Constellated Media: Serial Stars, Feminist Film Historiography, and Intermedial Hollywood

by

Justin John Morris

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Cinema Studies Institute
University of Toronto

This thesis is supported in part by funding from the
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

© Copyright by Justin John Morris 2021

Constellated Media: Serial Stars, Feminist Film Historiography, and Intermedial Hollywood

Justin John Morris

Doctor of Philosophy

Cinema Studies Institute
University of Toronto

2021

Abstract

This dissertation explores mid-twentieth century serial intermediality in Hollywood through case studies focused on three stars: Mary Pickford, Dale Evans, and Pearl White. Looking beyond our fixed understanding of these women's accomplishments in earlier eras, this project examines their later-career activities (or, in the case of Pearl White, how her persona resurfaced after her death) to argue that each star represented a locus of intermedial production beyond the screen. We can challenge media hierarchies that privilege the film object by broadening our understanding of the work associated with women in Hollywood after the institutionalization of sound in the 1920s. Looking to a variety of sources outside the film text, such as promotional materials, pressbooks, advertising, and autobiographical writings, and related media forms such as tie-in literature, comic strips, popular music, and television, I introduce the term "constellated media" to describe how these forms interrelate and become serialized. Through constellation, such entities come to constitute entire media universes outside (and within) the movie theatre.

In so doing, I also introduce a novel historiographical approach to assessing these forms. Drawing upon Monica Dall'Asta and Jane M. Gaines' theory of "constellating the past," I turn to the wealth of feminist film historiography texts centered on "early" and "silent" cinema and read this scholarship beyond its specific periodization. Invoking a shared emphasis on contingency and media permeability provides impetus for exploring the underexamined possibilities within serial media and Hollywood cinema at the mid-century.

Acknowledgments

My first and most significant thanks can only go to my partner, Amber Fundytus. Amber read and edited every word (more than once), workshopped every idea, entertained every half-baked scheme, sacrificed countless hours of her own work time, and showed me unconditional love and unwavering patience through a process that seemed to go on and on. It is an unbelievable blessing for a historian-in-training to have an archivist as a partner, and without her I would be buried in documents without a clue as to what to do with them. This project is as much hers as it is mine.

I am fortunate to have a committee that is doggedly encouraging and patient. My supervisor, Charlie Keil, nurtured me in every aspect of academic life and (hopefully) made me a better writer. Nic Sammond has been with this project from the very moment of its conception and has proven a stalwart mentor and friend. James Cahill consistently built me up and taught me how to think freely, a lesson he imparts to every single student he encounters. My thanks Mark Cheetham for immediately putting me at ease at the defense and to Corinn Columpar for her generative questions about constellating. This project is indebted to Shelley Stamp's work, and to her generosity and encouragement as an external reviewer.

I am grateful for my best friends, Kevin Chabot and Celine Bell (the noodies). They both went through the fire of defense before I did and answered my incessant queries about the process without a hint of annoyance. Kevin edited numerous drafts and taught me the useful lesson of knowing when something is "good enough." Our daily conversations over the last (near) decade, long in person and now online, have kept me afloat.

So many at Innis College have influenced, encouraged, and guided me over the years and I'd like to thank as many of them as I can. Anjo-mari Gouws proved a model of the consummate archival researcher and, along with Johannes Van der Horst, offered me a quiet place to write when I needed it most. Blake Williams encouraged my creative energies and put me up in Berkeley during my first conference on seriality. Tom Russell kept me in good spirits and plied me with countless pints. Tony Pi has been in my corner since the beginning and has the answer to any question seemingly at a moment's notice. Kass Banning took me under her wing and kept me employed, in the know, and even loaned me her office. Corinn Columpar provided me with numerous opportunities and was a thoughtful collaborator when we had to figure out how to move things "online." Matt Thompson taught me the joys of academic collaboration, and remains a brother-(with babes)-in-arms. Daniel Laurin was the perfect carrel neighbor and talked me down from more than one ledge. Ganga Rudraiah encouraged me to try academic activities outside my wheelhouse, and then helped me figure out how to do that. Ramtin Teymouri happily found me wherever I might be hiding around Innis College, and consistently offered a sympathetic ear. Karina Griffith encouraged me to realize my full potential as a scholar (still trying!). Thanks to Kate Russell and Sarah-Tai

Black for stepping in as phenomenal guest speakers in CIN322 in the weeks surrounding my thesis defense.

Thank you to my friends and family in Alberta and Ontario who have stayed with me throughout this process: the Morris & Fundytus families, Stephen Griffith, Candace Griffith, Marshall Boyd, Sarah Barnes, and Steven Jorgensen. Ashley Fundytus arrived at the 11th hour and provided me with some desperately needed time to concentrate. The project would have never been finished without her. Dan Berube and Elisabeth Shapiro have been unbelievably supportive and offered the opportunity to take a break when it was most needed. Jim Martens got me started on this road, and for that I will always be grateful. Liz Czach has been my mentor since my undergraduate days at the University of Alberta, and helped me get into grad school, housed me once I did, and has provided guidance on innumerable topics. Thank you, Liz.

Many within the burgeoning field of "seriality studies" have made me feel welcome and part of an academic community: thanks to Scott Higgins, Rudmer Canjels, Ilka Brasch, and Guy Barefoot. Shane Denson was always willing to workshop ideas, including my corruption of his and Ruth Mayer's theory of the serial figure, on the happy occasions that our paths crossed. Rob King encouraged and improved the earliest versions of these ideas in my master's research project and pointed me toward innumerable resources.

Thank you to the many tireless archivists, librarians, and keepers who have facilitated and bettered my research: Len Ferstman and Kate Johnson at the Innis College Library, Louise Hilton at the Academy archives/Margaret Herrick Library, Ned Comstock at USC's Cinematic Arts Library, Mark Quigley at the UCLA Film & Television Archive, Elaina Archer at the Mary Pickford Foundation, Becky Marangelli at the Ball State University archives, and Brock Silversides and Christina Stewart at the University of Toronto's Media Commons archives.

This project was funded by grants, scholarships, and fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Vivienne Poy Chancellor's Fellowship, the Centre for the Study of the United States, and the Cinema Studies Institute. My thanks to those institutions and to everyone who helped me with my applications.

Finally, to Echo Morris Fundytus: you came along halfway through the writing of this project and changed my perspective (for the better) on everything. This project was finished during a global pandemic that you may or may not remember, but despite the horrors we witnessed I would not trade the over 1000 beautiful days we have had together. I consider myself lucky that I had to find a way to write while you slept or played, because it meant our family was never apart. I love you. And, yes, I wrote three chapters because you are three.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments iv

Table of Contents vi

List of Figures viii

Introduction - Three Stars in a Constellation 1

"Why I liked the Old Rin Tin Tin:" Cinema Pressbooks as Constellated Guides 5

Monads, Constellated Media, and Feminist Film Historiography 11

Looking Past the New Film History's Gaps 20

Seriality: Spirals, Dead Ends, and Cultural Paradigms 25

Pickford, Evans, & White: Star Personae as Serial Figures 34

Chapter One - Neither Astronomical, nor Astrological: Comic Strips, the Wholesome B Movie, and Serial Failure at Mary Pickford's Comet Productions, 1946-1947 37

Blondie, Little Iodine, & "Little Mary:" America's "Wholesome" Serial Sweethearts 43

Plain and Reasonably Predictable: Comet Productions and the Postwar B Movie 73

"We Shouldn't Make Any More of Them:" King Features Comics and Intermedial Adaptation 85

Chapter Two - Dale Evans' Roundup: Postwar Intermediality, Serial Evangelism, and the "Temporal Wedge," 1945-1955 93

Sunset in El Dorado: Dale's Dispersive Dress 102

"A Year's Supply of Bear Meat:" Merchandise and Comics 119

"Be Not Forgetful To Entertain Strangers:" Constellated Christianity 131

Angel Unaware and the Little Angel of History 142

Chapter Three - "A Fascinating Nostalgic Cavalcade:" Pearl White, Topos Study, and the Spectre of the Extraordinary Body, 1914-1970 152

"An Old-fashioned Respect for Logic:" The Marvelous Silent Serial 156

The Spectre of the Extraordinary Body 163

Amplified/Intensified/Modernized/Embellished: Remaking *Pauline* in the 1930s 167

"Watch This Rising Young Star:" Topos Study and *The Perils of Pauline* (1947) 182

"Foil the Foul Villain:" Residual Serials 200

"Historical Buffoonery:" The Perils of Cartoon Serial Queens 207

Join the Dodge Rebellion! Pearl White and the 1960s 216

Conclusion - ?: Constellating the Unseen in Media History 232

Bibliography 243

List of Figures

Figure 1: Detail from *The Return of Rin Tin Tin* (1947) Pressbook 5

Figure 2: The Comet trio in 1947 38

Figure 3: A typical *Little Iodine* Strip 44

Figure 4: Comic strip Blondie and Dagwood are "bought" for the movies, while their human counterparts look on 50

Figure 5: *Little Iodine* Pressbook, 1947 54

Figure 6: Three Annie Rooneys 73

Figure 7: "Comet Productions fill the bill" 92

Figure 8: Detail from author's copy (previously Valerie's) of *Dale Evans and Danger in Crooked Canyon* 99

Figure 9: Dale Evans constellates with herself in *Sunset in El Dorado* 105

Figure 10: Enjoying the new Dale Evans western clothes 120

Figure 11: Dale Evans' Roundup detail 123

Figure 12: Dale Evans weaponizes domesticity in *Dale Evans Comics* 128

Figure 13: Dale and Roy's Religious Tract 132

Figure 14: The Little Angel of History 151

Figure 15: Pearl White in 1937 152

Figure 16: "The Screen's Famous Thrillers Re-made to Revive Big Business" 169

Figure 17: *Perils of Pauline* trade ad, 1933 171

Figure 18: Pearl White's extraordinary body defies gravity 180

Figure 19: Dummies fold in *Perils* 33 182

Figure 20: *The Perils of Pauline* trade advertisement, 1947. 190

Figure 21: Pearl White descends from a balloon on a segment 192

Figure 22: While Pearl (Betty Hutton) and Mike (John Lund) squabble 195

Figure 23: The Ohio Express, *Mercy* LP cover (1969) 200

Figure 24: Robin (Burt Ward) is trapped in a typical melodramatic peril while a mustachioed Riddler (Frank Gorshin) gleefully looks on 204

Figure 25: Fearless, Peerless Penelope faces perils of water and air… and rescues the Ant Hill Mob (dressed as Keystone Kops) in *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop*. 214

Figure 26: A cliffhanger buttresses car sales in *Dodge Rebellion* TV ads 224

Figure 27: "That 'Rebellion Girl is dodgin' unbelievable perils in *The Perils of Pauline* (1967) 229

Figure 28: ? Continued Next Week 242

Introduction
Three Stars in a Constellation

> "Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time."
>
> -Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"[1]

> "It's sort of a symbol of what's happened to him and to Mommy: the cross has become the great big thing in the middle of their lives. Everything else in their lives now sort of moves around it, like a wheel around a hub."
>
> - Dale Evans Rogers, *Angel Unaware*[2]

Between 1945-1947, Mary Pickford inaugurated her new company, Comet Productions, with a B-movie adaptation of the popular newspaper comic strip, *Little Iodine*. Concerned about the prospect of their top western star, Roy Rogers, being drafted into the war effort, Republic Pictures looked to radio, rodeo, and songwriting pioneer Dale Evans to fill his shoes. And Paramount Pictures metatextually redefined and confined the codes of the silent-era serial queen melodrama in remaking *The Perils of Pauline* within a feature-length biopic of Pearl White. Besides the relative concurrence of these events, each of the preceding three examples involves a faded Hollywood star whose image was (re-)defined by significant intermedial interplay outside of film. Each of these stars formed

---

[1] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations,* edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 263.
[2] Dale Evans Rogers, *Angel Unaware* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), 94.

singular, but significantly related, celestial bodies within a larger overall figure of constellated media.

An analysis of the later careers of Pickford and Evans or, in the case of White, the ongoing posthumous legacy of her career, uncovers a vast network of serialized media forms alongside and beyond the screen. None of these women, or their work, has been "forgotten" by dominant media histories, but the accounting of their accomplishments tends to be circumscribed within set constructs of periodization, filmic medium specificity, and their professional and domestic relationships with prominent men. Mary Pickford was a silent film star, "America's Sweetheart," co-founder of United Artists, and one-time wife of Douglas Fairbanks. Dale Evans was a B- and television Western sidekick, a supporting figure to Rogers, her singing cowboy husband, and his horse, Trigger. Pearl White was a star of early cinema and the best-known "queen" of the serial films that disappeared with the consolidation of Hollywood. Taking these three well-established narratives and asking what else remains, what happened after the reification of their historical personages, opens the door to an expansive "space in-between." In-between entrenched historical narratives, yes, but also in-between these stars and their projection on screen, where we find new perspectives on their work within underexplored media forms.

Assessing this space in-between allows us to ask what happens when one expands the frame to incorporate entire media forms. If one were able to sketch the contours of a perimeter around any given media object, what might lie in the space outside of that perimeter? Medium specificity would suggest *nothing*, arguing that

each visual and auditory medium sets its own formal and narrative boundaries in order to properly exist alongside every other. Conceptualizations of the digital have tended also to answer *nothing*; following from Bolter and Grusin's foundational update of Marshall McLuhan that all media is *remediated* within the frame of the digital, such arguments contend that there is no longer any space in-between to consider.[3] But what of the historical status of pre-digital popular media forms, particularly those that are linked by a serialization of theme, narrative, or representation? This project argues that this serialization is typified by an intermedial space between that is filled with overlooked media objects.

Such objects are generally understood as para- or extratextual to film, including promotional materials, advertising, and autobiographical writings, and related media forms such as tie-in literature, comics, popular music, and television. Tying these paratextual objects to the underexplored histories of three particular media stars acquaints us with different and distinct contexts and poses new questions about the activities of women in Hollywood after the Second World War. It also creates a need for a new historiographical process, one that I theorize, by way of Monica Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines' theory of the constellation, as constellated media. The metaphor of the constellation offers a rapid vacillation between the part and the whole. Disconnected entities that shine brightly on their own, constellated media form complete images when observed from a distance. We may even forget their individual qualities, and the serial nature by which they are

---

[3] J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000).

connected. These objects, whether they are paratextual, promotional, autobiographical, or otherwise, are doubly forgotten—in their ephemerality and disposability, they are sufficiently ignored in critical and academic literature as to be considered unsuitable as sources.

In another sense, however, serialized paratextual objects were essential to the ways in which pre-digital audiences conceived of their media diets--not as an unconnected succession of disparate forms, but as an interconnected whole. Constellated media serve as a serial bonding agent amongst forms, transforming multiple separate entities into a single idea. Mary Pickford's efforts to cinematically adapt a comic strip within the boundaries of her outmoded star image, or Dale Evans' articulation of her own plurimedial production in the form of evangelical autobiography, or Pearl White's spectral appearance in Saturday morning cartoons of the 1960s, may appear to be historical curiosities outside the main story: their appearances as actors on film. Each of these examples will work, however, to define a serialized network of forms in which the stars themselves become media.

This project offers a broad definition of constellated media, and argues that media of this nature, functioning as a serialized whole, have the tendency to disrupt the distinction between a film and its "extratextual" contexts. These forms operate altogether differently from our contemporary understanding of "convergence culture," or "transmedia," for a myriad of reasons. Not the least of these concerns narrative, insofar as the vast majority of constellated media do not serve to advance, reconstruct, or reinforce the story arcs of any other narratively driven form with which they might share certain qualities of theme and subject matter.

Another has to do with availability and accessibility. In each case, the constellated media discussed below were and are unevenly distributed to audiences both past and present. Unlike a contemporary transmedia property, in which a film may signal a website, which signals a comic, which signals some form of processed food, pre-digital constellated media are just as likely to confuse and confound narrative consumer flow. In so doing, constellated media offer the reader alternating perspectives towards a diversity of exterior objects. But what, exactly, are constellated media? A brief analysis of an example exterior to my eventual case studies, that of a silent film star and their status after the advent of sound, Rin Tin Tin, will provide some clarity.

"Why I liked the Old Rin Tin Tin:" Cinema Pressbooks as Constellated Guides



Figure 1: Detail from *The Return of Rin Tin Tin* (1947) Pressbook

Take, for example, the studio pressbook for the film *The Return of Rin Tin Tin* (1947). Produced for exhibitors, the pressbook remained invisible for a majority of the film's audience, and yet the larger structural purpose of the pressbook was to provide the exhibitor with strategies to promote the film and to provide copy for local newspaper columnists. The content of this constellated media was unevenly distributed to the audience—depending on whether, and to what degree, an exhibitor or newspaper employed images, text, and promotional suggestions from the pressbook, the audience had either ample access to the pressbook's content, very little access, or none at all. And while the contemporaneous Hollywood trade press might occasionally serve as primary sourcing for when and where these strategies were employed, the resultant appearances are sporadic and unreliable at best. The pressbook therefore stands alone as a constellated medium unmoored from its relationship to the film it sought to promote, and prompts historical questions somewhat apart from those offered by the rather rote animal-adventure B-movie.

Prominently featuring the panting visage of a German shepherd, the pressbook eagerly announces that "the greatest animal star of all time is back," his greatness "proved conclusively" by a "nationwide survey by [the] research dept. of BUCHANAN & CO. [that] finds 94.6% of people [are] PRESOLD on RIN TIN TIN!"[4] The pressbook continues to promise tie-ins with "22 magazines," *True Comics,* and Gaines Dog Food. But *who* is the Rin Tin Tin promised to be the greatest animal

[4] *The Return of Rin Tin Tin* pressbook, *Cinema Pressbooks from the Original Studio Collections* (Reading, Berks: Research Publications, 1988.) Media Commons Microform Collection, 1.

star of all time? "Rinty" had not appeared on film since the 1931 serial *The Lightning Warrior*, while his offspring, Rin Tin Tin, Jr. last starred in 1939's *Law of the Wolf*. As the pressbook makes plain, *The Return of Rin Tin Tin* featured Rin Tin Tin *III*. The original canine, discovered as a stray pup by trainer Lee Duncan during World War One, "starred in 22 pictures for Warner Brothers over a period of a dozen years—and is still a famous name throughout the country."[5] The third, however, is but a "scion of the Rin Tin Tin family," who likewise makes "his debut in […] the first of a series."[6]

The promotional tool here, then, refers both to past and future – a remembered cinematic past for the famous animal performer and an assumed future for his supposed grandson. In so doing, the pressbook copy also imagines a future for the Poverty Row Hollywood studio, Producers Releasing Corporation (PRC), vis-à-vis the celebrated past of Warner Brothers. The included ballyhoo suggestions point primarily to a youthful audience, encouraging drawing contests in art class, a school orchestra dog parade, and a youth Rin Tin Tin fanclub.[7] A proposed Rinty essay contest features an illustration of a smartly dressed young man imagining the specter of the eminent hound, writing a letter on "Why I Liked the Old Rin Tin Tin and Am Looking Forward to 'THE RETURN OF RIN TIN TIN.'"[8] Undaunted by his non-existent memory of 1920s Hollywood cinema, the

---

[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid., 3.*
[8] *Ibid.*

young man eagerly scratches away in a pleasure that blends cynophilia with cinephilia.

To what media object, then, does this postwar pressbook refer? *The Return of Rin Tin Tin,* yes. But it also draws attention to issues of *True Comics, Calling All Boys,* and *Parents* magazines, bags of Gaines 'Complete Meal' dog food, a host of lobby cards and posters in black & white and colour, and an essay contest, likely proposed by the PRC promotions department and subsequently forgotten. The intention of the pressbook's authors was to produce materials that might increase the likelihood that an audience would seek out opportunities to view the film. However, if mass production and mass consumption offer a kind of equalization of media, can one prove that, experientially, a historical audience proceeded in a distinct fashion: the remembrance of fondly regarded trained animals through promo materials and dog food tie-ins might prove every bit as significant as the viewing of a film in that audience's regular media consumption. Is the single idea produced by the interconnection of objects via the constellation simply the film, or is it something else entirely?

One can find precedents for this probing of the singular film's apparently all-encompassing meaning. Miriam Hansen's notion of "vernacular modernism," to take one example, suggests that the quotidian and disposable might pair with "cultural practices that both articulated and mediated the experience of modernity, such as the mass-produced and mass-consumed phenomena of fashion, design, advertising,

architecture and urban environment, of photography, radio, and cinema."[9] In grappling with classical Hollywood's influence world-wide by way of rethinking the "totalizing account of classical cinema," Hansen suggests that more attention needs to be paid to elements seemingly "outside" the system, such as genre and the star image; to do so is to appreciate that "if classical Hollywood cinema succeeded as an international modernist idiom on a mass basis, it did so not because of its presumably universal narrative form but because it meant different things to different people and publics, both at home and abroad."[10] To these differential elements and meanings I would add constellated media. I do not specifically concern myself with classicism in this study, though a significant body of recent literature has shown the ways in which Hollywood serial films maintained an "attractions" model well after the establishment of classical norms, and may even have anticipated later arguments about the "post-classical."[11] This project does suggest, however, that the universe of constellated media peripheral to mainstream media industries (including Hollywood) might offer a different understanding of the post-war American popular media ecosystem. Constellated media connect dominant media forms but also operate outside of them, and often offer unexpected avenues of inquiry.

The pressbook's primary invocation, after all, is of a particular deceased dog, Rin Tin Tin (1918-1932), who had nothing to do with the film in question. Signaling

---

[9] Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999): 60.
[10] *Ibid.,* 68.
[11] See, for example, Scott Higgins, 2016; Ilka Brasch, 2018; Guy Barefoot, 2017.

a cycle of earlier films, and thus the prewar studio system that was already in decline by 1947, *The Return of Rin Tin Tin* allowed PRC to (perhaps) capitalize on a mythologized past, while imagining a prestigious future for the company opened up by the disarray that the anti-trust actions directed at the major studios created.[12] Flattened into a one-dimensional figure, Rin Tin Tin becomes a kind of talisman of studio-era historicity. For the purposes of PRC he has become, in Raymond Williams' term, residual.

In counter-distinction to the "archaic," those elements of culture that are understood as squarely belonging to the past, the residual "has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only […] as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue."[13] Rinty is a residue of the early studio system. Arriving before the institutionalization of sound, the original Deutscher Schäferhund's filmography reflects a multitude of genres and styles common to the era, especially serial films, westerns, and northern adventure epics. Rin Tin Tin is but one small example of any number of stars, genres, and stylistic elements that were, during the silent era, enormously popular aspects of dominant Hollywood culture. Into the late 1940s, '50s, and '60s, however, these elements had become constellated themselves,

---

[12] A not uncommon phenomena for Poverty Row, which is further discussed in chapter one

[13] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122.

residual entities employed by a myriad of media producers in order to invoke a glorified past of studio production. Media do not necessarily need to be residual in order to be constellated, but as an operative action of the organizational impulses of everyone from historical audiences to contemporary historians, the assessment of constellated residual objects helps define the ever-evolving process of historical narrativization. In offering simultaneously progressive and regressive historical viewpoints, constellated media challenge progress-oriented historicist accounts of media and technology. They provide useful tools in identifying the horizons of possibility for certain historical vectors of media. As tools, constellated media outline the fact that the past is not simply narrativized wholesale by contemporary historians outside of context, but in response to assumptions and understandings long gestating. Applying these ideas to contemporary feminist film historiography provides the larger theoretical armature of this study.

Monads, Constellated Media, and Feminist Film Historiography

Specifically positioned to respond to feminist-historical inquiries into women in the silent film industries, Monica Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines' discussion of "constellating" the past is equally useful for addressing the three post-sound case studies discussed here. They note that "historical objects are of momentous importance in [the] search for a critical historical method. Severed from their original context, removed to another time—the present which is (just one of) their (possible) future(s)—they stand before us like so many unrelated 'monads,' fragments of a fourth-dimensional picture that, if ever it existed, has for us gone

forever."[14] Rather than merely providing empirical data for the "historicist faith in filling in by addition," the historical object reveals "gaps" that "prompt multiple narratives, none of which can ever pretend to exhaustiveness."[15] The theory of constellating seeks to address the ambiguity central to the term "history," or what the authors term the impossibility of history's history, or, "the perfect correspondence between a history (of) and historical events (themselves)."[16] Constellating understands the historical object as *coexisting* in both past and present, and therefore creating the opportunity for the present to commune with the past, to connect the star of the present with the star of the lost forever. As Gaines and Dall'Asta make clear in their example, the recently rediscovered film print of a lost silent film pioneer is not that person, but merely a tiny aspect of their work. But that tiny aspect might still be animated, to offer the objective existence of a history that we have not heard or understood, and in so doing we might pursue lines of inquiry regarding other "lost" histories. In opposition to historicism's method of "attempting to restore totality in a narrative" by "accumulating documents to burst through the gap," constellating encourages the historian to luxuriate in the insurmountable distance between past and present.[17] To constellate

---

[14] Monica Dall'Asta and Jane M. Gaines, "Constellations: Past Meets Present in Feminist Film History" in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future,* edited by Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 18.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.,* 22.
[17] *Ibid.,* 18.

is to accept the impossibility of totality in our narratives of the past, and to therefore welcome the fragmentary trace left by the material historical object.

Neither hollow nor one-dimensional, the historical object's historicity makes it a powerful heuristic tool: "in a way, the peculiar present-pastness of the historical motion-picture object allows us to create a temporal wedge in our present that makes us momentarily coincident with the historical past."[18] Thinking through the motion picture object as temporally coincident with the past in this way, while attempting to determine its evidentiary efficacy in the present, is a project remarkably similar to the analysis of serial media. The meanings of so-called para- and extra-textual forms as historical objects are even less fixed than film, precisely because they have been ignored in the history of popular media. For Gaines and Dall'Asta, the study of film history prizes, like no other field,

> the extant 35mm motion picture print […] the historical artifact par excellence, the centerpiece that organizes surviving documents in its orbit: the screenplay, the account book, the poster; a narrative object that encourages historical narratives while it also invites us to find the dreams of its makers and spectators in its "realization."[19]

The motion picture object may legitimately point toward the "dreams" of specific historical makers and spectators, dreams that exist within narratives, but in acknowledging this reality, we must also understand that said dreams also exist(ed) elsewhere, and on the periphery. The privileging of the male artistic act in history *and* historiography found women creators readjusting their efforts so that

---

[18] *Ibid.,* 19.
[19] *Ibid.,* 17.

the motion-picture object was not the single star that held all related media in its orbit, but merely a point in a firmament filled with multitudinous media.

Of course, the cinematic object has been traditionally understood in film historiography as the "centerpiece," the undivided whole of the "constellation," in the industrial sense that the "surviving documents" outlined by Dall'Asta and Gaines above were developed and manufactured solely to perform the function of promoting the consumption of the film. However, as this study endeavors to show, constellated media have and do stand independent of the apparent "primary" or "originary" text, and certainly do more than simply support such texts. In Gaines and Dall'Asta, as elsewhere, nomenclature is important. The authors pass off what I have termed constellated media as mere "surviving documents" held in the orbit of the surviving film text, but their use of the term "surviving" in this instance already suggests that these media may have a different evidentiary power than the film print; certainly, they have survived beyond the past moment of their original creation, and therefore may allow the historian to be "momentarily coincident" with this past.

The tendency towards minimizing the power of constellated media has been addressed by scholars of paratextuality, intermediality, and transmediality, though the prefixes of "para-," "inter-," and "trans-" may already suggest a relational distance. As Jonathan Gray has noted, the use of the words "text" or "source text" in relation to a film or television program suggests a status equivalent to "the entire text, and/or that it completes the text […] a film or [television] program is but one

part of the text, the text always being a contingent entity, either in the process of forming and transforming or vulnerable to further formation and transformation."[20]

Gray's assessment might just as easily apply to the "text" that is the historical past, insofar as historians and their myriad sources and theoretical approaches constantly form and ultimately *transform* our understanding of the past. Similarly, a film text that is contingent at the moment of its creation and dissemination on any number of variables— its production contexts, its critical and popular reception, its distribution, and its para- and extratextual worlds—remains contingent for a contemporary audience, both in terms of those unknown contexts of the past and new contexts of the present. This unfixed contingency tied to historical objects is, in many ways, the idea central to the notion of constellating. In Dall'Asta and Gaines' formulation, however, the film text is of such fixed evidentiary power that it might be thought of in terms of the monad, which would suggest that many of the above-mentioned contextual pressures placed on the ever-evolving text are not mutable but are, in fact, fixed.

According to Jeremy Dunham and Pauline Phemister, summarizing Leibniz, "monads are indivisible unities and cannot therefore be homogenous parts of divided aggregate extended things […] a plurality of monads requires that each monad is identifiably distinct from all the others. As indivisible, they cannot be distinguished by their parts, but they can be distinguished by their qualities, […]

---

[20] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 6-7.

each monad represents the whole world."[21] Despite the difficulty inherent in trying to describe any industrially produced cultural object as "identifiably distinct," Gaines and Dall'Asta contend that the filmic object might still hold within itself not only the first-order content of the film, but also all of the related production, distribution, and reception contexts--the "dreams" of its creators--as a historical source. Our study here of serialized constellated media, however, strives to employ this theory of constellating while problematizing the idea of the film as monad. The limitation of emphasizing the *singularity* of motion picture objects as monads is that it places them at the top of a media hierarchy – they may bear some relation to the paratexts with which they share subject matter, but they are nonetheless indivisible and therefore apparently hold all meaning within themselves. Constellated media tend to take on their own "present-pastness," however, and the deconstruction of the interrelation between text and paratext in our own present serves to unveil the possibilities always evident in the "secondary text."

As sites of intermedial intermingling representing any number of diffuse media forms, constellated media show that while the historical film object may appear to act as a holistic constellation, monads opening and revealing historically coincident moments, that in fact these constellations are not indivisible and are comprised of myriad constituent parts that form a whole in their interaction. The fine grain of any constellation depends above all on resolution: our ability to place ever-smaller stars in relation to an overall figure we imagine. Constellated media

---

[21] Jeremy Dunham and Pauline Phemister, "Monadologies: An Historical Overview," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23.6: 2015, 1024.

work together in the middle to form historical figurations of their own, while also contributing to the larger image of wholeness projected by the motion picture object. If a film might pose any number of historical queries and invite various divergent answers, what questions might arise from a star's extratextual quasi-autobiographical religious writings, for example, or from a trade ad, or from a costume, or a comic strip?

Indeed, turning to Walter Benjamin's discussion of monadology in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* one finds that if the film text is to be understood as the monad that "holds all surviving documentation in its orbit," perhaps this "surviving documentation" must also have monadological qualities. As Benjamin outlines (again, working from Leibniz):

> every single monad contains, in an indistinct way, all the others. The idea is a monad—the pre-stabilized representation of phenomena resides within it, as in their objective interpretation […] it is not surprising that the philosopher of the *Monadology* was also the founder of infinitesimal calculus. The idea is a monad—that means briefly: every idea contains the image of the world. The purpose of the representation of the idea is nothing less than an abbreviated outline of this image of the world.[22]

Employing these conceptions of the monad in service of a media historiography does not mean the creation of media hierarchies, but rather their dissolution. Clearly the notion that the film text as monad might contain an image of the whole (past) world, and make us "momentarily coincident" with it, is central to a notion of constellating. What this study seeks to suggest, however, is that constellated media might also give us a glimpse of that world, as every single paratextual object,

---

[22] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 48.

however ephemeral or seemingly unimportant, might similarly contain an entry point into the world. The monad, in Benjamin's elaboration here, is a distinctly *serialized* phenomenon, in that the "abbreviated outline of this image of the world" is at once a complete image and an abbreviation – it is at once the whole of the image *and* a portion of the image that, along with innumerable other portions, forms the whole image. In working through the meaning of "origin," Benjamin suggests that part and whole, centre and periphery, are held in a constant balance. That insight proves essential for our analysis of constellated media: "the guidelines of philosophical investigation are inscribed in the dialectic that accompanies origin. It demonstrates that in all essentials *uniqueness and repetition mutually condition one another*."[23]

Dall'Asta and Gaines' theory of the constellation depends on the idea of the historical object as monad. To include constellated media, we must expand their parameters for what constitutes such an object. Constellated media function as the historian's tangible connection to an unknowable past that the historian must nonetheless attempt to construct. It stands to reason that constellated media must hold within themselves historical realities beyond what is represented within their fictions. The authors signal the importance of fiction when they note that "a critical-historical feminist film historiography is well aware that historical knowledge is built precisely upon […] nothingness since we know that the holes and lacunae that

[23] Walter Benjamin, quoted in Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 133. Emphasis mine.

we find contain both what did and what *never* did happen."[24] They take as their primary example the Italian silent film director Elvira Giallanella and the recent (re)discovery of her film *Umanita* (1919). Discovering evidence that the antiwar fantasia film was never exhibited publicly before 2007, the authors contend that "on the one hand, we see how Giallanella needs *us* to bring her work into existence, to find a new antiwar audience for a film that never had one […] but on the other hand *we* need her to make sense of the continued negation of women, of those experiences of loss, failure, and demise that define the lives of so many."[25] Thus the historical object in question, *Umanita*, not only offers quantitative and visual information about a past, but continues that story: Giallanella did not have the opportunity to exhibit her film during her lifetime but others eventually did, lifting the film from the past to our present.

The constellated media addressed in this study do not represent, nor does our study of them rectify, lacunae as monumental or as oblique as those tackled by Dall'Asta and Gaines. Nonetheless, my analysis of the selected examples nuances our historical knowledge of serialized intermediality in American media production in the middle of the last century, and expands our notion of what constituted the artistic work of women involved in that production. I similarly work to constellate with Pickford, Evans, and White, and to inhabit the temporal wedge that is opened by the underexplored elements of their careers and star images.

---

[24] Gaines & Dall'Asta, 21.
[25] *Ibid.*

Looking Past the New Film History's Gaps

The questions posed by a historical discussion of constellated media certainly function to "fill in by addition" those gaps in historical narratives that have tended to ignore or malign the artistic work of women, along with particular media forms robustly consumed by women. But, as Gaines and Dall'Asta have shown, this filling in is simply a first step towards historical nuance, and constellated media simultaneously disrupt and undo conceptions of wholeness and linear trajectories by generating their own gaps and absences. Constellated media further expand the "temporal wedge," placing historical media objects in the present in conversation with their forgotten contemporaneous sources.

Pairing parallel histories of Mary Pickford, Dale Evans, and Pearl White—and the myriad constellated media objects springing from those histories—with Dall'Asta and Gaines leads to an expansion of the authors' originary queries. Beyond "who were the women working in silent film industries?", "where did they go?", and "how did we forget them?", we must ask questions designed to address the situation of women working in Hollywood after the conversion to sound and beyond the screen. In so doing, this project builds upon Erin Hill's recent work in *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production*. Hill argues against the all-too-familiar "myth in Hollywood […] that women did not participate in much of film history except as actors or, more rarely, as screenwriters, because they were pushed out from behind the camera in the early years of filmmaking, managing to return

decades later only amid nationwide equal rights activism."[26] Thus, the gap so central to Dall'Asta and Gaines' project serves to create another historical gap, that of the artistic activities of women in classical Hollywood. The media industrial context of each of my case studies reveals yet another underexplored area, as a long-established emphasis on the Big Five major studios in histories of classical Hollywood has tended to overshadow the particular operations of the minor and Poverty Row studios discussed in each chapter, such as Comet Productions, Republic Studios, and Universal Pictures.[27] Additionally, given the "gap's" centrality to serial and series forms, where narratives and the audience's consumption of them are consistently punctuated with temporal pauses and disruptions that often eschew beginnings and closures, these texts become particularly apt for a critical historical approach. The series, in this instance, refers not to a set of texts interconnected by narrative alone, but a complex interaction of various media forms in which "Mary Pickford," "Dale Evans," or "Pearl White" are multifaceted and adaptable intermedial entities that might be understood in all their complexity whether on screen, page, comic strip, etc.

---

[26] Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016): 1.

[27] Efforts have been recently made to correct this absence within the historical literature. Robert J. Read, notably, argues that there is "very little remaining of Poverty Row, or its nondescript producers; likewise, film history has largely forgotten this marginal aspect of cinema's past." Read's dissertation admirably treats these films, and the people who created them, seriously. Robert J. Read, *A Squalid-Looking Place: Poverty Row Films of the 1930s*, McGill University, Unpublished Dissertation, 2010: 3. See also Blair Davis 2012; 2017, Scott Higgins 2016, Guy Barefoot 2017, Ilka Brasch 2018, Maureen Rogers 2017.

As we have seen, the assumed medium specificity of the filmic text exerts a delimiting force, and our understanding of the forgotten work of women becomes a function of that force. The motion picture object serves merely to reveal new avenues of historical inquiry that extend beyond the cinematic image; these are avenues that should be understood as parallel with, rather than inferior to, the image. As Richard Dyer reminds us, "star images are always extensive, multimedia, [and] intertextual."[28] Dyer's description fits with our earlier definition of inter-mediality (note Dyer's choice of the term "intertextual," rather than "extratextual"): the star image, crafted at the intersection of various distinct media objects, is about the crafting of meaning amongst texts, and what is generally understood to be "paratextual" is also textual, and not merely extraneous material "outside" of a film. Taking my cues from Dyer, I argue that constellated media involve those objects traditionally understood as paratextual; however, I go further to argue that these women become intermedial serial entities *themselves* by virtue of their star images, and are similarly constellated.

Media archaeology and the New Film History, and their influence in remaking feminist film history, illuminate this stroll along underexplored historical avenues. Wanda Strauven credits the New Film History with pioneering media archaeological approaches that "range from questioning what is taken for granted or accepted as 'truth' to digging up forgotten pioneers, unimportant films and other neglected material or dimensions" and, most importantly, critiquing traditional

---

[28] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Routledge, 1986), 3.

historiography's obsessions with "chronology, genealogy, and […] teleology."[29] If the objects in question do not constitute a sufficiently significant intervention on their own, then the development of a new methodology certainly does; as Vicki Callahan notes in *Reclaiming the Archive,* "media archaeology's deep-time methodology opens the possibilities for film history and theory by envisioning temporality as a nonlinear, multidirectional flow of information rather than a singular reductive and evolutionary stream of apodictic data […] [W]hile the notion of deep time might at first glance seem antithetical to a *historical* project given its absence of strict chronology, its multiple vectors through time are more consistent with *feminist* and *cinematic* topologies."[30]

Callahan's argument is undoubtedly true of feminist topologies, but the historical study of the cinematic has occasionally become overly delimited in its emphasis on film and its related contexts. Strauven clarifies, because New Film History necessarily had to treat the dearth of extant films made before 1906 as archaeological objects, that the emphasis soon shifted to "an exploration of their context—of production, circulation, and reception."[31] Thus, film history became cinema history, "the history of cinema as institution, as exhibition space, as social

---

[29] Wanda Strauven, "Media Archaeology: Where Film History, Media Art, and New Media (Can) Meet" in *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives,* edited by Julia Noordegraaf, et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013): 63.
[30] Vicki Callahan, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Archive – Archaeological Explorations toward a Feminism 3.0," in *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History,* edited by Vicki Callahan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 2.
[31] Strauven, 62.

space."[32] In taking up constellated media, and the prismatic study of stars marginalized or misunderstood in standard histories of classical Hollywood, I argue that the originary expansion of film history to include other texts, other sites, and other audiences might again be expanded to see what else has been forgotten, namely the cinema's always-present connection to other popular media forms via the strands of those ephemeral objects that form their own sections of the larger media constellation.

The chosen case studies here are not simply an effort to identify lost pioneers or their work and influence in various media industries. Rather, outlining the multiple vectors of this work helps to restructure our understanding of Hollywood "film" history during the studio era. Histories that typically neglect the role of women in media production do so because the historical window on what constitutes that role, Hill's actors and screenwriters, is unnecessarily narrow. This projects responds, in its own modest way, to Shelley Stamp's call to arms that historians must "look past the screen" in embracing Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin's suggestion of "film scholarship without films."[33] For Stamp, such an approach proves of central importance for feminist media historiography, "because looking past the screen changes our object of study. It moves our gaze away from representations of female characters on screen, away from the spectator-screen binary, into a world of culture,

---

[32] *Ibid.,* 63.

[33] Shelley Stamp, "Feminist Media Historiography and the Work Ahead," *Screening the Past* 40, September 2015, http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-40-first-release/feminist-media-historiography-and-the-work-ahead/

a world where women circulate, have agency, and make meaning."[34] As apt tools for looking past the screen, constellated media prove their utility.

Seriality: Spirals, Dead Ends, and Cultural Paradigms

The applicability of constellated media to this larger historiographical process hinges on the fact that they are, in their interrelation, inherently serialized objects. The serial form described here is not one of an extended sequential and causally motivated narrative, broken into smaller pieces for consumption; instead we can more appropriately comprehend it by way of Umberto Eco's understanding of seriality in terms of the loop, the spiral, and the mold. Eco contends that

> to serialize means, in some way, to repeat. Therefore, we shall have to define a first meaning of *to repeat* by which the term means to make a replica of the same abstract type […] consider the universe of mass media and see the case in which (i) something is offered as original and different […] (ii) we are aware that this something is repeating something else that we already know, and (iii) not withstanding this—better, just because of it—we like it (and we buy it).[35]

Within this definition of seriality, every medium is but a node in an already culturally established network of media, a star in the larger constellation. As Frank Kelleter has argued, "commercial series need to be examined as narratives of proliferation that tend to expand beyond the bounds of their original media and core texts […] This observation involves more than simply a matter of narrative technique. Iterative modes […] of storytelling are propelled by the same project that animates the capitalist production of culture at large: they aim at an endless

---

[34] *ibid.*

[35] Umberto Eco, "Interpreting Serials" in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991), 85.

innovation of reproduction."[36] The serial in this formation is not a classically constructed procession from introduction to denouement, but a production and reproduction, a repetition and a variation; a mold cast and then cast again in the hastening of media change.

The reproduction in this case, however, encompasses more than genre, character types, or narrative situation. Serial repetition is not solely a kind of single-medium installment plan but rather a larger intertextual and intermedial operation where figures and properties appear and intersect in plurimedial forms to constitute a larger thematic *spread* that audiences engage and participate in from any number of vantage points. I am not proposing an ahistorical recapitulation of Henry Jenkins' theory of *transmedia*, where singular sequential narratives in the era of "convergence" might appear and be followed by audiences from, for example, films to web pages to comic books to television shows, et cetera; instead, I am thinking along the lines of Jenkins' notion of *spreadable media,* which seeks to excavate the "cultural technologies that have enabled content (stories, images, ideas, etc.) to circulate by means of 'systems of spreadability' or, put another way, mechanical mass production."[37] Understanding seriality as precisely this cross-medial spread means reconsidering the means by which this spread occurs. Addressing the failure of a particular iteration of a serialized text, as Chapter One does, we might attribute its lack of success to a combination of economics, reception,

---

[36] Frank Kelleter, ed. *Media of Serial Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), 2; 125.
[37] Henry Jenkins quoted in Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 62.

and aesthetics, but ultimately it has failed to *extend the spread.* Whether we understand a serial installment as a link in a causal narrative chain or as a reiterative node in a larger matrix, overall we perceive seriality in terms of plentitude. Serial narratives tend to spread out, potentially indefinitely, embracing a variety of media adaptations, merchandised products, and amateur fan production. Successful serial enterprises may continue unabated and even unnoticed, while a failed serial iteration may immediately stand out to the historian because of its finitude; however, we can use this demonstrable limitation to reify the parameters of a larger media spread. We will have opportunity to assess both in this project's case studies.

