CINEPHILE

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New Lenses on Old Hollywood

ART BY AISLYNN DAVEY

JAMES NAREMORE • CYNTHIA ANN BARON • WENDY HASLEM
EMILY CARMAN • MONICA ROXANNE SANDLER • JIMMY DEAN
SMITH • MAGDALINA EL-MASRY • ASH KINNEY D'HARCOURT

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Editor-in-Chief
Tamar Hanstke

Design
Tamar Hanstke

Artwork
Aislynn Davey

Faculty Advisor
Christine Evans
Program Administrator
Cameron Cronin
Department Liaison
Karen Tong

Public Relations
Tamar Hanstke

Social Media & Web Content
Tamar Hanstke

Printing
East Van Graphics

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UBC Film Program
Department of Theatre and Film
6354 Crescent Road

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Contributors

Cynthia Ann Baron is a professor in the Department of Theatre and Film and the doctoral American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University. She is the author of *Modern Acting: The Lost Chapter of American Film and Theatre* (2016) and *Denzel Washington* (2015), the co-author of *Acting Indie: Industry, Aesthetics, and Performance* (2020), *Appetites and Anxieties: Food, Film*, *and the Politics of Representation* (2014), and *Reframing Screen Performance* (2008), and the co-editor of *Intersecting Aesthetics: Literary Adaptations and Cinematic Representations of Blackness* (2023) and *More Than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Film Performance* (2004). She is the editor of the *Journal of Film and Video, The Projector: A Journal of Film, Media, and Culture,* and the Palgrave Studies in Screen Industries and Performance Series. She is working on a book about representation and creative labor.

Emily Carman is an associate professor of film and media studies in the Dodge College of Film and Media Arts at Chapman University. She is author of *Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System* (University of Texas Press, 2016) and co-editor of the anthology, *Hollywood and the Law* (BFI Press Palgrave-MacMillian, 2015). She has published articles on stardom, American cinema, and film historiography in *The Moving Image, Quarterly Review of Film and Video, Celebrity Studies*, and *Cinephile*. She is currently writing a book about John Huston's *The Misfits* as a transitional film through which to understand the important industry shifts from classical to New Hollywood.

Magdalina El-Masry earned her M.A. in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. She also holds her BFA in Film Studies from Concordia University. Her M.A. thesis is a study of dramatic film performance in contemporary US cinema through the lens of intensity. Her research interests include film historiography, performance studies, and adaptation.

Wendy Haslem is an Associate Professor in Screen Studies at The University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research investigates new approaches to the history of the cinema in the digital age. The research monograph *From Méliès to New Media: Spectral Projections* (Intellect/ University of Chicago Press, 2019) examines the intersections of celluloid and digital, focusing on traces of celluloid materiality on digital screens, the ethics of digital restoration, color and illumination, cinema outside of the theatre and the creation of a new experiential spectatorship. She has produced 60+ research, scholarly and engagement publications including: two single authored monographs; two edited anthologies, articles and chapters in journals and books, along with invited papers and translations.

Ash Kinney d'Harcourt earned a doctorate in cognitive psychology at UT Austin and is currently a PhD candidate in Media Studies in the Radio-Television Film department. They recently published two book chapters: one on the negotiation between cultural visibility and preservation of drag ball identities in "RuPaul's Drag Race" and another on the queer reworking of the romantic comedy genre in the contemporary television rom-sitcom "Take My Wife." Ash's dissertation project, "Of Men and Monsters: A Messy Anatomy of Drag Kings and Media Iconography," investigates how the subcultural performance of drag has evolved from drag balls to digital platforms in tandem with popular US media genres and figures. Their research interests include feminist and LGBTQ+ media studies, genre, screen cultures and industries.

James Naremore is Chancellors' Professor Emeritus at Indiana University and author of several books on film, among them *The Magic World of Orson Welles*, *Acting in the Cinema, The Films of Vincente Minnelli*, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*, *On Kubrick*, and the BFI film classics volumes on *Sweet Smell of Success* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. He has been awarded fellowships by the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Gallery of Art, and The Motion Picture Academy.

Monica R. Sandler has her Ph.D. from UCLA, graduating June 2023. Her dissertation research presents the most extensive existing history of the Academy Awards and the Hollywood awards season. The project fixates on the socioeconomic role of prizes and the lasting effects that these systems of meritocratic achievement have had on the hierarchies of labor and disparities in opportunity still dominating the industry today.

Jimmy Dean Smith has published work on Flannery O'Connor in The Flannery O'Connor Review, Summoning the Dead: Critical Essays on Ron Rash, and Critical Insights on Flannery O'Connor's Shot Fiction. His most recent publications include "Reading *Lolita* in Coal Country" (*The Tacky South*), "Ginseng-Gathering Women" (*Representing Rural Women*), "Knowing Your Place: Tony Earley's Human Geography" (*North Carolina Literary Review*), and "Country Roads: Mountain Journeys in the Anthropocene" (*Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies*). He lives in Barbourville, Kentucky, with Sharee St. Louis-Smith and teaches at Union College.

Issue Artist

My name is ***Aislynn Davey***. I'm 23 years old, and grew up in Abbotsford BC.
I am a Visual Artist Graduate, and have had artwork showcased in the 'Women in Art' Exhibition at the Kariton Art Gallery. I am exploring something new with mixed collage media, and it has given me a new perspective and an amazing opportunity to express my passion in a new light.

Each collage in the 'Old Hollywood' series is unique to its own article. I wanted to provide a visual impact to accompany the writings in the issue, while also capturing the essence of old Hollywood movies. The imagery used in each collage were sourced from a selection of vintage magazines and informational look books. Adding modern imagery and splashes of color to the black and white themes outline my style as an artist. I was thrilled to be given an opportunity to participate in the issue and showcase my skills as an artist.

Find more of Aislyn's work @aislynn_art on Instagram.

Letter from the Editor

Dear readers,

Even though Classical Hollywood is now considered "Old" Hollywood, there is something about this era that continues to linger well into the 2020s, ranging from the debacle over Kim Kardashian wearing an original Marilyn Monroe dress to the Met Gala; to the multiple references to Classical Hollywood stars, including Marlon Brando, Humphrey Bogart, and Lauren Bacall, during the televised Johnny Depp-Amber Heard trial; to the debate over whether it is ethical to resurrect James Dean via CGI in a contemporary film. All of these recent cultural moments show us that these performers' legacies are like the ancient stars shining above our heads in the night sky: having already been admired by countless generations before us, we continue to gaze on them with wonder all the same.

What initially inspired me to theme issue 17.1 of *Cinephile* around the Classical era was my own personal affinity for it. When I first began falling in love with movies, I would watch the Turner Classic Movies channel religiously, trying to keep up with every Star of the Month spotlight and record every showing of a rare film. While my love for this era inevitably bleeds into my choice of theme, I believe that the reach of this issue extends far past the niche of Classical Hollywood addicts; indeed, many people voicing their opinions on Kardashian's dress choice have never seen an original Marilyn Monroe film. Monroe's cultural legacy extends far past her literal filmography, allowing for a multiciplicity of different relationships with her image--all of which clearly incite strong opinions and emotions in the people involved. All of the articles in this issue interrogate these feelings that live on for the most iconic images from Classical Hollywood.

We begin this issue with two contributions from our prolific star scholar, Dr. James Naremore: first, a short interview with Naremore about his scholarship on Classical Hollywood; and second, an original essay on John Farrow's *His Kind of Woman* (1951). Naremore's essay examines the "wayward pleasures" of this *film noir,* and the ways in which underseen or underappreciated films can sometimes be the most rewarding of all.

In dialogue with Naremore's scholarship on acting, Cynthia Ann Baron guides us through the "engaging contradictions" of Marlon Brando's career, including the fact that his status as a method actor--his most oft-cited quality as a performer--was a status he personally rejected.

Wendy Haslem provides another deep-dive into a specific star via her thoughtful analysis of Andrew Dominik's 2022 biopic *Blonde,* examining what the film shows us about Marilyn Monroe's lasting legacy.

Emily Carman continues our journey with Marilyn Monroe, using new archival research to prove how Monroe and Clark Gable's contracts for *The Misfits* (1961) reflect the change in gendered power dynamics as Hollywood transitioned from the Classical period to New Hollywood.

Clark Gable is most often remembered for his leading role in *Gone With the Wind* (1939)*,* and Monica Roxanne Sandler deftly draws our attention to a timely event surrounding this infamous film: Hattie McDaniel's Oscar win for Best Supporting Actress, Louise Beavers' nomination snub earlier in the decade, and how these events foreahadow the birth of #OscarsSoWhite.

Jimmy Dean Smith completes the *Gone with the Wind* 'trilogy' with his article on author Flannery O'Connor's ambivalent relationship to filmgoing—including a healthy disdain for Scarlet O'Hara, and a previously unknown connection to Edward Dmytryk's *Till the End of Time* (1946).

This literary thread continues with Magdalina El-Masry's analysis of *The Testament of Judith Barton (*2011)*,* a feminist novelization of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) from the female protagonist's point-of-view.

Ash Kinney d'Harcourt closes out this issue by focusing on another form of intersectional adaptation: the way contemporary drag kings, such as King Molasses, reimagine the Classical Hollywood cowboy image.

I believe this issue of *Cinephile* has something to say to every reader about the power perpetually wielded by Classical Hollywood films and stars in Western culture. We are a society of image-lovers, and every article in this issue provides new insights into the Hollywood images that continue to fascinate, challenge, and even--when the stars align--move us to see all the light shining for us out there in the dark.

Sincerely,
Tamar Hanstke

A Short Interview With James Naremore

By Tamar Hanstke

There is something about the Golden Age of Hollywood that seems to attract many of the best and brightest scholarly minds in the film studies field, and I am so grateful that one of them generously donated his time to contribute to this issue of Cinephile. Dr. James Naremore has made a name for himself, in part, by writing a variety of books about the Golden Age of Hollywood, including The Magic World of Orson Welles *(1978);* The Films of Vincente Minnelli *(1993);* More than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts *(1998); and, most recently,* Film Noir: A Very Short Introduction *(2019) and* Some Versions of Cary Grant *(2022). Alongside writing books, Dr. Naremore enjoys a position as Chancellors' Professor Emeritus at Indiana University, and has provided a number of written essays and audio commentaries to the Criterion Collection's home media releases. What follows is a brief interview I conducted with Dr. Naremore over email, covering some of his accomplishments and his unique perspective on our theme of "New Lenses on Old Hollywood".*

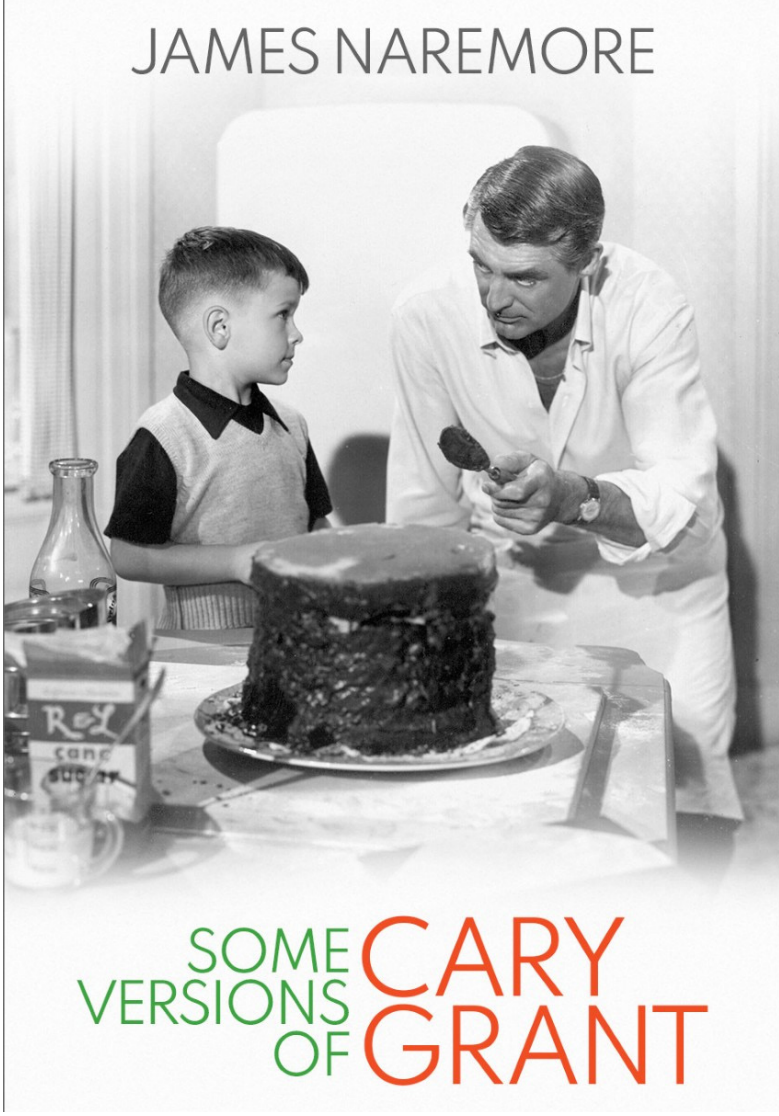

Figure 1. James Naremore's most recently published book.

Tamar Hanstke: Firstly, thank you so much for contributing an essay to this issue of Cinephile, and agreeing to take part in this short interview! Your book *Acting in the Cinema* (1988) is one I initially encountered during my undergraduate degree, and your writings about the simultaneous pleasures and challenges of analyzing an actor's performance in written form are ones that have stuck with me ever since. Your insights in this book, in tandem with your many works on Golden Age filmmaking and personalities including *Film Noir,* Vincente Minnelli, Orson Welles, and Cary Grant, make me very excited to hear some of your thoughts on the specific topic of this issue of Cinephile: New Lenses on Old Hollywood.

To begin, I am curious about your early experiences with viewings from the Golden Age of Hollywood. I learned from some past interviews linked on your website (https://jamesnaremore.net) that you benefitted from growing up in an era of truly great filmmaking—particularly the French New Wave—and that you had easy access to these films at various college campus screenings. I was wondering about how you came to delve more deeply into the Golden Age of films that were so influential on these French New Wave filmmakers, and what were some films or stars that particularly struck you during this early viewing period?

James Naremore: Yes, I still bear the lipstick traces of the critics of the French New Wave, along with the writings of Andrew Sarris, who formed my taste for classic Hollywood. My earliest writing and teaching of film was devoted to Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles. I'm still an auteurist and have a fondness for many of the old guard—Hawks, Lubitsch, Ophuls, and Tourneur especially. But I'm ambivalent about Hollywood and as time went on my writing increasingly showed this. We should remember that Hitchcock became famous in Britain, Welles made half his films in Europe, and Kubrick, about whom I also did a book, became a kind of self-exile, moving to England. I recently did a book about Charles Burnett, who

was never a Hollywood director. Still, I remain a fan of the old pictures on Turner Classic Movies. I've always liked a remark by Welles: "I love movies but I hate Hollywood."

Tamar Hanstke: Turning to the very literal nature of this issue's topic "new lenses", I am interested in some of your experiences working as an academic in the field of classical Hollywood studies. You published your first books on the Golden Age in the 1970s, and you are still writing about this period today, with your recent publication *Some Versions of Cary Grant*. Congratulations on that, by the way! As a result of your long-spanning career, I imagine you have seen many changes in this field over the years. Has your own approach to writing about the classical Hollywood era changed as a result of larger shifts in your field over time? In a similar vein, are there any topics or "lenses" you wish were more prevalent in scholarly writing on this era today?

James Naremore: I began at a moment of world-wide cinephilia, which was immediately challenged by left high theory. Auteurism came under heavy attack, and classic Hollywood was considered ideologically pernicious. My politics have always been of the left, and I've tried to reconcile my politics with my aestheticism, which I hope is apparent in everything I've done. But I still admire classic Hollywood filmmakers and think they deserve close formal analysis. Cultural studies made things easier for me, as I hope is apparent in my little book on Minnelli. Where I think I differ with contemporary trends is in my belief that personal enthusiasm, artistic evaluation, and formal analysis, not simply reception study, is crucial. Without evaluation, there is no politics. I also try to make my writing of interest to non-academics.

Tamar Hanstke: Forgive me, this next question is quite personal to my own interests and past engagement with your book *Acting in the Cinema*—however, it is a curiosity I have held for a long time, and am very interested in your thoughts. In the introduction to your book, you describe the challenges of analyzing acting performances thusly:

> Unfortunately, the attempt to describe some [aspects of performance] in writing is rather like wrestling with Proteus . . . actors use analog techniques; their movements, gestures, and inflections are presented in gradations of more and less—subtle degrees of everchanging expression that are easy to comprehend in the context of a given film but difficult to analyze without falling back on unwieldy tables of statistics or fuzzy, adjectival language.

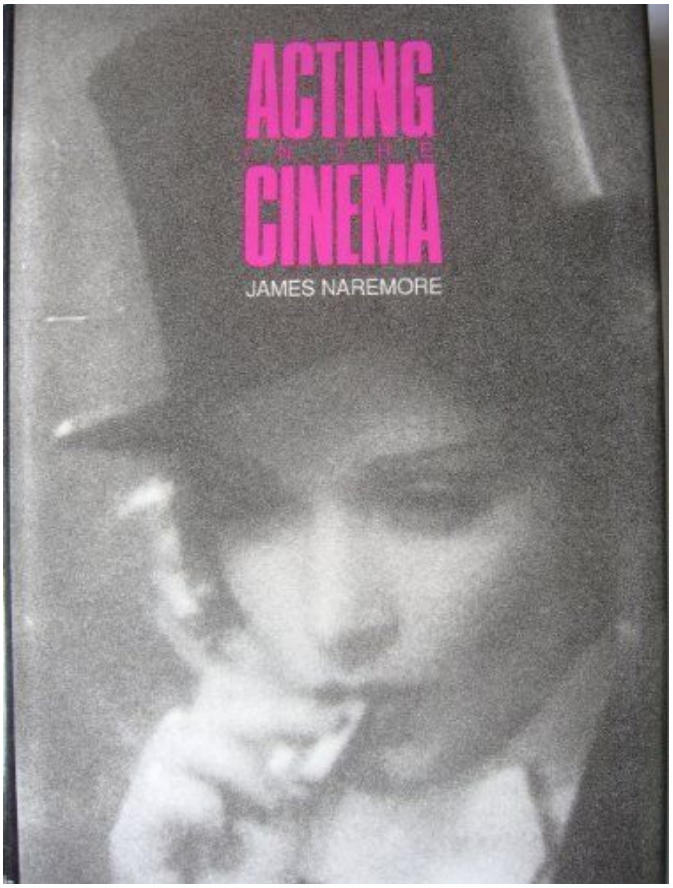

Figure 2. One of James Naremore's classic publications.

I have read that this book is one you have mixed feelings on, partly due to the difficulties you describe in the above quotation. I am personally interested in star and performance studies, and have lately become more engaged with the academic trend of using the video essay format to examine acting performances. I'm fascinated by how this format opens up the possibility for an audience to appreciate the original film text and the scholar's analysis simultaneously, in a way that cannot be achieved in written form. I saw that you recently recorded a commentary track with Jonathan Rosenbaum for the Criterion Collection's 4k box set release of *Citizen Kane*, and I know that Criterion is particularly invested in video essay criticism, with a couple of video essays even appearing in that specific box set. I was wondering if you have any thoughts about the video essay trend, and if you personally see merit in this medium as a new form of academic analysis, particularly in the realm of acting and performance studies?

James Naremore: You're right. The video essay is indeed an important development for critical analysis of performance. The problem in the past was that there was no way for writers of books or essays on film to actually quote. A literary critic can quote a poem and analyze it, but with movies we were limited to frame enlargements. I'm currently working on a video essay with a former student (now a professor at Northwestern) in which we analyze the way actors use objects.

Tamar Hanstke: Switching gears now to the wonderful essay you provided for this issue on *His Kind of Woman*, I really appreciate your personality and warmth in describing this film. One of the prompts I had written for the call for papers for this issue was the idea of Golden Age cinema as a kind of "comfort food", and your essay is a lovely engagement with this concept of loving films that, as you say, "nobody would list as masterpieces". I am sure that everyone who will later be reading this issue has at least one beloved film that would fall under this category! I am interested in how you first encountered *His Kind of Woman*, and in hearing a bit more about whether you believe the inconsistencies of the film—which have led many to overlook or discredit it—are a large part of what actually make it so special. You have mentioned in other interviews that it is frustrating when scholars try to overly constrain what *Film Noir* is or should be, and this film often seems to play with such expectations, as you elaborate on in your essay. Given that you in particular have spent so much time researching *Film Noir,* is part of the "personal pleasure" of the film the way it diverges from other, similar films in this 'genre'?

James Naremore: I have at least five old movies that I return to often, and I'm sure many people do. In my case the choices probably have something to do with my age. I first saw *His Kind of Woman* in a theater when I was a kid, and it stayed with me. As I indicated in the introduction to my book on noir, I think I have a deep attachment to movies of that kind made in the 1940s and 1950s. I wouldn't say that *His Kind of Woman* has "inconsistencies," it just has a wayward charm, both sinister and romantically amusing. For me that doesn't make it better than *The Maltese Falcon* or *Double Indemnity* or *Laura*—it's just different.

Tamar Hanstke: To conclude, many of the authors for and readers of this issue are graduate students or recent post-graduates who are just beginning their foray into classical Hollywood studies. As a veteran of the field, do you have any advice or recommendations for those who are just now entering it?

James Naremore: I've been retired from teaching for a long time, but if I were still doing it, I would stress that grad students need to see as many films as possible and read good critical books. There is less a generally agreed canon of films nowadays, but ten-best lists such as the *Sight and Sound* poll, which gives you the choices made by individual critics and filmmakers, is maybe a place to start. Canons should never be fixed, but one should see movies that cinephiles and cineastes recommend.

Thanks for inviting me,
Jim.

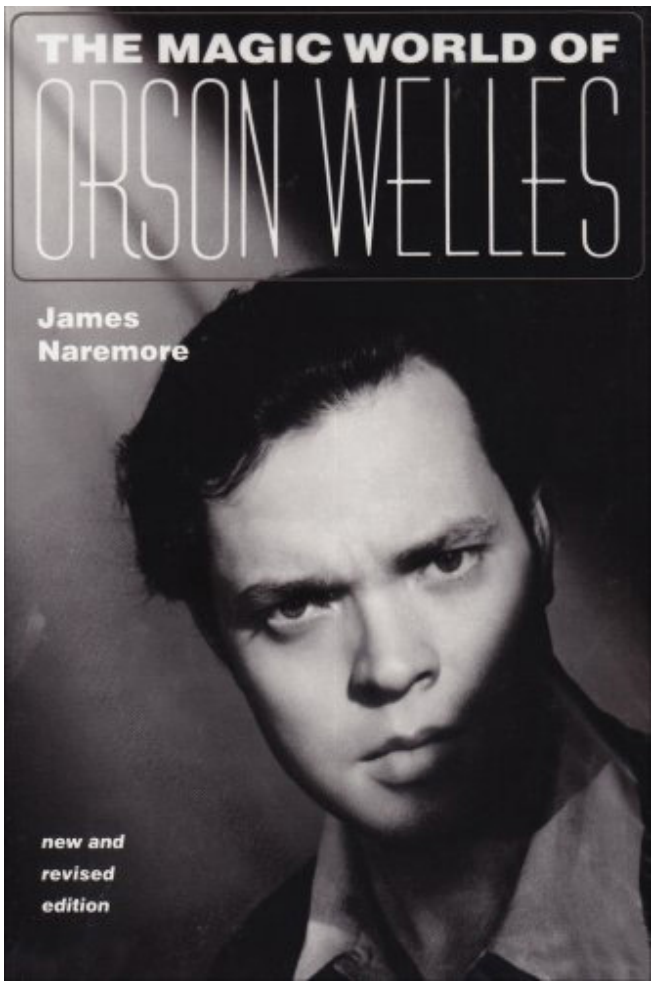

Figure 3. Another of James Naremore's classic publications.

James Naremore

The Wayward Pleasures of *His Kind of Woman*

Abstract

Nobody would pick His Kind of Woman *(1951) as one of the ten best films of all time, but for me it has long been a kind of comfort food. An unusual mixture of noir, comedy, music, and romance, it benefits from the chemistry of Robert Mitchum and Jane Russell, from the comic/heroic turn of Vincent Price as an aging movie actor, and above all from John Farrow's direction and screenwriter Frank Fenton's wit. It was marred in some ways by producer Howard Hughes, who kept recasting the villain and called in the uncredited Richard Fleischer to direct new climactic scenes aboard a new set—a full-scale ocean-going yacht on a water tank at the back lot of RKO. Hughes rewrote some of the dialog and pressured the reluctant Fleischer to pump up the violence, sadism, and comic heroics of Price. All this didn't spoil the picture, but it did alter the overall tone, departing from the charming, almost leisurely melding of Farrow's tracking camera with shifts between the glamourous, the tuneful, the witty, and the sinister.*

Like many people, I have a fondness for several old Hollywood movies that nobody would list as masterpieces. Most of my favorites come from the 1950s, the twilight of the classic studio system, which was a less conservative and more artistically interesting period than historians have made it seem. Every few years I pull one out of my DVD collection and re-visit it like a familiar tune from the American song book or the cinematic equivalent of comfort food. Among these is RKO's *His Kind of Woman* (1951), supervised by studio chief Howard Hughes and starring Robert Mitchum and Jane Russell, an acting team described by Lee Server as "the screen's two greatest chests, together for the first time."[1] For me it has special status--not as a guilty pleasure, a term I dislike, but as a personal pleasure in something that critics haven't given four-star endorsement.

I'm nevertheless happy to report that in his January 1952 column for *The Nation*, the legendary Manny Farber, one of the most talented writers in the history of American film criticism, listed *His Kind of Woman* as the third best film of 1951, just below *Little Big Horn* and *Fixed Bayonets* and above such worthies as *The Thing, The Prowler*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Farber was impressed by the "expressive dead-pans" of Mitchum and Russell--an oxymoron perfectly capturing the innuendo of two actors "who would probably enjoy doing in real life what they have to do here for RKO." (In real life Mitchum and Russell were just pals.) He also praised supporting actor Vincent Price, "superb in his one right role--that of a ham actor thrown suddenly into a situation calling for high melodramatic courage." (Always hammy and fey, Price is equally good playing a ham in *Theatre of Blood* [1973].) An incidental pleasure Farber especially enjoyed (and so do I) was Russell's singing of "Five Little Miles from San Berdoo," which he described as "high art of a sort." Six years afterward, in his classic essay "Underground Films," he listed His Kind of Woman along with The Big Clock (1948) as praiseworthy achievements of director

John Farrow, whose forte was "a fine motoring system beneath the veering slapstick of his eccentric characterizations."[3]

Although *His Kind of Woman* is usually classified as a *film noir*, some commentators have worried about whether it fits the category: it not only has eccentric characters but also high-key scenes, strong comic elements, and musical numbers (Russell's singing of the romantic "You'll Know" is almost as good as the San Berdoo tune, and she originally sang a third song, which was cut). They should stop worrying. There's no rule that film noir has to have shadows and a completely somber atmosphere--it's an amorphous category, and like all Hollywood genres can accommodate a variety of moods and settings.

In any case, whatever one wants to call *His Kind of Woman*, it was planned from the start as

Figure 1. Robert Mitchum and Jane Russell.

slightly unorthodox thriller with an unusual romantic couple. Mitchum plays Dan Milner, a gambler who drifts through a diner, a cantina, and a glamourous resort, but who, unlike most noir types, never smokes or drinks alcohol. Russell plays Lenore Brent, a broke lounge singer masquerading as a rich playgirl; she's recently become semi-engaged to aging movie star Mark Cardigan (Price), who seems more devoted to hunting and fishing than to her. At the beginning of the film Dan suffers a series of troubles: he emerges from jail after serving time on a bogus charge, has his pocket picked, and is beaten by thugs. He's then called to a gangster's mansion, where he's offered $50,000 to leave the country and live for a year in Mexico. Without knowing the reason for the offer, he accepts the job and is given a $5,000 advance. On the journey south he encounters Lenore and travels with her to Morro's Lodge, an expensive resort in Baja, where an unidentified contact is supposed to give him further instructions.

At least half of the film consists of Mitchum strolling around the lodge in his panther-like, chest-out style and meeting various characters, some amusing, some sinister, any one of whom could be the mysterious contact. In addition to Lenore and Cardigan, there's lodge owner José Marro (Philip Van Zant), who knows relatively little about his guests; Wall-Street broker Myron Winton (Jim Backus), whose chief interests are women and gambling; honeymooning couple Jennie and Milton Stone (Leslie Banning and Phillip Bergren), who seem troubled; novelist Martin Krafft (John Mylong), who plays chess with himself ("Maybe he hates to lose," Dan says); and a tough fellow named Thompson (Charles McGraw), who carries a gun.

Then one stormy night an apparently drunken pilot named Bill Lusk (Tim Holt) flies to the lodge. He's actually a federal agent of the immigration service, who informs Dan that "novelist" Krafft is an ex-Nazi plastic surgeon. He also says that deported mob boss Nick Ferraro (Raymond Burr) has left Italy and is secretly on his way to the lodge, where he plans to eliminate Dan and assume his identity. Not long afterward, Lusk is killed by Thompson and spectacularly sadistic violence blended with slapstick comedy ensues.

