

Legitimizing Laughter:
Class, Gender and the Rise of Feature Comedy

By

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Abstract

Legitimizing Laughter: Class, Gender and the Rise of Feature Comedy asserts that female audiences shaped the development of feature-length comedy in the 1910s American film industry. As producers sought to attract further female patrons through respectable features, they faced the problem of trends in comedy shorts being perceived as too broad and masculine for most female viewers. To service women's presumed tastes, the industry notably shifted character and plot types from short to feature comedies. Past studies of silent comedy have emphasized slapstick at the expense of comedy forms in which women held stronger sway as both performers and consumers, including avoiding the comedy genre's general transition to features. Scholars valorize slapstick's aggressive physicality and defiance of narrative structures while denigrating comedies targeting female patrons as artistically stifling, culturally fading 'genteel humor.' Feature comedies targeting female audiences, however, did not simply replicate 19th century mores despite embodying middle-class tastes. While much of the literature on gender and comedy highlights the contributions of individual comedienues, this project grants historic value to culturally 'feminine' humor.

This project's methodology involves extensive analysis of trade press publications, screenwriting manuals, exhibitor reports, fan magazines, production files, theatrical publications and extant films for 992 comedies over four reels released between 1913 and 1920. To contextualize approaches to feature comedy, the first chapter also surveys synopses and reviews for 1,388 comedy shorts released in 1913 prior to the introduction of comedies over three reels. After a period of experimentation, producers by the end of the decade settled upon an approach for feature-length comedies to attract multiple sectors of female consumers. I label this strategy 'affirmative comedy,' which emphasized youthful, attractive leads (often female), sympathetic humor and beneficial plot trajectories. While the trade press saw this approach as more wholesome than slapstick, the films complicate scholarly discussions of narratively-driven silent comedies as 'genteel' or 'refined.' Rather than focusing on specific producers or comedienues, this mass compilation of data illustrates the larger influence of feminine taste cultures on comedy as a film genre.

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Introduction

There was no guarantee that feature-length comedy would become a mainstay of the American film industry. While the feature transition of the mid-1910s generally forced producers to undergo a rapid learning process, they had an especially trying experience crafting comedy features. Director Tefft Johnson of the ensemble farce *C.O.D.* (Vitagraph, 1914) was just one of many industry members to express frustration with overseeing a humorous feature. An article in *The Moving Picture World* noted “the stress of directing a feature comedy,” further detailing that Johnson “swore numerous classic and mighty oaths (under his breath of course) in the doing of it.”¹ While the article adopts a playful tone, its direct reference to Johnson’s difficulties reflects the industry’s initial struggle to make critically and financially successful feature comedies. Perusals of the trade press, exhibitor reports and producer correspondence during the mid-teens yield signs of widespread exasperation about comedy features’ riskiness. A review for *Brewster’s Millions* (Paramount, 1914) remarked, “there are many perils in attempting a multiple-reel comedy,”² while a 1916 photoplay manual advised “it will be noted that comedy has not been mentioned in connection with feature work” as “you must either spend your shot too soon or trust to melodrama to keep up the interest in the plot.”³ By the end of 1915, many studios couched their decision to advertise features as ‘comedies’ in defensive language. As a press release for V-L-S-E’s fall 1915 series of feature comedies stated,

“Heretofore the impression prevailed among some exhibitors that only dramatic subjects could be successfully offered as the big feature attraction. Comedies were out of the reckoning. Up until the present time the real drawing power of comedy features had never fully been demonstrated, chiefly because there has been a dearth of good features of this class.”⁴

The publicity piece’s acknowledgment that comedy features’ drawing power had been limited—even while advertising them—points to their initially mixed reception.

By the end of the decade, however, the fortunes of comedy features had taken a remarkable turn. While only 27 comedies over four reels saw release in 1914, the number rose to 95 by the following year and to 233 by 1918.⁵ For the next twenty years, the proportion of comedies among features as a whole remained consistently between 15-25%.⁶ A bevy of stars regularly made feature comedies deemed box office ‘smashes’ with their popularity seconded in fan polls. Those stars include Beverly Bayne and Francis X. Bushman, Marguerite Clark, Ethel Clayton, Viola Dana, Douglas Fairbanks, Harold Lockwood, Mary Miles Minter, Tom Moore, Mabel Normand, Mary Pickford, Charles Ray, Jackie Saunders, Constance Talmadge, and Olive Thomas.⁷ By 1918, exhibitors listed the comedy of five to seven reels as ‘best suited’ to meet audience desires.⁸ Signifying this success at the decade’s close, a nationwide survey of exhibitors taken by *The Moving Picture World* in 1920 declared “light society comedy starring a woman is voted most popular.”⁹ The category beat out all types of dramatic features, along with comedy two-reelers.¹⁰ Such a change in the reputation of feature comedies over the course of a few years is striking.

How *did* comedy features overcome formidable challenges to become vital components of American film culture? Current overviews of silent film offer comedy frameworks of ‘slapstick’ and ‘situation’ that do not capture the complexity of producers’ trial and error process for comedy features. Slapstick refers to forms of physical humor, often assaults on the body that American society tends to perceive as ‘lowbrow,’¹¹ while scholars distinguish other forms of situational comedies as meant for the tastes of higher-class audiences due to a reliance on narrative context.¹² From these assessments of silent comedy, one might presume that the transition to longer, more prestigious features would simply necessitate a move away from slapstick’s pratfalls. To the contrary, a wide array of comedy features struggled due to precarious relationships with class and gender. Some comedy features initially deployed broad comedians from film shorts or stage

musicals that didn't exhibit slapstick's violence but still conflicted with higher-class and feminine tastes. On the other hand, some comedy forms that supplied more narrative structure, such as ensemble farce plays, floundered due to stylistic struggles and a disassociation from female patrons. The current literature's regard for situation humor as 'higher class' also fails to distinguish between 'highbrow' and 'middlebrow' humor. Material seen as too high-class for large swaths of female consumers also proved unpopular as 1910s feature comedies. Producers did not simply move towards 'higher' humor, but rather, underwent a tricky negotiation process.

The survival of feature comedy as an industry staple, this dissertation argues, hinged on female audiences. As the 1910s progressed, producers increasingly constructed feature-length comedies in accordance with the perceived tastes of female viewers. These attempts to appeal to women fundamentally reconfigured character and plot types in film comedy. Though the longer format and silent aesthetics of the feature film certainly affected producers' opinions about what forms of comedy were suitable, the industry's belief that the feature would draw film audiences beyond working-class men proved just as crucial. Producers of feature comedy initially prioritized higher-class women in their advertising but treated female consumers as a monolith by the end of the decade. The industry ignored non-white female consumers in their public overtures, but some of the industry's presumptions about women carried over into Black, middle-class publications.¹³ At the time of the transition, the trade press worried that comedy shorts generally conflicted with higher class and feminine tastes. That conflict posed obstacles for producers if they hoped to craft comedies for the more respectable feature market. The film industry sought in the early 1910s to entice middle and upper class patrons of legitimate theater through the more prestigious 'feature,' and women were variously estimated to make up three-fourths to four-fifths of legitimate audiences.¹⁴ The heavy emphasis on adapting plays for feature-length comedies tied the films

closely to a feminized cultural space, though as previewed above, women had stronger affiliations with some types of plays over others. Legitimate adaptations made up 70% of comedies over three reels in 1914.¹⁵ Film reviews often stressed the vehicles' appeals to female patrons, as had reviews for the original stage productions. Producers and performers of comedy features similarly portrayed their films' box office prospects as reliant upon female consumers. An 1918 profile for legitimate star Taylor Holmes in *Motion Picture Magazine* claimed of both his plays and feature comedies,

“Women, in his mind, are the makers of any attraction, whether of the screen or stage. If they like the show, you don't have to worry about the men. Leave them to the women. They'll drag them in, whether they want to come in or not.”¹⁶

