).

State of Research

Many studies deal with Weimar expressionistic cinema of the 1920s (Korte 1978, Elsaesser 2002 & 1999). Most media historians concentrate on famous directors like Fritz Lang, G.W. Pabst or Robert Wiene (see the contributions in Isenberg 2009), but studies on the influence and role of female screenwriters during that time are mostly a side note (Kasten 1990). Exceptions are famous screenwriter Thea von Harbou (Bruns 1995) and Leni Riefenstahl (Trimborn 2002), but they mostly were highlighted in their role during the national socialist dictatorship, not to their early contribution on silent Weimar cinema. The role of professional female filmmakers is still a fragment research topic in German film and media history.

To the contrary, screenwriting research in the United States has contributed to Gender Studies approaches by establishing the important role of female scenarists in silent cinema (Norden 1995, Francke 1994 Bielby & Bielby 1996, N.N. 2006a; Herminghouse & Mueller 1997). The interdisciplinary studies informed Film Studies, Sociology and the history of professions by concentrating on female actors and protagonist on and off screen. Anglo-American *New Cinema History* and *Postcolonial Film Studies* especially have established key concepts not only analysing film narrations and relying on close readings, but including various production contexts and institutional, political, economic and structural patterns of the film industry. They have also introduced postcolonial understandings of race, class and gender into *film studies* (Malby 2011: 4).

For the German case, these kind of historical studies are still very rare, because the importance of the *Geschlechtergeschichte* or *gender studies* has not been as influential as the Anglo-American *Gender Studies* and is still a very recent phenomena in German academia (Gebhardt 2006, Hagemann 2007, 194f). The idea of narrating a history on the relation of at least two *sexes* or *genders* and connecting classical social and cultural history approaches with the construction of gender representations or body image is still very new (Gebhardt 2006; Heinsohn & Kemper 2012). Studies on Weimar Republic explained ‘the failure’ of the democratic system by demonstrating the influence and political impact of the middle classes and their radicalisation. Those historical attempts were widespread, but the role of women and gender as a research perspective ‘excluded’ women as actual active historical protagonists until the emergence of *Geschlechtergeschichte* (as an enhancement of *Women’s Studies*). Those newer approaches provided several influential studies on Weimar era, where *gender* as a category became a focal point and women were seen as important support for the national socialist regime. The researchers tried to understand the reactionary anti-feminist backlash just before national socialists took over in 1933 and rethought the role of women in the dictatorship. But those groundbreaking studies (Koonz 1976a and 1976b) were also heavily criticised as anti-feminist and tendentious works by leading Women’s historians themselves (Grossmann 1991). Taking a closer look at *Screenwriting Studies*, the emergence of screenwriting as a profession was addressed in just a few works (Kasten 1990, 43-55; Schwartz 1994, 71-84; Scholz 2014, 289-327 and Scholz 2015, 17-29). The discourse about the role of the *New Woman* as a cultural phenomenon in the 1920s was addressed several times in *German Studies* (Makela 2015, Ankrum 1995), *Film Studies* (Hales 2007, Kosta 1997) and *Cultural Studies* (Marhoefer 2011; Sharp 2004; Sutton 2011, Föllmer 2005) as well as in general historical overviews on Weimar era (Wirsching 2010; Büttner 2008; Sassenberg 2004).

Ruth Goetz as Screenwriter

Some of the earliest traceable screenplays were written by female screenwriters, like the aforementioned Ruth Goetz, Fanny Carlsen and Marie Luise Droop. Ruth Goetz’s screenplays served both traditional and more emancipated gender roles. In order to exemplify and deconstruct the *New Woman* the movie *Die Dirnentragödie*¹ (*Tragedy of the Street*, 1927) and accompanying screenplay by Goetz, can be analysed as an

¹ Another possible English translation could be *Tragedy of a Harlot*. All film information is taken from <http://www.filmportal.de> and <http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de> unless otherwise stated.

example of late first wave feminist struggles. The film presents a narrative and plot, which reflects ambivalent representation of women in Weimar times. The narration contributed to broader debates and mediated discourses of traditional female stereotypes and a newly founded image of women on and off the screen.

Goetz was one of the first professional screenwriters in German film history. She began her writing career as a translator of French. Goetz published various entertaining and popular novels like *Das ewige Fräulein* (The Eternal Fräulein, 1919) and soon became editor of publishing houses like Ullstein and Mosse. Since the advent of World War I, she submitted film ideas and screenplays, becoming a professional scenarist. Other early female scriptwriters in Weimar cinema included Marie Luise Droop who wrote *Die Teufelsanbeter* (Devil-Worshipper, 1920), Fanny Carlsen whose screenplay for the successful Gerhard Hauptmann play *Der Biberpelz* (The Beaver Fur, 1927) gained widespread recognition and finally Jane Beß, who wrote the script for *Razzia* in 1921. These women became successful screenwriters during the 'roaring twenties'; most of them co-authored or single-handedly wrote scenarios for more than fifty movies of the silent era (Weniger 2011, S. 199f).

After working for the French film producer *Gaumont*, Goetz moved back to Germany and worked as a full-time screenwriter for *Decla-Film* in Berlin teaming up with producer Erich Pommer and director Erwin Neuß on *Der Weg der Tränen* (The Way of Tears, 1916). She became well known for scripting silent movies for actresses like Hedda Vernon and Asta Nielsen. Her screenplays for movies like *Mouchy* (1918) and *Noemi, die blonde Jüdin* (Noemi, the blonde Jew 1917) became silent classics. In 1918 Goetz co-authored with notorious producer and director Joe May monumental films like *Die Herrin der Welt* (The Ruler of the World) and the three-piece high-budget epic *Veritas Vincit*. Goetz contributed to various German production companies such as *Ring-Film*, *Eiko-Film* or *Carl-Wilhelm-Produktion*. She specialised in melodramatic and historical subjects, but most of all, she predominantly constructed plots around strong female protagonists (Scholz 2016, 180-192).

During the late 1910s and early 1920s she also worked as a journalist for fashion magazines like *Modespiegel* or *Mode-Notizen* and focused on popular 'women' topics, for instance cooking manuals and beauty guidebooks. One of her guidebooks, *Lehrbuch der Schönheit* (Textbook of Beauty), made numerous reissues and became a bestseller in early 1930s. The beauty guide gave tips for female lifestyle issues such as make-up tips for different shaped heads, how to brush your hair right, how to get rid of facial hair and how to hide big pores or crow's feet wrinkles. The health and beauty instructions were designed for a new kind of modern women, but also the proposed directions were designed to help older women maintain their beauty and appear younger than they actually were (Goetz & Strassburger 1930). This was also a common narrative in the screenwriting works Goetz scripted. Goetz also wrote the famous recipe collection *Kochbuch für Alle* (Cooking for Everybody) in 1932 and gave styling and fashion advice in her various magazine articles (Bertschik 2005, 274). As a female freelance author, writing for different media genres, she performed various lifestyles.

I argue, Goetz added self-referential sub-texts in her screenplay, which not only deal with lost stardom of the silent movie starlets with the beginning of sound film, but also transformed the idealised *New Woman* into a more conservative and traditional female gender appearance by the end of the 1920s. This development became increasingly obvious since 1930 and finally led to a reactionary backlash of anti-feminist movements and buried subtle women's emancipation attempts (Maccormick 2009, 284; Büttner 2008, 254f). At the end of the 1920s, several religious, political and educational movements claimed that equality between sexes had been accomplished by the right to vote in 1918, the right to work and the right to enter universities

and that feminist ideas and supporting minorities, outcasts or stigmatised professions like prostitutes were not needed anymore. So this first very heterogeneous social women's movement was further separated because of overall goals and thematic issues into bourgeois' temperate, the more radical middle class and the socialist women's movement. Also studies assumed that political women activists joined the rising nationalist movement rejected feminist activities eventually (Davis 2000 & 2007; Scheck 2004). Goetz and her screenwriting works were influenced by those changes around her and the growing women's movement ideas and struggles.

On another level, considering the movie and screenplay *Die Dirnentragödie* transports a stereotyped version of sexualised crimes and female delinquency by arguing women had an irrational criminalist nature, which could only be suppressed by keeping them in private or separate spheres and by supporting their 'passivity' with 'traditional' features of 'essential womanhood'. Female sex crimes were another common trope in Weimar *street films*. The film industry debates around medical and pseudo-scientific explanations offered an answer and 'proof' for the 'predatory' inner-self of women, which committed certain 'sex crimes' out of her emotional state and 'irrationalised' nature. The question is, if and how this can be traced in *Die Dirnentragödie* and how it supported an alternative expression and role of femininity and gender?

(Re)-Constructing the Myth of the *New Woman*

Weimar Republic yielded vast cultural and political conflicts. After the German revolution in 1918/19 traditional aristocratic elites began to vanish and bourgeois middle classes emerged (Siegrist 2003, 21-30). Educated bourgeoisie and the new stratum of *Angestellte* (staff employees) were established and with the inflation and economic crisis a new notion of rationalised, industrialised modernity arose (Kocka 1977, 170-184). Women were still in precarious and unequal positions, especially when they belonged to the lower social stratum, but even members of the bourgeoisie suffered from the lack of gender equality. The emancipation movement was designed for white women who belonged to the middle classes or aristocratic households in urban regions.

The highly divergent women's movement supported the idea of re-shaping gender roles and stereotypes at all stakes. Most importantly, women achieved the right to vote in 1918, after that the emancipation movement frayed out and other religious, political and ideological beliefs became obvious. Therefore, the debates on the *New Woman* only affected some individual women's organisations and specific milieus, and cannot be seen as widespread social phenomenon. The position and social status of women depended on many factors and varied from case to case. But, the discussions on cultural patterns of several reform movements left deep traces in history in terms of political, cultural and economic transition of women's rights (Wirsching 2008, 94).

The most influential idea in mass media became the image of the *New Woman* as an expression of independent modern womanhood, which was heavily advertised in journals and newspapers. The *New Woman* was characterised by an androgynous appearance; a shorter hair-cut called *Bubikopf* or bob (Eton crop), spare time activities like cinema, dancing and sport clubs (mostly playing tennis). Typically younger employees (*Angestellte*) strove after this new ideal (Ankrum 1995, 180-182) and it was also represented by female screenwriters in the movies.

The myth of *New Woman* was also shaped by many beauty and life-style journals, who significantly contributed to the image of a financially independent, relaxed and androgynous woman, who was the anti-thesis to the 'nurturing, passive and irrational' woman of older generations (Stern 2004, 52; Sharp 2004, 122-124). These images served normative gender roles and polarisation of sexes since the enlightenment and even the Weimar women's movement assimilated those stereotypes between the sexes in order to gain

political and social recognition (Büttner 2008, 258f, Koontz 1976b). Despite several divergent emancipation movements, sexual and educational reformers fought against patriarchal repression and stereotyped gender roles (Koontz 1976s and 1976b). But, gender and women's equality was not yet achieved and the women's emancipation movement lost its influence in the late 1920s, after having reached their overall goal: the right to vote in 1918 (Büttner 2008, 258).

The urban image of a *New Woman* promptly became a glorified myth of Weimar era. Some historians argued that the image of the *New Woman* was not a widespread social phenomenon, but just a media constructed hype in a narrow milieu (Föllmer 2005, 289, Ankrum 1995, 180). It seems that androgynous, masculine and more self-aware women appeared primarily in urban spaces and were typically pictured in fashion magazines like *Die Dame* (Haase 2008, 28-32), but were not the characteristic representative of everyday life in rural areas and in working class households. Ursula Büttner limits the time span of this experience to the interim time of teenage girls and young adulthood, when most women were not married yet, but lived on their own and had a steady employment (Büttner 2008, 254-257). If *New Woman* was limited to such a short time in women's lives and was a phenomena in urbanised middle and upper classes, how could the myth persist as a dominant historical pattern and leading expression of 'modernity' and emancipation in Weimar era?

In times of gender pay gap, sexual discrimination as well as unequal marriage law, the possibility to work autonomously became a common way for educated women to achieve certain financial sovereignty and destabilise the ever-present hetero-normative patriarchy since the turn of the century (Büttner 2008, 254). Working in the film industry provided new workspaces for female novelists who entered the screenwriting profession in the first decade. Until the mid1920s screenplays could be easily written as a spare time activity even at home and the success of the new mass medium served as bread and butter for aspiring female writers, who saw themselves not as intellectual novelists, but as 'Filmarbeiterinnen' (film workers) like Thea von Harbou, as mentioned, who wrote mostly on trivial plots, which served entertaining needs (Scholz 2016, 180-195).

Additional important debates in press circulated around the type of the *New Woman* concerned the fear for a so-called 'masculinisation' and blurred gender lines. A woman with trousers and short hair, who played tennis and took part in public events, was seen as the ultimate enemy of patriarchy (Sutton 2011, 1-24). The *Vermännlichungsdebatte* attributed the *New Woman* as central focal point of changing gender roles since the end of World War I. At its peak around 1925, *male women* and the uprising gender confusion became an important topic of media transmitted discourse. Not only reports focused on the myths of the *New Woman*, but advertisements displayed smoking androgynous trouser-wearing females, which were now considered as major consumers. Some magazines even represented queer/lesbian lifestyles candidly in magazines like *Die Freundin* (Sutton 2004, 126-150).

But, the *New Woman* also meant ambivalent reflections on femininity, which supported the 'aggressive' and 'irrational' element in womanhood. Medical discourses on sex glands, hormones and passive aggressive behavior stereotyped women as *femme fatale*, who committed sex-crimes and lured poor and naïve men into their spider-web like Goetz did in *Die Dirnentragödie* (Sharp 2004 118-120). In general, it does not seem to be a proper perspective to consider the discourses on *New Woman* narrowly as a media event to improve the sales figures of cloths manufacturers and publishing houses. The promotion of female consumerism and co-modification of products for working women was just one aspect of a very versatile discourse in the Weimar society.

Women's movements formal legal and political equality and the idea of blurring gender roles became particularly visible in cinematic expressions during the 1920s. It looks like there is more to it than a short-lived idealised cliché. The aforementioned debates, which centered on the *New Woman* formed an entangled discourse, which happened to be blatantly visible and readable in (sub)-texts of *street films* at that time.

As for the movies and their screenwriting practice women in early silent film were extremely important, because they provided not only an anticipated female 'gaze' of characters and plot structures, but also scenarios, who were important cinematic milestones (Scholz 2016, 190-192).

Die Dirnentragödie (1927) – Femme Fatales, Nurturing Woman and Sex Crimes

In the vast amount of her movie scripts, her magazine articles and the notorious *Lehrbuch der Schönheit* Goetz contributed to traditional women's issues like household, beauty, health and love advice. At a first glance, all those topics do not sound emancipated or feminist at all, but her professional screenwriting career contributed to various discourses focused on the *New Woman* from a more traditional conservative and entertaining point of view. Moreover, Goetz's screenplay for *Die Dirnentragödie* contains numerous hints and links to aforementioned debates during that time.

If the image of the *New Woman* is ideally recaptured as a hard-working, self-conscious and independent (financial, social, and political) female, all these elements are mutually reflected in Asta Nielsen's depiction of the 44-year-old prostitute Auguste in *Die Dirnentragödie*. The film was directed by Bruno Rahn (1887-1927) and is one of the important *Sittenbild* of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (*New Objectivity*). Films of *New Objectivity*-era (1923-1930) contained expressionistic features, but relied more on social realistic aesthetics. Topics included alienation of individuals and supernatural forces beyond human control like tyranny as well as insanity, nihilism and loss of status and dignity (Aitken 2001, 53-56). Those very dark and gloomy urban street films described the hidden criminal and dangerous sides of town.