I've omitted subplots--chiefly Dan and Lenore's growing romantic attraction, and Cardigan's marriage problems and ultimate redemption--but I hope I've suggested the mixed moods and pleasantly meandering quality of the film. One reason for this mix has less to do with the film's original intentions than its wild production history. The opening credits announce His Kind of Woman as a "John Farrow production," written by Frank Fenton and Jack Leonard (more about Fenton later). Farrow did indeed direct the pre-release version, but Howard Hughes became obsessed with the project. He wanted to increase the violence and sadism of the climactic fight scenes and give more attention to the comedy of the Vincent Price character. By this time Farrow had walked away, so Hughes had Richard Fleischer direct new material with writing help from Earl Felton and Hughes himself, who wrote dialog for the plastic surgeon Krafft. (Mitchum and Russell's next outing for Hughes, *Macao* [1952], was also complicated: Josef von Sternberg started it and Nicolas Ray finished.)

Fleisher, who is uncredited in the released film, initially turned down the job, but Hughes resorted to extortion: he refused to release Fleisher's excellent low-budget thriller, *The Narrow Margin* (1952), until Fleisher complied.[4] Hughes then had a set rebuilt for the fight scenes, changing it from the bridge of a yacht into a complete 150-foot vessel with fully equipped interiors. Once the fighting and torture scenes were shot, Hughes became dissatisfied with the actor who initially played Nick Ferraro (Howard Petrie) and had the everything reshot with another actor (Robert Wilke). Then he saw Raymond Burr in a picture and had everything reshot with Burr. The many reshoots inside the yacht so infuriated Mitchum that he exploded, beating up a stunt man and wrecking the lighting equipment. Years later, in an interview with Gerald Peary, Jane Russell recalled, "It was a good film until they took John Farrow off and put in this nonsense at the end, the gore and needles."[5]

Richard Fleisher was a fine director, but Russell was right; except for some of the comic moments when Price comes to Mitchum's rescue, the charm of the film is due to its first three quarters. Farrow was a virtuoso of scenes involving long takes, depth of field, and the moving camera (assisted in this case by photographer Harry J. Wild), and although his style was more elaborately employed in the mostly high-key *The Big Clock*, it's pleasurably evident here in the early sequences. Consider the long take when the weary Mitchum enters his tiny walk-up apartment and finds three beefy men playing poker at his kitchen table. As usual in the sinister moments, the camera views the scene from a low angle, looking up at shadows cast on the ceiling; it barely moves as the dead-panned Mitchum circles the crowded room; then a fight suddenly develops, leaving him unconscious on the floor. When the thugs gather up their money and leave, the camera tilts down to show a ringing telephone in the foreground.

In the next sequence, Mitchum enters a mansion, and the low-angle camera tracks as he walks the full length of a broad corridor, at the end of which he stops, drinks a ginger ale, loses a dime in a slot machine, and has a long conversation with two politely civilized gangsters. The most spectacular tracking shot, however, is the introduction to Morro's Lodge--one of the largest sets in 1950s cinema, beautifully designed in mid-century modern style by J. McMillian Johnson and decorated by Ross Dowd. We see a bathing beauty diving into the lodge pool as the camera tracks right along an open façade beside a beachfront and follows a waitress with drinks; she turns and the camera moves forward with her along a lengthy, luxurious bar, until it reaches a dance floor filled with couples doing the rhumba; then it pans left and moves forward as Mitchum enters from the wide, sunlit patio beside the pool, walks over to the bar, and orders a ginger ale.

Another pleasure is the dialog, as when Mitchum, after being beaten in his room, loosens his tie and tells his phone caller, "I'm just taking my tie off, wondering if I should hang myself with it." This was almost certainly written by Frank Fenton, who was also a writer (uncredited) on Mitchum's

Figure 2. Mob boss Nick Ferraro, played by Raymond Burr.

Figure 3. Unwelcome guests.

most celebrated noir, *Out of the Past* (1947).[6] In that film, Fenton was responsible for a memorable exchange between Mitchum and Jane Greer: "Is there any way to win?" she asks. Mitchum replies, "There's a way to lose more slowly." For the same film he wrote another exchange between Mitchum and his innocent girlfriend, who says Greer "can't be all bad, nobody is." Mitchum replies, "She comes the closest."

Fenton was a gifted novelist who had a long career as a screenwriter. In the November 1938 issue of *The American Mercury*, he wrote a savage critique of the industry entitled "The Hollywood Literary Life," which served as a warning to aspiring writers.[7] Unless the newcomer to the studio system was a celebrity (like Chandler, Fitzgerald, or Faulkner in the 1940s), he wrote, he or she would need an unscrupulous agent, and would be placed on option with a salary less than the average schoolteacher. Furthermore, all his or her screenplays would be read by producers and directors who had ideas for scenes, or simply "touches," usually inconsistent with what was submitted and requiring convoluted rewrites by other hands. It was a mug's game, but somehow Fenton persevered, occasionally finding time to write novels while he made little-recognized contributions to films.

Fenton was an ideal writer for Mitchum's relaxed, wry, seen-everything style, which in *His Kind of Woman* has hipster overtones, as if Dan Milner (like Mitchum in real life) might smoke an occasional joint. Russell ends her rendition of "Five Little Miles" with a jazz-inflected "San Bernardino, man!" and Mitchum compliments her by saying "I'm hip." One of his favorite words is "man," as when he tells the gangster who offers him money, "I'm not knocking it, man, I'm just trying to understand it." Later, when Vincent Price says he can't figure out why Russell likes him, Mitchum says, "If she liked me, man, I wouldn't try to understand it." (While Russell is still pretending to be a millionaire, Mitchum kids her with a country-western accent: "Who's your friend the gee-tar player?")

Fenton probably thought up the film's most off-beat scene, ideal for a movie that enjoys going nowhere, when Russell visits Mitchum's room at the lodge and finds him ironing the money gangsters gave him. "Whenever I have nothing to do and can't think," he casually explains, "I iron my money." "What do you do when you're broke?" she asks. "When I'm broke I press my pants," he says. I suspect Fenton was also responsible for the scene (no doubt inspired by Casablanca), when Mitchum comes to the rescue of the newlywed couple. The young husband has been playing poker and losing a great deal of money to the Wall Street broker, who wants to seduce the wife. Mitchum, who has confessed to Russell that he makes a living as a gambler ("The way I do it, it isn't gambling."), decides to enter the game. By sleight of hand, he gives the husband four aces and backs him against the broker. When both sides bet all their chips, the broker raises by tossing his wallet on the table. "If you're betting leather," Mitchum says, "we call." He removes one of his big shoes and drops it on the table with a thud. "There's a thousand dollars in my leather," the broker says. "And there's a thousand in my leather," Mitchum replies, reaching into the heel of the shoe and pulling out a bill.

Most of the film alternates almost dialectically between shadowy, up-shot moments of suspense and laid-back, relatively sophisticated comedy. Mitchum and Russell are very likeable as a tough couple with a sleepy, sexy attitude toward one another, who gradually realize how much they have in common. Howard Hughes does everything he can within the limits set by censors to give Russell costumes emphasizing her breasts; at one point she goes sun-bathing on the beach in a one-piece swimsuit, and when she asks Mitchum to rub oil on her back his understated double-take is worth some kind of comic award.

The most overtly comic character, however, is the movie star Cardigan, played by Price, who gave Fenton a chance to satirize Hollywood. One evening Cardigan shows everyone at the lodge his latest film--an Errol Flynn-style swashbuckler in

Figure 4. "Put some oil on my back, will you?"

Figure 5. Movie star Mark Cardigan, played by Vincent Price.

which he swordfights with villains and ends the combat by giving the leading lady a kiss. Sitting alone in the dark during the film and wearing a plaid dinner jacket, he squirms with prissy delight and applauds himself, occasionally looking around at the audience, which seems bored. In his spacious rooms at the lodge he has a collection of guns and hunting trophies, and during the day he tries to emulate Hemingway by killing all the wild game in the area. Underneath his bravado, he's a narcissistic, rather feminine man with no apparent interest in women. Among his best scenes is when he invites Russell and Mitchum to his rooms for dinner. Clad in an apron, he lovingly strokes a plucked duck, which he aims to cook with sage, salt, and pepper (Vincent Price was in fact a gourmet cook). Suddenly his wife (Marjorie Reynolds) and his manager-agent (Carleton Young) interrupt the party. The wife has been to Reno for a divorce but has changed her mind. The manager reminds Cardigan/Price that "You're not as young as you used to be," and that publicity about his affair with Russell will endanger his faltering career. Price, still holding the carcass of the duck, lamely complains, "I've never been in love before." Russell slaps the manager, everyone exits, and Price looks mournfully at the duck in his hands. "It was going to be such a lovely dinner," he says.

At Hughes' command, Fleisher amped up the comedy involving Price at the end of the film, just as he amped up the violence to a point that challenged censors. For all his efforts, however, the result is standard melodramatic suspense mixed with slapstick. Mitchum is captured by Nick Ferraro's men and taken to the yacht, where he's beaten, blasted with steam, whipped with a belt buckle, and almost injected with a deadly serum. All this is cross-cut with Price coming to the rescue, seizing his chance to do in life what he's only pretended to do on screen. He grabs his rifle and hunts down several of the gangsters, quoting Shakespeare after every kill. Then he dons a cape,

commandeers a gaggle of unwilling and inept Mexican cops (the racial stereotyping of these characters is an embarrassment), and leads them in a raid on the yacht. Some of the jokes during his adventure are far over the top, but Price emerges as a proud, wounded hero. The leading man and real hero of the film is of course Mitchum, who gets the opportunity to kill Raymond Burr.

The film closes with a scene that was probably in Farrow's original version. Russell visits Mitchum's room at the lodge and finds him ironing his pants. She asks how it felt when he shot Ferraro, and he replies, "I don't know. He didn't say." They kiss. It's a cliched Hollywood ending, like the one that closed the film-within-the-film, but it's also self-reflexive and deliberately unspectacular. It turned out to be slyly appropriate for Howard Hughes' promotion efforts. He advertised the initial release with a giant, fire-blazing billboard spanning Wilshire boulevard, showing Russell bending over Mitchum, her cleavage on display. The original audience probably expected something very steamy, but what they got was a perfect ending for a noir romantic comedy: when Russell and Mitchum kiss, the camera pans away to the ironing board to show the unattended iron burning a hole in Mitchum's pants.

James Naremore is Chancellors' Professor Emeritus at Indiana University and author of several books on film, among them The Magic World of Orson Welles, Acting in the Cinema, The Films of Vincente Minnelli, More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts, On Kubrick, and the BFI film classics volumes on Sweet Smell of Success and Letter from an Unknown Woman. He has been awarded fellowships by the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Gallery of Art, and The Motion Picture Academy.

Figure 6. "When I'm broke I press my pants."

End Notes

1. Lee Server, *Robert Mitchum: "Baby, I Don't Care",* St. Martin's Griffin, 2001, p. 209.
2. Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, edited by Robert Polito, Library of America, 2009, pp. 374-75.
3. Ibid, 487.
4. For details about his experience with the film, see Richard Fleisher, *Just Tell Me When to Cry*, Carroll & Graf, 1993. See also Server, pp. 209-16.
5. Gerald Peary, "MITCHUM RUSSELL." *Film Comment,* vol. 24, no. 4, 1992, p. 31.
6. See Jeff Schwager, "The Past Rewritten." *Film Comment* 1991, pp. 12-17.
7. Frank Fenton, "The Hollywood Literary Life." *The American Mercury,* 1938, pp. 280-86.

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Figure 7. An original advertisement for the film.

Cynthia Ann Baron

Brando's Engaging Contradictions

Abstract

This article belongs to the continuing work on the labor and craft of screen performance, feminist scholarship that recognizes women's overlooked contributions, and cultural-materialist research that examines film practice in relation to its historical context. It deconstructs the Cold War and Hollywood-friendly idea that Marlon Brando was a Method actor by untangling the term's multiple meanings, contextualizing the factors that gave rise to Brando's association with Method acting, and highlighting the ignored evidence that he studied with Modern acting teacher Stella Adler. The article details contrasts between the Method's Freudian focus on actors' inhibitions and the holistic, research-intensive Modern acting principles Brando employed. It clarifies that Strasberg's Method was designed to make actors' more responsive to (male) directors, whereas Modern acting strategies foster actors' agency and collaborative abilities. The article explores connections between Modern actors' in-depth exploration of characters' social realities, Brando's interest in films with diverse casts and progressive politics, and his offscreen work to support social justice initiatives. It highlights his involvement in One-Eyed Jacks *(1961),* Burn! *(1966), and other films that align audience identification with the autonomous nonwhite characters. The discussion also outlines Brando's participation in political actions integral to the rise of the American Indian Movement in the 1960s, the work of Martin Luther King Jr., and the Black Panthers. It proposes that contradictions between well-publicized aspects of Brando's star career and the mundane dimensions of his work as an actor and citizen reveal new insights into American acting, Hollywood cinema, and mid-twentieth century America.*

Marlon Brando's two Academy Awards and eight Oscar nominations for Best Actor place him in the rarefied company of acclaimed studio-era stars Katharine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, Bette Davis, and Ingrid Bergman. Yet his career also reflects the unique dynamics of the late studio era, when the producer-unit system, overseen by executives and studio producers, gave way to package productions involving studio contracts with "independent producers who put each individual film together by assembling financing, key above-the-line talent, and other members of the freelance team" (D. Mann 67). During this transitional period, the studios still dominated production, distribution, and publicity, but stars of the 1950s, who include Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe, James Stewart, Elizabeth Taylor, John Wayne, and Aubrey Hepburn, were independent agents and individual brands rather than studio-affiliated contract players. As brands, these stars sometimes reflected the polarized 1950s, with nonconformist Marlon Brando often representing rebellion against corporate and Cold War dictates to conform (Palmer 1–17).

Brando's commercial and critical success in the 1950s suggests that his early screen performances held special relevance for the era. His portrayal in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951) led to his first Oscar nomination. The next year, he garnered wider acclaim: for *Viva Zapata!* (Elia Kazan, 1952), he received an Academy Award nomination and was named Best Actor at the Cannes Film Festival and Best Foreign Actor by the British Academy. The following year, *Julius Caesar* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1953) led to another Oscar nomination and another Best Foreign Actor Award from the British Academy. The next year, Brando won the Academy Award for his performance in *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954). In subsequent award seasons, he was named World Film Favorite–Male at the 1956 Golden Globe Awards, garnered an Oscar nomination for *Sayo-*

nara (Joshua Logan, 1957), received a Best Foreign Actor nomination from the British Academy for *The Young Lions* (Edward Dmytryk, 1958), and was named Top Male Star at Motion Picture Exhibitor magazine's 1959 Laurel Awards.[1]

Brando's onscreen embodiment of a complex 1950s masculinity with conflicting qualities and associations is likely the most discussed contradiction in the star's image (W. Mann). As observers consistently note, his performance in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and several other 1950s films gave vivid expression to a "mean-but-vulnerable masculinity" (Dyer 12–13). Describing Brando as a "cauldron of paradoxes and contradictions," Molly Haskell finds that he was "vulnerable and intense, yet impossibly virile." Amplifying her observations about Brando's ambiguous masculinity, Haskell explains: with his "high voice and studly physique, he was all male, yet whimperingly feminine [and in] the meteoric incandescence of his beautiful youth, these qualities were in exquisite equipoise."

Analyzing Brando's contradictory, even androgynous masculinity in *On the Waterfront*, James Naremore highlights the "Olivier-like delicacy in the movement of his hands that makes an effective contrast with his weightlifter's torso and his Roman head" (194). Brando's portrayal in *Viva Zapata!* features a similar sustained contrast, despite changes in his physical choices that illustrate Emiliano Zapata's journey from farmer to community leader, disenchanted political insider, and ill-fated ethical outsider. Throughout that evolution, contrasting qualities in Brando's performance convey Zapata's undefined masculinity, intense freedom of thought, and attunement to the land. Notably, his solemn, almost weighted countenance is a marked counterpoint to his light, fluid movement, as when he essentially glides across spaces in the character's form-fitting pants and bolero jacket that reveal the actor's supple physique and modern dance training.[2]

The "sullen, neurotic individualism dovetailing with antiestablishment 'sincerity'" in Brando's signature roles warrant continued analysis, especially because they "set the tone for a new kind of male star and movie scenario in which women were rendered marginal, scorned, degraded and ignored" (Haskell).[3] Moreover, Brando's career features incongruities beyond the fraught masculinity he portrayed. The discussion that follows explores three intertwined, often overlooked contradictions. First, for many observers, Brando remains the quintessential Method actor, even though he was not a Method actor who used personal experiences to generate emotion; instead, he was someone who employed a *Modern acting* approach, in which actors use script analysis and research to imaginatively enter their characters' social and psychological worlds (Rosenstein et al.; Dillon; Ochoa). Second, some of Brando's early screen performances exemplify the Method acting style associated with young or working-class male protagonists, whose verbal inarticulateness and physical expressiveness captured a nonconformist "stylistic or ideological leaning within fifties' culture" (Naremore 200). Yet Brando, the icon of the new "American" acting style (Vineberg), used his ability to combine expressivity and inarticulateness to create characterizations that challenged American machismo and exceptionalism in Hollywood films as different as *The Ugly American* (George Englund, 1963) and *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (John Huston, 1967). Third, Brando's early critical and commercial success made him a member of the Hollywood elite, but his offscreen political activities, which included support for the Black Panthers, put him at odds with executives, exhibitors, and film critics attuned to the demands of mainstream (white) audiences.

In Brando's career, the three contradictions intersect: the Modern acting approach, which heightened his attention to characters' cultural realities, fostered the social awareness that led to his activism and interest in films like *The Appaloosa* (Sidney J. Furie, 1966); in this "Western," a modest Latino homestead is the platonic haven to which Brando, the white cowboy who had been adopted by the family as a youth, happily returns at the close of the story. Like the labour involved in Modern acting, Brando's participation in socially conscious films and offscreen social justice work fails to match the mystique surrounding daring acting methods, alluring characters, and offscreen misadventures. As a result, the vision of Brando as a Method actor, fifties' sex symbol, and eccentric recluse dominates discussions. This trend in film criticism creates ample room for inquiries into the unglamorous contradictions in Brando's star career.

Sorting Out Method Acting's Myriad Meanings

Brando's assumed affiliation with "Method acting" emerges from the term's ambiguity and association with admired performance. For example, physical transformations have become signs of professionalism. So, Robert De Niro, who gained weight for *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980), and Michael Fassbender, who lost weight to portray Bobby Sands in *Hunger* (Steve McQueen, 2008), get categorized as Method actors. Performers who stay in character seem to demonstrate actorly commitment. Thus, critics blithely identify Daniel Day-Lewis, Denzel Washington, and Jared Leto as

Method actors.

Acting teacher Lee Strasberg publicized a direct connection between his Method and the new "American" acting style popular in the 1950s. Since then, some people have seen "Method acting" as a catchall term for extreme preparation techniques *and* intense male performances. Despite variations in the term's use, one detail remains constant: commentators identify male actors' physical alterations, zealous offscreen work, and highly expressive performances as examples of Method acting, but they rarely discuss women and the Method. Feminist theatre scholars have long called attention to the sexism underlying Method training and discourse. Rosemary Malague, Sharrell D. Luckett, and other scholar-practitioners illustrate the need to contextualize and look beyond patriarchal, Euro-American acting methods and acting styles.

Patriarchy's focus on men's labor has made Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman, and Elia Kazan the central figures in accounts of mid-twentieth century American acting. However, it was Brando's training with Stella Adler and Montgomery Clift's collaborations with Mira Rostova that created the new "American" style of acting. Moreover, a gender-based, multi-decade war in the acting-directing profession has obscured the acting principles that define the Method. The key opponents in this war had their first major battle in 1934. Group Theater actors had been questioning Strasberg's approach to actor training and script analysis. Frustrated that Strasberg claimed Stanislavsky as his authority, Stella Adler took time to study directly with Stanislavsky. She then shared Stanislavsky's actual views on training and directing actors with Group Theater colleagues. In response, Strasberg defiantly conceded that he taught "the Strasberg Method, not Stanislavsky's System" (Lewis 71; Chinoy 95–112). He then spent his career promoting his Method as superior to *and* authorized by Stanislavsky's ideas. Adler and subsequent scholars have spent their careers untangling Strasberg's Method and Stanislavsky's System.

Whereas Stanislavsky and Modern acting teachers seek to facilitate actors' ability to delve into and convey the rich inner lives of fictional characters, Strasberg focuses on "the peculiar, divided, dual quality of modern man" (Strasberg 20). The Stanislavsky System and Modern acting techniques give actors a toolkit of strategies for creating characterizations and performances, while Strasberg's Method offers exercises to "unblock areas of the individual that may be locked or inhibited" (Strasberg 138). Circulating Stanislavsky's ideas, Modern acting teachers like Adler emphasize script analysis. As illustrated in the notebooks her student Marlon Brando prepared for every production, this requires actors to explore and identify (a) characters' given circumstances, (b) scene-by-scene problems that characters strive to solve, (c) characters' actions to solve problems, and (d) moments when characters switch from one action to another.

Following Stanislavsky, Modern acting proponents study characters' given circumstances and actions to develop performances. By comparison, Strasberg argues that actors can use anything, including substitutions unrelated to the script, to motivate them to do what their character "comes on stage to achieve" (Strasberg 78). He values the "storehouse of an actor's memory" and explains that locating ways for actors to find, capture, and relive bits of emotional memory is "the task [he] was to devote [himself] to in establishing the Method" (Strasberg 60). Exercises to recreate or relive "an intense emotional experience at will" are the core of his Method (Strasberg 114). In his view, these exercises are the *only* training that leads actors to "reveal the idea of the play" (Strasberg 173). For Strasberg, tapping into private, often traumatic experiences, is the *only* way to trigger "real" emotion in performance. Importantly, Stanislavsky had explored this approach years earlier, but he rejected it because it was unreliable and damaged actors' mental health.

Strasberg's emphasis on mining psychological traumas constitutes a profound split with Stanislavsky's view of the actor as a creative artist who builds characterizations and executes performances by focusing on the "facts" of the fictional world (Carnicke 203). Strasberg sees actors through a Freudian lens, but Stanislavsky and Modern actors envision a holistic self, which is responsive to nonthreatening activities that (a) sharpen concentration, attention, and observation and (b) develop an actor's imagination and ability to create a bond with characters' circumstances and challenges. Script analysis leads actors to "put themselves in their characters' shoes [and fosters] concentration on the events of the [fiction] during performance" (Carnicke 133). Similarly, "continual exposure to literature, art, people, cultures, and history" enhances actors' imagination and ability to understand and embody characters' given circumstances, problems, and actions (Carnicke 153, 152). This emphasis on study that directs actors' attention outward contrasts sharply with Strasberg's Freudian focus on eliminating personal inhibitions. Moreover, whereas Strasberg's Method trains actors to be responsive to directors and teachers, Stanislavsky and Modern acting teachers facilitate actors' work as "independent artists," free from "dependence on directors (and teachers)" (Malague 75). Brando's renown as a headstrong

actor is telling evidence of the Modern acting training that prepared to him be independent.

Modern acting techniques address the *acting problems* of building characterizations and developing the concentration and physical ability to embody those characterizations. As such, they contrast with the Method's emphasis on "the actor's problem" of experiencing real feeling during performance (Strasberg 85). As Brando's production notebooks show, Modern acting labour includes voice and body work, observation and life study, script analysis, and pantomime sense-memory improvisations to develop attention to environments and raise awareness of how thought, feeling, and intention colour movement. This approach contrasts with Strasberg's view that sense memories are primarily useful for accessing and retrieving personal experiences.

Modern acting and the Method represent different paths to "truthful" emotion in performance. For Modern actors, it emerges from their embodiment of characters' actions. Strasberg thinks it results from actors reliving personal experiences. Modern acting principles foster performers' ability to "think and behave as their characters would logically do in the circumstances" of the story. Strasberg wants actors to create "an inner life" unrelated to the fiction that prompts the behavior "needed by the scene or requested by the director" (Carnicke 204). Strasberg's idea that acting requires use of personal experiences leads him to see non-Method actors as never doing the real work of acting (Strasberg 5). He insinuates that non-Method actors do little more than deliver lines and manage props. However, the published and archival documents of Adler, Brando, Josephine Dillon, Sophie Rosenstein, and the Actors' Laboratory in Hollywood show that Modern actors do much more than memorize lines.

Strasberg expanded his attacks on Adler and other professionals who embraced Stanislavsky's holistic view of acting, charging that they dealt only with "the rhetorical and external nature of acting" while his Method alone created "truthfulness of experience and of expression" (Strasberg 30). Further, he contrasted the "American" style of allegedly Method actors with what he described as the artificial, conventional, and commercial nature of British and Anglo-American acting. Elia Kazan, co-founder of the Actors Studio in New York, took up the attack on Anglo-American acting styles after (long unemployed) Strasberg became the Studio's artistic director. Kazan praised "American" acting for being intense, spontaneous, and filled with defiant (male) emotionality. He identified the Moscow Art Theatre as his primary influence, arguing that Americans did not have "the burden that everyone should be noble or behave heroically, that the English used to have'" (qtd in Vineberg 113). Positioning Method acting as "American" stymied the anticommunists who had laid siege to the liberal performing arts community. Disparaging Anglo actors made Kazan's references to the Moscow Art Theatre a sign of patriotism rather than communism. Importantly, Strasberg and Kazan's calculated attacks on Anglo acting muddled ideas about Method acting: the rhetoric conflated Strasberg's Method, which broke down inhibitions and made actors responsive to directors, with the intensity of the "American" acting style ushered in by Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift.

Disentangling Brando from Myths about Method Acting

Brando's reputation as one of the twentieth century's greatest actors rested on his seemingly fearless portrayals, which were more expressive than theatrical and cinematic norms and, at the same time, suggested that words often fail to communicate thoughts and feelings. Reflecting on Brando's work as an actor, Naremore observes, "Among the 'rebel' stars of his day Brando always seemed the most gifted and intelligent, the least inclined to romantic excess" (195–196). Yet, as he points out, Brando's performances do not reveal a Method approach. Instead, the star's ability to communicate "subtext was not new in Hollywood performances, [because] every form of realist acting … encourages the use of expressive objects" (194). Naremore highlights that "Brando himself has disclaimed any significant influence" from the Actors Studio in New York (197; see 198; see Ochoa 215).

Brando is not the only actor mistakenly associated with the Actors Studio and Strasberg's Method. Montgomery Clift's portrayals in *The Search* (Fred Zinnemann, 1948), *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1948), and *From Here to Eternity* (Fred Zinnemann, 1953) are seen as Method performances (Vineberg 142–154). However, Clift was openly opposed to Strasberg's Method, arguing that Strasberg's actors "never created characters [and] instead merely played variations of themselves" (Bosworth 133). Even though some observers see Clift as "the first member of the Actors Studio generation to become a movie star" (Vineberg 143), from 1939 to 1941 he apprenticed with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, respected stage actors maligned by Strasberg. Clift's supposedly Method performances also reflect his collaborations with Mira Rostova from 1942 through the early 1950s (Baron 74–76). Their behind-the-scenes work on *The Search* led to "a new kind of acting—almost docu

mentary in approach" (Bosworth 138).

As with Clift, Brando's memorable performances in the 1947–1949 stage production and 1951 film titled *A Streetcar Named Desire* were thought to exemplify Method acting. As David Garfield notes, "the prime symbol of the [Actors] Studio actor was always to be the torn T-shirt and its prototype, Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski" (151). Hal Hinson observes, "For most, the Method begins and ends with Brando. He and the Method are synonymous to the extent that his style has become the Method style" (200). While Brando's performance as Kowalski initiated and defined "an entire *style* of acting," Brando's approach to acting was not shaped by Strasberg or Kazan, but instead by Stella Adler (Malague 58; see Balcerzak). His scripts and research materials made available after his death in 2004 reveal that his stage and screen performances were grounded in extensive individual script analysis and preparation. Brando "read books about the world of his characters, wrote pages of notes highlighting questions and problems," and drafted revised scenes and dialogue sequences for each of his characters (Mizuchi xxiii).

Brando studied with Adler, enrolling in her workshops "at the New School for Social Research in the fall of 1943" (Mizruchi 32). Revealing his interest in Modern acting work that gently encourages development of a flexible and expressive body, Brando also studied with Katherine Dunham, the renowned modern dancer, choreographer, and social activist. Embracing Modern acting's view that building characterizations includes attention to physical details, Brando took makeup classes at the New School and then began to incorporate appearance-altering makeup into many of his characterizations. In 1944 and 1945, Brando spent considerable time as a guest of Adler and Harold Clurman. As Susan Mizruchi notes, "the New School atmosphere [of artistic freedom and attention to craft] was reinforced at the home of Adler and Clurman (now married), whose apartment on West Fifty-Fourth Street was a gathering place for the Adler acting clan" (48). Stage performances that established Brando as a serious actor include *Truckline Café* (1946), directed by Clurman, and *A Flag Is Born* (1946), directed by Luther Adler, Stella's brother.

Throughout his career, Brando identified Stella Adler as his formative acting teacher. In his foreword to Adler's manual, *The Technique of Acting* (1988), Brando explains that her Modern acting approach does not lend itself "to vulgar exploitations, as some other well-known so-called methods have done" (1). In *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, he states that, in contrast to the Stanislavsky-based approach Adler taught, "'Method Acting' was a term popularized, bastardized and misused by Lee Strasberg" (81). Despite all this, Brando's 1950s performances are still seen as emerging from Strasberg's Method. Gender-based perceptions frame Brando's portrayals in *A Streetcar Named Desire, The Wild One* (László Benedek, 1953), and *On the Waterfront* as Method-inspired, even though the gestures, postures, and vocal choices he used to portray his characters in these films depended on his Modern acting training with Adler.