In either case, serialized constellated media have often been overlooked in standard accounts of postwar media production. This investigation of the overlooked shares common theoretical ground with the heterogeneous approaches of media archaeology. Thomas Elsaesser, in *Film History as Media Archaeology,* quotes Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka's assertion that "media archaeologists have begun to construct alternate histories of suppressed, neglected, and forgotten media that do not point […] to the present media-cultural condition as their 'perfection'. Dead ends, losers, and inventions that never made it into a material product have important stories to tell."[38] For Elsaesser, this emphasis on the 'dead end' is generative for a historiography of the cinema as

> it does not insist on cinema's uniqueness as an art form and its specificity as a medium. Instead, it sees cinema's past as well as its future firmly

[38] Elsaesser, 20.

> embedded in other media practices, other technologies, other social uses, and above all as having—throughout its history—interacted with, been dependent on, been complemented by, and found itself in competition with all manner of entertainment forms, scientific pursuits, practical applications, military uses. To arbitrarily and ahistorically cordon off these other uses of the cinema apparatus and manifestations of the moving image would, from today's position, not only block understanding of how cinema came about; it would also risk misunderstanding some of the key developments underway.[39]

One should be careful to acknowledge that the neglected objects discussed here do not constitute the same kind of productive avenue-not-taken so favored by media archaeologists when discussing forgotten technologies or alternative utilizations of the moving image.[40] Instead, this project endeavors to map a shadow history of intermediality. The digital cinema's cross-medial intersection with a variety of media forms stands as one of Elsaesser's misunderstood "developments underway:" such an intermediality is not a recent development of the digital but is, in fact, an ever-present historical reality. Employing constellated media, one can begin to grapple with the broader legacy of this postwar intermedial nexus to determine the ways in which cinema served as a single medium within a serialization of media.

How does my understanding of intermediality connect the case studies under examination to notions of seriality? The recent approaches of André Gaudreault, Rick Altman, and others provide some historiographical guidance: Gaudreault, in reference to early cinema, notes that "we need different conceptual tools than those that traditional historiography has accustomed us to use" in order to understand

---

[39] Ibid., 19.

[40] See, for example, Acland, ed., 2006; Acland & Wasson, eds., 2011; Kluitenberg, 2006; Parikka, 2010; Zielinski, 2008.

the complex system of relations defining that period. As a remedy, Gaudreault offers the concepts of "cultural paradigm" and "cultural series."[41] Describing kine-attractography, his chosen term for what scholars might have once called "early" or "primitive" cinema, Gaudreault argues that

> in the present case, the cultural paradigm could be, for example, late-nineteenth-century stage entertainment. This cultural paradigm would be made up of 'various forms of signification': music hall, shadow plays, magic sketches, fairy plays, circus acts, variety shows, pantomime, et cetera. Each of these forms of signification is a cultural series, and their overlapping creates a context in which kine-attractography attempted to carve a space, often from within these same cultural series.[42]

Obviously, Hollywood cinema had already arrived at a level of mature institutionalization by the 1920s; accordingly, we might choose to understand seriality as a cultural paradigm in its own right. In this case it was a paradigm that began accelerating in the 19th century with advances in printing and graphic reproduction. This paradigm's "various forms of signification" encompassed, moving through the 20th century, the serial queen melodramas and their attendant pitch to a female audience by means of cooperation with news publications (a subject that will be addressed in Chapter 3), the first film adaptations of popular newspaper comic strips, the network syndication of serialized radio drama and soap opera,

---

[41] André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, translated by Timothy Barnard (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 64.; See also Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004)

[42] *Ibid.*

popular literature made for children, the eventual consolidation of television around the recycling of film libraries, and more.

This paradigm of the serial produces the potential to break down our preconceived notions of the formal boundaries between the cultural series of film, radio, and comics, but also of related, constellated media, such as star images, advertisements, merchandise, and promotional material. The serial paradigm reveals the always present, ever-changing intermediality central to these forms and their interactions. Just as Gaudreault argues that the reception and aesthetics of the loose historical entity once labeled "early" cinema was in fact an amalgam of already extant cultural practices, we can identify film, radio, comics, popular music, advertising, the popular biography, and newsprint as deeply interrelated. Jeffrey Geiger and Karin Littau grapple with this interrelation in attempting to define a specific "cinematicity":

> If cinematicity can be found 'outside' cinema […] it follows that using the term to reinforce media purity would falsify the context in which media operate, and would fallaciously determine the character of their emergence. Our point is not that 'in the beginning,' as Andre Gaudreault has argued, 'cinema was so intermedial that it was *not even* cinema'; our argument is that all media, cinema included, are part of an ecology of intermedial borrowings, conjoinings, and convergences […] Mediality—including cinema's supposed cinematicity—can only be understood intermedially. All media (not just emerging media) are, therefore, in an intermediate state with reference to other media.[43]

Seriality, therefore, serves as a bonding agent amongst these media and facilitates this "intermediate state." Serial media forge particularly robust and direct

---

[43] Jeffrey Geiger and Karin Littau, *Cinematicity in Media History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 4.

connections amongst media forms. These forms may only occasionally invoke one another on the level of representation, but they more importantly fuse to create interstitial "variety programs" of reading in which the traditionally defined parameters of a text undergo a reframing. To fully understand such texts, we must engage with various other complementary texts and their programming by the interlocking operations of media industries. We can therefore understand seriality itself as an inherently intermedial process that renders the relationship between producers and consumers unstable, and dissolves the assumed fixity of the narrative, formal, technological, promotional, and reception contexts within which media are produced.

The serial cultural paradigm provides the connective plane on which intermediality operates historically, but we ought not to confuse these intermedial interconnections with media convergence. Juha Herkman has pointed to the historiographical difficulty inherent in the term "convergence," in that it not only blurs "the differences in media change" but that it also erroneously suggests a "similarization process" brought about by the digital.[44] The theory of convergence has tended to produce what David Holmes has called a "New Media historicism," a kind of technological determinism in which the historical development of various media and their apparatuses are understood as contextually, socially, and formally distinct from one another until the ultimate "remediating" force of the digital. For

---

[44] Juha Herkman, "Introduction: Intermediality as a Theory and Methodology" in *Intermediality and Media Change,* Juha Herkman, Taisto Hujanen, & Paavo Oinonen, eds. (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2012), 14.

Holmes, "communicative integration is not so much new as *internal* to a range of media which had co-existed with broadcasting long before the internet."[45] In attempting to mitigate the historical and heuristic misunderstandings of the term "convergence," Herkman offers intermediality as an alternative as it "addresses not only the changes brought about by the digitalization and computerization of communication and media technologies, but it also pays attention to the historical continuities and contextual differences between the various media. Different media have always been inherently linked to each other, that is, been 'inter-medial'."[46] The prefix "inter" supposes continuity over rupture in the historical development and related operations of distinct media forms, and it also gestures to the serial nature of these forms. Understanding intermediality through the lens of the serial cultural paradigm thus offers a productive methodological framework—the spreading serial object, continuing through ever more installments, iterations, and adjustments, finding and losing audiences constantly, serves as a useful metaphor for the intersections of media and their resulting transformations over time. The serial proliferation of intellectual properties across media forms in this period is not "transmedial," nor is it indicative of a culture of "convergence." Rather more concrete, these properties and their recurrent adaptations reveal the means by which media industries relate to one another in their attempts to ignore, exploit, cooperate, or consume one another.

---

[45] David Holmes quoted in *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*

The serial cultural paradigm works to engender an understanding of a larger intermedial exchange between forms, where all simultaneously inhabit center and periphery. In uniting various cultural series, the serial cultural paradigm throws these hierarchies into flux from the point of view of varied audiences, both contemporaneous audiences who consumed not just film but a whole variety of media forms, and for the present-day historian who attempts to constellate with these pasts. Constellated media represents the overall unification of the various forms of signification that comprise the serial cultural paradigm. Repetition of narrative and topological elements are reinforced by the variation of the variety program(s). Audiences of the late 1940s attending a screening of a B film adapted from a comic strip, as is our example in Chapter One, perhaps did so after many years consuming the daily variety program that is the newspaper comic section.[47] Having been primed by one variety program, the newspaper, the hypothetical audience engages with yet another, where strip-to-film adaptations screen alongside disparate feature films, with the possibility of additional newsreels, cartoons, contests, live performances, et cetera. Individual audience members might experience this path of consumption in reverse, in some other fashion, or not at all. The serial cultural paradigm envelops a multitudinous interchange of series upon series upon series.

[47] The daily newspaper as a whole is, of course, a variety form as well, with its mixture of news, entertainment, and community programming.

Pickford, Evans, & White: Star Personae as Serial Figures

This project proceeds as a series of three distinct, but thematically related, case studies. Each focuses primarily on a particular woman who is central to understandings of "early" and silent-era Hollywood (and, in the case of Dale Evans in Chapter Two, the somewhat similarly archaic understandings of the B-western film), finding them much later in their careers, either literally or as a legacy, in the post-war period of the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. In crafting a kind of "great woman" history, this project takes a specifically gendered approach to evaluating the transformations of the era-specific advancements associated with these women: Pearl White, the most famous of the Serial Queens and model of the "New Woman;" Mary Pickford, America's Sweetheart and perceived childlike alternative to that archetype; and Dale Evans, a rare female Western star and a pioneer in the realms of merchandising, self-help, and religious media. Each of these stars serve as rare "real world" examples of what Shane Denson and Ruth Mayer have termed the "serial figure:" "a type of stock character that became entrenched in the popular-cultural imagination of the 20th and 21st centuries and whose career was shaped across a range of different media."[48] As serial figures, each of these women produced a robust universe of related constellated media that played upon their earlier entrenched star images in the circulation of a variety of post-war media objects. The theory of constellated media shares an emphasis on intermedial contingency with many theorizations of early and silent cinema. Each case study utilizes one or more

[48] Shane Denson and Ruth Mayer, "Border Crossings: Serial Figures and the Evolution of Media," *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* 7.2 (2018): 1.

of these theorizations and reads beyond their specific subject matter to underscore the ways in which the frames of periodization might be broken down so that historiography becomes a kind of constellated medium in and of itself. The periodization of this study, therefore, similarly engages with the center and the periphery. It is, at once, extremely broad, moving from the serial queen melodramas of the 1910s to automobile advertising and Saturday morning cartoons of the late 1960s and early 1970s. On the other hand, all three chapters oscillate, to varying degrees, around the nexus of 1946-1948. As will be explicated at various moments throughout the chapters, this is a distinct moment in Hollywood, as it stands between the defining contexts of the Second World War and the Paramount Decision of 1948. In this way, even as it deviates in practice, this project finds commonality with both Catherine Jurca's analysis of a single year in Hollywood production in *Hollywood 1938,* and Siegfried Kracauer's suggestion that Marc Bloch had reconciled macro and micro history with "a constant back-and-forth between [the two], between close-ups and extreme long shots, so as to continually thrust back into discussion the comprehensive vision of the historical process through apparent exceptions and cases of brief duration."[49]

Chapter One uses André Gaudreault's theory of "intermedial meshing" (in support of his aforementioned redefinition of early cinema as "kine-attractography")

---

[49] Catherine Jurca, *Hollywood 1938: Motion Pictures' Greatest Year* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Siegfried Kracauer quoted in Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It" in *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive,* trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 164.

to assess Mary Pickford's appropriation of the earlier "Little Mary" star image in her failed foray into B-movie production in the late 1940s. Chapter Two expands Dall'Asta and Gaines' theory of "constellating the past" while outlining how Dale Evans managed her own serial figuration, moving beyond the rigid gendered confines of the Western film by way of comics, recorded music, early television, and a host of constellated media. Finally, Chapter Three looks to Jennifer Bean's "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body" to probe the renegotiation of Pearl White specifically, and the Serial Queens generally, as serial figures throughout the mid-20th century and into 1960s-era network television and related constellated media. As a theoretical tool employed to disrupt the hierarchical organization of media forms by revealing their ever-present intermedial serialization among other forgotten objects, constellated media offer a variety of new and unexpected perspectives on popular American media.

Chapter One
Neither Astronomical, nor Astrological: Comic Strips, the Wholesome B Movie, and Serial Failure at Mary Pickford's Comet Productions, 1946-1947

> Comet's the name […] but there's nothing else astronomical about it, including the budgets, and there nothing astrological about the inspiration for it, the basis of its policy, nor the processes of predicting revenue which were utilized in arriving at [the] decision to set up the company as a source of supplemental product for United Artists […] What [Mary Pickford, Buddy Rogers, and Ralph Cohn] had in mind when they decided to join forces was to make some pictures for the plain and reasonably predictable family trade, of which there is so much more than any other kind. They knew the Music Hall and theatres in its lustrous category were getting along all right with the stuff the mammoth studios were turning out, but they'd heard there were a lot of other theatres in the world that could use some simple, wholesome little pictures obtainable at a price and containing simple, wholesome entertainment only—narratives about people like the folks next door, plausible and diverting stories, and neither probing abstract problems nor declaiming social theories.[50]

This overwrought announcement published in the *Motion Picture Herald* describes Comet Productions, a production company founded by the trio of Mary Pickford, pioneering film star, co-founder of United Artists, and "America's sweetheart;" her third husband, former matinee idol and "America's boyfriend," Charles "Buddy" Rogers; and Ralph Cohn, son of Columbia Pictures co-founder Jack Cohn and nephew of studio head Harry Cohn. Comet was a short-lived enterprise that produced four B movies between 1946 and 1947.[51] This chapter assesses the history of Comet's utilization and serialization of the entrenched star image of Pickford, an

---

[50] William R. Weaver, "Comet the Name; Product's Simple," *Motion Picture Herald* (4 January 1947): 25. All primary citations to the Hollywood trade press were accessed using the Media History Digital Library's "Lantern" database, unless otherwise noted: https://lantern.mediahist.org/

[51] *Little Iodine* (1946); *Susie Steps Out* (1946); *Stork Bites Man* (1947); *The Adventures of Don Coyote* (1947)

image defined by memories of her "simple, wholesome entertainment." Beyond her already distant performances on screen, Comet relied upon constellated media linked to Pickford's original persona; those linkages translated into an ill-fated attempt at synergy tied to the rapidly evolving B-production landscape of postwar Hollywood. Juxtaposing the invocation of Pickford with a fine-grained analysis of Comet's failed industrial activities, this chapter illuminates the varied operations of serialized constellated media. As the Comet Productions story lays bare, such operations frequently collided with Hollywood business models, and could well result in a strategy where expected synergies did not emerge.



Figure 2: The Comet trio in 1947 with Don Ameche. From left: Ralph Cohn, Mary Pickford, Ameche, and Buddy Rogers. *Motion Picture Herald* (21 June 1947): 10.

Comet Production's first film, *Little Iodine* (1946), becomes a key text for my argument: intended to be the first in a potentially long-running film series, and based on the popular newspaper comic strip of the same name (1943-1983), the film was subsequently forgotten and eventually "lost."[52] *Iodine,* or what remains of it, is somewhat unremarkable, and the failure of the series overall is perhaps of little surprise, especially in the larger context of independent and B-movie production in studio-era Hollywood, particularly in the immediate postwar period. Conceiving of seriality as an inherently intermedial process allows us to understand such failures in relation to the era's favoured process of series media production. Though lacking the higher profile of other filmic adaptations of King Features Syndicate comic strips, such as Paramount and the Fleischer Corporation's *Popeye* cartoons (1933-1942), or *Blondie* (Columbia, 1938-1950), *Flash Gordon* (Universal, 1936; 1938; 1940), *Jungle Jim* (Universal, 1937), etc., *Little Iodine* can still be instructive. In fact, the completeness of the film's archival record proves useful for addressing the standard adaptive procedures used in bringing comic strip product to the screen, procedures that have been unfortunately obscured due to the relative paucity of preserved materials related to the series-B production units of the Little Three and

[52] As of 2015, the King Features Syndicate website lists *Little Iodine* as a lost film. In concert with Mark Quigley, Manager of the UCLA Film & Television Archive, and Elaina Archer of the Mary Pickford Foundation, I was able to determine that a nitrate print of the film's first reel has survived in the UCLA Mary Pickford Collection. https://www.comicskingdom.com/trending/blog/2015/03/12/ask-the-archivist-lost-film

Poverty Row studios.[53] The *Iodine* materials provide key insights into the kinds of institutional relationships integral to the functioning of serial intermediality during this period.

Comet's activities seem at first blush to merely represent a misread of the industrial transformations underway between World War II and the Paramount Decision of 1948. Beyond this surface level interpretation, I argue that Pickford's outmoded business practices (and those of her partners) were of a piece with an effort to capitalize on constellated media linked to Pickford's silent-era star image as a "woman-child." Comet's generative failure is indicative of the ways in which constellated media form serialized nodes of interconnection, with the postwar B movie, comic strips and comic books, and Pickford's star image distinct subsets of a larger whole. Analyzing these nodes, like stars in a constellation, unveils an alternative history of serial media production.

In this instance, Pickford became an example of Shane Denson and Ruth Mayer's theory of the "serial figure." At the center of their argument lies the notion that such figures become media themselves, "articulating a distinction between a relatively formless (medial) substrate and the (diegetic) forms it is capable of assuming," thus problematizing "the mediality of those higher-level media, such as film or comics, with which it comes into contact."[54] Unlike Mayer and Denson's

---

[53] The materials related to the production and promotion of *Little Iodine* are part of the extensive Mary Pickford Papers housed at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science's Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles.

[54] Shane Denson, "Marvel Comics' Frankenstein: A Case Study in the Media of Serial Figures," *Amerikastudien* 56.4 (2011): 544.

figures (fictional characters all, such as Frankenstein's monster, Superman, Fu Manchu, etc.), Mary Pickford was a flesh and blood individual. Applying this theory to a real historical individual causes the diegetic instances of the figure's seriality to fall away and leaves only the medial substrate, here defined as constellated media. A medium unto herself even beyond her diegetic performances in films, Pickford as serial figure pulls together a number of paratextual objects outside her filmic appearances, thus forming a serialization of constellated media. Comet Productions' failed reliance on an already extinct production and distribution process, along with its address to a somewhat obscure notion of "wholesomeness," confirms the seriality of the "formless substrate." In this instance, the extra-cinematic connections between Pickford, subsequent stars such as Shirley Temple, and constellated media objects such as comic strips and popular songs, persisted despite Comet's lack of popularity with audiences. Here we find Pickford attempting to utilize an earlier moment of her career, one of significant power, to find a space within a Hollywood structure that was increasingly unavailable to women.

Little Iodine arises at a moment when a model of seriality undergirding "wholesome" family entertainment and depictions of white girlhood was being rethought, in terms of both business operations and cultural valence. Pickford is key to these transformations, as the significance of her serial figure undergirds the cultural paradigm at work. Pickford's persona and business acumen were ill-suited for the changes that the postwar era introduced to the film industry and popular entertainment forms. Serial figures, and the constellated media worlds of which they are a part, must adapt or lose their currency. Adapting a property that

featured a rambunctious and spunky youth, Pickford attempted to reassert her cultural relevancy. As we shall see, these efforts were wholly unsuccessful, and the brief history of Comet Productions is littered with failures: failure to assess the place of independents in postwar Hollywood; failure to properly employ the intermedial connections between source material and adaptation; and failure to capture Pickford's serial figure through related constellated media. Accordingly, the intersection of the serial figure (Pickford) and the constellated media (comic strips) short-circuits. The source material may have offered a variation on Pickford's figure, but Comet over-invested in a version left over from the 1910s and '20s, and its subsequent reification in the 1930s, rather than allow for its full transformation through *Little Iodine*. The proceeding two chapters offer case studies that outline highly successful and multi-generational serializations of particular figures by way of constellated media. We begin here with failure, however, to underscore the ways in which constellated media have often been discarded and passed over in media history in favor of more tidy and deterministic narratives. Re-evaluating these sources produces a parallel history that has much to offer in terms of reassessing the narrative of "absence" attached to women in this period of Hollywood history, and the ways in which we as historians find and relate those narratives.

This chapter begins with an analysis of Pickford as serial figure before turning to a dissection of Comet's business practices. Pickford's antiquated serial figure was of a piece with Comet's outmoded production strategy; detailing *Iodine*'s failure at the box-office works to reinforce the significance of Pickford's involvement.

Blondie, Little Iodine, & "Little Mary:" America's "Wholesome" Serial Sweethearts

Little Iodine was adapted from cartoonist Jimmy Hatlo's eponymous Sunday comic strip, a spin-off of his more successful two-panel *They'll Do It Every Time* (1929-2008), an observational, and misanthropic, daily strip that related various domestic and workplace frustrations ranging from the universal to the extremely idiosyncratic. Largely reader-driven, each strip includes a "tip of the Hatlo hat" to the reader who suggested that day's gag. A fairly typical strip, such as the one published on October 1st, 1945, features a wedding scene with beaming Mom and Pop who, having raised and educated their child, look forward to a life of freedom alone together. By the second panel, Mom and Pop are surrounded by screaming children, their daughter and son-in-law feet up at the table with the classifieds, demanding dinner—"and did they take it easy? You guessed it. They'll do it every time."[55] *Every Time*'s spin-off primarily concerned Iodine Tremblechin, who occasionally appeared in the parent strip, an overly bratty but loveable child in the mold of Marge's *Little Lulu* (1935-1944) and of a piece with the "little orphan girl" strip narratives of *Little Orphan Annie* (1924-2010), *Little Annie Rooney* (1927-1966), and, tellingly, Pickford's performances in films such as *A Little Princess*

[55] Jimmy Hatlo, "They'll Do It Every Time," *Atlanta Constitution* (1 October 1945): 18. Millennials, take note. All citations to historical newspapers were accessed using the Proquest Historical Newspapers database, unless otherwise noted: https://about.proquest.com/en/products-services/pq-hist-news/

(1917), *The Poor Little Rich Girl* (1917), and *Little Annie Rooney* (1925).[56] The *Iodine* strip concerns the character's various schemes to harass her mother Cora and father Henry, who constantly catch the ire of their neighbors and work superiors due to her behavior. Iodine's antics emphasize the foibles of white post-war domesticity, as she continually upends her father's quest for respectability and her mother's efforts to mold the free-spirited child into demure girlish femininity.[57]



Figure 3: A typical *Little Iodine* Strip with an atypical mention of the upcoming film (Jimmy Hatlo, 20 October 1947)

As source material for a film series, these subjects set *Little Iodine* apart from many film serial adaptations of King Features Syndicate strips, primarily from Universal and Columbia: *Flash Gordon, Jungle Jim* (Universal, 1937)*, Secret Agent*

[56] Pickford's *Little Annie Rooney* was released concurrently with the strip but was not an adaptation of it. Both were inspired by the popular song.
[57] As in numerous strips where Iodine offends Henry's employer and subverts her father's obsession with gadgetry to her own ends.

X-9 (Universal, 1937; 1945), *Mandrake the Magician* (Columbia, 1939), and *The Phantom* (Columbia, 1943), among them. Serial adaptations of adventure strips frequently caught the negative attention of parents' groups and the disdain of exhibitors because of their emphasis on fistfight and car-chase attractions and cliffhanger action.[58] Quite unlike these serial films, the familial domestic comedy of *Little Iodine* fit within Comet's purview of producing "wholesome" films for the "family" market: the proposed film series was to be modeled after the successful twenty-eight-film *Blondie* series, based on the long-running (1930-Present) Chic Young comic strip saga of Blondie, Dagwood, Daisy, and Baby Dumpling Bumstead (and later daughter Cookie), and produced by Columbia.

The *Motion Picture Herald's* glowing review of the first *Blondie* film argued for the film's "appealing" formula and dual generic draw, as the film sat comfortably alongside wholesome "family series" such as MGM's *Andy Hardy* series and 20th-Century Fox's *Jones Family* series, while the characters created by Chic Young and "published in hundreds of newspapers […] are well known to millions. Thus there not only is a popular familiarity, but opportunity is made for contacts with papers publishing the strips."[59] Similarly, on December 14, 1946, the *Showmen's Trade Review* noted that "a nation-wide promotion by the Hearst Newspapers is being

---

[58] Guy Barefoot, *The Lost Jungle: Cliffhanger Action and Hollywood Serials of the 1930s and 1940s* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2017), 60.
[59] "Blondie" (review), *Motion Picture Herald* (5 November 1938): 38.; Seventeen *Jones Family* films were produced between 1936-1940. The *Andy Hardy* series, which featured Mickey Rooney and, occasionally, Judy Garland, encompassed fifteen films between 1937-1946, with an attempted reboot in 1958. Both series seem brief compared to the staggering twenty-eight *Blondie* films produced between 1938-1950.

accorded United Artists' *Little Iodine*, first of the Comet productions […] Adapted to the screen from Jimmy Hatlo's famous comic strip appearing in Puck, the Comic Weekly, *Little Iodine* is being pre-sold weekly to 20,000,000 readers of the Hatlo cartoon in […] newspapers from coast to coast […] In addition to a credit line for the picture in the comic strip, all promotion managers of the newspapers named have been instructed to cooperate with United Artists field representatives and local theatre managers to send *Little Iodine* over the top."[60] Exhibitor's reports in the "What the Picture Did For Me" section of the *Motion Picture Herald* and "The Exhibitor Has His Say" section of *Boxoffice,* however, found this twenty-million-strong viewership wanting, while confirming the Comet trio's somewhat more modest ambitions, describing *Iodine* as "strictly program stuff" that needed to be doubled with a popular western in order to attract patronage for those exhibitors who could even afford to program *Iodine* on a double feature.[61] Though the *Iodine* film seemed to capture the basic premise of the strip, and obviously employed its title, very little was accomplished promotionally or formally to link the strip and the film as equal variations of a mold. Instead, the film version appeared as a remediated retread of the former. The varying promotion and industry reception, in some cases a decade earlier, of the myriad films of the model *Blondie* series at Columbia sets into relief Comet's missteps, and suggests that the debate over series repetition versus single-film variation raged even for successful series.

---

[60] "Hearst Newspapers Push 'Little Iodine'," *Showmen's Trade Review* (14 December 1946): 27.
[61] Harland Rankin (Plaza Theatre, Tilbury, Ont.), "The Exhibitor Has His Say: 'Little Iodine'," *Boxoffice* (7 June 1947): 3.

Though *MPH* exhibitor reports suggest that, by 1947's *Blondie's Big Moment* (the 19th film in the series), the series was "O.K. for a double feature program [but] has started to weaken on a single stand," the trade press had debated the series' draw in terms of audience, prestige designation, and source material exploitability from the outset.[62] *Variety* imagined *Blondie* playing to different strengths depending on locale and audience, noting that the film was

> turned out on a moderate budget [but] bids for attention as a top programmer that must be spotted in individual houses to particular requirements and possibilities. In key duals, it will fill the supporting bracket most acceptably; in subsequent runs, especially those catering to family trade, it will get across in great style; while localities where the cartoon strip has wide and popular circulation may get it over profitably as a solo or top attraction of duals with exploitation.[63]

Thus, unlike *Little Iodine,* the series could fulfill a number of different exhibitor needs – *Blondie* could offer perfectly acceptable filler on the bottom of a double bill, but it could also stand on its own in neighborhood theatres geared towards a "family audience." The film's relation to its comic strip source material, and the strips' daily audience, seems almost an afterthought—though Hearst had some 230 newspapers nationwide in 1938, the film's ability to bring in an audience devoted to the strip may have proven secondary to its related merits.[64]

Even critically well-received films in the series, however, were assessed and programmed according to a "pre-made audience," though potentially one that had been established for the *film* series, rather than the strip. *The Box Office Digest*

---

[62] James C. Balkcom, jr. (Gray Theatre, Gray, GA), "What The Picture Did For Me: 'Blondie's Big Moment'," *Motion Picture Herald* (7 June 1947), 45.
[63] "Film Reviews: Blondie," *Variety* (2 November 1938), 22.
[64] *Blondie* trade ad, *Motion Picture Herald* (9 November 1938), 11.

suggested to exhibitors that *Blondie Brings Up Baby* (1939, so named to capitalize on the success of the Howard Hawks screwball comedy of '38) might prove "okay for the top spot where the series has followers" but mostly as "a life-saver for the balancing spot with many a program."[65] Indeed, one exhibitor, Fred Flanagan of the Moon Theatre in Stratton, Colorado, argued that the series only increased its draw as it went along, noting with 1946's *Leave It To Blondie* that "all 'Blondie' films draw well for us. We used to play them on a double bill. Played this one by itself and did very well."[66] Contrary to the suggestion that the series was running out of steam by the mid-to-late 40s, exhibitor assessment of the series suggests that the larger constellation of the *Blondie* franchise had reached a kind of critical mass, in which the strip, the films, and the radio program (which shared the film series' stars, Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake, and aired intermittently from 1939 to 1950 on CBS and NBC) coexisted outside of any traditional media hierarchy, feeding one another with unique and shared audiences. Another exhibitor relating his experience screening *Leave It To Blondie*, O.A. Fosse of the Community Theatre in Ridgeway, Iowa, noted that the film only played to average business when "doubled with 'Cowboy from Lonesome River,' [Columbia, 1944]" but that the "popularity on the radio of 'Blondie' and 'Dagwood' makes the series worth playing."[67] The films remained popular, for this exhibitor, only in relation to the

---

[65] "'Blondie' Maintains Pace of Series," *The Box Office Digest* (11 August 1939), 10.
[66] Fred Flanagan (Moon Theatre, Stratton, Colo.), "What The Picture Did For Me: Leave It To Blondie," *Motion Picture Herald* (16 February 1946), 42.
[67] O.A. Fosse (Community Theatre, Ridgeway, Iowa), "What The Picture Did For Me: Leave It To Blondie," *Motion Picture Herald* (23 March 1946), 40.

franchise's other media appearances, but in this case the radio audience trumped that of the comic strip.

Promotional advertising for the *Blondie* films shows an overt attempt to fuse and conflate the characters of the comic strip and their flesh-and-blood doppelgangers of the screen and airwaves in representations that mixed the material form of cinema and comic strips. One such ad features the cast of Penny Singleton, Arthur Lake, Larry Simms, and dog Daisy posing with hands on their chins, while behind them portions of a comic strip depict a film executive arriving at the Bumsteads' home offering to "buy" Dagwood and Blondie "for the movies." When Blondie reminds Dagwood not to let Hollywood go to his head, he explains that he has been asked to play himself in the upcoming film.[68] Another ad visually underscores the similarities between film and comics, both media forms comprised of individual frames, separated by a "gutter," and arranged sequentially, as the comic strip characters walk along a film strip of frames portraying promotional shots from the film.[69] Yet another ad performs the reverse operation, rendering the cast of the film in a series of faux-pencil panels as Blondie/Penny Singleton exclaims, by way of text balloon, "snap out of those comic strips, Dagwood! We're in the movies now!"[70] A tie-in promotion with Tested Quality Donuts for *Blondie*

---

[68] *Blondie* Trade Ad, *Box Office* (19 November 1938), 11.
[69] *Blondie* Trade Ad, *Box Office* (9 November 1938), 11.
[70] *Blondie* Trade Ad, *Motion Picture Daily* (30 November 1938), 4-5.

Brings Up Baby finally fuses the two in collage form, the drawn bodies of Dagwood, Blondie, and Baby Dumpling pasted over with the heads of the film's actors.[71]

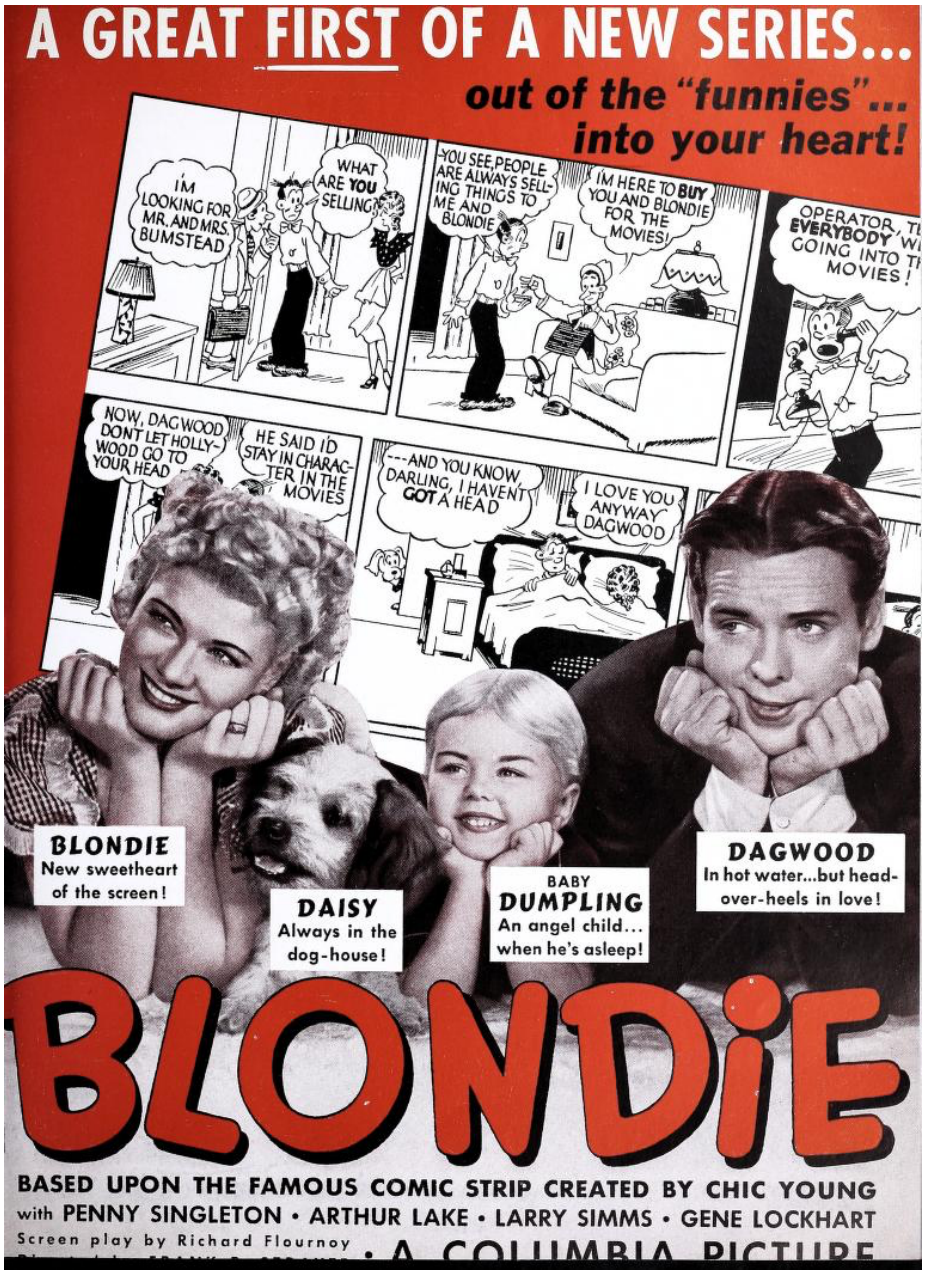


Figure 4: Comic strip Blondie and Dagwood are "bought" for the movies, while their human counterparts look on. *Blondie* Trade Ad, *Box Office* (19 November 1938), 11.

[71] Tested Quality Donuts Ad, *Hollywood-Screen Life* (November 1939), 19.

This type of intermedial meshing has no place in either the film or comic strip version of *Blondie*—the twenty-eight films have nary an allusion to the comic strips (beyond the standard mention in title cards), and the daily and Sunday strips did not actually follow the Bumsteads' journey to Hollywood. The prevalence of direct boundary-disrupting intermediality in "ancillary" constellated media such as popular advertisements helps us to understand seriality as a cultural paradigm *after* the institutionalization of cinema and the newspaper strip. As Jared Gardner has explained in relation to "early" cinema and comic strips, "early film and the early comics sought to break the experience of modernity into segments that could be repeatedly viewed and analyzed, even as the accidental and fragmentary nature of those films promised that the segment on the screen was always part of a continuous, if irrecoverable, larger 'whole'."[72] Gardner is certainly correct in clarifying that, after 1907, "the industry trained audiences to privilege continuity, resolution, and closure—and to reject as 'bad film' the fragments, the gaps, the illogical connections of early film. The gutter that film and comics shared for their first decade was dissolved."[73] Though Gardner notes that the serial film and the animated short stood outside this adjustment, one might also add that though the continued drumbeat of classical continuity and narrative closure certainly structured a highly rationalized mode of filmmaking such as the series B film, ancillary interconnective forms such as the advertisement might serve as the

---

[72] Jared Gardner, *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 19.
[73] *Ibid.,* 22.

constellated media to the larger operation of the serial cultural paradigm, simultaneously establishing gaps and tendrils between the "frames" of otherwise distinct media, even after 1907.

Little Iodine once again proves an instructive failure, as the film and strip had very few intermedial interconnections, though not for a lack of effort on the part of its producers. The *Iodine* one-sheet does feature a similar collage image of actress Jo Ann Marlowe's head pasted onto a drawn body holding a copy of the *Iodine* strip (see figure 5).[74] Unlike the *Blondie* ads, however, Iodine's drawn body is stock and the repurposed newspaper strip does nothing narratively or formally to unite the juxtaposed images. The poster was no doubt used to promote the film at local theatres, but there is no evidence the image was used to promote the film in either the trade or popular press. Other efforts on the part of Comet to produce constellated media were greeted with outright antagonism from King Features Syndicate. KFS's Chester Weil proved a continual thorn in Comet's side, writing the studio to explicitly warn that "you are reproducing the character, LITTLE IODINE, in display material without the copyright of KING FEATURES SYNDICATE […] Our legal department has instructed us to warn you that KING FEATURES SYNDICATE copyright must be used in any reproductions of LITTLE IODINE."[75] Responding to an overly concerned Ralph Cohn, UA publicity head Paul N. Lazarus,

---

[74] *Little Iodine* Pressbook, *Cinema Pressbooks of the Major Hollywood Studios*, microfilm, University of Toronto Media Commons, reel 32.

[75] Correspondence—Chester Weil to Charles Buddy Rogers (5 November 1946), Box 30, Folder 296 (LITTLE IODINE – publicity 1946-1947), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.

Jr. registered confusion: "I am informed that Weil saw what he calls 'a letter folder or mailing piece' which used the cartoon character without a copyright credit. For the life of me I can't figure out what that is unless he is referring to the pressbook, and even there I see no violation."[76] KFS's concern seemed to relate more to the protection of their copyright than to the practice of producing ancillary media, as they had allowed the practice with many other properties. Nonetheless, King's obsession with copyright ownership, the then burgeoning field of "intellectual property," fixed the intermedial possibilities of the *Iodine* property within the confines of the newspaper comic strip. Overly litigious, KFS seemed determined not to allow the types of innocuous ancillary media that had made the *Blondie* series an intermedial success.[77]

---

[76] Correspondence—Paul N. Lazarus to Ralph Cohn (25 November 1946), *ibid.*

[77] KFS continued to express more interest in zealously protecting their copyright than in promoting the film, again writing Paul Lazarus to remind him that, per Comet's contract with King Features, that "Purchaser will not cause or authorize the publication of any synopsis or excerpt in any newspaper or newspapers published in any city, town, or village except those publishing said 'LITTLE IODINE' comic feature; in the event, however, that said […] feature is not published in any newspaper […] then Purchaser shall have the right to cause or permit publication of such synopsis in any newspaper." - Correspondence—Chester Weil to Paul N. Lazarus (7 May 1946), *ibid.*



Figure 5: ***Little Iodine*** **Pressbook, 1947.** ***Cinema Pressbooks of the Major Hollywood Studios*****, microfilm, University of Toronto Media Commons, reel 32.**

Further correspondence reveals that at least one Hearst newspaper actively resisted cooperating with Comet and United Artists. Writing to Ralph Cohn concerning the idea for an all-children Hollywood premier for the film, UA consultant Barry Buchanan inveighed against the *Los Angeles Examiner*: "First of all, the Examiner is not enthusiastic […] It is only because pressure has been brought from New York that they have agreed to give it any publicity at all. With only casual support from one newspaper the event cannot be given the proper publicity to make it big."[78] Without adequate cooperation from King Features, Comet was unable to successfully invoke the interconnection of the strip and the film for its audience—blocked from producing the necessary constellated media, the already doomed film floundered at the box office.

Unlike *Little Iodine,* the *Blondie* series came to be understood as a film series alongside a diversity of series of other media forms featuring the same intellectual property. Furthermore, the *Blondie* entries were understood generically as a film series amongst film series, as the trade press viewed the productions as Columbia's offering amongst a wealth of contemporary comic strip-based and family-centered film series. *Motion Picture Daily* previewed the first *Blondie* film as "auspiciously inaugurating Columbia's entry into the field of 'family series' production," and *Variety* was careful to note director Frank Strayer's pedigree directing "several of the *Jones Family* series for 20th [Century Fox]."[79] The minors cashed in as well—in

---

[78] Correspondence—Barry Buchanan to Ralph Cohn (17 October 1946), *ibid.*
[79] Preview: '*Blondie'," Motion Picture Daily* (8 November 1938): 4; "Film Reviews: Blondie," *Variety* (2 November 1938): 22.

addition to Columbia's *Blondie,* Republic Studios offered a series of *Higgins Family* films (1938-1941).[80] For some industry voices, the homely nature of these film series set them outside the usual criticisms of crass commercialism and artistic bankruptcy leveled at the series film. The *Box Office Digest*'s review of *Andy Hardy Gets Spring Fever* (MGM, 1939), for example, noted that though the series remained "good small town family fare […] this one […] continues to advance the steadily growing prestige of the series."[81] Whether or not prestige had found Andy Hardy, however, some were determined to bemoan the family film's placement alongside the more lurid subjects of the typical series film. The July 9, 1938 issue of *Boxoffice*, for example, reprinted an item from the *Telegram* of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, that suggested

> it is heartening to observe that movies which dramatize normal family lives are coming into their own. The Jones Family has long since become a minor institution, and a profitable one for 20th Century-Fox. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has recently and successfully entered the 'family' field with Judge Hardy and his domestic ménage. Columbia Pictures [with *Blondie*] crosses the family threshold 'to meet the current exhibitor and audience demand for the homey, domestic drama.' And herein lies the grave mistake which film producers persist in making. We have had the gangsters, the G-men, the doctors, the nurses, the football players, the newspapermen. Now, it appears, we are to have the families—and not singly but in series! […] This, of course, would merely be part of a more fundamental fallacy: that motion pictures can be produced by formula.[82]

---

[80] Republic produced 9 *Higgins Family* films between 1938-1941. The films featured the real life family of James, Lucile, and Russell Gleason.

[81] "'Spring Fever' Upholds Andy Hardy," *The Box Office Digest* (17 July 1939): 7.

[82] "From the Press: Family Films – And Formulas," *Boxoffice* (9 July 1938): 74.; A very similar article, published four months later in *Variety*, worried that "family pix may be overdone […] with so many series or groups in the field, competition promises to be so keen that patrons may tire of the vogue." "Fear Family Pix May Be Overdone," *Variety* (9 November 1938): 2.

It was all well and good to enjoy the continuing adventures of detectives, gangsters, and doctors, but the "welcome mats" of the family film invited positive response "not by filling some formula, but by capturing that touch of humanity which makes the whole world kin."[83] Insofar as serial media strive for the perfect balance between repetition and variation, one could counter that the daily foibles of the heteronormative family is just as suited to the series narrative as case files, organized crimes, or unknown illnesses. And yet the cinematic purity of the "wholesome" is somehow understood here to be impervious to formula and recycling, and something that should be protected from the tasteless repetition of the series format. Initiating their planned-for *Iodine* series in the same year that *Andy Hardy* ceased production, Comet nonetheless staked their claim to continue serializing, by way of their most notable co-founder, an industry notion of the "wholesome."[84]

Pickford and Rogers were not alone in their paean to wholesomeness following the close of the war. The *Herald*'s William R. Weaver verbosely announced, "with gusto and a deal of hope," in June of 1947,

> the discovery of a new cycle in motion pictures. Unlike most, this one started with no ballyhoo, and may turn out to be a trend, or even the beginning of an era. It is a cycle of wholesome pictures. To be sure, there are always wholesome pictures, in the sense that there are always pictures which are not unwholesome, but here are pictures in which wholesomeness is outstanding

---

[83] "From the Press: Family Films," 74.