In *Die Dirnentragödie*, prostitute Auguste falls in love with young student Felix (Werner Pittschau), who searches for shelter in her room after running away from home. Auguste, who is aware that she cannot work on the streets any longer, thinks Felix loves her truthfully and could get her out of the brothel. Her younger roommate Clarissa (Hilde Jennings) seduces Felix knowing Auguste has feelings for him. She realises that Felix was just looking for some motherly understanding and needed a warm place. He is far more sexually attracted to younger prostitute Clarissa. Out of jealousy and envy, Auguste tells her naive pimp Anton (Oskar Homolka), that Clarissa plans to leave with their money. Out of rage, Anton kills Clarissa on the streets, but is caught by the police in the nearby bar afterwards and finally confesses that Auguste instigated him to the crime. Before the police can enter the brothel room Auguste commits suicide.

Auguste is pictured as a *femme fatale*, who put Anton up on the murderer of Clarissa. Also the scene depicts that Auguste's former beauty is fading when she looks in a mirror and sees an old and exhausted reflection of herself. The negative stereotyped *femme fatale* in the characterisation of Auguste is also a representation of the negative image provided by Weimar society on prostitutes at that time. Most of the conversations between her and Clarissa centre on her teenage years and former seduction skills. Remarkably director Bruno Rahn and Ruth Goetz's screenplay depict prostitution as not something perverse or criminal, but rather as an everyday, legitimate profession.

It also provides a stereotyped plot centred on social class and gender debates, when the bourgeois aristocratic student enters the felonious and shady prostitute milieu. Those fictional narratives or plot ideas were accompanied by general social and legal developments outside the film industry, which gained legal deregulation of female prostitution in 1927. The revised *Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung von*

Geschlechtskrankheiten (*Reich Law to Combat Sexual Transmitted Diseases*) promised more sexual freedom and bodily autonomy for women, because scientists argued, that prostitutes must be ‘ill’ or ‘degenerated’ psychologically and/or biologically. Simultaneously, women’s organisations and religious associations tried to help and prostitutes with counseling. The end of the decade was marked another legal deregulation, which eased paragraph 175 that criminalised homosexual encounters between men (Marhoefer 2011, 532-538). *Die Dirnentragödie* addressed those debates and tried to show the emotional and social deterioration of Auguste. By referring to a newspaper article in the last scene, which reports the tragedy and states the crime out of jealousy, a certain kind of link to Weimar social reality is built up. It is also most likely that the film story itself refers to an article that Ruth Goetz and Leo Heller finally adapted for the screen version.

The representation of Auguste and her decay serves as anti-thesis to cheerful and happy Clarissa. This is not only symbolised by all the glances into various mirrors or windows, but through the techniques and beauty tricks she uses to appear younger, to stop her decay, something that actress Asta Nielsen could interpret in one of her final roles. But her character is seen as an unstable *femme fatale* with sexual openness and criminal energy (Hales 2007, 228). Auguste is also characterised as a mother surrogate for student Felix, which she at first confuses with real sexual interest or love. Therefore, the character of Auguste combines elements of the *film noir* stereotypes like *femme fatale* (*sexually active*) and *nurturing woman*, who acts passively and is victimised by Clarissa.

Furthermore, this double representation reflects several problems that women faced at the end of the 1920’s in Weimar society. In the transition period of the 1920s, more and more reactionary and conservative ideas came to surface and there was a struggle with the modern expression of the *New Woman*. It became obvious that the short-lived myth was challenged by conservative female stereotypes, which allowed women just to be mothers who care for the household.

Other readings of *Die Dirnentragödie* also reflect common legal debates on woman committing sex crimes and become delinquents out of jealousy and her ‘irrational’ and ‘criminal’ nature. The so-called *Dirnennatur* (*inner whore*) of women was especially popularised in magazines and newspapers like *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, *UHU* and *Die Dame*:

Readers of popular press were taught how to identify certain ‘types’, especially of women, based on visual clues such as physical appearance and body language [...] This was backed by pseudo-scientific research (Sharp 204, 120).

For example, criminologist Erich Wulffen offered an explanation for the rise of female crimes in the post-war years and stated that the women’s movement wanted to disturb female passivity through sexual freedom. Wulffen believed this was as an absolute danger for society, which led to women committing further sex crimes, because sexualised and ‘active’ women were seen as amoral predators. He preferred women to be kept in their private spheres, serving their traditional domestic roles passively to prevent an outbreak of their inner criminality (Sharp 2004, 121). It is no coincidence that *Die Dirnentragödie* referred to such a sex crime and focussed on a prostitute as a main character.

On the other hand, sexual reformers and socialist politicians in the early 1920s saw the *New Woman* as future ideal. They aimed for equality of the sexes and were in favour of greater independence and new moral standards (Sharp 2004, 123). The idea of marrying Felix was also a plan of Auguste in the Rahn’s film, but she was not naïve for she anticipated that Felix might use her to get Clarissa or his bourgeois parents. Since the common way of forced marriage was more and more being replaced by companionate marriage (Büttner 2008, 254-257) during that era, the idea of marrying Felix seemed a lot more realistic for the plot as it may

seem today. Nevertheless, *Die Dirnentragödie* used the idea of true love as a way for Auguste to have her last chance to escape poverty, so she utilises and rationalises the institution of marriage for her own good. Those expressions were also connected to the Weimar society and women's movement of the late 1920s, which at time was separated and no longer united. After women were acquired the right to vote in 1918, the other goals of the first wave women's movement were placed behind overall social and economic decline during the worldwide depression and withdrawal by nationalist radicalisation of middle classes.

Those debates were swiped, reflected and internalised by the plot. The focal point became the image and myth of the *New Woman*. Ruth Goetz scripted *Die Dirnentragödie* and also contributed to the common idea of depicting professional prostitution and female sex workers in social realistic movies of Weimar cinema (Wagner 2007, 11-13), which had a long tradition in cinema and reconfigured the relation between media, gender and Weimar society. Prostitutes were not only passive victims of society and abuse, but were most likely pictured as strong and self-dependent women who were looking for a social advancement by marrying. The famous *street films* or *Dirnenfilme* (prostitute films) mainly characterised lower class women on their way to escape poverty and poor life conditions (Hall 2009, 147). This prominent plot structure became heavily criticised by feminists and was later cinematically repeated in the USA with *Pretty Woman* (1990).

The discourse on the *new women* peaked in the early thirties and lead to a conservative turn, which preferred traditional gender-binary stereotypes and supported the passive and irrational emotionality in women's natures. A comeback of conventional 'feminine' appearances and the re-setting of orthodox roles for women in society also accompanied it. This turnabout to traditional role models about the differences between 'male' and 'female' justified the image of the caring, birth-giving and 'nurturing' woman who cared for the children and household, and was not interested in the double burden of family and career. Those ideas forestalled the Nazis' radicalised and perverted idea of womanhood as 'emancipated from emancipation' and as a birthing machine (Buske 2004: 89ff, Koonz 1976a; 1976b).

Conclusion

Taking everything into account, the film *Die Dirnentragödie* should not be reduced to an anti-feminist and deep-rooted patriarchal plot construction dooming the image of the *New Woman* in cinematic discourses, but credited for stirring up the debate on *new women* and on how female roles and expressions could conquer during Weimar era. Through and inside the film industry - with a major female audience and various female filmmakers - debates about the re-configuration of women's rights and gender roles were reflected through the *street films*. Those films also represented several social, political, religious and legal reforms and debates about femininity and the role of prostitution. It becomes obvious that Ruth Goetz's screenplay *Die Dirnentragödie* was not just another modern film classic, but a film balancing two different sides of *New Women* discourse in the end of the 1920s. This article has explained how different ideas of womanhood and femininity during Weimar times were constructed through mass media, through political, legal and social reforms and how the myth of the *New Woman* clouded strong counter-movements that finally succeeded in 1933. Goetz's film idea cannot be considered as a feminist piece of counter-cinema (Johnston 1999, 31-39), but it strived all complex questions the women's movement struggled with during the 1920's and provided an ambivalent view on female gender roles, aging and professional autonomy.

Moreover, the movie offers several conclusions on how women in everyday life, and especially female sex workers, can be narrated and characterised and how political debates and legal reforms became an important factor of transforming the image of *New Woman* towards more traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The film also provides a complex understanding of women's social situation and the idea of independent working women without men. An alternative distribution title listed *Die Dirnentragödie* as *Women without Men*, which also served the image of female 'masculinisation' and the criticism from reactionary bourgeoisie

movements, which in the early 1930s became more and more anti-feminist and underlined conservative female stereotypes.

Ruth Goetz's career as a novelist and screenwriter also reflects the emergence of professional female filmmakers who became common role models in the German film industry. After the coming of sound, the number of female filmmakers declined rapidly to under 10 percent (Scholz 2016 and Kasten 1990, 45-50). Also with the coming of sound in 1928, Goetz ended her career in the German movie industry. Her last work as a screenwriter was the Asta Nielsen starring drama *Die Dirnentragödie* in 1927. From that time, she concentrated on her career as a novelist and journalist. After the national socialist uprising in 1933 Goetz called herself Ruth von Schüching (Goetz took the last name from her husband, Bernhard von Schüching, after their marriage in 1922), but as a Jew she was banned from work and eventually migrated to England. The national socialist dictatorship blacklisted her books and banned her from writing. She was expatriated legally on 25th May 1939 (Hepp 2985, 287), and lived in London until her death in 1965.

In general, the history of female screenwriting internationally remains a research gap. One step forward is the comprehensive handbook *Women Screenwriters: An International Guide* edited by Jill Neldes and Jule Selbo, which was published in October 2015. But systematic historical studies not only on female screenwriting practice, but also in professional fields like direction, cinematography and producing in the first two decades of 20th century are still missing.

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Bracketting Noir: Narrative and Masculinity in *The Long Goodbye*

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ABSTRACT

This paper will look at the subversion of tropes within *The Long Goodbye* (Robert Altman, 1973). Leigh Brackett, a veteran of the Hollywood studio system of the 1940s and 1950s, wrote the screenplay and previously had co-written Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (1944). Brackett adopted a different approach when working with Altman, maintaining his working practices of over-lapping dialogue and abandonment of traditional three-act structure. Brackett uses this opportunity of the less-restrictive production practices of the American New Wave of the 1970s to explore, and deconstruct, the myth of the detective. Throughout the narrative, Brackett populates the film with eccentric characters as Marlowe weaves his way through a labyrinthine plot and in many cases extreme representations of masculinity, evident in the scene where a gangster assaults his girlfriend with a coke bottle. Finally, Brackett presents Marlowe, played by Elliot Gould, as an out-of-time hero that needs updating.

KEYWORDS

Screenwriting, Gender, Film Noir, Masculinity, Narrative, New Hollywood

Introduction

What's a man's story? Conflict. Explosions. Killing. Guns. Special effects. A strong, heroic, nonemotional man doing physical action. Dinosaurs. Monsters. And, men might add, "They make lots of money." That's the stereotype and there's some truth to it (Seger 2003, 111).

Linda Seger's statement above demonstrates the macho saturation of mainstream cinema. It is a male-dominated industry producing male-orientated films. However, looking over the history of cinema production we can see the key players are often women, 'In the early years of filmmaking, women screenwriters outnumbered men ten to one, with the not surprising result of some classic films, roles, performances by and about women - many of whom wrote for, produced, requested and directed each other' (McCreadie 2006, xii). Female talents have and continue to create 'masculine-centred' narratives that appeal to a large male audience. The role of masculinity is refracted through the male heroes who respond to the environment in which they are placed in and are, thus, a construct:

Masculinity, like femininity, is a product of culture, not of nature: it is constructed and performed. There remains an assumption, even in contemporary society, that gender differences are innate and reflect an underlying dichotomy between men and women based on sexual difference (Gates 2006, 28).

As cultural shifts occur, it becomes more and more important to constantly evaluate masculinity. One of the most fascinating examinations of screen masculinity is Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). The film was released during a period of revitalisation of American cinema; known as a 'Hollywood renaissance'. Dubbed 'New Hollywood', the late-sixties, early-seventies saw an unprecedented number of filmmakers taking over the studio systems. Filmmakers were given substantial control over their projects, producing mostly character-driven dramas such as *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) and *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese, 1973):

For a time, as the sixties gave way to the seventies, it seemed that the revolution had indeed come, that a cadre of technically sophisticated filmmakers, frequently welcomed with open arms by a new generation of studio executives who were ready to try almost anything to reverse the decline in box office receipts, had set about the business of creating a New Hollywood (Bernardoni 1991, 2).

The movement was influenced heavily by the French New Wave, which had filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut experimenting with classical Hollywood styles:

Influenced, in part, by Asian and European art cinema of the 1950s and the 1960s – with its looser narrative structure and emphasis of character ambiguity – seventies film-makers, working within the classical Hollywood model, tested that model's flexibility by adapting the radical techniques of more truly subversive film-makers to Hollywood's classical form (Berliner 2010, 6).

Moving away from the classical studio style of filmmaking, and incorporating some of the European experimental practices such as jump-cuts, non-linear narratives and developing the characterisation of anti-heroes, provided audiences a refreshing and complex viewing. 'The narrative structures of classical Hollywood films are often characterized by tightly organized and carefully honed plots, in which most if not all events are clearly explained to the viewer' (King 2002, 180). With a prominence of character over plot, filmmakers were able to delve into their character's psychology, as well as subvert and re-evaluate the classical studio style of filmmaking.

Altman has been identified as one of the key filmmakers of New Hollywood and *The Long Goodbye* stands as one of his strongest and most subversive works, 'Altman was seen as a worthwhile investment, although his output in the 1970s, during which he worked with a number of studios, was resolutely prickly and uncommercial' (King 2002, 94). Screenwriter Leigh Brackett wrote the script of *The Long Goodbye* and was a veteran of the classical Hollywood studio system. Brackett, along with writers William Faulkner and Jules Furthman, wrote Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946), a milestone in the development of film noir. *The Big Sleep* was noted for its rapid-fire dialogue, sexual chemistry between the leads Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, and its convoluted plot. Based on the novel by Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* featured the character of detective Philip Marlowe, an archetypical private investigator associated with film noir.

This essay will, firstly, explore film noir tropes with an examination of *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye* to illustrate Brackett's desire to subvert her work. Secondly, there will be some discussion on the way Brackett weaves together a complex plot in line with Altman's work practices. And finally, there will be an analysis of the use of masculinity through the various male characters that populate the film, from Marlowe to gangster Marty Augustine. It will be argued that Brackett, in collaboration with Altman, subverted the masculine tropes of the private detective by utilising Marlowe's previous iconic status and placing him within a period of cultural change. Brackett was able to twist the world of Chandler into an examination of masculinity and its relevance within cultural shifts. This will be placed into the context of New Hollywood cinema.

Noir Narrative

The narrative complexities of many film noirs, stemming from their literary sources, at first appear to abandon typical screenplay structure associated with studio systems. *The Long Goodbye* stripped many of the plots within the novel, yet still maintained a complex structure that today has been replicated in many neo-noirs, 'For Brackett, a major challenge in tackling *The Long Goodbye* script was that American culture had changed so much since 1946 that it was impossible to approach the project as she had done in the 1940s' (Luhr 2012, 158). The shift in cultural tastes in America during the 1960s and early 1970s were replicated in New Hollywood, as stated above, the emerging character-driven cinema was reflecting the turmoil of the times:

[...] film noir [...]is generally understood [...] as being largely about the acute sense of disempowerment men felt returning home from World War II to find that during the war women had left the domestic sphere and entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers (Grant 2011, 6).

While there was an increase in noir filmmaking in the post-war period, it has never ceased to be an inspiration for many contemporary filmmakers and writers. Noir cinema challenged the models of the classical Hollywood system that despite extensive censorship was able to convey and insinuate the dark side of the American dream. Noir was making somewhat of a revival in films such as *Harper* (Jack Smight, 1966) and *Marlowe* (Paul Bogart, 1969), which bled into the New Wave that was occurring in America. Incorporating this mould within the American New Wave spoke to new audiences who wanted more from their characters that reflected their time:

The style and substance of the American New Wave films can be linked just as legitimately to industrial changes and economic pressures (bulging youth demographics, fierce competition from television, the erosion of the Production Code, etc.) as it can be to the politics of the time (Dwyer 2015, 56).