Feature comedies released later in the decade additionally adapted other source materials that targeted female consumers, lifting stories and novelettes from women's magazines such as *Women's Home Companion*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Ainslee's*.¹⁷ The industry additionally hired female screenwriters for feature comedies and touted their ability to reflect a 'feminine' perspective. A 1918 publicity piece for Clara S. Beranger, who primarily wrote light comedies for World and Paramount, claimed female screenwriters were necessary since women enjoyed motion pictures more than men. “To appeal to the female patrons,” Beranger maintained, “the photoplay must display the feminine point of view and no one is better able to project this angle than women writers.”¹⁸

Characters and plotlines in feature-length comedies increasingly corresponded with cultural notions about feminine taste more broadly, however, than just immediate source material. This dissertation proposes that efforts to target female fans resulted in comedy features that typically differed from comedy shorts with respect to story structure, types of performers, and modes of emotional engagement. To encapsulate these strategies, I adopt and modify Henry Jenkins' label of 'affirmative comedy,' which he views as a more realist, socially agreeable

alternative to spectacle-filled, ‘anarchic’ comedy.¹⁹ Most feature comedies by the late 1910s presented an optimistic worldview that ‘affirmed’ society’s positive potential through youthful and likable leads, sympathetic humor and beneficial plot trajectories. Over 90% of all comedies over four reels exhibited these three traits by 1917.²⁰ Members of the film industry presumed female consumers enjoyed appealing stars (socially deemed as having desirable physical or personality attributes), especially young women. Film and theatrical commentators also associated female viewers with sympathetic humor—the notion that women preferred laughing ‘with’ characters rather than ‘at’ them. Instead of relying on a character’s humiliation, punishment, or aggressively anti-social behavior against others, comedy vehicles designed for women often relied on playful mix-ups, benign adventures and the character’s own wit. In addition, film and theatrical critics aligned women with plot progressions that these commentators sometimes dismissed as ‘wish-fulfillment’ stories. Protagonists in comedy features often went through personality maturation, improved relationships or achieved major career gains. While the industry generally assumed that plot development pleased respectable patrons, it characterized this positive growth as specifically suited to feminine tastes. Though these films exhibit a general movement away from the physical humiliation of slapstick, it is critical to note that slapstick could still be harnessed in these kinds of features for certain moments. For instance, a female lead might be portrayed as glamorous for most of the film but spend one scene chasing a pig through mud.

While the industry projected generalized ideas about feminine taste that could not accurately reflect every individual woman’s preferences, its attempts to appeal to ‘generalized’ female viewership appear to have borne fruit. Exhibitor feedback for feature comedies mentioned their success with women, making comments such as “especially pleasing to the women; the house was full of giggles”²¹ or “the exhibitor shouldn’t worry about the men. They’ll have to come whether

they like it or not.”²² By 1918, exhibitors listed comedy features as the most reliable type of attraction to audiences that they claimed were over 60% female.²³ In short, we see a ‘cultural feminization’ of film comedy on a mass scale between the years of 1913 and 1920. That process points to a curious gap in prevailing accounts of silent American cinema. Scholars who affirm the importance of female audiences make virtually no mention of comedy, while those who study silent comedy almost entirely overlook female audiences. Although film historians spotlight women’s influence on the silent industry, the films they point to in this regard tend to be serials, problem plays or other types of dramatic fare.²⁴ Conversely, accounts of silent comedy prioritize slapstick, a form of humor that the industry associated with working class men.²⁵ If we give inadequate attention to the factors that shaped the standardization of feature comedies, we fail to understand female audiences’ pivotal role in shaping American film humor.

Lost Years of Laughter: Secondary Literature and Silent Comedy’s Transition to Features, 1913-1920

No monograph examines how feature comedies became viable products by the end of the 1910s. The gap remains despite a recent surge of scholarly interest in women’s relationship to comedy, as those studies aim to recognize the contributions of female performers.²⁶ Two approaches currently make up scholarly treatments of feature comedies released between 1913 and 1920: the avoidance approach and the passing nod approach. Both approaches’ apathy concerning comedy’s transition to features, I argue, unintentionally erases the relevancy of feminine taste cultures to film comedy as a genre. That neglect supports a larger, masculinized historiographic narrative impoverishing general histories of film comedy.

A good deal of literature on silent cinema exhibits the ‘avoidance approach.’ Histories highlight the sensational success of Charles Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and other male slapstick stars’

transition to features in the 1920s, but most fail to mention, or sometimes outright deny, the substantial existence of feature comedies before those men's contributions. Although American-made comedies of four reels or longer enter the marketplace by the end of 1913, Eileen Bowser's *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (1990) includes no reference to feature comedies.²⁷ While studies of silent comedy regularly consider how Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton or Harold Lloyd transitioned from shorts, their 1920s features arrived well after the standardization of feature comedy.²⁸ In his history of silent film between 1915-1928, Richard Koszarski claims "Relatively few feature comedies were produced before 1920"²⁹ and that "Fairbanks was a one-man show against the shorts talent of Arbuckles, Chaplins and Lloyds."³⁰ Such statements present several factual problems. A stable of stars, often female stars, found commercial success in 1910s comedy features, so the notion of Fairbanks as a 'one-man show' is simply erroneous. Furthermore, it is unclear what Koszarski means by 'relatively few.' If he means in comparison to later decades, the number of comedies over four reels in the late 1910s remain consistent with the 1920s and early 1930s.³¹ If he intends to say that fewer were produced than comedy shorts, it hardly follows that humorous features weren't yet industry staples. Features took more time to produce and maintained longer runs, meaning shorts naturally outnumbered dramatic or comedic features.³² In a similar vein, David Robison's entry on silent comedy in *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (1996) inaccurately claims that *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (Alco, Dec. 1914) was the "first multi-reel comedy" despite the earlier releases of *Brewster's Millions* (Lasky, April 1914), or *The Country Mouse* (Bosworth, Oct. 1914).³³ "It was to be several more years before the feature-length comedy was established," he continues, jumping forward to slapstick auteurs' entrance into the feature field around 1920.³⁴

More recent scholarship tends toward the ‘passing nod’ approach. These scholars acknowledge that feature comedies existed by the end of the 1910s but limit analyses of the transition to a few sentences or paragraphs. These thumbnail sketches do have elements of truth but remain too vague to hold much explanatory power. The most common thesis is that the longer feature required comedies to become more ‘narratively-driven’ as opposed to prioritizing physical gags. Geoff King’s summary in *Film Comedy* (2002), for example, suggests that: “As films became longer, eventually reaching feature length, events tended to become more integrated and less episodic.”³⁵ King avers that modes of comedy ‘emerging from situation’ befit this transition, such as the approach found in the Vitagraph shorts of John Bunny or Sidney Drew.³⁶ The industry did indeed move away from slapstick and broad humor, but saying that comedies became ‘narratively-driven’ or ‘more integrated’ tells us little about which *types* of narratives and characters thrived in 1910s comedy features. Offering Bunny and Drew as examples also demonstrates the limited utility of focusing on ‘situation’ versus slapstick as neither comedian found sustained success in features. King’s emphasis upon situation also encounters issues when one considers how many critics framed popular feature comedies as star vehicles that lacked coherent plotting.

Other scholars similarly emphasize situation, but their word choices also imply that the transition led to ‘refined’ or ‘high-class’ humor. In her groundbreaking study on silent comediennes, Kristen Anderson Wagner succinctly states, “As films grew longer, and narrative supplanted attraction-based cinema, slapstick gave way to light comedy, also described as ‘refined’ or ‘polite’ comedy. This type of comedy was based around situations rather than gags.”³⁷ Wagner’s ‘refined’ adjective suggests comedies became high class in their material. The description of refined humor runs into problems, as comedies considered ‘high class’ on the stage floundered in feature form. In fact, critics usually described successful feature comedies as harmless fluff as

opposed to edifying content. Critics also stressed that such films appealed to ‘all classes’ as opposed to elite tastes. The other adjective—‘polite’—comes closer to accurately identifying feature comedy’s adjustments, but Wagner’s focus is on comediennes as opposed to parsing out which types of polite humor targeted female viewers. Her use of ‘light comedy’ applies better to comedy’s development in features than any other descriptor I’ve seen, but Wagner uses refined, polite and light interchangeably when, in fact, there were important differences in how these terms were applied at the time. For instance, not all types of clean humor held associations with the same audiences. Some types of ‘clean humor,’ such as legitimate farce, targeted middle-class men and did not achieve as much success in 1910s feature films. Similarly, ‘high-class’ humor also struggled in the feature due to conflicts with middle-class mores. While these brief summaries are an important step forward in accuracy, they neither address how feature comedies *resolved* initial hurdles nor how women proved instrumental to this process. They treat the adoption of more ‘narratively-driven’ forms as a naturalized phenomenon, somewhat teleologically recounting comedy’s expansion in feature films.