[84] In his history of the Hollywood sound serial, Guy Barefoot describes the ways in which serial producers caught the ire of "women's clubs, school organizations, and church groups" who felt that serials were "exaggerated, inconsistent, not true to life, and abnormal." Barefoot, echoing Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, maintains that local exhibitors frequently shared in this noted disdain, lamenting that the "crushing machines," "streams of acid," and "serpent infested sewers" of the serial cliffhanger left many picture people "ashamed." Barefoot, 60.

> and vital, a factor that lingers longest in memory and sends the customers away with minds made up to send their friends to enjoy the same entertainment experience.[85]

The films Weaver commended as fitting within the cycle, *Miracle on 34th Street* (20th Century Fox, 1947), *Welcome Stranger* (Paramount, 1947), and *Cynthia* (MGM, 1947), are all decidedly 'A' pictures. Tellingly, in the context of Comet, however, is Weaver's definition of a wholesome film as one in which "the characters closely resemble the folks next door, and the things they do are the things everybody's done or wanted to do but didn't quite get to. There isn't a straining for impact, tension, or shock in any of them, and when they come to their respective ends they simply end."[86] Particularly striking is his description of *Cynthia*, starring then-teen idol Elizabeth Taylor, as the story of "a teen-age girl and her parents [who] progress normally and intelligently through events leading up to her first high school dance."[87]

In this description, Weaver draws a seemingly odd and explicit connection between wholesomeness and singularity, tying together an absence of narrative or visual attractions with an end that "simply ends." This seems contradictory to the author's desiring of a "new cycle" of wholesome pictures, and indeed to the homogenizing futurity that figurations of the "wholesome" seek to enshrine by way of the childhood narrative. Lee Edelman, for example, describes the child as the

---

[85] William R. Weaver, "Wholesome Film May Be Cycle," *Motion Picture Herald* (7 June 1947): 29.
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] *Ibid.*

"fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism."[88] "Reproductive futurism" can inform our discussion of seriality and intermediality, as it offers a different conceptualization than one that hinges on the narratively sequential. Indeed, Weaver's call for a "cycle" of singularly wholesome films resembles that of the intermedial series text discussed here, with each text individual in its temporal and narrative construction, but part of an ever-reproducing and normalizing family of interrelated texts. One can begin to identify an overt relationship between the series-centric industrial conceptualization of wholesomeness and a particular depiction of white girlhood, each inexplicably linked to the continuing star image of Mary Pickford as she returned to film production on *Little Iodine* for the first time since 1936's *The Gay Desperado* (Pickford-Lasky/United Artists).

Discussing Pickford's image as a "child-woman" that developed from a series of turns as children and young adults in the 1910s and '20s, Gaylyn Studlar argues that "since 'Our Mary' cultivated her films' 'uplifting,' 'wholesome' appeal, her account of her audience [as comprised of conservative family units, driven by the mother's fandom] may be regarded as a savvy marketing ploy seeking to incorporate the whole spectrum of the family into her box office."[89] For Studlar, Pickford's

---

[88] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 21.

[89] Gaylyn Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013), 28.

childlike visage and spunky performativity offered a nostalgically old-fashioned depiction of womanhood as an easily digestible alternative to the related controversies of the New Woman and the flapper. Pickford eventually attempted to shake this image after the death of her mother in 1928, shedding her famous curly locks and playing against type in 1929's *Coquette*. Despite these efforts, however, Pickford's reputation as "America's sweetheart" remained solidified after her retirement from acting in 1933, albeit nuanced with a reputation for business acumen. We can understand Pickford's return to production after a ten-year absence with the "wholesome" B pictures of Comet Productions as a reinvocation, however subtle, of Pickford's star image. That image operated in opposition to the potential transgression offered by the B film, but was more properly transformed into a "serial figure," where "non-diegetic traces of previous incarnations accumulate […] allowing them to move between and reflect upon medial forms."[90]

The reemergence of this outmoded image in the late 1940s is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a complex series of constellated media within a serialized cultural paradigm, with "Little Mary" and the "Pickford-type" serving as iterations of the "serial figure."[91] According to Denson and Mayer,

> media do not just serve as narrative platforms, but become self-reflexive objects in their own right, supporting continuously shifting narrative functions. Principles of seriality and mediality therefore stand in a tense, historically variable interrelationship […] A serial figure, in our definition, is a type of stock character that became entrenched in the popular-cultural imagination of the 20th and 21st centuries and whose career was shaped across a range of different media. Examples include the plurimedial figures of

---

[90] Denson, "Frankenstein," 532.
[91] Denson and Mayer, "Border Crossings," 1.

> Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, Fu Manchu, Fantômas, Superman, and Batman.[92]

Denson and Mayer's contention, however, that "the series of enactments and reenactments that generates a serial figure has less in common with an ongoing television series than it does with a disjointed series of murder cases; the seriality of a serial figure is really not that different from the seriality of a serial killer" offers an opening in which we might understand the "star" as a kind of serial figure.[93] With the serial figure, as with the serial killer, "seriality is constituted in the repetition of ritualized acts, the commission of which allows for formal or situational variation but fails to produce progression on a psychological or narrative-biographical level. There is therefore no developmental logic between one action and the next […] both of them would appear to be caught in an endless loop of repetition compulsion."[94] Thus, as Studlar herself argues, the quasi-Victorian America's sweetheart, "Little Mary," always stands as the same figure, beyond "formal or situational variation." This is true whether she is appearing in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (Artcraft, 1917) or *Pollyanna* (United Artists, 1920); *M'Liss* (Artcraft, 1918) or *Little Annie Rooney* (United Artists, 1925); or in related paratexts of promotion and merchandising; or producing "wholesome" films for Comet Productions. These instances of variation, anchored by the repetition of the "Little Mary" figure, bear a distinct resemblance to the function of series and constellated media.

---

[92] *Ibid.*
[93] *Ibid.,* 3.
[94] *Ibid.*

The serial figure's plurimedial appearances across disparate forms contribute serially to media change.[95] One can identify a number of instances in which the figure of "Little Mary" functioned across media boundaries. In an early example from the mid-teens related to newsprint, Richard Abel has discussed McClure Newspapers' syndicated column "Daily Talks by Mary Pickford," in which the actress (or Frances Marion, a suggested ghostwriter) offered myriad advice, biographical details, and sanctimonious reflections on the fickle nature of Hollywood and Broadway.[96] For Abel, the column "exhibited certain relatively consistent characteristics in a possible effort to center and control the reception of her star image."[97] Pickford consistently assumed the voice of a young adolescent addressing other young girls, while her middle-class privileged whiteness allowed her to frequently blend in with other ethnicities and class positions, "as if playing one of her frequent poor and sometimes orphaned screen characters, whose social rise must have had a special appeal to both her working-class and middle-class fans."[98] Of ultimate importance was Pickford's emphasis on family: "as a frequent and welcome visitor in millions of households, [Pickford and her identification with] family trumped any other social category of identity, subsuming most, if not all, social differences—at least in fans' imaginations."[99]

---

[95] Denson, "Frankenstein," 533.
[96] Richard Abel, *Menus for Movieland: Newspapers and the Emergence of American Film Culture, 1913-1916* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 160-165.
[97] *Ibid.,* 165.
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] *Ibid.*

Here, Pickford as serial figure, understood as a one-dimensional avatar of wholesomeness and the heteronormative family, offered continuity between screen and newsprint; at the same time she consolidated her international superstardom by exerting control over her own artistic future, first in her negotiations with Adolph Zukor and later via United Artists. Pickford's liminal "Little Mary" persona, the innocent girl who nonetheless assumes a kind of patriarchal authority over her family and career, comes to define her functions beyond the story worlds of her films. A fabulously wealthy white star, Pickford nonetheless successfully assumes other subject positions by virtue of her remembrance of hard times growing up in Toronto, and courtesy of her devoted and diverse audience. These conditions allow this serial figure a kind of agency that lies outside both media boundaries and her fixity as a human being of flesh and blood. Mary Pickford's career did of course produce a number of high-profile "psychological and narrative-biographical" transformations, including those related to the founding of United Artists, her marriage to Douglas Fairbanks, her infamous haircut, et cetera. Nonetheless, each contributed to a transformation from Pickford to "Little Mary," a fixed, though contextually mutable, figure.

This particular intermedial representation of "Little Mary" played a distinct function within the above-mentioned historical context that gave rise to conceptions of the "New Woman" in the 1910s. And yet the same figure continued to generate meaning beyond that period and within the differing social and medial contexts of the period immediately following the Second World War. Ruth Mayer sees this adaptability as essential to the continued cultural life of the serial figure:

> it seems that a serial figure is most successful when it manages to evoke an aura of universality and archetypal timelessness […] but at the same time, serial figures do adapt to changing social and political parameters, and at times undergo quite dramatic changes in appearance or function […] intertextual cross-references, editorial collages and juxtapositions, and crossovers from the world of one serial figure to another are usually executed to mask or manage such transitional moments in the serial flow.[100]

In this instance, one can see the transitional moment of the serial flow marked by an inscription of Pickford's child-like femininity onto subsequent generations of child stars, and the popularization of the little girl figure in constellated media such as the popular song, comic strips, and literature.

Kristen Hatch links Shirley Temple's star image, as defined during the moment of her greatest popularity, the 1930s, to Pickford's, tracing them back to the depiction of girlhood of "sweetness and light" so important to 19th-century sentimental stage melodrama. In line with Studlar, Hatch argues that Pickford embodied a tension between "new and old ideals of femininity."[101] Pickford as the serial figure "Little Mary" was able to "bridge the divide between Victorian and modern culture and values," providing a "fantasy of escape" from modernity, with even her business successes likened by the contemporary press to the tantrums of a headstrong child.[102] This liminal serial figure, embodying the old and the new, continued to fluctuate into the Depression years, though in decidedly transformed contexts. Hatch maintains that while Pickford's classic "Growing-Girl" narratives

---

[100] Ruth Mayer, *Serial Fu Manchu: The Chinese Supervillain and the Spread of Yellow Peril Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 157.
[101] Kristen Hatch, *Shirley Temple: The Performance of Girlhood* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 38-39.
[102] *Ibid.,* 31-37.

(*M'Liss, Daddy Long Legs, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm,* etc.) "had been celebrated for their universal appeal" in the silent era, sound remakes of the same films starring Temple "highlighted a rift in American taste culture" during the Depression.[103] Like Pickford, Temple appealed to those audiences who still favored sentimentality and melodrama over "realism," though the taste divide of audiences in the 1930s now operated along an urban/rural axis, with Temple finding her popularity in largely unaffiliated hinterland and neighborhood theatres, the very same theatres that Pickford unsuccessfully pitched with Comet Productions.[104] Employing Kathryn Fuller-Seeley's work on the taste distinctions articulated by local exhibitors in the *Motion Picture Herald*, Hatch argues that Temple's films "appealed to audiences who felt threatened by both the crass sensationalism embraced by the working class and the cosmopolitanism of urban sophisticates," with rural exhibitors representing "themselves and their rural audiences as a 'wholesome' middle ground."[105]

This middle ground is the terrain onto which Comet imagined, and failed, to stake their claim at the end of the 1940s, regardless of significant industry and societal transformations following the close of the war. *Little Iodine* was released in 1946 to a society in transition towards suburbanization and the solidification of mass culture and society, what Nicholas Sammond has called the "highly rationalized nature of post-Depression, postwar American middle-class society" that

---

[103] *Ibid.,* 43.
[104] *Ibid.,* 44.
[105] *Ibid.,* 48.

allowed for "cohesive social activity and infrastructural development of a scale and pace never before imagined."[106] Mass-culture depictions of, and media for, white middle-class girls during wartime and into the 1950s would move beyond the various incarnations of sentimentality popular to Pickford and Temple's audiences, as the "solidification of girls' culture" nurtured "girls' individual and collective identities and stimulated their consumer desire for the thriving wartime market in teenage products," a new demographic category that would reach its zenith in the 1950s and '60s.[107]

Despite these developments, however, the relation between the historically specific reception of Pickford and Temple suggests a concurrent "archetypal timelessness" of the serial figure both within and outside of era specificity. The "Little Mary" type is a particularly complex serial figure of intermedial exchange, as it at once embodies the anxieties of generational change and the fixity of childhood femininity. Sarah Projansky has identified a persistence in thinking about the girl star as "simultaneously in transition and static/nostalgic," while putting Studlar's work on Pickford in conversation with her own concerning Tatum O'Neal [108] This duality of convention and progression, repetition and variation, is typical of the serial form. In extending across forms intermedially, the serial entity is in a perpetual state of evolution and thus offers a locus for understanding the vagaries

---

[106] Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 206.
[107] Miriam Forman-Brunell, "Anxious Adults and Bad Babysitters: The Struggle over Girlhood in Interwar America," *Girlhood Studies* 2.1, Summer 2009: 139.
[108] Sarah Projansky, *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination & Celebrity Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 33.

of technological and cultural transformation in a nondeterministic fashion. The production process of *Little Iodine* reveals a kind of dead zone in the standard chronology of technologically determinist histories of American popular media as it attempted to economically maximize a star image popular in the silent period whilst employing B-production strategies successful during the Depression and World War Two. This dead zone might also apply culturally to the production of gendered codes of girlhood more closely tied to the 1910s and '20s of Mary Pickford and the 1930s of Shirley Temple. The slow evolution of a cultural paradigm reveals an image of the serial figure in transition. *Little Iodine* and Comet productions attempted—thematically, promotionally, and formally—to model outmoded practices for a postwar audience.

If Pickford's name was conspicuously absent from the majority of the *Little Iodine* press material, a number of letters received by Comet during an open casting call for the film's title role reveal that audiences very easily drew a through line from Pickford, through Temple, to the Little Iodine of the comic strips. One such letter, addressed to "Miss Pickford" from eight-year-old Betsy Badger, somewhat unconsciously invoked the "Little Mary" figure, as Betsy explained that "Daddy says Little Iodine can't hold a candle to me [… I] can sing, play the piano. I can also twirl a baton. I have brown eyes and I have light brown hair. It is curly and long. Mother says I'm not pretty but wholesome."[109] Here, tied to the young woman's comparison

[109] Correspondence—Betsy Badger to Mary Pickford (29 January 1946), Box 27, Folder 274-275 (LITTLE IODINE – correspondence (casting) 1945-1946), Mary

of herself of the character Comet sought to cast, Iodine, is a purposeful description of "curly and long" hair that invokes both Pickford and Temple.

Another letter, which more directly offered an unknown as the successor to Pickford and Temple, is worth quoting at length:

> Here I am still wondering, if there could be any chance for my little girl to have a bright future […] I know darn well she's cute and does remind you of little Shirley Temple when she was a girl her age. That is why I cut the little pictures of her out of movie magazines to have you compare the two […] she's got that sweet something in her face that Shirley Temple had in her days. I know one thing if she had the proper attention like Shirley Temple had years ago, I know she'd be a darn success […] I often read to Barbara 'Little Iodine,' in the Sunday papers […] she sure is funny this 'Little Iodine' and I'm sure when it's on the screen, it sure will be a big hit because children, as well as grown ups, love to see that type of picture, more than any other […] Just like the people and friends I meet, who think she is pretty enough to be in pictures, I only hope when you look at her photograph you'll think the same. This is why I'm writing to you Miss Pickford, because I really believe you'd understand how one feels.[110]

Writing directly to Pickford, the author of the letter, Clara Sile of Chicago, felt that her daughter fit the Little Iodine type, and that a successful film series might engender the type of childhood star power that had once been associated with Shirley Temple and Pickford before her. Though it is clear from the production files that the letters were actually destined for Buddy Rogers and Ralph Cohn, Pickford's audience understood her serial figuration sufficiently to recognize the Iodine role as

---

Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.

[110] Correspondence—Clara Sile to Mary Pickford (19 February 1946), Box 27, Folder 274-275 (LITTLE IODINE – correspondence (casting) 1945-1946), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.

of a piece with those of Temple or Pickford herself.[111] Working from Sile's description of her daughter, one can identify the connection between Projansky's discussion of the girl star as at once in transition and static, Mayer and Denson's articulation of the serial figure, and our understanding here of constellated media. As Denson argues, the "non-linear seriality of the serial figure" is defined by the distinction of "repetition and variation:" any variety or novelty introduced by various iterations of particular figures "arises not through the use of new materials but through the novel employment of the old, through repetition itself."[112] Thus, while the cultural contexts of Pickford and Temple's film careers may vary, they were cast from the same mold. Sile seems to instinctively understand this, and offers her own daughter as the latest variation: she believes that her daughter possesses the same "something" that Shirley Temple had and that Pickford will understand how such a quality needs to be cultivated. *Little Iodine* could serve as a perfect vehicle for this cultivation, not only because it was, in Sile's estimation, familiar to an audience of children, but also because the markers of the "Little Girl" genre of comics and stories had become so firmly entrenched as constellated media and so strongly associated with Pickford and Temple.

Temple's remakes of the Pickford "Growing-Girl" films continued beyond the 1930s. In 1942, Temple initiated her teen years on screen with *Miss Annie Rooney*,

---

[111] Correspondence—Helyn Yorke (Comet Productions) to Eileen Garber (31 January 1946), Box 27, Folder 274-275 (LITTLE IODINE – correspondence (casting) 1945-1946), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.
[112] Denson, "Frankenstein," 544.

a film pitched as a remake of Pickford's *Little Annie Rooney* of 1925. The pressbook for the former specifically describes the film as a kind of debutante ball for Temple's adulthood, nothing that "in a story full of the charm and vivacity of modern American youth…she gets her first love, her first evening gown, her first kiss!"[113] The *New York Times* reported that the remake rights had been obtained specifically from Pickford and, should the "remake" prove successful, that "other Pickford properties [would] be exhumed for the youngster."[114] That this specific property would be used to distance Temple's star image from that of her childhood is somewhat ironic, as the Pickford film was received as a return to the actor's portrayal of children. A 1925 *New York Times* review described Pickford as "capitulating to the desire of the vast majority of her public" in returning to "curls, short frocks, and to playing the part of an East Side hoyden" and curiously remarked that "she looks smaller than ever in this film."[115] This morbid fixation on Pickford's appearance relative to her actual womanhood extended also to Temple, as it was reported that the producer of the remake had "as a desperate measure" hired a photographer to take "glamour" shots of Temple and that the stills "were decidedly demure, but Miss Temple's newly created maturity caused [the producer]

---

[113] *Miss Annie Rooney* pressbook, *Cinema Pressbooks of the Major Hollywood Studios*, microfilm, University of Toronto Media Commons, reel 32.
[114] Douglas W. Churchill, "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times* (27 October 1941): 21; "Hollywood Reports," *New York Times* (4 May 1941): X5.
[115] Morduant Hall, "Mary Pickford as of Old," *New York Times* (19 October 1925): 26.

to change the title of his picture from 'Little Annie Rooney' to 'Miss Annie Rooney.'"[116]

I draw the link between these films to reveal the ways in which "Little Mary" came to stand in for a whole network of constellated media that carefully placed nostalgia for Pickford's star image within a constellation of nostalgic media. We will see how the specific production and exhibition practices of Comet Productions seemed outmoded by the postwar period, banking on attracting unaffiliated theatres in hinterland and neighborhood areas precisely through a reinvocation of Pickford's heyday through the image of the "little" girl, in this case *Iodine*. Pickford's audience evidently made such a connection even before the release of the film, as a letter from A.J. Waisnen of Hollywood, responding to the open casting call, affirms: Waisnen asks whether Pickford has considered "selecting your little Iodine from an orphan's home" to "give a break to some poor little waif," again tracing an association between Pickford's star image and characters appearing in comic strips.[117] For Waisnen, the suggestion would "be good especially now since the public is reading and weeping at Little Annie Rooney's orphan home experiences in the funnies."[118] King Features Syndicate's attempt at a *Little Orphan Annie* knockoff, *Little Annie Rooney* drew not only upon the 1925 film version, but was

---

[116] Thomas F. Brady, "Hollywood Soiree: Being Some Sidelights on the Academy Awards Presentations—Other items," *New York Times* (8 March 1942): X3.
[117] Correspondence—A.J. Wiasnen to Mary Pickford (25 February 1946), Box 27, Folder 274-275 (LITTLE IODINE – correspondence (casting) 1945-1946), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.
[118] *Ibid.*

titled after a popular vaudeville song of 1889, written by Michael Nolan and George LeBrunn. By the 1920s, the tune was already considered a well-loved but dated American songbook classic, with various reports at the end of the decade and into the '30s describing the song as part of an "Old Timers Night" program, fondly remembered in a regular *Chicago Daily Tribune* "Do You Remember Way Back When" column, and as part of a Macy's sheet music collection entitled "Good Old Timers."[119] In 1931, the Fleischer Studio released a "Screen Song" animated short version of the tune, starring Bimbo the dog. No less a stilted callback to the "good old times," Comet Production's resuscitation of Pickford's star image serialized a network of constellated media tied back to her originary performances and even earlier periods of entertainment in an effort to capitalize on an already dated and eroded method of B-movie production.

---

[119] "To Hold 'Old Timers' Night: Newspaper Club to Stage Annual Party Tomorrow," *New York Times* (3 February 1928): 26.; "In the Wake of the News: Do You Remember Way Back When," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (19 August 1929): 23.; "Macy News," *New York Times* (9 August 1934): 5.

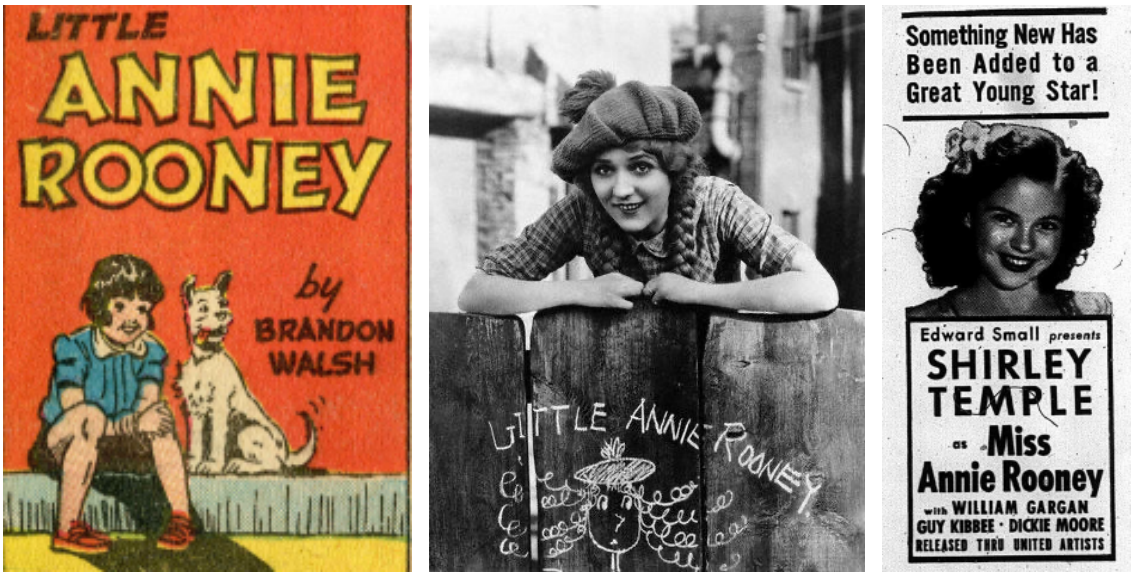


Figure 6: Three Annie Rooneys. From left, comic strip detail (1948); Mary Pickford in *Little Annie Rooney* (1925), Shirley Temple in *Miss Annie Rooney* (1942)

Plain and Reasonably Predictable: Comet Productions and the Postwar B Movie

On April 13th, 1946, the exhibitor trade journal *Motion Picture Herald* announced that Comet was "set to take off," and intended to 'spend $1,500,000 on the first six pictures [to be released by United Artists]. The pictures, previously referred to as 'streamliners,' are to run between 60 and 70 minutes and 'the organization will stress comedy and adventure […] and will aim for the family trade'."[120] Comet Productions appeared at a moment in which a rash of independent Hollywood production companies offering B fare quickly cropped up and just as quickly faded in the immediate postwar period.[121] The *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*

---

[120] "Comet Set To Take Off," *Motion Picture Herald* (13 April 1946): 45
[121] Yannis Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 88.

(*IEFB*) reported, on March 4th, 1946, that "with the influx of so many new independents, it has become increasingly apparent that Hollywood [is] in the midst of a serious studio shortage".[122] David O. Selznick was left without studio space after the RKO lot overbooked independent producers, and Samuel Goldwyn kicked all independent production off the Goldwyn studio lot in order to make way for the "heaviest production schedule of his career," leaving Pickford, a part "forty-one eightieths" owner of the lot, scrambling to find studio space for Comet. The dispute was the opening volley of what proved to be a protracted legal battle over the space.[123] Following the production of *Iodine* at the rundown Lasky lot, the *IEFB* reported that Comet would solve the shooting space problem by making their next production, *The Adventures of Don Coyote*, "a strictly location venture […] even the interiors will be shot on location," in accordance with the tradition of independent and Poverty Row productions in Hollywood.[124]

Comet's stated intention (in the *Motion Picture Herald* announcement which opens this chapter) to produce short "streamlined" B films for theatres outside the "lustrous category" of Radio City, implies a pitch to the "family trade" of "nabes"—the independent exhibitor outside of the major metropolis, and the majors' soon to be dissolved monopolistic distribution networks, in neighborhood, small town, and rural theatres--the primary market for larger independents like Republic, and a

---

[122] *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin* (4 March 1946): 22.
[123] *Ibid*.; "Goldwyn Vs. Pickford," *The New York Times* (18 December 1949): X6. By 1949 the *Times* was gleefully reporting the very public fight between Pickford and Goldwyn as having "reached the stage at which it became a point of honor for each to make the other as uncomfortable as possible."
[124] "United Artists," *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin* (8 July 1946): 19.

host of fly-by-night Poverty Row studios.[125] As previously mentioned, Kathryn Fuller-Seeley has argued that these independent exhibitors held a somewhat judgmental attitude towards their audiences' tastes, but did indeed call for "plain and predictable" films that would fill seats. Writing letters "calling for an end to the Broadway fare and return to westerns, action films, and comic films that children could enjoy," hinterland exhibitors demanded that they have access to a wide variety of product that would appeal to their patrons' supposedly unrefined tastes.[126] United Artists had never before courted this exhibition audience, but the rhetoric promoting Comet that called for a similar nostalgic return to "simple" films was tethered to Pickford's serial figure. Agreements secured with each of the majors in the late '20s and early '30s allowed UA access to major-owned and affiliated first run metropolis theatres. It is this unprecedented step beyond UA's well-established business model, from a 'downtown' first-run environment to one of hinterland exhibition, that provides the context for Comet's first step towards a quick dissolution.[127] In miscalculating an eroding industry need for series-B films, Comet engaged in a poorly planned low-budget gambit that was simultaneously too soon and too late. Too late as majors, minors, and indies alike moved away from B

---

[125] "Poverty Row" implies both a spatial location *and* an economic reality—these studios were so named for their impoverished budgets and studio lots located near the infamous "Gower Gulch" area of Los Angeles, where scores of extras and B actors in western garb would roam the streets between takes. See Read, 2010.
[126] Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, "What the Picture Did For Me: Small-Town Exhibitors' Strategies for Surviving the Great Depression," in *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*, ed. Kathryn H. Fuller Seeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 188.
[127] Tzioumakis, 33.

production, and too soon as the studio failed to anticipate the fluctuations of the serial cultural paradigm. As we have seen, the studio's initial film, *Little Iodine,* was meant to serve as an intertext to Pickford's serial figure, but the conflation of a star image forged in the silent period with production processes left over from the '30s and early '40s proved too incongruous, particularly when that intertext was made clear in the trade press but was insufficiently invoked elsewhere.

Despite its status as a loose conglomeration of independent producers, United Artists had never before ventured into B production. In Thomas Schatz's estimation, although UA was "one of the Little Three, [it] focused even more heavily than the Big Five studios [20th-Century Fox, RKO, Paramount, Warner Bros, MGM] on high-end product, [but] scarcely operated at the same volume."[128] In 1946, having "barely managed to eke out a profit" during the war (despite an industry-wide boom), United Artists was desperate for product and began to settle for movies that, in Tino Balio's opinion, "lacked merit altogether or were in questionable taste."[129] The other two of the Little Three, Columbia and Universal, had increased their output and profits by roughly 20 percent during the war years, primarily through their reputation as producers of B films in general, and series and serial films in particular.[130] Likewise, Republic nearly doubled their gross revenues between 1942

---

[128] Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 58.
[129] Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company Built by the Stars Volume 1, 1919-1950* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 202.
[130] Schatz, 59-60.

and 1945.[131] Modeling Comet's business model on the wartime successes of Columbia, Universal, and the more successful Poverty Row studios, Pickford's gambit was met with derision by her colleagues at United Artists. Balio reports that in this period, as stockholder arguments became "more petty [and] more vitriolic," Pickford's requests for finances and special distribution terms to return to producing were outright refused.[132] As the "streamlined" productions for Comet's B movies began to go over-budget, the company's entire modus operandi became untenable.[133] By August of 1946, *Variety* was reporting that Pickford, Rogers, and Cohn were to form yet another production company, Triangle Films, with the intention of producing "two high-budgeters" at $1,250,000 each.[134] Pickford and Rogers figured, as *Variety* reported, that "with the majors giving up all B picture production […] there would be a bonanza for the smaller companies in that field. However, inasmuch as the future is so clouded as to how and when single-selling and auction-bidding is to become effective and what its influence on the industry will be […] the Comet trio was anxious to protect itself against any eventuality."[135] The promotion of Triangle's first feature, *Sleep, My Love,* a 1948 Douglas Sirk film noir, suggests that Pickford may have agreed with the disdain that her UA colleagues' directed toward her B-movie sojourn. In a move conspicuously absent from any of the Comet films, the film was prominently marketed as "Mary Pickford

---

[131] Tzioumakis, 85.
[132] Balio, 206.
[133] *Ibid.*
[134] "Rogers-Pickford-Cohn's Costlier UA Films As Hedge Against Decree," *Variety* (21 August 1946): 4.
[135] *Ibid.*

Presents," with the actress's famous signature featured prominently in posters and other advertising material.[136]

1946 proved to be one of the highest-grossing years for Hollywood overall, but it was also the year that "the District Court decree prohibiting all block booking," the major studio monopolistic practice of controlling screen time by linking a slate of B movies to the sale of A features, came into effect.[137] Comet appears to have been victim to unfortunate timing in its efforts at calculating industry adjustments, but as we shall see, the nature of the company's failure related also to what exactly a "prestige" film might be in the postwar period. Moreover, Comet misjudged how prestige might be tied to the intermedial potential of the particular "wholesome" constellated media of which Pickford was the brightest star.

Brian Taves' taxonomy of the B film provides some context for Comet's confusion concerning the B-marketplace. Taves clarifies a distinction between "(1) major-studio 'programmers,' (2) major-studio B's, (3) smaller-company B's, and (4) the quickies of Poverty Row."[138] Taves' first category, the programmer, were neither

---

[136] *Sleep, My Love* Pressbook, Media History Digital Library, 1.

[137] As Michael Conant reports, "during the 1946 boom, the majors were able to fill the screen time of their own [theatres] with extended runs of their own […] first-grade films" and it was not until the 1948 supreme court decision forcing complete divorcement of the majors from their distribution and exhibition arms that independent production really took off. Michael Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry: Economic and Legal Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 113.

[138] Brian Taves, "The B Film: Hollywood's Other Half" in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise 1930-1939,* Tino Balio, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 317.; Recent scholars have understood independent producers, operating in conjunction with unaffiliated hinterland theatres, as engaging in a different type of B-movie production. Maureen Rogers contends that,

prestige films nor hard B's but "lower-level A's occupying an equivocal position, intended as major product but sharing aspects of B's."[139] Comparable terms such as "'shaky A's,' 'gilt-edged B's,' 'in-betweeners,'" or, most appropriately for this study, "intermediates," describe films that generally sat comfortably in either the A or B slot (depending on the exhibition contexts of the theatre's location, audience, and programming), had larger budgets, borderline stars, longer production schedules, and average feature-length running times.[140] This taxonomy can make plain the ways in which Comet Productions cut something of an odd figure in the industry of the immediate postwar period. Despite Comet's claiming of a tier well above studios

---

after the initial consent decree of 1938, B-studios were finally offered the opportunity to potentially compete in a marketplace restructured around single-film selling, and so began to produce "higher-budgeted, lazy A releases […] programmers or midbudget releases that could play on either slot of the dual bill or alone on a single bill." Likewise, Robert J. Read has argued that "the majority of works of film scholarship on the lowest levels of film production have treated that production under the catch-all heading of the 'B film,' understanding it in terms of the industry's need to fill the bottom half of a double feature" but that "the programming of two films to create a double feature was much more flexible than the notion of the B-feature suggests." Maureen Rogers, "Remaking the B Film in 1940s Hollywood: Producers Releasing Corporation and the Poverty Row Programmer" *Film History* 29.2 (Summer 2017): 139.; Robert J. Read, *A Squalid-Looking Place: Poverty Row Films of the 1930s* (Montreal: McGill University, unpublished dissertation): 23.

[139] Taves, 317.

[140] The second category, efficiently produced studio Bs that utilized leftover resources such as sets and actors, tended to be shorter series films, made with a maximum of production and budgetary control, resulting in reliable profits. The final two categories encompassed the releases of independents with a developed reputation (such as Republic), and the myriad outfits of Poverty Row (such as the Producers Releasing Corporation), respectively; films that played nearly exclusively to independent nabes outside of the majors' vertically integrated distribution systems., *ibid.*

like PRC and Republic by merit of their association with United Artists, an arrangement that provided access to UA's distribution network of first-runs, the above-mentioned descriptions of the B studio in the trades nonetheless suggests that the management trio saw their product straddling the lines of Taves' taxonomy.

Comet films were not conceived as filling the liminal space of the first category, the programmer between A and B for smaller studio-owned houses; despite their exaggerated budgets, they provided instead the supposedly missing necessity of the third and fourth categories--cheap, short, simple, and wholesome product for the "other theatres in the world." In this, Comet behaved as if Poverty Row and the minors did not exist. The previously cited *Herald* article further complicates the studio's imagined audience in revealing that Rogers and Cohn consulted with United Artists branch managers to determine if exhibitors would be "interested in buying some product that wouldn't tax the capacity of their marquees with sure-fire star names, but would fit in snugly as to running time with the pictures that did, and perhaps furnish some solid entertainment that some of the latter didn't."[141] The pair evidently received an affirmative response, and yet by November 1947 *Variety* reported that "Comet Productions' […] low-budgeted streamlined pictures […] were difficult to sell because of their abbreviated length."[142] Producers such as PRC and Republic maximized the short-lived potential

---

[141] William R. Weaver, "Comet the Name; Product's Simple," *Motion Picture Herald* (4 January 1947): 26.
[142] "Uncertainty of Indie Production Splits Trio," *Variety* (12 November 1947): 3.

of the post-consent decree period in "upscaling" production to produce feature-length films that might stand on their own should single film selling prove viable.[143] Conversely, Comet set its sights much lower and falsely identified a need for short, innocuous filler with an aspiration towards "wholesomeness." Caught between the prestige of UA and the efficiency of Poverty Row, and indeed between the wholesome reputation of Pickford's serial figure and the legacy of her original business partnerships, Comet budgeted a curious average of $250,000 for each of their films, a figure that is not at all "low" when compared with industry standards.[144]

Yannis Tzioumakis reports that the most successful Poverty Row outfits, such as Monogram and Republic, "rarely exceeded the $100,000 [budget] mark, even for their most 'prestigious' productions."[145] Meanwhile, majors who took B production seriously (Fox, for instance) operated budgets at $150,000-$200,000 for the average programmer.[146] Despite the frequent allusion to low-budget production in the trade press, Comet's distended budgets resulted in a number of films that were exceedingly difficult to sell to independent and affiliated exhibitors, as they registered as "intermediate" in cost but decidedly "B" in quality and runtime. Assessing the issue of budget trends, Lea Jacobs has further qualified assumptions concerning the B film's place at the bottom of Hollywood's cultural hierarchy. Jacobs argues that, despite the standardized budget ranges established at major,

---

[143] Rogers, 139.
[144] "Comet Set To Take Off," *Motion Picture Herald* (13 April 1946): 45
[145] Tzioumakis, 74-75.
[146] *Ibid.*

minor, and independent studio B units alike, the success of many A and B films was far more dependent on the vagaries of distribution, exhibition, and advertising. Some lower-budgeted Bs might achieve a place on a single film bill at a major downtown theatre (not unlike our earlier discussion of the *Blondie* series), given the right circumstances, just as a relatively high-budgeted A might be relegated to a dual bill in second-run exhibition.[147] Under the practice of blind bidding, the majors would attempt to sell any B they deemed favorable at the box office for a percentage of the gross, with only the most staunchly B films (often genre and series films) sold at a flat rental fee. Jacobs draws particular attention to intermediate films, "which cost between $250,000 and $500,000," a figure that "precluded the studio making a profit unless some exhibitors could be persuaded (or coerced) to pay a percentage of the gross rather than the flat rental fee usual for westerns and other B pictures."[148] Looking to Comet's *Iodine* sales assessments, one notes that the association with Pickford was not enough to secure percentages over flat fees. One such assessment, prepared on October 25th, 1946, reveals that of 796 total sales, 788 were sold at a flat rate. One of the remaining eight sales managed to secure a typical A film's 35% of the gross, but the majority of the remaining seven only garnered an inflated B's

---

[147] Lea Jacobs, "The B Film and the Problem of Cultural Distinction," *Screen* 33.1 (Spring, 1992): 2.; For a more successful B, Jacobs gives the example of John Ford's *The Informer* (1935). Produced on a budget of $243,000, the film opened at Radio City Music Hall and earned multiple Academy Awards thanks to its dramatic subject matter, RKO's lavish promotional campaign, and the increasing reputation of Ford. On the other hand, the Marx Brothers' expensively produced *Room Service* (1938) quickly slid from single to dual bills due to a poor box-office performance (Jacobs, 2-3).

[148] *Ibid.,* 3.

25%.[149] *Little Iodine* had neither the prestige to move into "Lazy-A" territory, nor did it have the budget limitations necessary to turn a profit with flat rental sales.

Perhaps sensing Comet's structural flaws, Buddy Rogers wrote to United Artists branch managers before *Little Iodine's* release, requesting a "frank, honest appraisal of *Little Iodine* and *Susie Steps Out* and any suggestion you might have on possible improvements."[150] The responses received were predominantly negative (if worded not to offend), and serve to underscore the budgetary and industrial difficulties outlined above. G.P. Price, manager for Washington, D.C., clarified that *Iodine*'s failure was not solely a matter of dual versus single bills, but also of running time and genre: "about 75% of the exhibitors […] operate on a single feature policy. You can readily see that a 57-minute feature is rather difficult to book. The balance of the territory that operates on a double feature policy are predominantly action situations. For this type of exhibitor, an action film is, of course, much more suitable."[151] These arguments were echoed by branch managers from Omaha, Salt Lake City, and the whole of Texas, who unsurprisingly lamented that exhibitors were unwilling to pay 'A' percentages for 'B' fare: "the picture can only be used as the second half of a double bill […] it was juvenile fair [sic] and questionable so far as the adults were concerned […] I am sorry to say that I do not

---

[149] *Iodine* Sales Assessment, 25 October 1946, Box 27, Folder 276 (LITTLE IODINE – distribution 1946-1947), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.; Jacobs, 3.
[150] Correspondence from Buddy Rogers to United Artists Branch Managers, 18 September 1946, Box 27, Folder 276 (LITTLE IODINE – distribution 1946-1947), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.
[151] Correspondence from G.P. Price to Buddy Rogers, 1 October 1946, *ibid.*

think it will be possible for us to secure distribution that will be satisfactory to you unless we are permitted to sell these pictures on terms that will permit the exhibitor to use them as second features […] we have found a willingness […] to buy this type of product, but they expect to purchase it at a price that is paid for their normal run of second features."[152] Using a newfound freedom to no longer "blindly" accept lesser product at exaggerated prices, exhibitors balked at purchasing a film that was too short for a single bill and too expensive for a double feature.

Comet, therefore, purposefully produced streamliners meant to appeal to the 'family trade' on budgets far exceeding that of the most prominent crossover B produced by a major studio. Neither programmers nor cheap quickies, Comet's four films arrived useless to affiliated and independent exhibitors alike. The wartime boom and repealing of block booking completely eliminated the industry need for B movies and placed the increasing number of independent studios in an ultimately precarious situation in having to compete with the majors in single-selling.[153] Quite incongruously with industry developments, Pickford, Rogers, and Cohn attempted to remedy UA's wartime slump by setting up Comet to double down in producing the same type of content that had undergirded the policies of block booking and blind bidding before antitrust. Comet ran against the grain of general trends—as every production element in Hollywood, low and high, moved away from B production, Comet attempted to embrace it, even going so far as to publicly

---

[152] Correspondence from Fred M. Jack to Buddy Rogers, 2 October 1946, *ibid.*; correspondence from Carroll S. Trowbridge to Buddy Rogers, 24 October 1946, *ibid.*; correspondence from D.V. McLucas to Buddy Rogers, 24 October 1946, *ibid.*
[153] Rogers, 157-158.

announce their intention to make cheap (by their apparent definition), unassuming, and easily forgettable films. Without the benefit of block booking and blind bidding, however, exhibitors had no need to exploit product explicitly identified as being of secondary quality. Pickford, Rogers, and Cohn ineffectively commandeered a method of filmmaking and exhibition in transition. Nonetheless, the excessively inscribed use of the term "intermediate" here is telling of Comet's failure to extend the spread of the media constellation tied to Pickford: just as *Little Iodine* proved a confused production intermediate to the established hierarchies of 'A' and 'B,' so too would the film prove intermediate within the film programs on which it found itself secondarily scheduled. Most importantly, the film failed as an intermediate element in a projected series that attempted to adapt, and invoke, its sequentially intermediate source material.

"We Shouldn't Make Any More of Them:" King Features Comics and Intermedial Adaptation

Comet's approach to producing and selling *Little Iodine* was incongruous with the studio's intention to initiate a long-running series. King Features, the syndication arm of Hearst Newspapers, publishers of the *Little Iodine* strip, clearly banked on the eventuality of a successful film series, as the resume of Comet's contract with King provided the possibility of three renewal options for a total of six additional

films in the series.[154] The original licensing fee was set at $5,000, but each subsequent option increased the price for every individual film by $1,000 and required payment on a two-film basis. Thus, if Comet had taken up its first option for sequels, the company would have been required to pay out $12,000, whether one or two films were made. By the third and final option, and the sixth and seventh films, the licensing fee would have increased to $16,000. Historian Blair Davis has noted that the *Blondie* film series had come to a close in 1950 (after 12 years and 28 films) as the price for screen rights from King Features Syndicate had been similarly raised "heftily" with each installment, well beyond the sustainability of a mere series-B film.[155] *Iodine* was budgeted as an intermediate, however, and the $16,000 maximum barely comprised a tenth of Comet's announced budget for the first film. Though B-film series were central to the industry of the 1930s and '40s, primarily for their reliable budgets and box-office returns, King Features clearly expected film adaptations of their strips to gradually increase in profitability and prestige as the series went along, transcending the lower rungs of exhibition and potentially charting the path, outlined by Jacobs, towards A-film accolades. Comet's expectation to produce a successful B series on exaggerated budgets proved similarly flawed, and both parties operated by the standards of obsolete industry norms that dovetailed with Pickford's obsolete serial figuration.

---

[154]Resume of King Features *Little Iodine* Contract, 14 February 1946, Box 29, Folder 289 (LITTLE IODINE—legal 1945-1951), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.
[155] Blair Davis, *Movie Comics: Page to Screen, Screen to Page* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 168.