It is these shifts within American cinema of the 1970s that enabled Brackett to experiment with the noir elements. In collaboration with Altman, the screenplay was able to address issues of the time as well as invoke, and critique, the cinema of the past.

A noir narrative could be best understood as a narrative of layers, weaving together several plots, sub-plots and digressions, 'Film noir is a fabric woven out of many threads. Its various styles, themes, motifs, and forms make it a complex and contested cultural phenomenon' (Sanders 2007, 91). Because of the complex nature of their 'plots' noir films are a stark contrast to conventional, three-act structure, which concerns itself with cause-effect plot devices. The three-act structure can best be understood, simply as a beginning, middle and end, with an introduction to the central character, a key plot point to thrust the remainder of the action (act two) and a build up to a climax and resolution in act three:

Writing what has become the three-act, plot-driven Hollywood script in its most crass form leads to what I call the microwave script. That is, the attempt to make a meal instantly by simply throwing elements together according to a set piece, setting the timer, and zapping it all for a brief time (Horton 1999, 4).

Applying the three-act structure to both *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye* reveals the complexity of the noir narrative. Whilst there is the set-up, the thrust of the action and a conclusion, there are many problems with regard to the development of the 'story', 'Structure is like gravity: It is the glue that holds the story in place; it is the base, the foundation, the spine, the skeleton of the story. And it is this relationship between the parts and the whole that holds the screenplay together. It's what makes it what it is' (Field 2005, 21). Conventional story structure within this context follows what Kristin Thompson deemed to be the key aspect of a Hollywood narrative, 'The most basic principle of the Hollywood cinema is that a narrative should consist of a chain of causes and effects that is easy for the spectator to follow. This clarity of comprehension is basic to all our other responses to films, particularly emotional ones [...]' (1999, 10). If noir narratives are complex and convoluted in their nature and eschew many of the given traditions of conventional Hollywood narrative – easy-to-follow plot; happy ending; straight-romantic lead – then Brackett was able to break away from this formula through her work on *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye*. The influence of filmmakers Howard Hawks and Robert Altman working in collaboration with Brackett managed to support and aid her writing as she explored new terrain with regard to masculinity.

Adapting the Chandler source novel, which had a complicated and over-layered plot, would not be an easy task to fit within the Hollywood narrative template as stated above. However, despite over-lapping subplots, various characters appearing then disappearing without explanation, characters killed off-screen, the script was able to develop and maintain an air of mystery as well as audience interest. Building on these layers and plots as the protagonist weaves his way to achieve his goal in itself becomes the primary purpose of the narrative rather than achieving the key plot points in each act (cause and effect). The unfolding of the narrative and the various red-herrings, partial clues and information involve the audience to piece together the mystery:

As the viewer watches the film, she or he picks up cues, recalls information, anticipates what will follow, and generally participates in the creation of the film's form. The film shapes particular expectations by summoning up curiosity, suspense, and surprise. The ending has the task of satisfying or cheating the expectations prompted by the film as a whole. The ending may also activate memory by cueing the spectator to review earlier events, possibly considering them in a new light (Bordwell & Thompson 2008, 75).

As Bordwell and Thompson state, the audience anticipates what will occur next as the mystery unfolds. A very basic summary of the 'plot' of *The Big Sleep* would be private detective Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) is tasked with uncovering a blackmail scam involving the Sternwood family. While very minimalist in its description, this (very short) synopsis covers the first plot point of the narrative where we are introduced to Marlowe, his personality and his latest employer. What follows becomes convoluted, as more and more characters appear to interrupt the task at hand, providing new developments, contradicting information and swallowing Marlowe up into a swamp of no direction. However, despite all the confusion, noir is able to keep the viewer hooked through its visual style, its ability to examine the underbelly of society and delve into the world of corrupt characters:

[...] the film noir seems fundamentally *about* violations: vice, corruption, unrestrained desire, and, most fundamental of all, abrogation of the American dream's most basic promises – of hope, prosperity, and safety from persecution. Taken as a whole, the *noir* films are noteworthy neither for their subtlety nor their muting of our cultural problems; to the contrary, they deploy the darkest imagery to sketch starkly disconcerting assessment of the human and social condition (Telotte 1989, 2).

Despite the censorship restrictions in place in the 1940s, Brackett and her co-writers were able to subtly incorporate the sexual desire between Marlowe and Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall) through the use of dialogue. The infamous scene in which Vivian confronts Marlowe in his office and then calls the police is a perfect substitute for foreplay. Hawks uses the space of the office and the character's closeness and glances to insinuate their mutual attraction. Of course, this is developing the chemistry established between Bacall and Bogart from Hawks' *To Have and Have Not* (1944). Hawks himself was able to establish a breakaway from his previous directorial style and instead opted to utilise unusual setups, the scene described above is a perfect example:

Perhaps Hawks worked well in so many different areas because his "style" – a succession of neutral camera set-ups, flat lighting, conventional continuity cutting – is so unobtrusive. In its determined flatfootedness, *The Big Sleep* is almost an anti-noir, a display of impersonal Hollywood craftsmanship. Hawks is sure of his effects, he is skilful in handling his actors (he wisely places Bogart and Bacall at the center of the film), but *The Big Sleep* has no genuine feeling for the genre's possibilities (Hirsch 1981, 115).

With a certain ‘distance’ from Hawks with regard to a visual style, he still utilises shadows, long-takes and while Hirsch accuses the director of having no feeling for the genre *The Big Sleep* established key tropes that filmmakers would use again and again within film noir, including Altman.

Brackett around Altman

Whilst Brackett’s development of the script was fitting into the new freedom afforded to filmmakers during New Hollywood, Altman’s directing style and techniques were a perfect match for her subversiveness. One of the primary facets of an Altman film is the over-lapping dialogue, which creates a confusing yet realistic soundscape:

Altman takes from Welles (and Howard Hawks) the notion of overlapping dialogue, people talking at the same time without waiting for a response. The effect is an aural space that parallels the decentralization of the visual space. By refusing to allow the comfort of pauses in the dialogue any more than he allows the comfort of simple visual orientation, Altman creates a demanding and busy visual and aural field (Kolker 2000, 338).

Creating this aural field aided Altman’s continuously moving camera, developing an even more disoriented cinematic experience. Altman utilises these layers to work concurrently with Brackett’s dense screenplay. However, the areas Brackett wanted to subvert with regard to both the masculine characters and the structure of film noir would provide Altman with a template to challenge the audience and perhaps even reinvented certain genres, ‘Altman’s *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971) and *The Long Goodbye* (1973) displayed rough-edged performances, dense soundtracks, and a disrespectful approach to genre’ (Bordwell & Thompson 2008, 465). This, in addition to Brackett’s lack of exposition in the screenplay, allows Altman to further challenge the audience to ‘keep up’ with the narrative and take nothing for granted, ‘What Altman creates is not the conventional structure of a whole that is analysed into its parts, but a simultaneity of the whole *and* its parts, a simultaneity the viewer must always attend to’ (Kolker 2000, 338). Though film noir narratives are complex, Altman and Brackett take it further through the aural and visual techniques the filmmaker employs and confound expectations and any familiarity with traditional noir:

[...]Altman’s film is a neo-noir opus, although one far less often mentioned as such. The nocturnal entanglements with gangsterism and debauchery, the meandering filament of the narrative, Marlowe’s constant muttering filling in for voiceover, the sense in which the past is constantly revived to taunt the present – all these are noir themes, strictly speaking (Pomerance 2015, 245).

The absence of so many traditional elements – voiceover, love interest and rapid but clear dialogue – opens up more possibilities to challenge the dominant Hollywood system, marking *The Long Goodbye* as one of the most subversive films to come out of this period as well as one of the key productions that developed the notion of neo-noir for future generations of filmmakers.

The Big Sleep and The Long Goodbye: Establishing the Narrative

If we take the first ten minutes of both *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye* they have both similarities and contrasting screenplay parameters. We are introduced to Marlowe upfront in both films yet where *The Big Sleep* is concerned about thrusting the protagonist into the action as soon as possible, *The Long Goodbye* takes its time in establishing the dramatic narrative, ‘Act I, the beginning, is a unit of dramatic action that is approximately twenty or thirty pages long and is held together with the dramatic context known as the *Set-Up*’ (Field 2005, 22). If we take Field’s analysis of the first Act, *The Big Sleep* at first adheres to this structure. Marlowe arrives at the home of General Sternwood where the Butler invites him in. There he meets Sternwood’s youngest daughter Carmen (Martha Vickers) who teases Marlowe. Hawks establishes upfront the sexual magnetism of Marlowe by having Carmen sheepishly bite her thumb and then fall into his arms. Marlowe is promptly introduced to the General, who is confined to a wheelchair. At this point, the

action is established – the blackmailing scam – in which Marlowe has been tasked to investigate. With the *Set-Up* established within these moments, *The Long Goodbye* takes a different approach. Brackett and Altman take their time to reveal that this Marlowe is a different breed from Bogart's version. Elliot Gould makes Marlowe more ragged and un-heroic, with his crumpled old-fashioned suit and lazy lifestyle. Instead of having Marlowe pursue an investigation in the opening scenes, he instead finds himself tasked with trying to feed his belligerent cat. Simultaneously, we are presented with Terry Lennox (Jim Bouton) who is speeding away from his home to an as-of-yet unknown location. Meanwhile, Marlowe leaves his apartment, has a quick interaction with his young, hippie female neighbours and proceeds to hunt for cat food. Unable to find his regular brand, he is forced to buy another and attempts to fool his cat by swapping the labels on the can. However, it still does not work and the cat shuns him. Lennox's parallel narrative reaches closure when he arrives at Marlowe's apartment to explain the dilemma he is in. Marlowe agrees to help which then becomes the *Set-Up* for the remainder of the narrative, opening the convoluted plots, sub-plots and characters akin to *The Big Sleep*. Ultimately, with the narrative layers beginning to form from this point in both films, the remaining similarity lies with the establishment of the primary antagonist in both films, as Carmen and Terry are finally revealed to be the villains of the piece. That is not to say the path to this revelation is clear. On the contrary, it becomes redundant in a noir narrative to expect a clear resolution.

The subversion of the set up in the opening scenes presents Brackett's first instance of critiquing her own work. While *The Big Sleep* fits within the parameters of a classical narrative in the beginning, *The Long Goodbye* quickly establishes a breakaway from this formula, '*The Long Goodbye* eschews much about the classical Hollywood style; it also presents classical Hollywood as outdated and irrelevant, as well as a central clue to Marlowe's character' (Luhr 2012, 161). Working within New Hollywood, then, provided Brackett the freedom to experiment and revisit her previous efforts to refine and analyse the cultural shifts since 1946.

A Different Kind of Hero

Brackett was able to explore the nature of the masculine detective and with Gould taking over from Bogart in an iconic role, emphasised the writer's interpretation of a man who is now out-dated. Bogart, known for his gruffness and hard-edged masculinity in films such as *The Petrified Forest* (Archie Mayo, 1936) and as hard-edged detective Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), began to bring in a bit more sensitivity to his roles, such as the romantic hero in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) and *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks, 1944). *The Big Sleep* cements this shift with his partnership with Bacall: '*The Big Sleep* presented a series of fascinating film personalities who delivered gusto entertainment value. This began with tough but fair and sensitive Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart)' (Hare 2012: 86). The determined Sam Spade of *The Maltese Falcon* was aggressive in his pursuit of the title-object as well as a need for revenge. Whereas Marlowe, in *The Big Sleep*, takes information as it comes, weaving through the many developments. The sensitive aspects of his character come from his interactions with Vivian who is his equal. Within film noir there is the presence of a *femme fatale*, which is one of the signature tropes, 'The *femme fatale* is an irresistible dramatic and dangerously attractive woman. She is "la Femme" who directs men toward danger, perils, catastrophes, and disaster' (De Lafayette 2011, 13). The classic *femme fatales* in film noir, from Mary Astor in *The Maltese Falcon* and Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* to neo-noir interpretations in *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) personified by Faye Dunaway, provide the primary weakness for the male protagonist. Bacall in *The Big Sleep* becomes the object of desire for Marlowe yet she is not his weakness. Instead, as stated above, she is his equal and becomes involved in the investigation, aiding Marlowe as he tries to uncover the truth. This makes a contrast with the classic *femme fatale* personified by Vivian's younger sister, Carmen, who is seductive and dangerous and ultimately the villain of the piece. This dynamic brings added dimensions to Marlowe, as he is slightly weaker around Carmen and stronger with Vivian:

A frequent element of noir suspense films is the direct clash of evil between a good and often at least somewhat naïve woman and that of a more experienced, hardened female. This clash is often plausibly aided by having the good woman younger than that of the wily, experienced femme fatale (Hare 2003, 43).

We can see here that the writers are subverting these conventions through the characterisation of the female leads: the experienced female – Vivian – then is part of the stronger side of Marlowe’s character and Brackett is able to utilise the dynamic to full effect to reinforce Marlowe’s masculinity. They are a fitting match and make for some of the film’s best sequences as they verbally spar with one another.

The development of the private detective from hard-boiled novels to cinema was a redevelopment of the masculine heroes of other genres, for instance the classical Cowboy archetype, a heterosexual male, with a quiet exterior and the person who just got the job done. The noir hero developed this archetype and as they delved into various mysteries, they explore the dark underbelly of society, which often leads to violence:

The classical detective, as envisioned by the golden age writers, never flourished on the big screen in the same way that he/she did in literature because stories with labyrinthine plots and an emphasis on ratiocination and observation rather than action or characterization were not easily translatable into film; nevertheless, the 1930s were the heyday of the classical detective in film before the arrive of the American private eye (Gates 2012, 63).

The development of detective stories and cinema in the 1930s started the trend of the male private investigator that continues to this day with films such as *Inherent Vice* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2014), though this would be in the vein of Altman’s impression of noir. *The Big Sleep* would develop the notion of the fast-talking, quick-witted detective as represented with the first meeting of General Sternwood, ‘How do you like your brandy, sir?’ in which Marlowe replies, ‘In a glass’.

The appeal of Marlowe, apart from his sharp wit, within *The Big Sleep* stems from his ability to plunge himself into the unknown without too much thought and be able to recover from any situation. The source novel was, obviously, from Marlowe’s point-of-view and his perspective on the events that unfold a subjective experience:

Detective Philip Marlowe as a scrupulous man of detail and circumstance is very well aware of where he is proceeding. Part of the narrative hook’s appeal in these first three paragraphs of *The Big Sleep* is the descriptive manner in which Detective Marlowe introduces the world to another style of life far removed from what he...is accustomed (Hare 2012, 86).

Because of this, Marlowe’s characterisation is best reflected when confronted by various hoods, femme fatales and gangsters that confront him throughout the narrative. Stemming from literature and adapting the material for a screenplay leaves Brackett and her co-writers many challenges when it comes to creating a suitable protagonist that maintains at least the essence of the character from the novel as well as creating a convincing screen presence.

Whilst Bogart’s interpretation of Marlowe is one of the most iconic characters of classical Hollywood, Gould’s approach was significantly different, in line with New Hollywood’s complex characters, ‘The underlying concept is intriguing: Elliot Gould is intentionally miscast as Philip Marlowe, and the setting is updated to contemporary, dope-crazed Los Angeles, where the private eye becomes a ridiculous anachronism. (Naremore 2007, 203). Altman’s decision to use Gould, known for his comedic turn in Altman’s first box-office success *M*A*S*H*, utilises this casting against type to establish the break away

from traditional noir and fully integrate Brackett's vision of the character. As Brackett developed the screenplay for *The Long Goodbye*, her writing began to change with regard to the portrayal of Marlowe:

In constructing her screenplay, she eliminated the novel's World War II context and a substantial number of plot threads to largely focus on the Roger Wade story. She also changed the novel's quiet, sad climax and invented the abrupt, violent ending of Marlowe killing Terry. All centered on her version of Marlowe. Agreeing with Altman, she saw him as a loser (Luhr 2012, 159).