Naremore explains that Brando's performance in *On the Waterfront* is "so technically adept and intense that it energized the film and affected whole generations of actors" (205). Through his ability to depict a "tough but confused and sensitive male who wins his way to adulthood … in an indifferent society, [Brando became] one of those actors who represents a type so forcefully that it becomes a persistent feature of the culture" (Naremore 205). It has been assumed that Brando created the performance by substituting experiences from his personal life. However, the actor's papers and public statements, together with information about the acting methods Brando developed through his work with Adler, clarify that his characterizations in *On the Waterfront* and other films began with research into characters' social circumstances and emerged from crafted, rehearsed choices about vocal and physical expression.

Strasberg argued that his Method fostered "truthfulness of experience and of expression" that contrasted with an old-fashioned emphasis on "the rhetorical and external nature of acting" (30). Brando's performances, however, show that compelling emotional expression can emerge from the sympathetic knowledge of characters that actors develop during script analysis and cultural, historical, and socioeconomic research. As Modern acting teacher Josephine Dillon explains, actors' intensive study is the basis for lifelike portrayals that arise from the "mental pictures" and "mental conversations" actors generate as they build characterizations (9). Stella Adler also saw life study, historical research, and script analysis as actors' best tools for creating characters distinct from themselves. In her view, spontaneous, lifelike, authentic performances occur when actors concentrate on their characters' circumstances, beliefs, and experiences. Moreover, Adler's "emphasis on the 'given circumstances' pushes actors to analyze the social, political, and economic environments that produce different kinds of 'characters'" (Malague 27). If Brando had been a Method actor focused on retrieving and reliving personal experiences, the preoccupation with breaking down psychological inhibitions might

have carried over into other aspects of his career. Instead, his training with the "eclectic, politically committed Stella Adler" (Naremore 198; see Ochoa 186) focused his attention on social and material realities. That focus fostered Brando's participation in socially relevant films and offscreen political activism.

Modern Acting Approach Accords with Brando's Political Films and Activism Offscreen

Brando's activism began in the 1940s. His vision of the actor as an engaged artist-citizen reflects the sentiments of the Group Theater expatriates who established the Actors' Laboratory in Hollywood in 1941. These seasoned character actors, who include Phoebe Brand, Morris Carnovsky, Roman Bohnen, and J. Edward Bromberg, "rejected the image of the actor as a colorful figure 'inhabiting an ivory tower above the petty affairs of daily life'" (Baron 195). A longtime sceptic of Hollywood, Brando recognized that stars "are made for profit" and used to sell films, "newspapers and magazines … toiletries, fashion, cars and almost anything else" (Dyer 5). However, he came to see that films and media events could be used to sell something other than commodities, serving instead to raise awareness of social inequities. In the 1950s and 1960s especially, Brando mobilized his fame to highlight injustices and foster support for efforts to dismantle racist and imperialist policies and practices.

Long before Brando, studio-era stars tacitly or directly promoted lifestyles, consumer products, and social identities (Gledhill xiii–xx). Yet they also lent their time and prominence to social causes, most visibly in work to support American involvement in World War II (Blauvelt). Brando shared their interest in doing film work on behalf of service personnel. Thus, after rejecting many Hollywood offers, he agreed to appear in *The Men* (Fred Zinnemann, 1950), a film about the plight of disabled World War II veterans. The production presents the servicemen in a sympathetic light, but it rejects jingoistic celebrations of military adventure to illuminate the irreparable physical and emotional cost of combat. Its candid viewpoint aligns with Brando's earlier participation in the stage productions of Maxwell Anderson's *Truckline Café*, about the damage war inflicts on relationships, and Ben Hecht's *A Flag is Born,* which advocates for a Jewish homeland after the Holocaust.

Brando saw *The Men* as an opportunity to appear in a socially conscious production, whereas Hollywood cast Broadway's hottest star to attract audiences to a risky commercial venture. Brando's first film thus foreshadows ongoing, career-defining tensions between his interest in progressive narratives and studios' focus on conventional entertainment. For example, Brando elected to portray Zapata because the historical figure had led land-reform efforts, but 20th Century Fox minimized the narrative's socialist message, instead promoting *Viva Zapata!* as an adventure movie featuring a sexually alluring star. *The Men* also prefigures Brando's more overt use of his star status to facilitate the financing and distribution of independent productions such as *Burn!* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1969), about a slave rebellion against commercial-imperialist control in the Caribbean, and *A Dry White Season* (Euzhan Palcy, 1989), about human rights abuses in apartheid-era South Africa.

Brando's interest in promoting progressive social values is especially visible in his directorial debut, *One-Eyed Jacks*, which was shot in 1959 and eventually released in 1961. Produced by Brando's Pennebaker Productions, the multiyear endeavor led to an unusual "Western" in which Latina women are central. Set in 1880s Sonora, Mexico, and Monterey, California, the film presents a world populated by Spanish-speaking and English-speaking characters whose daily interactions are sometimes marred by white racism. In those instances, Brando's flawed but eventually altruistic character challenges the racists who denigrate Latinx people. The film is notable for the screen time and in-depth characterizations of the two Mexican actresses: Pina Pellicer plays the young woman, who sagaciously navigates Rio's conflicting agendas, and award-winning star Katy Jurado portrays her mother, who uses intelligence, compassion, and diplomacy to protect herself and her daughter in a precarious environment.

Figure 1. In One-Eyed Jacks *(1961), Brando and co-star Pina Pellicer exist in an unsegregated social world.*

In 1959, when *One-Eyed Jacks* was in development, Brando worked with African American actors Harry Belafonte and Ossie Davis to establish the Hollywood chapter of SANE (National Committee for a Sane Nu-

clear Policy). Throughout the 1960s, Brando was active in the civil rights movement, contributing money to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and to a scholarship for the children of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers. He participated in freedom rides to desegregate interstate buses and joined the 1963 March on Washington. In 1964, he participated in protests organized by the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). The civil disobedience actions took the form of "fish-ins," which publicized tribal people violating fishing-season regulations to assert Indigenous rights ratified in treaties between tribal nations and the US government. The Washington state fish-ins attracted Indigenous people from across the United States and Canada. They sparked the Red Power Movement and "paved the way for future intertribal activist endeavors," which include the 1969–1971 occupation of Alcatraz Island by the Indians of All Tribes group and the 1972 occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington, DC, by members of the American Indian Movement (Shreve 406).

Brando had attended the NIYC's 1963 annual meeting in Utah and "brought a film crew along to record the proceedings" (Shreve 418). Members of the youth council subsequently "contacted Brando about the fish-in, believing his presence would attract greater media attention to their cause and aid in the larger goal of sustaining treaty rights" (Shreve 418). As part of the protest, Brando, Episcopal minister John Yaryan, and Puyallup tribal leader Bob Satiacum fished in Washington state's Puyallup River without permits. They were arrested, and soon news of the fish-ins and Brando's arrest "splashed across the front pages of the state's newspapers and even flowed through national news wires" (Shreve 420). Some Indigenous activists saw Brando's participation as "detrimental" (Shreve 418), because he initially did not understand that African American and Native Americans had different agendas: "Instead of integration into American society, [Native American activists] sought to preserve Native culture; rather than focus on social equality, they wanted tribal communities to remain sovereign and self-governing; and instead of devoting their time and resources to gain voting rights, they [emphasized] upholding treaty rights" (Shreve 405). Later, "the NIYC did work closely with leaders of the African American Civil Rights Movement, most notably in 1968 when Hank Adams, Mel Thom, and others joined Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign" (Shreve 419).

In 1968, Brando's political activities included continued financial support for the Black Panthers and his participation in the memorial for Panther leader Bobby Hutton. Throughout the decade, he walked away from stardom, making himself unavailable or ill-suited for roles in *The Arrangement* (Elia Kazan, 1969), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, 1969), and *Ryan's Daughter* (David Lean, 1970). He chose instead to focus on *The Ugly American, The Appaloosa, Reflections in a Golden Eye*, and *Burn!*, films that exposed mainstream audiences to diverse casts, queer sexuality, and the toxic legacy of Anglo-European imperialism.[1]

Figure 2. Queimada*, also known as* Burn! *(1969), gave Brando the chance to make an anti-imperialist film with director Gillo Pontecorvo, known for* The Battle of Algiers *(1966).*

Like studio-era stars whose Hollywood battles merged with their onscreen roles, Brando became associated with the rebellious characters he portrayed in films like *The Wild One*. In addition, like complex figures such as Marilyn Monroe, Paul Robeson, and Judy Garland, Brando revolted against the Hollywood system that made him a star (Dyer 6). Recognizing his especially privileged status as a white male sex symbol, Brando used his fame to publicize injustices against marginalized people and to secure funding for films with more diverse casts. Brando also directed attention to social justice initiatives in the rare interviews he granted. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, Brando appeared on Johnny Carson's late-night talk show to ask white Americans to recognize their implicit biases and to contribute one percent of their annual income to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.[2] He also appeared on *The Dick Cavett Show* in 1973 after the four-month siege at Wounded Knee, in which armed government forces surrounded protesting American Indian Movement members. During the interview, Brando explained how stereotypes in Hollywood movies had harmed all people of colour and contributed especially to the misconceptions about Indigenous people. He also ensured that tribal leaders

illustrated successful tribal-led economic projects and clarified the negative effects that mining and other outside ventures have on tribal land.

Thus, Brando, a Hollywood star *and* an actor trained to prioritize social realities, used his fame to challenge dominant socioeconomic forces. His public support of Indigenous sovereignty, Black power, and African American civil rights reveal his conscious decision to mobilize his star power to benefit marginalized people. His many films that antagonized powerful constituencies ranging from studio executives to movie theatre owners reflect his deliberate efforts to highlight historical wrongs and lend visibility to contemporary figures seeking social justice.

Brando's Contradictions from a Twenty-First Century Perspective

Brando's use of Modern acting principles fostered his profit-enhancing performances, progressive film choices, and offscreen work for social justice. His decision to decline the Best Actor Oscar for *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) secured his reputation as an outsider "contemptuous of celebrity and increasingly guilty about acting" (Naremore 196). The move might seem like a childish, attention-seeking act of rebellion. Yet, it was an extension of his work on behalf of Indigenous sovereignty and a pragmatic choice that largely echoed George C. Scott's decision to decline the Best Actor Oscar for Patton (Franklin Schaffner, 1970) due to his opposition to the Academy Awards ceremony.

Similarly, Brando's huge salary demands to appear in *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) seem like bizarre, egotistical star behavior. However, they involve conscious political theatre designed to make studios pay for their focus on profits rather than equity onscreen and off. Over the course of his career, Brando's wavering status as favored son and disparaged pariah has led some critics to see an eccentric rather than committed actor, a charismatic youth turned corpulent recluse.[1] Perhaps reflecting observers' schadenfreude, he is seen as a great twentieth-century actor, but the acclaim now mixes with amusing memes.[2] Two events in 2022 illustrate Brando's contradictory legacy.

During the tabloid-fodder hearings in Johnny Depp's defamation case against his ex-wife Amber Heard, who had accused Depp of physical and sexual abuse, Depp's attorney made a strategic reference to Brando. An expert witness for Heard had intimated that Depp's on-set use of earpieces "could be a sign of declining health due to his use of alcohol and substance abuse" (Nambiar). So, in cross examination, Depp's attorney challenged the inference, asking the witness if he knew whether Brando used earpieces during productions. The question caused the witness to backtrack, but the exchange revived stories of the lazy, arrogant star, who used cue cards on various productions and had someone feed newly revised lines to him through an earpiece during the chaotic production of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (John Frankenheimer, 1966).

In contrast, Brando's laudable activism was a discrete footnote to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences event honoring Sacheen Littlefeather. To emphasize the plight of American Indian Movement members under military siege in the South Dakota town of Wounded Knee (Treuer 314–330), Brando had asked her to appear in his stead at the 1973 Oscar ceremony to decline his award for *The Godfather*. He wanted Littlefeather to read his statement condemning the US military action and Hollywood's misrepresentation of Indigenous people. The Academy denied the request prior to the telecast, members booed during her summary of Brando's remarks, and industry gatekeepers disparaged her character and denied her employment in the years following the telecast. The 2022 event included a formal apology to Littlefeather for Academy members' bigoted behaviour during and after the 1973 debacle. The Academy's "evening of reflection" noted her resilience in the face of sustained harassment and tacitly acknowledged the distance between the Academy's newfound commitment to Indigenous people and Brando's social justice efforts a half century earlier (Sun).

Whether seen as an agent of progressive social change or a cautionary tale about bad behavior and mental decline, Brando is part of contemporary popular culture, despite his passing in 2004 at the age of eighty. He continues to be known as Brando, his last name alone identifying the Hollywood icon known for his utilized or squandered abilities and his 1950s performances that gave visibility to a complex or incoherent white male identity in the postwar and Cold War era. An exemplar of the new "American" (Method) acting style, Brando has continued relevance to histories of performance, in part because contemporary research reveals that his performances were grounded in the Modern acting principles articulated by overlooked female acting teachers. The research also finally separates Strasberg's Method from the "American" acting style ushered in most notably by Brando's portrayal of working-class character Stanley Kowalski.

Brando's familiar image reflects the mystique surrounding certain 1950s stars, who had considerable power as studios transitioned into distribution entities

protected from the risks of production and exhibition. Stars remained key to marketing campaigns and, as Brando's career reveals, they secured additional influence as directors and independent producers. Strasberg's Method, which made acting mysterious, and the new "American" (Method) style of acting, which suited Cold War psychological dramas, supported Hollywood's focus on entertainment. By comparison, the cultural study central to Brando's Modern acting training fostered his support for social justice onscreen and off. In addition, his noncommercial film choices, social activism, and brinksmanship in negotiations with studio executives anticipate the counterculture independence associated with the Hollywood Renaissance (late 1960s/early 1970s). However, the prevailing disinterest in Brando's work beyond canonical, commercial hits like *A Streetcar Named Desire, On the Waterfront,* and *The Godfather* suggests that contemporary views of his career have been influenced by the corporate ethos that returned in the New Hollywood era (mid to late 1970s). Still, his prosaic contradictions—a Modern actor who was seen as a Method star, an anti-imperialist who was famous for his muscular "American" acting, and a social justice advocate whose influence arose from commercial media—are engaging because they shed light on histories of acting, cinema, and cultural dynamics in the United States.

Cynthia Ann Baron is a professor in the Department of Theatre and Film and the doctoral American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University. She is the author of *Modern Acting: The Lost Chapter of American Film and Theatre* (2016) and *Denzel Washington* (2015), the co-author of *Acting Indie: Industry, Aesthetics, and Performance* (2020), *Appetites and Anxieties: Food, Film, and the Politics of Representation* (2014), and *Reframing Screen Performance* (2008), and the co-editor of *Intersecting Aesthetics: Literary Adaptations and Cinematic Representations of Blackness* (2023) and *More Than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Film Performance* (2004). She is the editor of the *Journal of Film and Video, The Projector: A Journal of Film, Media, and Culture,* and the Palgrave Studies in Screen Industries and Performance Series. She is working on a book about representation and creative labor.

End Notes

1. Brando also received Best Actor Oscar nominations for *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972), and *A Dry White Season* (Euzhan Palcy, 1989).
2. Brando portrays characters of color in *Viva Zapata!* and *Teahouse of the August Moon* (Daniel Mann, 1956). Discussions surrounding *Viva Zapata!* focused on Cold War politics rather than Brando's casting (Schoenwald); today, observers list *Viva Zapata!* as one of many instances of brownface in Hollywood cinema, a pattern neatly summarized by Zach Vasquez. Casting in *Teahouse of the August Moon* followed the stage production, in which white actor David Wayne played the Japanese interpreter, a role that led to a Tony Award for Best Actor. The film was a commercial and critical success, receiving a Golden Globe Award for Motion Picture Promoting International Understanding. However, Brando's yellowface portrayal and the film's stereotypical depictions of Asian women have been criticized since the 1980s.
3. Haskell rightly identifies the misogyny that permeates Brando's films and those of other actors. The sexual abuse Maria Schneider experienced during the production of *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) is an example of Brando's complicity in the normalized misogyny that continues into today's #MeToo era.
4. Brando declined the role in *The Arrangement* because he had committed to activism following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Producer Daryl F. Zanuck wanted Brando to be cast in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, but Brando's support of the Black Panthers made him untenable in the view of 20th Century Fox executives (Meenan). Brando had been cast in *Ryan's Daughter,* but production delays on *Burn!* led him to withdraw from the project.
5. See "Marlon Brando Interview on *The Tonight Show* Starring Johnny Carson (May 11, 1968)."
6. See "Marlon Brando Interview on *The Dick Cavett Show* (June 12, 1973)." The tribal leaders on the show are Sam Cagey, Lummi Indian Tribal Chairman, Dennis Limberhand of the Northern Cheyanne Tribal Council, and Mervin Wright of the Pyramid Lake Piute Council. They are joined by Dr. Wallace Heath, Project Director for the Lummi People.
7. In 1936, Dudley Nichols declined the Best Writing, Screenplay Award for *The Informer* (John Ford, 1935) due to labor disputes between the studios and the Screen Writers Guild; Nichols accepted the Oscar at the 1938 awards ceremony.
8. Narratives about Brando's physical and mental decline after his early sexualized roles were gate-

keeper responses to the star's noncommercial film choices and offscreen activism—both behaviors that threatened rather than enhanced studio profits

9. Emotional moments in *A Streetcar Named Desire* are now material for parody, https://cheezburger.com/tag/marlon-brando and *On the Waterfront* offers opportunities puns, https://cheezburger.com/8347313408/marlon-brando-he-aint.

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Figure 3. An original theatrical poster for Viva Zapata! *(1952).*

Wendy Haslem

Blonde: Redefining Marilyn Monroe as Digital Artifact

Abstract

Andrew Dominik's biopic of Marilyn Monroe, Blonde *(2022), uses new digital technologies, including lenses, to redefine the star image of Marilyn Monroe. As Dominik mentions, the narrative of the film is drawn from the 'shards' of the biographical fiction novel which was written by Joyce Carol Oates in 2000. This article begins by considering the 'spectral' influence of Monroe that the filmmakers cited as a presence during the production of* Blonde. *It then contextualizes Monroe's screen persona with reference to research on stars that emerged during Hollywood's Golden Age. Much of this writing was contemporaneous with the height of Monroe's acting career. The article focuses on how* Blonde *revises Monroe's star's image, analyzing how a new digital screen persona is illuminated by flashes of light, lenses and framing that distorts and disembodies her image. It highlights how* Blonde *constructs Monroe primarily through the perspectives of other characters as a spectral image, one who is rarely afforded her own point of view.*

The 2022 biopic *Blonde* focuses on the enduring legacy of one of the highest profile stars of Hollywood's Golden Age, Marilyn Monroe. Director Andrew Dominik approached the adaptation "instinctively", describing the original novel by Joyce Carol Oates as, "a shattered mirror – there are all these little shards and it circles around, returning to certain memories. It's the feeling of being inside somebody's anxious thought process" (Newland). *Variety* classified *Blonde* as "a surrealist version of the life and death of the screen legends," citing Dominik's description of it as a "dream film, or a nightmare film" (D'Addiario). Ana De Armas plays Norma Jeane Mortenson and the larger-than-life film star Marilyn Monroe, highlighting the two distinct, but inextricably connected personas. De Armas describes the approach as one in which, "We're telling her story, from her point of view. I'm making people feel what she felt. When we had to shoot these kinds of scenes, like the one with Kennedy, it was difficult for everybody. But at the same time, I knew I had to go there to find the truth" (D'Addiario). Much of the publicity surrounding *Blonde* highlights the impact of the star's continued presence during shooting.

Principal photography began on the 4th of August 2019, the anniversary of Monroe's death ("Blonde Press Conference: 79th Venice International Film Festival"). Dominik says that Monroe's legacy continued to assert its presence, saying that "her dust is everywhere in Los Angeles" ("Blonde Press Conference: 79th Venice International Film Festival"). Ana de Armas says that at times during production the film felt "like a séance," that Monroe's presence was "in the air," and that the film was made "in her service" ("Blonde Press Conference: 79th Venice International Film Festival").

Blonde includes historical source material, cutting in sequences from some of Monroe's films, and re-creating scenes from others. This film uses archival photographs and posters, and scenes that are shot on significant locations, including the apartment that Norma Jeane lived in as a child, and later the bedroom which was the site of her death. However, *Blonde* is less interested in presenting a faithful, indexical reiteration of the life of the star as a biopic might, and more invested in engaging with the mythology that surrounds her. It approaches this mythology using digital effects to depict Monroe's inner world, experiences, senses,

and emotions; and includes scenes that present disarmingly intimate investigations of Monroe's body. One way to contextualize this new, digital version of Monroe is to examine how the star is remade using the aesthetics of Golden Age cinema. This article will begin by exploring some of the most influential research on stars that emerged during Hollywood's Golden Age, contemporaneous with Monroe's career. It will focus on Monroe's star image specifically, analyzing how the image is constructed through the perspectives of other characters and shaped by lenses, lighting, framing and effects that recall the aesthetics of Classical Hollywood cinema.

Roland Barthes identified how stars function as icons within the machine of mass culture. In *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes wrote about the role that popular culture plays in not only identifying which stars are worthy of attention, but also in shaping the image of stars as objects of desire. Barthes' approach to popular mythologies invited a very direct analysis, one that was dedicated to "the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse, which, in my view, is hidden there" (11). Barthes analyses its surfaces, shapes and curves; he writes that Garbo's face, "represents this fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty" (Barthes 63). A similar fascination with the flesh and its interior, is the central concern of *Blonde*. It is precisely the obsession with the flesh, its 'shapes and curves', the 'repeated fragile moments' in Monroe's story that impede a comprehensive expression of this star's agency and legacy.

Throughout *Blonde*, the image of Monroe as movie star and the lived experience of Norma Jeane Mortenson gradually intertwine, dramatically colliding and dissolving the split between the star image and Norma Jeane's reality. This dissociation is depicted in sequences that recreate Monroe's performances on film. An early shot of a mesmerized Marilyn Monroe holding a razor blade to her neck is accompanied by an interior maternal voiceover encouraging her to cut her throat. Only retrospectively is this revealed to be Monroe's performance from *Don't Bother to Knock* (Baker 1952). Once the camera recedes, it provides the perspective required to recognize the multiple layers of fantasy presented in this moment. Throughout *Blonde*, Norma Jeane struggles to separate illusion and reality. When she asserts that "Marilyn doesn't exist. When I come out of my dressing room, I'm Norma Jeane. I'm still her when the camera is rolling. Marilyn Monroe only exists on the screen," she is highlighting the illusion of the star, an impression constituted by projected light.

Another misapprehension appears earlier in Blonde. Deliberately, or perhaps by accident, the photograph that informs Norma Jeane's memories of her father is altered across two scenes. The photograph of the father figure that is placed on the wall by Gladys, Norma Jeane's mother, transforms in its placement on the wall, and in relation to the details of the photograph itself. The use of iris framing draws attention to the photograph by masking the edges of the frame. When the film returns to this photograph, its placement has been altered, and the crack on the wall has moved. Details within the photograph have been reversed. The white patches that were initially on the left of the father's hat now appear on the right. Whilst we might be tempted to rationalize this as a

Figure 1. Gladys hanging the photograph.

Figure 2. The altered photograph, appearing later in the film.

marker of the passing of time, it could also be an error in continuity, or an attempt to establish the fragmentary, mirrored, and distorted perspective that defines both the star and the film itself. The ways that Monroe's star image is understood by Norma Jean as illusory is underscored by the visual instability of these photographic images. Historically, photographic imagery has been understood as the basic unit of celluloid film, an index of truth. *Blonde* eschews authenticity in favor of the illusion.

Edgar Morin understands the position of Hollywood stars after 1930 as less magical or transcendent, but instead able to "participate in the daily life of mortals; they are no longer inaccessible; they are mediators between the screen-heaven and earth" (32). He identifies the oscillation between proximity and distance that maintains the ideal star image. Writing on Monroe's relationship to Hollywood specifically, Morin notes that, "[t]he star system seems to be ruled by a thermostat: if the humanizing tendency that reduces the star to the human scale brushes everyday life a little too closely, an internal mechanism re-establishes her distance, a new artifice exalts her, she recovers altitude" (32). Morin thinks about this expansively, writing that, "considered as a total phenomenon, the history of the stars repeats, in its own proportion, the history of the gods. Before the gods (before the stars) the mythical universe (the screen) was peopled with spectres or phantoms endowed with the glamour and magic of the double" (34). *Blonde* replicates a similar focus on the myth of Monroe;, however, the latest incarnation moves into a new realm in its desire to explore the star in increasingly intimate detail.

A sequence depicting a sexual interlude with Charlie Chaplin Jr. and Edward G. Robinson Jr. distorts, stretches, and blurs their bodies. Subsequent shots frame the repetitive, lateral movement of Norma Jeane's head, an absurd indication of the sexual impact on the body. The concluding shot of this sequence replaces Norma Jeane with the star image of Marilyn Monroe. The sexual interlude with 'The Juniors' segues into the banner image for *Niagara* (Hathaway 1953), as Marilyn's bed magically transforms into a rushing waterfall. *Blonde* uses digital compositing to update the matte shot and position of Monroe languishing at the edge of Niagara Falls. This shot connects Golden Age Hollywood with digital cinema, blending *Blonde* and the billboard for *Niagara* into one shot. Morin emphasizes the importance of sexuality in shaping Hollywood after 1947, and referencing the original film, states: "Marilyn Monroe, the torrid vamp of *Niagara*, naked under her red dress, with her ferocious sexuality and her sulky face, is the perfect symbol for the star system's recovery" (31).

Richard Dyer's influential research highlights the plural, sometimes contradictory aspects that define the central paradox of stardom, arguing that stars are ordinary and glamorous, like and unlike us, people and commodities, real and imagined, public and private (1979). It is the public destabilization of these oppositions that characterizes the mythology around Monroe. Media industries continue to devote themselves to speculation around aspects of Monroe's life, all intent on exploring, but never quite filling, this epistemological gap. Dyer argues that much interest in Hollywood lies in the "process of contradiction and its 'management' and those moments when hegemony is not, or is only uneasily, secured" (1979 3). For Dyer, "the star's image is so powerful that all signs may be read in terms of it" (1979 148). Monroe remains a polysemic 'hyper-sign' and many of these aspects are visualized in *Blonde.*

Norma Jeane's character embodies Dyer's notion of contradiction as confusion builds between the star image and her sense of self. Dialogue like: "She doesn't have any well-being, she's only a career" uses more contemporary phrasing to describe the power of the celluloid image. A similar fragmentation is expressed using film language as the protagonist struggles to control her image. This contradiction is articulated in the initial meeting with Joe Di Maggio when Norma Jeane tells him that "in the movies they chop you all to bits. Cut, cut, cut, it's a jigsaw puzzle. But you're not the one to put the pieces together". The version of Monroe played by De Armas is also built on the corporeal signs that define the star: breathy dialogue, platinum blonde hair, lowered eyelids, parted lips, and a precarious sense of self. The star's identity finally replaces Norma Jeane in what might otherwise be viewed as an aside right at the end of the film, a detail that might go unnoticed. When Charlie Chaplin Jr.'s parcel arrives, Norma Jeane signs for the delivery as Marilyn Monroe. This simple gesture indicates the overwhelming presence of the star, and the dissolution of Norma Jeane Mortenson.

In *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Richard Dyer reads Monroe's screen image as a range of discourses that encapsulate "clusters of ideas, notions, feelings, images, attitudes and assumptions that, taken together, make up distinctive ways of thinking and feeling about things, of making a particular sense of the world" (2004 19). Monroe's image is configured by a range of media discourses

that include pinups, photographs, images in *Playboy* magazine, advertisements, and theatre; as well as her film appearances, beginning with *The Dangerous Years* (Arthur Pierson 1947), and ending with the incomplete film *Something's Gotta Give* (George Cukor 1962) The public impression of Marilyn Monroe is also derived from 'unofficial' discourses that circulate across broader media forms: in newspapers, calendars, gossip columns, within art movements like Andy Warhol's screen prints, Joyce Carol Oates' book, Dominik's film, and popular cultural movements, particularly postmodernism. All media ultimately contribute to build the image of Monroe as a polysemic hyper-sign. For Dyer, "Monroe = sexuality is a message that ran all the way from what the media made of her in the pin-ups and movies to how her image became a reference point for sexuality in the coinage of everyday speech" (2004 20). During the 1950s, Monroe's star image represented a level of glamour and sexuality that was diametrically opposed to the stereotype of domestic femininity. Monroe's influence on film production during Hollywood's Golden Age was less well known. Her influence within the film industry was rarely credited, with one example being her role as executive producer for Laurence Olivier's *Prince and the Showgirl* (1957). S. Paige Baty calls Monroe a "representative character," a cultural figure through whom the character of political life is articulated (1995). However, whilst representative characters are often idealized stars embodying achievement and success, they can also display their struggles publicly. The influence of representative characters is not limited to their lifetime. Screen personas like Monroe's transform across time, particularly as their re-constructions are based on recollection and imagination. The digital version of Monroe in *Blonde* is shaped through the eyes of other characters, and illuminated by both analog and digital technologies.