Descriptions of feature comedy as ‘situational,’ ‘refined’ or ‘polite’ often position them as extensions of genteel culture.³⁸ That perception could explain scholars’ seeming inclination to skim over feature comedy’s development until slapstick comics found sustained success in the 1920s. Much of the literature on silent comedy shows a predilection for slapstick and treats genteel comedy as a stuffy, ideologically retrograde adversary. The term ‘genteel’ harkens back to a lambasting of ‘the genteel tradition’ by George Santayana, Van Wyck Brooks and other modernist critics and academics in the 1910s. They coined the phrase to describe a cadre of New England literary taste makers in the mid and late 1800s that sought to establish high culture in the United States.³⁹ They appropriated the word to denounce Victorian era bourgeois constraints on art. Some

historians use the term more broadly to denote a prevailing system of polite manners, moral conservatism, and refined tastes ostensibly signaling higher class status.⁴⁰ Assimilating this conception, film scholars apply the genteel label to narratively-driven comedies seen as appealing to audiences of higher classes.⁴¹ Echoing earlier modernist critics, contemporary scholars tend to use the term pejoratively, tacitly or explicitly presenting genteel comedy as a tame, unfunny and culturally repressive top-down intrusion.⁴² In contrast to slapstick's classification as a type of aggressive 'New Humor' found in amusements aimed at working class and immigrant men at the turn of the century,⁴³ the literature's insistence on the gentility of the comedy feature distances it from the modern. It is understandable that the literature would devalue the feature transition if it is apprehended as resulting in culturally stagnant or elitist forms of humor.

While this strand of scholarship is understandably suspicious of middle-class dismissals of 'lowbrow' culture, its aversion to respectable humor has effectively removed female consumers from accounts of silent comedy. In more general American histories, historians have called the genteel movement the 'feminization of culture.' Many genteel publishers targeted middle class women and encouraged a cult of domesticity.⁴⁴ Scholars of silent cinema also repeatedly note that producers and exhibitors enconced female patrons in respectability rhetoric, vaunting their presence in theaters as a way to establish films as safe, family-friendly entertainment.⁴⁵ Although the industry primarily targeted middle-class women, working class women weren't excluded from conceptions of respectable comedy. While Nan Enstad notes ways in which working women could differ, and receive criticism from, middle class women in regards to their participation in leisure culture,⁴⁶ the trade press often effaced class difference when discussing women's supposed humor preferences.⁴⁷ For instance, a review for the feature comedy *His Official Fiancée* (Paramount, 1919) only directed exhibitors to "go after the women

as hard as you can” without specifying class, age or regional subsets.⁴⁸ In fact, service sections in the trade press conveyed the belief that working class women resented being reminded of their lower-class status. For instance, a 1919 service section claimed the feature *The Unpainted Woman* would appeal to ‘working women’ but warned “class appeal is always dangerous...this is especially true of women,” and said that while female patrons would like the heroine of the film, “make no reference to the fact that the women who you are addressing are working women.”⁴⁹ The industry, especially by the end of the decade, portrayed feature-length comedies and their ‘sympathetic humor’ as appealing to women as one entity regardless of class. Considering the development of respectable feature humor addresses broader cultural conceptions of feminized humor beyond ‘elite’ patrons.

By recognizing the historical significance of non-slapstick forms of silent humor strongly associated with female audiences, we can reconfigure masculinized notions of film comedy’s ‘progress.’ As women often were viewed as the consumers of, or performers in, non-slapstick vehicles that scholars homogenously describe as ‘genteel,’ past histories indirectly present feminine influence as a dying taste culture. The label genteel, however, is both pejorative and inaccurate. In certain respects, feature comedies’ debt to legitimate theater and initial ties to higher class audiences did overlap with the class component of gentility. However, while the films often reflected middle-class taste cultures, that middle-class had changed significantly from mid-1800s gentility to a burgeoning consumer culture.⁵⁰ In fact, many feature comedies mocked parlor room manners, warning of the emasculating effects on men living in genteel households and/or celebrating young women who rejected ladylike behaviors. ‘Respectable’ women’s humor therefore had its own relationship with changing social practices that cannot be distanced from modernity.

Lea Jacobs astutely notes that contemporary film scholarship often unconsciously perpetuates gendered notions of modern tastes from earlier cultural critics. For example, critic Gilbert Seldes' praise of slapstick at the expense of supposedly genteel forms in the 1920s exhibited "misogyny attendant upon the simultaneous rejection of sentimentality and celebration of the vulgate."⁵¹ Outside of cinema studies, scholar Rita Felski argues in *The Gender of Modernity* (1996) that definitions of modernity in artforms often adopt a masculinist bent: "the stories we create in turn reveal the inescapable presence and power of gender symbolism. This saturation of cultural texts with metaphors of masculinity and femininity is nowhere more obvious than in the case of the modern."⁵² She writes that "woman is aligned with the dead weight of tradition and conservatism" in analyses of modernism in literature, even though processes of social change were occurring in the historically feminine 'private sphere' during the 19th century as well.⁵³ A limited conception of silent comedy's modernity manifests in film histories' emphasis on New Humor or cinematic modernism originating in male-dominated, lowbrow entertainment spaces. It is a mistake to utilize the 1800s term of 'genteel' for a 20th century entertainment form reflecting a greatly different social and ideological milieu in which women's public participation and consumer power had rapidly evolved.

This study not only hopes to broaden our conception of modernity in silent comedy but to de-stigmatize so-called 'middlebrow humor.' We can see a tendency in studies of silent comedy to either praise highbrow sophistication by auteur directors such as Ernst Lubitsch or to express fascination with the 'vulgar' defiance of lowbrow humor.⁵⁴ The types of comedy features that producers constructed for women in this period, in contrast, would likely be classified as middlebrow given their affirmative attempts to please across classes with comprehensible and inoffensive humor. In this way, studying female audiences' relationship to comedy's feature

transition augments literary scholars' efforts to reassert the value of studying middlebrow literature aimed at female consumers. Diana Holmes argues for close examinations of the middlebrow in *Middlebrow Matters: Women's Reading and the Literary Canon Since the Belle Époque* (2018) to overcome literary criticism in the 1920s that dismissed 'feminine' popular culture as "conceptually mundane" with "neither the dignity of the high nor the colourful if vulgar energy of the low."⁵⁵ I second Holmes' assertion that the middlebrow matters. Feel-good humor that the industry crafted for female viewers profoundly influenced the film industry's approach to long-form, comedy narratives. If we do not recognize the forms of humor that frequently targeted female consumers and starred female performers, women's participation in histories of film comedy can be marginalized as sporadic and inconsequential.