With Marlowe being slightly less 'masculine' in the classical, Bogart-sense, Brackett is able to explore masculinity through other characters. This move away from traditional noir heroes, such as the corrupt Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944) and Jeff Bailey in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947), offers the writer a chance to explore and analyse the complexities of these characters, 'The typical film noir protagonist, so often in the grip of desperate emotional needs and sexual desire (as typified by encounters with the femme fatale), must act against a backdrop of human duplicity and the threat of imminent death' (Sanders 2007, 92). The absence of a romantic interest, although there is interest from several female characters in *The Long Goodbye* especially Marlowe's young neighbours, demonstrates how oblivious Marlowe is to his current surroundings. He is unable to compute this attraction and as he is pulled further into the narrative stemming from helping Lennox at the start of the film, there is no development of a traditional romantic relationship.

The focus of the narrative after Lennox's departure at the start of the film falls on Wade. The bear-like drunk writer appears to be the frontrunner for a classic masculine character - animal in nature and quick-tempered – and creates an unnerving presence within the film. Convinced of his wife, Eileen (Nina van Pallandt), being unfaithful he unloads torrid amounts of verbal and physical abuse only to sober up and beg for forgiveness, 'Dominant masculinity then transfers its problems and anxieties onto others to disavow them and maintain its own centrality' (Gates 2006, 30). Wade is certainly dominant and while this element appears to be somewhat melodramatic, Brackett is able to question what masculinity means within the cultural shift. This weakness within the 'classical' masculine character is exemplified further by having Wade primarily interact with Marlowe whom he seems amused by. Being older than Marlowe, who is already established as a non-heroic figure, Wade is the 'old-fashioned' male, with Hayden being the perfect casting as a reference to his masculine characters found in *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954) and *The Killing* (Stanley Kubrick, 1956). Hayden's passivity in *Johnny Guitar* projected a faux masculine image, as he was secondary to Joan Crawford's Vienna. Hayden plays Johnny with a forced tough guy persona, which covers his frail, nervous personality. In *The Long Goodbye*, his appearance, bulking, bearded, shabby, gives him an animalistic quality. This screen presence allows the perfect contrast to Marlowe who despite being crafted as a 'loser' pales in comparison to the gruffness and animalistic nature of Wade. Marlowe, in effect, is the moral compass of the story. However, Brackett is able to separate *The Long Goodbye's* Marlowe from his predecessors by having him kill Lennox in the conclusion:

Although Altman modified Brackett's draft script in various ways, he endorsed for her ending of the picture, whereby Marlowe eliminates Terry without any remorse. Altman even asserted he would not have directed the picture if it had a different ending... (Phillips 2000, 138).

This act finally makes the transition of Marlowe from the novels to the cinema complete with Brackett converting him into an anti-hero, 'With the final scene providing the apex of Altman's and Gould's provocative mash-up of anti-noir and neo-noir, Gould's Marlowe is simultaneously a Jewish clown in Bogie-face...and also an authentic hard-boiled hero (like Bogie)' (Kaye 2011, 132). The presence of an anti-hero have always been part of Hollywood cinema and in particular film noir – again, Walter Neff is one such example – however, they became more apparent in New Hollywood within films such as *Bonnie and Clyde*

(Arthur Penn, 1967) and *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976). Whilst the titular characters in *Bonnie and Clyde* and Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* were killers and psychopaths, Marlowe was less extreme throughout *The Long Goodbye* until the climax, killing Lennox in cold blood. Brackett's development of a classic figure such as Marlowe to fit within this mould further demonstrates her adaptability, subversiveness and ability to reform masculine characters.

Brackett also uses the gangster Marty Augustine to both subvert traditional noir and explore extreme masculinity. A Jewish gangster who at first appears to be flamboyant and even entertaining turns violent when he smashes a coke bottle on his girlfriend's face. While Wade represents a fading figure of masculinity, particularly when confronted by his prissy psychiatrist Dr. Verringer (Henry Gibson) who puts him in his place by slapping him in front of his friends and family, Augustine is a paradox. The figurehead gangster is another trope of film noir and acts as an interruption and another plot layer to stall the protagonist while they investigate, or becomes a new lead to explore. In *The Long Goodbye*, Augustine is a phantom from Lennox's past who wants money back and tasks Marlowe with acquiring it. The polemical nature of Augustine's character whether oddly amusing or curiously terrifying moves away from *The Big Sleep*-style gangster who is fast-talking, clearly depicted as dangerous (always wielding a gun in Marlowe's direction) and someone who is merely an inconvenience. For example, the scene where Marlowe is confronted by hood Harry Jones (Elisha Cook, Jr.), a nervy and somewhat unpredictable character that has Marlowe trapped. Marlowe manages to talk his way out of the situation and gains more information about his case. However, Brackett wants to subvert this type of character in *The Long Goodbye*. Augustine breaks from tradition by appearing non-threatening yet can snap at any moment. When Marlowe runs out of time finding the money, Augustine tries to make him strip and instead forces his gang to take off their clothes. While Bogart's Marlowe could talk his way out of a situation, Gould is left humiliated and helpless, which further reduces the masculine presence associated with the character. Further to this, Gould's almost laconic performance substantiates Brackett and Altman's aim to refashion the traditional nature of noir, 'Gould is too flaccid to play out the hero that he is taken to be, too unnervingly contradictory about the central vitality of the appearance and performance' (Pomerance 2015, 246). The hero, then, is adrift, as lost as the audience. The narrative becomes a playground for Brackett and Altman as they push Marlowe to his limits.

Fade Out

The Long Goodbye not only played on the conventions of classic noir as well as traditional screenplay structure but also explored the nature of the old-fashioned masculine hero. What Brackett was able to do was play on some of the techniques she helped to establish in *The Big Sleep*, whether it be the use of rapid-fire dialogue, simmering sexual subtext and the tough but sensitive detective. We can see that Gould's Marlowe is then an inversion of this: sensitive but ultimately tough, demonstrated through his act of violence at the conclusion. In collaboration with Altman and the New Hollywood freedom available to them, their partnership was a perfect fit. Altman's developing filming techniques began to form, in a paradoxical fashion, coherently. The challenges they both set out for the audience whether it is the complex nature of the plot, even though it was considerably reduced from the source novel, and the drifting visual and aural fields created by Altman invite the viewer to be an active participant. The unwillingness on their part to feed the audience easy answers or slow-down the narrative makes the film work on several levels. The screenplay is able to deviate from the norms of traditional practice as Brackett was within the parameters of the risk-taking New Hollywood.

Questioning masculinity, particularly in film noir, which has a tradition of troubled, weak and often duped male characters, provides Brackett with the platform to take apart the dominant ideologies and perspectives of male figures. Altman, in his part, was able to fully elaborate on this with his casting choices. Having Gould as Marlowe instantly develops another interpretation of that character. Hayden is able to play off his

tough-guy persona of classical Hollywood and the most extreme cases of masculinity are in the hands of Augustine and Lennox whose violent crime sets the narrative in motion. Augustine surrounds himself with a posse of hoods who follow his lead. There is even an unbilled appearance from Arnold Schwarzenegger whose physical appearance dwarfs Marlowe and humiliates him even further. Brackett further breaks this down by having no romantic interest and having Marlowe be constantly perplexed with his young female, yoga-practicing hippies and is quite content running errands for them on a regular basis. While Bogart's interpretation of Marlowe demonstrated a man capable of talking himself out of most situations and willing to collaborate with a female equivalent, Gould's Marlowe is lost in time, unable to comprehend the environment he is in. Altman and Brackett make use of the Hollywood setting to further demonstrate this aloofness within his character, as he even seems oblivious to the environment. The opening and concluding scenes perfectly encapsulate the stark contrast of the interpretation of the male character. *The Big Sleep* brings the viewer into the first plot layer, the instigator of the remaining action and we understand the nature of the character. *The Long Goodbye* on the other hand has an almost organic progression, revealing more of the character of this Marlowe through his attempts to feed his cat. *The Big Sleep* concludes with Marlowe and Vivien together, having a final heated exchange, cementing their desire for one another – a perfect encapsulation of the classic Hollywood ending. Brackett would challenge this by having Marlowe kill his former best friend and chief antagonist in cold blood in *The Long Goodbye*. Brackett not only transforms Marlowe into a cinematic anti-hero within the New Hollywood vein but also finally reveals the true, destructive nature of masculinity as it erupts from the a masculine character who was pushed too far.

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Position-in-frame: gendered mobility, legacy and transformative sacrifice in the screen stories of Susanne Bier.

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ABSTRACT

An integral connection point between the screenplay and reader/viewer is the protagonist's transformative journey. The construction of this narrative backbone is critical to the articulation of overarching thematic concerns and story premise but also reflects the story creator's worldview- one often coloured by representations of gender. The Hollywood model certainly divides narrative function along gender lines but does this representation hold true within a different cultural context? This article examines the selected screen stories of Danish director Susanne Bier whose partnership with screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen is one of Denmark's most successful film partnerships. Employing a case study methodology I examine the dramatic function of and agency afforded screen characters and the critical dynamic between cultural landscape, practitioner preference and narrative inquiry. Key to this address is an exploration of mobility, legacy and sacrifice as textual considerations of gender and its utilisation as transnational narrative strategy.

KEYWORDS

Transnational, mobility, transformative, collaboration, gaze

Refocusing a masculinised gaze?

With persistent ubiquity Hollywood continues to cast a dominant shadow over much of the global film & TV landscape. Similarly pervasive is the figurehead of such industrial influence - the male protagonist as narrative gatekeeper. This prioritising often domesticates or sexualises female counterparts arguably diminishing access to and impact on the world (and what might really matter) that exists beyond the picket fence women on screen are often constrained by.¹

Primed as dramatic enablers for the transcendence of male lead characters, one might suggest the transformative agency of female screen characters in Hollywood's mainstream narratives is not only limited but often entirely transferred to male protagonists, rendering many female roles muted and functionally hollow. Gender disparity is also reflected in creative presence (or opportunity) of above-the-line practitioners, with women in some industrial analysis accounting for just 20.5% of these filmmakers.²

The dominance of Hollywood and industrial preferences within are often recalled when examining 'combative innovation'; in this instance how US market dominance results in alternate approaches to screen narrative development and delivery. Denmark is a key player in reconfiguring expectations of and access to small nation film & TV. One of the most significant collaborations contributing to Denmark's transnational status is the partnership between director Susanne Bier and screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen.

¹ Out of the top 100 grossing Hollywood films of 2014 female characters were more likely than male counterparts to be identified through their personal status as wife or mother (58% vs 31%)

<http://blogs.indiewire.com/womenandhollywood/statistics>

² <http://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/gender-bias-without-borders-full-report.pdf>, p24.

This article explores representation and role-play, not only in relation to screen characters but also how the appropriation of gender can be viewed as a practitioner strategy to attract or maintain international recognition. I consider the utility of gender in the Bier/Jensen collaborations a form of narrative labour that articulates a transnationalized cinematic gaze. In the case study texts I examine [*Efter brylluppet/ After the Wedding* (2006) & *Haevnen/In a Better World* (2010)] this is expressed through thematic binaries (static & mobile, expressive & restrained, passive & proactive) situating gender as a construct with a diminished political or feminist agenda. This kind of narrative neutering situates character as an expression of ideology or ethical dilemma binding concept and screen world(s) together.

I also examine how Bier transfigures what Yvonne Tasker (1998, 5) expresses as the correlative significance of gendered identities & constructions of independence, by exploring perceptions of women behind the lens. Much like the problematic ethical terrain navigated in her films, Bier's, at times, antithetical approach to gender representation can be read as equally agitating. As a female screenwriter I lament her predictable reliance on male protagonists but deeply engage with the spatial tension within the narrative that characters, regardless of gender must reconcile. In turn this leaves me questioning my own gaze and how the interpretation of narrative and authorial intention can also be read as engendered practise.

Genre as key collaborative expression

While the feature film is commonly used to anatomize the screenplay as architectural text, examining practitioner collaboration and developmental pathways significantly broadens the framework of discourse. Indeed if one pivots the axis of inquiry towards Denmark the dialogue converges upon how the writer-director dynamic contributes towards an understanding and analysis of narrative form.

Anders Thomas Jensen and Susanne Bier are arguably one of Denmark's most significant and successful screen partnerships, their conspicuous international presence defined by a predilection for melodrama. This long term dynamic³ reflects a culturally definitive approach to screenwriting, one where writer and director often share a co-story credit. In this way, directors in Denmark contribute towards the manifestation of story in an arguably more organic, seamless fashion where continuing conversations between writer and director develop a valuable understanding of and attachment to the screen idea.

This partnership is framed by considerations of genre. This allows for an interesting examination of gender and the transmutability of melodrama, through which narratives navigate complex geographic & ethical boundaries aimed at attracting the globalized viewer. Bier/Jensen reconfigure the melodrama genre away from what might have once been heralded as an immersive, inclusive site of feminized concerns and dramatic imaginings, towards a cinematic space in which Pam Cook (cited in Gledhill [ed.] 2012, 3) suggests the presentation and perception of identities is wilfully lost rather than confirmed.

Driven by restrained expressions of masculinized desires and frailty, their screen worlds pull focus from a feminine emotionality commonly associated with melodrama. However, the genre's tonality persists in the heightened affectivity of secondary female characters, revisiting conventional characteristics of melodrama. These re-presentations reflect an inevitability regarding roles and role-playing but arguably avoid a didactic approach to modes of genre and gender.

³ This writer/director partnership co-share story credits on 6 feature films: *Elsker dig for evigt/Open Hearts* (2002), *Brodre/Brothers* (2004), *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006), *Haevnen/In a Better World* (2010), *Den skaldede frisør/Love is all you need* (2012), and *En chance til/A Second Chance* (2014)

The him and her in critique

Genre is also used as an avenue for critique, where sentiment is framed as an inherently weak articulation of craft. Peter Bradshaw (2011) disparagingly dismisses *Haevnen/In a Better World* (2010) as a ‘faintly preposterous cine-soap opera for haemophiliac-hearted liberals’. As director, Bier’s work is often classified as popular rather than high art with emotion emphasized as a female-centric failing rather than reflection of directorial sensibility. A similarly unbalanced line of critique assumes female dynamics present within the storyline dictates a feminist rendering of the unfolding narrative, binding gender to process and practitioner. However, one of the main issues is gender imbalance within the reviewer profession. Dr Martha M. Lauzen’s (2016, 2) recent study of the film review website Rotten Tomatoes found that of the ‘top critics’, only 27% were women. Given the report also established that writers reviewed a higher proportion of films with a protagonist of their own sex, more films with a masculinized gaze attain visibility through the apparatus of critique.

While the Bier/Jensen collaborations dwell in a space of expressively heightened drama the often dubious boundary between objective and subjective interpretation renders critique itself a gendered construct, evidenced in a persistent ‘historical devaluation of women’s production through a conflation with negatively feminized discourses, including genre and emotion’ (Smaill 2014, 15). Such positioning reflects a perpetual reconciliation of femaleness; the inherently pathological need to question ‘her’ relevance, role and relationship to the material.

Stigma bound to this kind of problematizing is often serviced through mainstream media’s referential language use. Where male directors’ work is notably articulated through a technological prism such as the architectural components of the drama, female directors are often critiqued according to emotionality and character dynamics. This build/nurture dichotomy presents distinct ways to examine viability or adequacy of craft through biological pre-determinates; women cocoon fragile narrative traits and men construct clear, bold statements through the mechanics of cinema as man-made innovation. This is demonstrated most clearly through the genre/gender prism. The Sundance Institute’s longitudinal study sites a higher concentration of drama, comedy or romance films exhibited at the Sundance Film Festival, directed by female directors.⁴ These genres typically traverse female-oriented emotional landscapes, rather than the masculinized and hyper-physical realms of action, horror or sci fi rendered much more conspicuously through technology such as CGI or green screen. The study also found a default ‘think director, think male’⁵ perception at play within industry, which positions women as working despite or around their perceived lack of authority or commitment.