As the Comet trio debated whether to pick up the option to produce further *Iodine* films in late 1946, Comet's Eastern sales representative, Harry Kosiner, forwarded along a number of single-line reviews from exhibitors across the nation. The responses were not any more enthusiastic than those of the UA Branch Managers: "in Columbus: 'very poor, classed lower than a 'B' picture' […] in Louisville: 'reaction very poor-cannot see anything in this picture-even children did not like it […] in Canton: 'lacking story material--consequently only mild program picture […] in Providence: 'new serial which I do not think much of--audience reaction only fair-extremely juvenile."[156] This last exhibitor note, dismissing a new juvenile serial, is telling—the failure of the singular *Iodine* film was necessarily interpreted as a larger failure to jumpstart the series narrative on which the film was promoted. While an announcement in *Showmen's Trade Review* suggested the film would access a "ready made" audience of 20 million Hearst newspaper readers (a later *Film Daily* Comet Productions ad raised that number to 40 million), *Little Iodine* reveals that the assumed cross-promotional possibilities of comic strip adaptations in the 1930s and '40s were not always realized.[157] The success of any given adaptation could not only be attributed to its perceived built-in reader/viewership.

---

[156] Correspondence--Harry Kosiner to Ralph Cohen (2 December 1946), forwarded correspondence from Ben F. Joel, Jr. to Joseph Unger (8 November 1946), Box 27, Folder 276 (LITTLE IODINE – distribution 1946-1947), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.
[157] *Showmen's Trade Review* (14 December 1946): 27.; *Film Daily* (24 September 1946), 4.

As Comet entered into the unsure independent production marketplace of the immediate postwar period, it unwittingly recreated a now-dated serialized cultural paradigm central to the wartime successes UA had missed. Kosiner, Cohn, and United Artists vice-president and general manager of domestic distribution Gradwell L. Sears thus found themselves debating the cause of *Little Iodine*'s failure—was it a matter of poor form and content, or one of intermedial inadequacy? Kosiner wrote to Cohn that

> Grad brought up a point and said that the dropping of the option was one thing, but that the material that went into the picture was what made the series successful or unsuccessful as illustrated by the contents of the attached [the aforementioned reviews]. However, despite his statement, I still feel that we shouldn't make any more of them because if the title and its syndication had any value, we would have felt it in the selling of the film, which is still being received as just another second feature.[158]

For Gradwell Sears, the reception of *Little Iodine* had very little to do with its intermedial status, and much more to do with the film's apparent lack of quality, and its inability to distinguish itself as more than typical B fare. Of course, Comet's stated *raison d'etre* and entire business model was precisely to produce unassumingly typical B fare for hinterland theatres, and Sears' opinion is no doubt reflective of his larger belief, outlined by Balio, that Pickford's foray into B production was largely beneath United Artists' tradition of quality.[159]

---

[158] Correspondence--Harry Kosiner to Ralph Cohen (2 December 1946), forwarded correspondence from Ben F. Joel, Jr. to Joseph Unger (8 November 1946), Box 27, Folder 276 (LITTLE IODINE – distribution 1946-1947), Mary Pickford Papers (Production files-Produced), Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.
[159] Balio, 206.

An ad in *Showmen's Trade Review* evidently had it wrong in boasting that "United Artists is proud to say that Comet fills the bill, and proud, too, that Comet productions releases thru United Artists."[160] Indeed, Sears' laying of the blame at the feet of the filmmakers was somewhat hypocritical as, according to Pickford, Sears was "'loud in his denunciation . . . and not at all backward in expressing his lack of enthusiasm in handling them [Comet's films and] convinced the board not to grant Comet special distribution terms," as had been afforded the productions of the UA cofounders in the past.[161] Sears thus contributed to Comet's premature demise by increasing the expenses of an outfit already overspending for a supposed B studio. Harry Kosiner, however, seemed to liken *Iodine's* failure to betting on the wrong horse—the specific merits of the individual film were not as important as the commercial viability of the King Features brand in general, and the comic strip in particular; *Little Iodine* in this case was but a failed ancillary product. Comet's banking on the B movie's earlier successes in the industry was intimately connected to the privileging of constellated media that invoked Mary Pickford's now thirty-year-old star image and serial figuration.

Assessing the short-lived history of Comet Productions at a base industrial level suggests nothing more than a misguided and poorly executed effort to capitalize on the early stages of the studio system's eventual dissolution. Pairing that industrial history with an understanding of the studio's most famous co-

---

[160] "Comet Productions Fill the Bill," *The Showmen's Trade Review* (12 October 1946): 16-17.
[161] Balio, 206.

founder as a kind of serial figure, however, reveals the complexities of the intermediality at work in postwar American media, an intermediality that is typically elided in the telling and retelling of dominant studio history. Mary Pickford's serial figuration as "Little Mary," was, to return again to Denson and Mayer, a formless substrate; a media form in and of itself. Pickford had not appeared in a film since 1933's *Secrets*, and yet the figure of "Little Mary" had continued to move from popular song to comic strips, and was an undergirding feature of subsequent star images. In taking a transitory celestial object as its namesake, Comet Productions sought to invoke the faded star power of its co-founders. In so doing, the company also provided a useful metaphor for the nature of serialized constellated media in the postwar period. A comet burns up, but in passing a sun the process of outgassing produces a fuzzy coma and tail around the object's icy core. This formless material functions much in the same way a serial figure does – tied to originary cinematic appearances and star images, but able to spread beyond to related media. The invocation of the coma and tail surrounding Mary Pickford when capitalizing on the changing face of B-movie production was, to again borrow a phrase from Brian Taves, intermediate. As we have seen, the B movie itself was already an intermediate form in its evolving position on any given theatre marquee. The opportunities offered independent producers throughout the period of anti-trust litigation also proved to be intermediate. And Pickford's serial figuration was intermediate, too – intermediate to the various media forms that it defined and embodied, and typified by a representation of white girlhood that was at once liberatory and conservative, juvenile and fully grown. Comet's productive

failure helps us understand how women creators could deploy constellated media as an alternative point of access in a Hollywood that was increasingly closed to their artistry, even if said deployment was not successful. Subsequent chapters will turn to other women and other figures that serialized constellated media to thoroughly different ends.



Figure 7: "Comet Productions fill the bill," *The Film Daily* (14 September 1946): 6.

Chapter Two
Dale Evans' Roundup: Postwar Intermediality, Serial Evangelism, and the "Temporal Wedge," 1945-1955

> The position of Dale Evans in the entertainment field is unique. Since the pre-sound, serial days of Texas Guinan, Dale is the only woman star to make her name in Westerns […] in New York, she was the first woman to receive star billing in a rodeo at [Madison Square Garden], the Mecca of the nation's cowpunchers […] Dale also co-stars with Roy in the "Roy Rogers Show" on both television and radio for NBC under the sponsorship of Post Cereals. She is "Queen of the West" on records, too, her Western and children's records for RCA-Victor being consistently high in popularity. [She's in the comic book field] with a book whose popularity is soaring, [and] with 25 American and two Canadian companies licensed to manufacture various clothing, toy and novelty items in Dale's name, under permit from Dale Evans Enterprises, she is also the only feminine figure starred in this aspect of Western popularity.
>
> - Publicity fact sheet on Dale Evans, 1953.[162]

In the spring of 1945, Dale Evans was poised to assume the mantle of Republic Studio's leading B-western star. On March 14th, *Variety* reported that Roy Rogers, Republic's top singing cowboy attraction, was due to be called up to "face the draft board."[163] With the studio's other singing cowboy, Gene Autry, already enlisted, and Republic standbys Wild Bill Elliott and Sunset Carson unable to carry a tune in a bucket, studio chief Herbert Yates announced his plans to "co-star Trigger, the cowpoke's horse, with Dale Evans, who has appeared opposite Rogers

---

[162] "Fact Sheet on Dale Evans, 1953 edition," Al Rackin Publicity Director, Spec.082, Box 1, Folder 15, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA. This chapter is indebted to the work of Raymond E. White. Not only did he produce a staggeringly detailed catalogue of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans' work in a variety of media industries, but the fruits of his research (housed in special collections at Ball State University) came to my rescue after the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans papers became inaccessible as the archives at the Autry Museum of the American West closed for renovations that will extend into 2022.

[163] "Roy Rogers, 33, Faces His Draft Board Sat." *Variety* (14 March 1945), 2.

for almost two years".[164] A screenplay was drafted for Evans' first starring role, *Sunset in El Dorado*, a film that was to break the generic mold of the "singing cowboy" western in featuring a female lead, while employing an uncharacteristic time-travel set-up that underscored the B-western's often unstable combination of themes of manifest destiny and settler colonialism with more contemporary dramatic concerns.[165] Following V-E Day on May 8th, however, a new draft ruling exempted those who had reached their 30th birthday and who were engaged in "useful business," with *Film Daily* reporting that the change spared a number of Hollywood leading men from service, including Alan Ladd, John Garfield, Dana Andrews, and Roy Rogers.[166] Despite the subsequent refiguring of the screenplay to shoehorn Rogers back into the plot, *Sunset in El Dorado* nonetheless stands outside the generic limits of the singing-cowboy western. The film presents a historical fantasy in which the heroine rejects both the doldrums of corporate employment and the strictures of domesticity in favor of an imagined liberty invoked by her perceptions of a familial feminist past. The plot of the film seemed to run contrary

---

[164] *Ibid.*

[165] Peter Stanfield clarifies that "towards the end of its existence [around 1940, when it was purchased by RKO] Grand National released a news item announcing that Harry Dreifuss was planning an 'all-girl Western.' That idea did not materialize, but the studio did produce three singing westerns starring Dorothy Page: *Ride 'Em Cowgirl* (1938), *Water Rustlers* (1939) and *The Singing Cowgirl* (1939). The studio's perilous finances meant these were under-resourced pictures, and other studios did not pick up the novelty." Despite these antecedents, *Sunset in El Dorado*, as originally conceived, would have offered an exciting new development in the genre.
Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the Singing Cowboy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 124.

[166] "Draft Ruling Exempts Number of Pix Stars," *The Film Daily* (24 May 1945), 1.

to its real-world corollary, however, as Evans was retired from westerns by Republic studios following her marriage to Rogers in January of 1947, until a letter-writing campaign on the part of fans returned her to the saddle in 1949's *Susanna Pass.*[167]

Evans' career on film and interactions with Republic in this period fluctuate wildly between the potentiality claimed by women on the home front during the war and what Elaine Tyler May has called the "domestic containment" of white middle-class suburbanization in the burgeoning Cold War era.[168] In August of 1948, *Modern Screen* editor-in-chief Albert P. Delacorte took the unusual step of publishing an open letter to studio chief Herbert Yates, drawing attention to his announcement that Rogers and Evans' marriage had "lessened their romantic appeal as a team," and that Republic would therefore "no longer star them in the same pictures."[169] While Delacorte maintained that the couples' fans very much desired to see the pair's romance on screen, any dedicated consumer of series westerns would have known that the genre very rarely featured romance of any kind.[170] That Yates decided that Evans would no longer serve any purpose in

---

[167] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 6 (DC Comics, July-August 1949): 36. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

[168] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 14.

[169] Albert P. Delacorte, "You Can't Come Between Roy and Dale!" *Modern Screen* (August 1948), 27.

[170] In response to multiple reader letters on the subject, a columnist at *Screenland* wrote: "Gee, I know how you feel—and how hard it is not being able to see Dale and Roy smooch a little bit on the screen, but cowboys are like boy scouts, I guess. They're supposed to get the girl in the end, but no love scenes, even if they're Mr.

Rogers' films, even as she was never a truly romantic foil, underscores the fact that—for the film's producers, anyway—Evans was merely an object to be placed on screen in contrast to the cowboy and his horse; even marriage represented too much agency.

Yates' very public admonition that the co-stars' marriage had "lessened their romantic appeal," and thus Evans' star-power as sidekick to their biggest attraction, was alternatively challenged and mirrored in Evans' writings and interviews. Evans wrote, in her joint memoirs with Rogers in 1979, that her gut feeling was to fight against "becoming more and more typecast," and that, by 1947, her relationship with "Republic had run its course […] Enough was enough. They could get themselves another cowgirl."[171] Conversely, Evans told *Screenland* upon her return to co-starring with Rogers in 1949 that "my only thought is to make Roy happy—and to be with him. He would be miserable if I were to ambitiously pursue my career as I did before we were married".[172] Her own stated gender conservatism in this period would only grow in later years as evidenced by her increased religious zealotry and role in the rise of the New Christian Right in the 1960s and 70s, as Evans played an early role in both Henrietta Mears' Hollywood Christian Group, and Billy Graham's initial California Crusades. Nonetheless, the constellated media

---

and Mrs. in real life. Anyhoo, you can always watch Roy neck with Trigger, and he's pretty, too." Fred Robins, "From The Man In Gray," *Screenland* (August, 1948): 68.
[171] Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, with Carlton Stowers, *Happy Trails* (New York: Bantam Book, 1979), 115.
[172] May Mann, "A Wife Should Play Second Fiddle," *Screenland* (June, 1949): 26.

objects explored in this chapter offer an entirely different consumable image of an independent and continually engaged songwriter, successful business owner, sportswoman, and author. For those who had followed Evans' serial exploits beyond Republic, her comeback in *Susanna Pass* was completely predictable, and only the beginning of a rich media life beyond the silver screen.

In contrast to the limitation placed on Evans' film career by Yates following her marriage to Rogers, and in the spirit of Joanne Meyerowitz's contention that "an unrelenting focus on women's subordination erases much of the history of the postwar years," this chapter again reads our case study, in this case Dale Evans, as an intermedial serial text. The meaning of "Dale Evans" only begins on screen, but quickly extends beyond the confines of the feature film and into her continued appearances and activities in radio, comics, and eventually television, but also to neglected, maligned, and secondary media forms and material culture such as the popular song, consumer merchandise, the comic book "roundup" editorial, the fan-club newsletter, and the religious tract.[173] This chapter assesses a number of these objects in Dale Evans' media universe to offer an alternative reading of the star's work as a unique instance of post-war serial intermediality. An initial reading of *Sunset in Eldorado* functions to simultaneously upend histories of the B-western that have tended to put Roy Rogers at the centre of the story, while outlining the ways in which the diegetic and extratextual worlds Evans embodied might be

---

[173] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Introduction" in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960,* edited by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 4.

understood as a particular example of Jane Gaines and Monica Dall'Asta's theory of constellating outlined in the introduction. The rest of this chapter is primarily concerned with Evans' autobiographical writings, initially in the page of DC comics and eventually in her forging of a new kind of evangelical media. Whilst ostensibly dealing with a variety of topics from the domestic to the political, between the lines these writings reveal the ways in which Evans understood her various productions as part and parcel of a larger serial enterprise. In reading a later evangelical work, *Angel Unaware,* in particular, this chapter proposes that in attempting to constellate with her deceased infant child that Evans developed a kind of serial media historiography. Reclaiming Evans as an important producer and theorist of postwar American media away from major studio Hollywood, this final section of the chapter uncovers the ways in which the author articulated the formal specificity of each element of her career (radio, films, television, song, etc.), while also detailing the ways in which each of these forms were always interconnected in a serial, if not narrative, fashion.

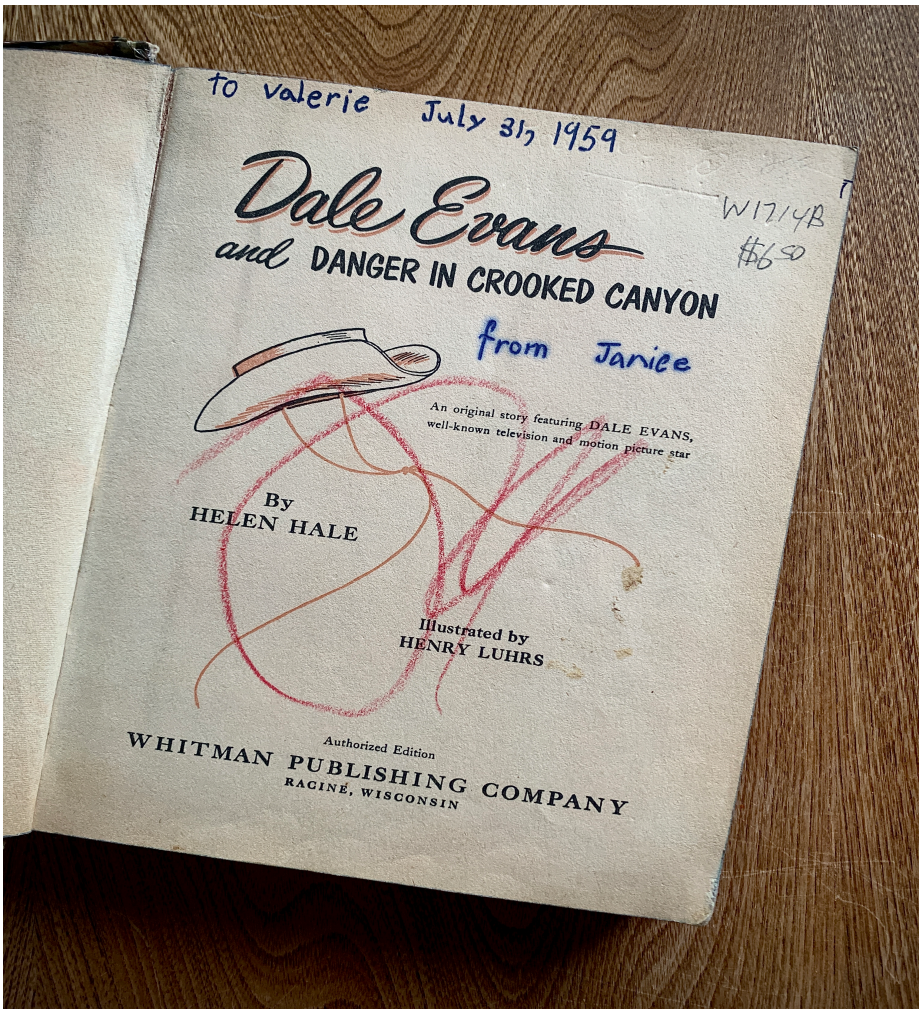


Figure 8: Detail from author's copy (previously Valerie's) of *Dale Evans and Danger in Crooked Canyon*

Though Hollywood mostly relegated Evans to supporting actor status, I would suggest that Dall'Asta and Gaines' "temporal wedge" opened by the historical film object leaves room for discussion of a plurality of constellated media that reveals a far more consequential and multi-faceted career. We will turn to specific and detailed case studies related to Dale Evans shortly, but a brief example is useful here. In the author's possession is a copy of a young adult novel entitled *Dale Evans and Danger in Crooked Canyon*, published by Whitman Publishing Company

of Racine, Wisconsin in 1958. This particular copy is inscribed, in crayon, "to Valerie, from Janice, July 31, 1959."[174] Written by Helen Hale and illustrated by Henry Luhrs, one would assume that the book has very little to do with the real historical figure of Dale Evans, beyond her appearance in the novel as a fictionalized protagonist. But is it not possible that, for Valerie and Janice, that this Dale Evans was every bit the author that Hale or Whitman Publishing purported to be, and that the novel was as consequential to their understanding of "Dale Evans" as her contemporary appearances in film, television, and radio? Archival documentation certainly suggests a guiding hand in the constellated media productions baring Evans' name: an advertisement for Evans and Rogers' merchandising arm, Roy Rogers Frontiers, Inc., for example, notes that "a child's trust is a precious thing […] that's why Roy and Dale personally check every item of Roy Rogers Double-R-Bar brand merchandise to make sure it measures up to the confidence your children have in them. Roy and Dale feel deeply their responsibility to your youngsters—and to you. They will never permit the exploitation of their names on merchandise of inferior quality […] it is your assurance that the product is made by a reputable manufacturer and backed by the integrity of Roy and Dale themselves."[175] Likewise, the August 1951 issue of the house organ of Whitman Publishing Company, *The Westerner*, describes in detail a visit made by Evans and

---

[174] Helen Hale, *Dale Evans and Danger in Crooked Canyon* (Racine, Wisconsin: Whitman Publishing Company, 1958). Author's collection.

[175] "A Child's Trust is a Precious Thing," Roy Rogers Frontiers, Inc. Advertisement, Spec.082, Box 1, Folder 1, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

Rogers to the company's headquarters in Racine, with detailed descriptions of the pair inspecting the many books and consumer objects bearing their name, touring the factory, meeting with union leaders, and even operating some of the equipment.[176] Thus, while we may not assign authorship of these constellated media to Dale Evans in a traditional sense, she was nonetheless extensively involved in their production and they are as essential in opening a temporal wedge upon this intermedial history. They are monads that contain the historical realities of the intermedial serial figure Dale Evans, as much as a film or television program. Additionally, much as film archivists have shown that each print of a film is a unique iteration, this particular material edition of *Danger in Crooked Canyon* opens a particular window upon the past of Valerie and Janice, whomever and wherever they may be.[177]

Evans' consuming audience, those who followed "Dale Evans" from films through to her activities in related industries, observed a unified, though fluctuating, multimedia whole, one that upends the limitations placed on Evans the actress by patriarchal Hollywood. As the film marking her semi-retirement from (western) screen acting, *Sunset in El Dorado* is essential as a starting point for understanding Evans' constellated media endeavors, as the film refracts her extra-

---

[176] *The Westerner* 21 (August 1951), 2-5, Spec.082, Box 1, Folder 1, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

[177] See Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI, 2001).

cinematic activities. Some initial discussion of film may help to break down the supposed distinction between the centre and the periphery.

Sunset in El Dorado: Dale's Dispersive Dress

"The eternal, in any case, is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea"
– Walter Benjamin[178]

In *Sunset in El Dorado*, Dale Evans plays Lucille Wiley, an agent at Worldwide travel agency.[179] She becomes tired of describing and booking exotic travel for others instead of experiencing it herself, and resolves to visit the ghost town of El Dorado, where her grandmother Kansas Kate ran a saloon and casino, the Golden Nugget, in the Days of '49. The opening sequence of the film offers Lucille/Dale before an interested audience of prospective tourists, lovingly describing the ghost town and its romanticized past in medium and close-up shots of a travel film. The colonization of the west by settler Americans is understood as a romanticized "past," as the ghost town is juxtaposed with "an Indian ceremonial dance," where the tourists might "learn something of early American history." Returning to her desk, Lucille/Dale is frustrated at receiving yet another telephone inquiry. When asked by a receptionist what's bothering her, she laments that "Worldwide sends people everywhere, but where do they send me? Home every night on a streetcar […] I'm

---

[178] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 463.
[179] It should be noted that Evans plays some form of professional in nearly all of her films with Rogers, whether a journalist, or a scientist, or a ranch owner, to name but a few.

fed up and I'd like to kick out a few of these windows!" Overhearing the schedule for a bus trip to El Dorado, Lucille/Dale resolves to take matters into her own hands. Leaving that day, her sudden absence from her fiancé/employer's patriarchal sphere is automatically assumed to be a kidnapping, with a whirling newspaper headline announcing "LOCAL GIRL DISAPPEARS – Lucille Wiley Feared Kidnap Victim – Police baffled by mysterious disappearance of girl."

Eventually arriving in El Dorado after a series of desert hijinks, Lucille/Dale comes upon the Golden Nugget at night. Moving slowly through the darkened saloon, her flashlight alights upon a portrait of her grandmother Kansas Kate behind the bar. A series of shot/reverse shots and a swell of strings underscores Lucille/Dale's discovery of her historical doppelganger, before George "Gabby" Hayes, playing his familiar "old-timey prospector" role, arrives to confront the trespasser. Recognizing Lucille/Dale as looking "enough like Kate to be her twin sister," Gabby happily shows Lucille/Dale to Kate's room, a space he guards from tourists. Removing a dress from a trunk and holding it before her ancestor's mirror, Lucille/Dale performs her own constellating with her familial past, as a dissolve constructs her vision of life as Kansas Kate and leads from the film's frame narrative to its historical fantasy, in which Lucille/Dale lives out a day in the life as Kansas Kate. Holding the dress and looking in the mirror, Lucille "opens a temporal wedge" within her own past, reflecting her narrative connection with her diegetic ancestor as a means of liberation from the limitations of her own life. Simultaneously, Dale's star image also refracts to reveal potentialities not immediately evident from her film work and imminent semi-retirement. If Evans'

film work alongside Rogers proves an inadequate representation of her potentiality, Kansas Kate's glittering dress in the refracted image points the way for any number of alternative Dales offered in constellated media. Though Dale as Kansas Kate runs a saloon and casino and is tied up in gold prospecting with Gabby, the shoehorning of Rogers back into the plot after his draft deferment means that narrative development for Dale is cut short by haphazard fight and chase sequences. Lucille/Dale's "opening of the temporal wedge" nonetheless provides a useful image for conceiving of the intermedial connections amongst the various Dale Evanses, at once delimited to sidekick status while also forging an independent path down various other avenues. Gazing in the cobweb-covered mirror, Lucille/Dale's cherished caress of Kate's dress places the object at the centre of her intermedial world.

A shared visual iconographic language of the western underpins the connections between these avenues. Gaines offers a passing mention of the mimesis of Evans' film work, arguing in *Contested Culture*, by way of Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, that

> the mise-en-scene of the Republic films echoes the ranch life of Roy and his wife, Dale Evans, who, even in their contemporary California "private" lives, are always represented wearing western gear, driving a jeep, or riding horses […] Their style of living, as well as their personal tastes and attitudes, "have been made to mimic the fictional world … in order that the world might appear not entirely fictional. Life is thus modeled on fiction in order that fiction, in appearing to reflect life, might also serve as a model for it".[180]

[180] Jane M. Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and The Law* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 167.



Figure 9: Dale Evans constellates with herself in *Sunset in El Dorado*

Gaines is correct in identifying a specifically constructed relationship between reality and cinematic fiction, meant to encourage for the audience the sense that the sunset into which Roy and Dale might cinematically ride leads directly to an appearance at a local rodeo or movie house. Gaines is similarly interested in establishing the connections between Rogers and Evans' intermedial appearances in film, radio, and television, as they are central to her assessment of Rogers' precedent-setting lawsuit against Republic Pictures in 1951.[181] Evans' films

[181] In Rogers' 1951 lawsuit against Republic Pictures, the cowboy attempted to prevent Republic from licensing his back filmography to the Hollywood Television

discussed here, however, suggest that the function of the interplay between moving image and star image were far less regimented as one might assume, and that the potentiality for Evans' agency on the screen at once signaled a continuing (non) fictional independence while making clear that said independence could not function without support from exterior narratives. That is, the western mise-en-scene of Evans and Rogers' films might be similarly employed in related comic books, radio, and personal appearances, but the implications of Dale's place within that universe of media is varied and complex.

Costuming is of central importance here. Evans plays sidekick to Rogers in their films, but is the primary protagonist in her own intertextual world of comic books, personal writings, merchandise, etc. and in both cases her clearly demarcated sartorial appearance offers a supporting through line. Gaines maintains that Evans' public life is modeled after fiction. I suggest that her baroque western costuming – always a central feature of any representation of Dale Evans, whether filmed, written, drawn, or live—is the life from which her many fictions are

---

Service for broadcast, on the grounds that the association between his films and the television sponsor would damage his parallel self-advertising business, disrupt his program on radio, and upend the production of a television series of his own. Curiously, Evans was not deposed or mentioned in the case, despite running a similar parallel merchandising business that would have been affected by the Republic deal. The judge in the case initially sided with Rogers, but the decision was overturned in appeal in 1954. For more on Rogers' precedent-setting litigation against Republic Studios, see Gaines, *Contested Culture,* 164-171; Jennifer Porst, "Roy Rogers and Gene Autry Do Not Endorse This Project: Actors, Advertising, and Feature Films on Early Television," *Television & New Media* 22.4 (May 2021): 420-439.

modeled. Costume is the central constellated media in this multi-medial world, the initial space for meaning making that serves as a hub connecting films, comics, music, radio, television, and autobiographical writings. If the sartorial material of Dale Evans' appearance generally provides her with a generically delimited image in most of her films and media appearances, the function of costume in *Sunset in El Dorado* is telling of the film's lost potentiality for Evans' career independence after the reinstatement of Rogers. For Lucille/Dale, the dress lovingly preserved by Gabby functions as a talisman for her imaginative-historical transformation into Kansas Kate. Visiting the abandoned Golden Nugget regularly and keeping watch over Kate's portrait and her possessions, Gabby serves as the archivist to Lucille/Dale's object-based exploration of the past, applying a preservationist's eye to objects and documents that hold significant historical value, and waiting for the appropriate historian to come along and apply meaning to said value. Though Evans' vestiary is unique, it was frequently understood in relation to that of Rogers', as was her larger star image.

The western in general has been considered a masculinist genre in terms of authorship, subject matter, and audience. A number of scholars have recently begun to nuance our understanding of the role of women in the production and consumption of both literary and filmic westerns, however. Victoria Lamont powerfully argues in *Westerns: A Women's History* that the genre as a literary tradition was "founded as much by women writers as by men and played a significant role in American women's literary history at the turn of the twentieth

century."[182] The absence of women from the canonization and historical narrativization of the genre, while multifaceted, shares a similar complication of distinction of taste with the B-western film. Lamont argues that the critical dismissal of the western by literary critics had the dual effect of removing the western from most serious discussions of cultural production, whilst leaving only the legacy of men when any discussion did occur.[183] Thus, in responding to Mary Eagleton's question of "how can feminism speak of the relentless silencing of women, while at the same time maintaining that there is a formidable tradition to uncover?," Lamont shares with Gaines and Dall'Asta a concern with not simply "filling in by addition," but exploring the ways in which the marginalizing of women's artistic voices went hand-in-hand with a powerful historical discourse of absence.[184]

Peter Stanfield ties this absence to the "patriarchal crisis" of the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the B-western came into its own as a genre. Despite the adventure narrative's penchant for the "fantasy of rescue" and its attendant delimiting of women characters' independence, Stanfield maintains that the "requirement for such closure does not motivate the appearance of strongly independent women within the [B-western] film. What is striking in these films is

---

[182] Victoria Lamont, *Westerns: A Women's History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016): 1-5.
[183] *Ibid.,* Nonetheless, Lamont falls into a similar trap in using her introduction to clarify that her work only concerns "respectable" westerns released by notable publishers such as Little and Brown, noting that the concurrent dime novel tradition in western publishing was heavily serialized and produced for a "juvenile" audience, and therefore less worthy of study, 3.
[184] Mary Eagleton in Lamont, 2.

precisely how unmotivated and 'natural' the independent and economically active woman is: the films do not mark her as extraordinary, and her position passes without comment."[185] Stanfield's examples do not include Roy Rogers and Dale Evans films, largely due to the periodization of his study, and yet he dismisses the complexity of their films outright in stating that Evans merely "allowed *his* films to focus in a novel manner on domestic intrigue."[186] The domestic was certainly an element of Evans and Rogers' public personas especially after their marriage, as is explored below, but Stanfield's reduction here is somewhat one-dimensional. Evans' portrayal of the strongly independent women described by Stanfield is, contrarily, challenged by Rogers' characters in many of their films, despite the fact that they became and remained equal business partners after their careers were yoked together.

Roy Rogers is a disruption in this story that demonstrates the historiographic problem of erasure. Our discussion of Dale Evans shares with the *Women Film Pioneers Project* a desire to "discover" Evans' intermedial career, and to push beyond that discovery to find meaning.[187] And yet, Evans has been generally understood as associated with and secondary to Roy Rogers. Dale Evans may be the "Queen of the West," but not before the "King of the Cowboys." In Stanfield's landmark study, for example, Evans' passing during the writing of his book in 2001 is remarked upon in the introduction, but she is rarely mentioned again. The

---

[185] Stanfield, 122.
[186] *Ibid.,* 98. Emphasis mine.
[187] See https://wfpp.columbia.edu/

reinstatement of Rogers into *Sunset in El Dorado* is particularly telling – though the film largely leaves the narrative of Lucille/Dale's historical self-discovery well enough alone, the presence of Rogers serves as a constant nagging force (he plays himself in both the frame narrative and the historical fantasy). Rogers' character assumes, upon meeting Kansas Kate for the first time, that she is a schoolmarm. When he discovers her true profession, he responds with disgust, wanton acts of fisticuff violence, and seeks at every turn to protect her from the rough and rowdy ways to which she has long belonged. It is Rogers who grows over the course of the film (not Evans), coming to appreciate Kate's status and independence. The Roy Rogers of the frame narrative offers Evans the promise of a western lifestyle as equal partners in the closing moments of the film, but this does not erase the desire to ask "what if" Republic had gone ahead with Evans as the true star of the film, nor does it prevent the performance of an astonishingly misogynistic song entitled "The Lady Who Wouldn't Say Yes," a seemingly reactionary retort to Rogers and Hammerstein's "I Can't Say No" from *Oklahoma!* (1943). Rogers' presence in this film and elsewhere subordinates Evans' stardom, as well as her presence as an intermedial subject and object. For these reasons, this study will read Rogers as neither star nor sidekick, but instead will perform a similar erasure in suggesting that he is of secondary concern to Evan's efforts to constellate her own career. Roy Rogers was but another figure for Dale Evans to constellate her own historical reality, but his gravitational pull has often outstripped hers. This project seeks to upend that legacy by focusing the frame on Evans (rather than Rogers) to produce a new and different historical account.

An early sequence in the film underscores Dale's independence within the western genre. Boarding the bus for El Dorado, Lucille/Dale enjoys a performance by Bob Nolan and the Sons of the Pioneers, the famous western swing group that gave Rogers his start. Singing the ironic "Go West Young Man," the Sons pair "Home on the Range"-style imagery ("all aboard for a wonderland/learn to drink your coffee from an old tin can"), with humorous warnings for urbanites about the "untamed" nature of the wild ("I want to go where coyotes feed/on city folk that we don't need"). In a series of two shots, the coach audience of elderly men and women—along with children attired in Evans/Rogers-branded western wear—express surprise and consternation at the graphic lyrics. Only Lucille/Dale remains unperturbed, even as she is the subject of a solo from Son Ken Carson: "I want to see my Two Gun Sal/She done done away with my lifelong pal/She shot him dead so we could wed/She's the gal for me." Dale's star image and intertextual exploits structure the viewer's understanding of this sequence, despite plot points related to Lucille's inexperience. Dale is unafraid of the "wild west" the viewer knows to be her kingdom via their own intertextual knowledge and by merit of her whiteness and privileged position as a settler. The children wear clothing produced by her and Rogers' merchandisers, and the Sons of the Pioneers are as much her band as Rogers'—after all, a number of Evans' song compositions became standards for the Sons and every other western swing combo: "T For Texas" (not to be confused with Jimmie Rodgers' first blue yodel), "Hazy Mountains," and "Happy Trails," to name

but a few.[188] In the context of the film's diegesis, Dale may be the inexperienced Lucille, but the pairing of the actress with her backing band and images of Dale Evans Enterprises merchandise confirms that she also embodies the agency of "Two Gun Sal." She is disturbed, however, by the lecherous gaze of an attendant who continues to compare her face with a picture in the newspaper. A honking horn reveals that the attendant sold her out to his superiors, and Lucille/Dale is forced off the bus by her fiancé/employer and aunt.

The cinematic west of the B-movie and singing cowboy western is somewhat different from that associated with the western productions of John Ford and major-studio Hollywood. Roderick McGillis makes the case that the B-western's combination of familiar Southern California location shooting, ample use of stock footage, and sound stage rear-screen projection creates, in distinction to the "reality effects" of the mainstream western, "a fantasy chronotope—time and space exist in free-flowing combinations that disregard temporal and spatial realities."[189] For McGillis, this "fantasy" space, with its disregard for verisimilitude, opens up possibilities for queer and against-the-grain readings that are perhaps anathema to standard interpretations of the western film. Nonetheless, McGillis' larger argument concerns itself primarily with heteronormative masculinity in the films, and suggests that "these films are about what goes on in the mind of a man, and what goes on in the mind of a man is just as inscrutable as that sublime landscape

---

[188] Raymond E. White, *King of the Cowboys, Queen of the West: Roy Rogers and Dale Evans* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 342.
[189] Roderick McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 147.

he roams."[190] In any case, it is the young man that goes west. Looking to Lucille/Dale, however, I would argue that the film is filled with instances in which the character might assert her independence through the use of the fantasy landscape and "western lifestyle," and that these opportunities are intimately related to the constellated media excursions taken by the "Dale" character elsewhere. The above-described Sons of the Pioneers performance, for example, draws upon familiar stereotypes about the West to amuse and frighten the bus tourists who seek adventure in heavily sanitized and already colonized locales. Lucille/Dale, the "young man" who is to go west, is comfortable with the performance, however, as she and the audience know that she is the central figure in the construction of this fantasy space.

The genre's fantasy of manifest destiny and violent colonization is no less blunted in the B-western, but Evans' habitation of this fantasy chronotope by way of her own intertextuality offers the possibility to challenge our assumptions of the western's goals and attitudes during the height of its production in Hollywood, just as it allows us to challenge the historiographical assumptions central to the genre. As Roland Barthes argues, "in 'objective' history, the 'real' is never anything but an unformulated signified, sheltered behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent. This situation defines what we might call the *reality effect* […] historical discourse does not follow the real, it merely signifies it, constantly repeating *this happened,* without this assertion ever being anything but the signified *wrong side* of all

---

[190] *Ibid.,* 161.

historical narration."[191] The big-budgeted westerns of the 30s-50s employed long shot and then widescreen images of vast uninhabited "frontiers" to metonymically confirm the *this happened* of the anti-Indigenous ideological mythology of a supposedly heroic and innocent settler society. The series western's fantasy chronotopes challenge the masculinist directive of that mythology, if not its racism. Understanding the evolving possibilities of this western mise-en-scene is central to an assessment of Dale Evans as a serial figure. The appearance of the traditionally gendered iconography of the cowboy – horses, six-shooters, white hats, etc.—was balanced in the singing cowboy western with then unheard-of elements: guitars/musical instruments, and garishly designed clothing, for example. It is perhaps this balance that gives such iconography the simultaneous powers of liberty and repression. As Caetlin Benson-Allott underscores: "objects change how we see other objects, including people, and how we treat people, including how we treat them as objects. The personal is political—that much we know. So, too, is the material political."[192]

Thomas Schatz uses the B-western subgenre as examples of less interesting and engaging genre films that "merely deliver the codes intact" and "almost literally 'all look alike'."[193] Evans' embodiment of certain markers of these westerns that

---

[191] Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History," in *The Rustle of Language,* translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 139.
[192] Caetlin Benson-Allott, "Editor's Introduction: Special Issue on Materialisms" *Feminist Media Histories* 1.3, (July 2015): 2.
[193] Thomas Schatz, "Film Genre and the Genre Film," in *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings,* edited by Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010), 456.

differ from their major studio relatives, in particular costuming and musical performance, challenges Schatz's assumptions, as she utilizes the material of the singing cowboy western to political ends, constellating with a fictionalization of her historical self, by way of costume and song, in order to reveal the potentialities of the subgenre laid out by McGillis.

While addressing these potentialities underscores the unexplored possibility of expanded gender representation in Evan's multi-medial western universe, it does not negate the ideological problematics inherent to the genre. Schatz's contends that the western's "community in conflict" revolves around the male "western hero," who, in Schatz's words, "regardless of his social or legal standing, is necessarily an agent of civilization in the savage frontier. He represents both the social order and the threatening savagery that typify the Western milieu."[194] Clearly the invocation of the "savage frontier" here underscores the western's obsession with re-reading the history of the colonization of Indigenous peoples by a settler society within the familiar dichotomies of wilderness/civilization and primitivism/modernity. It is, in a larger sense, Philip J. Deloria's argument that "the indeterminancy of American identities stems, in part, from the nation's inability to deal with Indian people. Americans wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness. Yet, in order to control the landscape they had to destroy the original inhabitants."[195] Both sides of the

---

[194] *Ibid.,* 457.

[195] Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 5. I have retained Deloria's use of the term "Indian," though it remains contested in the

dichotomy are necessary for the dialectic here to work, and the destruction of Indigenous communities was deemed necessary to reinvigorate a feeble, febrile colonial civilization.

Unlike a good deal of A-fare classical westerns, like *Unconquered* (1947) or *The Searchers* (1956), that sought to depict cultural and physical genocide, the films of Dale Evans predominantly imagine such destruction of Native American societies as already complete. This imagination of a nostalgic present *after* the conflicts that define the typical western film is a central part of McGillis' fantasy chronotope. Indeed, the above-mentioned travel film that opens *Sunset in El Dorado* is the only instance of Indigenous representation in the film, even after Lucille/Dale imaginatively travels through time. In this way the films are much closer to Michelle H. Raheja's contention that, as much as Native Americans are "hypervisible" in North American films, their representation is at the same time "outside of their historical, geographical, and cultural context, situated in the past with no viable future […] rendered invisible through plotlines that reinforce the trope of Indigenous people as vanishing or inconsequential."[196] The west is already "won" in the B-western film, and, as Peter Stanfield makes clear, are primarily

---

United States and the history of its usage in Hollywood western films is undeniably racist —see, for example, a 2021 resolution from the National Congress of American Indians: https://www.ncai.org/AK-21-007.pdf

[196] Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans on Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), *x*.

focused on contemporary concerns of "labour and capital, and particularly the impact of new technology."[197] The purpose of this project is, in part, to reclaim Dale Evans' constellated media and decenter narratives of classical Hollywood that have overall concealed the activities of women after the introduction of sound. But in identifying such a lacuna in Dale Evans' career, other erasures are made evident. The work of the "Queen" of a genre dependent on the valorization of the colonization of Indigenous peoples is imbricated in the same problematic representations as that of her white male co-stars. Raheja finds and addresses just such a similar erasure in her discussion of Cheyenne actor Minnie Ha Ha (Minnie Devereaux) and Penobscot actor Molly Spotted Elk (Mary Alice Nelson) and notes that "as people who have not historically mattered, there is a lack of substantial material in the official historical archive that provides witness to the lives of early Native American female film actors."[198] This archival lack is supplemented by Raheja with an alternative archive of more ephemeral sources, what this project has termed "constellated media." The act of recovering Dale Evans' work from the standard patriarchal narratives inevitably obscures histories shadowed by her own privilege. As Jane Gaines asserts: "even the concept of women's 'historical insignificance' cannot hope to contain, let alone fathom, all of the no-longer-existing women of every class and race category worldwide."[199] Discovering the perceived outline around the various media

---

[197] Peter Stanfield, *Hollywood, Westerns, and the 1930s: The Lost Trail* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001): 79.
[198] Raheja, 51
[199] Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018): 118.

releases of those marginalized in the telling of dominant histories will always obscure other stars just beyond.

The film in which Evans returned to the screen, *Susanna Pass,* offers a fleeting expansion of her constellated media beyond costuming, but an expansion that would only have been available to dedicated consumers of her non-filmic activities. *Susanna Pass* can be seen as deflecting Evans' attentions away from Rogers and onto her fictional and non-fictional recreational work – that of hatching fish as an ichthyologist. In a lengthy sequence lacking any substantive narrative motivation, Evans explains in near-painful detail the process of hatching trout. Looking for Evans' absent employer, the film's antagonist enters her laboratory and asks after her activities in an effort to bide time. In a series of close-ups clearly culled from scientific films, Evans explains in voice-over the process of hatching the fish: dead and infertile eggs must be carefully removed daily, lest they spoil active eggs; hatching baskets hold tiny eggs with black spots that have started their "hatching procedure;" a moveable basket needs to be adjusted constantly to separate the hatched fish; at first they live on their yolk sacs, but after absorption they receive three daily feedings of ground liver; the fish and game commission of California certainly goes to a lot of effort to keep lakes and streams well stocked for professional and recreational fishermen. For the casual viewer, this surprisingly long sequence is but a non sequitur. Informed audiences, however, would have noted that just before the release of the film, in her semi-regular column in the pages of DC Comics' *Dale Evans,* Dale announced some

> wonderful news for all you—wonderful because each and every one of you is responsible for bringing about my return to motion pictures [...] We've wanted to do this for more than a year, and you fans who kept up a steady stream of letters to the studio, to magazines, and to newspaper editors, have my warmest thanks […] The story has a fish and fish hatchery background, and, as you fans know, since fishing is one of my greatest enthusiasms, you can imagine how much I've enjoyed working on this picture. It's been wonderful fun and I was thrilled with it.[200]

The hatchery was yet another in a plethora of constellations, the sequence but a signal that more lay beyond.