This examination of early feature-length comedy also seeks to reorient current investments in historiographies of comic media that more broadly discourage the examination of comedies crafted for female patrons. Scholarly dispassion for non-slapstick silent humor is a microcosm of the manner in which comedy analyses exclude films intended for women. Philosopher Henri Bergson influentially characterized laughter as a form of 'social correction' with "sentiment as the enemy of humor."⁵⁶ Many comedy studies still stress superiority, or notions of the comedian's defiance of social excellence, with book titles such as *Comedy is a Man in Trouble* (Dale, 2001) or *Buffoon Men: Classic Hollywood Comedians and Queered Masculinity* (Balcerzak, 2013).⁵⁷ That emphasis excludes 'gentle' comedies that targeted women. Linda Mizejewski points out that the 'unsympathetic aggression' of Bergson's theory indirectly discourages women's comic participation due to society expecting women to engage in nurturing behavior.⁵⁸

Other books on comedy in film and media, in carnivalesque tradition, highlight the

‘transgressive’ nature of humor and its inversion of social protocols. The carnivalesque has fostered rich feminist engagements with film comedy, perhaps most prominently in Kathleen Rowe’s *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (1995).⁵⁹ However, even this methodology can indirectly discourage histories of industrially conceived ‘women’s humor,’ especially regarding the first half of the twentieth-century. As women were expected to be a civilizing influence, feature comedies aimed at them in the 1910s often show social reconciliation as leads improve those around them. Though this may seem less interesting to comedy scholars preoccupied with the genre’s ‘disruptiveness,’ we will see in this dissertation that women in the 1910s voiced preferences for ‘gentle’ forms. Many of them framed such comedies as less misogynistic and as holding larger, better developed parts for female characters (something Rob King and Kristen Anderson Wagner have quoted female performers from the period opining as well).⁶⁰

Even the literature’s seeming desire to pit comedy against normative narrative approaches can unintentionally sideline comedies associated with feminine taste cultures. While the silent film industry associated women with respectable, narrative humor, Tom Gunning discusses silent comedy as a rare hold out from early cinema that prioritized visual attractions.⁶¹ Other scholars ignore silent comedy features until they discuss the survival of slapstick ‘gags’ within longer narratives.⁶² Past the silent era, other studies emphasize deviations from conventional Hollywood narratives, such as the extradiegetic power of the comedian’s persona or the genre’s breaks with realism.⁶³ It is understandable that comedy scholars want to illustrate the genre’s worthiness of serious study by spelling out its unique possibilities. Yet this anti-narrative perspective causes histories to miss the degree to which female audiences and performers shaped comic characters and story tropes in feature films. Those types and plots continued to hold sway

in feature comedies for the next century.

Though some scholars might counter that 1910s feature comedies have purposefully been sidelined because their female performers simply adopt appropriately feminine behaviors, this work follows in the steps of Maggie Hennefeld's effort to carve out a 'middle' way in feminist analyses of comedy. Hennefeld notes astutely a rough dichotomy between feminism's distaste for much of comedy's misogyny ('the killjoy' approach) and a pure celebration of comediennes' carnivalesque disruptiveness ('the unruly woman' approach).⁶⁴ Just as Hennefeld notes that violence against women's bodies in slapstick cannot simply be 'recuperated' by carnivalesque readings of women's power, the influence of feminine taste cultures over silent feature comedies does not rescue the films from patriarchal preoccupations of the early twentieth-century. A comedy from a young wife's perspective in this era might support her gaining control over her household's finances but is unlikely to advocate that she pursue a career while married. The argument of this dissertation is *not* that these films are 'more feminist' due to their association with feminine taste cultures. Rather, it is that we cannot make *comedy scholarship* more conducive to feminist analysis if we ignore the types of comedies that most often employed female leads and targeted female viewers.

Methodology

This dissertation focuses on the years 1913 through 1920. My start date of 1913 reflects the initial release of comedies longer than three reels along with the emergence of early discussions in the trade press about comedy's relationship to 'longer films.' The year 1920 also serves as a useful stopping point since by then feature-length comedies starring women had beaten out all other types of film fare as the most reliable industry staple. That result affirms that feminine influence already

established the feature comedy before male slapstick stars (i.e. Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd) began to produce their feature hits.

To trace the development of feature comedies in the 1910s, I rely on an array of source materials that lend insight into how the film industry viewed feature-length humor and its relationship to audiences. Producers and exhibitors strove, over years of trial and error, to develop commercial strategies based on what they felt would expand their class and gender reach. It is crucial to recognize, however, that producers' conceptions did not necessarily reflect how individual patrons actually felt. For instance, Kristen Anderson Wagner traces how women were encouraged at the end of the 19th century to partake in less bawdy, gentler forms of humor. Written assessments of feminine taste, therefore, were undoubtedly influenced by social perceptions.⁶⁵ Contemporaneous cultural biases pervade the industry's accounts, but these factors should not lead us to regard its appraisals of audiences as worthless historical evidence. The industry was, above all, interested in generating profits. It behooved them to ascertain their audiences' preferences as accurately as possible. My main goal is not to pinpoint the individual responses of spectators, but rather, to trace how the industry appears to have deliberately refashioned feature-length comedies in an effort to attract multi-class, female viewers. What the industry *thought* patrons wanted, however congruous with individual fans' reactions, shaped their strategies for production.

Various types of sources shape my understanding of how the industry adjusted feature comedies over the course of the 1910s. Public materials in the trade press, newspapers, screenwriting manuals, and fan magazines, provide the most complete, consistently accessible evidence thanks to online archives such as Media History Digital Library. The trade press offers articles discussing the viability of feature comedies, contains reviews and publicity for the films, and gives advertising suggestions. Importantly, it includes exhibitor feedback and box office

reports from about 1916 onwards.⁶⁶ These publications prove especially useful for assessing the discourse surrounding these films, along with industry attitudes and approaches. While the trade press shows us how industry members conceived of these films, one cannot assume that they fully grasped or articulated all of the currents shaping feature comedy. Historical distance enables recognition of certain patterns, trends, and distinctions not apprehended by period observers. In particular, I am able to take stock of the entire output of feature comedies within one year in ways contemporary observers could not. For instance, the trade press insisted that features relied too much on stars and believed producers would move towards emphasizing a story's dramatic values. Yet most successful comedy features continued to be unabashed star vehicles. Therefore, I only treat trade commentary as relevant if it correlates with observable production outcomes. Some aspects of the trade press also have to be approached skeptically. As industry organs, these publications were invested in advancing the industry's agendas. They usually tried to downplay problems. For example, in the mid-1910s, publicity initially praised almost every feature film as 'high class' regardless of how its source material had been culturally classified. Despite reviewers' tendency to be 'easy' on early features, however, coverage of many feature comedies still evinced critical or lukewarm feedback. The trade press started to become more forthright about the troubles of feature comedy by 1916, once enough of them had been released for the industry to diagnose what was working and not working.

Because of the initially supportive bent of the trade press, daily newspapers or theatrical trade papers like *Variety* or *The New York Clipper* help to balance out overly optimistic film publications. Screenwriting manuals, geared towards pre-professional or professional readers, similarly tend to be more direct about what was working in the industry while offering the most detailed discussion of comedy classifications and structural expectations. Fan magazines also

usefully temper the trade-press boosterism by using more critical language. However, many columnists for fan magazines worked in the film industry, so these publications overlapped to some extent with the industry's conception of audiences. Along with commentary in articles, fan letters and polls give some insight into audience tastes beyond the trade press' assumptions.

As so many early feature comedies drew from legitimate theater and its predominantly feminine fanbase, I also draw upon theatrical coverage of productions and players that later transferred to feature films. Most accounts of feature comedy's development neglect its strong reliance on the legitimate stage. Theatrical publications, both trade papers and magazines, tended to be more specific in outlining cultural hierarchies and associations between different kinds of comedy performers and productions later utilized for feature films. Most of these evaluations can be found in publications such as *The Theatre* or *The Green Book Magazine*, which often anticipated film magazines in their layout, content and appeals to middle-class female consumers. Other theatrical reviews and commentary can be found in newspapers such as *The New York Times*. Most of the stars and productions that migrated to comedy features by the mid 1910s had achieved popularity between 1880 and 1915, so my interaction with these publications largely falls within this timeline.

Along with published writings, this dissertation includes documents from archives. Archival research for the silent era offers particular challenges. Unlike later decades, few detailed memos or organized production records survive. Instead, there is typically sparse correspondence (just one or two letters at times), stills, continuity scripts and some financial bookkeeping. It is rare to find detailed producer memos that debate strategies for attracting particular audience sectors or explain the thinking behind production decisions. Luckily, some correspondence and unpublished autobiographies do survive to offer partial insight into how feature comedies performed and how

producers assessed the market. Studio records and correspondence discuss some feature comedies, including those of producer George Kleine at the Library of Congress, Vitagraph producer Albert E. Smith at University of California, Los Angeles, and Paramount producer Adolph Zukor at Margaret Herrick Library. Unpublished biographies of J. Searle Dawley and J. Stuart Blackton housed at Margaret Herrick Library also shed some light on how contemporaries viewed 1910s feature comedies and their stars. Beyond these expressions of opinion, surviving continuity scripts at archives such as the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research or Margaret Herrick Library provide an additional sense of plotting and characterization. Some archival papers also offer information about how legitimate theater modeled strategies for comedy approaches later adopted by feature producers. New York Public Library houses the correspondence of theatrical producer Charles Frohman along with some complete scripts from Billie Burke's plays.