Dyer writes that Monroe "is knitted into the fabric of the film through point-of-view shots located in male characters - even in the later films, and virtually always in the earlier ones, she is set up as an object of male sexual gaze" (2004 21). In addition, the intersection of sexuality, gender, and cultural background defines the image of this star. Dyer writes, "[t]o be the ideal Monroe had to be white, and not just white, but blonde, the most unambiguously white you can get..." and that "[b]londeness, especially platinum (peroxide) Blondeness is the ultimate sign of whiteness" (2004 42-3). Some sequences of *Blonde* amplify that whiteness in makeup, costume, and by framing Monroe centrally as the lightest point in wide shots of audiences. In one instance, Monroe's luminous presence is the only source of light in a sea of gray outfits and faces. Dominik's camera disrupts the light beam that projects the film, looking back at the star as the lights in the cinema come up. Another sequence in *Blonde* begins with a performance from *The Seven Year Itch* (Billy Wilder, 1955), and extends cinematic artifice beyond the cut to recreate one of the hyper-signs associated with Monroe. This is the famous image wherein she is positioned over a subway grate, the warm air below billowing her dress out like a giant white mushroom. *Blonde* blends the film performance with 'media moments' as a crowd of photographers surround Monroe: watching, photographing, their eyes widening, seemingly expanding in the frames, illustrating the lascivious gaze that Dyer describes. As flashes illuminate her presence, an expanding mob of male photographers with analogue cameras frame and sculpt one of the images that defines Monroe's career. This scene is reminiscent of Maria's dance in *Metropolis* (Lang 1927), a performance that was constructed similarly with increasing close up shots of the widening eyes of a male audience watching the performance. Both films perpetuate an illusion of femininity that has been 'knitted' into the fabric of both celluloid and digital films, primarily using reaction shots of lustful male viewers.

When *Blonde* offers Monroe's own perspective, it is one that includes her within the frame, rarely showing what she sees herself. A fish eye lens expresses Monroe's increasing delirium as she drives through the streets of Hollywood, where the palm trees curve in to surround her. As the camera tracks behind Monroe walking down her own garden path, a similar visual distortion is combined with high exposure to depict her surroundings as cylindrical, almost as if she is walking through a pipe. *Blonde* develops confronting perspectives that imagine the star from the inside. Internal images of Norma Jeane's body are depicted on a microscopic level. Eggs and sperm unite, cells grow and divide, and a fetus is shown hovering inside her uterus. Two specific images of Norma Jeane focus on her uterus, showing the viscous movement of the uterine walls as they respond to the insertion of a speculum. The second centralizes the eye of the gynecologist who peers inside. The shots that expose the internal organs and position the surgeon's eye centrally contrast with the distance and objective observation that defines the "medical gaze" (Foucault 1963). Another is the view from inside an airplane's toilet, a vessel that captures a view of Monroe's vomit

as she throws up mid-flight. These perspectives of the internal body, its cells, organs, and fluids, 'chop her to bits' and contribute to the dissolution of the star image.

Lighting also plays an important role in establishing and dissolving the star image. *Blonde* uses light in expressive ways during sequences of Monroe attending film premieres. Flashes timed with the shutters of analogue cameras punctuate these sequences, adding a new form of editing between shots. One of the flashes explodes and hits her body. Monroe reacts by moving in an ungainly, circular pattern. These blinding and dangerous flashes recall the history of chemical powders or magnesium strips that also formed the base for fireworks. In *Blonde*, flashes are caused by single use globes that explode at the peak of their intensity. Lighting becomes a hyperconscious sensory link in other moments in *Blonde*. Intense sounds of burning light globes are discernable in the audio mix, amplifying as she passes them in on a studio set. Refracted lighting dominates a 'behind the scenes' shot as Monroe steps away from a scene, overwhelmed by her perceived slippage

Figure 3. Monroe attending a film premiere.

Figure 4. The lighting creates a visual impression of dissociation.

between present and past events of her life. Here, a lateral shaft of refracted light dominates the foreground, providing an intense point of illumination. This refracted, distorted light amplifies the sense of dissociation. Further light abstractions surround and almost obliterate the star image as she freshens up before meeting President Kennedy. Lighting effects that originate from flashes or refraction are reminiscent of the original technologies that shaped Monroe.

Blonde is the first film distributed on Netflix to have been given an American NC17 classification, which resulted in a limited theatrical release and advertising. This may be due to the dehumanizing visions of Monroe's body, but also to an early sequence depicting a rape, one that is contextualized as part of a meeting with the studio mogul "Mr Z." The sexual assault is filmed as a monochromatic, silent indication of the abusive power relations at play in Hollywood. It also reveals the temporal mix that is characteristic of *Blonde*, one that emphasizes a traumatic past inflecting the present, the silence and power that shaped her career. In relation to this scene, Dominik says, "It just happens, it's almost glossed over, and then the feeling follows her later" (Newland). Dominik argues that the film is indebted to the #MeToo movement, "because nobody was interested in that sort of shit, what it's like to be an unloved girl, or what it's like to go through the Hollywood meat-grinder" (Bergson). Interviewing Dominik, Christina Newland emphasizes what is glossed over or left out of *Blonde*. She says, "I feel there are cultural repercussions to making certain choices in terms of how we present a figure from the past. What does it say to an audience that we're not seeing that she formed her own production company, or that she was involved in opposing the anti-communist witch-hunts by the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s? Or that she fought against segregation on behalf of Ella Fitzgerald, and so on?" (Newland). As Dominik reveals in his reply, in *Blonde* reality is less important than the images (Newland).

Susan Griffith perceives Marilyn Monroe as the paradigmatic representation of woman's relationship to "the pornographic consciousness," arguing that Monroe is a tragic figure because she was forced to impersonate a pornographic image of feminine sexuality, particularly in the image of the bombshell (1981). Griffith writes that beneath every pornographic image is the notion that the woman doesn't really exist (214). Baty sees the original Monroe as a self-referential image, suggesting that "she mediates the real by being a simulation of herself" (24). More

broadly, Slavoj Žižek understands the presence of the classical femme fatale in Golden Age Cinema as elusive and spectral (2000). Others have seen the latest incarnation of Monroe in similar ways. Joyce Carol Oates said of Ana de Armas, "the wonderful actress who plays her, I think it took her like four hours of make-up. So when you see them on screen, they don't really exist. It's like a fantastic image" (Barleycorn).

This erasure is expressed in a shot at the end of the film which begins by centralizing Monroe in her bedroom, before tracking outside where she also appears sitting by the pool. The temporal continuity implied by the movement through space is another 'fantastic image,' one that positions Monroe within the interior and exterior simultaneously. Focus softens to reveal abstract light and color as detail dissolves into planes of colored light, creating impressions of Monroe's life slipping away. In its obsession with these 'fantastic images,' and with the shapes and surfaces of the body and its interiors, Blonde creates the image of the star as an effect of lighting, framing, and lenses that reference classical Hollywood aesthetics, erasing the star in the process. In *Blonde*, the star image is ultimately shown to be a spectral illusion, an indication of the multiple ways that filmmakers can nostalgically re-animate the star and simultaneously display the continued presence of Golden Age filmmaking on contemporary screens.

Wendy Haslem is an Associate Professor in Screen Studies at The University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research investigates new approaches to the history of the cinema in the digital age. The research monograph From Méliès to New Media: Spectral Projections (Intellect/University of Chicago Press, 2019) examines the intersections of celluloid and digital, focusing on traces of celluloid materiality on digital screens, the ethics of digital restoration, color and illumination, cinema outside of the theatre and the creation of a new experiential spectatorship. She has produced 60+ research, scholarly and engagement publications including: two single authored monographs; two edited anthologies, articles and chapters in journals and books, along with invited papers and translations.

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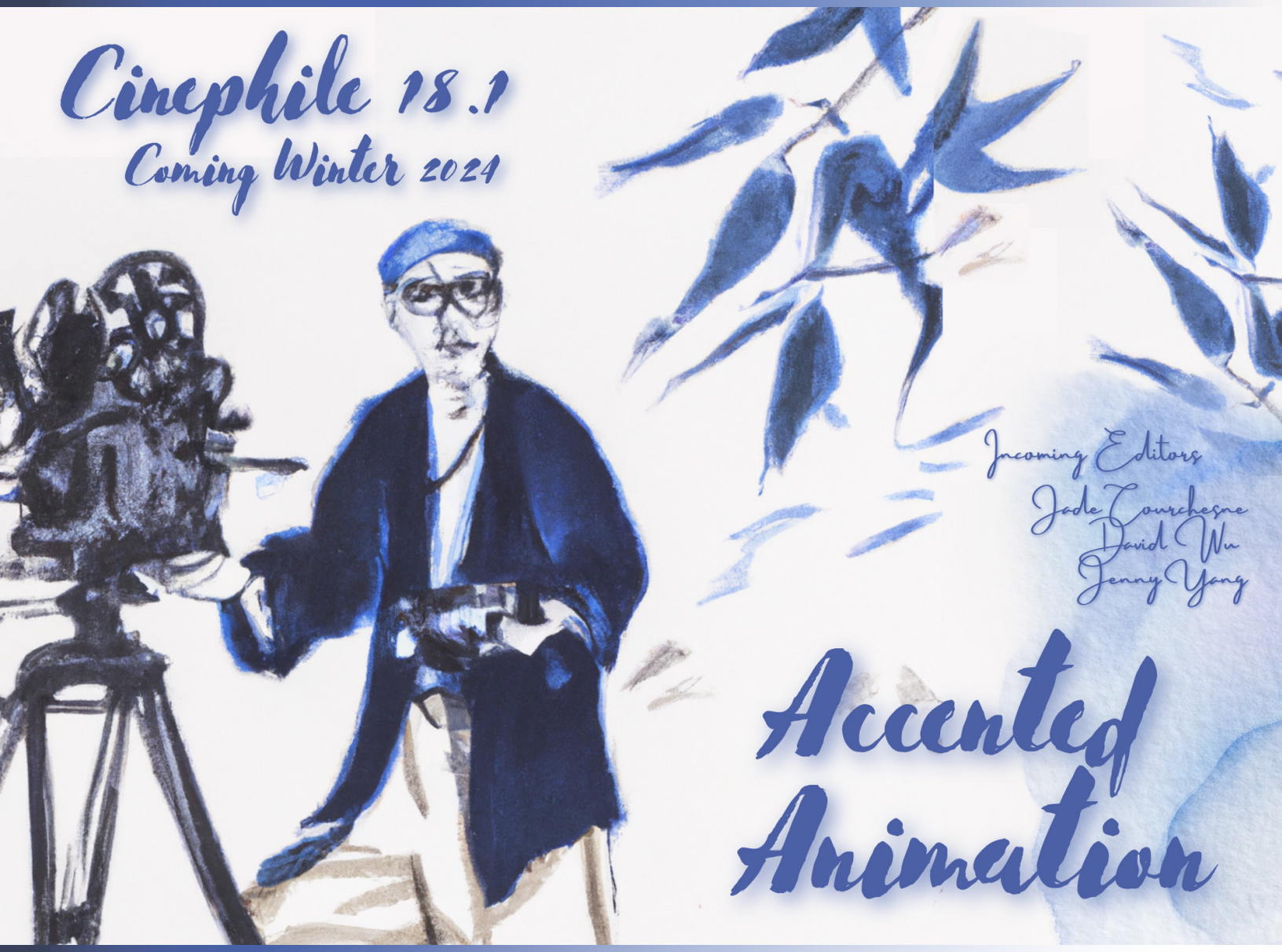
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A *Misfit* Revision: Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable and Transitional Stardom in Postwar Hollywood

Abstract

Director John Huston's The Misfits *(1961) was one of the most volatile productions of his career, with its ensemble cast headlined by a trio of screen icons: Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe, and Montgomery Clift. Drawing on new archival research, I argue that* The Misfits *illuminates the transition from old to New Hollywood in terms of its behind-the-scenes star negotiations of Gable and Monroe, who had varying levels of creative control to appear in the film. My analysis of their respective deals underscores how* The Misfits *anticipates the shift from the female driven star system of Classical Hollywood to the male lead talent of the New Hollywood era, in which men dominated creatively and financially in Hollywood productions . Nevertheless, even within this male centric production context, Monroe exerted her own creative influence in the film by using her star power to help secure United Artists and the A-list talent in the film and by utilizing her Method acting technique. In this way,* The Misfits *is a transitional film that points to the emerging gender gap that continues to impact Hollywood filmmaking to the present day.*

When the highly anticipated film *The Misfits* premiered on February 1, 1961, it was defined by tragedy. Directed by John Huston and penned by Arthur Miller as a starring vehicle for his former wife, Marilyn Monroe, *The Misfits* was haunted by the untimely death of costar Clark Gable, who succumbed to a heart attack only ten days after shooting concluded. A year later, Monroe also passed away from an accidental drug overdose, and the film became one of the final noteworthy roles for costar Montgomery Clift, who died in 1967. Apart from symbolizing the loss of these Hollywood luminaries, *The Misfits* has been dismissed as a critical and box office disappointment: a star-studded anachronism that added another nail to old Hollywood's coffin.

To characterize *The Misfits* as a failure, however, is to misunderstand the film itself and this postwar period of American cinema culture. *The Misfits* exemplifies the fundamental changes that mark the transition from "old" to "New Hollywood" that occurred during the 1960s, in particular a production model that offered more control to stars, directors, and writers, freelance contract negotiations that safeguarded creative agency, and a shifting star system. Drawing primarily on studio correspondences between executives sourced from the United Artists (UA) Studio collection,[1] as well as on-set accounts and interviews with the cast, this essay reconsiders *The Misfits* as a transitional film through which to understand how the American film industry was simultaneously on the cusp of conglomerate New Hollywood while also still contending with the legacy of studio-era Hollywood. In particular, Monroe and Gable negotiated varying levels of creative control during this transitional period. While the film's narrative onscreen gender dynamics, specifically regarding Monroe's performance, have been well-theorized,[2] the primary source production materials on *The Misfits* that underscore the creative bargaining behind-the-scenes have received limited scholarly attention. Both Monroe's and Gable's contractual agreements make clear how *The Misfits* anticipates the shift from the female lead star system of Classical Hollywood to the male talent dominion of the New Hollywood era that encompassed not just

male stars, but also writers and directors (in this case, Arthur Miller and John Huston), a trend that persists in contemporary Hollywood. Furthermore, analysis of the talent contracts from *The Misfits* highlights the creative and financial muscle flexed by A-list stars—in this instance Gable—who leveraged top billing, an impressive salary enhanced by a generous profit-sharing deal, and approval of the final shooting script. The magnitude of Gable's star power also represents how the postwar Hollywood star system prioritized male stars (and male audiences and genres) as opposed to the female-driven star system of old Hollywood

Figure 1. A behind-the-scenes promotional photo for The Misfits.

in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s that presumed women were its target audience. Understood in this context, Monroe's central role in *The Misfits* symbolizes the end of the era, particularly that of the cultural and economic dominance of the female star in Hollywood; male stars such as Steve McQueen, Warren Beatty, Paul Newman, and others,[3] eclipsed their female peers in terms of box office popularity, cultural allure, and financial earnings in the latter half of the 1960s. My analysis of Gable and Monroe's off-screen contractual bargaining makes clear this discernable cultural and economic shift in the postwar Hollywood star system.

Even as Gable's financial and contractual stipulations eclipsed Monroe's, the actress leveraged her creative power in *The Misfits* in alternative ways that further signify the transition to New Hollywood stardom. These strategies include A-list stars seeking out what they perceived to be compelling projects separate from the stereotypical Hollywood fare by working with independent producers to develop their own material and to gain influence over their careers and artistic choices. For example, Monroe created her own production company Marilyn Monroe Productions in 1956 to make films apart from Twentieth Century-Fox, who exploited her sexuality and ruthlessly typecast her as a sexpot. Monroe was a top postwar star after making her reputation in musical comedies at Fox. The actress put her film career on hold in 1955 when she abandoned Hollywood to work with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio in New York; there, she closely studied his interpretation of the Method acting style. Penned by Monroe's husband, playwright Arthur Miller (whose work was often associated with postwar Method acting), *The Misfits* provided Monroe the strong dramatic role that she craved, one that would showcase her acting ability and allow her to deconstruct her Hollywood blonde bombshell image. As Amanda Konkle contends, Monroe utilized her Method training in her performance in *The Misfits* "to demonstrate that although she might look the part of sexpot, the sexpot could challenge what men expected from her" (173). Her character, Roslyn, bears a striking resemblance to the actress herself that invites a reflexive reading of her performance. Hence, my analysis also accounts for how Monroe's Method acting in *The Misfits* represents a new strategy of postwar Hollywood stardom—particularly for women—

that is to take ownership over one's career vis-à-vis their acting and complicate their established but limited Hollywood persona. Monroe sought to achieve professional dignity and respect through her Method acting and by taking on a role that deconstructed her sexpot image, even if this meant a lower salary or a reduced share of the box office profits ; this was not choice that Clark Gable or any of her male costars had to make by comparison.

Accordingly then, *The Misfits*' talent negotiations indicate important industry changes for Hollywood stardom in the early 1960s, including the growing prac

> The company and producer had to agree on the basic ingredients—story, cast, director, and budget—but in the making of the picture, UA would give the producer complete autonomy including the final cut. Talent would defer much of their salary until the picture broke even [financially], but UA would help keep production costs down by not charging any administrative overhead, which at another company could boost budgets by as much as 40 percent. (42)[5]

However, these incentives were only partially responsible for the company's success; UA attracted top talent

Figure 2. A variant behind-the-scenes promotional photo for The Misfits.

tice of talent gaining influence over their artistic choices by developing their own personal projects. They achieved this primarily by working with producers to secure distribution deals through major studios. By the late 1950s, UA had revived its reputation as a studio distributor of independently produced films that attracted top Hollywood talent, making it an ideal studio for producing and releasing *The Misfits*. As Tino Balio explains, the revamped postwar UA led by Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin embraced an alternative strategy for its distribution of independently produced features to appeal to talent: "...in return for distribution rights, UA offered independent producers complete production financing, creative control over their work, and a share of the profits" (42).[4] Balio notes how UA appealed to talent-turned-producers by essentially "going into partnership" with them:

"by starting trends, by challenging the HUAC and the Production Code, and by investing in off beat pictures" (1). Miller and Frank Taylor, the publisher and soon-to-be-producer of *The Misfits*, had sent the script to director John Huston in July of 1959. Huston, who had already had prior experience releasing films through UA (*The African Queen*, 1951), tipped off UA executive Eliot Hyman, who was then president of United Artists Associated and purchased screen rights for the studio, about the Miller script. In 1960, Hyman became an independent producer by forming Seven Arts Productions as a subsidiary of UA and the studio produced and distributed the picture based on his recommendation, which also gave Miller more creative control over the finished film.[6] A March 30, 1959 memo from UA executive Max Youngstein to his boss, Arthur Krim, reveals the potential that he saw in *The Misfits* project, especially in

terms of the talent attached:

> ...I love this property. I think it is short of action, but it is by far, the best character Western have read. I feel that with very few changes, it is ideal for Monroe. In addition, the three male roles are tremendously interesting and this could be a real blockbuster picture, in spite of the fact that it could never be a great action Western.[7]

Youngstein's observations reveal the allure that came to define *The Misfits*: a Western bereft of action but steeped in character, with the promise to showcase the acting talent of its stars, mainly of Marilyn Monroe (a curious casting move given that Hollywood Westerns were typically headlined by and marketed to men). Furthermore, his comments also foreground this transitional industrial moment, when female stars like Monroe wielded top creative and economic power in Hollywood.

Monroe was one of the last long-term contract stars attached to a major Hollywood studio when she signed a standard seven-year contract with Fox in 1951 (with the studio's option to renew). The contract "called for a salary of $500 per week in the first year, $750 per week in the second year, and $1250 in the third year, eventually reaching $3500 per week in the final year" (Lev 168). Such a contract gave her no control over her image, her salary, script approval, or casting decisions. As Peter Lev contends, this contract was far from equitable for the actress because "Monroe earned far less than some of her costars...yet audiences were buying tickets to see Marilyn Monroe" (168).[8] Increasingly over the 1950s, these long-term contracts were supplanted by a freelance talent system that offered a viable alternative to A-list talent seeking greater artistic and financial control of their work. This shift in actuality benefited the major studios, as they could not maintain lengthy exclusive (and expensive) contracts with the downturn in postwar film production. Monroe's career is demonstrative in this regard; when she renegotiated with Fox during her New York hiatus, her new 1956 contract granted her higher compensation ($400,000 for four pictures in seven years), with approval over director (though not story) as well as costars, and the ability to make her own films with her newly formed production company (Konkle 12).[9] As Miller recalled his autobiography, *Time Bends*:

> Marilyn's hopes were immense for this arrangement which promised both decent roles and personal dignity. Naturally the then-powerful movie columnists were taking shots at Marilyn, the non-actor floozy, for the preposterous chutzpah of making artistic demands on the so great and noble a corporation as Twentieth Century Fox. (358)

Consequently, Monroe defied her "dumb blonde" sex-pot persona crafted by Fox in her proactive contract negotiations. Eli Wallach, her costar in *The Misfits*, also observed this, and commended her astute knowledge of film industry contracts:

> I was impressed with her determination to remake her image, also with her professionalism. She once even helped me rewrite a contract to make sure that I got the best possible deal. I remember her putting on her little Ben Franklin spectacles to read the contract. 'All right,' she told me, 'take out clauses three and four. And make sure they clarify your billing.' (211)

By the time *The Misfits* project was in development at UA, Monroe had launched Marilyn Monroe Productions (which released *Bus Stop*, directed by Joshua Logan in 1956, and *The Prince and the Show Girl,* directed by Laurence Olivier in 1957). *The Misfits* was the third independent film made by the actress, who had reached a crossroads in her career in 1955 when she relocated to New York while bargaining for a new contract with Fox. Monroe vented her frustration with her career and sex symbol persona to fellow Actors Studio disciple Wallach: "That's all they want me to do in films. I told 20th [sic] Century-Fox and the press that I want to do Grushenka in Doestoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. They all laughed, but none of them have read the book; I call them 19th Century Fox" (Wallach 210). Monroe's career expansion to an actor-producer exemplifies the transition from old to New Hollywood, specifically in her repudiation of being a contract star at a major Hollywood studio and desire for more creative discretion. In essence, she was a transitional star who spanned two distinct eras in American cinema, beginning her career under the old Hollywood studio long-term contract system and later adapting to the freelance talent-producing model of New Hollywood by the end of the decade. Along with her, actors-turned-producers who formed their own production company in the 1950s included Bing Crosby, Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Ida Lupino, John Wayne, and Kim Novak.[10]

The Misfits, along with *Bus Stop* and *The Prince and the Showgirl*, exemplified Monroe's newfound professional agency after studying at the Actors Studio with Strasberg. Her decision to study the Method both galvanized her decision to become a film producer and develop new roles to complicate her Hollywood sex-pot image. As Keri Walsh explains, Monroe's use of the Method represented a feminist professional awakening for the actress; she contends that Monroe and her contemporary female method actors used their screen per-

formance to both challenge and expand "Hollywood's capacities for representing women's lives" in the 1950s-1960s (37).[11] Specifically, Monroe "moved to New York, joined the Actors Studio, allied herself with one of its leading playwrights [Miller], and ended her career in a film role (*The Misfits*) that critically investigated the kind of Hollywood glamor she had previously represented (37).[12] Historian Lary May echoes Walsh, noting a distinct change in the "major films she made with Billy Wilder, John Huston, and her husband Arthur Miller" as she moved from a sex symbol to a "critic of official gender roles" in the 1950s (248). Hence, Monroe's embrace of the Method was a defiant career move to counter her studio-crafted Hollywood persona, as evidenced by her performance in *The Misfits*.[13]

Furthermore, much of Monroe's hard-won creative power spanned from the perceived value of the female-centered star system, since women were the presumed dominant audience for Hollywood movies during the 1920s-1940s. As I have argued elsewhere, female stars achieved independent stardom vis-à-vis their contractual negotiations with film producers that paved the way for Monroe's generation.[14] Monroe herself ranked as a top box office star several times in postwar Hollywood (in 1953, 1954, and 1956) and flexed her star muscle as a result in her renegotiations with Fox and by becoming a star-turned-producer.[15] However, a discernable marketing shift began in Hollywood during the 1940s when male stars began to outnumber women in the top ten box office star-exhibitor polls. This trend continued into the 1950s, and by 1957, there were no women in the top ten ranking of money-making stars.[16] Postwar Hollywood marketing shifted to presume its target demographic was male, and this corresponded not only to the dominion of men in the top-ranking box office star polls, but also to the postwar production increase of action, war, and Western genres (Carman 132). In this context, Monroe's star agency illuminates what Paul Monaco has coined "the twilight of the movie goddesses" that had ruled Hollywood screens since the 1920s (120).

Analysis of Clark Gable's contract reveals the changing power dynamics evident in the Hollywood star system in the casting of *The Misfits*, and the UA collection memos between executives exemplifies this gender realignment in the postwar Hollywood star system. Not only was *The Misfits* a Western, but as UA contractual memos underscore, Gable wielded the star bargaining power, creative input and top billing, even though Monroe was by far the bigger box office draw and major Hollywood star in 1960. A UA memo between executives Robert Blumofe and Jesse Skolkin, dated December 30, 1959, details that the acting talent was budgeted at $1.6 million, with the lion's share going to Gable's $750,000 salary for the film, payable over a six-year period, with a ten percent cut of gross receipts after the film had earned $7.5 million. By comparison, the same memo states that Monroe received a $300,000 salary with a cut of the box office gross once the film had grossed over $3 million.[17] Gable's salary also eclipsed his male costar Montgomery Clift, who earned $200,000 for his work, and supporting players Eli Wallach earning $50,000 and Thelma Ritter $60,000 (both were given featured billing below the title).[18] Gable also had director, female costar, second male costar, and cameraman approval, as well as "one iron-bound clause in his contract—at 5:00 PM, no matter where he was in a scene," that his work concluded for the day (Wallach 223).[19] Moreover, Gable's contract specified a weekly overtime fee of $48,000 for any work after September 15, 1960; his salary was estimated to exceed $800,000 due to production time of *The Misfits* shoot being extended.[20] All of these provisions—high salary, profit sharing, creative input over the cast and crew, and specified work hours—were achievements that Gable attained relatively late in his career, after he finished his quarter of a century tenure as the longest serving studio contract star at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). Barry King discusses how Gable's MGM contract player status rendered him a "low autonomy" star in Hollywood, revealing a striking disparity between his long-standing box office draw from the 1930s into the 1950s and his weekly salary of $7500 for forty weeks (bereft of any financial or creative provisions) (173). Gable was effectively compelled by industry changes to become what King classifies as a "high autonomy" star who secured a degree of control over his career:

> It was not until after his contract with MGM expired in 1954…that Gable was able to command what he had long been seeking: a flat fee and a percentage. Given that in Hollywood the association between earnings and prestige was high, this long suffering acceptance of lower earnings is striking. (173)

In regard to their negotiations to make *The Misfits,* while Monroe lobbied hard to attain creative provisions and function as a high autonomy star in postwar Hollywood, by contrast, Gable was much more passive as a formerly low autonomy star. Gable's contractual power belies his "company man" background, as he was one of the longest standing actors to be on a studio contract until financial difficulties at MGM basically forced Gable to exit in the mid-1950s. His freelance career thus benefitted from the enhanced value of male stars in

postwar Hollywood.

The main reason why Monroe's contractual agency lagged behind that of her male costar is that the actress and her husband, Miller, pitched themselves as a creative team for their role in *The Misfits* contractual negotiations. Miller noted that his unusual amount of authorial control over the film was due to mainly to Monroe, who "wanted to do the film and she was a big star" (Miller and Toubiana 33).[21] The couple's control over the project correlated to their selection of John Huston due to his respectful direction of Monroe in her small but memorable role in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). Explained Miller, Huston was the "only director who had previously been respectful and treated her like an actress" and "did not expect some kitsch from her…he had taken her seriously from the start" (36). Monroe also noted that "nobody would have heard of me if it hadn't been for John Huston" in terms of his impact on her career.[22] Monroe's personal UA contract gave her approval of Huston as director and Gable as her costar, and stipulated that, should they drop out of the production for "any reason prior to the commencement of photography," she had "the right to terminate; after commencement of photography, she has the right to designate a director and male star of similar caliber."[23] Despite their salary and story approval disparities, Gable and Monroe (as well Huston and Miller) had equal choice over director and costar approval should any of the said talent drop out of the picture. While Gable earned substantially more money and maintained final screenplay approval, Monroe prioritized her artistry—utilizing her Method acting, playing a new dramatic role, and putting her faith in the original material written by Miller and directed by Huston.