This oppositional approach can be evidenced in regards to the acclaim bestowed upon Anders Thomas Jensen as feature film writer/director. Diverging from Bier’s preference for melodrama as transnationalising narrative device, his own projects utilise an absurdist/black comedy tone tapping into the cultural specificity and humour of a domestic audience.

The appropriation of masculinity in Jensen’s films and those he writes with Bier separate into two distinct modes: masculinity in the Jensen/Bier collaborations is maintained with a brooding introspection and

⁴ 92% of films by female directors vs 69% of films by male directors. <http://www.sundance.org/pdf/artist-programs/wfi/phase-iii-research---female-filmmakers-initiative.pdf> p4.

⁵ <http://www.sundance.org/pdf/artist-programs/wfi/phase-iii-research---female-filmmakers-initiative.pdf> p5.

restraint, and male protagonists are worldly or seek wisdom. In Jensen's stand alone projects a more externalised cinematic maleness is emboldened by a physicalized presence. Often loud, brutish or unsophisticated, their limited worldview generates indifference to or ignorance of the world at large.

While aimed at a domestic audience, these films also attract international intrigue if not significant box office success. Peter DeBruge's (2015) review of Jensen's latest film *Men & Chicken* (2015) frames aspects of the film as 'wonderfully off-putting' and 'tonally astounding'. The eccentricity that typifies Jensen's films is often critiqued with a convivial 'boy's will be boy's' attitude endorsing presentations of juvenile masculinity. As individual filmmakers Bier and Jensen's dissimilar approach to characterisation feeds an evolving discourse on the legitimacy of creative sensibilities as an expression or extension of the engendered practitioner.

Position-in-frame: case studies of male protagonist as narrative navigator

Case study 1

Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding (2006)

Jacob Petersen left Denmark long ago to work with street kids in India, and revels in his role as beloved father figure to orphan boy Pramod. When the orphanage he helps run is in danger of closing, Jacob must return home to negotiate with the orphanage's benefactor, wealthy businessman Jorgen who is willing to donate a conditional \$4 million dollars. Jorgen invites Jacob to the impending wedding of his daughter. Through a series of revelations the past dramatically collides with the present and Jacob is forced to reconcile the presence of his ex-lover and now Jorgen's wife Helene, and their newlywed daughter Anna. Jorgen's plan soon becomes clear when his terminal illness is revealed. The orphanage will be fully funded but only if Jacob stays in Denmark to assume a paternal role in Jorgen's family's life after his imminent death. Jacob is torn between commitments to his surrogate son Pramod in India, his biological daughter Anna and Jorgen's twin boys with Helene in Denmark. Either way, Jacob is in danger of losing one family in order to gain another.

Where and how a screen character sits in the text often indicates if dramatic intent challenges, reflects or revises the serviceability of gender. As two of their most critically acclaimed collaborations the screen narratives of *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) and *Haevnen/In a Better World* (2010) pre-suppose a world order where sites of conflict are combatted by male-dominated positions, preferences and persuasions. This creates a binary of mobility where male characters instigate and move forward with action whilst female characters *re-act* to the unfolding drama. Story placement takes on a geographic context when male characters journey into foreign spaces of conflict and women attend to interior cohesion, suturing emotional/psychological damage.

This imposed passivity⁶ does not present female characters as incapable of negotiating conflict; they are simply not afforded primary access to it. And though dimensionally drawn, their relational positioning as mother or partner prevents transcendence from the domestic into the global, limiting female influence and revelatory authority.

In *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) Jacob's attendance at his (as yet unknown) daughter's wedding can be read as inciting incident. His physical presence when introduced to his daughter and ex-lover Helene generates tension leading to pivotal plot revelations. Male characters steer the drama as they move between physical spaces and relationships while female counterparts wait to be introduced into conflict and utilized accordingly. A significant example of this is the disclosure scene when Helene confirms that Anna is in fact

⁶ I refer to this as waiting room syndrome- female characters sit in the background of the story until dramatic urgency requires them to facilitate or generate conflict in line furthering the masculinized narrative arc.

Jacob's biological daughter. Helene is a linchpin between male characters and given the imminent revelation of her husband Jorgen's terminal illness, Helene's connective role allows for a necessary transfer of paternal responsibility from Jorgen to Jacob. This consequently provides Jacob with redemptive commitment to both personal relationships and geographic locale.

But both Anna and Helene's narrative arcs remain housebound so to speak, limited by the utility they afford the male protagonists who journey further afield in order to attain transformative experiences. Interactions between mother and daughter reveal character with a feminized predictability, articulating emotional landscapes with considered philosophical insight that feeds back into the male protagonist's conflicts and overarching thematic concerns. When Anna asks Helene if (as a single mother with young child) she married Jorgen for love, the inquisitorial subtext reflects the sacrificial and somewhat primal nature of mothering; that one seeks to attain a father figure who will protect & provide in lieu of the 'real' thing.

Ultimately the narrative conflict rests between Jorgen and Jacob. Jorgen makes a secret plan to bring Jacob into the family fold as a paternal replacement after his imminent death. Familial security both emotional and financial becomes a transaction between males without the implicit knowledge or involvement of the women who lie at the heart of such an agreement. It is also Jorgen as affluent businessman who has the financial acumen to manipulate Jacob into the position that he desires- one that also decides the fate of the women and children in the Indian orphanage. Rendered helpless without his intervention one might cynically suggest Jorgen's is a calculated, self-serving compassion. Conflicted by Jorgen's emotional blackmail Jacob retaliates: 'Is it fun playing God, you big, fat pig?' (*Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* 2006)

Gender is also layered into the narrative through rituals such as the fishing trip Jorgen takes with his and Helene's twin boys. Hoping to avoid the inevitable conflict that awaits her with Jacob and Anna, Helene tries to come along but is humorously rebutted by Jorgen: 'It's sons and their father in the woods. Or else they turn out gay.' While the mother/daughter relationship is fractured as a consequence of Jacob's return, there is little doubt that reconciliation is both secondary concern and inevitable outcome, once the novelty of the new (biological) father and daughter relationship has expired.

Anna is defined through her dual role as daughter and newlywed, betrayed by both significant male figures in her life. In this way she is acted upon, rather than initiating dramatic action and consequently rendered reactive rather than proactive. Granted she must forge her own path and the story allows for a rite of passage strand to emerge as she struggles to reconfigure the position and value of absent father and cheating husband, but her dramatic purpose revolves around the expansion of domestically oriented familial issues, rather than the transnational scope of conflict Jacob must reconcile.

As a narrative device Jorgen's funeral solidifies Jacob's transcendence as primary paternal figure, contextualized when one of Jorgen's sons asks Jacob to zip his jacket up and moments later when Jacob holds Anna in a tight embrace; these actions establish a union of the lost & found where children both biological and circumstantial are kept under his watchful gaze. It is also a scene that compounds the thematic considerations of family- loss is inextricably tied to love. The very next scene delivers Jacob back into the orphanage. Construction work underway confirms the orphanage's newfound viability. Jacob tells Pramod that he will return to Denmark for good but asks if he wants to come back with him. Pramod is provided with the agency to decide his own fate and rejects the offer now that everything in the orphanage is 'so good'. This gendered rite of passage concludes with a small but significant release:

'Do you want to go out and play?'

'Yes.'

'Then go.'

Jacob watches Pramod through the window, the final reversal of fortune established.

While both genders are capable of betrayal, women chase men in search of answers. Subsequent revelations (true or false) provided by male characters largely sustain the narrative's dramatic momentum. In this regard the attainment of knowledge- affairs, parental status, terminal illness- affords male characters a critical command of and influence on story. This concealment of information arguably feminizes the audience as the viewer and female characters alike must wait for the dramatic full stop commonly punctuated by men's declarative statements. This stimulates a gendered dynamic of calling and answering.

Case Study 2

Haevnen/In a Better World (2011)

Anton is a doctor who commutes between his home in an idyllic town in Denmark, and his work at an African refugee camp. In these two very different worlds, he and his family are faced with conflicts that lead them to difficult choices between revenge and forgiveness. Anton and his wife Marianne, who have two young sons, are separated and struggling with the possibility of divorce. Their older, ten-year-old son Elias is being bullied at school, until he is defended by Christian, a new boy who has just moved from London with his father, Claus. Christian's mother recently lost her battle with cancer, and Christian is greatly troubled by her death. Elias and Christian quickly form a strong bond, but when Christian involves Elias in a dangerous act of revenge with potentially tragic consequences, their friendship is tested and lives are put in danger. Ultimately, it is their parents who are left to help them come to terms with the complexity of human emotions, pain and empathy. (Jorgensen 2010)

This narrative opens in a sparse and bare landscape; the refugee camp immediately engendered with women standing around in the wind and dust, children milling close by. Similar to the opening in *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) Anton enters the scene on the back of a ute; a beacon of white hope with children running after him cheerfully calling out. But his gaze and interaction is removed and measured.

Where *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) addresses third world otherness through poverty, *Haevnen/In a Better World* (2010) contextualizes with the savagery of conflict. Africa is a place where the local warlord routinely butchers pregnant women. In both scenarios western maleness is utilized as a verb with Jacob and Anton fixing, feeding, mending; their agency offering (limited) respite to others as well as themselves. The extreme presentation of third world reality- passivity or survivalist brutality- reflects the Bier/Jensen preference for thematic binaries; in this case the safety of the known opposed to a fear of/for the other.

Given the third world entities of India and Africa are inevitably disposed of as protagonists return to the safety and stability of family life in Denmark, one might suggest that the audience has also been provided with the protagonists' privilege of whiteness. However many life lessons are embraced by the Danish characters on their return home, the legacies of war and poverty remain safely on foreign shores for characters and viewer alike. This also provides an example of Bier's binary strategy extended to encompass race and geography.

The dramatic concerns within both case study narratives contribute to a normalisation of the male gaze whilst affording authority to a Eurocentric whiteness. Despite reflecting the Nordic region's ethnic homogeneity⁷ this can also be viewed as a marketing strategy privileging the white male in his familiar role as transnational

⁷ The politicizing of issues such as migration/refugees has resulted in a conservative push away from more inclusive policy towards more restrictive agendas aimed at preserving the (largely white and Christian) constitution of the Danish nation state. However the current European refugee crisis is shifting attitudes towards and expressions of ethnic representation.

story guardian. This status is actualised through aspects of craft such as plot, structure and character arc that impose a fractured authority regained by way of transformative journey.

Narrative mobility and the transformative sacrifice

Holding dual citizenship to narrative realms the male protagonist is utilized as figurehead for Denmark's transnationalised status and the increasing urbanisation of screen stories that intersect with the world at large. Accordingly both Jacob and Anton are situated as (semi) bi-lingual Danish nationals able to transcend cultural and political borders. The Jensen/Bier preference for the melodrama also privileges their male protagonists with personal development through the negotiation of crisis. But for this to hold significance on the page, a sacrifice of character depth and mobility is required. In both case study films the romantic partners of male characters provide a base of emotional solidity. This grounding suggests an inherent feminized strength of character that the male protagonist must draw upon or remain in close proximity with to counter doubt or lack of direction through his narrative transcendence.

Accordingly these women embody a prescriptive 'sensitivity, perception, intuition and the necessary privileging of the concerns of the personal life' (Brunsdon in Scheffman 2011, 23). In *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) we are introduced to Helene as a sexualised domestic fixture within Jorgen's world: as he prepares for bed he saunters into the bathroom where Helene lies in the bath ensconced in bubbles. Her opening lines reference the imminent wedding of their daughter: 'it will be fun to see what important thing I forgot.' Though jovial in tone her words embody the self-deprecating, organisational nature associated with motherhood. Jorgen's mother requiring help with her computer breaks their intimate, sexually charged encounter. Jorgen wanders from place to place in the house, delivering what is required with ease and confidence, transitioning seamlessly between domestically oriented roles as father, lover and son.

In essence housebound women provide stability to the dislocated male ego constantly in momentum, seeking and solving to push the narrative forward. The concerns of male characters are entwined with expansive considerations such as an ethical cosmopolitanism (Smaill 2014, 21) that extends expressions of identity beyond the self. Indeed through cultural intersections the filmic potency of maleness is enhanced by three dimensions of narrative mobility: *intra-mobilisation*- the drama revolves around male emotional/psychological desires and obstacles, contextualised with an *inter-mobility* through conflict with other characters, all the while transitioning between spatial locales that provide *extra-mobility*.

Conversely female characters are never afforded the same degree of crisis driven self-exploration. Their static positioning affirms sacrifice as a positive aspect of mothering/partnering but also renders the collective *her* a de-personalized construct, unable to initiate or investigate conflict on her own terms. Unable to shed transformative skins she embodies the very antithesis of change while ironically propelling the protagonist into momentum where as Martinsson (2014, 41) suggests 'the meta narrative on women depicts a gender in the margin or as a dramaturgical "spice" to move the narrative forward.'

Though in *Haevnen/In a Better World* (2010) we see Anton's (separated) partner Marianne working as a doctor in a Danish hospital the significance of this role is diminished through a benign conversation with a patient joking about hospital food. The sense of urgency, significance and nobility attached to Anton's work in Africa is missing. After their son Elias is injured after a bomb explosion Marianne is seen running frantically down the hospital in her white doctor's coat. When she sees how badly he has been injured she becomes hysterical, driven by maternal angst. This lack of composure, while authentic reflects a feminine

dramatic that sits uneasily between realism and tired cliché, a predictable connection point for female viewers' perceived maternal empathy.

The gendered legacy of knowledge and violence

The use of children works an expository tool in both texts, expanding upon thematic concerns with naïve poignancy. As Martinsson (2014, 40) suggests many Nordic films masculinize the realm of childhood and associative parental relationships where 'the relation between sons and parents are more frequently depicted than between parents and daughters.' The realm of childhood itself has been engendered in these narratives, providing an important legacy between men and boys to develop throughout.

This is evidenced in *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) through circumstantial binaries; impoverishment in India with Jacob's favoured male orphan Pramod and affluence in Denmark with Jorgen's twin boys. India is largely conceptualised through incapacity to provide for *her* collective offspring, left to fend for themselves on the streets. Jacob teaches the orphans English as his voiceover states: 'I can't leave the kids.' This statement strengthens his status as provider with more impact than the immobilised female orphanage director who pleads for his help to secure funding.

Both screen stories explore the rite of passage experienced in youth where children are granted access to adult realms that inform identity. The thematic threads binding these narratives together- a) aggression as masculine attribute or instinct, b) patriarchal responsibility and c) agency to instil (negative or positive) change are experienced through male children. They are taught that life is inherently about reconciling loss. Orphan boy Pramod chooses to let go of Jacob as father figure. Elias' friend Christian must learn how to openly grieve for his deceased mother. Trying to reconcile his parents' separation, Elias tells his dad jokingly: 'I bet mum would love it if you weren't such a wimp'. This suggestion reflects a childish association between an assertive maleness and virility. Consequently Anton's passive approach to life is seen as a contributing factor in the fracturing of Elias' family unit.

Haevnen/In a Better World (2010) focuses on the ethics that underpin notions of violence and revenge. This resonates through transactions made between father (figures) and sons. Christian's world is framed by perceived injustice. Losing his mother to cancer, having to start life again in Denmark, seeing Elias picked on and an overarching belief that his father lied to him about his mother's illness. Children's inability to fully comprehend the complexities and contradictions of parents and teachers creates a spatial tension between the child and adulthood, a conflict that bonds Christian and Elias together.

Christian's response to this chaos is extreme violence. He savagely bashes the school bully with a bike pump and holds a knife to his throat. This undercuts previous images of emotional sterility that frame his privileged world of wealth. Underneath such pretence the same base instincts prevail. Christian's survivalist logic within an unforgiving reality is expressed when his father confronts him over the attack:

'If you hit him and he hits you then it never ends. Don't you see? That's how wars are started.'
'Not if you hit hard enough the first time.'