Finally, extant films offer another form of evidence. While the films cannot tell us *why* producers and filmmakers made their production decisions, they do show us *how* feature comedies evolved over the course of the decade. As trade commentators, reviewers and exhibitors discussed types of content that would appeal to cross-class or female patrons, we see their recommendations increasingly carried out in the films by the end of the 1910s. The limited number of surviving features from the teens unfortunately dictates and restrains my case studies and how completely I can track the development of feature comedy. Roughly 20% of silent features still exist in some form,⁶⁷ and survival rates for feature comedies from the 1910s roughly correspond to this rate. Based on FIAF search results, the survival rate for feature comedies ranges from a low of 15% (1914) to a high of 32% (1917).⁶⁸ This was more than I hoped for, as I feared a lack of interest in feature comedies from the teens could translate into even lower rates of preservation. Of the feature comedies I found evidence for between 1913 and 1920, 233 are extant. Only 212 are available for

viewing as some are nitrate prints. Of this number, I have seen 150 of these films (70%). Most can be found at archives in the U.S., with the next greatest number of films being housed in France at the Cinémathèque Française or Bois d'Arcy, and then the British Film Institute in London. I was able to visit all of the U.S. archives, Cinémathèque Française, and the British Film Institute. Due to budget and travel restrictions, I prioritized archives with the largest number of early features and did not visit archives with more sporadic extant holdings in Belgium, Italy, Russia or Spain. While viewing these 150 films gave me some sense of how feature comedies were constructed, many of the films are incomplete. I can only confirm that 129 are complete out of the 212. Obviously, the limited number of complete features affected my choices for case studies. While some good examples of romantic comedies and comedies with female leads survive, remaining comedies with male leads are almost entirely restricted to the films of Douglas Fairbanks or Charles Ray. For this reason, I did not include an entire chapter with case studies for the male leads even though middle-class, feminine influences certainly shaped presentations of masculinity in feature comedies. The restriction also prevents me from being able to use some of the most financially successful, or interesting, feature comedies as examples. For instance, there were big hits with female leads from the mid-1910s, such as Marguerite Clark's *Miss George Washington* (Paramount, 1916), that I would have loved to analyze but which no longer survive. Therefore, my case studies for successful feature comedies all date from 1917 onwards.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One outlines the state of film comedy prior to the introduction of comedy features (three reels or longer) at the very end of 1913. I begin the dissertation this way in order to establish the daunting task that producers faced due to tendencies in comedy shorts presenting a conflict with the feature's purported goal of attracting higher-class, female patrons from legitimate theater.

The trade press proclaimed that features would draw more higher-paying playgoers than the film industry's prior nickelodeon model. Trade columnists, along with theatrical critics, thought that several elements appealed to higher-class, female viewers: attractive and likable stars (particularly female stars), sympathetic humor that promoted audience morality, and beneficial plot developments for protagonists. Those elements contrasted from the industry rhetoric around comedy shorts, which columnists believed targeted working-class boys and men. Trade writers complained that most shorts contained broad farce with minimal development, laughably 'inferior' character types, and aggressive humor that emphasized character humiliation and misdeeds. To evaluate columnists' perspectives, I include a statistical analysis of all 1,388 comedy shorts released by American companies throughout 1913. Though the chapter's industry rhetoric derives from the entire first half of the teens, I chose 1913 for surveying comedy shorts because it offered the most immediate models for producers when comedy features began to be released in November of that year.

In Chapters Two and Three, I consider some strategies that appeared early in 1910s comedy features but failed to meet the industry's need to appeal to cross-class, female patrons. Between 1914 and 1916, companies initially showed a surprising openness by adopting an array of comedy materials. The failure of multiple forms of comedy in the feature importantly challenges or qualifies current histories. Those histories treat the move towards narratively-driven humor in features as predetermined and divorce it from considerations of gender. Chapter Two details the failure of broad comedians from both film shorts and the stage in features. It reconceptualizes 'broad' humor in silent film beyond slapstick to encompass other types of vaudeville routines, burlesque and musical comedy. The chapter revises prior accounts of film comedy that misguidedly characterize shorts made outside of Keystone Company, as well as many stage

comedians, as higher-class humor. Rather than slapstick being a sole opponent to middle-class, feminine mores, it existed within a larger category of ‘broad comedy’ that generally encountered trouble in feature films. As case studies, I examine Sidney Drew’s *A Florida Enchantment* (Vitagraph, 1914) and stage comedian DeWolf Hopper’s *Sunshine Dad* (Triangle, 1916) to show how both films belonged to comic traditions seen as too ‘low’ and ‘masculine’ for feature audiences. The vehicles displayed unglamorous characters, aggressive humor and loose plotting that critics and exhibitors felt violated middle class and feminine tastes.

Chapter Three examines how some types of adapted plays constructed for higher class tastes also floundered as feature comedies, especially when the plays didn’t have strong feminine ties. The chapter demonstrates that historians’ characterizations of the feature transition as a simple move to ‘high class’ comedy don’t fully capture the nature of comedy features’ addressal of cross-class, female patrons. For instance, film producers adapted ensemble farces that while rowdy, were considered clean and harmless. However, such farces did not translate well onscreen due to their complicated plots and lack of dialogue. From the standpoint of audiences, theatrical critics and film exhibitors found ensemble farce to be more popular with men than with women. The ensemble-over-star emphasis, relative absence of female leads and unsympathetic humor all conflicted with critics’ conceptions of feminine taste. George Kleine’s *The Commuters* (1915) provides a vivid illustration of this less successful approach. Another form of legitimate humor, ‘high class’ comedy, fared poorly with film audiences as well. High class plays had their own stylistic troubles due to a heavy reliance on dialogue and slow pacing, but the plays’ older actors and moral cynicism also did not cater to cross-class audiences or have strong associations with loyal female fans. A close examination of Anna Held’s *Madame La Presidente* (Paramount, 1916)

demonstrates the difference between such fare and the types of culturally feminized humor that ultimately prevailed in features.

After establishing roads taken and then largely abandoned, Chapter Four lays out what strategies typically manifested in feature comedies by the end of the 1910s. The chapter gives an overall summary of trends in feature comedies by the late teens, an approach I label ‘affirmative comedy.’ The industry increasingly released comedies with several aspects that seem to have appealed to different classes of patrons, particularly female fans: physically appealing and youthful stars, sympathetic humor and positive plot developments. The chapter seeks to defamiliarize components that readers may take for granted in many feature comedies that they see today. For instance, if attractive leading men and women appear in both dramas and comedies, which *types* of leading men and women are more likely to anchor a comedy feature? Youth, energy, likability and rebelliousness were key qualifications. In addition, while scholars acknowledge that the trade press promoted some forms of humor as ‘sympathetic’ or ‘gentle’ without close examination, this chapter explores what sympathetic humor looked like in feature comedies. It also addresses the historically specific nature of the films’ purportedly ‘moral’ humor. The third characteristic, beneficial plot trajectories, also receives unpacking in order to more precisely capture narrative approaches in feature comedies than ‘situation.’ This broader perspective of how comedy radically shifted in key ways from shorts to features incorporates trade press accounts, exhibitor reports, screenwriting manuals as well as extant films. The chapter also explains the industry’s use of the term ‘comedy drama’ as a marker to distinguish feature-length comedies from shorts (a designation they used for Chaplin, Lloyd and Keaton’s early features as well). The industry’s labeling may have impeded other scholars from recognizing the extent of feature comedy’s presence in the 1910s.