At the same time, Monroe's professional behavior in Hollywood in the preceding years tarnished her star power and deal-making ability, and this may have impacted her contract for *The Misfits*. As Monaco explains, "her reputation had become increasingly negative" as an "unreliable" talent who was "difficult to work with" and "disruptive on sets" (123). However, her conduct should not be simplistically construed as merely unprofessional, or as victim of industry sexism and patriarchy. The change in Monroe's professional etiquette can be attributed to her health and increasing reliance on prescription medications, as well as her devotion to character motivation and the Method, both of which caused clashes with directors, costars, and crew in *The Prince and the Showgirl* and *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959).[24] As Carl Rollyson points out, her "extreme nervousness," despite the reassurance from her mentor Strasberg that this was a common characteristic for actors, "sometimes made her seem inept, withdrawn, and resistant to direction" (149). Monroe's chronic lateness did impact *The Misfits* set. Gable, the consummate professional, recalled working with Jean Harlow, who was always on time. He remarked, "It was a different era. In those days when stars were late, they were fired."[25] Nevertheless, Gable defended Monroe to the press about her tardiness: "It's part of her life, and I know she doesn't do it to upset anyone."[26] In fact, the only indication that her previous erratic behavior impacted her negotiations for *The Misfits* was UA executives' concerns about keeping the production on schedule. Jesse Skolkin highlighted UA's concerns, should Monroe's health, delay or preclude the actress from making the film:

> If because of Monroe pregnancy [sic], photography cannot commence on that date, we have the right to postpone photography to a date between July 1, 1961 and June 30, 1962. Subject to his availability, Huston is obligated to go along. An attempt should be made to cover this in the Gable and Clift agreements.[27]

Skolkin's remarks also underscore the importance of casting Monroe in the film, noting that any delay caused by her health would compel the director and her costars to reschedule so as to accommodate her. Closer scrutiny of correspondences between producer Frank Taylor and costume designer Dorothy Jeakins, archived at Indiana University's Lilly Library, attest to the substantial control that Monroe had over her image in the film. This resulted in the firing of Jeakins and hiring of Jean Louis for her personal wardrobe in *The Misfits*—apart from the credited costumes (Jesse Munden) and wardrobe (Shirlee Strahm).[28] These occurrences belie the notion that Monroe's unprofessionalism impacted her ability to leverage control over not only her image in the film, but also her acting.

Monroe's adoption of the Method was a strategic career move, one that fortified her star power precisely because her Hollywood sexpot image did not afford her the same financial earnings or professional respect compared to the male talent in *The Misfits*. Consequently, her contractual terms did not match Gable's star agency nor Miller's authorial control over the script, both of which had far-reaching ramifications on the finished film. Miller's UA contract gave him alone (and not Monroe) control over the final version of *The Misfits* script, and it further specified that director John Huston must accept all changes to the script made by Miller.[29] Likewise, Gable had final script approval, in that once he read the screenplay, as stated in his UA contract, "there are to be no further changes in it without his

consent."[30] A confluence of sources ranging from UA memos to Jim Goode's journalistic account from the set and Eli Wallach's autobiography all verify Gable's final script approval.[31] Gable explained on set that he was dissatisfied with his character Gay: "I didn't like the original ending of the screenplay but I didn't know the solution. I think Arthur's new ending is the answer…he [Gay] says if it makes you that unhappy, I'll find another way of life. That isn't breaking him..." (Goode 206). As Peter J. Bailey notes, the Gable-approved version of *The Misfits* ending gives Gay "the status of late-emerging protagonist and the hero of the film" (212).

In my assessment of the archival evidence provided by the Huston, Taylor, and UA collections, I conclude that Gable made final script approval a key contractual bargaining point so as to influence his character and make it more in line with his established screen persona. With the exception of *Gone With the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), Gable always "got the girl." By contrast, Monroe was not pleased about the revised ending, nor with *The Misfits* script as a whole.[32] Bailey asserts that Monroe understood the "overshadowing" of her character Roslyn in favor of Gay, but she attributed this shift to Miller and Huston, calling it "their movie"; explained Monroe: "It's really about the cowboys and the horses. They don't need me at all, not as an actress. Only for the money. To put my name on the film. To seduce people to…see another sex film about a dumb blonde" (Luitjers 18). As my analysis of the archival materials from *The Misfits* has illuminated, it was also Gable's film. Monroe's creative and star agency was dwarfed in favor of her aging male costar as well as her screenwriter-husband Miller; together their creative control enabled them to change the ending that appears in the final film. Nevertheless, Monroe was no shrinking violet—she abdicated contractual power to these men because she desired control over her acting and screen image, and she believed in the script written by Miller. Thus, *The Misfits* is a case study that complicates our understanding of the gender dynamics during this transition from the Classical Hollywood to New Hollywood, as the American film industry would increasingly revolve around male creative auteur and/or star power, a trend that continues to this current day.

This essay has argued for a reconsideration of *The Misfits* within the canon of postwar American cinema as a transitional Hollywood film between old and New Hollywood. Illuminated by archival materials from the UA papers, the behind-the-scenes negotiations for *The Misfits* highlights an important shift in the Hollywood filmmaking that prioritized male stardom (and authorship) economically, mirroring its renewed focus on male-oriented genres during the 1960s and into New Hollywood. At the same time, these primary materials crystallize the creative priorities of Monroe: her artistry and professional recognition of her talent beyond her sexpot image, two attributes that would be key for female actors working in the New Hollywood era and beyond. My analysis of *The Misfits*' transitional stardom off-screen points to the gender gap that persists in contemporary Hollywood in the twenty-first century, given the continued disparities in terms of pay, narrative screen time, and creative work behind the camera in feature filmmaking. The shifting creative bargaining and personifications of stardom in this postwar Western are two such examples that attest to rethinking *The Misfits*' transitional Hollywood significance.[33]

Emily Carman is an associate professor of film and media studies in the Dodge College of Film and Media Arts at Chapman University. She is author of *Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System* (University of Texas Press, 2016) and co-editor of the anthology, *Hollywood and the Law* (BFI Press Palgrave-MacMillian, 2015). She has published articles on stardom, American cinema, and film historiography in *The Moving Image, Quarterly Review of Film and Video, Celebrity Studies*, and *Cinephile*. She is currently writing a book about John Huston's *The Misfits* as a transitional film through which to understand the important industry shifts from classical to New Hollywood.

End Notes

1. The United Artists Collection (UAC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research (WCFTR) Madison, WI. The studio memos between executives outline much of the contract deals struck for all of the major talent who appeared in *The Misfits*. Additionally, I consulted the John Huston Papers (JHP), the Frank Taylor Papers (FTP) at the Lilly Library at Indiana University , and Thelma Ritter and Joseph Aloysius Moran Papers (TRJAMP), Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Beverly Hills, CA as well for this essay.
2. See Bailey 193-219; Salzberg, 78-87, and Konkle, *Some Kind of Mirror*.
3. See Monaco 139, his chapter 9 titled "Male Domination of the Hollywood Screen" discusses the aforementioned three actors as well as Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman and Gene Hackman as to how the 1960s and 1970s "proved to be far more agreeable to male actors" (139).

4. As Balio points out in his introduction, the old UA (founded by Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and D.W. Griffith in 1919) depended on independent producers solely financing their films.
5. Balio also notes how these financial terms enabled the producer to attain advantageous tax incentives, and that talent were not compelled by long-term contracts – all agreements with UA were non-exclusive (42).
6. This included a cut of the film's distribution profits and approval of the final screenplay. For more about the film's arrangement with Seven Arts and UA, see Goode 21.
7. Memo dated March 30, 1959, UAC, WCFTR.
8. For example, Lev notes that Jane Russell in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and Lauren Bacall and Betty Grable in *How to Marry a Millionaire*, all earned more in salary than Monroe.
9. Konkle also cites Dorothy Manning's *Photoplay* article "The Woman and the Legend" that called this "one of the greatest single triumphs ever won by an actress against a powerfully entrenched major studio" in 1956 (Konkle 12).
10. This practice remains in place for A-list Hollywood stars, male and female, who seek to diversify their acting careers by developing their own material with their own production companies, apart from studio roles. For more examples of star-producers in the post-studio system, see McDonald 107-116.
11. In Walsh's compelling book, she examines the under-studied tradition of feminist Method acting in Hollywood (and by feminist she means second wave feminism). Although Monroe is not one of Walsh's case studies, she classifies her within this group of feminist Method actresses who "were determined to change the conventions governing women's screen performance and the idealizations Hollywood so often applied to women's lives" by employing the "realist values of the Actors Studio" as a "counterweight to Hollywood's default setting of glamor" (3).
12. Walsh, Women, 37.
13. In my book, tentatively titled *A Misfit Cinema*, I include a full analysis of the transitional acting styles of the leading cast members and Monroe's use of the Method in *The Misfits*.
14. See Carman, *Independent Stardom*.
15. By 1959, four female stars ranked in the top ten: Sandra Dee, Debbie Reynolds, Susan Hayward, and Elizabeth Taylor, but Monroe remained absent after 1956. See Lev 306.
16. See Schatz 469-71. From 1940 onward, male stars outnumber women 7 to 3. See also Lev 306.
17. Memo to Robert Blumofe written by Jesse Skolkin, dated December 30, 1959, page 2, UAC, WCFTR.
18. Salary terms outlined in memo written by UA executive Arnold Burk to Goldberg, February 5, 1960, UAC, WCFTR. The character actress Thelma Ritter earned $40,000 for four weeks of shooting and $20,000 as a deferment out of the Net receipts; see her contract dated June 30, 1960, page 3, TRJAMP, MHL.
19. Eli Wallach recalled that Gable would "leave the set, waving a polite goodbye as he drove away" promptly at 5:00 PM (223). While the exact duration of his on-set hours are not spelled out in the UA memos for Gable's contract for *The Misfits* (nor is a final copy of his contract in the file – since UA was a distributor-only studio), a December 7, 1959 specifies that UA must emulate his "working time, act of God contingencies, etc. as per "Run Silent," (*Run Silent, Run Deep* directed by Robert Wise was released by UA in 1958, costarring Gable and Burt Lancaster, whose HHL productions company produced the film). See UAC, WCFTR.
20. *The Misfits* filming did not conclude until November 4, 1960. Figures provided by *Daily Variety*, 31 October 1960 and his final earnings for *The Misfits* were noted by his obituary in *Daily Variety*, 18 November 1960, cited from *The Misfits* AFI catalog entry.
21. Miller also attributed his creative control to UA, who he referred to as "Greenwich Village. These people had genuine aesthetic interest. They were not only businessmen" (Miller and Toubiana 33).
22. Goode, *The Misfits*, 202.
23. The provision goes on to outline that any replacement director/costars "who are available and who will render services for the same or less compensation." Jesse Skelkin to Robert Blumofe, UA memo dated December 30, 1959, page 4, UAC, WCFTR. See also December 30, 1959 memo, provision 7, page 3, memo to Robert Blumofe and Jesse Skolkin, UAC, WCFTR.
24. For example, Monroe biographer Rollyson also notes how Laurence Olivier disregarded the advice of Monroe's previous directors, Joshua Logan and Billy Wilder, on how to best work with Monroe. See Rollyson 148-149. Miller and Olivier later admitted that Monroe's performance in *The Prince and the Showgirl*, in Miller's words, lent "the film a depth of pathos it did not really have" (Miller 422), which Keri Walsh suggests "that her acting preparations in fact may have contributed something new and valuable that

was lacking in the script" (38).

25. See Goode, *The Misfits,* 105. On this, Eli Wallach recalled that Gable was a "true professional, always on time and line perfect." See *The Good, the Bad, and Me,* 223.

26. *Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 1960, cited in *The Misfits* AFI catalog entry.

27. Jesse Skolkin to Robert Blumofe, UA memo dated December 30, 1959, page 4, UAC, WCFTR.

28. Dorothy Jeakins, letter to Marilyn Monroe, May 3, 1960, FTC.

29. See Jesse Skolkin to Robert Blumofe, memo dated December 30, 1959, UAC, WCFTR, page 1-2.

30. Memo dated December 7, 1959, titled "Re: Clark Gable—The Misfits," from Robert F. Blumofe to Seymour M. Peyser, page 1. UAC, WCFTR.

31. See December 30, 1959 memo, titled "Re: The Misfits," page 3, provision 7. Please note that Huston "approves screenplay and will accept any changes made by Miller." UAC, WCFTR. Eli Wallach in his autobiography also noted that Gable "contractually had the power" to veto a scene from *The Misfits* script (which Wallach claimed Gable did to a scene they would have played together); see Wallach 224.

32. Bailey points out that this sentiment was tragically expressed through Monroe's increasing barbiturate intake that later required her to be hospitalized in Los Angeles and shut down production for a week (206). Production was shut down August 30th to September 6th, 1960, according to industry trades *Variety,* the *LA Times*, and *The New York Times* coverage, as noted in the American Film Institute (AFI) catalog entry on the film.

33. Although the reception of *The Misfits* was mixed at the time of its release, with critics finding its perspective arcane and more European than American, Monroe herself thought that though the film had its problems, "it would eventually become a classic" (Banner 361).

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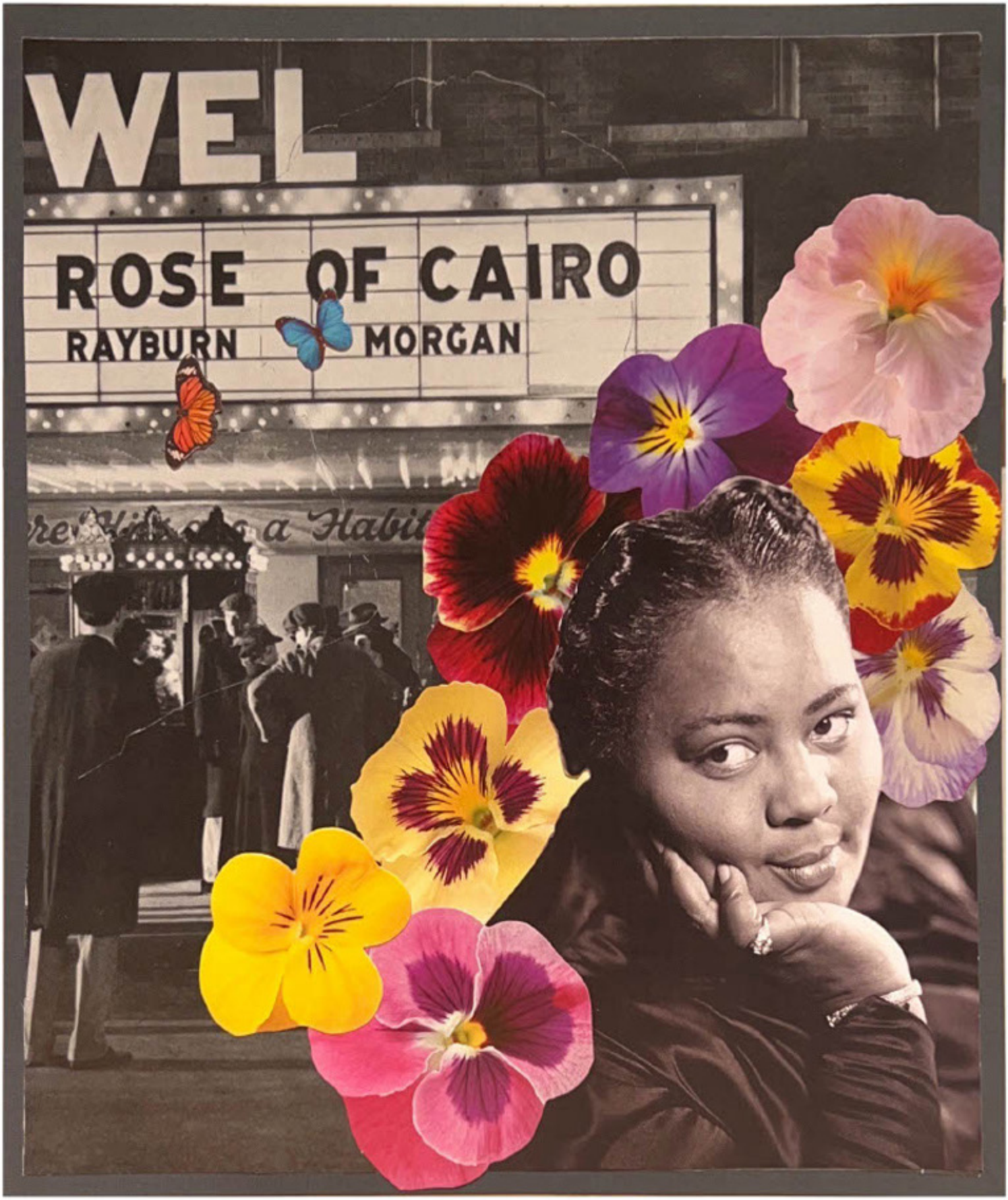
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Monica Roxanne Sandler

The First Years of #OscarsSoWhite: Louise Beavers, Hattie McDaniel, and the History of Black Media Discourse at the Academy Awards

Abstract

The #OscarsSoWhite twitter campaign started a major conversation in the 2010s about diversity at the Academy Awards, and Hollywood more broadly. However, the moment was just the latest in a long history of media discourse responding to the event. This paper examines the news coverage around the first two Black performers to receive awards "buzz": Louise Beavers in Imitation of Life *(1934); and Hattie McDaniel, who became the first person of color to win an Academy Award for her performance in* Gone With the Wind *(1939). Beavers, who ultimately did not receive a nomination, had been the first potential Black contender at the event; nonetheless, her snub facilitated a dialogue about the systemic exclusion of minority groups at the Oscars that continues today. As the first Black winner, McDaniel fueled a wider exchange about what the moment would ultimately mean for progress on screen. McDaniel had broken barriers, but did that actually accomplish anything? This paper focuses on the symbolic meaning of the Academy Awards trophy and how its allure as Hollywood's most coveted achievement has often been used as a symbolic gesture without any long-term substance. At the same time, the modes of discourse around the event has motivated conversations and pushback exposing the wider systemic realities of the American film industry. This paper looks at the origins of Black media discourse around the event, and how they persist into the contemporary context of the Academy Awards.*

In January 2015, with the announcement of the Academy Award nominations, activist April Reign started a movement with a simple tweet and the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite. As she stated: "#OscarsSoWhite they asked to touch my hair" (Ugwu). The tweet, of course, identified the reality that, despite many potential contenders, no people of color had been nominated in the major acting categories. Her tweet quickly went viral, instigating a wave of critical commentary on one of Hollywood's oldest and most sacrosanct institutions, the Academy Awards. The controversy was further exacerbated when the snubs continued for a second year in 2016. The *LA Times* remarked: "It's another embarrassing Hollywood sequel" (Keegan and Zeitchik). The massive backlash has come to define recent drives from the Academy, seeking to reconfigure its voting pool and membership composition. Soonafter, the organization committed to doubling the number of women and minorities in its membership, which at the time was reported to be 91% white and 77% male; a goal it successfully accomplished in 2020 (Ugwu).

Though the aftermath of #OscarsSoWhite continues to drive the goals of the modern Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), it may also be seen as a reflection on a history. Indeed, what can be considered the first iteration of #OscarsSoWhite occurred in 1935. An article in the

Figure 1. Louise Beavers in Imitation of Life *(1934).*

Pittsburg Courier commented on the absence of Louise Beavers for her work in *Imitation of Life* (1934) at the awards: "Louise Beavers, who 'stole the picture'" from some of "Hollywood's greatest film luminaries by her superior acting, would be entitled to consideration for the Motion Picture Arts and Science Academy award… but 'she is black'" ("Color Bars"). In the run-up to the seventh Oscars, there had been a small but concerted effort to celebrate Beavers' performance as Delilah Johnson, a domestic servant who helps her employer (played by Claudette Colbert) launch a pancake company that essentially involves Colbert's character stealing Johnson's recipes. As seen in the *Courier* commentary, Beaver's snub was not surprising to contemporary critics, and was instead discussed as emblematic of larger issues in Hollywood: the limitations of roles available for Black performers, and the lack of recognition given to those who succeeded in bringing depth to the range of stereotypes typically offered (Petty). Like #OscarsSoWhite, Beaver's Oscar snub became a catalyst for a range of discourse around the Awards and the lack of opportunities for Black performers in the American film industry.

As case studies, this paper analyzes the dialogues around the two earliest Black contenders at the event. This includes Beavers in 1935, but also Hattie McDaniel and her victory in 1940 for her performance in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Through these examples, reporters at Black news outlets debated two overarching questions: what does it mean to be snubbed from the event? And, and, conversely, what does it mean to be celebrated? While Beaver's snub reflected the barriers for minority groups, McDaniel's eventual win highlighted the inherent contradictions around the achievement. Even as Hollywood celebrated her portrayal, McDaniel was seated at a segregated table at the Coconut Grove (Sturtevant, 75). Studying these discourses, we see a history of writers trying to grapple with the meaning of symbolic representation, debating whether or not victory can lead to true change. This paper asks two overarching questions: how has the public profile of the event both fueled and hindered representation throughout Oscar history? And what has been the lasting impact? These early examples show how the Oscars have helped ingrain the kinds of systemic racism that Hollywood has only recently been forced to self-examine through movements like #OscarsSoWhite. At the same time, the highly visible space has also created a forum for discourses pushing back against those same injustices.

Louise Beavers and the Right to Participate

Louise Beaver's Oscar snub was about more than simply missing out in the acting categories:; it was about what acclaim in these kinds of white public spaces could mean for representation on the screen. Headlines like "Color Bars Louise Beavers from Film Awards" were the beginning of a dialogue about what

it means to be allowed to participate in what was emerging as a new system of meritocracy in American filmmaking. Started in 1929, only six years before, what had initially been a small ceremony with limited attendance had already become the most coveted accomplishment in Hollywood (Davis). Exploring the example of the awards commentary around Beavers, however, allows us to consider the implications of the exclusion at an event that was only growing in significance within Hollywood industrial practice and popular culture.

Rather than viewing the awards discourse as an endorsement of Beavers and the film--indeed, many reporters at Black media outlets were critical of its portrayal of a "mammy" character--much of the commentary responded to the kinds of acclaim seen in white news venues (Everett, 179). Columnist Jimmie Fidler, for example, wrote: "I don't see how it is possible to overlook the magnificent portrayal . . . If the industry chooses to ignore Miss Beavers' performance, please let this reporter, born and bred in the South, tender a special award of praise to Louise Beavers for the finest performance of 1934" ("Color Bars"). In response, Chappy Gardner at the *Pittsburgh Courier* commented that Fidler, "has been telling the world over the air every week that Louise Beavers has turned in the best performance of the year. And while everybody else heard him and thousands agree with him, the 700 Academy members evidently wore their ear mufflers" (Gardner). Gardner's critique emphasizes the modes of recognition that Beavers had already received, from predominantly white critics praising the performance and from consumers through the national box office success around the film.

Even still, she was unable to crack the ever-elusive Academy. To writers like Gardner, Beavers's exclusion felt especially egregious because Claudette Colbert, Beaver's costar in *Imitation of Life*, ultimately went home with the Best Actress statue. Though she was rewarded for *It Happened One Night* (1934) rather than *Imitation*, Colbert's recognition immediately drew a comparison to Beavers as her snubbed costar. Gardner noted: "this actress [Beavers] stole the picture from her white sister on sheer acting ability. And the honorable judges just couldn't take it -- and didn't." (Gardner). While critics could praise Black performances, an Oscar represented the recognition by the top figureheads within the industry itself; and, more significantly, it meant being seen as part of a peer group. Beyond the symbolism of being celebrated by peers, the value of the awards has always been heavily tied to the view amongst studio creatives that winning a trophy could benefit their careers. The Oscars are seen as a tool for social mobility into the upper echelons of industrial prosperity. From this standpoint, the conversations around Beavers' snub exposed the problem that Black performers, even at their best, were not invited to be part of this emerging system of prestige--a discussion still continued in the #OscarsSoWhite tweets roughly 80 years later. These past and present issues may be best defined in relation to Pierre Bourdieu's principles around symbolic inclusion. As he explains: "There is no other criterion of membership of a field than the objective fact of producing effects within it. One of the difficulties of orthodox defense or explicit terms of entry is the fact that polemics imply a form of recognition" (Bourdieu, 42). The first stage, as writers began to indicate, is being able to participate in the first place. Even worse, despite the acclaim, Beavers quickly began to face career setbacks following her performance in *Imitation.* After her team negotiated a higher salary for her based on name recognition, the performer began to be offered fewer parts in films, perhaps paving the way for a performer like McDaniel ("Hattie McDaniel Won't"). In Beavers' case, the public recognition led to career consequences rather than new prosperity.

Hattie McDaniel and the Meanings of Symbolic Representation

Can an Oscar win actually facilitate progress? This question became a major source of debate around Hattie McDaniel's Best Supporting Actress victory in 1940. Clarence Muse summarized the complexities of the moment in his column for *The Chicago Defender.* Speaking about the central racism in *Gone with the Wind,* a film glorifying the lost ages of the antebellum south, he notes: "The STORY is not inspiration, EDUCATIONAL, and it is DANGEROUS propaganda." Yet, he continues, "WITH all of this, HATTIE McDANIEL has been NOMINATED for the ACADEMY AWARD, and she SHOULD win it." He hoped that the mainstream critical acclaim she received would translate into more nuanced roles for the performer. McDaniel, he explains, is "A GREAT ACTRESS, that should be placed SOMEDAY in a STORY that not only SHOWS her ABILITY, but one that MEANS GLORY to a RACE, trying HARD to find TRUE DEMOCRACY" (Muse). In the run-up to the ceremony, this cause also became a call for community organizing. The *Pittsburgh Courier* published a letter from reader Bill Lawrence, proclaiming:

> Why doesn't The Pittsburgh Courier start a letter-writing campaign among Negroes to write to Selznick Studios praising the work of Miss Hattie McDaniels in "Gone with the Wind" and demand that she receive the Supporting Player Academy Award for 1939? It will mean more and better roles for Negroes in major film productions. (Lawrence)

The Courier later reported that writers had "flooded Hollywood with letters on behalf of Miss McDaniel" (Morris). Notably, given the range of voters, it is unclear how this would have influenced the outcome; rather, it highlights a level of collaborative support. Like Muse's comments, Laurence's proposal looked to the future, arguing that McDaniel's win could have a major social impact that would justify widespread mobilization to help secure this win.

At the same time, other writers questioned whether the celebration of a stereotype could actually be seen as an accomplishment. Shortly before the nomination, Afro-American columnist Lillian Johnson responded to a letter from a group of school children, asking if McDaniel could win an Oscar. In her response, Johnson downplayed the value of the trophies. Alternatively, she explains: "Miss McDaniel has something that she and the colored race need far more now than they need academy awards -- a long-term contract at a very good salary." McDaniel had recently signed a contract with Selznick Studios, becoming one of the few Black actors with a permanent contract. Johnson thereby celebrates that McDaniel's biggest achievement was her potential for future work. In a tone implying complete disbelief that McDaniel would soon be an Oscar contender, she continues: "The wisest thing to do, I think, is the thing that Miss McDaniel is doing. Just waiting and getting more roles. If she is good in all of them over a period of time, she will break down prejudice." "When that time comes" that America sees systematic change and a reevaluation of the kinds of performances available to minorities, "she will get her academy awards" (Ibid). Within two weeks, it was announced that McDaniel had received her nomination.

The commentaries raised across these articles, however, were predominantly a debate about the value of symbolic representation. Speaking about the modern Oscar landscape, Maryann Erigha explains that, in theory, "once a group has established visibility in symbols or images, its members might subsequently pursue advocacy for numerical representation" (Erigha, 26). The goal had always been to translate the visibility of the Oscars into more concrete forms of progress. Indeed, amongst many Black reporters,

Figure 2. Hattie McDaniel with her Oscar statue for winning Best Supporting Actress at the 1939 Academy Awards.

McDaniel'a win was heralded as a moment of broken barriers and new opportunities. One article in the *Atlanta Daily* explained: "While many may not relish the role of servitude in which Hattie McDaniel scored, it has often been the case where a person who accepted the lower places in life or occupied the back seat has been invited to the front" ("The Academy Award Of"). The writer, however, does maintain a clear asterisk reminding readers of the racism of McDaniel's winning role. Another writer, Ruby Goodwin, decidedly proclaimed: "the Academy proved itself an unbiased body of people ... This proves beyond a doubt that a Negro who can deliver the goods will be eligible for the award that really carries with it international recognition" (Goodwin). Ultimately, however, no Black actor would win in a competitive

category again until Sidney Poitier in 1962, though James Baskett was rewarded with an honorary award for *Song of the South* (1946).

Erigha emphasizes that the central danger of symbolic representation is precisely that it is symbolic and not concrete. It "can be present but with little real improvements toward alleviating inequalities"; it "could be only superficial yet not substantive" (Erigha, 26). For this reason, awards can easily become a shield that does not translate into other industrial prospects. This was Johnson's central reservation in her January article: she feared what a win would represent to Hollywood, explaining, "it is one thing to contend for a right and win it when only the right is at stake. It is another to win a right like an academy award at the expense of losing a right like that of earning a living" (Johnson, "Light and Shadow"). In the months ahead, McDaniel was unable to draw the frequently seen benefits of the Oscars. Though she previously gained a contract with Selznick Studios, in the aftermath she chose not to renegotiate her rate, despite this being a typical act for most recent winners. Her fear, one article noted, was that she would fall into similar traps as Beavers. McDaniel explained: "Big salaries and little work don't interest me, I don't want more money. I want more work" ("Hattie McDaniel Won't"). Even still, she became typecast into Mammy characters going forward.

However, bearing in mind the initial goals that fueled the rallying over McDaniel -- better parts and opportunities -- the early-1940s did see some headway. Thomas Cripps emphasizes a new range of roles offered during wartime and the rise of new stars like Lena Horne. Nonetheless, these advances largely left typecasted performers, like McDaniel, out of work. This movement was not necessarily in direct response to McDaniel's success; it is often attributed to the work of the NAACP, and a wider range of wartime campaigns (Cripps). Yet, even as these efforts ultimately left McDaniel out of work, the public profile of McDaniel's award was a significant public relations tool in its earliest phases. Within months of the Academy announcement, the NAACP put on an award ceremony described in many outlets as "Black Oscars." Beyond celebrating McDaniel, honours were given to the most prominent African American performers in Hollywood, including Beavers ("NAACP Gives").[1] The prizes were balanced between celebrating community and making an outwardly public statement. Emblematic of the latter effort, Louella Parsons wrote of her surprise "that there are so many fine artists of this race on the screen that it is possible to have independent awards", and the event was covered in most major newspapers (Parsons). Here, we can see how the win continued to fuel activism. McDaniel's award emphasized the push and pull between the calls for change in Hollywood, and the industry's own self-complacency. Yet, a place for discourse and dissent around the Oscars seemed to have been cemented.