"A Year's Supply of Bear Meat:" Merchandise and Comics

These possibilities were explored by Evans' merchandising arm, Dale Evans Industries, in the marketing of branded consumer products. In anticipation of *Sunset in El Dorado*, for example, the trade journal *The Exhibitor* noted that "over 200 department stores in the country are taking advantage of a promotional tie-in on Republic's outdoor musical […] arranged through *Calling All Girls*, the magazine is featuring a layout in its October-November issue on the trend toward western fashions in the 'teen-age set."[201] The subsequent issue of *Calling All Girls* featured a two-page spread of young women in front of posters of Rogers and Evans, sporting "cowboy inspired fashions that promise to be the number one fad on every high school campus".[202]

---

[200] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 6 (DC Comics, July-August 1949): 36. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.
[201] "Teen-Age Promotion of Rogers," *The Exhibitor* (24 October 1945), 23.
[202] "Wild About Westerns," *Calling All Girls* (Oct-Nov 1945), 18-19.



Figure 10: Enjoying the new Dale Evans western clothes.
"Wild About Westerns," *Calling All Girls* (Oct-Nov 1945), 18-19.

Ardent fans would have already been aware of Dale Evans the merchandiser and designer upon reading Evans' monthly update letters in a section titled "Dale Evans' Roundup," published in the pages of DC Comic's *Dale Evans* comic book. In one such letter, Evans takes time to "thank all of you for the wonderful letters you

have written and I'm especially glad to know that many of you are enjoying my new Dale Evans western clothes and other items that I have recently put on the market. I hope they may bring you much pleasure and enjoyment".[203] Evans also asks the reader to look out for her new Victor single, recorded with the Sons of the Pioneers. Such blatantly commercial statements are placed alongside detailed descriptions of Evans and Rogers' sporting life:

> Right after Christmas, Roy and I went on a hunting trip up in the high Sierras, east of Stockton, California. We were accompanied by Roy's hunting partner, Carl 'Alfie' Switcher. Alfie is the red-headed, freckle-faced boy who starred in the 'Our Gang' comedies a few years ago. We don't go in for hunting as a trophy-killing spree and this trip had the definite purpose of stocking our deep freeze with bear meat—which we ourselves eat (the steaks are very choice indeed); and the dogs get the tougher sections. We had terrific luck. Alfie bagged two big bears, Roy got one; and yours truly, scared a little, but determined to do her bit, got a big black character that will almost take care of the year's supply of bear meat![204]

Pairing a reminder to purchase Dale Evans clothing with a lengthy description of bear hunting in the High Sierras served to craft for her audience of girls and boys, women and men, a distinct kind of lifestyle brand that promised, at once, independence and domestic bliss, a look in the mirror to a past (or future) of a heavily idealized western history. It is important to note that it is not immediately clear that these columns were actually written by Dale Evans or that they describe

---

[203] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 11 (DC Comics, May-June, 1950): 34-35. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.; The status of these (and other) fan letters in the archival record is, at present, unknown. They are not part of the Raymond E. White papers at Ball State University, but the finding aid to the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Archives at the Autry Museum of the American West does list a series of "fan mail." My hope is that these may provide some answers when the Autry archives reopen in 2022.

[204] *Ibid.*

real events, but her later success as a best-selling author who generally did not use a ghost writer, and the presence of her authorial voice in the columns strongly suggest they were. Questions of authenticity, authorship, and the split between truth and fiction are not inconsequential in discussing Evans' writings, however, as we shall see. In any case, the production and branding of the intermedial ecosystem here imagines a kind of spectral Dale Evans in the absence created by her marriage and subsequent disappearance from the screen. Though assumed by the Hollywood press to have become "domestically contained," Evans' continued communication with her readers indicates otherwise.

Roy Rogers' limited presence in the above anecdote as mere hunting partner is reflected in the pages of the comic book itself; he does not feature in the narratives, which emphasize Evans' exploits as a ranch owner and local enforcer of the peace. In one story in the same issue, "Talent Scout for Danger," Evans assumes the role of talent scout while loaning her ranch to a film studio to shoot locations, building upon Evans' past while postulating a more diversified Hollywood future. In fact, some of the past injustices of Hollywood are even reimagined here. Dale teams up with a local old-timer who is revealed to be a former silent movie star whose career was stunted by the conversion to sound – with Dale's much-needed encouragement and convincing, the actor and studio agree to arrange his triumphant comeback.[205] Dale is absent from the screen, but engaged in an ephemeral struggle to right the wrongs of the cinematic past. I do not intend to

---

[205] *Ibid.*

suggest that these comic images express the sole authorship of Evans, as they were written, drawn, and inked by others. Rather, as more than cinematic paratexts of a distinct moment of industry transformation, these comic narratives provide meaning along a serialized chain of intermedial intersections—the diegesis of a figure such as Dale Evans extending beyond the image, or the absence of the image, to potentialities perhaps not fully realized. Our historical assumptions concerning one woman's experiences in Hollywood are reified by the cinematic image, but a secondary narrative linking Evans and her contemporary audience emerges here.

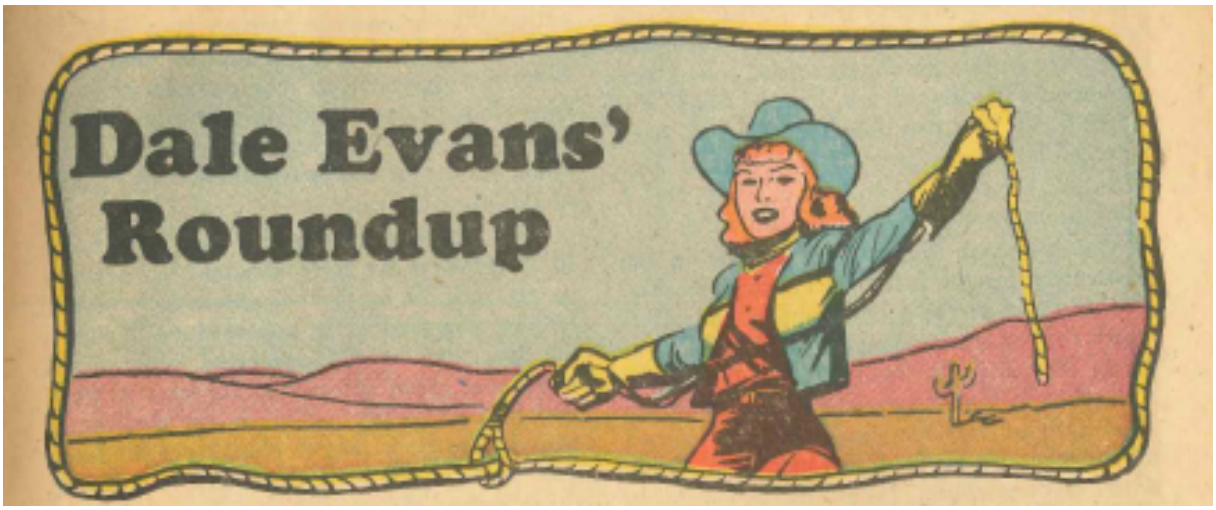


Figure 11: Dale Evans' Roundup detail, *Dale Evans Comics* issue 6

Evans' frequent "Round-up" missives describe the assumed scenes of domesticity that Republic Studios thought of as anathema to the western genre, but in so doing they also offer an image of a highly engaged media entrepreneur, expanding film and Hollywood's rigidly narrow gender definitions. In issue 7, for example, Evans discusses her desire to use the summer months to "spend days looking at wallpaper, materials, paint," everything needed to give her newly shared

home with Roy Rogers a "much needed facelift." However, the column goes on to describe Evans' appointment as an honorary sheriff in Pennsylvania, her choreographing of square-dance sequences for an upcoming film, and a recent original musical composition, "Hazy Mountains," and its recording.[206] Another issue pairs descriptions of organizing a children's birthday party with ruminations on the craft of songwriting, and a detailed accounting of Evans' visit to, and artistic collaboration with, DC Comics.[207] As an instance of constellated media, secondary even to the comic book in which it is housed, the "letters column" here serves as an accounting of the entirety of the Dale Evans media ecosystem and presages a similar accounting in her future religious writing explored below. While she gives details about her new domestic life with Roy Rogers, these are consistently paired with descriptions of artistic and business practices and individual achievements. Evans would eventually have a second (or third or fourth) career as a non-fiction author of some import, and these columns should be understood as the first published instances of her talents as an author that would take full form after the release of *Angel Unaware* in 1953. Despite their secondary status as addenda to comic stories exclusively written by men, the comic column-as-memoir nonetheless

---

[206] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 7 (DC Comics, September-October 1949): 36-37. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

[207] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 12 (DC Comics, July-August, 1950): 34-35. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

provides a voice of authorship and possibility over the DC comics. As Amelie Hastie has argued, the memoir provided women in classical Hollywood a "new form of authorship, as writers of history" as it served to transcribe and illuminate "the multiple roles as authors women have played in the film industry and in film culture more broadly."[208] "Dale Evans' Roundup" may emphasize her absence as an author of her films or comic stories, but the columns nonetheless point to her very real authorship in the creation of a serial figuration that would pervade an entire media ecosystem.

The acknowledgement and revelation of this act of creation is important in and of itself, and is representative of the desire to "fill in by addition." The filling in can prove to be so much more, however. Whilst identifying and attempting to rectify "gaps" in a teleological chronology is certainly an historicist enterprise, the sources used to fill these gaps can begin to transform our historical understanding when they are understood as works of history and their authors as historians. This study is sympathetic to Hastie's argument that, while treating the star memoir as history poses challenges related to the "fallibility of memory," such histories nonetheless "valuably transform" our knowledge of "history, historiographical processes, and film culture." Looking to any one example of "Dale Evans' Roundup," for example, one is struck by her roving and nonhierarchical descriptions of the industry, and her role(s) in it. Issue 8, for example, includes mention of production wrapping on three pictures (*Susanna Pass, Down Dakota Way,* and *The Golden Stallion* [1949]), and

---

[208] Amelie Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 73.

the upcoming release of four sides for Victor Records, before turning to a frequently asked question from fans concerning how Dale became a singer and composer of songs. Dale is at turns humble (calling the word "composer" too "high-falutin' for the kind of thing I like to do"), realistic about the hours spent engaged in study as a young woman, but also humorous in suggesting that an incident involving screaming the high notes on "The Bells of St. Mary's" as a youth wrecked her voice for a time, and thus taught her the utility of yodeling. In every case, and in concert with her discussed 78 sides and film releases, Evans disrupts our perception of the absence of women in Hollywood-related media production after the institutionalization of sound.[209]

The star image crafted in these columns is reflected in the narratives of the DC comics. Though the topline "Dale Evans" comic stories make plain that they feature "Dale Evans, movie star," the narratives almost always revolve around a ranch that is owned and operated by Evans somewhere outside Hollywood. Unshackled from the patriarchal "white hat" presence of Rogers, the stories squarely feature Evans as hero and renegotiate the domestic scenes described in the columns. Issue 6 features numerous acts of heroism involving food preparation, for example. "The Horse Thief Catcher," depicts Evans disarming a group of rustlers in the disarray caused by the explosion of overheated bean cans she has hastily kicked into the fire. The ranchers of the community, meanwhile, have formed a posse and

---

[209] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 8 (DC Comics, November-December 1949): 34-35. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

taken off in the wrong direction. The same issue features a narrative in which Evans combats a gunman via the skillful martial art of pie throwing.[210]



[210] *Dale Evans Comics* 6 (DC Comics, July-August 1949): 7;11. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.



Figure 12: Dale Evans weaponizes domesticity in *Dale Evans Comics* issue 6: 7; 11.

These examples would seem to run counter to the regressive public statements made by Herbert Yates, as well as the gender normativity of the Republic films and the Hollywood trade press. In 1947, Evans had controversially

complained to a journalist for the *Pittsburgh Press* that "the heroine in a Western is always second-string. The cowboy and his horse always come first," and by 1949 *Screenland* had published the aforementioned feature on Evans suggesting the same held true at home, where, as the headline bullishly maintained, "A Wife Should Play Second Fiddle."[211] The traditional primary sources for historical argumentation concerning dominant classical Hollywood—filmic content and production, studio communications, and the popular and trade presses—offer an understanding of Dale Evans in this period altogether different from that presented in the related constellated media. That film has traditionally assumed a privileged place in these histories does not discount the importance of alternative sources, for historians, or for the audiences who consumed the material.

Jane Gaines' recent historiographic writings once again prove useful here. Discussing the indexical status of the slowly disintegrating and diminishing film print, Gaines notes that

> the historian's investment [in sources] is predicated on the conviction that the artifact has an inviolate evidentiary relation to the historical past to which it once belonged […] what we cannot deny is that the artifact is but a tiny piece relative to the rest of the past. Indeed, it is given inordinate significance relative to its fractional portion. How strange that the primary source document, only a remnant, but *the very remnant*, can come to stand in for the entirety of the whole to which it once belonged.[212]

For Gaines, the film print is already at numerous degrees of remove from the actuality of *what happened* – even if the film print promised to give a full

---

[211] Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, with Carlton Stowers, *Happy Trails* (New York: Bantam Book, 1979), 115.; May Mann, "A Wife Should Play Second Fiddle," *Screenland* (June, 1949): 26.
[212] Gaines, *Pink-Slipped,* 75.

accounting of everything that was visibly said to have happened at any one time, the print has been edited, processed, printed (numerous times), perhaps digitized, and is beginning to erode. And in many cases, if not most, the evidence of these operations has been totally effaced. Gaines' meditations on the philosophy of film history remind us that the privileged source is always singular, and that our narrative accounting of moving photographic fictions might just as easily be nuanced by fictions of other kinds. Dale Evans' filmic output, and the related press infrastructure surrounding it, offers but one view of the story.

Returning to Evans' column in issue six of *Dale Evans Comics,* we can identify numerous alternative vectors as the author describes the medium-specific production difficulties inherent to juggling filmed and live art forms:

> The shooting of "Susanna Pass" went along smoothly until one day. We were on location way out in the country doing water scenes for the fish hatchery sequences. I was scheduled to do my broadcast of *Western Hit Review* that same day, but things went slower than was anticipated on the set. Finally I had to leave, and we went zooming into town, already very late.
>
> I missed the dress rehearsal and managed to step up to the mike just as the show went on. I wasn't sure of the orchestra tempos for the songs I was going to sing. I had never seen the script until that moment and felt as though I was going to collapse any second from the rushing and excitement. Somehow I did manage to get through the show, but I was close to being a complete nervous wreck afterwards!
>
> That's what comes of working in pictures and doing radio at the same time.[213]

---

[213] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 6 (DC Comics, July-August 1949): 36. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

Describing her own universe of constellated media, Evans' authorial voice had its beginnings in her comic book column. This process would be significantly nuanced and expanded as her media became increasingly religious.

"Be Not Forgetful To Entertain Strangers:" Constellated Christianity

In the 1950s, the American Tract Society (ATS) published a seven-page booklet entitled *King and Queen of the Cowboys*.[214] Ostensibly written by Evans and Rogers, the tract nominally described the couple's evangelical conversion, though they had both self-identified as Christians for many years.[215] The cover of the tract features Roy and Dale (and Trigger, too) resplendent in their typical finery, made all the more ostentatious by the saturated hues of the tract's cheap 4-colour newspaper print. Nothing about the cover suggests its contents – this might very well have been a comic book, or a catalogue of merchandise, or one of Western Publishing's Golden books. The American Tract Society was (and continues to be) the primary publisher of Christian religious tracts in the United States, and this formal trickery – that the pamphlet in hand appears more likely to be some manner of western adventure story than it is a heartfelt narrative of finding one's way to the bosom of Christ—was nothing new. Cynthia S. Hamilton has shown that the 1810 ATS tract *The Dairyman's Daughter* employed devices "associated with

---

[214] *King and Queen of the Cowboys* by Dale Evans and Roy Rogers, The American Tract Society, undated circa 1950s, SPEC.082, Box 2, Folder 18, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections, Muncie, Indiana, USA.
[215] White, 104-105.

popular sentimental fiction so effectively […] that the tract became embroiled in a heated controversy over its generic identity."[216] Certainly Evans' tract did not engender such controversy, but the pamphlet's appearance is nonetheless telling. Coming at a time when the pair was no longer primarily associated with the films of Republic Studios, but instead with music careers, comics, merchandise, and, centrally, a television program, the pamphlet used the popular generic associations tied to the pair to encourage Dale and Roy's audience to be born again.



Figure 13: Dale and Roy's Religious Tract

[216] Cynthia S. Hamilton, "Spreading the Word: The American Tract Society, 'The Dairyman's Daughter,' and Mass Publishing," *Book History* Vol. 14 (2011): 37.

The differences between Dale and Roy's testimonies are revealing. Both address the couple's media lives and productions. The first, Dale's, "At the Fork in the Road," centers the author's Hollywood lifestyle and domestic realities:

> At 28 I wound up in Hollywood under contract to a movie studio, the ambition of so many young girls. But my life was hectic and full of mistakes, disillusionment, insecurity and wrong decisions which hurt others as well as myself. As I began to acquire some of the things which ordinarily should have made me happy, I was miserable, life holding only a disappointing shallowness.
>
> These things flashed through my mind as my son sat beside me, tears in his eyes, as he tenderly pleaded, "*Jesus is all you need!"* Here I was, a movie star, married to a famous cowboy, step-mother to three lovely children, with practically any material luxuries I could desire within my grasp. I crumbled inside, and suddenly the falsity and emptiness of my existence loomed up before me. I knew why I had made such a mess of things; I had never surrendered my will to Christ.[217]

This initial section of Dale's testimony reads like a cautionary tale for those "back home" dreaming of making it in Tinsel Town. Reading beyond the tract's typical polemic of religious discovery, one might understand a rejection of the movie world for a life of piety that is more easily facilitated by alternative media production; transcendence in the constellation. Evans would eventually parlay her religious discovery into a divergent career as a religious author, speaker, and television host on the evangelical Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), but here it appears that she was just coming to terms with the possibilities offered to her by media production outside of the restrictions of studio Hollywood.

Roy's testimony betrays no such discovery. For Rogers, his audience always already flourished outside of the movie house:

---

[217] *King and Queen of the Cowboys*, 2.

> Almost three years ago, I introduced something entirely new and different into the show Dale and I were doing down in Houston, Texas—the annual Fat Stock Show and Rodeo, which is held in a huge indoor arena. I didn't even tell Dale ahead of time what I was going to do. Not that I was hiding anything from her; I guess it was just something I had to do by myself.
>
> At the end of one of my songs, I held up my hand to show that I wanted to say something. Then I just held onto the hand mike and opened up. I didn't have a prepared speech; just the thoughts I wanted to express. They went something like this: "I've been getting a lot of mail from kids—boys especially—who ask me if I don't think it's pretty sissy for them to go to Sunday school. I want to say right here and now that it isn't sissy at all. In fact, I think that going to Sunday school is one of the best things any child can do […] Now this was quite a statement for a cowboy to come out with, right in the middle of a rootin', tootin' arena show. Dale told me later that when I first began to speak, she could hardly believe her ears. But she was glad I spoke up that way—and so was I. I felt it was the blessing of God's spirit that I could do it, and I meant every word.[218]

Here, Rogers is not as concerned with forging a new path and identity for himself and his audience, but seems primarily concerned about potentially weakening his heteronormative masculine image in the face of an audience of children. Nonetheless, the story of Rogers' rodeo revival would become central to Evans' religious writings, and told and retold many times.

Dale and Roy's religious testifying would soon come to be a fundamental aspect of their appeal to their fans. The "My Most Treasured Moment" column of the pair's fan club newsletter, *The Double R-Bar Ranch News,* in which fans would share stories of meeting their idols, is full of descriptions of religious awakening.[219] Fan club member Carol Mae Corey's report of Roy and Dale's 1952 appearance at Madison Square Garden after the Houston Rodeo repeats the tract's story almost

---

[218] *Ibid.,* 6.

[219] As Raymond E. White notes, a 1953 issue of the newsletter featured an image of "Roy Rogers and Trigger meeting with more than two thousand people at the Trinity Methodist Church in downtown Los Angeles," 502.

verbatim (down to Roy's seemingly favorite homophobic term), except by this time Roy was conducting straw polls of how many girls and boys went to Sunday school that day.[220] Corey eagerly raised her hand, happily shared that her mother approved of their appearance that morning on their local TV "Bible Hour," and noted that, though she did not get to meet them, "just seeing them was answer enough to my prayer."[221] Earlier that year, another fan wrote with excitement at seeing Roy and Dale perform at a service with Billy Graham in Houston:

> One of the biggest thrills of my life came when I went to Rice Stadium to see the Evangelist Billy Graham and Roy and Dale. I have never enjoyed a sermon or religious gathering so much […] Roy and Dale arrived dressed in matching white suits […] Dale gave a very heart-warming talk in which she explained how four years ago she suddenly realized the full value of her religion and just how much it meant to her. When she finished speaking, she sang 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' with the religious verses she has composed [… they are] something every American can be proud of.[222]

This description of Dale and Roy's appearance alongside Billy Graham underscores all of the constituent components of their new religious media: western costuming with a Christian flair, performances at public events in which typically secular summer attractions are remade for evangelical purposes, frequent references to their origins in Hollywood ("Over the Rainbow"), and an emphasis on

---

[220] "Western Pair Thrills Eastern Audience" by Carol Mae Corey, *The Double R-Bar Ranch News,* November-December 1952, SPEC.082, Box 5, Folder 14, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

[221] *Ibid.*

[222] "My Most Treasured Moment" by Joyce Ann Wright, *The Double R-Bar Ranch News*, July-August 1952, SPEC.082, Box 5, Folder 14, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections, Muncie, Indiana, USA. I have been unable to find mention elsewhere of Dale's "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," but one imagines the original Harold Arlen/Yip Harburg tune with a "testifying" section added somewhere in the middle.

Dale's testifying and original music. Dale and Roy were certainly not the first, or the most prominent, Hollywood celebrities to attach themselves to Graham's personality-heavy brand of proselytizing. Religious historian Darren Dochuk reveals that Graham was primarily responsible for migrating southern evangelism to southern California beginning with his first Los Angeles rally in 1949. By 1969, the move was fully embraced by Hollywood's Christian community, with his "California Crusade" that year attended by 50,000 Californians, alongside Pat Boone and a Holy Trinity of western film celebrities: John Wayne, Gene Autry, and then-Governor Ronald Reagan.[223] The linkage between California evangelism and the Hollywood cowboy was not accidental, as the Manichean and melodramatic structure of the western genre mapped perfectly onto the burgeoning Christian evangelical theology. David A. Smith contributes that this seemingly inevitable pairing evolved both theologically and politically as the New Christian Right emerged to command a greater and greater purchase on the Republican party into the 1980s, precisely through a reimagined deployment of the frontier myth.[224] Smith writes, quoting Walter Fisher, that it was Reagan's star image that attracted him to voters: "He aroused a consciousness [of] the quintessential hero of the west—the town marshal. Accenting this image were his origins, the west […], his penchant for western garb, his ranch, […] riding horses, several of his film and television

---

[223] Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Horton & Company, 2011): XIII-XVII.
[224] David A. Smith, *Cowboy Presidents: The Frontier Myth and U.S. Politics since 1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 181.

roles, and his physical appearance."[225] Even beyond his own western roles, Reagan paralleled the "movie version of [John] Wayne," managing "to capture on his political speaking circuit an aura of the old American west […] longing for the 'good old days' of the nostalgic frontier, 'traditional' family values, the right to bear arms […] and free-market individualism […] the public would rather not come to terms with its real past and instead preferred Reagan's sunny substitute."[226] For evangelicals and Reaganite republicans, the revivification of the imagery of the white settler society became sunny nostalgia. Neither Reagan nor any other of the aforementioned screen cowboys would make their evangelical life and message as central to their continued work in the western genre, on the screen, page, and toy shelf, as Dale and Roy.

Dale Evans embodied what Dochuk calls, in relation to Graham, "Texas theology:" "certain of the absolute rightness of their doctrine, unwilling to compromise this doctrine but always open to new ways of proselytizing it, and dedicated to strong, single-minded leaders, southern evangelicals displayed a gritty determination and a spirit of pragmatism that distinguished them from California's religious climate [of the late 1940s and 50s.][227] "'Busy, vocal […] promotional' and 'task oriented'," southern evangelicals thrived particularly in southern California,

---

[225] *Ibid.*
[226] *Ibid.*
[227] Dochuk, xvii.

where its "Hollywood culture and competitive marketplace of ideas, resources and influences drew out this faith's innate inventiveness and combativeness."[228]

Part of this "inventiveness and combativeness" would involve Evans' participation in Bill Bright's initial "Campus Crusade for Christ" at Los Angeles City College in 1952. A parachurch organization founded in 1944 to evangelize on college campuses around California in an attempt to reach the "future's decision-makers," Bright's group grew under the guidance of Henrietta Mears, "Hollywood First Presbyterian's most prominent leader," and her Hollywood Christian Group (HCG).[229] *The Double R-Bar Ranch News'* summary of the event noted Evans' participation in the group, but also signaled that Dale's new religious activities should be considered part and parcel of her larger media universe: "[m]uch of the limited free time Dale has, when not making movies, television shows, radio broadcasts or personal appearances, is spent in helping both her own church and the Hollywood Christian Group in their many activities."[230] The story was published alongside pictures of Dale, Roy, and their children behind the camera on the set of their TV show, and an article detailing a "Roy Rogers Trick Lasso Contest." It was on this initial television program with Roy Rogers, *The Roy Rogers Show* (1951-1957) that Evans would first begin to blend her evangelical media with the burgeoning world of broadcast television.

---

[228] *Ibid.*
[229] *Ibid.,* 178-179.
[230] "Dale Addresses College Group," *The Double R-Bar Ranch News,* May 1952, 5.

The move to television was rife with uncertainty for Evans, as her contract with Republic Pictures came to an end in 1951. Again, Evans turned to the pages of her DC comics column to discuss her serial-enterprise-in-progress, noting in issue 15 that

> Right now, I'm thinking a lot about a big problem. I don't know if I should keep on making movies, or if I should try my hand at television. TV looks mighty promising and it would be an awful lot of fun to be able to come right into your homes. So far, I haven't made any final decisions, but I'm doing a lot of thinking![231]

Evans used the possibility of increased audience access to promote her newfound faith. Though the television program differed from her films with Republic in that it did not generally feature musical performances, *The Roy Rogers Show* nonetheless served as a vehicle for Evans' songwriting. Each episode ends with Evans and Rogers singing her most famous composition, "Happy Trails" over the end credits, frequently superimposed with the singing couple riding towards the camera in a close two-shot. Raymond E. White notes that as Rogers and Evans produced the program, "controlling the content of the show permitted the couple to both entertain and preach religious values."[232] As the program evolved it came to feature more and more "Christian" themes interspersed with the usual western horse chases and shoot-em-ups, and these episodes often feature the diegetic performance of one or another of Evans' spiritual compositions.

---

[231] Dale Evans, "Dale Evans' Round Up" in *Dale Evans Comics* 15 (DC Comics, January-February 1951): 36. Spec.082, Box 11, Folder 16, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collection, Muncie, Indiana, USA.
[232] White, 95-96.

One such episode, "The Ginger Horse" (1955) concludes with Evans, Rogers, and sidekick Pat Brady, along with a young woman named Janie (Frances Karath), her father (Harry Hickox), and the local sheriff (Harry Harvey, Sr.) singing "The Bible Tells Me So," an Evans composition that was a top 10 hit for Nick Noble in 1955. Written specifically for the episode, the jaunty song of praise extols the virtues of "faith, hope, and charity" and loving one's enemies.[233] Filmed in a unbroken take with the primary cast gathered around one side of a table in a shot reminiscent of *The Last Supper*, the performance reflects not the frequently staged musical performances of the singing cowboy westerns, but a downhome revival addressed directly to the audience, with Rogers playing guitar and enjoining "everyone" to join in in the key of F. Paired with the narrative of the episode, the song underscores Evans' "Texas theology" of rudimentary bible study and simple songs of praise.

The presentation of "The Bible Tells Me So" undergirds the influence of the Hollywood Christian Group in Evans and Rogers' spiritual awakening. White notes that the group was concerned with the "spiritual life and image of the entertainment business" and thus worked "to reach the entertainment industry for Christ."[234] Featuring prominent members, including Jane Russell and group president Tim Spencer (of The Sons of the Pioneers), the group maintained in their membership documents that group associates must agree to a certain statement of facts: "1. I have accepted Jesus Christ as my personal savior. 2. I am now a member

---

[233] *Ibid.,* 424.
[234] White, 107.

of a Christ-oriented church. 3. I now hold a union or guild card in the motion picture, television, radio, stage or allied industry."[235] As Evans began her foray into evangelism under the auspices of the HCG, it is perhaps unsurprising that her Christian media would integrate with her other endeavors. Though the purpose of the group was originally to redeem Hollywood, Evans would eventually tend toward a more combative posture, adopting the role of evangelical culture warrior, speaking at the John Birch Society's 1964 "Project Prayer" rally, and publishing a myriad of books tackling second-wave feminism, the 1960s counter culture, and post-Nixon patriotism.[236] In 1973, she was featured alongside orange-juice-shill and homophobe Anita Bryant in a biography entitled *Two Stars for God.*[237] But Evan's first forays into an illuminated media constellation, the publication of her first book, *Angel Unaware* (1953), was far more inventive and revelatory.

---

[235] "Identification Cards" Hollywood Christian Group materials, SPEC.082, Box 1, Folder 18, Raymond E. White western collection, Ball State University Archives and Special Collections, Muncie, Indiana, USA.

[236] Drew Pearson, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round May 14, 1964," *Bell-McClure Syndicate* (14 May 1964): 2.; Dale Evans Rogers, *Time Out, Ladies!* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966); ---, *cool it or lose it! Dale Evans Rogers Raps with Youth* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1972); ---, with Frank S. Mead, *Let Freedom Ring!* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1975);

[237] William J. Petersen, *Two Stars for God: Anita Bryant, Dale Evans Rogers* (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1973).

Angel Unaware and the Little Angel of History

> You know, when Daddy sings now in his big rodeo show, he has a lot of spotlights making a cross in the center of the arena. It's sort of a symbol of what's happened to him and to Mommy: the cross has become the great big thing in the middle of their lives. Everything else in their lives now sort of moves around it, like a wheel around a hub.[238]

Dale Evans' first book, *Angel Unaware,* was written as a means to process the death of her first child with Rogers, Robin Elizabeth, after she was diagnosed with Down syndrome in 1950 and passed away two years later.[239] An extremely idiosyncratic text, *Angel Unaware* is written by Evans from the perspective of Robin as she discourses with God and endeavors to understand the reactions of those around her to her Down syndrome. Astonishingly empathetic and uncharacteristically inclusive of disability, *Angel Unaware* proved to be more than an anatomization of grief.[240] Like her frequent missives from the pages of DC Comics, the book would function as an accounting of Evans' serial and intermedial production practice.

Even in describing her reasons for writing the book in her later co-autobiography with Rogers, Evans drew attention to the daily grind of her work in various media: "I knew what I wanted to say […] but I just didn't know how to say it. Then one afternoon, as Roy and I were doing a radio broadcast, I had a few

---

[238] Evans Rogers, *Angel Unaware*, 94.

[239] Rogers and Evans' lives were beset by tragedy, particularly in regards to their children. Rogers' first wife, Arlene, died giving birth to their third child in 1946. Two of Rogers and Evans' adopted children, Debbie and Sandy, also died tragically in the 1960s. White, 110-111.

[240] Following these experiences, Evans would become a vocal advocate for children living with disabilities – the largest vocational training centre for the disabled community in Oklahoma, the Dale Rogers Training Center, is named in her honour.

moments away from the mike to rest. I sat down, closed my eyes, and prayed. And suddenly there was this voice telling me, 'Let Robin write it. Let her speak for herself. You just be the instrument."[241] Here again one finds Evans encountering the divine within the interstitial, with the few moments of rest "away from the mike" representing the gaps between media forms and the "moments of rest" in narrative and reception baked into the serial form. As a piece of constellated media, *Angel Unaware* is simultaneously about the process of creating constellated media.

Here we may expand and link our previous explications of Hastie and Gaines/Dall'Asta. Discussing the memoirs of Alice Guy-Blaché, Nell Shipman, and others, Hastie argues that "women such as [these] had to write their own histories because no one else was doing it; therefore, they produced histories through their memoirs for both present and future use. These histories, moreover, were not simply records of their achievements as individuals. Rather, their writing incorporates their work and presence into the wider field of film history."[242] In each of Hastie's examples, the authors wrote of their lives and careers within Hollywood, producing historical documents that, despite the aforementioned fallibility of memory, produced untold and unexamined historical narratives of the American cinema. As a genre produced primarily by women, the publication contexts of religious paperbacks in this period is not altogether different from the types of memoirs examined by Hastie. Emily Suzanne Johnson observes that "in Christian publishing in particular, women began to make inroads in the postwar decades,"

---

[241] Rogers and Evans, et al., 160.
[242] Hastie, 73-74.

with the Fleming H. Revell Company publishing books by Marabel Morgan, Anita Bryant, Beverly LaHaye, Dale Evans, and others.[243] Like the works and the memoirs that Hastie examines, Dale Evans' books offer illuminating recollections of particular media industries and their social and industrial contexts and produce a historical discussion of media production in a piecemeal fashion, creating a kind of serial historiography.

We will return to this step-by-step serial historiography momentarily, but it is first important to acknowledge the fiction of *Angel Unaware*'s autobiography. Despite depicting and unpacking Evans' real feelings towards her daughter, her work, and her faith, the text is nonetheless fictionalized from the perspective of Robin. Hastie notes that "a complex relationship between fact and fiction […] defines memory and autobiography; because of this condition, it is nearly impossible to unravel the intertwining of these elements."[244] Like the memoirs of Guy-Blaché discussed by Hastie, Evans' autobiographies "illustrate a very complicated knot of such discursive parts, and they are especially provocative in light of the field they illuminate: the history of the production of visual images".[245] We might replace "visual images" with "serial multimedia" here, but nonetheless the point still stands—the intermingling of fact and fiction in *Angel Unaware* is definitive of the history Evans unveils.

---

[243] Emily Suzanne Johnson, *This Is Our Message: Women's Leadership in the New Christian Right* (London: Oxford University Press, 2019), 26.
[244] Hastie, 101.
[245] *Ibid.*

While *Angel Unaware* mostly struggles to understand Robin's experience of life, the undergirding concern of the book is Dale's experience, told in the third person from Robin's perspective. Early in the book, Dale/Robin grapples with her career and domestic life: "Mommy had always been 'career minded.' Even when she was a young girl she wanted to succeed, and succeed *big,* in show business, and for a long time she put that career before everything else in her life. But after I arrived, it didn't seem to mean so much to her, after all."[246] As in *Sunset in El Dorado*, Evans as historian constellates herself as historical other through Robin, and finds meaning in fiction. This argument is, again, of a piece with Gaines and Dall'Asta's critical-historical approach of constellating, in that it seeks to sidestep the dangers inherent in the "history-as-fiction" discourse associated with metahistory and Hayden White.[247] Instead, "given the impossibility of history's history—the perfect correspondence between a history (of) and historical events (themselves) – we strive instead for something predicated on this very ambiguity. We claim our present telling as coexistent with past events. First, we are constellated with them when we do not fear, as Foucault phrased it, to 'conceive of the *Other* in the time of our own thought'."[248] Evans' ambition was only to approach the recent past in constellating with her deceased child as historical other, but in so doing she begins to reveal details of another history of serial media production. This history is, of course, predominantly exclusive to Evans' experiences but nonetheless provides another

---

[246] Evans Rogers, *Angel Unaware,* 30.
[247] Dall'Asta & Gaines, 16-17.
[248] *Ibid.,* 22.

vantage on the ignored work of women in media industries. As Liz Clarke notes in a review essay of a number of recent works of feminist film historiography, doing women's film history means "turning to different types of evidence, and asking different questions," quoting Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight observing that "asking about women promises new perspectives on film history and the many cinemas it generates, both past and present".[249]

Our primary questions must concern Evans' approach to the intermingling of her crystalline constellated media, the realities of pairing a rampant multimedia production schedule with difficult personal obligations, and the evolution of her career from one primarily associated with Republic Studios and film, to one associated with the burgeoning televisual medium (along with the myriad other forms in which she consistently worked). It is evident that Evans expressed an acute awareness of medium specificity on the one hand, while understanding her larger role as a serial figure that stood above and beyond any media hierarchy on the other. Numerous passages highlight this combination of distinction and unity:

> When I was two months old, my parents had to go off on one of those "personal appearance" tours, and they took me out to Jo's house, where it was nice and dry and sunny. It was cold and damp in the Hollywood Hills, and Mommy didn't think that would be good for me. She and Daddy were finishing up a "recording" of a radio broadcast, but they came out to see me the very next day.[250]

---

[249] Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight, *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 11, quoted in Liz Clarke, "Review Essay: Recent Works on Women in Media Production," *Gender & History* 30.3 (October 2018): 822.
[250] Evans Rogers, *Angel Unaware*, 34.

The use of scare quotes in this passage, and throughout the book, are no doubt a narrative device to signal words that infant Robin could not possibly have understood – but why emphasize "personal appearance" and "recording" but not "tour" or, more importantly, "radio broadcast?" For Evans, each of the media forms in her serial production schedule were distinct – this tour was of personal appearances, not rodeo; the radio show a recording for transcription disc, not a live broadcast. This is significant considering the earlier discussed column in *Dale Evans Comics*, in which Evans lamented the difficulty inherent in shooting films and broadcasting live radio at the same time. These descriptions are distinct, but feel extraneous to Evans' primary concern for Robin in the text – merely jobs that kept her away from her child. Indeed, keeping up with her and Rogers' hectic pace could prove difficult with young Robin at home. After their nurse contracts a virus, Dale/Robin notes that Evans and Rogers came home quickly and "started hunting for a new nurse. They had to record another radio broadcast that week, so You can imagine the confusion around the house. Mommy called doctors, hospitals, nurses' agencies—everything, and no nurse could be found, for love or money."[251]

Elsewhere, however, Evans elaborates on her work, and its meaning, in a way that suggests a larger serial enterprise, in which the various stars in the constellation interconnect for the audience:

> Mommy and Daddy worked hard. They left us for two whole weeks to go "on location" for a series of television pictures […] They were busy making motion pictures from sunrise to sunset—so busy that I wondered whether it was

[251] *Ibid.,* 41.; The capitalized "Y" in "You" here indicates the central narrative conceit of the book – that Robin is conversing directly with God in heaven.

> worth their while. Why work so hard just to make a little money and then die?
>
> Then one day I overheard Mommy say something about their work that I hadn't heard them ever say before: She said that if they could get Your message to people, especially young people, through their movies and television and rodeos—if they could just get in a good word for You this way, it was worth all the hard work. And I watched that idea grow and grow and *grow* in their hearts, all during Our mission.[252]

This passage is indicative of their newly adopted evangelical media, yes, but looking beyond that it is clear that, in constellating with Robin, Evans underscores the serial interconnectedness of their various media work. Genre and the "Dale Evans" serial figure previously fused the gaps between these media and their audience(s), now they would be subsumed under the aegis of their evangelism.

This returns us to the idea of "serial historiography." In his originary essay in *CTheory* in which he introduced the term "Media Archaeology," Siegfried Zielinski asserts that the term, from a "pragmatic perspective means to dig out secret paths in history, which might help us find our way into the future. Media archaeology is my form of activity/Tatigkeit."[253] Evans' history of constellated media is, like media archaeology, multifaceted and multipronged and hidden – just as we here "discover" (in Gaines' sense of the term) and discuss Dale's career, so too do the breadcrumbs of intermediality create a much larger body of work to grapple with. This is a fitting kind of storytelling for the constellation – assembled from a variety of sources and sometimes seemingly unrelated, these fragments nonetheless hang together to form

---

[252] *Ibid.,* 55-56.

[253] Siegfried Zielinski, "Media Archaeology," *CTheory.net,* 7/11/1996 (http://ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=42#text 4)

a whole. Following his clarification of the term, Zielinski turns to a useful example and image— the dream of Jacob's ladder. Discussing visual adaptations of the Book of Genesis story based on the "7th century heavenly ladder of Johannes Klimakos, abbott of the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai," Zielinksi describes images in a 14th c. Greek manuscript of the ladder using the language of cinema— the episode begins with a long shot; we zoom to a picture of the Abbot at work; the rungs of the ladder are depicted individually scene by scene; the "star" Klimakos greets Christ in a "close medium shot."[254]

Angel Unaware is like Jacob's ladder, too, in that the surface level narrative of the book is essentially progressive, teleological, and concerns Evans' love of Robin, struggle with the material realities of raising a child with Down syndrome, and eventual acceptance of her fate piece by piece, moment by moment, step by step, until her life and passing is understood by the couple to be a divine intervention in their lives, and the catalyst for their full immersion in American evangelical life and culture. But the book shares with Zielinski's manuscript a secret and more circuitous path, a history of postwar intermedial seriality. Evans initially discusses her work in disparate, unconnected terms, images of media as distinct rungs on a ladder, or chapters in a series. Eventually, with help from her constellation with Robin, she arrives at the above quoted realization that each instance of constellated media is interconnected and made a serial whole by her audience, and her perceived obligations to said audience. Like Benjamin's angel of

---

[254] *Ibid.*

history, who, blown by the storm called "progress," sees the past not as a chain of events but as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage […] in front of his feet," the constellation formed between Evans and Robin, her little angel of history, perceives postwar serial media not as distinct forms but as an undulating whole.[255] Benjamin asserts in his critique of Ranke's historicism that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize 'the way it really was.' It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[256] Evans' articulation of her brief but transformative time with her first child is an effort to seize hold of her memories, but the opportunity posed by the attendant danger unveils a constellation with a larger intermedial history. Just as Evans' understands her career as an intermedial world, her past work does not represent "homogeneous, empty time" but is intimately interconnected with her experiences with her daughter and the future of her religious media, allowing her constellation with Robin to function as an example of Benjamin's "tiger's leap into the past."[257] *Angel Unaware* is nearly 70, not 700, years old, and yet it offers an alternative genealogy of the media much as Zielinski's manuscript does, underscoring changes in the spiritual realities of a country and reifying a small corner of postwar American media production: that of serial intermediality.

---

[255] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257-258.
[256] *Ibid.,* 255.
[257] *Ibid.,* 261.