Chapters 5 and 6 will more closely examine subtypes of affirmative features that solicited mainstream, female audiences. As women outnumbered men as leads in feature comedies by the end of the teens, these chapters focus on variants that usually employed female protagonists. In Chapter Five, I argue that the development of feature comedy led to the solidification of romantic comedy as an industry staple. Though scholars rarely consider romantic comedy before the sound era, it became a lucrative product in 1910s features. Whereas less than 6% of comedy shorts in 1913 showed a couple falling in love, romantic narratives dominated feature-length comedies, making up over half of comedy features by 1918. While producers believed comic romance would attract cross-class audiences in general, they especially felt that it appealed to female spectators. The films often dealt with changing expectations during the Progressive era about how women should experience romantic relationships. The chapter engages with both reaffirmation comedies, portraying couples falling in love again, and courtship comedies, in which couples fall in love for the first time. To observe how both variants operated in practice, I highlight Constance Talmadge's *A Pair of Silk Stockings* (Select, 1918) and Viola Dana's *Satan Junior* (Metro, 1919) respectively.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I extend my consideration of feminine influence on feature comedies by examining non-romantic comedies built around female stars. Since scholars often mislabel comedies with female protagonists 'romantic comedies' even if the romance is only a subplot, the chapter parses out affirmative comedies that showcased female leads but contained narrative focuses besides romance. Three notable characters anchored those kinds of comic narratives: hoydens, sheros and madcaps. All three reflected various changes in the lives of young women as social norms evolved from the 19th century's genteel culture. The hoyden was a tomboy, typically rural and considered uncouth. As the physically active tomboy came to occupy the cultural imagination by the turn of the century, the hoyden became a popular heroine on the legitimate

stage. The shero, on the other hand, did not share the hoyden's misfit behavior in upper class settings, but rather, represented a role model who illustrated competency and heroism. Her resourcefulness related to nationalist and women's rights movements in the 1910s, especially around World War I. While the hoyden and shero both showed how expectations of young womanhood had shifted away from mid-19th century gentility, the madcap went even further by anticipating the 1920s flapper. This rebellious, wealthy teenager was mischievous, flirtatious, and sought to explore the public sphere unchaperoned. While studies of female comediennes often frame their modernity as stemming from their adoption of aggressive, masculinized New Humor, these female characters exemplified modernity by different means.

The conclusion reiterates female audiences' influence on feature-length comedy. It previews their remaining relevance to the 1920s comedy landscape, including the films of famous slapstick comedians such as Charles Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. However, despite women's continued importance as consumers, the industry's celebration of feminine taste appears to have abated. In fact, industry conversations convey what could be viewed as a backlash against women's influence on film comedy, which could be a fruitful area for further research.⁶⁹ While that backlash may explain why researchers studying slapstick stars' 1920s films did not highlight female viewers, the conclusion reasserts that the industry's initial strategies for appealing to women continued to shape production strategies beyond the silent era. I offer several ways in which histories of gender and comedy could move forward by considering female audiences' relationship to film humor outside of romantic comedy, engaging with film comedy's source material as well as rethinking comedy studies' frequent echoing of modernist art's aesthetic evaluations.

Thankfully, recent comedy scholarship has rediscovered certain comediennes and their comic transgressions. However, we must be careful not to let theoretical frameworks of 'exciting'

comedy passed down from earlier decades restrict our analyses of women and humor to the few comediennes participating in a ‘boy’s club’ of comic modes. Instead of letting those frameworks dictate our notions of what women’s comedy participation and consumption *should* be, let us find the historical value in what it *was*. If we consider the broader influence of women’s tastes on film comedy, not just comediennes’ rarer participation in traditionally masculine forms, then ‘feminized’ humor can rightfully be acknowledged as a powerful impetus for transformations in comic media.

¹ No reviewer. "C.O.D. a Scream." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/19/1914, 1689

² Louis Reeves Harrison. "Brewster's Millions." *The Moving Picture World*. 4/18/1914, 336.

³ Sargent, Epes Winthrop. *Technique of the Photoplay*. (New York: Chalmers Publishing Company. 1916), 296.

⁴ "V.L.S.E. Comedies for August." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/14/1915, 1136.

⁵ These numbers take the features listed as 'comedies' and 'comedy dramas' in the AFI Feature Catalog. This is crosschecked with the trade press, as occasionally a feature is missing from the AFI list.

⁶ These statistics are from combining the comedy, comedy drama and romantic comedy categories on AFI from 1915-1935.

⁷ For assessments of these stars' popularity, see *Motion Picture Magazine's* "Enthusiasm Great in Popularity Contest." August, 1920, 98 or "Norma Talmadge and Wallace Reid Win National Star Popularity Contest." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/19/1921, 247, *Motion Picture Magazine's* "Enthusiasm Great in Popularity Contest." August, 1920, 98 or "What a Picture Earns." *Picture-Play Magazine*. June, 1920, 96. For results that place Fairbanks, Charles Ray, Harold or Moore in the top five in polling, see "Star Popularity Contests Are Arousing the Nation." *The Moving Picture World*, 1/1/1921, 32-33, "The Motion Picture Hall of Fame." *Motion Picture Magazine*. March, 1918, 102, or "Norma Talmadge and Wallace Reid Win National Star Popularity Contest." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/19/1921, 247. For exhibitor feedback, the comments in "What the Picture Did for Me" in *Motography*, later *Exhibitor's Herald*, and the "Box Office Reports" in *Motion Picture News* proved the most helpful. There was some verification in producer correspondence. J. Searle Dawley reported in his private papers that Marguerite Clark's *Miss George Washington* (Paramount, 1916) "made more money than any other film in the U.S. for eighteen months." ("Notes on Motion Picture Record of J. Searle Dawley." Folder 18, p. 17. J. Searle Dawley Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, California).

⁸ "Cut Out the Sobs, Exhibitors Say." *Motography*. 3/2/1918, 393.

⁹ "Light Society Comedy Starring a Woman is Voted Most Popular of All Features." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/23/1920. 1068.

¹⁰ The categories were as follows: Society Dramas (female star), Action Dramas (female star), Strong Emotional Dramas (female star), Strong Emotional Dramas (male star), Dramas of home life (rural or middle class settings and female star), Light comedies of society life settings (female star), Rural comedy dramas (male star), Comedy adaptations of recognized stage successes (recognized stars), Stunt comedy (male star), Slapstick comedy (male star, two-reel), Slapstick comedy (all-star feature length), All-star productions of strong dramatic interest with comedy relief, action being outstanding feature (recognized director), All-star productions of strong dramatic interest and comedy relief, emotional reflexes being the outstanding feature (recognized director), All Star production of strong dramatic interest required chiefly through characterization (recognized director). The same article also mentioned that the feature comedy-drama had beaten out the comedy short, though the comedy short was apparently more popular than some of these other feature options (1068).

¹¹ Dale, Alan. *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1-3.

¹² For descriptions of 'situation' comedies and their bourgeois framing, see Eileen Bowser's *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 179-180, Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and the Silent Comedienne*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 22, Henry Jenkins' *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), Chapter Two, Geoff King's *Film Comedy*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 23, Rob King's *The Fun Factory*:

Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), 112, Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale. "The Case of Silent Slapstick." *Hollywood Comedians, the Film Reader*. Ed. Frank Krutnik. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 60, Frank Scheide's "The Mark of the Ridiculous and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929", 29-33, and Kristen Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 2018), 21, 41-42.

¹³ Women's respectability in entertainment spaces, as well as Black press' denouncement of slapstick in favor of sympathetic humor mirrors the white trade press. See Jacqueline Stewart's *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 131-141, and Allyson Field's inclusion of quotes from the Black press assessing film comedies in *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 218. We can also find this disdain for slapstick and promotion of 'wholesome' comedies similar to those the white trade press associated with female audiences in articles in Black newspapers. (see "Moving Picture Studio-Bartlett Films." *Freeman*. 5/9/1914, 5).

¹⁴ See Walter Pritchard Eaton's "Women as Theatergoers." *Women's Home Companion*. October 1910, 13, and "Plays and Players." *The Theatre*. August, 1913, 38.

¹⁵ These numbers stem from the comedy and comedy drama listings in AFI's feature catalog cross-checked with analysis of the trade press between 1913-1920. See *American Film Institute*. <https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/Showcase>.