Manifestations of violence are utilized to build relationships as well as destroy them. Christian offers Elias his knife as a gesture of comradeship. This thrills Elias; a conspiratorial transaction has occurred and the boys become united in deceit. There is a strange conversation between the boys when they talk about death- Christian says his mother was burnt, that 'corpses rot and seep into the groundwater.' It's disturbing to frame

the death of his mother with such a blunt dissection of decay but also highlights Christian's emotional disconnect with himself and such tragic events.

Anton is tender but firm with his boys, exuding a gentle strength. Even when provoked by aggressive mechanic Lars who slaps him repeatedly for breaking up a fight, he retreats from the conflict. Elias is unhappy with his father's pacifist approach and seems insistent on educating 'his father to be a man' (Bier in Armengol 2014, 141). However Anton predictably chooses a passive direction, returning to confront Lars and demonstrate to the boys that strength of character is far more important than physical intimidation.

When the situation gets out of hand Christian issues a collective punishment for the world's injustices where 'rule breaking' adults penetrate the sanctity of childhood. The boys make a bomb out of old firecrackers, delighting in the noise and force of the bomb exploding on a secluded beach. Christian then reveals his plan to blow up Lars' van in order to please Elias' Dad. This act of violence stimulates their friendship in an us-against-the-world pact.

The structure of this narrative is dependent upon a disintegration of established values, primarily experienced through a male gaze. We return to Africa where the now injured warlord has arrived for treatment in the medical camp. He looks at the deceased body of one of his victims and laughs: 'little pussy, big knife'. This obscene objectification marked by an act of extreme violence unhinges Anton's moral code. Any allegiance to the Hippocratic oath is abandoned as Anton shoves the incapacitated warlord out of the medical station knowing full well relatives seeking their own vengeance will kill him. And indeed they do in a grossly primal act of collective wrath, sanctioned by Anton's lack of intervention. In this appropriation of justice Anton's role of bystander becomes a violently charged position of defiance.

Back in Denmark Elias tries to tell Anton about the bomb he has made with Christian but their bad Skype connection leaves Anton oblivious to Elias's admission. Without any fatherly advice Elias seeks to restore his unravelling relationship with Christian by agreeing to help bomb Lars' van. Violence is justified as a restorative measure with passivity confirmed as an act of weakness.

The thematic utilisation of violence has been used within the discourse on altered depictions and expectations of manhood (Armengol 2014, 139). The metanarrative in these parallel storylines of boy and manhood examines violence as an engendered, perhaps inevitable instinct and intergenerational transfer. Though the story considers versions of violence in an attempt to universalise behaviour this is only expressed through male cultural counterparts; the sadistic warlord in Africa who butchers pregnant women, the aggressive Danish mechanic Lars who talks with his fists, the schoolyard bullies who tease Elias, and Christian whose grief manifests through violent episodes and a preoccupation with death.

It is however worth noting the subversion of sensibility within Anton and Marianne's relationship. Marianne is fiery and passionate. Anton tries to pacify with his considered logic and measured temperament. During a meeting with teachers an incensed Marianne declares that the boy bullying Elias is 'a psychopath!' Anton addresses the teachers in response: 'what do you suggest if we take a constructive approach?'

Marianne is not afraid to forcefully shake her son with disbelief when she discovers the knife Elias is given by Christian. She provides a dominance and physical assertion that Anton lacks. Yet Marianne's actions borne of parental impotence and guilt reflect her compromised relation not only to legacy (McHugh in Smaill 2014, 27) but her son's psychological landscape. This provokes an aggressive reaction when Christian comes to the hospital hoping to see the injured Elias. Knowing he is to blame for her son's critical injuries, she

roughly pushes Christian against the wall and holds his head between her hands, telling him (falsely) that Elias is dead.

While this act serves the overarching thematic principle, that we are all capable of violence, in calling Elias a psychopath Marianne is also seeking some sense of retribution for the collective acts of masculinized

violence perpetrated against her son who has been corrupted by association. Violence as circumstantial exploitation is extrapolated upon in the third world not only through the abhorrent in-utero violations committed by the warlord where violence ends life before it begins, but in the resigned acknowledgement of a grim third world order at play. As one of the refugees simply states to Anton: ‘everybody has killed here, man, woman, children.’

This provides a weighty resignation to the scene and more significantly allows for a momentary reversal of roles, in which Anton (and perhaps audience alike) becomes disempowered with despair.

A de-gendered Denmark?

Despite the bleak tone, acquiring personal agency is a recurring theme in the Bier/Jensen collaborations. Given their standing as successful Danish filmmakers whose work transcends domestic borders it is worth considering whether autonomy as narrative theme reflects broader industrial attitudes. The current success of numerous Scandinavian TV series provides an example of how small nation cinemas have revised Hollywood models of gender representation by providing screen worlds accessed through a conspicuously female gaze.

This TV content showcases a contemporary Danish femaleness with striking diversity. Detective Inspector Sarah Lund, the protagonist in *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* (2007-12) is a loner and has trouble communicating with others. *Borgen* (2010-2013) follows the political (mis) fortunes of a female Prime Minister and *Arvingern/The Legacy* (2014-present) charts the conflict of inheritance between four siblings after their mother’s death. These narratives focus on a worldview instructed by a feminized drive and importantly, where humanistic failings are permitted in both personal and professional roles.

Behind the camera practitioner attitudes reflect a benign value association with gender. Indeed Bier’s commentary suggests ambivalence if not outright rejection of a feminist agenda or imposed expectations:

I’ve never had to fight for the right to be a woman and a film-maker. So in a certain sense I’m not preoccupied by feminist issues. I don’t make films because I want to make some political statement about women (Bier cited in Hjort and Bondebjerg 2000, 247).

Another entry point into the gendered constitution of Danish screen narratives comes through marketplace orientation. I argue that industrial traits prioritizing female visibility are evidenced primarily within small screen narratives and domestically driven feature films. Many of the dramatic conceits proffered by contemporary Danish directors that are ‘not obsessed with defining human beings by traditional notions of gender’ (Shriver-Rice 2015: 5) resonate more strongly with home grown audiences; due in part to the art-house sensibility of these films more so than the border-crossing genres of comedy, action or drama⁸. In contrast Danish cinematic output with a transnationalized orientation echoes the conventionality of a

⁸ The Danish Film Institute’s Autumn 2015 catalogue of films promoted at film festivals reflects the prominence of (heterosexual) male driven narratives as cultural exports and includes Jensen as writer/director for *Maend & Hons/Men & Chicken* (2015) and the latest Jensen/Bier collaboration *En chance til/A Second Chance* (2014). The significant number of period dramas in this list also suggests a gendered retrospective approach to the reframing of history. (<http://www.dfi-film.dk/catalogue-fall-2015>)

Hollywood model of gender representation. Within a wider industrial context Terese Martinsson's (2014, 24) analysis suggests that a (historically) Scandinavian socialist ideology does not cross over into the cinematic realm; of 98 Scandinavian films released in 2012, 85% of directors, 80% of scriptwriters and 69% of producers were male whilst male leads in a film accounted for 64%.

The perceived cultural egalitarianism of Denmark is I argue more applicable to the industrial conditions and attitudes that allow for Bier's status as international director, rather than the kind of stories she chooses to tell. The Danish film industry has supported her as a practitioner who primarily preferences the male gaze, rather than as a female director contributing to a feminist discourse within the frame. This address also demonstrates that support extended to women as practitioners does not presuppose a feminist blueprint stamped into the screen text. Nor does it generate an inclusive story world that promotes gender equality through various text mechanisms such as protagonist preference, premise or thematic consideration.

In order to attain international viability I argue the Jensen/Bier collaborations utilize gender as a strategic consideration preferencing the male gaze. This is an approach as Danish director Annette K Olsen reflects, that situates male characters as 'non-gendered beings and thus as representative of a kind of universal humanity' (cited in Shriver-Rice 2015, 5). Olsen's critique references a cinematic prism of maleness through which the narrative is both revealed and reconciled. Certainly the case study narratives I analyse in this article do not attempt to disrupt this standardized approach. And though a favourable relationship is often apparent between female directors and the percentage of girls/women on screen⁹, this is not demonstrated within Bier's story worlds. One might then consider Bier's approach to gender as a creative currency servicing transactions made between story creator and (transnational) audience.

Meryl Shriver-Rice's (2015,19) illuminating analysis demarcates contemporary Danish cinema by a willingness to push the boundaries of western ethical subject matter. Certainly the premises at the heart of both case study films are framed by ethical considerations, but the dissection of morality and interrogation of personal dilemma are interpreted through a decidedly masculinized lens. What this suggests is fragmented industrial liberty seen more clearly through innovative screen ideas rather than the dynamics of gender that service them. In light of this assertion, more focused inquiry is needed to qualify how practitioner sensibility and domestic/international story orientation may impact on the application of gender within the Danish screen text.

Conclusion

Though limited in scope this article has articulated a number of reference points that may be useful in understanding the utilisation and functionality of gender within the screen stories of Anders Thomas Jensen and Susanne Bier. Key to this address is the placement of text as a mechanism for creative agendas and industrial forces.

Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding (2006) and *Haevnen/In a Better World* (2010) identify a number of practitioner preferences that situate the narrative with an outward, transnationalized orientation. Accordingly the Bier/Jensen employment of melodrama observes a position-in-frame that largely domesticates female characters as agents of change for the male protagonists' transformative journey. Another key avenue for the expression of gender is realised through ritualization of childhood where violence in particular has been

⁹ A report by *The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media* found that female roles increased by 6.8% with at least one female director attached and 7.5% with one or more female writer attached. <http://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/gender-bias-without-borders-full-report.pdf> p.23

masculinized and rites of passage situate male characters as belonging to the world with static female characters remaining enclosed within. Bier's strategic and at times antithetical approach to representation reflects the complexities inherent in deconstructing gender and how practitioner sensibility impacts not only on contextualising gender, but how critical analysis of creative expression is often an engendered practise in its own right.

While a cinematic culture of inclusivity is in part evidenced through a number of 'visible' female practitioners¹⁰ in Denmark I suggest that distortions of gender representation through story premise and character arc are largely articulated and received within a domestic landscape. This further implies reticence within transnational marketplaces to embrace such agitations, in turn echoing the habitual practise (Martinsson 2014, 45) of prioritizing and promoting maleness within the narrative.

The novelty of Bier as antidote to the European male auteur has long since lost currency. She now holds independent authority based on her engagement with the dynamic conditions of both big and small screen (co) productions across geographic borders. From a personal standpoint there are conflicting points of entry into the texts; though Bier says she is interested in exploring female stories, the persistence of a male POV demonstrates inopportunities for such perspectives to emerge. This raises questions as to how scholarly discourse critiques the dramatic intentions, success and placement of women as practitioners. As Smaill (2014, 16) asserts Bier is 'successful when classified in relation to popular European cinema and negatively gendered as a female director when evaluated against the imposed criteria of (European) art cinema modernism.'

Yet as I view the film translations of text, the utilization of gender seems less important. Consequently I have at different times with varying analytical intentions de-gendered my position as viewer, tapped into feminized textual qualities, and conceded the privileging of the male gaze as an inevitable insignia of the Western imaginary (Smaill 2014, 27). This personal consideration draws out two final points: whether Bier has neglected 'sisterly' concerns, or demonstrated how female practitioners can ably stake out territory in the masculinized playground of transnational production, her ongoing body of work as story collaborator and director challenges how critical associations and expectations of gender on and behind the screen are voiced. While the reading of text and viewing of film often elicit varying responses there is a singularity of intent (if not consistent success) within the Jensen/Bier story collaborations that boldly exposes humanity and the inequities within that arguably travel further and deeper than gender alone.

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¹⁰ Sisse Graum Jorgensen is one of Zentropa's most acclaimed and prolific producers. Director Lone Scherfig's fourth feature *An Education* (2009) was nominated for 3 Academy awards. Director Annette Oleson's success remains largely within a European realm with *Sma ulykker/Minor Mishaps* (2002), *In your Hands* (2004) and *Lille Soldat/Little Soldier* (2008) all premiering at the Berlin International Film Festival.

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Filmography

Alskar dig for Evigt/Open Hearts (2002), Wr: Anders Thomas Jensen, Dir: Susanne Bier, Denmark, 113 mins.

An Education (2009), Wr: Nick Hornby, Dir: Lone Scherfig, UK/US, 95 mins.

Arvingerne/The Legacy (2014-), Creator: Maya Ilsoe, Denmark, 55 mins (episode).

Borgen (2010-13), Wr: Adam Price, Jeppe Gjervig Gram, Tobias Lindholm, Dir: Adam Price, Denmark, 60 mins (episode).

Brodre/Brothers (2004), Wr: Anders Thomas Jensen & Susanne Bier, Dir: Susanne Bier, Denmark, 117 mins.

Den skaldede frisor/ Love is all you Need (2012), Wr: Anders Thomas Jensen, Dir: Susanne Bier, Denmark, 116 mins.

Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding (2006), Wr: Anders Thomas Jensen, Dir: Susanne Bier, Denmark, 116 mins.

En chance til/A Second Chance (2014), Wr: Anders Thomas Jensen, Dir: Susanne Bier, Denmark, 102 mins.

Forbrydelsen/The Killing (2007-12), Wr/Creator: Soren Sveistrup, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, 57 mins (episode).

Haevnen/In a Better World (2010) Wr: Anders Thomas Jensen, Dir: Susanne Bier, Denmark, 118 mins.

In your Hands (2004), Wr: Kim Fupz Aakeson & Annette K. Oleson, Dir: Annette K. Oleson, Denmark, 101 mins.

Lille Soldat/Little Soldier (2008), Wr: Kim Fupz Aakeson, Dir: Annette K. Oleson, Denmark, 100 mins.

Maend & Hons/Men and Chicken (2015), Wr/Dir: Anders Thomas Jensen, Denmark, 104 mins.

Sma ulykker/Minor Mishaps (2002), Wr: Kim Fupz Aakeson, Dir: Annette K. Oleson, Denmark, 109 mins.

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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

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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 Truffaut before he became a director, created this concept in film analysis. When Truffaut'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.

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Sexism From Page to Screen: How Hollywood Screenplays Inscribe Gender

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how characters are described in recent Hollywood screenplays, and notes that female characters are routinely described very differently than male characters. Male characters are commonly named and described expansively, whereas female characters are often unnamed, described meagrely, highly sexualised and infantilised. How characters are described in screenplays matters, because it impacts on production practices, the nature of workplaces, the films produced, and the gender representations we see daily on our screens. Conceptualizing this as a problem of screenwriting rather than an abstract problem of representation helps us imagine and enact change for people both imagined and real.

KEYWORDS

screenplays, sexism, gender, feminism, Hollywood, screenwriting, representation

Introduction: Hollywood is Sexist...In Ways We Haven't Even Explored Yet

In this article, I argue that sexist representations of women on screen are already well formed before a woman steps in front of a camera, before a single frame is shot. By analysing Hollywood screenplays, we can see how women are imagined by the writers of the world's biggest screen industry. And it is not pretty.

The representation of women in screenplays recently came to popular attention with the Twitter feed [@FemScriptIntros](#), where American film producer Ross Putnam tweets descriptions of female characters from unproduced scripts he reads, anonymized with the character name JANE. It [received](#) a [great deal](#) of [media attention](#) (Wagner 2016, Hunt 2016, Brown 2016, Dockterman 2016). The quotations published in the @FemScriptIntros twitter feed effectively demonstrate a pattern of women valued for their youth, beauty and sexuality.

'A gorgeous woman, JANE, 23, is a little tipsy, dancing naked on her big bed, as adorable as she is sexy. *BONUS PTS FOR BEING THE 1ST LINE' (9 Feb 2016).

'JANE leads a yoga class on the quad. Her stomach is flawless as she does a bridge' (28 Feb 2016).

'JANE is beaten, bruised yet resilient and beautiful' (16 Mar 2016).