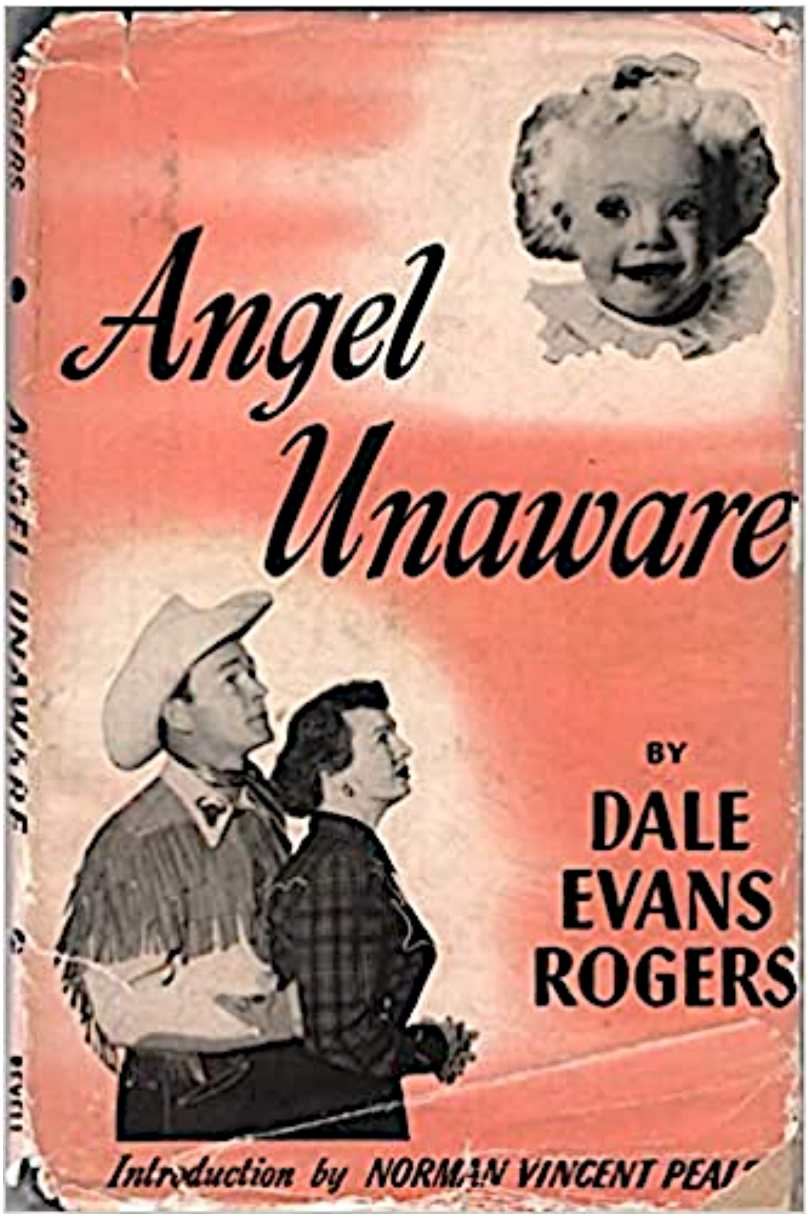


Figure 14: The Little Angel of History

Chapter Three
"A Fascinating Nostalgic Cavalcade:" Pearl White, Topos Study, and the Spectre of the Extraordinary Body, 1914-1970

Pearl White died on August 4th 1938, at the age of 49.[258] "EXECUTED DARING STUNTS" led the *New York Times* obituary that described her onscreen escapades as "the most daring ever performed before the camera."[259] White had retired in 1923 before the institutionalization of sound, declaring that she had "become tired of 'being swung from cliffs and dropped from burning houses down into sewers,' and was planning to enter a convent in France."[260] So what, then, was Pearl White doing on television in advertisements for Dodge automobiles in the late 1960s?



Figure 15: Pearl White in 1937, *The New York Times* (5 August 1938)

---

[258] White's age at her death depended on who was asked—the *Times* clarified that White's 84-year-old father thought she was 41 but had added a few years "to keep ahead of Mary Pickford." "Pearl White Dead; Ex-Star Of Movies," *The New York Times* (5 August 1938), 17.
[259] *Ibid.*
[260] *Ibid.*

White may have died in 1938, but a distillation of her star image as "fearless, peerless Pearl," *the* serial queen, a "synonym for courage and daring," continued to turn up in American media throughout the 20th century.[261] The "vast mythology [that] surrounded Pearl White" in the 1910s, as Marina Dahlquist puts it, did not dissipate after her death, but merely mutated and spread.[262] What Jennifer Bean has called the serial queen's "extraordinary body," became but a spectre, haunting film serial remakes in the 1930s, classical musicals in the 1940s, and, by the 1960s, comics, television pilots, feature-length films, Saturday morning cartoons, and car commercials.[263] In the process, Pearl White also became a synonym for the silent film serial and all of the multivalent meanings of that form as an outmoded, but consistently remembered and discussed, residual media. Even after the codification of classical Hollywood, and through that industry's confrontation with various forms of emergent media, the silent serial remained a point of reference for a staggering variety of producers, exhibitors, advertisers, and audiences. Abstracted into a serial figure, White came to be the representation of a style of film and media production that itself became constellated media – ephemeral and never again fully embraced,

---

[261] "Pearl White in 'Plunder'," *Motion Picture News* (10 February 1923), 694-695.; Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 143.
[262] Marina Dahlquist, "Introduction: Why Pearl?" in *Exporting Perilous Pauline: Pearl White and the Serial Film Craze,* edited by Marina Dahlquist (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 1.
[263] Jennifer M. Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema,* edited by Jennifer M. Bean & Diane Negra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 413-452.

but also significantly intermedial/textual, heterogeneous, invocatory, and omnipresent.

This chapter again turns to media archaeology to read a particular historical personage as themselves an embodied serial technology. Drawing upon Erkki Huhtamo's methodology of media archaeology as topos study, "a stereotypical formula evoked over and over again in different guises and for varying purposes […] shells or vessels derived from the memory banks of tradition," I construct a topology of these multitudinous appearances of "Pearl White" as serial figure/queen and reconstruct and assess their consistently evolving cultural meanings.[264] The chapter outlines a serial queen topology through over 50 years of remakes and reconfigurations of Pearl White's most famous film, *The Perils of Pauline* (1914). From failed and successful attempts to remake the film as a sound serial in the 1930s, to a classical musical biopic in the 1940s, to early efforts to adapt the property to television in the late 50s and early 1960s, to a rash of media released at the end of that decade that refracted the topos significantly, the spectre of the extraordinary body continued to make daring escapes long after the heyday of the silent serial and Pearl White's death. All of these texts were produced after the institutionalization of sound, but placing them in conversation with silent film historiography (as we have done in previous chapters) reveals the ways in which the unique narratological, promotional, multimodal, and receptive parameters of the

---

[264] Erkki Huhtamo, "Dismantling the Fairy Engine: Media Archaeology as Topos Study," *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications,* edited by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 28.

silent serial persisted, even though the form has been understood as essentially extinct since the 1920s. Thinking through this media alongside the wealth of film history concerning the silent serials, while tracing the topological references in a serial fashion, reveals the ways in which the silent serial was consistently revived and discussed for myriad purposes.

Encountering this spectre of the extraordinary body in varied incarnations across a half century offers another approach to the secondary task of every chapter thus far. The tension between the originary meaning of White, the serial queens, and their relationship to a form that has been understood as both integral and outside of Hollywood's process of institutionalization takes on new meanings depending on where one discovers the topos between the 1910s and the 1960s. The tracing of this topology also reveals the ways in which Hollywood responded to events that have generally been understood by traditional historiography as major moments of crisis and change for the industry: the Great Depression, the formal disassembly of the major studios' systems of monopoly, and the competition of television. I employ three separate but related conceptual strands, two of which are drawn from silent film historiography: Jennifer Bean's "series of principles" related to the serial queen and the extraordinary body, and Rob King's conception of "social temporality" related to the silent slapstick film. These are paired with Raymond William's definition of the "residual" in order to reveal the ways in which constellated media raise discontinuities within traditional historical narratives and in so doing set into relief the contours of already familiar stories. I will introduce each of these conceptual strands in turn, but begin by outlining the ways in which

the film serial was conceived as an outside alternative to Hollywood's ascendant classicism almost from the moment of its conception.

"An Old-fashioned Respect for Logic:" The Marvelous Silent Serial

The film serial of the silent period was considered antiquated almost immediately. That *Variety* would describe *The Perils of Pauline* (1914), *The Exploits of Elaine* (1914), and *The Iron Claw* (1916) as a "trio of ancient cliffhangers" not twenty years after their release, in 1932, is perhaps not surprising given the technological and social upheavals wrought in the interim.[265] But these films were understood as "ancient" long before 1932. As Christina Petersen describes in her analysis of the serial queen melodrama's far-ranging influence on the first European avant-garde, from the Impressionists, to the Surrealists, to the initial Soviet filmmakers, the form was influential precisely because it had already become locked in nostalgia.[266] Petersen pulls out a small section of an Ado Kyrou quotation, that "those privileged in the marvelous exist no more," to suggest that the surrealist notion of the "marvelous" was simultaneously a form of nostalgia and kitsch, and the surrealists' love of the serial queen melodramas of the Teens was predicated on resurrecting a path not taken, "film's forgotten future."[267] This understanding of the silent film serial is simultaneously quaint and out of fashion, and, with its emphasis on

---

[265] "U Will Revive 'Perils of Pauline' with New Story," *Variety* (27 September 1932): 6.
[266] Christina Petersen, "'The Most Assassinated Woman in the World': Pearl White and the First Avant-Garde," in *Exporting Perilous Pauline*, 100.
[267] *Ibid.,* 107.

intertextuality and an eschewal of narrative closure, formally at odds with classical Hollywood. This understanding forms a through line for each of the avant-garde movements discussed by Petersen, but in divergent ways. For Jean Epstein, for example, the serial's "perilous stunts represented the interchangeability of narrative and thus signaled their antiquated status." Additionally, the serial's emphasis on intertextuality and the newspaper tie-in tainted the films for Epstein, as they "mixed art forms," and therefore disrupted the purity of cinema.[268] This was precisely what attracted the surrealists, on the other hand, who found an "old-fashioned cinematic form that represented a different path film might have taken before the feature's singular narrative structure took hold."[269] Similarly, American film's late arrival in the Soviet Union meant that the serial and the classical feature stood side by side and offered totally different views of film form – Petersen even goes so far as to describe the "piling up" of narrative events without clarity or resolution in the serial film as an early influence on Eisenstein.[270] In any case, we can say that the serial melodrama's popularity was extremely short-lived and seemed totally antiquated and frozen in nostalgia by the 1920s, even by the end of World War One. If the serial film itself disappeared from American screens until the 1930s (and even then reemerged in a significantly altered form), this notion of the film serial as anachronistic had a long afterlife.

---

[268] *Ibid.,* 103.
[269] *Ibid.,* 107.
[270] *Ibid.,* 118.; We might also recognize the influence in Lev Kuleshov's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924) and Sergei Komarov's *A Kiss from Mary Pickford* (1927).

The post-war European avant-garde was certainly not the last group to find alternatives in the silent film serial, and a diverse body of people in myriad industries invoked the form's status as simultaneously dated and potentially revolutionary during periods of media change. These moments are not the monumental upheavals described by technologically determinist histories of the cinema, but rather the infinitesimal adjustments and renewals that mark the evolution of media forms. The serial queen melodramas became a point of reference for film studios and exhibitors outside of the major studios' networks looking for a remedy to failing theatre attendance, for cartoon producers navigating growing societal and governmental outcry concerning televisual violence, and for Madison Avenue executives experimenting with campaigns featuring recurring characters and imagery.

In many ways this pull between the nostalgic and the innovative produces a mediated version of Raymond Williams' distinction in *Marxism and Literature* between dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forms. For Williams, the residual has "been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present," but he distinguishes between an "alternative" and "active" residual. The former encompasses "certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture" but are "nonetheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation." The active residual, by distinction, "has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant

culture." All of these are distinct from the "archaic," "that which is wholly recognized as an element of the past, to be observed, to be examined, or even on occasion to be consciously 'revived', in a deliberately specializing way.[271] Clearly, for the first European avant-garde, and the surrealists in particular, the serial queen melodramas constituted an alternative residual. This was a product of the serial film passing so quickly from its status as a vital element in film's emergence as a medium to instantaneously archaic with the codification of the feature film. To return to the introduction's discussion of André Gaudreault, the serial film as a cultural series belongs to the cultural paradigm of kine-attractography more than it does to that of what Gaudreault calls "institutional cinema," and yet it continued to operate as a cultural series after said institutionalization.[272] The hard line of distinction between these two paradigms made the serial queen melodramas seem (to everyone but the surrealists) initially archaic from the 20s on and for many decades. Even so, as we progress in our topology we will see that the form glacially transforms from archaic to something more properly residual by the time of the 1960s. Additionally, with the gradual slowing of direct references to White and the historical specificity of the silent serials, these residual media become more active than alternative.

I am not the first to note this genealogy, though its discussion has tended to be included as an afterthought or parting note. The very first secondary texts on film serials concluded in just such a fashion. Writing in 1970, Alan G. Barbour

---

[271] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122.
[272] André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction,* 64-65.

closed his popular history of the Hollywood sound serial's heyday in the 1930s and 40s with a brief chapter on "The Great Serial Revival of 1965-66," where he argued that the "revival" began with celebrated midnight screenings (presaging the accepted arrival of the "cult film") of Columbia's first *Batman* serial (1943) and the subsequent adaptation of the character on television in 1967.[273] Frederic Jameson employs the sound serial and *Star Wars* (1977) to outline his conception of pastiche in relation to the nostalgia film, noting that *Star Wars*, "far from being a pointless satire of such now dead forms [the serials of the 30s and 40s], satisfies a deep […] and more properly nostalgic desire to return to that older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artifacts through once again."[274] Similarly, in his monograph on the sound serials and formula, Scott Higgins concludes with a chapter on "serial legacies," which yokes the film serial to the theory of post-classicism by way of the *Indiana Jones, James Bond,* and *Jason Bourne* franchises.[275] Guy Barefoot provides a succinct, yet extremely detailed, summarization of the serial film's prevalence in reruns on American television, as well as their varied influence on Steven Spielberg, Alan Moore, and Turkish cinema.[276] The final chapter of Ilka Brasch's book on film serials and the American cinema asserts an apt comparison between the film serial's mode of address and Raymond Williams' influential description of

---

[273] Alan G. Barbour, *Days of Thrill and Adventure* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 159.
[274] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 19.
[275] Scott Higgins, *Matinee Melodrama: Playing with Formula in the Sound Serial* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016): 156-178.
[276] Barefoot, 173-184.

"televisual flow," convincingly arguing that "film serials imagined and practiced a televisual mediality before the advent of TV," thus countering "the prevalent notion that television killed film serials."[277] In each of the above cases the film serial is offered as pre-history, but as archaic: a distinguished influence on any number of later developments, whether they be television, Hollywood blockbusters, comic books, or particular national cinemas, but nonetheless an object firmly of the past. None of these characterizations answers the questions posed by this study, however, which seeks to find the ways in which the film serial as a form, represented by the spectre of Pearl White, transformed into an intermedial constellated media that might appear in various media forms, and thus continued to operate *beyond* its original lifespan, rather than as a mere reference point for later artists and media producers.

One secondary text that begins to suggest some avenues of inquiry concerns not the silent film serial, but silent slapstick comedy. In *Hokum!: The Early Sound Slapstick Short and Depression-Era Mass Culture*, Rob King addresses the reappearance of silent-era slapstick comedy in the 1930s and into the 50s and 60s, noting that "the reconstitution of slapstick in a throwback mode […] speaks to a basic change in what might be thought of as slapstick's *social temporality* […] what can be made of the pleasures of a form of comedy that survived—was, indeed,

[277] Ilka Brasch, *Film Serials and the American Cinema, 1910-1940: Operational Detection* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018): 285-302.

commercially recycled beyond—the social context that produced it?"[278] The commercial recycling described by King is somewhat different from the reappearance of the Pearl White topos in a number of varied media forms and decades, given that the self-conscious readjustment of slapstick to something "old-timey" was conducted by a number of individuals who originally worked in the form. Nonetheless, the reduction of the silent serial to a certain set of topological markers largely divorced from the form's historical realities renders the serial, like King's slapstick, "untimely [and] culturally situated in the past […] objects of enthusiasm that were similarly marked by the 'untimely' social positions of their users—whether children (defined through their presocial abilities) or heartland filmgoers (associated with the ambivalences of 'provincial modernity'). Old-time comedy […] thus marked a kind of temporal displacement linking the social position of its audience to a throwback cultural form."[279] Like slapstick, the serial queen melodrama did not disappear so much as its meanings changed as audiences and media forms shifted.

These transformations had very real corollaries to King's examples, particularly with the numerous efforts to remake *The Perils of Pauline* in the 1930s. More significant for this study, however, is King's argument that "to live in the time of the media […] does not refer solely to the way personal reminiscence may be periodized according to media change, but also to the process of indefinite recycling

---

[278] Rob King, *Hokum! The Early Sound Slapstick Short and Depression-Era Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 159.
[279] *Ibid.,* 178.

and remediation that makes media history a permanently renewable platform for the affective investments of later generations."[280] As our topology of Pearl White proceeds away from the 1910s and towards the 1960s, it will become clear that this process of recycling and remediation did indeed produce later affective investments that were cut off from any real possibility of widespread nostalgia for the actual silent serial queen melodramas, and yet the prevalence of certain tropes and associations with the form and its daring heroines produced a set of peculiar social linkages between the serial media of the 1960s and those of the 1910s (particularly as it pertains to the "closure" of first-wave feminism around the time of the latter, and the renewal of the second wave around the time of the former), social linkages that are unique to constellated media as defined here.

The Spectre of the Extraordinary Body

Jennifer Bean's work on the "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body" serves as an important theoretical signpost. Bean begins her article by noting that, despite the "crisis of the archives" related to the relative dearth of prints from the silent period available for study, "it would be a serious mistake to overlook the copious documents extant from the media system of early stardom. Here we traverse not a 'ruined map' but a densely textured topos."[281] Bean could have just as easily been describing the assessment of constellated media this study engages in. Certainly, the archival crisis of American media after the arrival of sound is not

---

[280] *Ibid.,* 196.
[281] Bean, 404.

generally considered to be one of absence, but one of overwhelming plentitude, and yet it is this plentitude that has left certain serial media forms (the productions of less powerful media producers, advertisements, forgotten genres, children's television, etc.) by the wayside, even as they were manifold and ubiquitous in the media diets of contemporary viewers, much like the "copious documents extant from the media system of early stardom." Some of these constellated media are those that continued to function under the sign of Pearl White's serial queen star persona, what Bean calls a "series of principles:"

> Each of the [serial queens] stood for a particular synthesis of femininity, athletic virility, and effortless mobility; each was shaped by a complex discursive system that produced a variety of overdetermined metaphors: the "Peerless, Fearless Girl," the "Empress of Daredevilry," the "Temptress of Chance" […] What this catalog, with its shimmer between the highly individuated and the syntactically programmatic, demonstrates, is that White's fame may have been unique in scope, but it was certainly not in type. Tracing the reducibility of White's celebrated persona to a series of principles reveals an index to the genesis of film stardom per se.[282]

For Bean, these "principles" displace the "lure of referentiality that underlies the system's epistemological endeavor" away from the "perceptual realism associated with technological reproduction," and onto the star's body, where the "technologies of early stardom […] flaunt catastrophe, disorder, and disaster rather than continuity and regulation."[283] This topology seeks to take this argumentation one step further to say that these principles remained so overdetermined that, though they were eventually subsumed by the continuity and regulation of Hollywood,

---

[282] *Ibid.*, 406.
[283] *Ibid.,* 407.

nonetheless they persisted and continued to flaunt disorder where they did appear. Much of this has to do with Ben Singer's discussion (as described by Bean) of the dual-strand in serial queen melodramas, with "representations of female power" suffusing the action serials on the one hand, while "an extremely graphic spectacle of female distress, helplessness, and abject terror" persisted on the other.[284] In many of the entries in the Pearl White topology an emphasis was placed on terror over power, on the tying of the heroine to the railroad tracks, rather than her daring escape from them, and thus the serial queen's "body" becomes not a powerful avatar of the media form, but fodder for so many misogynistic "damsel-in-distress" colonial adventure genres. These tired nostalgic recyclings' forgetting of the serial queens' power in favor of their gendered distress does not erase said power, however. Those entries in our topology that preserve the fusion of the body of the serial queen to the media form, in the spirit of the serial film's alternative to classicism, provide the avenue for the serial queen melodrama's movement from archaic to residual.

Bean's theory is attuned to early cinema, and yet we may find use in it, given that it is specifically designed to disrupt the assumptions of tidy, linear developments in media history. Bean argues for continuation where closure has often been found, arguing for example, vis-à-vis the "cinema of attractions," that "in the shift to a predominantly narrative cinema [… the] 'imagination of disaster' does not disappear; it is instead displaced onto the technologies of stardom."[285] And, if those technologies of stardom are already a set of principles rather than a whole

---

[284] *Ibid.,* 414.
[285] *Ibid.,*422.

person, a "real-life aesthetic" that nonetheless takes shape "through a body that is necessarily absent (recorded), invariably flattened (projected), and thus dehumanized by the very technology it seeks to conceal," must such technologies be tied to the flesh and blood individual who initiated them, even after that individual's passing?[286] Pearl White as an embodiment of these principles necessarily becomes a serial figure, because the principles possess, to return to Ruth Mayer's definition, a "figurative quality […] they are flat, familiar, and iconic" and "loosely connected by means of their status as cultural icons or stereotypes yet move across media and medial forms."[287] As the meanings of serial figures adjust to particular cultural contexts, certain intrinsic features of these figures tend to predominate over others; unsurprisingly, some serial media featuring the Pearl White topos underscore the rupturing power of the serial queens, while others only accentuate themes of capture, imprisonment, and gendered violence. In any case, while one can assert that Pearl White's original appearances in the silent serials, and the rabid fan base that grew around them, served as an "index to the genesis of film stardom per se," the obsessional power associated with her serial star image in the teens slowly transformed her into a serial figure. Again, we might relate Bean's concern with the multimodal nature of early stardom to the larger project of tracing the solidification of the "series of principles" of Pearl White's stardom into a serial figure. Bean offers that the "successive views disclosed by the machinery of stardom" (films, yes, but also promotional materials, fan magazine reports, textual

---

[286] *Ibid.,* 414.
[287] Mayer, *Serial Fu Manchu,* 9.

and visual ephemera, etc.) are responsible for the rupture with perceptual realism associated with technological reproduction.[288] Likewise, the successive views of Pearl White as serial figure in a number of multimedia appearances across our topology reveal the serial film's slow movement from archaic to residual in American media production.

Amplified/Intensified/Modernized/Embellished: Remaking *Pauline* in the 1930s

The various efforts to return *The Perils of Pauline* to the screen in the 1930s serve as useful cases in point. Pathé, the studio responsible for the original film serial, initiated the efforts, announcing in *The Film Daily* that they were to soon start production on remakes of *Pauline, The Exploits of Elaine,* and *The Poison Pen* – a bold proposition that surprised the trade paper, as the Depression was already causing a "slackening of activity among coast studios."[289] Though the Pathé remakes were never produced, the studio invested in promoting them, publishing illustrated announcements that same month that suggested that, as much as Pearl White might have been retired from filmmaking, the spectre of her memory could serve to revive failing box office revenues. One such announcement illustrates a number of typical cliffhangers with the illustrated heroine dashing across the roof of a train, or driving an automobile off a cliff. But the visual emphasis here is on distress over power, as the largest image in the foreground depicts Pauline being

---

[288] Bean, 407.
[289] "Pathe Serials Will Get Under Way Next Month," *Film Daily* (10 September 1930): 1.

helplessly carried off by a masked man.[290] Though the ads are certainly extra-cinematic, the remembrance of Pearl White nonetheless reflects Bean's description of a body that is necessarily "absent and flattened." We might think of them as part of the omnitextual armature of White's stardom, here placed not on a body, but a spectre. If the principle of the serial queen's power is elided in the ad's iconography, it is more than present in its copy, which imagines the formal alternatives offered by the film serial as a salve to flagging attendance during the Depression:

> The screen's famous thrillers re-made to revive big business – the Great Pathe Serials that popularized motion picture entertainment and promoted steady theatre patronage. AMPLIFIED by exciting dialogue—INTENSIFIED by startling sound effects—MODERNIZED in action, acting, and staging—EMBELLISHED by a new Hero and Heroine for youngsters to idolize and grown-ups to follow week after week […] Fast action—nerve tingling adventures—cleverly suspended suspense to maintain interest and keep them coming.[291]

[290] "The Screen's Famous Thrillers Re-made to Revive Big Business," *Film Daily* (4 September 1930): 4-5.
[291] *Ibid.*



Figure 16: "The Screen's Famous Thrillers Re-made to Revive Big Business," *Film Daily* (4 September 1930): 4.

This quotation is of a piece with the aforementioned analysis of the serial queen melodramas by the first European avant-garde. The film serial here is simultaneously "ancient" and potentially innovative. Pathé imagined that perhaps they could bolster their own faltering brand with a promise to bolster a faltering movie industry, by returning to one of their most successful enterprises of the past. The serial is definitionally "archaic" here, however, as the process of such a revival

would require the films to be rescued from the past; amplified, intensified, and above all modernized. Nonetheless central to such a remake is the "embellishment" of a new serial queen for both the youngsters and grown-ups to obsess over, to ideally recreate silent-era moviegoing "serialitis," defined by Stamp as "a type of compulsive film viewing at once appealing, for its capacity to hook repeat customers, and appalling, for its indulgence in abject cinephilia."[292]

The remake of *The Perils of Pauline* that Universal eventually produced in 1933 took this understanding of the serial as archaic cash cow even further. An early ad in the studio's house organ, *Universal Weekly,* featured an illustration (remarkably similar to those used by Pathe) of a serial heroine gliding down a zip line above a busy street and into the clutches of armed men.[293] "Whoopee!" declared the copy, "something to get excited about! The most famous serial in the world! Bought for its publicity value TO YOU! Used for a modern version which will hit the headlines and set your business humming just as it did the original, in which Pearl White climbed to greatest star glory! And, what's more, announcement will soon be made of a new 'Pauline,' a female star destined for the same spectacular rise as her predecessor!"[294] This advertisement effectively proves Bean's argument, in that the material promise of the film serial (for exhibitors) is directly and intimately tied to

---

[292] Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls,* 102.
[293] "Perils of Pauline," *Universal Weekly* (3 June 1933): 13-14. As is the case with most ephemeral advertising artwork of this period, I have been unable to identify the artist responsible for either the Pathe or Universal ads. It is worth mentioning, however, that the illustrations appear remarkably similar.
[294] *Ibid.*

the star power of the serial queen, and the verisimilitude of her daredevil perils.

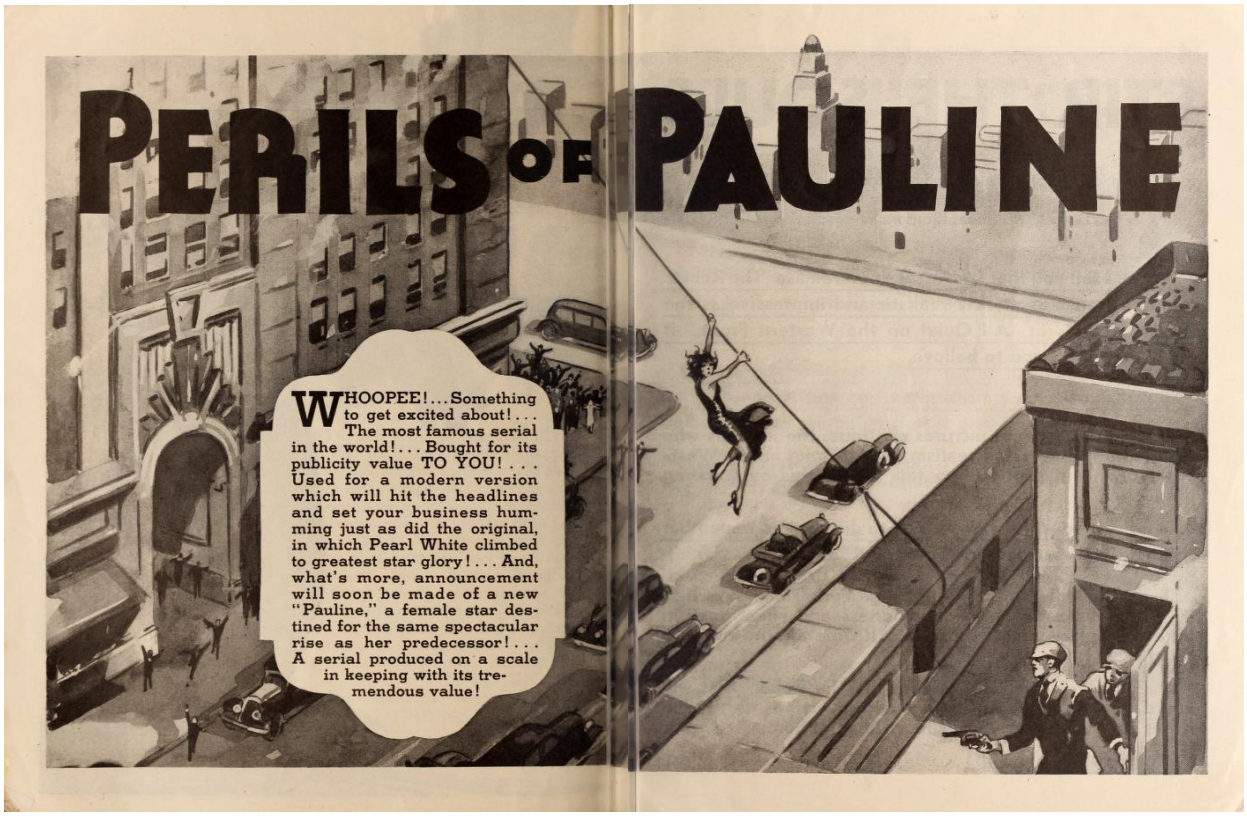


Figure 17: *Perils of Pauline* trade ad, *Universal Weekly* (3 June 1933): 13-14.

Universal would continue in this line of promotion for many months, declaring in 1934 that "box-office history will repeat itself! Just as the first 'Perils of Pauline' made box-office history in the 'good old days' so will Universal's brand new modern serial make box-office history today. Because this serial has all of that old-time pull plus everything else that could have been put into it to make it a smasher!"[295] Pains were consistently taken to assure the readers of the trade paper, predominantly independent exhibitors, that the new and improved *Pauline* would

[295] "Box-office History Will Repeat Itself," *Universal Weekly* (14 October 1933): 24-25.

invoke the highly successful serials of yesteryear, while offering supposedly "modern" entertainment. A full-page spread on the difficulties of producing the remake described studio chief Carl Laemmle, Jr.'s desire to introduce the "tremendous war horse" to new audiences. Of central importance was the finding of "a proper successor to Pearl White in the title role," though one wonders how the criteria differed in this case from Laemmle's usual lecherous M.O.: "The girl had to be an athlete; she had to be beautiful; and she had to be a good actress. That task was accomplished last week when Universal finally chose Evalyn Knapp to play the role."[296] Having understood the female star's importance to the success of the silent serials, the article nonetheless misunderstood her intimate link to the form of the films, quoting producer Henry MacRae in deriding the "crude" narrative and formal structure of the earlier serials as apparently too old-time:

> in the days of the original 'Perils of Pauline' each episode ended anywhere, after a wild flurry of action. The public accepted this in the early days. There was no complaint when characters stepped out of their roles, were not true to type and were not what we of today would call 'believable' […] if we attempted to use the same script today we would be hooted out of the theatres […] we have knit the plot in such a way that each episode is a satisfying adventure in itself. […] Mechanical improvements mean that we can make the scenes more believable as far as action is concerned. In the early days mechanical devices were crude. How they deceived the public is astounding. Today they would break down illusion. We have fixed all that in the new version.[297]

Here, MacRae and Universal apparently wished to have it both ways, endorsing an archaic product in the hopes of recreating "box-office history," but distancing themselves from any part of that product beyond the serial queen herself. In any

---

[296] "Re-creating 'The Perils of Pauline'," *Universal Weekly* (2 September 1933): 26.
[297] *Ibid.*

case, MacRae was wrong on both counts – Shelley Stamp has shown that the original episodes of the *Perils of Pauline* did not actually end on cliffhangers (while the 1933 version does), precisely because each installment offered "a double-edged pleasure […] allowing audiences to revel in Pauline's spectacular escapades while also enjoying the comfort of seeing her back in Harry's arms in the final moments."[298] Additionally, as Bean notes and has been discussed here, the very success of the serial queen melodramas hinged not on "mechanical deception," but on a dangerous and staggering verisimilitude that collapsed the perils on screen with those undertaken by the serial actors themselves, and with the intertextual world of their stardom, to the point that it created "a competing industrial logic in the period, one favoring the affective sensation of realistic thrills and grounded in the practice of on location shooting."[299] Universal was quick to publish an endorsement of the serial from the Motion Picture Bureau of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, where one Mary Harden Looram wrote that the "new edition of 'The Perils of Pauline' is a definite improvement on that popular thriller of the old silent days. Universal has recreated and re-vitalized […] the dim memories of Pauline of twenty years ago […] the hazardous stunts which Evalyn Knapp is called upon to go through […] make the dangers which Pearl White faced in the old days pale into insignificance."[300] The *Motion Picture Herald* published a positive notice, but was sure to note that the film was not a "parallel of Pearl

---

[298] Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls,* 131.
[299] Bean, 407.
[300] "Praises 'Perils of Pauline'," *Universal Weekly* (16 December 1933): 27.

White's 'Pauline' of the early days of the silent."[301] Meanwhile, exhibitors writing in to the "What The Picture Did For Me" section offered variations on a theme: "one of the much heralded comebacks that failed to come back at the box office. The poorest serial in years;" "apparently just another serial;" "So far I can't see much to this. I hope it gets better;" "I played seven chapters so far and if it don't get better it will hurt my serial trade in the future. A lot of my patrons don't like it;" "too much rehashed. Well acted but lacks something."[302] What was lacking, perhaps unbeknownst to this beleaguered exhibitor, was an understanding of the nature of the silent serial's transgressive relationship to the classical Hollywood feature in terms of form and intertextuality (a misunderstanding clearly articulated by MacRae), as well as a loss of the dichotomy between the empowerment and imperilment of the serial queen, which had here been replaced with an emphasis on the latter without any real tie to the "sensation of realistic thrills."

The Perils of Pauline (1933) is thus archaic in that the property was, as Williams puts it, "consciously 'revived', in a deliberately specializing way."[303] What is deliberately specialized here is an emphasis on the perils of the serial queen heroine, but not her amazing escape, and the relation of that peril to technological advancements associated with classical Hollywood, more than to the inherent intermedial possibility of the serial form. The "sound serials" of the 1930s and 40s were certainly capable of embodying said possibility. Ilka Brasch notes that "in the

---

[301] "'Perils of Pauline' Called 'Great'," *Universal Weekly* (11 November 1933): 15.
[302] "What The Picture Did For Me," *Motion Picture Herald* (9 June 1934; 3 February 1934; 7 April 1934; 2 June 1934): 73; 72; 84; 64.
[303] Williams, 122.

1930s, serials found themselves entangled in a network of multifarious established and emerging media to an unprecedented extent," and, for example, "instead of aiming to represent radio and television as conceptually consolidated media, film serials presented and demonstrated varying options of what radio and television could be."[304] The remake of the *Perils* does not reflect the crossmedial possibilities of these serials, however. The representation of Pearl White/Pauline is, to begin, lacking in the basic emancipatory elements of the Pearl White original, while MacRae's emphasis on the technological advancements of the 20s and 30s mostly translates to economizing with an overabundance of stock footage, studio shooting, and metallic sound design.

The 1933 film also gives prominence to the notably archaic but entrenched issues of racial representation that are part and parcel of the adventure genre, jumping wildly from the yellow peril ideology of the film's initial setting in a nameless Asian country experiencing civil unrest and the Fu Manchu-stereotyped "Eurasian" villain of Dr. Bashan, to anti-Black jungle film tropes, to Hollywood Egyptology reminiscent of *The Mummy* (released a year earlier, in 1932). These issues are baked into the genre, as evidenced by Harry's blackface disguise as a "pirate" in the third and fourth chapter of the original 1914 *Perils*, along with the anti-Indigenous "white goddess" storyline of episodes seven and eight. Nearly every entry along the Pearl White topology engages in one or more of these instances of racist representation. Indeed, orientalism, anti-Black, and anti-Indigenous racism

---

[304] Brasch, 235-236.

was already an archaic element baked in to the film serial from its origins in stage melodrama and adventure literature. As the topological markers of the serial queen melodrama specifically move from archaic to residual, these representations are softened or elided altogether. Nonetheless, they have nefariously persisted wherever the form has been referenced, as borne out quasi-recently by (to name just two of many) the *Indiana Jones* franchise's depiction of a white archaeologist in conflict with supposedly atavistic and "primitive" cultures, and the *Star Wars* saga's parade of thinly-veiled racist caricatures. *Perils '*33, then, is not unique in this regard, but rather combines these elements with an inability to embrace the emancipatory potential of the original serial queen films.

While the 1933 *Perils* shares the original serial's engagement in the "reflexive treatment of restraint and entrapment," at the same time affording the viewer an omniscient perspective associated with the male leads in the film, it does not possess the basic narrative elements that allowed for Pearl White's then-striking display of independence.[305] The 1914 *Perils* is framed by the death of Pauline's parents and her guardian, who wills her a fortune that can only be claimed after she has wed her paramour (her guardian's son, Harry). Pauline refuses to wed Harry, stating that she wishes to remain "absolutely free for a year" to fulfill "my desire to live and realize the greatest thrills so that I can describe them in a romance of adventures." In the meantime, the fortune is kept in trust by her guardian's secretary, Raymond Owen, who devises a series of increasingly complex

---

[305] Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls,* 134.

plots to kill Pauline and claim the fortune for himself.[306] Thus, as Stamp explains, "Pauline's 'perils' are initiated not only by the death of her beneficent patriarch Stanford Marvin but also by her marked refusal of a conventional feminine role and her willful insistence on seeking adventure outside of marriage."[307] The *Perils* of 1933 offers no such literal breaking free of patriarchy and domesticity in favor of adventure, excitement, and independence. In the later *Perils*, Pauline's father, a professor of chemistry, is alive and well and seeking the film's weenie, a recipe for a toxic ancient Egyptian gas. While Pauline primarily engages in the international daring-do required to obtain the recipe and keep it out of the hands of Dr. Bashan, it is all at the behest of her father, and her function does not extend beyond a sort of lab assistant to Professor Hargrave. Similarly, Pauline's love interest, Robert, is committed to helping the professor achieve his goals. Though marriage is not even discussed in this version of the film, Pauline's agency is totally dependent on her father and her male protector/love interest. This is not to say that *Perils* 14 is an unambiguously feminist text and *Perils* 33 is not. As Stamp has shown, the serial queen melodramas were deeply ambivalent about their dismissal of traditional depictions of femininity:

---

[306] As Barefoot (2017) and Canjels (2011) note, the remaining extant copies of *The Perils of Pauline* (1914) survive only as extremely disjointed French reedits. Stamp (2000) reconstructs the original plot of the film from the remaining source, press materials, and contemporary newspaper tie-ins. Any discussion of the film here is based on the "restored collector's edition" issued by Eric Stedman's Serial Squadron group in 2018. While this version is not without its flaws, it is vastly superior, in terms of appearance and completion, to the previously available French version.
[307] Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 126.

> Pauline manifests athletic talents and a taste for adventure that belie outmoded notions of demure 'ladylike' behavior and stay-at-home femininity. These young women lead independent lives, noticeably freed from familial obligations, marital bonds, and motherhood. Still, however much they promoted a kind of modern femininity clearly tailored to appeal to their cadre of female fans, the serials' woman-oriented plots offered alarmist tales in which independence is always circumscribed by the shadow of danger, the determinacy of familial ties, and the inevitability of marriage. In fact, formulaic serial plots repeatedly, even obsessively, staged the same cautionary tale in thinly disguised repetitions from episode to episode, and serial to serial, as plot lines quickly came to resemble one another.[308]

Nonetheless, if this ambivalence in the serial queen melodramas can be marked by the pull between the dichotomy of empowerment and imperilment, *Perils* 33 offers no such ambivalence. As much as this serial's formal construction bespeaks the presence of the archaic – as, again, an outmoded form "brought back" with supposedly "modern" techniques—so too does its representation of gender, especially in comparison with the earlier serial of 1914. Narratively and visually similar perils from each of these serials further clarify the marked difference.

Chapter 14 of the 1914 *Perils* and chapters 8 and 9 of the 1933 version both feature cliffhangers involving the near drowning of the heroine and her love-interest. In 1914's "The Aerial Wire," Owen and an accomplice devise a scheme to lock Pauline in a cellar and flood it with water from a nearby river. Staging a false fire at one of Harry's factories and posing as firemen, a gang of Owen's compatriots kidnap Pauline and Harry when they arrive at the scene. Eventually struggling free of their bonds, Pauline and Harry fight off rats while the enclosed space fills with water. Harry soon hits upon the idea of escape by swimming up through the

---

[308] *Ibid.,* 125.

fireplace and chimney to the roof of the shack. Though Harry dives in first, Pauline quickly follows. The depiction of their escape is decidedly artificial, as a shot of Pauline diving underwater cuts to a long shot of what appears to be White slowly crawling up a flight of stairs, superimposed with close-up footage of cascading water. The truly daring escape soon follows, however, as Harry and Pauline attempt to cross the river by dangling from a wire stretched from the roof of the shack to some unknown location off-screen. An extreme long shot offers the two figures slowly inching themselves across hand over hand. Any doubt on the part of the viewer that this too is a superimposition is erased when the wire is severed by a member of Owen's gang and the two figures fall dramatically into the river below. Though the episode does feature narrative resolution – Pauline and Harry climb from the river, and finish the episode ensconced at home in an embrace—the promise of future perils and images of the serial queen's extraordinary body slung high above a river, fused with the intertextuality of her stardom, create a disruptive contingency that can not be contained by the suture of the narrative resolution.



Figure 18: Pearl White's extraordinary body defies gravity in *Perils* 14

By contrast, *Perils* 33's watery escape possesses none of this contingency. While exploring an ancient temple in India, Pauline and her male counterpart Warde are held at gunpoint by Bashan. Attempting to escape, Warde and Pauline run towards a window but the floor collapses beneath them and they plunge into the water of an underground cavern. Episode 8, "Dangerous Depths," ends on a cliffhanger with a high angle shot, not of Evalyn Knapp suspended above a chasm, but of two obviously limp dummies folding into the water. Picking up after the cliffhanger, episode nine, "The Mummy Walks," does not depict the daring escape of the serial queen, but her rescue by her father. Having been alerted to Warde and

Pauline's plunge, Professor Hargraves collects the temple's priest, who quickly leads them to the appropriate room and extends a ladder. Climbing from the water, Pauline is quickly enveloped in her father's embrace where, in a close two-shot, the professor apologizes to the temple priest and makes plans to catch a plane to New York. Though these two episodes seem narratively similar, the latter is but an archaic revival of the former. There, the pull between empowerment and imperilment constructed a world of serial intermedial engagement even beyond the screen, begun in the diegesis-rupturing appearance of death-defying stunts and bolstered by the intertextual world of White's stardom. Henry MacRae and Carl Laemmle, Jr. had imagined that their *Perils of Pauline* would secure the original's box-office and cultural significance by merit of its "modernization," but such modernization is nothing more than technological advancements that amount to cheap special effects. *The Perils of Pauline* (1933) was produced by a minor conservative studio concerned with the economizing practice of B-movie making, and while the film they intended to remake offered fissures in narrative and formal construction and gender representation, Universal wanted only to revive its nostalgia, not its possibilities.[309] White as serial figure was already a "set of principles," but the spectre of the extraordinary body is summoned here as

---

[309] This is no doubt a later legacy of Mark Garrett Cooper's assertion that, coming out of the 1910s, Universal was "predisposed […] to understand serial success as an organizational triumph to which women might temporarily contribute but which they could not reliably orchestrate in the long term. This interpretation, in turn, affirmed the geographical separation between workplace and domestic space that increasingly defined Universal City itself." Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 126.

something arcane and of another time, an intertext only to itself. As *The New Movie Magazine* offered, in a full-page photo spread of the new *Perils*' star: "do you remember Pearl White, the serial queen and her *Pauline* of the perils? And only a few years ago, too! … Here you see the 1933 version of Pauline—Pearl brought up to date by Evalyn Knapp."[310]



Figure 19: Dummies fold in *Perils* 33

"Watch This Rising Young Star:" Topos Study and *The Perils of Pauline* (1947)

Wanda Strauven summarizes Huhtamo's approach to topos study by stating that the topos "concept refers to a (literary) convention or commonplace that returns periodically over time."[311]As a node in the topology of Pearl White as serial queen-figure, *Perils* 33 embodies the latter's suggestion that "the use of topoi in promotional strategies exploits their attraction value but also their 'nonattraction' value. Topoi are used to arrest the eye in accordance with the long traditions of the

[310] "Do you remember Pearl White, the serial queen?," *The New Movie Magazine* (January 1934): 51.
[311] Strauven, 232

culture of attractions […] in commercial media culture their character is instrumental: they have been recruited to provide a product or spectacle with a certain historical or cultural surplus value acknowledged by the observer."[312] Beyond certain reviews and the less-than-rapturous assessment of some local exhibitors quoted above, we cannot know that the historical and cultural surplus value of the serial queen melodramas was acknowledged by the mass of observers of the 1933 serial; nonetheless, we can safely say that the film's producers assumed that an association with Pearl White (and her earlier box office success) would promise some manner of built-in attraction.[313] As one moves away from the originary moment of the silent serial's success in the teens it becomes ever more difficult to accurately determine whether or not audiences retained cultural memory of the serial film in its original incarnation. Producers, exhibitors, and advertisers, however, frequently presumed that capitalizing on the suggestion of nostalgia for the form would have economic benefits, as the aforementioned Pathé and Universal promotional materials attest. This question of a conscious or unconscious revival is of significance, but is perhaps too one-dimensional to understand the movement from archaic to residual vis-à-vis the serial queen "series of principles." In nearly every case where the Pearl White serial figure was recycled, producers consciously invoked the topos. This is true for the films discussed thus far, as they were ostensibly remakes of the original *Perils* (even if their genesis is a mélange of

---

[312]Huhtamo, 39.