¹⁶ Brewster, Eleanor. "Taylor Holmes Has Struck Twelve." *Motion Picture Magazine*. May, 1918. 72-73.

¹⁷ See Helen Damon-Moore *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post*. (1880-1910) (Albany: State University of New York Press: 1994); Jennifer Scanlon's *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995) or Richard Ohmann's *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

¹⁸ "Are Women the Better Script Writers?" *The Moving Picture World*. 8/24/1918, 1128.

¹⁹ Jenkins, Henry. *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 148.

²⁰ See Appendix III

²¹ "What the Picture Did for Me." *Motography*. 6/22/1918, 1157.

²² "The Veiled Adventure." *The New York Clipper*. 5/14/1919, 34.

²³ "Cut Out the Sobs, Exhibitors Say." *Motography*. 3/2/1918, 393.

²⁴ See Miriam Hansen's *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), Lauren Rabinovitz's *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998) and Shelley Stamp's *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²⁵ Gerald Mast's *The Comic Mind: Comedy at the Movies*. (University of Chicago Press, 1978), characterizes silent comedy as ruled by male, slapstick comedians. More recent works still present slapstick as the most influential approach, such as Alan Dale's *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) or Rob King's *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008). The form's prioritization carries over into accounts of women in silent comedy. See Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick & Silent Film Comediennes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

²⁶ The influx of recent publications on women in film comedy, as well as comic media more generally, has been inspiring. Studies of silent comedienne include Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and the Silent Comedienne*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) and Kristen Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018). Female contributions to American comedy are considered more broadly across film, television and stand-up in the anthology *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy* (Eds. Linda Mizejewski and Victoria Sturtevant. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), while Stephanie Brown explores gender inequality in stand up in "Open Mic? Gendered Gatekeeping of Authenticity in Spaces of Live Stand-Up Comedy." (*Feminist Media Histories*. Vol. 6, No. 4. October 2020, 42-67).

²⁷ See Chapter Twelve, "The Feature Film" in Eileen Bowser's *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

²⁸ See Gerald Mast's *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), Walter Kerr's *The Silent Clowns*. (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1990) or Tom Dardis' *Harold Lloyd: The Man on the Clock*. (New York: Viking Press, 1983). This narrative carries over into more recent studies, such as Saul Austerlitz's *Another Fine Mess: A History of American Film Comedy*. (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010), Christopher Beach's *Class, Language and American Film Comedy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Alan Bilton's *Silent Film Comedy and American Culture*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Peter Kramer's "The Making of a Comic Star: Buster Keaton and *The Saphead*." *Classical Hollywood Comedy*. Eds. Kristine Karnick and Henry Jenkins. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 190-210, Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale's *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. London: Routledge, 1990, 96-131,

²⁹ *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1990, 174-175.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ These statistics are from combining the comedy, comedy drama and romantic comedy categories on AFI. The percentage of feature output would remain between 15-25% for the next twenty years (even by 1935, when the Production Code had been enforced and sound practices solidified).

³² For instance, despite feature films being the economic center of the film industry by 1918, Ben Singer shows that the American film industry still produced 1,567 shorts compared to 836 features that year. Just because more comedy shorts were produced to round out multiple feature programs does not necessarily mean that comedy features were not also performing well (see "Feature Films, Variety Programs, and the Crisis of the Small Exhibitor." *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*. Eds. Charles Keil and Shelley Stamp. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 80).

³³ David Robinson. "Comedy." in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 82-83.

³⁴ Ibid. He does mention Chaplin's *A Dog's Life* (1918) as well, but this was only three reels and most exhibitors considered five reels to be a typical feature by this date. I did not see the trade referring to his efforts as 'features' until *The Kid* (First National, 1921).

³⁵ King, 23.

³⁶ "This was true of some comedies, particularly in the development of more 'genteel' forms in the 1910s...Examples include *A Cure for Pokeritis* (1912) and *Fox Trot Finesse* (1915), featuring early comic stars John Bunny and Sidney Drew, respectively. Comedy emerges from situation in both cases." (23)

³⁷ Kristen Anderson Wagner. "Pie Queens and Virtuous Vamps: The Funny Women of the Silent Screen." *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 52.

³⁸ See Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale's discussion of how slapstick comedians incorporated genteel components for features in *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. (London: Routledge, 1990), 96-131. Geoff King, Henry Jenkins and Frank Scheide also use the term 'genteel.'

³⁹ Ed. Alan Trachtenberg. *Critics of Culture: Literature and Society in the Early Twentieth Century*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons,) 1976. This debate is summarized well in pages 1-13.

⁴⁰ See Ann Douglas' *Feminization of American Culture*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1977, John Tomsich's. *A Genteel Endeavor: American Culture and Politics in the Gilded Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), or Dorothy C. Broaddus' *Genteel Rhetoric: Writing High Culture in Nineteenth-Century Boston*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

⁴¹ For references to narratively-driven comedies as 'genteel,' 'refined,' or 'comedy of manners,' see Henry Jenkins' *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), Chapter Two, Geoff King's *Film Comedy*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 23, Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale. "The Case of Silent Slapstick." *Hollywood Comedians, the Film Reader*. Ed. Frank Krutnik. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 60, Frank Scheide's "The Mark of the Ridiculous and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929", 29-33, and Wagner, 38.

⁴² This characterization would apply to all of the works in the footnote above except Scheide, who describes the shift neutrally.

⁴³ See Rick DesRochers' *The New Humor in the Progressive Era: Americanization and the Vaudeville Comedian* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Henry Jenkins' *What Made Pistachio Nuts?*, 26-58, the entirety of Rob King's *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley University of California Press, 2008), or Kristen Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus*, 188.

⁴⁴ See Douglas' entire book or Tomisch, 15, for American feminization. Work connecting gentility to femininity extends past American culture in works such as Dianne Lawrence's *Genteel Women: Empire and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1910*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

⁴⁵ See Richard Abel's *Menus for Newspapers and the Emergence of American Film Culture, 1913-1916*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2015), Chapter Four, Robert Allen's "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan, 1906-1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon," *Cinema Journal* (Vol. 18, No. 2, 2-15), Diana Anselmo's "Screen-Struck: The Invention of the Movie Girl Fan." *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 55, No. 1. Fall, 2015, 1-28, Lee Grieveson's *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Miriam Hansen's *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 119, Shelley Stamp's *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), and Wagner, *Comic Venus*, 41-42.

⁴⁶ Nan Enstad. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2. See also Richard B. Stott. *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity and Youth in Antebellum New York*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 271.

⁴⁷ Wagner, 34-42.

⁴⁸ Laurence Reid. "His Official Fiancée." *Motion Picture News*. 10/18/1919, 3045.

⁴⁹ "Special Service Section." *Motion Picture News*. 5/31/ 1919, 3605.

⁵⁰ Sukimo Higashi effectively encapsulates this evolution in middle-class mores in her analysis of Cecil B. DeMille's career, particularly regarding female consumers in Chapter 6 (see *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1994).

⁵¹ Lea Jacobs. *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 2008), 16.

⁵² Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1996), 1.

⁵³ Felski, 3.

⁵⁴ Studies of comedy in the silent era often assess Ernst Lubitsch's 'sophisticated comedies' or or 'slapstick.' For some studies of Lubitsch, see Joseph McBride's *How Did Lubitsch Do It?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), Lea Jacob's chapter on 'Sophisticated Comedy' in *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s*, Ben Brewster's "The Circle: Lubitsch and the Theatrical Farce Tradition." *Film History*. (Volume 13, No. 4. 2001) 372-389, and Kristen Thompson's "Lubitsch, Acting and the Silent Romantic Comedy." *Film History*. (Volume 13, No. 4. 2001), 390-408. For monographs on slapstick in the silent era alone, see Alan Bilton's *Silent Film Comedy and American Culture*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Alex Clayton's *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick*. (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2007), Alan Dale's *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*, Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick & Silent Film Comediennes*, Rob King's *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture*, Tom Paulus and Rob King, Eds. *Slapstick Comedy*. (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁵ Holmes, Diana. *Middlebrow Matters: Women's Reading and the Literary Canon in France Since the Belle Epoque*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2018), 9-10.