The examples tweeted by Putnam have shone a spotlight on gender stereotyping in Hollywood, and specifically on the role of screenplays in contributing to this. From the perspective of screen performers, the Tumblrs [Casting Call Woe](#) and [Terrible Casting](#), and YouTube series [Lady Parts](#) have similarly drawn attention to the hackneyed casting calls for performers to fill poorly written female roles. But Putnam has also been criticized for circulating quotes from unproduced screenplays; it is implied that produced screenplays will be less likely to use reductive introductions to their female characters, as will be explored further below.

Like Putnam's Twitter feed, this article applies a familiar feminist lens to artefacts of screen practice not previously examined in this way. Screenplays and films are understood here as key sites where contemporary society negotiates and produces meanings about gender and sexuality, masculinity and

femininity, women and men. As Karen Hollinger and Anneke Smelik confirm, this approach to film as a vital creator of cultural meaning has been significant for feminist scholars since at least the 1970s (Hollinger 2012, 8-9; Smelik 1998, 9). In this study, cinema is understood as an important and active participant in the cultural construction of gender difference, a dynamic process that influences social conventions, behaviour and personal conceptions of identity. In this context, women's exclusion from and distorted representation within screen stories indicate women's disempowerment in society and the cultural imagination.

Hollinger and Patricia White both note that feminist scholars have actively interrogated and engaged with both the theory and practice of filmmaking, intertwining production, politics, and philosophy (Hollinger 2012, 7-8; White 2015 8). In this tradition, I work here to reveal the biased industrial norms of mainstream filmmaking. Analysis of screenplays provides evidence for how gender difference is manifest, how women are excluded from screens in droves, and when represented on screen women are moulded through fantasies of male dominance and female stereotypes. In the wake of Laura Mulvey's pioneering work, much feminist cinema scholarship on gender representation has concentrated on the 'male gaze', and how film's perspective routinely positions women on screen as an erotic object and the film audience as a heterosexual male (1975). Many scholars, including Mulvey herself, have complicated this framework since the mid-1970s (Mulvey 2009). This study likewise complicates the notion of the gaze by examining how women are constructed through language on the page rather than images on screen, suggesting that the notion and construction of the film's gaze prefigures its visual manifestation. Screenplay analysis reveals how women's otherness is inscribed at multiple stages of the production process, and opens room for rewriting and reworking. In order to challenge dominant, biased representations of gender on screen, it is necessary to understand their practices of production, so that these practices might be challenged and transformed.

Of the scholars addressing gender in screenwriting and screenplays, Kevin Boon's work stands out as particularly relevant for its analysis of the representation of gender in screenplays as texts. Boon focuses heavily on screenplay dialogue, and identifies masculine and feminine character types commonly found in Hollywood screenplays, noting that a wider range of types seem to be available to male characters and that female characters are primarily defined in terms of their sexuality (2008, 115-48). I take a closer look at how gender is represented in screenplays, by comparing how female and male characters are described in produced screenplays, and by exploring some of the implications this has for screen production. It is already well known that [male characters dominate dialogue on screen](#) (McIntyre 2012). A [recent study](#) of over 2000 American films found that, in the vast majority of them, male characters had 60-90% of the dialogue (Anderson and Daniels 2016). Although not without its complexities, dialogue is relatively easy to measure and something the viewing public readily understands. In addition, substantially more male characters appear in Hollywood films than female characters. Male characters outnumber females by a ratio of approximately three to one in most films; only 10% of films have a roughly equal proportion of male and female characters (Smith, et al. 2013). Hollywood screenplays thus marginalise women in a number of ways.

In this article, I concentrate on the *scene text* (also known as *big print*) in screenplays. Screenplays comprise two main components: *dialogue* and *scene text*. Claudia Sternberg explicates the chief functions of scene text: to describe characters and setting, and to report action (1997). As prose description of a scene's action, separated from a scene heading and dialogue, scene text has been a key feature of Hollywood screenplays since before the sound era (Norman 2007). Recent screenplay manuals generally encourage direct, pithy expression (Corley and Megel 2014, 24-26; McBride 2011, 31) in third person, present tense (Millard 2011, 145; Price 2013, 117). In a tradition that Adam Ganz identifies as 'lens-based' writing, with lineage through scientific and travel writing (2012), most manuals urge the writer to describe only what the film viewer will see on screen, discouraging explicit camera direction (Field 2005, 220-221), but promoting language that 'direct[s] the reader's visualisation of the potential film' (Ingelstrom 2014, 31). This sounds tightly

prescriptive, but Price notes that there is ‘widespread variation’ in practice (2013, 10), chiefly due to the differing styles of writers. Analysing scene text in screenplays allows us to see how the film and its characters are imagined, at a stage when the practical vicissitudes of production are somewhat limited.

For this article, I read screenplays for 36 feature films nominated for Academy Awards for Best Original Screenplay, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Picture, Best Actress in a Leading Role and Best Actor in a Leading Role in the years 2014 to 2016. (For a small number of nominated films, a screenplay was not available in English). This sample was chosen because the films are recent, commercially successful, and critically acclaimed; they are emblematic of current trends and presumably demonstrate best practice. A few television screenplays are also mentioned here, from series that have won Emmy Awards for Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series and Writers Guild of America Awards, however reading of television screenplays for this study was not wide or systematic. As a collection, this sample crosses a range of genres and target audiences; the films are largely, but not exclusively, from the USA. I read each entire screenplay and treated them as independent texts (I have not seen some of the films made from them). I concentrated discourse analysis on descriptions when characters are first introduced, as this creates a dominant impression. I paid particular attention to the patterns of naming characters and descriptions that mark status, agency or role. I compared how male and female characters are described in the scene text within each screenplay; there is enough variation between writing styles in different screenplays that scene text would not be directly comparable.

The key finding of this analysis is that male characters are described in screenplay scene text in very different ways from female characters. The following analysis will show how descriptions of female characters in Hollywood screenplays differ from descriptions of male characters, focusing on common tendencies across a number of screenplays. Firstly, I examine how a lack of description of female characters renders them invisible, compared to well-described male characters. Secondly, I analyse how female characters are commonly described in terms that position them as accessories owned by male characters. Thirdly, I examine how scene text sexualises and objectifies female characters. Fourthly, I analyse how the language used to describe adult females often infantilises them. Fifthly, I examine how the names given to female characters in screenplays downgrade their social status. These five patterns amount to a consistent, multifaceted marginalisation of female characters in Hollywood screenplays. Finally, I explore some of the implications of this marginalisation, in production, industry and wider society. This problem of representation is broader than any single screenplay; the problems outlined here are pervasive. Women are systematically marginalized on screen and this article analyses just one aspect of a broader problem (Smith, Choueiti and Pieper 2014). I hope this analysis will raise consciousness about how to write more and better female characters, which is an important step towards more equitable representation on screen. Most significantly, I hope that it will enliven an understanding of screen representation as the product of malleable practices.

Describing Women: The Invisible

In this section, I compare how much description is afforded to male and female characters in screenplays. Male characters are routinely afforded more detailed description than female characters. This means that male characters commonly have more personality and depth than female characters, who thus readily become superficial and secondary.

Female characters are frequently introduced without any character description whatsoever, whereas it is uncommon for male characters to be introduced without any description. For example, *Foxcatcher* is a 2014 American sports/crime drama that is populated predominantly by male characters, who are described in detail. The screenplay by E. Max Frye and Dan Futterman concentrates on three male wrestlers, Mark

Schultz, Dave Schultz and John Du Pont. On the first page alone, Mark's body, clothes and possessions are described in several sentences:

MARK SCHULTZ (27, 180 lbs., cauliflower ears) lifts a human- sized, leather WRESTLING DUMMY from the mat to stand in front of him [...] Mark pulls his beat-up car into a space in the parking lot of this nondescript, 1960s-era suburban brick-facade school. He's freshly showered, wears a short-sleeve dress shirt, clip- on tie, slacks [...] Mark waits alone in a chair he's much too big for...(2014, 1)

Dave is introduced a little later with a paragraph:

DAVE SCHULTZ (31, bearded, intelligent, 163 lbs., strong, fierce, but calm), Head Coach of U of W wrestling, stands on the wrestling mat speaking VERY QUIETLY with 3 or 4 select WRESTLERS from the team. We can't quite hear what Dave is saying to them, but we can sense immediately the reverence and deep respect they have for Dave - one of the country's top wrestlers and great coaches (2014, 4).

Before we first meet John Du Pont, he is introduced in the script through dialogue about him and photographs that show him as '50, thin, beak-nosed, blond-grey hair' and meeting with US Presidents (2014, 15). When we meet him, his personality is described in a paragraph:

You quickly realize that du Pont can be voluble and charming, but the more time you spend with him, the more you see what an effort this is for him - how essentially uncomfortable he is in his own skin.... Also, he just might have snorted a tiny bit of coke before he came in (2014, 15).

There are only two female characters in the film with names and speaking roles: Nancy Schultz and Jean Du Pont. Through dialogue among the men, we are given to understand that Nancy is Dave's wife and Jean is John's mother. The screenplay reader is given no description of their personality, their looks, their professional position or social role when they are introduced. There is simply no description of Nancy; she features in the big print only in action, despite being mentioned on 18 pages of the script: 'Nancy turns to walk away' (2014, 22), 'Nancy looks over' (2014, 23). On her introduction, Jean Du Pont is described only as 'in her wheelchair' (2014, 53). To be sure, Mark, David and John are given much more description in the screenplay because they are major characters, while Nancy and Jean are only supporting characters. But Nancy's description is scant even compared to male supporting characters. Stan Beck works for John Du Pont and features on 16 pages of the script (two fewer than Nancy); he is described briefly on his first appearance with age, personality and dress: 'mid-forties, no-nonsense, suit and tie' (2014, p. 25). It is notable that that similar traits could not be afforded to Nancy Schultz.

Similarly, in the biography of a criminal stockbroker, *The Wolf of Wall Street* by Terence Winter, Jordan Belfort's first wife Teresa features on 9 pages of the script, but is never described (2013). Likewise, over fifteen male characters in political drama *Argo* by Chris Terrio (2011) are introduced with their age and job title ('TOM AHERN, 48, the CIA station chief' p2; 'FRED KUPKE, 34, communications officer' p6), but two of the three female characters who work in the consulate in similar roles are given no description at all. The introduction of 'MARK LIJEK, 29, a consular officer' is routine (2); when his wife appears and speaks she is not even mentioned in the scene text (6), despite the fact that she features in just as many scenes throughout the script as he does.

It is rare to find male characters lacking description in the same script as female characters described in detail. Even when female characters outnumber male characters and take central roles, in a script such as *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts, the male characters are usually afforded description. This demonstrates how pervasive the bias is. It is not simply a matter of major characters being described in more detail, but minor characters being further marginalized.

When male characters are introduced without description, this tends to be a matter of style in scripts where no characters are afforded description. Scripts including *Carol* by Phyllis Nagy (2015), *The Martian* by Drew Goddard (2014), and *Nebraska* by Bob Nelson (2013) provide little description of both male and female characters, as their sparse big print concentrates on action. One exception is kidnapping drama *Room* by Emma Donoghue (2013), where the young boy Jack is given no description, but his mother and father are given brief descriptions. The lack of description seems appropriate in this case, given that much of the film is mediated through Jack's point of view: he describes those he observes, but not himself.

Nevertheless, it is striking that many successful scripts have a complete absence of description for female characters. It causes concern that all women might be generic or interchangeable, entirely defined by their gender. She is a woman: detail is superfluous. Lengthy descriptions often translate to a lingering camera and longer screen time, so a lack of description in screenplays contributes to the absence of women on our screens. Characters without their own description recede into the background, rather than become the subject of the camera's focus. The gross preponderance of men on our screens is created by these screenwriting practices. Just the simple practice of writing similar *amounts* of description for male and female characters in screenplays would help to ameliorate the marginalization of women on screen.

Describing Women: The Possession

This section compares the language used to introduce male and female characters in screenplays, which casts them in very different positions, both linguistically and socially. Male characters are usually the subjects of sentences; female characters are often objects, possessed by a male character.

For many female characters, they are introduced only as an appurtenance to a male character. In Donald Margulies' *The End of the Tour* (2014), male lead David Lipsky is described thus:

A boyishly handsome forty-three, quick-witted, tightly-wound, smokes and types speedily from scraps of handwritten notes, surrounded by books on his current journalistic subject, climate change. A stack of copies of his recent publishing success - *Absolutely American* - looms nearby (1).

By contrast, Sarah is the largest female role in the script, and she is described simply as 'his pretty girlfriend' (4).

In *Legend*, the story of London mobster brothers written by Brian Helgeland, Reggie and Ronnie Kray are introduced expansively on the first page. They are described briefly in the scene text, 'the Krays: REGGIE tough and fit, RON off kilter in style ... heavier, thicker, bespectacled' (1), but also described expansively in the voice over by Frances,

They were brothers. But bound by more than blood, they were twins as well. Counterparts. Gangster princes of the city they meant to conquer. [...] Ron Kray was a one man London mob. Bloodthirsty, illogical, but funny [as with Reggie was different. Once in a lifetime do you find a street fighting man like Reg. Believe me when I say it took a lot of love for me to hate him the way I do (1).

Frances herself is the narrator and the principal female character in the script, but her introduction is meagre. She is described only as 'the future Mrs Kray' (3). Apparently there is nothing to her, but who she will later marry. If she has age, appearance and personality, it is not worth the ink.

There are only a few named speaking roles for female characters in *American Sniper*, a war drama written by Jason Hall, and all these women are described using possessive terms to explain their relation to protagonist Chris Kyle. Chris is the sniper of the title, introduced in action and description:

CHRIS KYLE lays prone, dick in the dirt, eye to the glass of a .300 Win-Mag sniper rifle. He's Texas stock with a boyish grin, blondish goatee and vital blue eyes (1).

The phrase ‘Texas stock’ effectively highlights the importance of his family and cultural background, without diminishing his independence and agency. The women in this script are not afforded such dignity: ‘SARAH steps out, his high school sweetheart all grown up’ (8). The fact that Sarah and Chris were once high school sweethearts becomes her defining characteristic, but further than that she is also ‘his’. In addition, the script insists that the spaces inhabited by female characters should be identified as possessions of the male protagonist. The house shared by Chris, Taya and their children is repeatedly referred to as ‘Chris’s house’ in scene headers, despite the fact that he is rarely seen there due to his military deployment (57, 61); the home does not belong to the family, but to him.

This relegation of female characters to appurtenances of men is more widespread than these glaring examples might suggest. It is often crucial in scene text to spell out relationships between characters – this is far from inappropriate. But the phrasing used in screenplays routinely renders women as possessions of men. On the first page of *Boyhood*, written by Richard Linklater, Olivia is described as ‘Mason’s MOM’, and her character name throughout most of the script is MOM. Mason Sr is likewise named DAD throughout most of the script, but is introduced in this way: ‘Dad gets out of the car and hurries to the door’ (16). He is not Mason’s Dad, or Samantha’s Dad. He is not possessed by another character. But Mom is. She belongs to Mason.

The Theory of Everything, by Anthony McCarten, provides a neat example of how to write male and female characters with dignity, even when depicting a story world that does not. *The Theory of Everything* is a biographical story of Stephen Hawking. We see a blossoming romance between young scientist Stephen and young Christian Jane in the UK in the 1960s. In this era, Stephen Hawking is described as:

STEPHEN HAWKING (in his early 20s) [...] his face almost entirely covered with spectacles and floppy hair, slight of frame, a velvet jacket and velvet bow tie, eccentric-looking. STEPHEN is a fun-loving, playful, active, young student (2).

Jane is introduced as:

A YOUNG WOMAN, JANE WILDE, (18) arrives at the door with her friend DIANA. [...] JANE, shy, has her hair up in a fashionable bouffant roll (3).

Both Stephen and Jane have ages, personal styles, and personalities. When Stephen asks another character about Jane, Brian says she’s ‘Basil’s sister’ (4) – a description that might aptly reflect the speaking character, the characters’ relationships, and the broader view of women in society in mid twentieth century Britain. The cleft between the scene text’s character description and the description in dialogue suggests that Jane is much more than just ‘Basil’s sister’. This kind of nuance seems to feature rarely in screenplays. By routinely positioning female characters as possessions of male characters, screenplays use language to subordinate women, effectively concealing their personality and agency.