The long-term effects of McDaniel's win, however, may have been the impacts it had on the white corners of Hollywood. In the aftermath, mainstream coverage focused on the symbolic meaning of the victory for Hollywood, and American identity more broadly. Johnson, in another column entry, describes how, "writers of prose, philosophy, and news had a Roman holiday" with the moment "hailed as a symbol of American democracy and a blow at Hitlerism and all that it stands for" (Johnson, "A Woman Talks"). On the cusp of WWII, reporters like Ed Sullivan stated, "The United States motion picture industry served notice to the world that it was not narrow or bigoted" ("Tolerance"). The moment was promoted as a grand statement, and proof of Hollywood's racial tolerance.

By the post-war period, many of the gains described by Cripps had already started to regress. This was embodied by the release of Disney's *Song of the South*, which received a massive wave of backlash from Black audiences leading to protests and boycotts. Featuring McDaniel as another Mammy character, columnist Hedda Hopper remarked: "Hattie, I discovered, had not been victimized by the whites. She had been attacked by certain members of her own race simply because she had tried 'to earn an honest dollar' by playing roles those critics thought degrading to Negroes." Nevermind, she explains, that "It was her mammy role in 'Gone With the Wind' that got her an Oscar" (Hopper). Her comments harken back to the discourse that had emerged when McDaniel won in the first place: that it would lead to better parts and

1. This included honours for Louise Beavers for *No Time for Comedy*; Ben Carter and Clarence Muse for *Maryland*; Willie Best for *The Ghost Breakers*; Earnest Whitman for *The Return of Frank James*; Eddie (Rochester) Anderson and Therese Harris for *Buck Benny Rides Again*; and a special award for Bill Robinson, "for the many contributions he has made and for his various activities as an American" ("NAACP Gives").

better pictures. One world war later, the pushback highlighted the lack of change over the decade.

Within weeks of Hopper's article, James Baskett became the second Black performer to win an Oscar, an honorary award for his performance as Uncle Remus--also in *Song of the South*. The prospect was initially raised by the Mayor of Atlanta at the movie premiere. Richard Dier at *Afro-American* commented that the Mayor "arose and told the audience that James Baskett ... should get the Academy Award for his fine acting. What the venerable Mayer meant to say was that no film character ever created compares with Uncle Remus in his interpretation of a role that is humiliating and degrading to the race" (Dier). Dier expresses his frustration over the celebration of yet another Black performer bringing depth to characters ultimately grounded in racism. Even still, the recognition sparked the next wave of commentary about representation and the roles offered to minorities — a discourse cycle that had now solidly grown to exist around the Oscars.

Conclusion

McDaniel's victory became the stuff of generations of Hollywood self-congratulation. One immediately thinks of George Clooney's 2006 Best Supporting Actor acceptance speech, when he stated: "This Academy, this group of people gave Hattie McDaniel an Oscar in 1939 when Blacks were still sitting in the backs of theaters. I'm proud to be a part of this Academy, proud to be part of this community, and proud to be out of touch" (Clooney). Clooney was clearly unaware that the Oscar banquet itself was one of those still-segregated places. Even further, the cycle of celebrating Black performers, and publicizing this celebration as a moment of groundbreaking social progress, has historically been followed up by generations of overlook. This harkens back to Halle Berry's speech in 2002, as the first Black performer to win Best Actress. She spoke of how the moment was bigger than herself, "for every nameless, faceless woman of color that now has a chance because this door tonight has been opened" (Berry). She later retracted her statement in 2022, after 20 years without another Black winner: "It didn't open the door," Berry said. "The fact that there's no one standing next to me is heartbreaking" (Bahr).[2] This highlights what has often been a cycle of optimism around the event, followed by a sea of nothingness.

However, what has been significant about them is how their visibility creates a highly effective mechanism for fueling discussion. As a spectacle designed to draw attention, it has easily become a national forum for discourse, debate, and perhaps new understanding. Nowhere has this been more clearly accomplished than with modern social spaces like Twitter, which have brought discussions of the Oscars even more to the forefront. The questions of the past decade have now become, will these new pushes actually lead to meaningful change in Black representation on screen? The success of *Moonlight* (2017) appeared to be hugely significant after two years of #OscarsSoWhite. However, to see the complications of this aftermath, look no further than the 91st Academy Awards in 2019. The night saw a record-breaking six African-American winners at the ceremony, only for *Green Book* (2018) to win Best Picture at the end of the night--a story about jazz performer Don Shirley and his white driver, described by one reporter as a film that "spoon-feeds racism to white people" (Judge).[3] On the complexities of the evening, April Reign later noted: "I don't believe in having one good night and then declaring, 'Everything is great.' The pendulum swings back and forth, as we've seen" (Ugwu). For this reason, it is important not to ignore the continued challenges of representation that mainstream Oscar publicity may seek to mask.

In 2020, the Academy reached its diversity goals announced in 2016. However, even after doubling the numbers of women and POC in the organization, AMPAS remained 84% white and 68% male, raising questions about the long-term impact (Barnes). The history in this paper emphasizes the superficial role of the awards and their position of presenting all the gloss and glamour of Hollywood, often devoid of any substance. At the same time, this forum has the potential to continue facilitating productive dialogues around opportunities for Black performers in Hollywood. As Director Barry Jenkins has commented

2. Michelle Yeoh became the second woman of color to win in the Best Actress category in 2023 for her performance in Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022).

3. Winners that night included: Ruth E. Carter - Best Costume Design for *Black Panther;* Hannah Beachler - Best Production Design for *Black Panther*; Mahershala Ali - Best Supporting Actor for *Green Book*; Regina King - Best Supporting Actress for *If Beale Street Could Talk*; Peter Ramsey - Best Animated Feature for directing *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*; and Spike Lee - Best Adapted Screenplay for *BlacKkKlansman.*

on the future of #OscarsSoWhite: "We just have to keep the conversation going and keep making movies" (Ugwu). He describes the movement as ongoing; and as we have seen, it continues to build upon a long-existing legacy.

Monica R. Sandler has her Ph.D. from UCLA, graduating June 2023. Her dissertation research presents the most extensive existing history of the Academy Awards and the Hollywood awards season. The project fixates on the socioeconomic role of prizes and the lasting effects that these systems of meritocratic achievement have had on the hierarchies of labor and disparities in opportunity still dominating the industry today.

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Figure 3. Hattie McDaniel posing at home with her Oscar statue for winning Best Supporting Actress at the 1939 Academy Awards.

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Jimmy Dean Smith

Poison: Flannery O'Connor's Habit of Moviegoing

Abstract

The American novelist and short story writer Flannery O'Connor felt divinely chosen in her vocation from an early age. However, like more than sixty percent of the American population in the 1940s, she had a moviegoing habit that lured her away from practicing her art. With the recent release of archival materials, we are able to see how frequently O'Connor wrestles with addiction to film, as well as how little effect her performative dislike of cinema had. In the end, cinema—Gone With the Wind, Mighty Joe Young, Till the End of Time—*informs her fiction, no matter how strong her protests that movies are low and anti-art.*

On February 6, 1941, the students of Peabody High School in Milledgeville, Georgia, saw Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (1939) at the nearby Campus Theater ("Students"). Among that year's Peabodites was fifteen-year-old Mary Flannery O'Connor, who would soon drop her first name and become one of the United States' greatest writers, publishing two novels and two collections of short stories that are by turns hilarious and terrifying—and never less than morally rigorous. A devout Catholic and an intellectual devoted to upending mid-century bourgeois complacency, O'Connor noted that the strongest polemical tool of her fiction was "shock": "to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures" (*Collected Works* 806). Although O'Connor's Southern gothic fiction has been adapted to film several times, most notably John Huston's *Wise Blood* (1977), O'Connor's own professed beliefs about cinema derive from her apparent conviction that, for the most part, film is incapable of "shouting" and "startling." At the same time, however, in her teens and young adulthood O'Connor often visited movie theaters in the college towns she lived in. Her mixed feelings about moviegoing, which have begun to appear as archival materials emerge from embargo, constitute a complex, nigh inarticulable, relationship with Golden Age cinema. That field trip to the Campus Theater, an entertainment O'Connor was forced to enjoy, must have been agonizing to the fifteen-year-old.

"For the twenty-five years following [its] premiere," writes O'Connor's biographer Brad Gooch, "*Gone With the Wind* remained a running joke in O'Connor's life and work" (69). In adulthood, O'Connor swiped at Margaret Mitchell in short stories like "The Partridge Festival" (CW 776) and "The Enduring Chill" (CW 560) in which genteel Georgians, of O'Connor's own social class, cite *Gone with the Wind* as a "good book," the kind authors ought to write instead of literary fiction that doesn't sell. "Put the war in [your novel]," one bourgeois mother tells her author son: "That always makes a long book" (*CW* 660). She does not have to add that the neighbors understand, even revere, novels about the war, but not those about social issues or matters of spiritual importance. The title story of O'Conner's first collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, features a purposefully bad *GWtW* joke (*CW* 139), and both it and the title story of her second collection, *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, satirize the plantation myth exemplified in Mitchell and Fleming (CW 143; 487-88). But O'Connor's most sustained engagement with *Gone with the Wind* was not with the novel, but with the 1939 film that epitomizes Golden Age Hollywood, the one Peabody School valo-

rized with a two-day field trip.

Most prominently, in "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," O'Connor uses the December 15, 1939 Atlanta premiere of the film to deconstruct the mendacity, vulgarity, and outright stupidity of Lost Cause mythology (*CW* 254-256). The film stalked her personal life, too. There was a "family rumor ... that the ... Tarleton twins owed their name" to O'Connor relatives (Gooch 67-8). As a graduate student at the University of Iowa in 1945, O'Connor was amused—and appalled—to meet a classmate who claimed that scenes from *GwtW* had been "took," or filmed, in the house O'Connor lived in throughout high school and college: "I assured her to the contrary, lest it get out that I was the niece of Scarlot [*sic*] O'Hara" (DR 35, editorial note in original), delivering a portmanteau that comments on the uber-belle's questionable character. The too-muchness of *Gone with the Wind* might have appalled (and amused) O'Connor. To say, as Brad Gooch does, that the "hoopla ... merely irked" the young

Figure 1. An original screening of Gone with the Wind.

Figure 2. Vivien Leigh as Scarlet O'Hara, expressing her own "antipathy" in Gone with the Wind.

Georgian fails to register the intensity of her antipathy to it and other ultra-popular vehicles of mass culture (67). "It is ... difficult," she later wrote, "to reconcile the South's instinct to preserve [its] identity with [its] equal instinct to fall eager victim to every poisonous breath from Hollywood" (*CW* 856). She arrived at this public stance—movies equal "poison"—as a teenager, even while she frequented the picture show.

With the exception of 1930, the percentage of American attending movies each week reached its zenith in the mid-1940s (Pautz). Like many in the nineteen-forties, O'Connor had the Hollywood habit, attending screenings with casual frequency. Unlike most habitual moviegoers, however, in adolescence she had already developed a self-image of high seriousness, recognizing herself "as a dedicated young artist, committed to her work and God above all else" (Bosco 66). Thus, she reflexively set her artistic-and-spiritual self apart from the mainstream tastes of her time, place, and class, following movie nights with what usually seems to be expressions of shame or disgust, casually reviling herself for "falling eager victim" to Hollywood: "I should know better than to go to the picture show" ("HM," 74). One may read O'Connor's purported dislike for Hollywood literally, as an early critic does regarding *Gone With the Wind*: "[S]he effectively employed the novel and the movie," writes J.O. Tate, "as sentimentalities, false images, misrepresentations, and bad taste" ("On Flannery O'Connor," 34). Her literary "exploration of worthless products, false ideals, and empty lives," writes Tate, regularly focuses on "commercial film," citing *GWtW* and *Mighty Joe Young*, "a miserable film released in 1949" as examples of "dreck" ("Uses," 20-1). In the ensuing fifty years, O'Connor's critics have grown less likely than Tate to ascribe elitist scornfulness to the writer, but O'Connor still claimed repeatedly to regret the time-wasting, soul-consuming addiction of the moviegoing habit. In retrospect, her repudiation of Hollywood product comes off almost as a performance of theorized snobbishness. As revealed in recently released archival documents (letters, journals, cartoons) to which Tate and myriad other early critics had no access, while O'Connor may have appeared to disdain "Hollywood at its worst" ("Uses," 20), while she was able (that is, before lupus affected her mobility and thus her ability to get to the picture show) she regularly consumed an awful lot of it.

"Yielded to the temptation of paying a nightly visit au cinema—not worth it," wrote O'Connor on 20 January 1944 (70). She was eighteen, then a junior at Georgia State College for Women, and already aware

of the hopes and burdens she embodied as an artist ("Am I just a brainy kid or am I a clever individual with refined, cultured, super-sophisticated artistic potentialities?" [68]). She lived at home in Milledgeville in a house then known as the Cline Mansion; Cline was her mother's birth name, and the residents of the mansion were Mary Flannery's aunts. At the time, Milledgeville was a "sleepy community at the dead center of Georgia, with barely six thousand residents" (Gooch 52), but for the students of Georgia College, "the four-block strip of downtown Milledgeville had its draws [including] two movie theaters, the Campus and the Co-ed" (Gooch 89). These theaters would have been especially popular during the forties, when pleasure seeking soldiers from nearby military installations filled Milledgeville (Gooch 98). "As the area's premier movie house, the Campus generally showed Hollywood's latest and best releases," writes a local historian. "During its early years, the theatre changed its movies as many as three or four times a week", while "the Co-ed tended to get second-rate fare or second runs of films that had already been shown at the Campus" (Jackson); a hint that O'Connor might not be exaggerating when claiming "nightly" moviegoing. From 29 December 1943 to the following 6 February, O'Connor kept a journal in an old-fashioned notebook she titled "Higher Mathematics." In it, she interrogates her own (at that point still theoretical) career as a writer, despairing comically but repeatedly of her laziness ("My greatest trouble in marketing a manuscript comes in the fact that I never send it off" [73]). While the young O'Connor often adopts a breezy tone in such pronouncements, the casual humor disguises a real existential fear. Sloth is not the only personal and spiritual shortcoming she recognizes: "I cherish a healthy respect for the avoidance of the seven deadly sins, but I fear a few of them are overtaking me" (71), reprehending the persistent temptations placed before her that take time and energy away from the artistic gifts God has given the devout Catholic teen.

While sloth and gluttony are foremost among these, there is also moviegoing. Without naming any of the films she saw, in "Higher Mathematics," O'Connor thrice writes about "going to the picture show," in each case regretting that decision: "Succumbed to cinema again" (73); "I should know better than to go to the picture show. I have outgrown them—particularly at night" (74); and "Yielded to the temptation of paying a nightly visit au cinema—not worth it" (70). The language—*succumbed, yielded to the temptation*--is that of theology. If, as Flannery O'Connor would shortly thereafter assert, she "want[ed] to be the best artist it is possible for me to be, under God" (*PJ* 29) and that "God has given me everything, all the tools, ... a good brain to use them with" (*PJ* 31), finally allowing her to be "the instrument for [God's] story" (*PJ* 11), then the picture shows drawing her away from the typewriter—"nightly"—are like the Devil tempting Christ in the wilderness. She cannot do God's work when she is giving into Hollywood frivolity, even though the temptation is almost overwhelming. Even if she is fated to live many years, she does not have time to waste.

Her language—again, succumbed and temptation—is likewise that of addiction. In a scene from her first novel, *Wise Blood*, O'Connor seems to recall the junkie-like shame and thrill of submitting to cinema. In letters to friends, O'Connor notes that she and the novel's halfwit second lead, Enoch Emory, are psychic twins (*CW* 970, 1000), suggesting that his struggles with the addictive habit of moviegoing resemble hers. "Helpless to resist the appeal of a movie poster" (Bacon, "Fondness" 31), Enoch Emory comically but pathetically struggles with the lowdown temptations of cinema:

> He ... stopped in front of a movie house where there was a large illustration of a monster stuffing a young woman into an incinerator. ... I ain't going in no picture show. ... I'm going home. I ain't going to wait around in no picture show. I ain't got the money to buy a ticket. ... I ain't even going to count thisyer change. It ain't but forty-three cent here, he said, that ain't enough. A sign said the price of a ticket for adults was forty-five cents, balcony, thirty-five. I ain't going to sit in no balcony, he said, buying a thirty-five cent ticket. (*CW* 78)

Enoch sets out good reasons not to go to the movies, but cannot convince himself to resist temptation. Ultimately, Enoch firmly tells himself, "I ain't going in," but "[t]wo doors flew open and he found himself moving down a long red foyer and then up a darker tunnel and then up a higher, still darker tunnel" (78-79). With a subtle shift of perspective, then, O'Connor specifies that Enoch no longer has even the illusion of autonomy. Instead, he "finds himself" performing an action over which he has no control, like an addict surrendering. After sitting through a tawdry triple-feature, which he does not enjoy, Enoch staggers out of the cinema to collapse against a building, a tableau vivant of junkie self-reproach.

One addiction a young O'Connor feared giving into was, to use the title of one of her stories, "the comforts of home." God does not want her to surrender her talents to middle class values—or, to put it more agnostically, O'Connor does not intend to demean

her abilities by settling for a mundane life. Young and curmudgeonly, in "Higher Mathematics" O'Connor inclines to regard her genteel home with an intellectual's disdain, so that she thinks of the bourgeois film habit, although she obviously adores it, as beneath her conception of who she is and can become. A few years earlier, H.L. Mencken had asserted that the "ideas in [film are] simply the common and familiar ideas of the inferior nine-tenths of mankind" (290). A similar perception informs the cinephile O'Connor's adolescent self-disgust: if she likes the same things her middle-class family and friends like, then movies must be "hollow and obvious" (Mencken 290). As a teenaged anti-bourgeois *artiste* in training, she must resist the commonplace mid-century addiction to Hollywood product. If around sixty percent of the population goes to movies weekly (Pautz), then cinema is surely a low habit to feed. In her cartoons for the Georgia College newspaper, O'Connor even attempts to put a satirical distance between herself and the habit of moviegoing, depicting a student who, having failed to make the Dean's List, will not be allowed to attend movies at night (*Cartoons* 39). (O'Connor herself failed to make the list because of a poor grade in a writing course [Gooch 93].)

However detrimental a diet of nightly cinema might have seemed to a teenaged O'Connor, it is not one she gave up when, at twenty, she left Milledgeville for graduate studies at the University of Iowa. This was the first time O'Connor lived away from her mother, but they were never out of touch. From 1945 to 1947, excepting winter and summer breaks, she and Regina Cline O'Connor wrote to each other almost every day. We do not have the mother's letters, but Flannery's—short, uneventful, usually humorless—seem to belie a claim O'Connor makes in "Higher Mathematics": "My epistolary powers enthrall me" (71). While the hilarious, profound, and brave letters in earlier collections—*The Habit of Being* (1979) and *Collected Works* (1988)—are indeed enthralling, those in the recently released *Dear Regina: Flannery O'Connor's Letters from Iowa* (2022) are mundane instead. These letters form one side of a kitchen table chat between parent and child, offering O'Connor little range for humor and profundity (For the latter, she availed herself of a contemporaneous notebook published as *A Prayer Journal* in 2013.) For the most part, Flannery tells Regina how her day went, and her plans for tomorrow. Among other quotidian details, the letters reveal that O'Connor continued yielding to the temptation of cinema. With the arch-bourgeois Regina Cline O'Connor as putative audience, O'Connor regularly dismisses Golden Age cinema as trash. Perhaps she is simply stating her opinions about the films that played in Iowa City, but there is also a distinct possibility that O'Connor takes pains to scoff at the preferred art of her mother's social class.

She notes seeing a variety of films, some that would eventually be considered classics: *Conflict* (1945)(18); *Anchors Aweigh* (1945)(22); *Junior Miss* (1945)(31-2); *Guest Wife* (1945)(38); *The Strange Affair of Uncle Harry* (1945)(40); *Over 21* (1945)(49); *Week-End at the Waldorf* (1945)(58); *What Next, Corporal Hargrove* (1945)(71); *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945)(78); *Spellbound* (1945)(86); *The Lost Weekend* (1945)(95); *Dragonwyck* (1946)(114); *Tomorrow Is Forever* (1946)(117-8); *Adventure* (1945)(120); *Whistle Stop* (1946)(124); *Till the End of Time* (1946)(146); *Anna and the King of Siam* (1946)(156); *The Green Years* (1946)(172); *The Stone Flower* (1946)(204); *Henry V* (1944)(211); *The Egg and I* (1947)(230); and *Dear Ruth* (1947)(240). O'Connor has little to say about these films, which is regrettable, albeit understandable, given the mundane nature of this epistolary conversation. In many cases, one strongly wishes that O'Connor had more to say. As an aficionado of poultry since early childhood ("When I was five, ... I began to collect chickens. What had been only a mild interest became a passion, a quest. I had to have more and more chickens" [*CW* 832]), O'Connor would have been well prepared to critique Fred MacMurray and Claudette Colbert's back-to-the-land chicken farming in *The Egg and I*.

Figure 3. A film still from The Egg and I *(1947).*

She does not follow up on seeing *Spellbound*, a missed opportunity for one great Catholic artist to comment on another. On other occasions, her brief comments suggest the O'Connors' everyday table talk back in Milledgeville might have included movies. Thus, after dismissing *The Bells of St. Mary's*, O'Connor goes on to write that, "It certainly glamourized the good nuns.

Figure 4. Till the End of Time *(1946), O'Connor's hidden inspiration for* Wise Blood.

You ought to see it for curiosity's sake" (78). Along with a passing reference to a newly announced stage version of *The Song of Bernadette*, O'Connor's recommendation suggests that the family took perverse interest in "religious fluff spewed out by a motion picture industry eager to cater to Catholic taste" (Smith 1). She also asks that, when it gets to Milledgeville, Regina recommend *The Lost Weekend* to "Aunt Mary [because] anyone with her alcoholic tendencies should be sobered by it" (103). O'Connor conditionally approves *Anchors Aweigh*, stating that it was "pretty good for a musical" (22), thus suggesting that Regina would already know what she usually thought of song-and-dance. (In *Wise Blood*, which she began writing at Iowa, she writes, "[Enoch] didn't like any picture shows but colored musical ones" [*CW* 78-9].) O'Connor reserves what might be her greatest praise ("very good indeed" [31]), for the mostly forgotten *Junior Miss*, George Seaton's 1945 adaptation of stories published in *The New Yorker* by Sally Benson, whose autobiographical stories had been made into *Meet Me in St. Louis* one year earlier. Along with *Week-End at the Waldorf* and, for that matter, *Anchors Aweigh*, *Junior Miss* can be read as a training film for O'Connor, whose plans ultimately were to move to New York and write, plans that fell short with the onset of lupus and the necessity of returning to the comforts of home.

Perhaps the most regrettably truncated review is for *Till the End of Time*. In an essay for *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Flannery O'Connor*, Jon Lance Bacon describes an assignment he gives his own students. As Bacon notes, "[b]efore the [Second World War] had even ended, studios began developing films about returning servicemen" and "whether the veteran would find his place" in the postwar social order ("Interdisciplinary" 101). *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) is, Bacon acknowledges, "the most acclaimed ... most famous" of such films, but his assignment instead requires the students in his O'Connor course to compare *Wise Blood* with *Till the End of Time*. In his essay, published in 2019, Bacon does not elucidate why he has his students focus on Edward Dmytryk's relatively obscure film instead of William Wyler's classic. Given the constraints under which O'Connor scholars often handle archival materials, however, Bacon perhaps could not explain his pedagogical decision. The Iowa letters, embargoed in 2019, would not be published for another three years. With their publication, it is now demonstrable that O'Connor had viewed *Till the End of Time* only a few weeks before she began imagining Hazel Motes, the nihilistic veteran/antihero of *Wise Blood*. (A later-arriving classic film about a returning veteran is John Huston's *Wise Blood* (1979). When we first see Hazel Motes, the discharged soldier is still in uniform). Bacon's ostensible purpose is to supply his students with the socio-historical context of a "more than a little disorienting" novel that "features a superabundance of shocking actions, from murder to

self-mutilation" (100). Through the film, Bacon seeks to inform his class of "the literal situation in which [Hazel Motes] finds himself at the beginning of the narrative," situating O'Connor's "jarring" Christian novel in a realistic setting (100). On the other hand, Bacon's complimentary report of his students' insights (101-4) allows him to make explicit connections to *Till the End of Time*, three years before he himself would himself have been able to justify that comparison (that is, rather than to *The Best Years of Our Lives*) under the legal and ethical terms of the O'Connor archives. With the official release of the Iowa letters, O'Connor's own moviegoing habit may at last be explicitly connected to work that, she asserted, God had chosen her to do.

One day after seeing *Till the End of Time*, O'Connor judged the film "certainly lousy" (DR 146). Monica Carol Miller notes, "Flannery's apparent enjoyment of what might now be referred to as 'hate-watching' movies. … Most of them she dismissed with a disdainful 'It was punk' or 'It was gruesome'" (xvi-xvii). Boiled down to exclamations of disgust, an element of self-reproach familiar from "Higher Mathematics" returns. The part of O'Conner that makes her seek out movies is not the "brainy kid." She knows that movies will disappoint and repulse her, but seeks them out anyway—or, having decided that the moviegoing habit is a banal sign of conformity, she performs disappointment and repulsion. Early in the Iowa letters, O'Connor writes that she and her roommate "wasted our money on the picture show last night, as it wasn't any good" (36); the grad student's dismissal mirroring the fifteen-year-old's objection to Hollywood's temptations. Devoted to frugality, O'Connor continues "wasting money" on movies while at Iowa. More consequentially, she also continues wasting a more precious resource: her time. As a teen, O'Connor counted a day joyful when she could "writ[e] all day" (*HM* 72). She was a happy amateur, and writing time appeared on its own schedule. In the professional writing program at Iowa, however, O'Connor codified a professional's lifelong routine: "write a certain number of hours a day at a given time regularly and without interruption" (*DR* 85). Given self-imposed constraints on time, it would not be surprising for O'Connor to deny herself movies among other "desires of the flesh" (*PJ* 23). But, fortunately, she did not. No matter that, as an uncomfortably typical midcentury moviegoer and hyper-serious instrument of God's will, she felt that she must cast cinema as "poison" or frame it as addiction, the movies gave her something to uplift. J.O. Tate dismisses Hollywood movies as "a mother lode of vulgarity … hardly worth mentioning" ("Uses" 20), but O'Connor's "uses of banality" are profoundly transformative. "Oh, Lord," she wrote in September 1947, "make me a mystic" (PJ 38). In *Wise Blood*, Enoch beats up a man promoting a movie and steals his gorilla suit. "[B]urning with the intensest kind of happiness," he buries his human clothes ("a symbol … of burying his former self" [111]) and dons the costume (111). Thus transformed, he sees the mundane world through the gorilla's "celluloid" eyes (CW 102).

Jimmy Dean Smith has published work on Flannery O'Connor in The Flannery O'Connor Review, Summoning the Dead: Critical Essays on Ron Rash, and Critical Insights on Flannery O'Connor's Shot Fiction. His most recent publications include "Reading *Lolita* in Coal Country" (*The Tacky South*), "Ginseng-Gathering Women" (*Representing Rural Women*), "Knowing Your Place: Tony Earley's Human Geography" (*North Carolina Literary Review*), and "Country Roads: Mountain Journeys in the Anthropocene" (*Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies*). He lives in Barbourville, Kentucky, with Sharee St. Louis-Smith and teaches at Union College.

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Figure 5. A photo of Flannery O'Connor.

Magdalina El-Masry

The Many Faces of Judy Barton: Contemporary Retellings of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

Abstract

This analysis of Wendy Powers & Robin McLeod's 2011 novel The Testament of Judith Barton*, a retelling of Alfred Hitchcock's* Vertigo *(1958) from the point of view of its female lead, argues that the shift in perspective makes space for the inner life and personhood of a character who has been objectified by the film's male gaze and flattened by its cultural legacy. As a work of adaptation,* The Testament of Judith Barton *demystifies* Vertigo*'s mysteries by closely following Judy from early childhood through to her performance of Madeleine within the film's plot, removing the distance imposed by the male protagonist's point of view on-screen. It is a contemporary retelling of a classic film that uses the conventions of the novelization genre to interrogate Judy's place in film history from a feminist angle. By flipping the script and approaching this well-known narrative from Judy's first-person perspective, the novel alternatingly explores and reinvents her complex motivations in ways that cannot be addressed by the film itself, thereby creating a more fully rounded character and breathing new life into the Hollywood classic.*

When Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* overtook Citizen Kane to claim the top spot in *Sight & Sound*'s "Greatest Films of All Time" poll in 2012,[1] it seemed inevitable. The film had been steadily climbing the ranks for decades, and had landed in second place in the previous poll ten years earlier. *Vertigo* has dramatically risen in esteem since its release in 1958 when, as Charles Barr describes in his monograph on the film, it received reviews ranging from lukewarm to outright negative: "Common to all of these reviews is a lack of sympathy with the basic structure and drive of the picture. Even the friendlier ones single out for praise elements that seem, from today's perspective, to be marginal virtues and incidental pleasures" (13). Despite this early negative reception, it has risen to the position of a classic of the American film canon and has been widely influential, with films as varied and praised as Brian De Palma's *Obsession* (1976), Christian Petzold's *Phoenix* (2014) and Park Chan-wook's *Decision to Leave* (2022) echoing and expanding upon its psychosexual vision of obsession and replacement. It has also inspired works which more specifically grapple with its themes, characters, and aesthetics, with the most straightforward of them being Wendy Powers & Robin McLeod's 2011 novel *The Testament of Judith Barton*, a self-published retelling of *Vertigo* from the perspective of its female lead.