[313] At least we cannot know within the very restricted archival confines of this particular study – contemporary audience/fan assessments may very well exist.

various serial queen melodramas), but is also true for some of the less overt revivals discussed below. Whether such invocations were intentional or not is not at issue here; I am focusing on how the understanding of the parameters of such an invocation evolved and were transformed.

In the context of media archaeology, topos study is "a search for the typical or clichéd, for those 'phenomena that (re)appear and disappear and reappear over and over again" and are "ideological constructs" prone to reactivation in media industries.[314] Strauven argues that the historical study of topoi "leads to a cyclical view of history characterized not only by returns but also by (anti-Foucauldian) continuities," an approach that, Strauven tells us, has been countered by media archaeologists such as Siegfried Zielinksi and Thomas Elsaesser who have "addressed media history in terms of discontinuity, singularity and fragmentation."[315] The application of topos study as a truly serial process, one of suspensions and resumptions, towards identifying and defining constellated media can hardly be described as cyclical or anti-Foucauldian. Indeed, serial constellated media are fragmentary in that they may reveal continuities in American media history, but they are continuities that have been neglected in the traditional mode of film and media historiography, and represent an alternative episteme to that that has been institutionalized--one that is defined by intermediality over medium

---

[314] *Ibid.*
[315] *Ibid.*

specificity.[316] The silent serial as nostalgic form's progression towards constellated media and from emergent, to archaic, to residual, reveals just such an instance of this misunderstood serial episteme.

If *Perils* 14 represented an emergent medium and a radical possibility for "film's forgotten future,' and *Perils* 33 revealed the ways in which the by-then archaic form was repurposed to capitalize on a certain perceived historical surplus value by minor studio producers, yet another "remake," *The Perils of Pauline* of 1947 represents the topos' total absorption by the dominant Hollywood culture. Not a remake in the traditional sense, *Perils* 47 is a classical musical produced by Paramount Pictures, directed by George Marshall (who had, interestingly, directed a number of Ruth Roland serials), and starring Betty Hutton as Pearl White. A heavily fictionalized biopic of White's rise to fame and eventual retirement, the film might nonetheless be understood as a kind of remake of *The Perils of Pauline*, as it spends a great deal of time recreating a number of the earlier film's perils, and a number of imagined ones, too. Indeed, *Perils* 47 presents the originary *Perils* as a kind of continually evolving serial. The depiction of *The Perils of Pauline* as a metatextual film within a film is not presented as a singular entry in a vast filmography (White starred in over 10 serials, a number of features, and innumerable shorts before her retirement). Rather, it is *the* serial, the only film

---

[316] Shane Denson describes the film serial's "cliffhanger continuity" a "discontinuous continuity" – the connections between the serial form and this mode of historiography are clear. Shane Denson, "The Logic of the Line Segment: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Serial-Queen Melodrama" in *Serialization and Popular Culture*, edited by Rob Allen & Thijs van den Berg (New York: Routledge, 2014): 73.

White works on after joining the film industry. Within the diegesis of *Perils* 47, *The Perils of Pauline* is an ever developing and evolving serial of countless episodes that White works on until her retirement from the screen to Paris, after it is decided by a group of exhibitors and her fictionalized film director that the public no longer has any interest in the serial form.[317] As promotional material and trade paper news stories concerning the film show, the *Perils* 47 represents the moment when the serial queen melodrama had become completely archaic, in that the alternative possibilities offered by the form had been completely nullified. The serial form was treated not as a revival that might resuscitate the moviegoing practices of the teens, but as a baroque articulation of the total ascendency of classical major-studio Hollywood at that point in time, exactly one year out from the final Paramount anti-trust decision in May of 1948, and just before the widespread dissemination of television in the mid-1950s.

The nostalgic remembrance of the American cinema's "early days" in *Perils* 47 is of a piece with a cycle of films described by Rob King. He notes that *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938), *Hollywood Cavalcade* (1939), and *Swannee River* (1940) are "identical in terms of their narrative template, depicting the history of their respective popular cultural forms—ragtime, the movies, minstrel songs—as a social integrative story of union and reconciliation, structured around a heterosexual romance […] the story of one man's rise and fall and rise again,

---

[317] The original *Perils of Pauline* had 20 episodes. The extant French version of the film edited a number of episodes together to produce a 9-episode serial. The Serial Squadron remastered DVD adds an explainer episode to make an even 10, and endeavors to note where and how particular episodes were edited together.

correlated with the vicissitudes of a love plot."[318] Though this incarnation of the *Perils* arrived nearly a decade later (and obviously featured a female rather than male lead), it nonetheless fits within the structure of these earlier films, depicting the rise and fall of the silent serials through the lens of Pearl White's life, though her rise again would be heavily circumscribed. Paramount thus understood the centrality of White and the serial queens to the form's popularity, but unlike these other films, the shoehorning of a totally fictionalized heteronormative relationship into the plot speaks to the ways in which the serial form was revived, again, in a "deliberately specializing way:" to demonstrate the technological and economic ascendency of classical Hollywood over that "forgotten future" produced in New Jersey, whilst expressing the post-war period's patriarchal entrenchment through a marked discomfort with the feminist possibility of White's star image, now in existence for over thirty years.

A four-page colour ad published in the *Motion Picture Herald* makes the transformation plain. Like the earlier Pathe and Universal remake announcements, the first two pages of the ad feature an illustration of Hutton as Pearl White engaging in perilous activities. Pearl swinging from a rope dominates the first page, but this image is effectively balanced with other generic markers that confirm that the observer can expect the musical's usual emphasis on romance and musical performance. An illustration of Pearl kissing her male co-star, John Lund, is featured alongside an image of the actress singing with a line-up of chorus girls.

---

[318] King, 192.

Interestingly, smaller images of a runaway train filmed by a camera crew and White's famous balloon stunt encroach upon the normative generic aspects of the musical – the filmed train seems destined to crash into Pearl, tied not to the railroad tracks but to her ineffectual and unsupportive love interest.[319]

This latter image is significant. The film attempts to impair and reinterpret White's historical independence, her status in the teens as a "new type of woman […] configured in tandem with discourses on the meaning of femininity overall [that had] seeped into the cultural lexicon of the era and thereby took on cultural significance outside as well as within the film theatres."[320] Finding the historical invocation of this cultural significance at odds with the heteronormativity of the classical musical, *Perils* 47 adds a heavily fictionalized love interest in the struggling actor Michael Farrington (ostensibly based on White's second husband, Wallace McCutcheon, Jr.). Farrington gives Pearl her acting start but is unable to accept her as an equal partner (despite her frequent advances) because her star image of fearlessness and daring rankles his own fragile masculinity, her success and stardom far outshining his own as a stage actor and co-star in the serials.

The yoking of the archaic silent serial form to these interrelated strands of technological/economic mastery and generic heteronormativity is explicitly laid out in the final page of the *Motion Picture Herald* ad, which promised, in fluorescently coloured columns, "3 wonder shows in one!"[321] In one column, the film is a

---

[319] "The Perils of Pauline" Ad, *Motion Picture Herald* (14 June 1947): 24-25.
[320] Dahlquist, 3.
[321] "The Perils of Pauline" Ad, *Motion Picture Herald* (14 June 1947): 26.

"fascinating nostalgic cavalcade of the days when Hollywood was in New Jersey and 'The Perils of Pauline' was a national institution, recreating the hilarious, death-defying adventures […] taking the old and new-timers behind the scenes to the inside story of movie making in the 'silent' days [… and] recalling the era when a whole nation waited every week to see what happened next to 'poor Pauline.'"[322] Not just a recapitulation of the "'silent' days" however, the ad also promised, in a second column, a "never-before-revealed love story of Pearl White" portrayed by Betty Hutton in a manner "richer in emotional scope than even 'Incendiary Blonde'" and featuring John Lund as "the secret man in the Thrill-Queen's life."[323] Finally, a third column pledged "a stunning musical in 1947 Technicolor, introducing the newest and biggest hits of the airwaves in the year's biggest production numbers [… with] The Living Curtain of Beautiful Girls [to] keynote the production lavishness and its big, handsome numbers."[324] As promised in the advertisement, *Perils* 47 features a series of sequences of White engaging in daring escapades on screen and off, but adjusts the significance of her dare-devilry away from the extraordinary body and onto show tunes and stilted romantic interludes.

---

[322] *Ibid.*
[323] *Ibid.*
[324] *Ibid.*



Figure 20: *The Perils of Pauline* trade advertisement, *Motion Picture Herald* (14 June 1947): 26.

Perhaps the most famous sequence from *Perils* 14, in which White repels down from a runaway hot air balloon, is given just such a treatment in *Perils* 47. In the original, Owen goads Pauline into taking a balloon ride with a carnival performer named Professor Panatella. Unbeknownst to her, Owen has arranged for a horse to charge the crowd while Pauline is having her photo taken in the basket so that the balloon and the heroine drift off without the aid of the balloonist. Subsequent long shots show a lone figure in the balloon coasting high above Fort Lee, New Jersey and the New Jersey palisades. Undeterred, Pauline hurls a rope and anchor and, in a stunning low-angle long shot, rappels out of the balloon onto the edge of a palisade as the camera slowly tilts down in a single shot to follow her

progress. Along with the river rope crossing described earlier, this is one of *Perils* 14's most audacious escapes and perhaps the one most associated with White. The use of the balloon premise was somewhat typical of earlier stage melodrama, and Stamp argues that this particular cliffhanger "repeatedly highlights Pauline's inability to control the mechanisms with which she experiments," and primarily underscores her boyfriend Harry's frequent rescues, as he manages to reach Pauline by rappelling down the cliff, before his rope is cut by the gang of villains.[325] Putting pressure on these analyses, we find that White's intrepid escape from the balloon (filmed in real-time and on location without the use of stunt doubles) is the very definition of Bean's assertion that "inasmuch as White figured as transcultural icon and embodied a heroic new personhood freed from the laws of physics, she may be seen as the apotheosis of the metaphor of stardom—'star' understood as liminal, transcendent sphere."[326] Like Bean, Shane Denson relates this liminal sphere of Pearl White's stardom to the structure of the film serial overall, noting that the balloon sequence in particular is indicative of a certain "logic of the line segment."[327] For Denson, the cutting of the rope is a useful metaphor for the serial's form of narration, revealing that unlike "the classical paradigm, which anchors its stories in a closed, self-sufficient diegetic universe […] in the transitional-era film serial

---

[325] Describing 10-20-30 stage melodrama, Ben Singer lists various stunts with balloons among a chart of "typical sensation scenes," which also include business dealing with trains, rivers, heroines swinging by rope, motorboats, and automobiles, to name but a few—all of which appear in *Perils* 14: Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls,* 133.
[326] Bean, 405.
[327] Denson, "Logic of the Line Segment," 73.

[…] the narrative world itself emerges from the intersecting line segments, the cut ropes of serially unfolding action: the fictional world seems to be constructed, piece for piece, by the linear strands that dominate both story and screen."[328] Again, one can see the applicability of this description of the serial form to the larger project of defining constellated media – various segmented strands nonetheless work together to form a much larger intertextual and intermedial world, a world that is defined not by continuity and singularity, but discontinuity and multitudes. So, too, is this expressive of the logic of the topos study. Pearl White's stardom is but one of these serialized strands, while the stardom of the teens moved serially beyond the diegetic world of the films, where it continued to propagate for decades.

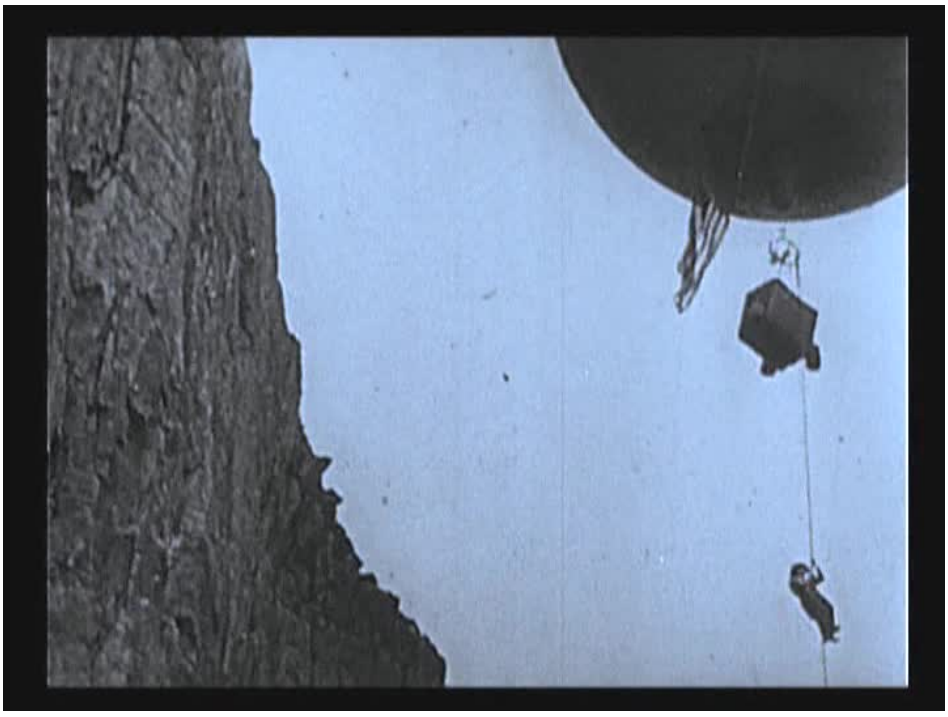


Figure 21: Pearl White descends from a balloon on a segment in *Perils* 14…

[328] *Ibid.,* 74.

Perils 47's recapitulation of this balloon sequence is telling, as it takes the visual representation of the serial's discontinuous continuity and attempts to subsume it under the order of classicism. In so doing, the film seeks to foreclose upon the White topos, and its boundary-shattering feminist and medial possibilities, so as to dismiss them as atavistic. Arriving mid-way through the film, the balloon sequence in *Perils* 47 begins with a close-up of a series of script pages that read: "Perils of Pauline episode #12: 'Murder in the Clouds.' Scene 20 ext. balloon location – Pearl in evening gown and Mike in dress clothes tied in balloon basket. Timmie (Hugo Mortimer) and his heavies are about to cut the rope. Pearl smiles sadly at Mike. Hugo cuts the rope." As Pearl and Mike prepare for the scene in the basket of the balloon, with Mike offering his by now expected asides that such sensational melodrama is beneath him, shots of the director conversing with the attending press corps suggests that the filmmaker has planned for something to go amiss with the stunt, and that he expects it to make headline news. Timmie, Pearl's longtime confidant and recently hired villain of the serial, appears not at all like Paul Panzer's Raymond Owen of the 1914 serial, but as a cliché of a melodrama antagonist in a top hat and curled moustache. Following a brief comedic interlude in which the director and Timmie debate the difference between gnashing one's teeth and chewing the scenery, the actor finally cuts the rope only to find, much to Pearl and Mike's surprise, that it is not a prop and the balloon quickly drifts out of sight. Here, too, a rope is cut, but it does not metaphorically signal the serial form's larger utilization of segmentation, but the binding ties of heterosexual romance.

After sending the press corps away with an appropriate headline, a balloonist surprises the director by stating that he did not have the chance to hide in the basket as planned. Pearl and Mike helplessly drift off, and a montage of switchboard operators, telegraph machines, and whirling headlines suggest that the balloon is lost for some time. Mike is baffled, and when Pearl suggests that he do something about it, he glibly responds with a litany of Bean's "overdetermined metaphors:" "me do something? You're the great serial queen, fearless fanny, the do-or-die gal, why don't you do something?" As the balloon drifts into a thunderstorm, Pearl and Mike huddle closely together, where, in a medium two-shot, Pearl begs her paramour to tell her he loves her—he finally does so, and a fade to black over a kiss implies their inevitable coupling. Waking the next morning to the sounds of angelic voices, Pearl and Mike believe they have ascended to heaven, before it becomes clear that the balloon is descending over a country church with an apparently stentorian choir. As the balloon crashes into a tree, Pearl enjoins Mike to remember he promised to marry her and offers to help him up, while he refuses her offer and grouses that, because cameras are not rolling, that he would like to help her for a change.



Figure 22: … While Pearl (Betty Hutton) and Mike (John Lund) squabble in *Perils* 47

This reimaging retreads one of Pearl White's most infamous stunts to effectively contain the serial queen's extraordinary body and its suggestion of counter-classical narration, extra-cinematic serialized expansion, and female power. Instead, the spectre of the extraordinary body is here contained by the strictures of Hollywood's heteronormativity and, in the process, rendered finally archaic. Though the sequence does not depict the actual balloon sequence of the 1914 film, but an imagining of Pearl White's supposedly "hidden" romance (as was promised in the promotional materials), it does offer a refraction of a real accident involving a balloon that is described in Pearl White's first autobiography, *Just Me,* published at the height of her fame in 1919. In the final chapter of the work, White describes the serious preparation she underwent for her films, learning to drive (and "stand a smashup"), fly an aeroplane, play tennis, swim and dive, and safely leap from

moving automobiles and trains.[329] White explains that ballooning, however, is one "thing that can't be learned and you just have to take a chance"—and proceeds to relate the filming of the sequence from *Perils* 14.[330] Her instruction on the initial day of filming was to float in the balloon until she was out of sight of the cameras, at which point she was to pull the ripcord and descend to safety. An unexpected wind picked up, however, and quickly pushed the balloon out over the sea. White soon discovered that there *was* a professional balloonist hidden inside the basket. The balloonist's good humor endeared him to White, but it would be many hours before they were able to descend as the balloon was blown variously over the ocean, across Manhattan, and through a thunderstorm. The narrative related in this chapter is far more harrowing than anything on screen in either of the *Perils* films, but what is of particular note is the way in which White herself understands the promotion of her death-defying stunts as central to her burgeoning stardom and to the formal structure of the serial films. As the companions weather the storm, White is suddenly reminded of some advertising proof sheets. Her description is worth quoting at length:

> The instruments told us we were up five thousand feet. The rain, lightning and thunder were still raging beneath us. "Well, we might as well take it easy," my companion said, "until the storm breaks beneath us—then I will begin to figure how we can get down." Well, it was such a wonderful sight watching the old storm carry on between us and the earth that I got all over being afraid for the moment and began to think more or less normally. I had a big roll of advertising proof sheets in my overcoat pocket that had been handed to me that morning. So I took them in hand and began to look them over. They were different sketches of newspaper publicity which I was going

---

[329] Pearl White, *Just Me* (New York: G.H. Doran Company, 1919), 162.
[330] *Ibid.*

> to receive. Some covered an entire newspaper sheet with a life-size face photograph of myself, with huge headlines proclaiming my talents and daring to the unsuspecting public. Now, up until that time no one in the picture business had received such expensive advertisements. Of course, the Hearst newspapers were interested in "The Perils of Pauline," and they gave me newspaper space that couldn't be bought for any amount of money. I remember one ad read "WATCH THIS RISING YOUNG STAR (meaning me) AND SEE HOW QUICKLY SHE ASCENDS TO THE VERY TOP." What a bromide that line was to me at the moment. I was ascending like a skyrocket, but to what?[331]

White eventually describes their harrowing landing thus: "I could see thousands of people waiting below with upstretched arms and it seemed as though they must be welcoming me back to the earth and fame. Be that as it may."[332] This event, and its account, could be very well (and likely was) staged and exaggerated in the manner depicted in *Perils* 47. White's self-effacing attitude towards her perilous activities nonetheless reveals a nuanced understanding of the ways in which, like the form of the serial film, her body and her persona were segmented in a manner that proved important and innovative for the emerging medium of film and, attendantly, her female audience. Even in the clouds above New York in 1914, the serial queen topos was already at work posing intermedial serial possibilities for a burgeoning industry and for the thousands of upstretched arms waiting to receive her.

Perils 47 remakes this episode to contain the trans-historical nature of these possibilities within the confines of the heteronormative plot, but marriage alone was not enough to contain the spectre of the extraordinary body. This version of the *Perils* reflects Stacy Wolf's broader discussion of the normative structure of

---

[331] *Ibid.,* 173-174.
[332] *Ibid.,* 179.

musicals in the post-war period, as she clarifies that the "musical grew and was popular during the post-World War II era—a period when many women who worked outside the home during the war returned to homemaking after men reclaimed their jobs; when homosexuals were both pathologized and criminalized; when the image of the white, middle-class, nuclear family in the suburbs represented America at its best. The musical appears to reflect the dominant values of the culture: conservative, sexist, and homophobic. […] Women seem to fall hopelessly in love in musicals. The eventual heterosexual union required by the musical also unifies the community, as woman submits to man, nature to culture, passion to reason, mind to body."[333] Wolf goes on to offer a groundbreaking against-the-grain queer reading of the stage musicals in this period, but *Perils* 47 withstands no such reading. In attempting to "unify the community," the film must not simply depict Pearl White submitting to a male partner, it must work to contain the continued transformative influence of the serial queen's extraordinary body, which Bean reminds us engenders "catastrophe, disorder, and disaster rather than continuity and regulation."[334] And so, the *Perils* 47 concludes with White again swinging by a rope, but this time on stage before an adoring audience in Paris. Again, the rope is severed but it is the body of the serial queen that is thus segmented: White wakes in bed following a tragic accident, surrounded by doctors informing her that she is paralyzed from the waist down and will likely remain so for the rest of her life. The

---

[333] Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002): 9.
[334] Bean, 407.

final scene of the film features White in a French movie theatre viewing an (fictional) episode of *The Perils of Pauline* where she engages in amazing acrobatics from the wing of a bi-plane. As tears fill Pearl's eyes, Mike arrives to remind her once more that she is "a terrible actress," as he delicately picks her up from her cinema seat and carries her to their new life of apparent domestic bliss, free from any further daring stunts or escapes. Some later accounts, suspect as they are, suggest that the cirrhosis that did kill White resulted from self-medicating injuries suffered during the filming of the *Perils*, but she was never paralyzed and she certainly did not live out her retirement as a paraplegic.[335] Though Paramount had the audacity to stage a premier that featured an "old-time" variety programme consisting of a newsreel, serial episode, and feature film (precisely the type of programme unaffiliated B-theatres operating outside the major's monopolies were still offering in 1947), with the remaining cast and crew of the original film in attendance, *The Perils of Pauline* (1947) was successful in rendering the serial queen melodrama fully archaic—a completely inconsequential artifact of an apparently bygone era.[336] Pearl White was dead and buried. It would take another moment of significant cultural change to reimagine the form as residual.

---

[335] Jim Bishop, "Many Remember Pearl White America's First Movie Star," *The Evening Independent* (3 April 1959): 7-A.

[336] *Boxoffice* reported that the pre-premier gala luncheon featured "beefsteak and beer," men dressed in era-appropriate police uniforms, and a six-piece band playing music from the teens. "Black cardboard handlebar mustaches were distributed to the male guests," while the women guests received necklaces of pearls. In attendance were a few actors and the director of the original film, the songwriter behind the popular hit "Poor Pauline," and Milton Berle, who appeared in the *Perils* as a baby. After lunch, the guests were escorted to the long-running Comet Theatre



Figure 23: The Ohio Express, *Mercy* LP cover (1969)

The front cover of the 1969 LP *Mercy,* by Buddah Records bubblegum group The Ohio Express, features a high-angle shot of a group of men (ostensibly the band) on a railroad handcar about to engage in comedic fisticuffs. The apparent hero of the shot is dressed in plaids and a toque, while the mustachioed villain sports a black

---

(where the original film had screened in 1914) in a parade of antique cars from the 1910s and 20s. "Beefsteak, Beer, Handlebar Mustaches, Feature Nostalgic 'Perils' Screening," *Boxoffice* (28 June 1947): 46.

overcoat and top hat. Below the men lies a screaming blonde woman, prone with her arms and legs bound with rope. A placard in the top right of the cover announces that "The Ohio Express foils the foul villain, saves fair damsel while doing their thing … see reverse side for schedule." On the reverse side the fight continues, but with the band and "damsel" on the front of a steam locomotive. As Kim Cooper and David Smay have argued, the available multifarious definitions of bubblegum music include "pop music contrived and marketed to appeal to pre-teens."[337] Why would an album primarily marketed towards children of the late 1960s feature a reference, however oblique, to a cultural phenomenon of over 50 years earlier?

This indirect allusion is of a piece with the process begun in the *Perils* 47. Its simple iconographic representation of the perceived (if not entirely accurate) mise-en-scene of the silent serials is paired with an emphasis on male heroism and gendered violence, and misinterprets and misremembers the novel possibilities of form and gender representation offered by the serial queen melodramas. It is part of an explosion of such references across the 1960s. Unlike the previously discussed remakes of *The Perils of Pauline*, these objects drew upon and exploited the one-dimensional iconographic topological elements of the silent serial form, and often in media explicitly for children. Many of them endorsed the retrograde "damsel-in-

---

[337]Kim Cooper & David Smay, "Introduction: Bubble Entendres" in *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth,* edited by Kim Cooper & David Smay (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 1. Only one of five interlocking definitions, Cooper and Smay argue that the term also encompasses "the classic bubblegum era from 1967-1972;" disposable pop music of all kinds; "pop music produced in an assembly line process driven by producers and using faceless singers;" and "pop music with that intangible, upbeat 'bubblegum' sound."

distress" topos of The Ohio Express cover, but some relished in the silent serial's relation between female power and formal alternatives. These entries in the Pearl White serial figure topology thus mark the moment in which representations of the form had moved from archaic to fully residual.

As The Ohio Express cover shows, the serial queen topos in this period appeared in a variety of disparate media forms. In films (Rob King notes the popular Robert Youngson silent-era compilation films of the early-to-mid 1960s, for example), yes, but also in music, comics, advertising, and breakfast cereal commercials. For the sake of space and focus we will centre specifically on television, which was rife in this period with allusions to the silent cinema generally, and the serial queens specifically, particularly on television designed and marketed to young people.[338]

The most famous example from this period, as profiled above by Alan G. Barbour, is surely *Batman* (1966-1968), which features a built-in serialized structure that would conclude every other episode on a cliffhanger, complete with a narrator replacing the film serial's standard title card, urging viewers to catch the conclusion at the "same BAT-time, same BAT-channel." The overall structure of the series is perhaps closer to the sound serials of the 1930s and 40s, but it does make specific reference to the silent serials in at least one set of episodes in season one:

---

[338] An entirely separate chapter could be written on the cornucopia of silent serial references in the televisual work of Jay Ward Productions, including *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends* (1959-1964, particularly the "Dudley Do-Right" shorts), *Fractured Flickers* (1963-1964), and a series of animated advertisements for Quaker Oats' Cap'n Crunch, Quake, and Quisp breakfast cereals.

"Death in Slow Motion"/"The Riddler's False Notion." In the context of a silent comedy film festival staged by a noted film collector (played appropriately by Francis X. Bushman in his final role), the Riddler engages in a series of robberies that mostly reference slapstick comedy but also traditional melodramatic perils, including binding Robin to a buzz saw in a typically overwrought citation of *Blue Jeans*. The Riddler wears a black cape, top hat, and false mustache to twirl, and his second-in-command is named Pauline. Here again we might identify a shallow obsession with the reification of the silent serial's mise-en-scene (mustachioed villain, bound hero(ine)). Nonetheless, *Batman* is more appropriately understood in the context of a separate (but certainly related) obsession in the mid-60s with camp and comic book-inflected 'pop,' a cultural trend that Will Brooker identifies with an intertextual discourse involving "the Broadway musicals *The Mad Show* and *It's A Bird, It's A Plane … It's Superman*, the comic-strip paintings of Lichtenstein […], and the parade of newspaper and billboard advertisements employing comic-style typography and effects."[339] *Batman* leads us down the path to the media that more directly engaged with the serial queen topos, but the dynamic duo of the 1960s more appropriately trades, like pop art overall, in a postmodern potpourri of cultural references and meanings, while other entries in our topos take a more direct approach.

---

[339] Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 217.



Figure 24: Robin (Burt Ward) is trapped in a typical melodramatic peril while a mustachioed Riddler (Frank Gorshin) gleefully looks on.

Returning to our earlier discussion of Raymond Williams, we can distinguish between his conceptions of an "alternative" residual and an "active" residual. In counter distinction to the archaic, the residual is active in the cultural process, "an effective element of the present."[340] For each of the archaic examples of *The Perils of Pauline* remakes identified above, the serial film as defined in the silent period, with its emphasis on female power, narrative disruption, and formal discontinuity, could not possibly remain an active part of dominant classical Hollywood culture. Rather, the topos was invoked as an element of the "ancient" past again and again to variously promise the lost economic benefits of that period (when "cinema" was still an emergent medium), or to effectively diminish the role that the silent serials and the serial queens played in the ascendancy of Hollywood. As Williams would later argue, aspects of persistent cultural forms understood as "past" are incorporated into dominant culture specifically to nullify and contain them: "at certain points a dominant culture cannot allow too much of this kind of practice and

[340] Williams, 122.

experience outside itself, at least without risk."[341] As a form operating more appropriately under an earlier cultural paradigm, the silent serial could not persist in the face of the institutionalization of "cinema," and where it did continue (as in the sound serials of the 30s and 40s) it was notably marginalized to minor and Poverty Row studios and hinterland exhibition practices.[342] Finding no place within itself for the legacy of the serial queen melodramas, classical Hollywood repeatedly reimagined the archaic serial form to effectively neutralize it.

And yet the form did have particular uses for television in the 1960s. As Charles R. Acland indicates in his definition of the term, "residual media" offer a certain "knowing unknowingness […] continuity and discontinuity both play roles in the structuring of a living culture, leaving behind any supposition about the simplistic, static, and well-defined boundaries of the province of the dominant, let alone the new."[343] Acland's description of a balance between continuity and discontinuity, typified by a certain "knowing unknowingness" should by now sound familiar, as it is remarkably similar to both Shane Denson's description of the serial film's "logic of the line segment" and Jennifer Bean's discussion of the "series of principles" attached to the serial queen's extraordinary body. As we can also see from the surrealists' endorsement of the serial form as an arcane entity that nonetheless represented "film's forgotten future" not decades later, serial

---

[341] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 41.
[342] See Barefoot, 2017.
[343] Charles R. Acland, "Introduction" in *Residual Media,* edited by Charles R. Acland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): xiv-xxi.

constellated media are particularly apt for a discussion of residual forms as they are always, by merit of their intertextual construction and marginalized status, simultaneously present and residual. Acland is correct in critiquing the ahistorical overuse of the term "new media," and it is a critique that is part and parcel of an outpouring of historiographical writings in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.[344] The general understanding following from Bolter and Grusin's discussion of "remediation," that supposedly "new" media is necessarily multimedial, reveals the ways in which serial constellated media have always posed a challenge to myopic media studies and specificity-obsessed media industries, particularly as they undergo processes of institutionalization.[345] All of this is to say that the objects that best represent the residual appearance of the serial queen melodramas in 1960s, televisual animation and advertisements, are primarily "active" residual media, as they were fully incorporated into the dominant culture and employed by producers and advertisers of said culture to offer stilted repartee to the upheavals of civil rights, second wave feminism, and the war in Vietnam. But in so knowing they also offer a certain unknowingness that perhaps speaks to the "alternative" residual, an unconscious employment of the possibilities offered by the serial form, particularly as it pertained to the serial queen melodrama's association with first-wave

---

[344] Acland offers a tidy endnote summary of these works, including Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (2000); Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference* (2002); Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment" (1997); Michelle Martin, "Hello Central?" (1991); Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television* (2001); and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past* (2003). See Acland, *xxvii* note 41 for a complete list.

[345] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

feminism at a point just after the first stirrings of the second wave with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.[346]

"Historical Buffoonery:" The Perils of Cartoon Serial Queens

Though television networks would find various reasons for the deployment of the serial queen melodrama as residual media in the late 1960s, numerous efforts were made to bring the *Pauline* property to television before that time. In 1958, *Variety* reported that Paramount-Sunset Productions was considering the property for only their second television series, but worried that "casting the lead" would unsurprisingly prove "a big hurdle."[347] Four years later, *The Hollywood Reporter* noted in March of 1962 that Warner Bros. was planning a series in the metatextual biopic mold of the *Perils* 47 starring John Dehner and Dorothy Provine as a "raffish, opportunist movie director of the silent picture days" and Pearl White, respectively.[348] Already one can note, in a *Boston Globe* article on the prospective series, that the recycling of the serial film was to be a nostalgic order specifically meant to capitalize on the form's alternative to classical Hollywood, noting that "the producer hopes to recreate the gay, unrestricted era of the first serials, before picture making was fenced in."[349] Paramount had earlier been at the epicenter of

---

[346] Stephanie Coontz (2011) has recently complicated the centrality of *The Feminine Mystique* to the coming of the "second wave," but that text's emphasis on advertising is nonetheless important here, even as a brief touchstone.
[347] "'Perils of Pauline' Mulled As Series,' *Variety* (15 October 1958): 54.
[348] "Dehner Co-Stars In 'Perils of Pauline," *The Hollywood Reporter* (12 March 1962).
[349] "Perils of Pauline," *Boston Globe* (3 June 1962): C22.

said "fencing in," but clearly saw some relational opportunity in depicting the silent era for early television. Televisual *Perils* would eventually arrive on the small screen, but not from the major studios and not featuring an extraordinary body of flesh and blood, but one of pencil and ink.

Promotional materials describe Hanna Barbera Productions' *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop* (1969-1970) as "recreating […] in animation the hilarious Mack Sennett style of comedy using a conceptual springboard the old Perils of Pauline cliffhangers. Penelope is the young, vulnerable heroine, the Ant Hill Mob her god-fathers who must protect her from her legal guardian, the evil Sylvester Sneekly, who is actually her arch enemy, the Hooded Claw."[350] The *Toronto Daily Star* noted that the series was unique in that it offered a first instance of a spinoff in children's programming, as it was one of two series "spun off" an earlier Hanna Barbera program, *Wacky Races* (1968-1969).[351] Perhaps the purest remake of the original *Perils of Pauline* discussed here, the *Perils of Penelope Pitstop* takes place in the 1910s and features the basic narrative of a wealthy heiress who is, unbeknownst to her, in constant conflict with her guardian, who is attempting to gain access to her vast fortune. The guardian in this case, Sylvester Sneekly/The Hooded Claw (voiced

---

[350] "The Perils of Penelope" Ad, *Ottawa Citizen* (10 January 1970): 81.

[351] John Twomey, "How Do the New Kiddie Shows Stack Up?" *Toronto Daily Star* (9 September 1969): 3. Spinoffs had been commonplace and popular since the very beginning of network television, with programs as early as the *Cavalcade of Stars* (1949-1957) spinning off both *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956) and *The Jackie Gleason Show* (1961), and *The Danny Thomas Show* (1957-1964) spinning off *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968). The assignment of the pioneering spinoff status for kids' tv is not entirely accurate, as Hanna Barber's own *Huckleberry Hound Show* (1958-1962) spun off *The Yogi Bear Show* (1961-1963) and subsequently a whole universe of cartoons stemming from that show.

with typical élan by Paul Lynde), is based on the original's Raymond Owen, but also the villain of another Pearl White serial, *The Iron Claw* (1916). Gone, however, is the original film's heterosexual love interest and protector. The above quoted advertisement is somewhat incorrect in suggesting that that role is filled by the Ant Hill Mob, a gang of seven caricatures of Hollywood gangsters in the mold of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* and their anthropomorphic car "Chuga-Boom." The comedic cabal *is* consistently trying to save Pitstop from the Hooded Claw's perils, but is humorously ineffective in those efforts. Indeed, in a majority of episodes, Pitstop saves herself *and* the Ant Hill Mob, and even, occasionally, the Hooded Claw. The Ant Hill Mob exists instead to perform the function of combining the "conceptual springboard" of the serial queen melodrama with Mack Sennett-style slapstick comedy.

This combination is unsurprising, as Rob King has shown that rereleases of silent-era slapstick on eight and sixteen millimeter by companies such as Classic Films, Ken Films, and Blackhawk created a generation of "hobbyist enthusiasts," and served as a platform for the remediation and recycling that would ensure a continued affective engagement with those films.[352] A review of the same Blackhawk catalogues assessed by King shows that silent serials (and White's filmography in particular) were as readily available for purchase on small-gauge

[352] King, 198.

home releases in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.[353] Observing televisual instances of the Pearl White topology such as *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop*, however, renders the argument for the preservation of cultural memory related to the silent serials through these releases dubious. The media that consciously invoked the silent serials in the 1960s did tend to fuse a remembrance of that form with slapstick. And the traditional tropes of perils and cliffhangers were often presented with a number of the remembered (though not necessarily historically accurate) visual and auditory markers of silent slapstick, including sped-up "undercranked" sequences, jaunty ragtime piano, and excessive physical humor. But this has more to do with navigating the vagaries of television self-censorship in the period, particularly for children's television, than it does a particular effort to appeal to older viewers who might also happen to be silent film collectors.[354]

In his work on the Saturday morning cartoon, of which Hanna Barbera provided the vast majority of programming in the 60s and 70s, Jason Mittell argues that the "cartoons' assumption of harmlessness exempted the genre from much of the anxiety that dominated this historical moment's construction of childhood."[355] This is not entirely accurate, however. Heather Hendershot clarifies that the mid-

---

[353] An online database of Blackhawk film catalogues is available through the USC's Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive: https://www.uschefnerarchive.com/blackhawk-films-catalogs/

[354] Flipping our perspective, it is possible that we might think of animators as just such collectors, as animation is not solely a line art practice but also a form of vivifying things, including the cultural products of a previous generation

[355] Jason Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," in *Prime Time Animation,* edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 43.

to-late 60s was a landmark period of "violent events shown on television, and publicly expressed fears about TV representations of violence," noting the televisual coverage of the Watts Riots in 1965 and, in 1968-69, coverage of the Tet Offensive, the assassinations of Bobby Kennedy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., police brutality at the '68 Democratic National Convention, and the killings at Kent State and Altamont.[356] Following from this rash of televised real-world violence, 1969 (the year of *Penelope Pitstop*'s debut) marked, according to Hendershot, a change in the relationship between the producers of children's programming and network Standards departments. The shift was brought on by the "Senate Subcommittee on Communications investigation of television violence. As the Vietnam War raged, the subcommittee chair, Senator John Pastore, expressed his conviction that *television* perpetrated violence."[357] The initial findings of Senator Pastore and the Subcommittee investigation on TV violence led to an effort by the networks to self-regulate television for children. The invocation of the silent serial form as residual here, and its combination with another silent residual form, slapstick, was noted numerous times in the press as a conscious effort to deal with the issue of violence in children's programming by returning to a template that was more traditionally comedic, if not actually less violent.

The change was noted by John Twomey, onetime producer of Canadian childhood classics *Mr. Dressup* and *The Friendly Giant*, who wrote in the *Toronto*

---

[356] Heather Hendershot, *Saturday Morning Censors: Television Regulation Before the V-Chip* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 31.
[357] *Ibid.,* 32.

Daily Star, that a "big switch in Saturday morning television for children has been launched. Last season's wall-to-wall […] animated violence of super-men and super-beasts is out […] Three events in the U.S. have brought about the big switch. These were: the report of the President's Commission on Violence in America; the subcommittee hearing on TV programming held by Senator Pastore; and the Surgeon General's study commission on the effects of TV."[358] Noted in the list of new shows introduced for the "big switch," were the *Wacky Races* spin-offs, *Dastardley and Muttley and Their Flying Machines,* and *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop*. Beyond even the argumentation of television critics, however, no less than Joseph Barbera acknowledged the conscious change, noting in an interview with UPI in 1969 that "you have to make a distinction in violence […] Comedy slapstick isn't violence. It's historical buffoonery going all the way back to Punch and Judy. A pie in the face isn't violent […] Like any one else providing shows for television, we have been producing shows the viewers want. Now they're asking for less violence, and I don't think you'll find any violence this season."[359]

Thus the insertion of the Ant Hill Mob in the *Perils of Penelope Pitstop* might have been meant to "save the day," but in this case it was more likely meant to save the program, the producers, and the network from accusations of harming their audience of children with excessive televisual violence. The slapstick form was invoked by Joseph Barbera as specifically "historical buffoonery" that could not

---

[358] Twomey, 3.
[359] Vernon Scott, "The Accent Will Be on Comedy In Saturday Morning TV Cartoons," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (29 June 1969): 7.

possibly have a negative effect on impressionable minds due to its residual nature, an element of the past put to cultural use in the present.

The pairing of these residual forms had the additional effect of reviving the spectre of the extraordinary body. Throughout *Penelope Pitstop*, though the heroine is obviously consistently in peril, her extraordinary escapes speak more to the diegesis-shattering escapades of Pearl White and her cohorts than do any of the previous *Perils* remakes on film. In one representative episode, "Hair Raising Harness Race," Pitstop is totally autonomous, preforming daring escapes no less than four times in a broadcast half hour—dodging descending spikes, climbing from a den of crocodiles, leaping from a falling elevator, and using a horse to rescue the Ant Hill Mob from explosives tied to a railroad track by the Hooded Claw. Presenting a depiction of a female character with significant agency, paired with animation's plasticity (that is not totally unlike the "new personhood freed from the laws of physics" described by Bean in relation to Pearl White), the *Perils of Penelope Pitstop* represents an entry in the serial queen topology that restores the novelty and extraordinary possibility of the silent serial queen melodramas, but here for the residual purpose of redefining the contours of televisual violence on children's TV.