Describing Women: The Sex Object

In Kevin Boon’s chapter, ‘Scripting Gender, Representing Race’ (2008, 115-148), he argues that female characters in Hollywood screenplays are consistently drawn within tight patriarchal boundaries and defined primarily as objects of a sexualised male gaze. This analysis of scene text in recent Hollywood screenplays supports Boon’s argument, finding that female characters are often described in terms that sexualise and objectify them. The sexualisation and objectification of female characters in scene text often comes at the expense of describing all other characteristics: women are exclusively sexual objects. By examining how this is written in screenplays, we can deconstruct the processes that compose biased spectatorship.

It is typical for female characters in screenplays to be described only or primarily in terms of their looks, but rare for male characters. Film and television are visual media, to be sure, but male characters are usually

described visually *and* in terms of their character, attitude, and personal qualities. As Laura Mulvey articulated, the female body functions in the cinema chiefly as an eroticised object of the male gaze (1975). In the wake of Laura Mulvey's influential work on the gaze, much of the feminist scholarship on cinema has been concerned with spectatorship, a concept that might seem tangential to the textual analysis of screenplays. However, screenplays contribute to the construction of spectatorship, and therefore offer strategies for changing those practices of construction.

For example, in the pilot episode of television political drama, *The West Wing* by Aaron Sorkin, Leo Jacobi is introduced as '55 and professorial' (1999, 2) and on the following page C.J. Gregg is described as '38, compact and athletic' (3). In the ensuing pages, Donatella Moss is introduced as '25 and sexy without trying too hard, DONNA is devoted to Josh' (6) whereas her boss Josh is introduced as, 'A youthful 38, JOSH is Deputy Chief of Staff and a highly regarded brain' (7). It is clear that women in *The West Wing* are valued for their physicality and service to men, but men are respected for their intellect.

In the *Birdman* script, a comedy/drama about a faded actor by Alejandro Inarritu and friends, major female characters are described primarily in terms of their attractiveness. Sam, 'has simple and striking good looks' (2014, 1); Laura is, 'dark, exotic, the kind of woman who makes every person she meets feel like she's seducing them' (3), Sylvia is, 'elegant and simply beautiful' (36). By contrast, only one of the many male characters has his attractiveness mentioned, but it is not his only attribute; Ralph is, 'slightly handsome, slightly balding, slightly invisible' (3).

The most prevalent of descriptions for female characters seems to be that she is unknowingly attractive. In Nick Hornby's historical tale of a young woman's immigration to the USA, *Brooklyn*, protagonist Eilis is described as 'open-faced pretty without knowing it' (2015, 1). Musical drama *Whiplash* by Damien Chazelle features only one female character: Nicole is 'pretty, but doesn't really know it. More to the point, she doesn't seem to care' (2014, 3). The pilot episode of fantasy drama television series *Game of Thrones*, 'Winter is Coming' written by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, introduces lead character Daenerys Targaryen in a similar way: 'Daenerys is a beautiful girl but nobody has bothered to tell her' (2011, 11). This common cliché seems to indicate a character, who embodies the Madonna/whore complex, offering the reader innocence, purity and potential sexual degradation all in one neat persona. The contradiction here hinges on a construction centered on the conjunction 'but' or 'without'. I have yet to read a similar construction applied to a male character.

Screenplays often use sexual language as metaphor when describing female characters. So even when she is not directly sexualized, there is no mistaking the sexual connotations readers should associate with her. For example, *Nightcrawler* (2012) is a crime thriller by Dan Gilroy, set in the world of news media, which introduces its main female character in this way:

NINA ROMINA is a veteran of three decades in the blood-sport that is local TV news [...] she's a 50-ish, over-made, hard-bitten beauty who began in front of the camera and has now, through sheer survival, become the madam of the whore house [...] (2012, 18).

Although ostensibly focused on Nina's professional experience in the television industry, this introduction tinges her professionalism with an image of sexual degradation. Exploitation is a key theme throughout *Nightcrawler*; for the female character, exploitation is expressed in explicitly sexual terms.

More often, the sexualisation of female characters is much less subtle. *Wolf of Wall Street*, the biography of stockbroker Jordan Belfort, introduces the protagonist as 'handsome' (2013, 1). But it is his second wife, Naomi, who is repeatedly described in sexual terms throughout the script. Jordan performs his rampant sexuality through active sentences: 'Jordan fucks an HISPANIC HOOKER from behind' (3); 'Jordan cums

loudly, convulsively' (47). By contrast, Naomi's descriptions are passive. The first time we see Naomi, she is introduced as 'a living wet dream' and if that were not crystal clear, she is also, 'incredibly, painfully hot' (3). Whose dream? Whose pain? These descriptions are not really about Naomi, but the effect she has on men.

Such descriptions render this female character as little more than an object of sexual fantasy, offered for consumption by male characters, the implied reader and the presumed screen audience. Almost astoundingly, *American Sniper* (2014) literally introduces its most prominent female character as a sexual object: 'A brunette steps to the bar. A sharp object with heavy eye-shadow and tight leather pants' (15). There is no mistaking the fact that this character is simply a sexualized tool for men, both within the script and beyond it. More pervasively, the heavy emphasis on looks, attractiveness and sexuality in descriptions of female characters effectively reduces them to objects for consumption. To describe female characters primarily in terms that sexualize and objectify them means that their characters routinely lack depth and agency.

Describing Women: The (Sexy) Child

The terminology used to describe adult female characters in screenplays often infantilises them, suggesting connotations of weak, foolish dependents. This is frequently combined with language of sexualisation and objectification to further disempower women characters.

Adult female characters are often idiomatically referred to as 'girls' in scene text. When applied to an adult female, the term 'girl' infantilises and disempowers her: she lacks independence, experience, her own perspective on the world, maturity and seriousness. Nicole's introduction in *Whiplash* is compact: 'The GIRL at the counter is about his age [20]' (3). Nevertheless, this short sentence brims with contradiction: it insists that Nicole is a female child rather than an adult woman, but clarifies that she is of adult age.

Similarly, in *Dallas Buyers Club* by Craig Borton and Melissa Wallack, 'Ron and T.J. party with two hot girls, KELLY and CRYSTAL, 20s' (2012, 11), who the middle-aged men proceed to have sex and snort cocaine with. *Inherent Vice* by Paul Thomas Anderson describes the narrator, Sortilage, as a, 'lovely young girl' and clarifies that she is in her '20s' (6); it similarly introduces, 'A sexy young Asian girl in a bikini: JADE (20s)' (2013, 15). Sexykitten is the screen-name of a character whose voice features in *Her* by Spike Jonze (2011); she is described as a, 'cute girl voice' (7) before protagonist Theodore has cybersex with her (8-9). The script does not seem to suggest that Sexykitten is, in fact, a child. Theodore is not portrayed here as a paedophile. She just seems childlike. Indeed, women in screenplays seem to be most often described as girls when they are about to have sex.

The adult male characters in screenplays tend to be referred to most often as men; young adult males are sometimes referred to as 'guys'. Scene text very seldom describes adult male characters as boys; notably, I did not find a single example. In Hollywood screenplays, 'Boy' is a word reserved for children. 'Girl' is a word equally applicable to children and sexy women. The terminology consistently chosen to describe female characters in screenplays constrains their independence, agency and autonomy.

Naming Women: The Anonymous

The names given to characters in screenplays are also revealing of attitudes to women. Character names used within scripts may not even be known to film audiences, though they often feature in the final credits. Nevertheless, names are significant for the way they signal character status within scripts. Readers are more regularly reminded of male characters' higher status.

In biographical health drama *Dallas Buyers Club* (2012), two doctors are introduced in similar terms: 'DR. NATHAN SEVARD, 50's, arrogant, DR. EVE SAKS, early 30s, sophisticated' (7). But throughout the script, his dialogue is headed 'DR. SEVARD' and her dialogue is headed 'EVE'. We are constantly reminded of his

title. Hers seems to vanish. Description of their actions reinforces this: ‘Dr. Sevard walks down the hallway with Eve’ (8). Similarly, in Wes Anderson’s European comedy *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2013), over a dozen male characters are referred to with titles throughout (M. Jean, M. Gustave, Deputy Kovacs) and only one female character has a title (Madame D.), whereas most of the female characters have only first names (Clotilde, Agatha). The constant reminder of the male characters’ titles calls forth their social prestige; the use of a first name alone gives the women an undistinguished familiarity.

More male characters are named in these screenplays than female characters. Naming a character gives them an individuated identity, something elusive for many women mentioned in screenplays. Scripts like *Argo*, *The Imitation Game* (2015) and *Nightcrawler* concentrate heavily on male characters, but are littered with unnamed women in minor roles. It is worth noting that minor male characters are more often given names and therefore the status of character, when females are not (Lauzen 2011). In *Birdman*, unnamed male characters are given titles like ‘STAGE HAND’ (3), ‘TOURIST’ (83), and ‘USHER’ (99), but the TV host is described as ‘busty’ and named ‘BLOND WOMAN’ (9). There is no reason why the screenwriter should not remain consistent, naming this character the TV HOST, yet her gender and hair colour eclipsed the job. There is no equivalency with Inarritu et al’s male characters, for instance the stage hand, tourist and usher could just as easily be give titles like ‘brunette man’ and descriptions like ‘beefcake’.

Marginalisation of characters by name regularly coincides with other disempowering descriptions outlined above. Despite lacking a name, minor female characters are nonetheless often sexualized. In the opening pages of Peter Landesman’s thriller *Kill the Messenger*, a pair of minor characters is introduced: he is named and described, ‘RONNY QUAIL, 40, nose collapsed from a lifetime of blow,’ and her description becomes nominalized, ‘LITTLE HOTTIE, 19, topless and G-string’ (2013, 2). He is a person with an affliction. She simply *is* her sexualized body.

The way characters are named (or not) and accorded titles (or not) reinforces throughout a script which characters matter. The common practice of skipping titles or names for female characters reminds the reader that she is less important than the male characters, whose titles and names are repeated regularly. This practice of naming characters differently by their genders seems to dovetail with and compound the effect of studies that show female characters are commonly given lower status professions in films than male characters (Crockett 2016).

Why Words Matter

How characters are described in screenplays matters, because it impacts production practices, the nature of workplaces, the films produced, and the gender representations we see daily on our screens. A screenplay is usually the basis for screen production, and film and television both reflect and shape our society in important ways. Ultimately, how women and men are described in screenplays matters, because screen representations contribute to the normalization of sexist gender roles in our society.

It is important to remember that meagre and hackneyed descriptions of women in screenplays are pervasive. I have cited many sexist examples here, and from scripts that are well regarded and widely considered successful. This is not the problem of any one screenplay, but indicative of a troubling norm. Before being published online, all of these scripts were read by dozens of industry professionals: writers, script assessors, script editors, producers, performers, crew, marketers and publicists. These scripts were deemed suitable for productions costing millions of dollars, and acceptable for distribution as scripts to be read by the general public. The level of industrial confidence in these scripts cannot be overestimated. Nevertheless, the way they describe female characters is glaringly deficient. This study hopes to suggest that changing the ways we write, read and produce screenplays will work to improve this.

Major characters in a screenplay are more than just a pithy introduction: they are created through an

accumulation of description, action and dialogue over dozens of pages. However, male characters also dominate screen time and many female characters often [sit on the narrative sidelines](#) watching the action driven by male characters (Hickey 2014), so their introductory description may take on greater significance. Character descriptions are sometimes simply lifted from scripts and posted as casting calls. Accordingly, female performers may be cast simply because they fit a certain physical description, rather than for their capacity to play a certain kind of character. Paradoxically, puny and cliché character descriptions mean that female performers usually work harder to create characters. They put in considerable work to build a character without direction from the page. For many male performers, the screenwriter has already done substantial work establishing their character. This contributes to the difficulty actresses regularly report in finding good roles (Casting Call Woe, Lady Parts, Terrible Casting).

The impact of poorly written female characters in screenplays rarely seem to be recognized within Hollywood. Indeed, it runs contrary to the claims of some industry insiders, who seem to think that the cliché roles available to female performers make their jobs easier. For example, screenwriter Aaron Sorkin [reportedly](#) claimed in an email to The New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd, that actors must do more work to win awards than actresses: ‘That’s why year in and year out, the guy who wins the Oscar for Best Actor has a much higher bar to clear than the woman who wins Best Actress’ (Boot 2016). Recognising that female performers work hard to compensate for deficient scripts is a small, but necessary step. It is also worth noting that for actors, playing the role of a named character usually commands a higher level of pay than playing an unnamed day player. So the many unnamed female characters in screenplays also represent many low-paid female performers.

Although sexist descriptions of female characters are prevalent in Hollywood scripts, there are some good examples of scripts that describe male and female characters in similar amounts and terms. Recent examples include *Philomena* by Steve Coogan and Jeff Pope (2013), *Gravity* by Alfonso Cuarón and Jonas Cuarón (2013), *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts (2013) and *Wild* by Nick Hornby (2014). These films are more likely to be nominated in the Academy Award category for Best Actress than for Best Original Screenplay or Best Adapted Screenplay. In this way, Hollywood institutionally prizes screenplays that depict men with greater depth and dignity than they depict women. This echoes Cate Blanchett’s 2013 Oscar speech in which she lamented the number of her peers ‘who are still foolishly clinging to the idea that female films with women at the centre are niche experiences’. That women’s cinema has long been marginalised, devalued, and trivialised has been explored by scholars including White, Hollinger and Butler (2002) and is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that the screenplays most lauded by the Academy would be dominated by ‘men’s cinema’.

Women make up a small fraction of Hollywood screenwriters, and Kevin Boon argues that this contributes to the sexist representation of female characters in screenplays. Women were credited as writers of just 15% of Hollywood’s 500 top-grossing films of 2015 (Lauzen 2016, 4). Of the 36 screenplays analysed in this article, there was a total of 60 writers: 52 male and 8 female. Liddy (2016) and Coles (2016) suggest that these figures are fairly steady across other Anglophone screen industries. Additionally, gatekeepers, such as producers and studio executives, are predominantly male. Scholarly efforts such as Jill Neldes and Jule Selbo’s encyclopaedic *Women Screenwriters: An International Guide*, Linda Seger’s *When Women Call the Shots*, and Bridget Conner’s ‘The Gendered Screenwriter as Creative Worker’ situate themselves explicitly within a context of longstanding industrial gender inequity, and feminist theorists such as Catherine Grant have interrogated what feminist film authorship might mean (2001). Wider awareness of this workforce marginalisation has grown recently, with news media reporting on the topic (Dowd 2015; Thompson 2015). It is beyond the scope of this study to determine a causation or even correlation between how gender is inscribed in scene text and the gender of the screenwriter/s, but I hope that further study can test this.

Similarly, this article has not addressed the representation of intersex and transsexual people in screenplays, or the intersections of gender and other kinds of social and cultural marginalisation, but I hope future research will address these important issues of representation. I suspect that there are a number of causal factors contributing to the problem of gender representation in screenplays, and I hope that future research will explore and examine them. The very publication of a book on how to write female characters, Helen Jacey's *The Woman in the Story: How to Write Memorable Female Characters*, suggests an acknowledgement of the problem outlined here, and it might be a useful tool for those writers working towards a solution.

Conclusion: Imagining a New Hollywood

Screenwriting is always a practice of imagination, alive to a world of possibilities. Examining screenplays allows us to analyse some of the steps in the byzantine process of creating mass media entertainment. Most significantly, it helps us to understand each of these steps as a practice that is continually enacted, and might be enacted differently. It helps us to shift the focus away from deficient representations committed to celluloid or compressed into files – storage that connotes permanence. It helps us shift the focus towards malleable, everyday practices. In this way, we can create change, for workers, investors, and audiences – for people fictional and real.

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