Adapted from Boileau-Narcejac's mystery novel *D'entre les morts* (1954), *Vertigo* follows retired detective John "Scottie" Ferguson (James Stewart) as he tails Madeleine (Kim Novak), the wife of his old college friend Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), at Elster's behest. As Scottie follows Madeleine and tries to solve the mystery of her increasingly strange behaviour, he falls in love with her. Afflicted with a debilitating fear of heights, however, Scottie is unable to save her when she throws herself from the top of a bell tower. Scottie

1. In the 2022 edition of the list, it has fallen to second place, overtaken by Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975).

continues to be haunted by Madeleine, seeing her at every turn, until he sets his eyes on Judy Barton, a shopgirl who looks strikingly like her. The film's paradigm-changing twist is this: the Madeleine that Scottie fell in love with was Judy all along, hired by Elster to impersonate his wife in his plan to assassinate her. Judy cannot resist falling into a relationship with Scottie, and finds herself subject to his obsessive drive to transform her (back) into Madeleine.

Approaching the same story from the opposite perspective, *The Testament of Judith Barton* follows its titular character from early childhood through to the end of the film's events, where she meets the same fate as the real Madeleine and falls off the tower of the Mission San Juan Bautista. In their Authors' Note, Powers & McLeod write of their motivations:

> Anyone bothering to ask why she participated in Gavin Elster's plot—and few do, most viewers being satisfied with objectifying Judy like Scottie does—will be told, "It's obvious. She's his mistress in the source novel," and they'll agree, dropping the subject. One night, watching the film, and Judy in particular, very closely, we could no longer drop the subject. (459)

The result is a novel that fits into a lineage made up of works like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995),[2] retellings of classic novels (Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, respectively) from the point of view of the mysterious women at their hearts. I argue that *The Testament of Judith Barton* is a contemporary work in deep conversation with the original text of *Vertigo*, as well as with its legacy as a canonical work in film history. Its retelling of the film's narrative from Judy's point of view proposes an alternate reading, countering interpretations which have been offered in the decades since its release: it calls for renewed attention for the objectified figure at the heart of the story.

Powers & McLeod adopt a very literal approach to *Vertigo*'s narrative, particularly when compared to the more interpretative perspectives that many critics and scholars have taken on. For example, one prevailing analytical framework applied to the film is psychoanalysis. Through this lens, the film's main theme is that of scopophilia, or "the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object" (Mulvey 806). Long sequences in the first half of the film have little to no dialogue and consist entirely of Scottie driving through the streets of San Francisco, following Madeleine from location to location and watching her every, silent move. In her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," published in 1975, film scholar Laura Mulvey uses *Vertigo*—and other Hitchcock films—to exemplify what she defines as the male gaze, which draws the (presumed male) viewer into the film by having him identify with the male lead in his voyeuristic capacity (814). Scottie, and by extension the spectator experiencing the film through his point of view, watch Madeleine, and continue to watch as Scottie transforms Judy into his "perfect image of female beauty and mystery" (814). In contrast, Judy-as-Madeleine spends the first half of the film passively being looked at by both Scottie and the spectator, before then allowing herself to be transformed by Scottie. In 1987, in response to Mulvey's interpretation of Vertigo, Karen Hollinger proposed an alternate analysis that makes space for the female spectator through acknowledging the shift from Scottie's perspective to Judy's, which takes place

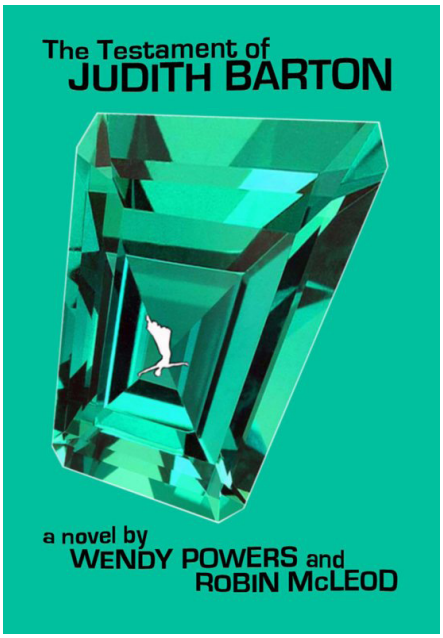

Figure 1. The book cover for The Testament of Judith Barton.

at the moment of her flashback (24). However, Hollinger's analysis remains psychoanalytical, as she maps the narrative of the film and the crises of each character onto classical Oedipal structures.

The Testament of Judith Barton foregoes such analysis, and instead narrows its scope onto the emotional life of its protagonist. By following Judy from cradle to grave, the novel fills in plausible explanations into the places where the film basks in ambiguity. The advan-

2. The comparison to Wicked is made directly on the "Preview" page of the promotional website for *The Testament of Judith Barton.*

tage of presenting Gavin Elster's contrived plan through the eyes of his reluctant accomplice, rather than those of his mark, is the clarity that this alternate perspective affords. Whereas Scottie is under the spell of Elster's story and Judy-as-Madeleine's performance, and is only able to pull back the curtain at the last moment, Judy is herself behind that curtain the whole time. By following her point of view as closely as the first half of the film follows Scottie's, the novel transforms *Vertigo*'s eerie sense of mystery into something more akin to a thriller. For example, Elster takes on a much larger role, becoming the novel's chief antagonist. Though his plan consists of manipulating Scottie through the performance of Judy-as-Madeleine, in the novel, Judy is also being manipulated by Elster. What he asks of her is help in protecting his vulnerable wife from a stalker:

> "You don't think she's in danger, do you?"
>
> "Well, that's just it, I don't know this man or his intentions. I can't tell if he's just infatuated with my wife, quite innocent, or if he means her harm. He may even be a kidnapper — my wife's family is rather wealthy. If he knows that."
>
> "How frightening for her!"
>
> "She doesn't know."
>
> [...] It was a disturbing story. How unsettling, I thought, to be watched and not know it. (Powers & McLeod 222-223)

In the afterword, the authors pointedly note how this is a crucial change from what is revealed in the Boileau-Narcejac novel: "*D'entre les morts* does indeed flesh out Renée Sourange, the Judy Barton character. Boileau and Narcejac's Renée is fully complicit in the Elster character's plot to kill his wife because she's his mistress and wants to marry him" (433-434). By filling in the narrative with the explanations Judy frantically gives Scottie during their final confrontation in the film's climax, rather than going back to draw from the well of the original novel, Powers & McLeod commit to creating a tragic, sympathetic character that is not wholly defined by the way the detective character perceives her. In other words, they attempt to release her from the confines of the male gaze that has constrained her in previous iterations.

The literal approach taken by Powers & McLeod is all the more apparent when compared to *The Green Fog* (2017), another, more recent retelling of *Vertigo*. Directed by Guy Maddin, Evan Johnson, and Galen Johnson, this hour-long experimental film takes the opposite approach to the canonical Hitchcock work, and embraces complete abstraction by reconstructing the plot of the film with clips taken from other films and television shows shot on location in San Francisco. *The Green Fog* is similar to *The Testament of Judith Barton* in that a prior knowledge of the original text imbues it with greater meaning. The film recreates *Vertigo* in broad gestures, capturing its emotions and themes more than the nitty-gritty of its complex plot machinations:

> As one actor turns into another several times in a single sequence, and yet some kind of narrative coherence persists, the effect is like listening to a symphony created by cut-and-splice from a hundred different recordings [...]. The basic "melody" continues to be recognizable as Vertigo, although the orchestrations and even the individual instruments change every few seconds. (Romney)

Though the tragedy of Judy's fate reverberates through the ending of *The Green Fog*, heightened by the liberty its experimental nature affords it, she nonetheless remains an abstraction: both a symbolic figure for the tragedy of an *amour fou*, and herself symbolically rendered through other actresses playing other characters.

The Testament of Judith Barton, by contrast, centers Judy and her inner life at the heart of the narrative. By doing so, the authors make this retelling a reclamation project for a character who, in their opinion, has never been given her proper due, despite being the subject of some of the film's most iconic images. "The film itself treats her as an image," reads the Author's Note, "just as Scottie does. Like him, the movie doesn't much care about who Judy is, why she does what she does, as long as she looks the part. We thought it was time someone cared" (Powers & McLeod 434-435). The authors present *Vertigo* through a feminist lens, but they do so by expanding on elements already found in the film itself. It is not that *Vertigo* does not care about Judy; nor is it, as Mulvey's psychoanalytic approach would have it, that the film represents her as a wholly passive character objectified by the male gaze. As Hollinger suggests, as soon as Scottie leaves Judy's apartment for the first time and she turns to face the camera—instigating a flashback to events we have previously experienced from Scottie's point of view—the film shifts to following her perspective much more closely than his. After this scene, Judy essentially takes Scottie's place as the protagonist until the film necessarily circles back to him at the very end, after Judy has fallen to her death. In the novel, this perspective shift is the baseline from which it begins, allowing more time to be spent developing Judy as a character, as well as closely and empathetically tracking the slow erosion of her control over her life as the story progresses.

More than the actual text of the film, *Vertigo*'s reception and cultural legacy are what flatten Judy to what she represents for Scottie—and for the film's

overall meaning—rather than digging into her complexities as a character. As Powers & McLeod point out, spectators and critics often assume the obvious: Judy was Elster's mistress, and her pleading defenses against Scottie's accusations are not to be believed. Elsewhere, she is viewed as "a harsh-voiced common shopgirl, with untidy hair and careless rainment [*sic*]" (Moffitt), compared to the more refined Madeleine. This can even be seen in Hollinger's analysis of the film, where she states that, "the character of Judy appears to provide a new figure of identification for the female spectator, but again it is an uneasy identification because Judy is a vulgar, cheaply provocative, and seemingly unintelligent department store clerk" (24). Much of the writing on *Vertigo* does not go past the surface of Judy's character, with the focus largely being on Scottie's descent into a mad obsession with the figure of Madeleine. When, in his maniacal grief, he strong-arms Judy into becoming the object of his fetishistic obsession, much of the writing and analysis follows suit, and Judy has thus remained a symbolic object or plot device.

Figure 2. Meeting Judy Barton.

By contrast, *The Testament of Judith Barton* narrows the focus onto Judy, and organizes all of its recurring motifs around her. The book can be categorized as a novelization, which, as Kate Newell defines, is a work that "[contributes] to a work's adaptation network [...] by expanding or establishing new significations for its existing lexicon" (26). Though not a tie-in novel, as is the case with most novelizations, its *raison d'être* is to be a retelling of the film, particularly in its second and third acts. When it is not following the onscreen narrative of *Vertigo*, it is filling in the backstory of its protagonist by extrapolating from character details present in the film's text. Though mostly made up by the authors, Judy's childhood in the first section of the novel is based on the few details present in the film. This becomes particularly clear in the scene where Judy and Scottie first meet, and she shows him her driver's licenses and family pictures: "That's my father. He's dead. My mother got married again ... I didn't like the guy. So ... I decided to see what it was like in sunny California. I've been here for three years" (Powers & McLeod 380). From these nuggets of information, a fully-realized character is created, and the motivations behind her actions in the film are given depth. For instance, her father owns a jewelry repair store, and in her youth she develops both interest and skill in the field. When asked what her favourite gemstone is, she carefully considers the question before landing on the emerald. This is a recurring motif throughout the novel, becoming doubly important as the story progresses: Judy-as-Madeleine falls into the San Francisco Bay not as a part of her performance, as one would assume from the filmic narrative, but rather in a frantic attempt to retrieve an emerald bracelet gifted to her by her late father.

Another crucial example is the metatextual throughline of performance: when Judy first arrives in San Francisco, she begins taking Method Acting classes.

This introduces a fascinating wrinkle into both her prior interest in the stage during her childhood, as well as her future performance as Madeleine. Her acting teacher Ben Phillips serves almost as an oracle figure: "Real acting is not about speaking rote lines in a cultured voice while striking some classic pose," he says in one of his classes. "It is about organically communicating the human condition. [...] This can rattle your sense of self—you can get lost in a role. Completely becoming that other person moment to moment will take discipline, and courage" (Powers & McLeod 189). Later on, when Elster is preparing her for her performance as Madeleine, Judy remarks to herself that "despite his professed disdain for "the pictures," Elster fancied himself quite the director, though unlike Ben Phillips he wouldn't risk letting an actress find her own way" (Powers & McLeod 253). The inclusion of a character like Ben Phillips, and Judy's constant referral back to what he would think or say about her performance as Madeleine, effectively foreshadows the novel's ending.

Though the novel brings in a lot of original material, its main flaw is its reliance on the film's text, which is a characteristic common to the genre of novelization in general. In her writing on the novelization, Newell quotes Robert Leedham of *The Guardian*, who argues that it is akin to "join-the-dots puzzles, with passages of description linking together the bits of dialogue supplied by the scriptwriter" (qtd. in Newell 34). In *The Testament of Judith Barton*, this only increases as the written narrative begins to run parallel with that of the film, and even more so when Judy-as-Madeleine and Scottie begin interacting face-to-face. Indeed, as it progresses, the novel often falls into the motions of repeating the film's dialogues and merely describing the characters' on-screen actions, as Leedham describes. Once in a while, Judy's third-person narration provides asides explaining her motivations for what she says and does. The strengths of these more constrained scenes, then, are when Judy finds herself straying from her expected performance as Madeleine, either needing to improvise or spontaneously reacting as herself rather than as Madeleine. But this is the tension at the heart of any novelization: the balance between newness and familiarity.

This familiarity does not, however, begin and end with the film itself. Powers & McLeod are sometimes playful in their writing, adding in winks to the well-informed reader. For example, in the last section of the novel, when Judy and Scottie have begun seeing each other, he takes her to a theater production of *Picnic*. During this date, they discuss the performance as well as the play's film adaptation:

> Scottie leaned over to ask if I enjoyed it. I was about to tell him how much it meant to me, that he took me to the theater; I was about to tell him about my acting, but he didn't wait for my answer.
>
> "It was alright," he said. "Though, to be honest, I preferred the movie a couple years ago. They got the casting right—that blonde was a real looker."
>
> I still caught him looking at blondes, and wondered—if I went back to that cheap salon in Oakland, would he want to kiss me then? (Powers & McLeod 395-396)

This is, of course, a tongue-in-cheek reference to Kim Novak, who plays Madge in the 1955 adaptation of *Picnic* along with Judy in *Vertigo.* Powers & McLeod play with

Figure 3. Behind-the-scenes photo of Novak in Picnic *(1955).*

layers of characters and contexts for the same face: in a universe where these fictional characters exist simultaneously with the very real adaptation of *Picnic* they are discussing, it would make sense that Scottie, after having had his brief affair with Madeleine, would be drawn to Novak as Madge. Beneath this metatext, the scene establishes that Scottie is not attempting to hide his fixation on blondes, and that Judy is already willing to consider changing herself (back) into the image of the woman he desires—at the expense of her own personhood.

The Testament of Judith Barton recenters the narrative of one of film history's most celebrated works onto the perspective of its objectified female lead, allowing her just as much—if not more—interiority than Scottie gets as the main character of the film. The difference between reading a novel and watching a film is stark; as the authors point out, one's experience of each version will undoubtedly be affected by their experience of the other. Watching Kim Novak as Madeleine, ghostly and refined, and then seeing her as Judy, made-up and full of nervous, combative energy, is a shocking twist as well as an impressive feat of performance; but one that does not necessarily translate to the written form. Instead, the experience of spending hours reading Judy's per-

spective allows for a look behind the curtain of Novak's performance, which, contained in a runtime of 128 minutes, cannot luxuriate in as much detail. By reading the novelization, we are no longer voyeurs alongside Scottie, but rather firmly aligned with the one being looked at. To a reader who is already intimately familiar with the film, *The Testament of Judith Barton* may read as a slow march towards inevitable doom, a tragedy from its first pages. To one who has no prior knowledge of *Vertigo* and its bitter ending, the novel plays out as more of a classically-structured *bildungsroman*, one in which its heroine repeatedly loses herself in the desires of others.

The novel has remained little-known since its publication in 2011, and there has been little writing on it and its relationship to *Vertigo*. Despite its small readership, it is a fascinating example of how the Hollywood canon can continue to be rediscovered and conversed with in new and inventive ways. Though some novelizations may fail to provide additional insights that could not already be found in the source film, in the case of *Vertigo*, such an adaptation has the distinct advantage of being able to go beyond the limited perspective of its protagonist, who spends the bulk of its runtime in the dark about the machinations of the plot. If Scottie is the one whom the film's plot is happening to, then Judy is the unsung driving force behind that same plot. *The Testament of Judith Barton* not only expands Judy as a character, but also offers a different angle on Scottie himself. Indeed, one of the novel's strengths is its rendering of Scottie and his obsession. For Judy, Scottie initially offers a degree of comfort—even from afar—as the love and affection he feels towards Madeleine is a love she herself craves. This makes Scottie's sudden shift to cruelty towards her just as shocking as it is in the film, if not more so. In the last act, when he is dragging her up the stairs of the bell tower, it is clearer than ever that in every format, the story's greatest tragedy is that the Madeleine that consumed Scottie was only ever Judy: "Elster had supplied the props and scraps of an identity, but so much of Madeleine had been my creation—couldn't Scottie see that what he loved in her was me?" (Powers & McLeod 428). By retelling Vertigo through Judy's eyes, Powers & McLeod craft a new lens through which to experience the classic film and its complex characters: a lens that sharpens the images onscreen and fills in the void between them.

Magdalina El-Masry earned her M.A. in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. She also holds her BFA in Film Studies from Concordia University. Her M.A. thesis is a study of dramatic film performance in contemporary US cinema through the lens of intensity. Her research interests include film historiography, performance studies, and adaptation.

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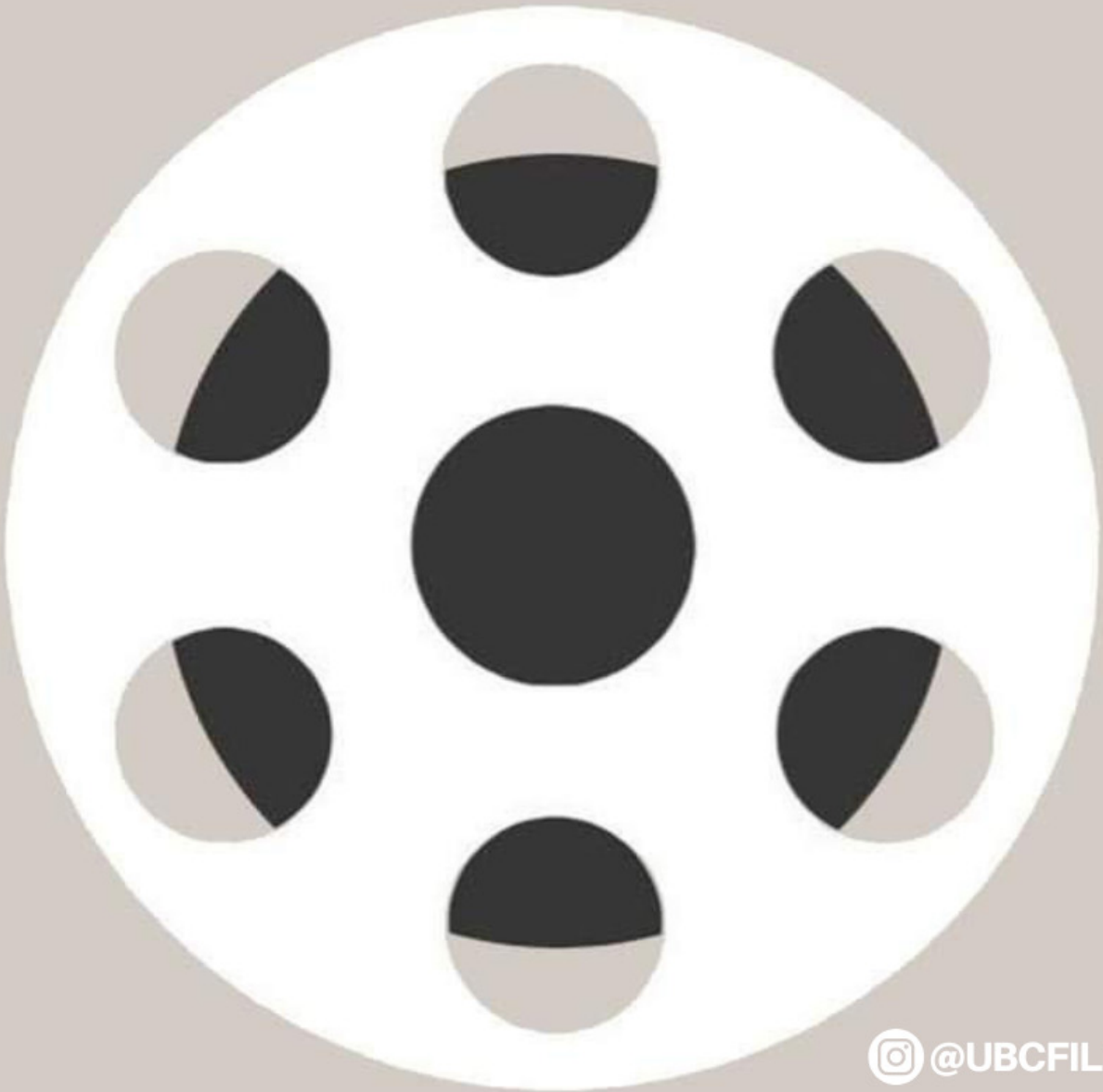

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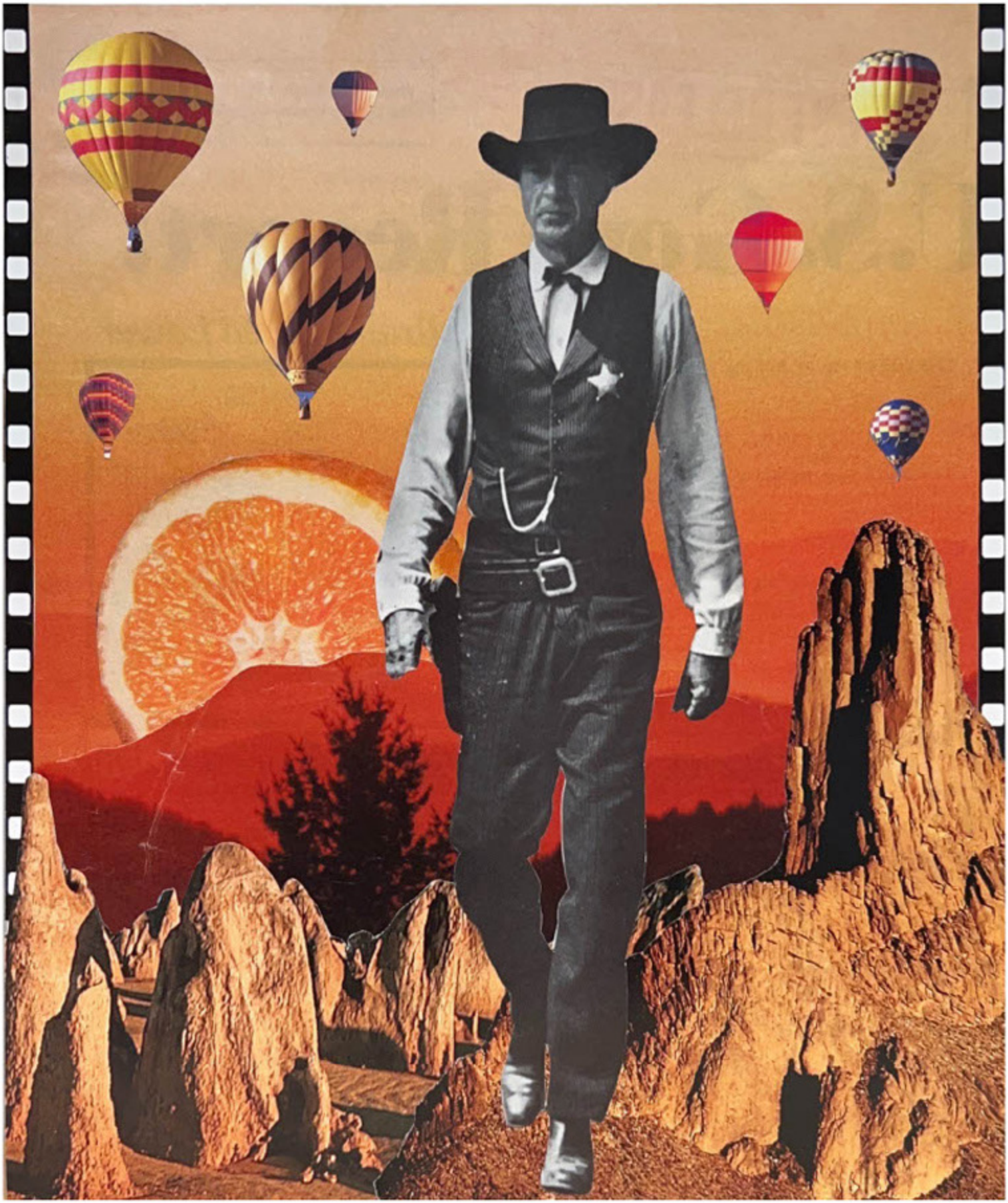

Ash Kinney d'Harcourt

Rider of the Purple S(t)age: How the Drag King Reinvents the Classical Hollywood Cowboy

Abstract

This essay explores how the contemporary drag king deconstructs and appropriates the iconography of the classical Hollywood western to reimagine the cowboy figure through subcultural drag performance. Through a combination of interviews and textual, ideological, and genre analyses, this case study illustrates how one drag king in the Washington, DC drag scene, King Molasses, responds to the western's prescriptive and normative constructions of gender and race by naming them and transforming them into new sites of resistance. Dragging the cinematic cowboy troubles the western's thematic binary oppositions between the individual and society, the masculine and feminine, as well as the cowboy archetype's rigid racial construction. The drag king's embodiment of the Hollywood cowboy renders visible the erasures inherent in the American frontier mythology of this figure, and simultaneously infuses these symbols with new meanings in the context of drag performance to create new subcultural voices and subjectivities.

Drag performance has been explored extensively by poststructuralist, queer, feminist, and critical race scholars in the fields of cultural sociology, history, and performance. This body of work tends to be ethnographic in nature and is often centered on nightlife and cabaret cultures of queer communities. Through a queer scholarly lens, drag is treated as a personal and, at times, political endeavor that serves valuable social functions for performers and audiences alike, including the fostering of collective identities and the building of grassroots LGBTQ+ social movements. However, in cinema and media studies, drag is often marginalized, and usually only referenced in passing to support larger studies of other aspects of film and media production.

In this essay—a precursor to my larger project on the interplay between classical Hollywood and contemporary drag performance, "Of Men and Monsters: A Messy Anatomy of Drag Kings and Media Iconography"—I examine how the iconography of the classical western film genre has been refashioned and repurposed within contemporary drag subculture. Although not inherently political, Judith Butler comments on the subversive potential of drag performance "to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (125). In the process, drag exposes unseen relationships between gender and power. Directing these notions toward media, this essay investigates how one drag king's appropriation of media imagery reveals such relationships in popular film. In particular, I consider how the drag king's embodiment of the cinematic cowboy of Old Hollywood masterfully deconstructs colonial notions of gender and race attached to this on-screen figure to create new subcultural subjectivities.

Tall Tales of the Classical Hollywood Western

In displaying both hypermasculinity and queerness, the generic cowboy figure is well suited to drag king performance. In artistic communities without well-established or archived subcultural histories, popular media can be an important site to mine aes-

thetic forms. However, the whiteness and heteronormativity in these images are often treated as a default to which other subjectivities are compared or evaluated. African American studies scholar Hazel Carby argues that white texts should be examined "to make visible what is rendered invisible when viewed as the normative start of existence" (193); as such, it is vital to further explore and understand these on-screen masculinities. In their study of drag king subcultures, Jack Halberstam observes a lack of theatricality in white masculinities that appears to express "the idea that masculinity is 'just is,' while femininity reeks of the artificial" (111). Halberstam asserts that white masculinities need to be made visible before they can be performed by drag kings. This essay puts white cisgender hegemonic masculinity[1] in the spotlight to dissect and, in the process, denaturalize it—something that drag kings have been doing for decades.