Figure 25: Fearless, Peerless Penelope faces perils of water and air... and rescues the Ant Hill Mob (dressed as Keystone Kops) in *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop.*

For these reasons, the program attracted the attention of early feminist television critic Marion Meade who, in a *New York Times* column entitled "Penelope Pitstop Isn't Enough!" lambasted children's programs such as *Sesame Street*, *H.R. Pufnstuf, Dudley Do-Right, The Flinstones, Captain Kangaroo,* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* as amounting to "thorough brainwashing which indoctrinates small girls into accepting second-class status and assures little boys that some day they

will take their predestined place in 'a man's world'."[360] For Meade, the only exception was *Penelope Pitstop*:

> The only word for the feminine image on children's television is crummy. Most offensive in their treatment of women are the cartoons, the biggest group of programs for kids. In an average week there are 50 hours of cartoons, a third of them on Saturday morning. Only one—'The Perils of Penelope Pitstop'—stars a woman. Penelope, a professional racing car driver, talks in a cloying Southern accent and powders her nose a lot; still, there's no question but that she is resourceful and gutsy, and has a sense of humor. She comes across as an intelligent human being, something which can't be said about any other woman in the cartoon line-up.[361]

Meade took Pitstop's agency at face value in comparison to the other 49.5 hours of cartoons on network television in 1970, but it is precisely the invocation of the serial queen melodramas as residual media that structured said agency. Meade's description of the character in the *Perils* does not apply to the character's original appearance as part of an ensemble cast in *Wacky Races,* where, devoid of any reference to White or the serial films, the character did mostly "powder her nose" and served as a the vessel for sexist jokes in an otherwise male cast. In turning to the silent serials in the spinoff, however, *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop* engaged in a reading of a residual form that, by merit of its cross-generational serialized potential, constellated with the significant feminine power and agency described by Bean, Stamp, and others. In the most unlikely of places, the Pearl White serial queen topos was deployed as residual media for highly specific reasons related to

---

[360] Marion Meade, "Penelope Pitstop Isn't Enough!" *New York Times* (13 September 1970): D25.
[361] *Ibid.*

the changing landscape of children's televisual animation, but in the process it had perhaps managed to resurrect some of the originary powers of Pearl White herself.

Join the Dodge Rebellion! Pearl White and the 1960s

If the "historical buffoonery" of silent slapstick and serials offered televisual animation producers the opportunity to sidestep censorship while unconsciously injecting the spirit of the serial queens into the otherwise masculinist world of Saturday morning cartoons, the association between the serial queens, the "New Woman" of the early 20th century, and first-wave feminism provided advertising agencies a fecund residual topology to profit off second-wave feminism, civil rights, and the Vietnam War without offering any meaningful engagement with these subjects.

In 1966-1967, the Chrysler corporation and the Detroit office of the advertising agency BBDO developed the "Dodge Rebellion" print, radio, and television campaign, which had the express purpose of transforming "the image of Dodge from that of a nice, comfortable, and dependable car for conservative older people to the more lively car for a broad range of buyers, including the youth market."[362] To do so, BBDO and Chrysler turned to the iconography of the serial queen melodramas whilst not so subtly referencing a rather amorphous conception of "rebellion." Starring a soon-to-be-famous Pamela Austin (whom *Variety* described as setting a new trend in moving "up from Blurbsville"), the television ads are

[362] "Rebellion Leads to 'Dodge fever'," *Broadcasting* (24 July 1967): 77.

structured around a midway cliffhanger.[363] Austin plays the "Dodge Rebellion Girl," who typically creeps into the frame clothed in "revolutionary" black turtleneck and slacks and invites the audience to join her secretive movement with some punning pitch concerning the latest model of Dodge. Inevitably, Austin stumbles into a peril reminiscent of the serial queen melodramas, complete with a cliffhanger signaled by a freeze frame. A male voiceover takes over for a montage of Dodge vehicles engaging in typical automobile action for ads (tearing up a beach, loading and unloading a large family of youthful baby boomers, hauling an outrageous quantity of some building material or other, etc.), before returning to Austin in the final moments to show she has escaped danger unscathed. That BBDO and Chrysler would associate the "youth market" with a vague notion of righteous political revolt in a year that marked the founding of the Black Panther Party and the death of over 17,000 Americans and nearly 240,000 Vietnamese in that conflict, amidst nationwide war protests on college campuses and elsewhere, was not seemingly lost on the campaign's architects, nor on media commentators.[364]

In a *Broadcasting* profile, BBDO vice president George F. Beech, Jr. admitted that the agency did have some reservations in structuring an ad campaign around inherently anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist public protests as "on the surface in retrospect it might seem that inciting citizens to rise up in rebellion […] might not

---

363 "Up From Blurbsville," *Variety* (13 April 1966): 35.
364 "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics," National Archives Military Records (https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics).

do much toward getting anybody to buy anything."[365] Lest he put too fine a point on it, Beech continued:

> There was the possibility of a negative reaction to a rebellion theme, even a tongue-in-cheek rebellion. If we were to use it we would have to sugar-coat it.
>
> The consensus was that a pretty girl could give the theme a light touch. We decided that a good-looking, pixie-type girl should be our Dodge Rebellion symbol. She would be a charming spokesman but an inept rebel [… we] screened it for two test groups to find out if there would be any negative reaction. Only 1% objected to the theme because of *world conditions.*[366]

Despite the vague and passing mention of opaque "world conditions," both the agency and broadcasters knew the specific implications of their campaign, as it was reported in *Broadcasting* that local affiliates pulled the ads during the Detroit anti-police demonstrations in the summer of 1967, lest they "contribute to any misunderstandings" and provide the strange image of a major automaker encouraging the populace, in Detroit of all places, to rebel (beyond the use of their wallets, that is).[367] The ads prompted a response from noted comedian and ad executive Carroll Caroll, who quipped, in the pages of *Variety,* that the "third largest automaker in the United States came along (while we were fighting an ugly war in Vietnam) and suggested the Dodge Rebellion. Fortunately, the idea was presented when a lot of our young men were busy dodging something else. As a matter of fact, the Dodge Rebellion had trouble competing with the action at Berkeley. Ultimately, Dodge had to scrap it and come up with something that

---

[365] George F. Beech, Jr., "Monday Memo: TV helps turn Dodge Rebellion sales to Fever pitch," *Broadcasting* (3 March 1969): 18.
[366] *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.
[367] "Riots in the cities test radio, TV," *Broadcasting* (31 July 1967): 44-45.

sounded a little less like Black Power."[368] Fully aware of the campaign's problematic thematics, the authors endeavored to white wash and "sugar coat" this reductive conception of "rebellion" not just with Pamela Austin, but also with an invocation of an older and supposedly more wholesome brand of residual entertainment.

Unsurprisingly, as the form becomes more properly residual, none of the trade paper notices related to the campaign makes specific mention of the use of silent serial aesthetics in the adverts. This deployment of the residual is more in line with Huhtamo's contention that, in the case of advertising, the utilization of certain topological elements "rarely happens systematically, in full awareness of the workings of the topoi. In fact, it often seem that topoi just happens to pop up in contemporary advertisements […] and need to be pointed out."[369] Though the reimagining of the serial queen melodramas in the Dodge Rebellion ads seem to operate without "full awareness," the ads are certainly of a piece with another campaign that passive-aggressively invoked contemporary feminism, hinging upon a linkage between the suffragettes and silent cinema: the long-running "You've Come a Long Way, Baby" campaign for Virginia Slims cigarettes, developed by the Leo Burnett Agency and Philip Morris. As Emily Westkaemper has explained, the late-60s campaign drew upon the Women's Advertising Club of Chicago's (WACC) frequent use of women's history in their efforts, where they "tailored their

---

[368] Carroll Carroll, "The Anti-Hero of Mad Mad. Ave.," *Variety* (3 January 1968): 84; 88.
[369] Huhtamo, 38.

depictions of the past to their own organizational and professional goals."[370] Controversially however, the Leo Burnett Virginia Slims campaign was designed, like the Dodge Rebellion ads, exclusively by "15 guys in Search of a Feminine Identity" to market Philip Morris' first brand of cigarettes "exclusively" for women and was the subject of numerous criticisms for its one-dimensional sexism across the campaign's nearly thirty-year run.[371] Juxtaposing comedic interpretations of the plights and struggles of historical American women against the apparent consumer freedom of the modern woman, the campaign laughingly reflected on the efforts of first-wave feminists in order to render the bubbling second wave seemingly inert. The chosen aesthetic means for such a process was the silent film. As Westkaemper explains, each of the initial television spots "began with a comedic dramatization of early twentieth century women's daily lives, shot to mimic 1910s silent films. A manipulated frame rate accelerated the action, evoking the style of slapstick shorts, and piano music provided the score."[372] These now standard visual markers of silent cinema ultimately give way to stark late-60s mod aesthetics, speeding "viewers from 1920 to 1968, celebrating feminism but defining its success entirely through the existence of Virginia Slims and the physical beauty of its ideal consumer."[373] Now able to purchase and consume their own brand of cigarettes, modern women had apparently "come a long way," but "[performed] no work and [did] not protest,

---

[370] Emily Westkaemper, *Selling Women's History: Packaging Feminism in Twentieth-Century American Popular Culture* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 180-181.
[371] *Ibid.,* 182.
[372] *Ibid.,* 183.
[373] *Ibid.,* 184.

simply posing and smoking against a white background."[374] Philip Morris' deployment of silent cinema aesthetics in these ads is unambiguously archaic, relating the strife and media of an earlier era to the present in a manner that signals that feminism was, like the silent cinema, atavistic and bygone--inequities resolved more than a generation ago and resulting in the apparently obvious reward of slimmer cigarettes. Relating second-wave feminism with its earlier counterpart by means of the silent cinema worked, not unlike the *Perils* 47, to make contemporary struggles seem arcane and of little importance. Devoid of under-cranking and piano rolls, the Dodge Rebellion ads offered a more subtle residual invocation of the serial queens as it pitched to a more generalized audience, utilizing a serialized structure to summon the media past in a nonetheless equally toxic imagination of the present.

Dodge and BBDO were certainly not the first to apply serial narrativity to television advertising. In 1962 *Sponsor* noted a "hot new trend in TV commercials" that arrived "under the old nickelodeon movie tag of 'cliffhanger,' [a] new breed of commercial [that] has all the intriguing aspects of a sophisticated Dashiell Hammett whodunit."[375] Of particular note was the work of the J. Walter Thompson agency for Seven-Up, whose campaign offered a similar approach to the Virginia Slims ads in presenting a serialized chronological telos depicting "advancements" from the beverage's introduction in 1929 to the then present.[376] The Dodge

---

[374] *Ibid.*
[375] "Meet the 'Cliffhanger' Sell," *Sponsor* (12 March 1962), 39.
[376] *Ibid.*

Rebellion ads provide something altogether different in employing a double-pronged seriality, as the cliffhangers of particular ads are resolved within the duration of the spot, but nonetheless encourage a continued investment in the ongoing series. In this way the ads appropriate the structure of the initial *Perils of Pauline* in salving the cliffhanger's narrative and affective disruption with classical resolution.

One representative ad utilizes the railroad tracks film serial cliché in opening with Austin pushing away on a sidecar loaded with boxes marked "TNT" and "explosives." In MLS, Austin directly addresses the camera with a monologue about "typical compacts" being on the wrong track, before a cut to a LS of a fast-approaching locomotive prompts Austin to frantically pump faster while enjoining the audience to "join the Dodge rebellion!" An over the shoulder freeze frame signals a cliffhanger before an abrupt cut to a quick pan shows a Dodge Dart convertible crossing another set of railroad tracks. In the driver seat is another blonde woman who resembles Austin but is clearly not. A lackadaisical male voice-over subsequently describes the car's features while a rapidly cut montage compartmentalizes the car and its driver as it moves away from the railroad and onto a winding highway. The ad quickly returns to Austin by way of a reversal of the same rapid pan of the railroad to show the sidecar bump a switch and move onto an adjacent track just in the nick of time. Austin closes the ad with another direct address, pointing to the camera and shouting "the Dodge Rebellion wants you" over the blare of the locomotive's horn.

Curiously, the ads employ a double doppelganger of Pearl White to simultaneously invoke youthful revolt as a means of capitalist consumption while

pairing those images with cruising cars and open roads to suggest that the inequities prompting such a revolt might be ignored and escaped with the already standard advertising imagery of rugged individualism and freedom associated with automobiles and the "open road." In this manner, the ads call to mind the silent serial's balance of empowerment and imperilment, with the reckless perils of Austin's activities implying a larger supposed recklessness in contemporary protest, whilst being paired with a vision of empowerment associated with the act of consumerist consumption. As Stamp argues vis-à-vis Pearl White in the *Perils* 14, Austin has no apparent control over the mechanisms that she seeks to employ, trains in the case of the above described ad, but also myriad others such as explosives, cannons, scuba gear, airplanes, boats, etc. – but never cars. The technologically-induced danger facing Austin falsely implies a certain degree of verisimilitude similar to the serial queen films, and is an incitement to the audience to enjoy the freedoms and relative safety of the automobile.





Figure 26: A cliffhanger buttresses car sales in *Dodge Rebellion* TV ads

A precursor to what Ella Howard calls "pink truck ads"--those advertising campaigns developed by a number of automakers in the 1970s to pitch directly to women, initially through *Ms.* magazine—the Dodge ads do not imagine particular products for women (as with Virginia Slims), but depict women driving their full

range of automobiles.[377] The isolation of Pamela Austin in the serial film bookends, however, places the new market segmentation within a comfortingly normative and residual frame. Not "past" and therefore archaic, the presentation of the serial queen melodrama here appears of the moment but is nonetheless of a piece with the Ohio Express cover in centering gendered violence and imperilment. Returning to Bean's contention that the serial queens "stood for a particular synthesis of femininity, athletic virility, and effortless mobility," we can see that the combination of the two Pearl White doppelgangers offers a residual reflection on that synthesis, with femininity and athletic virility, along with its associated danger, sequestered from mobility by the narrative limits of the freeze frame cliffhanger which gives way to a montage of the open road. In so doing, the Dodge ads liken the productive energy of "rebellion" to an older residual form in which the gendered aspects of that energy was redirected towards a burgeoning film industry and star culture. Here, too, that energy is neutralized into acts of consumerist consumption but, unlike the Virginia Slims ads, it does so with a residual rather than archaic approach. That campaign used direct references to the silent cinema in order to neutralize and cash in on second-wave feminism. The Dodge Rebellion ads blend an assumption that the "youth market" being pursued is primarily concerned with generational conflict, while assuaging viewer anxiety with the comforting patina of a residual form. The functioning of this blend hinges upon the relationship between violence and the cliffhanger.

---

[377] Ella Howard, "Pink Truck Ads: Second-Wave Feminism and Gendered Marketing," *Journal of Women's History* 22.4 (Winter 2010): 137.

Austin variously rides in a rail car filled with explosives, drops crates from airplanes, brandishes a bazooka, and fires a cannon, all the while calling on the audience to "join the Dodge Rebellion." This fictionalized incitement to violence in the Dodge Rebellion ads has another corollary in the career of Pearl White. As Liz Clarke has shown in regards to Pearl White's World War One "preparedness" serial *Pearl of the Army* (1916), the intertextuality and intermediality of the serial form is particularly apt for the transmission of political messaging.[378] Clarke argues that serial genre functioned "as an already popular format through which a number of debates happening in contemporary American politics were transformed into entertaining narratives aimed at a female audience," playing upon popular anxieties while "the white, female heroine, centered as *the* American girl provides a dual purpose. She is both ready to fight for her home and she is the image of home."[379] Like these WWI serials, the Dodge ads draw upon an oblique and obviously fictionalized account of rebellion and protest at home paired with the imagery of guerrilla warfare, but do so with the "sugar-coated" presence of Pamela Austin, who performs masculinity in her obvious preparations for violence, while "maintaining feminine qualities and thus remaining [a] admirable and non-threatening figure."[380] The young, white, female heroine here simplifies the conflict unfolding everyday on the streets of the nation and foreign battlegrounds, but

---

[378] Liz Clarke, *The American Girl Goes to War: Women and National Identity in US Silent Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, Forthcoming 2022), 149. My thanks to Dr. Clarke for the use of a publication draft of her forthcoming book.
[379] *Ibid.,* 153.
[380] *Ibid.,* 155.

simultaneously imagines it as wholesome, silly, and of little concern. Austin's appearance, language, and costuming is clearly of the present and functions to narrativize and fictionalize, in a serial fashion, the violence enacted on the television news for which the Dodge ads surely provided a sponsorship bracket. Just as White's preparedness serials encouraged a continued investment on the part of the viewer by way of the cliffhanger, and thus offered a continued site for political engagement, the dual seriality of the Dodge ads work to conflate the physical form of Austin with both the violence of the present and the residual security of the past.

Like Denson's "logic of the line segment," the cutting of the rope (or, in this case, cinematic cutting on the railroad tracks) creates a kind of discontinuous multiplicity, in that Austin's incitements and their stilted invocation of the violence of the 1960s expands across the entirety of an ad campaign, but also across the everyday shock of violence on the primetime news, in an interlocking fashion. But the structure aims to protect the central purpose of the ads, as the violence is kept decidedly separate from the actual promotion of the automobiles by means of the cliffhanger. Thus the deployment of the residual form of the serial queen melodrama here leaves the product (the Dodge automobile) outside of time – not old or "conservative," but youthful, even if detached from the upheavals occurring in that decade. An example of the active residual, the serial queen melodrama appears here again to compress "rebellion," either for the purpose of gender or racial equality, or against militarism, into a serialized melodrama whose energies expand and contract with the logic of the cliffhanger, and thus reimagines the upheavals of the 1960s as fully integrated within dominant culture.

However oblique the residual appearance of the structure of the serial queen melodramas in the Dodge ads, Pamela Austin was nonetheless cast in a pilot for yet another remake of the *Perils of Pauline,* this time as a regular series at CBS. Whether or not the ads predated the conception of the television series (or vice versa) is not at all clear from the trade press. In March of 1966, *Variety* reported that the TV spots had given Austin the status of "instant celebrity" and would "ring the death knell of the old myth about waiting for stardom on a stool at Schwab's in Hollywood," and that, on the back of such popularity, Austin was cast in the lead role of Pauline for that fall season, 1966.[381] In August of 1967, however, the same publication noted that CBS had passed on airing the pilot in 1965, sold it to Universal to be padded out for a feature film release, and that NBC was now considering airing the TV programme in '68-'69.[382] The idea for the series nonetheless hinged on Austin's stardom: "Since the original pilot the actress has gone on to blurb fame as the Dodge Girl. True to the traditions of the silent-pix heroine, the Dodge Girl blurbs found the pitchwoman in cliffhanger situations while screaming at viewers […] NBC psyched a new approach to a 'Pauline' tv series in the blurb antics."[383] The TV series was never produced, but the padded pilot was given a limited release as a theatrical film by Universal in 1967. Promotional materials suggest that Austin's "blurb fame" was deemed sufficient to promote the film in and of itself, as posters feature an illustration of Austin giving an Uncle Sam

---

[381] "Put an Austin in Your Dodge: Young Actress Parlays Video Spots Into TV Starrer for Fall; 1G-a-Day for Dodge Tour," *Variety* (23 March 1966): 60.
[382] "Rescue Squad for 'Perils' Pilot," *Variety* (16 August 1967): 33.
[383] *Ibid.*

finger to the viewer a la the Dodge Rebellion ads, with the none-too-subtle tagline "that 'Rebellion Girl' is dodgin' unbelievable perils in *The Perils of Pauline*." Austin, like Pearl White overlooking her promotional materials from the perch of her hot air balloon, had achieved a fully formed star image on the basis of media that put her in harm's way.



Figure 27: "That 'Rebellion Girl is dodgin' unbelievable perils in *The Perils of Pauline* (1967)

This final remake of the *Perils of Pauline* (thus far) has none of the residual purpose of *Penelope Pitstop* or the Dodge Rebellion, and instead functions as a

strange paratext to the advertisements (rather than the other way around). While these other two 1960s entries in the serial queen topology offer a refraction of the silent serial's balance between empowerment and imperilment vis-à-vis the serial queen, *Perils* 67 fully embraces the long gestating blend with silent slapstick over a vignette structure of racist and clichéd episodes that bely the film's televisual origins but do not embrace the serial film's alternative to classicism. Constructed, like the *Perils* 47, around a heterosexual romance, the film also stars Pat Boone as the ostensible hero of the film searching the world over for Pauline (his childhood sweetheart) whose antics mean she perpetually plays the damsel in distress in need of saving. Devoid of the possibilities offered by the serial queen melodrama, the film finally replaces "slapstick" for the whole of silent cinema with "perils" that are rendered with the now familiar accelerated frame rate, hammy reaction shots, and ragtime piano.

Fully removed from the non-classical form to which it ostensibly responds, the serial queen here oddly comes full circle in that her body is indeed absent, flattened, and dehumanized, not to the "fearless, peerless" stardom of Pearl White, but a new, and no less violent, kind of stardom related to the perpetually ephemeral world of television advertising. However novel the Hollywood trade press may have found the possibility of actresses finding film and television work on the basis of popular adverts on the small screen, here the radical verisimilitude of the extraordinary body, representative of "film's forgotten future" was merely another body within the gears of capitalist promotion. Huhtamo is correct that media topoi "are created, transmitted, and modified by cultural agents operating in historically

specific circumstances; they are not unchanging archetypes or proto-images existing *beyond* culture."[384] Thus we must acknowledge that the overall legacy of the continued recycling of the silent serial form was in equal parts about the solidification of classical forms/business practices, and the insidious and exclusionary limitations placed upon women within these structures.

In the same *Broadcasting* profile in which BBDO vice president George Beech admitted concern over the Dodge Rebellion's stilted topicality, he also gleefully conceded that Pamela Austin was not the first actress cast in the campaign, as they had to replace the original star, Connie Snow, after they "worked the kid so hard she collapsed on the set one day and we have to get a quick substitute […] it was clear that being the Dodge Rebellion girl was too much for one little female."[385] Connie Snow and Pamela Austin may not have actually swung out over a cliff face as the serial queens did, but the misogynistic workings of dominant advertising and film and televisual production were still as menacing in their own way as any hooded villain or Hollywood studio head. Pearl White's obituary may have remembered her as the screen's most daring performer but it is clear that over fifty years later the industry was no less dangerous for women and no closer to the promise of the serial queen melodramas, their death-defying stunts offering little reward.

---

[384] Huhtamo, 34.
[385] Beech, 18.

Conclusion
?: Constellating the Unseen in Media History

In 1986, The Nashville Network (TNN), a country music-themed cable television network, began airing episodes of *Happy Trails Theatre*. Hosted by Dale Evans and Roy Rogers (occasionally joined by their son, Roy Rogers, Jr.), the repertory program showcased films from their Republic Studios back-catalogue with opening and closing interstitial introductions and interviews with a variety of B-Western players, including Gene Autry and Pat Buttram. While a majority of the episodes featured a group of Gower Gulch old-timers cracking stale jokes and trying to remember the names of bit players, the installment introducing *Sunset in El Dorado* differs in some telling ways, as it simultaneously confirms and elides Dale Evans' central role in the creation of a B-Western intermedial universe in the late 1940s.[386]

Evans begins the episode with a set of reminiscences for Rogers: "you know, this was the picture that was written for me because they thought that you were going to have to go into the service—it was a picture starring *me*." Rogers interjects to explain the evolving nature of his draft status in 1945, before Evans describes the film's somewhat woolly plot "told in retrospect." She clearly delights in reliving her memories of playing a dual role in a film possessing a complexity unmatched in her Republic Studios filmography. Within the short introduction, Evans provides insights concerning the process of screenwriting in B-film production and the work

---

[386] Episodes of *Happy Trails Theatre* are available on Mill Creek Entertainment's 2009 DVD box set *The Roy Rogers Happy Trails Collection.*

of character actors such as Margaret Dumont. *Sunset in El Dorado* is presented as quite unlike the more typical fare associated with Rogers and Evans, until Junior reductively refers to the film as "the one where mom goes back in time, instead of dad," reducing the singularity of Evans' accomplishments to a footnote in Roy Rogers' story, as Herbert Yates had done so many years before. Returning at the end of the film, Evans describes plans for a new book analyzing celebrity from an evangelical lens, a work that would eventually become her response to the Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart scandals, *Only One Star: A Guide For The Celebrity Syndrome,* published in 1988.

As an instance of pedagogically-geared constellated media designed to teach film history to a popular audience, the *Happy Trails Theatre* is of a piece with other similarly "educational" objects tied to Pearl White and Mary Pickford. The aforementioned Robert Youngson silent-era compilation film, *Days of Thrills and Laughter* (1961), for example, describes in voiceover the legacy of Pearl White's serial queen melodramas thus: "Pearl's first serial, which thrilled so many so long ago, may seem primitive today. But since then, many a polished production with casts of thousands and cost of millions has come, gone, and been forgotten, while the world still remembers *The Perils of Pauline*!*"* In much the same instructive style, The Mary Pickford Foundation's 2012 DVD boxset *Rags & Riches: The Mary Pickford Collection*, introduces the movies with a set of short films in which a group of modern children discover a collection of old film reels and a projector in a grandfather's attic, leading to a series of object lessons where the children learn

about film projection, distribution, and production through the lens of Pickford's early career.

Each of these objects uses the same case studies addressed here to provide simple lessons in film history to a popular audience. The difference between *Days of Thrills and Laughter,* the Pickford Foundation shorts, and *Happy Trails Theatre* is that while the first two offer the same expected reflections on the successful portions of their respective subjects' careers, the latter reveals a history of women's artistic production in Hollywood that has, until now, remained unexamined in popular discourse. Coming just before the 1960s' deluge of topological resuscitations of the serial queen melodrama outlined in Chapter Three, *Days of Thrills and Laughter*'s remembrance of White is unsurprising. Nor is the overt way that White and other serial queens are nonetheless sidelined within the film's summary of silent cinema, compared not with the film's male subjects but with "other film heroines sighing with unrequited love." The Pickford Foundation shorts, likewise, understand Mary Pickford's centrality to the general arc of silent film history, but stop short of fully embracing the unparalleled influence the Pickford Foundation and archives have had in the telling of that history. Little to no mention is made, of course, of Pickford's career after her retirement from the screen in 1933. Each of these retrospective objects nonetheless underscores the significant heuristic possibility inherent in serialized constellated media, and the potential of peripheral paratextual forms to equalize knowledge and rebalance our perspective away from the dominant film history that has for so long been considered the centre. The faded

stars in a constellation still form essential elements of its overall figure, and reveal that no individual light illuminates more than any other.

This project has employed a theory of the constellation to set into relief a parallel, even hidden, history of Hollywood's serial intermediality, and to relate the overlooked aspects of the stories of three women who are not typically understood as "forgotten." To relate these narratives by means of constellating is to reveal the additional interconnections, gaps, and lacunae that remain for exploration within a history of serial intermediality. In Shelley Stamp's prescription for how scholars might tackle the "work ahead," one finds many alignments with my own methods; she advises that scholars "look past the screen;" "fundamentally reconceive authorship;" "trace alternative genealogies;" "acknowledge libidinal investments;" "offer more composite views;" and, most pertinent for this study, "embrace unsuitable sources" and "make absence productive."[387] Even so, Stamp forecasts the challenge facing such alternative histories: "meticulous case studies of individual women and discrete historical moments have done little to disrupt conventional histories. They remain on a parallel track, interesting footnotes to the central story. Our scholarship is accumulating along the sidelines of film history, railing in the

---

[387] Shelley Stamp, "Feminist Media Historiography and the Work Ahead," *Screening the Past* 40, September 2015, http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-40-first-release/feminist-media-historiography-and-the-work-ahead/

dark like Louise Brooks' marginalia, populating the little grey sidebars of our student's textbooks."[388]

This project's case studies were determined by the vagaries of archival access, the limited funds and time afforded to graduate researchers and, ultimately, by my own libidinal investments in the silent and sound film serial and the way those films are considered a footnote to classicism, rather than an essential component of Hollywood history. Nonetheless, the detail related in this project's case studies would escape even the "little grey sidebars," where White hangs from cliffs, Pickford is an early film celebrity and co-founder of United Artists, and Evans is but a sole "cowgirl" in a world of cowboys. The continually expanding world of what I have termed the serial cultural paradigm shows, however, that these are not singular instances of academic novelty but an entirely different branch of media history that undergirds everything from our understanding of the institutionalization and supposed dissolution of classical Hollywood to the countless breathless pages published on the digital and the "death of cinema."

As I outline in the introduction, it is essential that we, as researchers, rethink our definitions of seriality. The term has had some import of late in the many publications referenced above, but more importantly it is an essential component of how Hollywood history is typically understood. The narrative understanding of seriality as the movement from one plot point to the next until a satisfying conclusion is reached typifies determinist historical accounts in general,

---

[388] *Ibid.*

but also the specific way that the "serial film" is understood as a hiccup in studio Hollywood's otherwise seamless integration of classicism. Dissolving our understanding of the serial as a forward moving entity from A to B and replacing it with Umberto Eco's notion of the loop and the spiral, or Shane Denson and Ruth Mayer's serial figures in an intermedial nexus, or indeed my proposition of constellated media, frees not only the serial form from its marginalized status in media history, but also liberates our entire historiographic enterprise. None of my three chosen case studies possess instances of "narrative" interconnection with one another, but that is precisely part of the point. Like three sides of a crystalline star, each case study offers its own iteration of the serial cultural paradigm. In their collective discontinuity they reveal an underappreciated continuity: the continued centrality of the serial form to American media production after the conversion to sound and well into such hallowed temporal "posts" in that history as post-World War Two, or post-Paramount Decision, or post-television. I make brief mention of theories of "convergence" and "transmedia" only to demonstrate that intermedial interconnection inflects all of media history, not just that produced under the contemporary aegis of digital industrial conglomeration and synergy. And the work of women is at the centre of each of these reflections, driving and defining the serial cultural paradigm, not as footnotes, but as the main story.

Chapter Three's discussion of a topology of Pearl White as serial figure most directly relates that the serial film's "forgotten future" so appreciated by the surrealists did not merely disappear in the 1920s, but was rethought and reappropriated across the 20th century like a spectre haunting its supposedly

ascendant alternative. That the narrative and formal alternative offered by the serial film was so intimately tied to the serial queen's extraordinary body, to again invoke Jennifer Bean's evergreen theory, links the "abandoned" possibility of the form to the "abandoned" possibilities of women's work in American media production.[389] The power of that possible future was so great, however, that even while it was sidelined, it continued to operate behind the scenes. Pearl White became the ultimate representation of this continued operation, and as a serial figure her image became in itself a constellated medium: seemingly ephemeral, and undefined by media boundaries, it continued to appear and reappear as if to express that that initial potential could not be fully snuffed out. Embracing the absence of the film serial and the serial queens in subsequent Hollywood history uncovers the fact that such an absence was totally artificial and actually belies an ever-evolving presence.

If Chapter Three reveals the omni-presence of the serial cultural paradigm, Chapter One relates the ways that that paradigm was still subject to marginalization. In this case we have a double erasure: the massive output of B-units and independent producers remains underexplored in standard accounts—it functions as a literal grey sidebar for Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, for

---

[389] Again, Mark Garrett Cooper has eloquently established the origins of this linkage, noting that the serial queen melodrama's "configuration of possibility and constraint, novelty and tradition, was predicated on two theories of social power. First, serials demonstrated that the power responsible for imperiling modern individuals and securing their safety was organizational in character. Second, they demonstrated that such organizations properly subordinated professional collaboration to hierarchical specialization, with a man at the top of the hierarchy." Cooper, 127.

example—and the contributions of women in that field remain totally unaccounted for. The initial impetus of this project's archival research was to remedy some of that initial erasure, but I was quickly disabused of that notion by Rick Jewell and Ned Comstock of USC, who graciously took the time to inform me that the archival records of Columbia and Republic studios are all but non-existent. Consulting with Louise Hilton of the Margaret Herrick Library about film serials and comic strip adaptations eventually led to the treasure trove that is the Comet Production files. Given Comet's brief tenure, one can readily understand why the company rarely emerges in either remembrances of Pickford's career, or in more expansive chronicles of B production before, during, and after the war. However, that very brevity makes Comet Productions a productive example: constellated media have tended to offer alternative avenues for opportunity for women in Hollywood beyond the screen, even if those opportunities were not always fully realized. In adapting a comic strip like *Little Iodine,* Pickford sought to enter into a B-production marketplace in flux by seizing upon another opportunity to invoke her star image, a star image that had so centrally defined her screen and business career in an earlier period. Though Pickford and her business partners misjudged the realities of independent B-production after the war, the story of their failure contributes to the limited history of women's work in B-movies. Admittedly, this act of (re)discovery adds Pickford's name to an extremely short list that may only also contain Ida Lupino. But, even if the act of discovery serves as the "first step" described by Dall'Asta and Gaines, to outline the ways in which the serial cultural paradigm offered artistic opportunities through an engagement with constellated media

nonetheless suggests that there are additional stories to be told, and that we need to reassess the ways in which historians relate them.

Chapter Two contains the most robust examples of the means by which constellated media offered alternatives to limitations placed on women by male studio heads and the operations of Hollywood film production. Frustrated by Republic's continual side-lining of her talents to side-kick status, and controversially unimpressed at receiving billing below a horse, Dale Evans became a pioneering overseer of paratextual forms such as the comic book, the popular song, and merchandising. Evans' turn to constellated media production reached its apogee with her later evangelical media. Placing a text like *Angel Unaware* in conversation with Amelie Hastie's work on the star autobiography allows us to assess the usefulness of constellated media, while also developing a novel historiographical process for describing those media. Constellating with her tragically deceased child, Evans produced a useful serial historiography that reminds us that we must look past the singularity of the film text (or any other singular text, for that matter) to find underexplored linkages and interconnections. That this process was explicitly theological for Evans produces a useful entry point for comparisons with Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where the "time of the now" is "shot through with chips of messianic time."[390] The chips, in this case, are related to the functioning of constellated media: forms considered "outside" the film text, these serial objects nonetheless form intermedial

[390] Benjamin, *Theses*, 263.

associations with one another and produce a larger constellation of understanding. Taking these forms together, as Evans does in *Angel Unaware*, reveals an untold history of intermedial production and a secondary continuity outside those holistic narratives we generally associate with American media history.

My elaboration of a theory of constellated serial intermediality punctuates the fact that for every overlooked media object, for every underexplored historical interconnection, for every neglected person, in not just "early" but all of cinema history, there are countless more. Part of addressing this issue is finding these gaps where they present themselves in the archival record (and, as Stamp suggests, looking to new and otherwise dismissed sources), but the larger concern rests with *how* these histories are written. A theory of constellated media allows us not only to find and utilize neglected sources, but also to elaborate the ways in which they formed interconnections with one another. Operating within constellated media's serial nexus affirms that the lines drawing together the periphery trace an altogether different image, an altogether different whole. Like the *The Perils of Pauline*'s summary cliffhanger title card of a giant, all-encompassing question mark, erotemes populate media history to such an extent that to acknowledge them and place them in conversation with one another must eventually entail an overturning of dominant narratives. Serialized constellated media enjoin us to hurry back next week for the next installment, for the serial queen still hangs in the balance and the story has not yet been fully told.



Figure 28: Continued Next Week.

Bibliography

Abel, Richard. *Menus for Movieland: Newspapers and the Emergence of American Film Culture, 1913-1916.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

Acland, Charles R., editor. *Residual Media.* Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2006.

--- and Haidee Wasson, editors. *Useful Cinema.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011

Altman, Rick. *Silent Film Sound.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Balio, Tino *United Artists: The Company Built by the Stars Volume 1, 1919-1950.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976.

Barbour, Alan G. *Days of Thrill and Adventure.* New York: Collier Books, 1970.

Barefoot, Guy. *The Lost Jungle: Cliffhanger Action and Hollywood Serials of the 1930s and 1940s.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2017.

Barthes, Roland. "The Discourse of History," in *The Rustle of Language,* translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989: 127-140.

Bean, Jennifer M. "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema,* edited by Jennifer M. Bean & Diane Negra. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002: 403-443.

Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations* edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968: 253-264.

---. *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

---. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* trans. John Osborne. London: Verso, 1998.

Benson-Allott, Caetlin. "Editor's Introduction: Special Issue on Materialisms" *Feminist Media Histories* 1.3, (July 2015): 1-3.

Bolter, David J. and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media.* Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000.

Brasch, Ilka *Film Serials and the American Cinema, 1910-1940: Operational Detection.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018.

Brooker, Will. *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon.* London: Bloomsbury, 2000.

Callahan, Vicki, ed. *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010.

Canjels, Rudmer. *Distributing Silent Film Serials: Local Practices, Changing Forms, Cultural Transformation.* London: Routledge, 2011.

Clarke, Liz. "Review Essay: Recent Works on Women in Media Production," *Gender & History* 30.3 (October 2018): 820-832.

---. *The American Girl Goes to War: Women and National Identity in US Silent Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, Forthcoming 2022)

Conant, Michael. *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry: Economic and Legal Analysis.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.

Cooper, Kim & David Smay, eds. *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth.* Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001.

Cooper, Mark Garrett. *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

Coontz, Stephanie. *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s.* New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Dahlquist, Marina. "Introduction: Why Pearl?" in *Exporting Perilous Pauline: Pearl White and the Serial Film Craze,* edited by Marina Dahlquist. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013: 1-24.

Dall'Asta, Monica and Jane M. Gaines. "Constellations: Past Meets Present in Feminist Film History" in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future,* edited by Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015: 13-28.

Davis, Blair. *Movie Comics: Page to Screen, Screen to Page*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017.

Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Denson, Shane. "Marvel Comics' Frankenstein: A Case Study in the Media of Serial Figures," *Amerikastudien* 56.4 (2011): 531-553.

---. "The Logic of the Line Segment: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Serial-Queen Melodrama" in *Serialization and Popular Culture*, edited by Rob Allen & Thijs van den Berg. New York: Routledge, 2014: 65-79.

--- and Ruth Mayer. "Border Crossings: Serial Figures and the Evolution of Media." *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* 7.2 (2018): 65-84.

Dochuk, Darren. *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. New York: W.W. Horton & Company, 2011.

Dunham, Jeremy and Pauline Phemister, "Monadologies: An Historical Overview," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23.6 (2015): 1023-1032.

Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. London: Routledge, 1986.

Eco, Umberto. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

Elsaesser, Thomas. *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016.

Evans Rogers, Dale. *Angel Unaware*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1953.

---. *Time Out, Ladies!* Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966.

---. *cool it or lose it! Dale Evans Rogers Raps with Youth*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1972.

---. with Frank S. Mead, *Let Freedom Ring!* Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1975.

Forman-Brunell, Miriam. "Anxious Adults and Bad Babysitters: The Struggle over Girlhood in Interwar America." *Girlhood Studies* 2.1 (Summer 2009): 130-147.

Fuller-Seeley, Kathryn H. "What the Picture Did For Me: Small-Town Exhibitors' Strategies for Surviving the Great Depression," in *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*, ed. Kathryn H. Fuller Seeley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008: 186-207.

Gaines, Jane M. *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and The Law*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

---. *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018.

Gardner, Jared. *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

Gaudreault, André. *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, translated by Timothy Barnard. Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Gray, Jonathan. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts.* New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Geiger, Jeffrey and Karin Littau. *Cinematicity in Media History.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Ginzburg, Carlo. "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It" in *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive,* trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012: 193-214.

Gledhill, Christine and Julia Knight, eds. *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Hamilton, Cynthia S. "Spreading the Word: The American Tract Society, 'The Dairyman's Daughter,' and Mass Publishing." *Book History* Vol. 14 (2011): 25-57.

Hansen, Miriam. "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999): 59-77.

Hastie, Amelie. *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Hatch, Kristen. *Shirley Temple: The Performance of Girlhood*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015.

Higgins, Scott. *Matinee Melodrama: Playing with Formula in the Sound Serial*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016.

Hill, Erin. *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016.

Hendershot, Heather. *Saturday Morning Censors: Television Regulation Before the V-Chip* .Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998.

Herkman, Juha "Introduction: Intermediality as a Theory and Methodology" in *Intermediality and Media Change,* Juha Herkman, Taisto Hujanen, & Paavo Oinonen, eds. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2012: 10-28.

Howard, Ella. "Pink Truck Ads: Second-Wave Feminism and Gendered Marketing." *Journal of Women's History* 22.4 (Winter 2010): 137-161.

Huhtamo, Erkki. "Dismantling the Fairy Engine: Media Archaeology as Topos Study" in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications,* edited by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011: 27-47.

Jacobs, Lea. "The B Film and the Problem of Cultural Distinction." *Screen* 33.1 (Spring, 1992): 1-13.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991.

Johnson, Emily Suzanne. *This Is Our Message: Women's Leadership in the New Christian Right*. London: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Jurca, Catherine. *Hollywood 1938: Motion Pictures' Greatest Year*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Kelleter, Frank, ed. *Media of Serial Narrative.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017.

King, Rob. *Hokum! The Early Sound Slapstick Short and Depression-Era Mass Culture.* Berkeley: University of California Press , 2017.

Kluitenberg, Eric. *Book of Imaginary Media: Excavating the Dream of the Ultimate Communication Medium*. Rotterdam: RAI Publishers, 2006.

Lamont, Victoria. *Westerns: A Women's History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

Parikka, Jussi. *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Mayer, Ruth. *Serial Fu Manchu: The Chinese Supervillain and the Spread of Yellow Peril Ideology*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014.

McGillis, Roderick. *He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009.

Meyerowitz, Joanne, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

Mittell, Jason. "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," in *Prime Time Animation,* edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison. New York: Routledge, 2003: 33-45.

Petersen, Christina. "'The Most Assassinated Woman in the World': Pearl White and the First Avant-Garde," in *Exporting Perilous Pauline: Pearl White and the Serial Film Craze,* edited by Marina Dahlquist. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013: 99-125.

Porst, Jennifer. "Roy Rogers and Gene Autry Do Not Endorse This Project: Actors, Advertising, and Feature Films on Early Television." *Television & New Media* 22.4 (May 2021): 420-439.

Projansky, Sarah. *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination & Celebrity Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

Raheja, Michelle H. *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans on Film*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

Read, Robert J. *A Squalid-Looking Place: Poverty Row Films of the 1930s*. McGill University: Unpublished Dissertation, 2010.

Rogers, Maureen. "Remaking the B Film in 1940s Hollywood: Producers Releasing Corporation and the Poverty Row Programmer." *Film History* 29.2 (Summer 2017): 138-164.

Rogers, Roy and Dale Evans, with Carlton Stowers. *Happy Trails*. New York: Bantam Book, 1979.

Sammond, Nicholas. *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Schatz, Thomas. *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

---. "Film Genre and the Genre Film," in *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings,* edited by Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010: 453-465.

Singer, Ben. *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Smith, David A. *Cowboy Presidents: The Frontier Myth and U.S. Politics since 1900*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021.

Stanfield, Peter. *Hollywood, Westerns, and the 1930s: The Lost Trail*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001.

---. *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the Singing Cowboy*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Stamp, Shelley. *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

---. "Feminist Media Historiography and the Work Ahead." *Screening the Past* 40 (September 2015): http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-40-first-release/feminist-media-historiography-and-the-work-ahead/

Strauven, Wanda. "Media Archaeology: Where Film History, Media Art, and New Media (Can) Meet" in *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives,* edited by Julia Noordegraaf, et al. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013: 59-80.

Studlar, Gaylyn. *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2013.

Taves, Brian. "The B Film: Hollywood's Other Half" in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise 1930-1939,* Tino Balio, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: 313-350.

Tzioumakis, Yannis. *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

Usai, Paolo Cherchi *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age.* London: BFI, 2001.

Weber, Samuel. *Benjamin's –abilities.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008..

Westkaemper, Emily. *Selling Women's History: Packaging Feminism in Twentieth-Century American Popular Culture*. Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017.

White, Pearl. *Just Me.* New York: G.H. Doran Company, 1919.

White, Raymond E. *King of the Cowboys, Queen of the West: Roy Rogers and Dale Evans.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

---. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*. London: Verso, 1980.

Wolf, Stacy. *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Zielinski, Siegfried. "Media Archaeology." *CTheory.net (*7/11/1996): http://ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=42#text 4

---. *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008