Film genre scholar Thomas Schatz describes the western as "without question, the richest and most enduring genre of Hollywood's repertoire" (45). As such, the genre maintains strong associations with myths about the history, culture, and national identity of the U.S. Roger Horrocks asserts that Hollywood is one of the most prominent myth-making institutions in Western culture, and that the western is a major source of that mythic construction with its own set of symbols and narratives, many pertaining to U.S.-American notions of masculinity. For example, he describes the western as "a masculine genre par excellence," arguing that western novels and films are "'phallic discourses' taken to an endpoint—men gaze at each other, pump bullets into each other's bodies," and lust after women in bar rooms (3, 56). The cowboy is the Hollywood western's main protagonist, and the themes of the genre are broadly rooted in reductive, binary oppositions. The drag king appropriates and articulates elements of the western to expose and critique the binaries embedded in its themes, deconstructing oppositions between the individual cowboy and society, between masculinity and femininity, as well as critiquing binaries marked by the genre's rigid racial codes such as the protagonist-versus-antagonist opposition.

The theme of the individual versus society is common in western film plots that revolve around the colonial acts of territorial expansion depicted in the archetypal Old West, roughly during the latter half of the eighteenth century. According to media studies scholar Yvonne Tasker, the mythology of the western hero centers around a battle for territories that depends on violence perpetuated by white masculinity, deemed necessary to the formation and maintenance of a lawful community. This construction of masculinity in the western is in line with twentieth-century Anglo-American imperialism and is often enacted within the genre as a conflict between the Anglo settler and the Native American—and the annihilation of the latter.[2] Many scholars have noted that the violence presumed to be required by the cinematic cowboy to achieve social order simultaneously leads to his expulsion from the community, resulting in a solitary, stoic figure existing outside the boundaries of civilized society (see, for example, Pye 251; Tasker 113; Tompkins 219–220).

The cowboy figure's iconography includes boots, chaps, and a conspicuous wide-brimmed hat—tools of his cattle herding trade—as well as a holster and gun in the inevitable event of conflict. These elements align with the Hollywood western's other narrow interpretations of masculinity. Save for singing cowboys, such as Gene Autry, this figure has most often been portrayed as rugged, physically capable, and a man of few words, most notably in the performances of John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. Andrew Smith documents an even earlier emergence of this heteromasculine aesthetic in the western through William S. Hart's "quiet, intense, and subdued acting style" and in actors' physical prowess in later shoot-'em-up westerns that foreground horseback riding, strength, and athleticism—what he describes as "the best examples of Hollywood's engagement with the new [U.S.-American] notions of manhood" (161, 209).

Finally, as the genre's hero, the cowboy is often defined against the people he seeks to subject. His whiteness is reinforced by his history of racial violence, most visibly the oppression of Indigenous peoples, although also in the on-screen construction of African American, Latino/a, and other non-white entities as "others" (Tasker 117). The western's construction of the cowboy as exclusively white is also mythical in nature, since up to one-third of cowboys were of African and Mexican descent (Venable 62). However, as the American West took its symbolic shape in popular culture and on screen, many figures of Indigenous, African, and Mexi-

1. This essay borrows the term "hegemonic masculinity" from Raewyn W. Connell to refer to masculinity that occupies an authoritative position relative to others within a culture's given pattern of social relations (76).

2. For examples of how contemporary drag performers respond to the erasure of Indigenous subjectivities in popular media and culture through drag performance, see, for example, Mx. Wolverine in Toronto and Papi Churro in San Francisco, as of 2023.

can descent were written out of this history. As historian Michael N. Searles observes, "In the history and literature of scholars and writers alike, the only color that mattered was white" (216).

The Hollywood western brought all of these themes together in the myth of the U.S.-American frontier and its hero. Richard Slotkin describes the frontier myth as "the conception of America as a wide-open land of unlimited opportunity for the strong, ambitious, and self-reliant individual to thrust his way to the top" (*Regeneration Through Violence* 5). The frontier is seen as a potential Garden of Eden for settlers, though primitive and removed from civilization. This myth has been restructured in yet another way with the false notion that early settlers could regain their fortunes and nation through violence. In the Western, this myth depicts the U.S. as a racial entity, "a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant nation, which defines itself by destroying or subjugating a 'non-white' enemy" (Slotkin, "Unit Pride" 473).

These western binaries are epitomized in several films directed by John Ford, particularly *Stagecoach* (1939), in which John Wayne stars as Ringo Kid, a (wrongly imprisoned) outlaw vowing revenge for his family's murder. Adapted from a short story by Ernest Haycox, the film depicts Anglo settlers' dramatic stagecoach journey across a rugged and allegedly uncharted West in 1880. *Stagecoach* was partially shot amidst Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park's desert landscape and sandstone rock formations, in Navajo Reservation territory. In an extended chase scene in which nameless Apache Indian horseback riders attack the Anglo settlers, Wayne's physical prowess and skill with a rifle prove useful to the passengers as he picks off attackers one by one from atop the speeding stagecoach. The scene was shot mostly at eye level, although some low angles from under the horses accentuate its brutality, and the trampling of one rider under the stagecoach is made visceral by a stunt double's performance. Amidst the flying arrows and gunfighting, a close-up depicts an infant being held by its frightened white mother inside the coach. At the last minute, the stagecoach passengers are rescued by the US cavalry and, at the end of the film, Ringo Kid is released to live out his life, not among the townsfolk, but with his love interest in a remote cabin "across the border."

Cowboys are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other

Interdisciplinary analyses from both cultural and film studies have gradually shifted critical discourse on the Hollywood western to decenter the view of the cowboy hero as strictly a model of heteromasculinity. This conceptual shift in scholarship calls attention to something that queer communities have long recognized and celebrated: the cowboy is a very queer figure. The western depicts the cowboy as a lonely, stoic figure, yet often places him in an intense or intimate relationship with another person. The hero rarely finds intimacy in a heterosexual relationship, instead coupling with another man, whether friend, enemy, or sidekick. Steven Cohan observes that the western masculine figure keeps a variety of relations with other men, for instance, in the homosocial "hard man" / "soft boy" dynamic in *Red River* (1948) between the grizzly cattleman Dunson (John Wayne) and youthful cowboy Matthew (played by queer Hollywood icon, Montgomery Clift; 207).

Figure 1. John Wayne, the "hard man", and Montgomery Clift, the "soft boy", in Red River *(1948).*

Horrocks also cites the example of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*'s (1969) "slow motion mutual seduction, full of glamorous good looks and derring-do" between the characters played by Paul Newman and Robert Redford (66). However, despite being drawn to each other, masculine figures in the Hollywood western are never actually depicted within homosexual relationships. The drag king appropriates the cowboy figure from this liminal space of the Hollywood western and places him in subcultural contexts in which the genre's homoerotic and genderqueer subtexts are made explicit.

Dragging the Cowboy

King Molasses, a drag king in the Washington, DC drag scene, responds to the western's prescriptive and normative constructions of gender and race by naming them and transforming them into new sites of resistance. Through textual, genre and ideological analyses of one of Molasses's routines, I examine the ways in which the drag king appropriates generic symbols of

Figure 2. A promotoional photo of King Molasses.

the cowboy figure in ways that trouble the binaries of individual/society, masculine/feminine, and the rigid racial divides between screen figures. This research further aims to deepen understanding of the meaning-making that occurs through the appropriation of Hollywood imagery in the context of trans subcultures in line with a burgeoning critical transgender approach to cinema and media by foregrounding the work of a nonbinary cultural producer and employing ethnographic methods, namely interviews with the performer (as suggested in Cáel M. Keegan and Laura Horak 164; Thomas J. Billard and Erique Zhang 197–198). The drag king, Molasses, deploys classical western iconography in the context of drag performance to reimagine the cowboy figure, speak back to systems of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, and illuminate Black and LGBTQ+ histories that have gone unrepresented in the genre and in classical Hollywood cinema more broadly.

Molasses began performing drag in 2018. Their drag name evokes the stickiness and sweetness of molasses, though it is also suggestive of historical links between U.S. colonization, slave trades, and molasses. They have performed with the drag production company Pretty Boi Drag (PBD), founded by fellow drag king Pretty Rik E to forge space for Black and brown performers in what had been a predominantly white drag scene. Molasses has since co-created Half & Half, a drag show produced with PBD alumnus Blaq Dynamite. Like PBD, Half & Half's philosophy is to make contemporary drag culture as inclusive as possible, including prioritizing the casting of racially diverse and gender-diverse performers.

Social media and the move toward online platforms spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic have increased drag king visibility. Whereas kings have typically been visible at local nightclubs and burlesque venues, their glorious sneers, swaggers, and silicon bulges are now available online for theoretically anyone to view. Close readings of Molasses's drag routines shared through

Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube reveal the drag king's tendency to wear a hat, whether a cowboy hat, a West African palm hat, a kufi cap, or a gele. The hat, paired with a full beard made from synthetic hair that is applied before every performance, initially served as a masking function to alleviate anxieties about "being found out" in another environment where being a drag performer might be misunderstood or regarded with disapproval. Another aspect of Molasses's performance that stands out is their choice to lip-sync to the songs of musical artists with various gender and racial identities, which allows them to use signifiers of gender and race in their performances to different effects.

"Black Velvet"

The routine I analyze here is Molasses's rendition of Alannah Myles's "Black Velvet," a blues-rock ballad released on the singer's eponymous debut album in 1989. The song lyrics reference the impact of Elvis Presley's music in the Southern US, although the song has since become somewhat of a lesbian anthem. The performances I analyze here were originally recorded during an evening drag show at JR's Bar, a gay neighborhood bar, and the Berlin Nightclub, both in Washington, DC. The performance at JR's takes place at night, the lights are dim, and the air above the performer appears misty. The setting of the performance at the Berlin is similarly dark, punctuated with sparse neon lighting and spotlights on the performer. The first things one notices as the performance begins are the thick beard, the black leather chaps, boots, and the black cowboy hat. Molasses's posture is tall, and the hat is tilted conspicuously low, hiding their eyes in the shadow. The crowd is high-spirited, gathered closely around the stage, with hands reaching out as part of the custom to tip the drag king. The performer begins to move slowly at first, in time with the bluesy guitar. Their dancing, an eclectic mix of freestyle hip-hop and burlesque moves, is full of swagger; every gesture, roll, and grind hits the swinging beat of the verse. Molasses glides confidently across the stage to an audience member to retrieve bills, tossing them away with a dramatic flourish. In response, another audience member and fellow drag performer, Lucy Stoole, screams, "You can have my *wallet*!" Singling out a second audience member when the tempo slows, Molasses kneels, sustaining a brief gaze and gently brushing the audience member's cheek with the back of their hand. As the pace of the song picks up again, Molasses struts to another part of the stage and rips open their white sleeveless shirt, revealing a black vest and binder underneath. Whoops and hollers demonstrate the audience's enthusiasm.

Figure 3. King Molasses's performance of "Black Velvet".

Building on this excitement, the drag king executes an impressive dolphin dive to the floor, then bends backward before reaching to grab the mic with a rock star bravado that complements the song's rousing chorus. In the inclusive spaces of JR's and the Berlin Nightclub, generic binaries begin to break down. First, the performer's deployment of western iconography within this intimate performer-audience relationship complicates the opposition between individual and society in the western. Audience participation, including call-and-response interactions, fuels the drag king's performance and heightens the experience for both the performer and the audience. Molasses can reach out to individual audience members for authentic interaction—sincere, flirtatious, or simply playful—with the understanding that the audience recognizes the meaning of the gesture and will reciprocate. The intimacy of this shared experience dismantles the notion of the lonely, stoic cowboy who is an outsider; rather, the cowboy is embraced here.

Furthermore, the drag king's performance does not exhibit the cinematic cowboy's impassive hetero-masculine acting style. On the contrary, Molasses's cowboy emotes through their dancing, gestures, and facial expressions, visibly moved by the music and in acknowledgment of the audience's lively reactions. "Black Velvet" was the first song they performed by a musician who is not Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB). Combining the symbols of the cowboy—boots, chaps, and the wide-brimmed hat—with Myles's sensual vocals unsettles the notion of a strict masculine/feminine binary.

Notably, the cowboy's customary firearm is not one of the performer's sartorial choices for this performance. Drag kings often pack a prosthetic, creating the illusion of a bulge that is made more visible by the tendency of some to strip down to their undergarments on stage. The replacement of the six-shooter with a symbolic phallus highlights another distinction between masculinities performed on the screen versus in the space of drag performance: violence is not typically valorized in drag king performance. In an online essay entitled "Can Drag Kings Help Us to Reimagine Masculinity for the 21st Century?", Spanish drag performer Prinx Silver, who performs their own take on the drag cowboy, explains their personal view on masculinity: "The only masculinity I'm concerned with is the one that's trans and queer, that makes you work on your empathy [...] the one where you express yourself and reach out to people, and say that you love them. This, to me, is at the core of the masculinity of drag kings."

A performer's gender often develops or shifts through participation in a drag king subculture, which is considered by its members to be a safe space to express oneself (see, for example, Horowitz 38–43; Shapiro 259–266). In the case of Molasses, for example, the performer gave their stage alter ego they/them pronouns before themself. This personal link between performance and identity is encapsulated by Katie Horowitz: "Drag is meaningful not because it proves that gender is a fiction, but because it proves that gender is real—and no less so for being performed" (113). The cowboy aesthetic began to appear in Molasses's performance after a hiatus from drag during the pandemic. Upon returning to drag, they chose to perform to Myles's "Black Velvet," in part because the song brings together both feminine and masculine elements that are affirming to them. Acquiring leather fabric for a costume proved to be difficult at the time, so they thrifted a black cowboy hat, something they believed fit the Southern theme of Myles's song, and later they further developed the look with black chaps, vest, and heeled boots. Despite being an unplanned costume choice, these elements resonated with Molasses:

> When I put [the cowboy hat] on, I felt that energy and charge, too. I think it's mine in the sense of how the diaspora functions. As a Black person in the world, I think we are all incredibly connected through the mythologies and heroes that we create in our pantheons, and I feel like that connection to a Black masculine person whose face is half obscured and stands tall against the injustice present around them—that feels *very* Black to me.

The audience agrees, and comments on Instagram include "@kingmolasses BLACK IS KING," in which "Black" in the song title takes on a new meaning in the context of Molasses's performance. Molasses elaborates on how the iconography of the cowboy operates in their performance: "My connection to it and my power here is that I'm using a signifier or symbol that resonates with a lot of people, specifically around masculinity—and I think that is their way into me—but I'm going to just take you wherever I take you, which is the fuckery of it all..." The performer infuses these symbols with new meaning in the context of drag performance, disrupting the interpellation of audience members as subjects of dominant ideologies of race and gender, and allowing space for the creation of new voices and subjectivities—for example, by reimagining the cowboy figure within a new mythology, a Black "pantheon," as a hero who will "stand tall against the injustice present around them," such as anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ oppression.

The drag king's performance parallels a similar practice seen at the turn of the twentieth century. In tracing a history of minstrel performers, Annemarie Bean observes that African American male impersonators inverted assumptions of white minstrelsy, such as those of the emasculated Black man or the sexualized Black woman. To illustrate the former, minstrels such as Florence Hines and Alberta "Bert" Whitman turned the ineffectual "black dandy" caricature common in white minstrelsy into "a Jazz Age sophisticate, resplendent in black topcoat, tails, twirling a cane, and donning a top hat" (Bean 182). Molasses's contemporary drag performance similarly borrows a dominant mode of communication, "imprint[ing]" cultural signifiers with new meanings, associations, and values in the creation of a subcultural code that is constructed within drag's symbiotic relationship with mass media (Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson 55). Indeed, Molasses is cognizant of the cinematic cowboy figure's dominant cultural meaning in this process:

> As a Black person and someone who lives in America with generations of African American people who have been cowboys and are still cowboys today, [I understand] how the predominant imagery of a cowboy is that of a white man on a horse with a hat and very hierarchal, with him being above the land, above rules, or above, in some ways, other people, when it comes to the dynamics of systemic oppression and white violence in America. I am a little tentative when I think of its origin, but I think [my use of the imagery] is authentic to me. I was drawn to the cowboy imagery in a way that so many of us are: the look feels

like it's *Rebel Without a Cause*. It feels like it's above establishment rules to be a cowboy. So there are romanticized markers in the visual aspects of the cowboy, as well as the historical reckoning that is in constant tension with it.

The performer's engagement with the western's whitewashing not only underscores the cowboy's association with racial violence, but also calls attention to the erasure of Black figures from U.S.-American frontier history. In fact, historian Albert S. Broussard asserts that although fictitious portrayals of the cowboy largely ignore Black cowboys, the latter accounted for an estimated one-quarter of all cowboys, or more than 5,000 individuals, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, including Black ranchers, horse trainers, lawmen, and scouts who were instrumental in the cattle industry and in shaping the American West (vii-viii). Moreover, there were legendary Black women cowhands. Cecilia Gutierrez Venable traces the histories of several of these women, with one notable example being Johana July, a Black Seminole vaquera who raised livestock and broke horses in nineteenth-century Mexico. The trans cowboy is also typically left out of American history, though another long-time cowboy who worked in Idaho and Oregon in the late nineteenth century named Little Joe Monahan was later discovered to have been transgender upon his death in 1904 (62–63).

Conclusion

This analysis illustrates how one drag king's embodiment of the Hollywood cowboy figure renders visible the erasures inherent within American frontier mythology, while simultaneously appropriating western iconography to imagine and create new subjectivities. While the multiplicity of subcultural drag performance cannot be contained in one project, the seamless transformation of this figure in the context of this drag performance also calls into question assumptions about the masculinity of other hegemonic on-screen figures. The dragging of a generically masculine figure such as the cinematic cowboy demonstrates that mass media need not make us subjects of a fixed dominant culture, but rather, these images can be used to legitimize wholly new subcultural masculinities.

Ash Kinney d'Harcourt earned a doctorate in cognitive psychology at UT Austin and is currently a PhD candidate in Media Studies in the Radio-Television Film department. They recently published two book chapters: one on the negotiation between cultural visibility and preservation of drag ball identities in "RuPaul's Drag Race" and another on the queer reworking of the romantic comedy genre in the contemporary television rom-sitcom "Take My Wife." Ash's dissertation project, "Of Men and Monsters: A Messy Anatomy of Drag Kings and Media Iconography," investigates how the subcultural performance of drag has evolved from drag balls to digital platforms in tandem with popular US media genres and figures. Their research interests include feminist and LGBTQ+ media studies, genre, screen cultures and industries.

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Figure 4. A performance by King Molasses.

VIFF Vancouver International Film Festival

2022 Reviews

Aftersun

Powerfully understated, Charlotte Wells' debut feature hits as hard as any film this year. Paul Mescal and Frankie Corio star in the Scottish filmmaker's sensory deep dive into the archive, forging new memories out of old ones and asking its audience to look back at the warehouses of memory that form the fragments of their past.

Calum, a young man trying his best under pressure, and Sophie, his 10-year-old daughter who doesn't quite get it yet, embark on a Turkish vacation mediated through miniDV recordings and the young Sophie's impossibly fractured memory; *Aftersun*'s true triumph is in its unflinching compassion for everyone involved. The spectre of tragedy haunts most of the film's run time, yet Wells' thoughtful and subdued direction helps her find poignant moments of beauty and sentimentality along the way. Evocative and expressionistic sequences that point to memory's fluid leakage across space and time work in concert with a realist aesthetic that captures the temporary stillness of young life alongside the confused anger of adult life, all building towards one of the best gut-punch endings of the year.

Review by Liam Riley

Corsage

Corsage—the latest film from Austrian filmmaker Marie Kreutzer—opens on the backs of two maids. They whisper to each other about their employer Empress Sissi of Austria, who is preoccupied attempting to hold her breath under the bath water as long as possible. If ever there were a Princess Diana-esque figure of the German context, it'd would be Sissi. Married young amidst scandal, stunningly beautiful, and tragically unhappy, Sissi is the perfect material for cinematic recreation and cultural obsession. We aren't unsure whether to feel frightened for her, for we see how the strictness of 19th century monarchy suffocates her slowly;, or frightened of the systemic issues she reveals. "She scares me so much," says one of the maids. Why would a woman who has everything be feel so unhappy?

Unlike the other adaptations of Sissi's story, those from the 1970s with Romy Schneider—who proclaimed that she was the princess, not just playing her—and Netflix's latest adaptation, *The Empress*, *Corsage* takes place later in Sissi's life, after the dramatics of her engagement. By avoiding the spectacle of her wedding and the scandal that followed, *Corsage* allows us a deeper and more nuanced view of Sissi's mental health. Even in that first scene, it isn't not immediately clear that Sissi is just playing and not trying to drown herself. As the film progresses we get numerous instances of this shaky line between play and pain, which progressively delves into the latter as everyone around Sissi tries to stifle any liveliness

left in her. In a tragically ironic turn of events, the film ends with a callback to the opening: Sissi throwing herself off of a boat and into the water for good.

In its venture to be a new exploration of a famous figure in Germanic/Austrian history, *Corsage* succeeds with few bumps along the road. Vicky Kreips in the leading role is equal parts hilarious and heart-wrenching. She and Kreutzer guide us into considering a more empathetic and tragic lens on Sissi's life outside of the glitz and glamor of her early years, and present us with a critique of a male-dominated world that remains as relevant as ever.

Review by Lily K. Evans

EO

Robert Bresson envisioned the titular donkey hero of his 1966 drama, *Au Hasard Balthazar,* to be a symbol for Christianity, and many writers have conceived of the donkey's tragic death at the end of the film to be representative of the death of Jesus in scripture. Throughout this film, we are encouraged to empathize with the tragedies of Balthazar's life: a sweet, unassuming donkey who has no control over the cruelties inflicted upon him by humanity.

Jerzy Skolimowski's 2022 film *EO*, which was nominated for Best International Feature Film at the 95th Academy Awards, takes great inspiration from *Balthazar*. We see the same pitiable, helpless donkey, suffering cruel treatment at one set of human hands after another; and at the end of the film, we see his dreary demise that already seemed imminent at the start of the opening credits.

Where *EO* diverges is that we as viewers are not asked merely to empathize with the donkey, but rather to become the donkey. The camera frequently holds at EO's eyeline-level, shooting his surroundings in shallow focus that blurs all but whatever is directly in front of his face. Further, the camera follows the wandering donkey in numerous long takes; many of these takes are so long, in fact, that less than halfway through the film, the viewer begins to perceive the scenes with people as more strange and disorienting than those focusing on the donkey.

In this way, Skolimowski performs a feat rarely seen in cinema: asking viewers to empathize with an animal not simply by focusing on human cruelty, as in Balthazar; or by making the animal seem more human, as in many animated features tailored towards family audiences; but rather, by making the viewer take on the perspective of the donkey himself. In this, EO is not a Christlike figure working to remind us of our higher purpose as human beings. Instead, he is just a donkey, reminding us of how much life and vitality exists beyond the narrow scope of human-centric perception.

Review by Tamar Hanstke

Falcon Lake

Sunlight creeps above the horizon, shimmering against a lake of death. Summertime nostalgia haunted by lost adolescence. Charlotte Le Bon unearths fundamental rifts between young and old, French and English, and fleeting first love in her debut feature film *Falcon Lake.*

This coming-of-age summer vacation film broods with a submerged horror that oozes from the edges of its achingly beautiful images like its halation, the fog of light that spreads beyond its proper boundaries in the crystalized lake. Le Bon troubles the fond gaze we cast on our collective youth, acknowledging its fatality. The camera lingers, anticipating and recognizing a tragedy to be; a tragedy that is always already there.

Le Bon captures the despair of teenage love, pitting Bastien against older adversaries and (in)visible histories in his vying for family friend Chloe, who is three years his senior. Through this, Le Bon finds true sen-

ality by exercising exceptional care and restraint, ultimately understanding the violence and pain first love brings.

Teen anxiety mirrors the French-Canadian fear of Anglo domination and culture loss in Falcon Lake. The dialectal opposition between the two colonial forces refracts the conflictual genesis of a country that not only exists in opposition with itself but against its indigenous population, which figures as non-existent in this nostalgic view of childhood past whose Canadian history wishes to forget its colonial heritage. Yet a sense of melancholic dread bubbles beneath the surface and through the cracks of this rose-tinted vacation world, pointing to violence that pervades Canada's colonial history.

Review by Will Riley

The Novelist's Film

The novelist, Jun-hee (Lee Hye-young), walks into a series of encounters. She travels to see an old friend and runs into a director she almost worked with, then meets an actress, Gil-soo (Kim Min-hee), and her nephew, and even a little girl who stares in awe at Kim as they eat. She moves from past to future with blunt ease. She asks her friend why she didn't call after reading her novel and shuts up the director for calling Gil-soo a waste. She tells Gil-soo how much she wants to work with her, even tells the young bookstore employee how much she likes meeting her. This could be called charisma.

Lee Hye-young continues to be a great collaborator with Hong, her characters adding something sharp and opaque to each movie. Like *In Front of Your Face* (2021), this is a spiritual movie in how it is searching for something, maybe affirmation. All the conversations move gently around artmaking. The first two are about stopping, then with Gil-soo about starting again, then over drinks, a combination. The novelist's film exists only as a proposal for most of the runtime, and the movie's faith banks on whether or not it will exist. It must be shown to affirm all the hope for the future and the talk about art, and it eventually is, a lovely release from the structure of the rest of the movie slipping into a mundane documentary.

Kim walks with flowers, the camera walks with her, and finally colour. A voice offscreen, presumably Hong, her partner, talks to her. Quick and quiet, the camera captures two of the best statements of love I've ever heard. "I love you." "I love you."

Review by Harrison Wade

Until Branches Bend

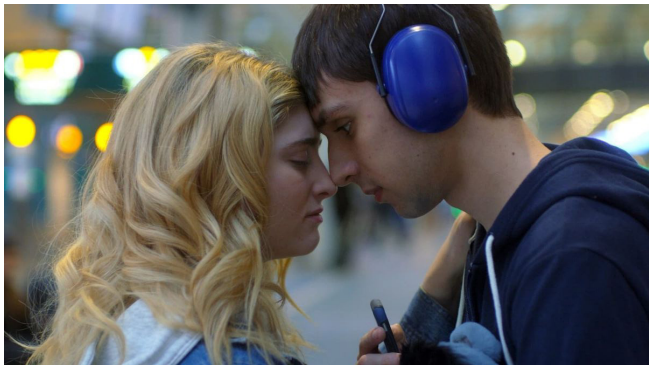
The ethereal gloss and dreamlike textures of the 16mm film stock provide audiences with only the slightest distance from the grotesque in *Until Branches Bend* (2022). Director and writer Sophie Jarvis' debut feature film is a feverish psychological drama vis-à-vis body horror that blossoms beneath the isolated landscapes of the Syilx territory. Set in the fictional, rural small town of Montague, Robin (Grace Glowicki), an industrial peach grader, is exiled from her community after discovering a rare invasive beetle species burrowed into a peach at the town's packing facility. Simultaneously, Robin must cope with an unintended pregnancy in an area where women's healthcare options are intentionally scarce. Robin's ostracization for speaking up against her employer (Lochlyn Munro) satirizes the moral dilemma of 'doing the right thing', an action that plays on the veiled religious fanaticism and fiscal conservatism of a town biblically plagued by ecological catastrophe.

Jarvis tethers a critical eco-consciousness unique to the narrative that urgently asks us to question the consequences of complacency in a diegetic world that closely resembles our own. Or rather, a dystopian, *inhospitable* post-world marked by environmental degradation–forewarned in the scholarship of Jennifer Fay.

Previously titled *INVASIONS*, *Until Branches Bend* is, at its core, an oppositional text that critiques the precarity of industrial labour, capitalist agriculture, and the literal invasion of settler-colonialism in the Okanagan region. The director contrasts harmful methods of industrialized orcharding practices against indigenous modes of cultivation and land stewardship through moments of historical reflection. Jarvis self-reflexively emphasizes the consequences of capitalist agriculture against a backdrop of actual environmental deterioration, through capturing the region's fast-burning wildfire season. The wildfire, itself a character within the film, oscillates between proletarian and bourgeois spaces of Montague to historicise the lineages of indigenous enous populations affected by agricultural run-off and pesticide pollution.

Review by Orrin Pavone

When Time Got Louder



While watching When Time Got Louder, you find yourself faced with a question: how do you express love when struggling to speak?

For sister-and-brother duo Abbie (Willow Shields) and Kayden (Jonathan Simao) Peterson, this has never really been an issue, even with any difficulties their family has to adapt to when it comes to Kayden's nonverbal autism. But things change when Abbie gets into university in pursuit of her dream to one day start an animated series with Kayden, and her family has a hard time adapting in her absence.

For the film itself, it *shows* rather than *tells* an answer to the proposed question. It is intimate even in its primary use of longer shots and muted colours, creating an understated yet tender portrait of the Peterson family. By cutting between each character's perspectives, it's easy to connect to everyone as they try "taking it one day at a time." Even when communication fails between them, their love still *shows.*

And as things take a turn for the worse for Kayden while Abbie tries to balance fun and guilt in her newfound independence after she begins dating Karly (Ava Capri), you teeter with the nuances. *Yes*, you may think, *Abbie does deserve to enjoy more of her own life!* But Kayden does too. That's what the film does so well—exploring these complexities. Even when the father, Mark (Lochlyn Monro), tips close to a slightly antagonist role, viewers can understand. Despite his occasional pushiness or mother Tish (Elizabeth Mitchell)'s emotional state over Kayden's future, it's clear they simply want what's best for their son.

Jonathan Simao's portrayal of Kayden is also amazing—it really does convey so much. I'll admit I'm a teensy, *tiny* bit biased since I did go to elementary school with him, so it's one of those happy, "it's a small world, after all" moments of pride and excitement, hearing of him again after all these years! But *When Time Got Louder* has plenty to offer regardless.

I'll admit I teared up multiple times throughout it. Truly, it's a heartfelt film.

Review by Jenny Yang


HOLLYWOODLAND