⁵⁶ Bergson's notion of emotional distance is repeated in Andrew Horton's introduction for *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 9.

⁵⁷ See Alan Dale's *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) or Scott Balcerzak's *Buffoon Men: Classic Hollywood Comedians and Queered Masculinity*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

⁵⁸ Mizejewski, Linda. "Introduction." *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy*. Eds. Mizejewski and Victoria Sturtevant. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 13.

⁵⁹ Rowe, Kathleen. *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

⁶⁰ For instance, Rob King acknowledges' actress Mabel Normand's expressed wish to receive more respect by appearing in 'light' comedies with 'story' by the late teens (see *The Fun Factory*, 228) while Kristen Anderson Wagner also notes consistent themes in comediennes' coverage whereby they claimed they preferred to appear in 'polite' or 'situational' film comedies (see *Comic Venus*, 41-42).

⁶¹ See Tom Gunning's "Crazy Machines in the Garden of Forking Paths: Mischief Gags and the Origins of American Film Comedy." In *Classical Hollywood Comedy*. Eds. Kristine Karnick and Henry Jenkins. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁶² See Rob King's *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley University of California Press, 2008), Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale's *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. London: Routledge, 1990, 96-13, or Gerald Mast's *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1979), Walter Kerr's *The Silent Clowns*. (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1990).

⁶³ For defiance of narrative norms, see Henry Jenkins' *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), Steve Seidman's *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981). For deviations from realism, see Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and the Silent Film Comedienne* and (find one more)

⁶⁴ Hennefeld, 4-6.

⁶⁵ Wagner, 34.

⁶⁶ Towards the second half of 1916, *Motography* (which later combines with *Exhibitor's Herald*) begins to include a section of sample exhibitor comments entitled "What the Picture Did for Me." Though only one or two comments can't provide an accurate perspective of a film's financial performance, one can note trends across their responses across several months. Around 1917, *Motion Picture News* offers "Exhibitors' Box Office Reports," which actually give ratings across the country (North, East, West, South) such as 'Big,' "Average,' or 'Poor.' They also will include a compilation of exhibitor comments. These give a better sense of the overall performance but are less consistently published than "What the Picture Did for Me," only appearing every few months (and not for every film).

⁶⁷ Library of Congress estimate (14% complete and 5% incomplete). Calculated by David Pierce. "The Survival of American Silent Feature Films: 1912-1929." Council on Library and Information Resources and the Library of Congress. 2013, 1.

⁶⁸ See list of surviving films Appendix VI. I calculated the survival rate by comparing the complete and incomplete extant films to the totals for comedies, comedy dramas and romantic comedies listed by year in AFI's feature catalog. The respective rates by year are 15% for 1914, 21% for 1915, 32% for 1916, 28% for 1917, 17% for 1918, 22.5% for 1919, and 25% for 1920.

⁶⁹ See Jacobs' *The Decline of Sentiment* and Elizabeth Clarke's *War and the Sexes: Gender and American Film, 1898-1927*. (PhD Dissertation. Wilfrid Laurier University, 2013), 201-241.

Chapter One- **A Comic Conundrum: Comedy and the Feature Transition**

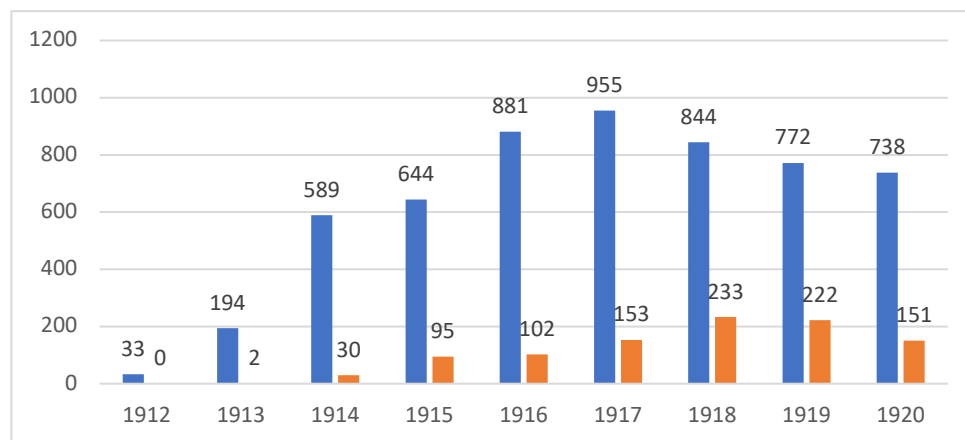
Over the course of the 1910s, the American feature film evolved from a fad into an industry fixture. Initially, the ‘feature’ referred to any notable attraction on a program regardless of length,¹ but the popularity of multiple-reel films by the mid-1910s altered trade usage of the term. Features came to signify longer films requiring specialized distribution outside of weekly shorts programs.² The growth of the feature during this decade proved remarkable. The year 1911 saw the release of just 7 three-reelers in the United States market.³ By 1914, 589 films over three reels were distributed in one year.⁴ By the late 1910s, features had become the film industry’s main commercial attraction on theater programs.⁵

While features developed rapidly, feature-length comedies lagged. The industry initially seemed reluctant to produce comedy features. We can observe this delay by comparing comedy’s percentage of all shorts versus longer productions in the early 1910s. Before the industry attempted comedies of three reels or longer at the end of 1913, comedies made up about thirty percent of the shorts put out by both licensed and unlicensed manufacturers.⁶ In contrast, comedies represented none of the 33 films over three reels released in 1912, and only two of 194 films over three reels in 1913.⁷ Even by 1914, when film companies initiated schedules to offer features throughout the entire year, comedies made up less than one in twenty of films over three reels.⁸ Comedy features remained under fifteen percent of all features until 1917 and would not match levels in pre-feature shorts until 1918.⁹

Why did the production of feature comedies lag behind? Film historians recognize comedy’s slow move into longer formats, but remain vague as to the reasons. While histories sometimes note

that slapstick's looser narratives and lowbrow reputation prompted producers to avoid placing it into features, that does not explain why forms of short comedy besides slapstick wouldn't easily carry over.¹⁰ By focusing primarily on slapstick's experience during the transition, historians have missed broader causalities of critical importance to studies of gender and comedy. This chapter outlines how the landscape of comedy shorts in the first half of the 1910s conflicted with the industry's initial conception of the feature film and its supposed appeals to higher class, feminine tastes. Even before producers started making feature comedies and encountering difficulties, there already was a mismatch between aspirations for the feature and common approaches to comedy shorts. Crucially, those deviations depended upon cultural suppositions about class and gendered tastes. Trade writers anticipated that features would expand film audiences by attracting higher class, female patrons from legitimate theater. Discussions of feature films promoted traits that those viewers were thought to want. Unfortunately for comic producers, comedy shorts were generally understood as not possessing such traits. Trade press recommendations for features' story structures, types of performers, and modes of emotional engagement differed vastly from most comedy shorts. Resolving these disparities would prove essential for the development of feature-length comedy.

Table 1: American film releases of three reels or longer by year. Blue is total number, orange the number of comedies.



My methodology in this chapter combines discursive and content analysis—what the industry said about comedy shorts along with what the shorts actually contained. Both these lines of inquiry make apparent on a larger scale female audiences’ influence on feature comedies’ general character and story types. I use trade documentation to illustrate the disjunction between hopes for the feature and perceptions of comedy shorts. As industry organs, trade publications did not directly highlight ‘inadequacies’ in film production, such as comedy being inherently incompatible with feature filmmaking. However, their comments about comedy shorts clearly conflicted with their notions about why features would attract greater numbers of higher class—especially female patrons— from legitimate theater.

Since trade articles offered opinions that did not always reflect the actual state of affairs, this chapter also includes a statistical overview of comedy shorts’ plots, character types and modes of humor. As comedy films of three reels or longer arrived at the end of 1913, this chapter restricts analysis of comedy shorts to that year in order to understand what immediate models were available to producers as they contemplated making comedy features. According to the release schedules of American manufacturers, 1913 contained 1,388 comedy shorts.¹¹ Given the low number of surviving shorts, I must rely heavily on reviews and synopses. The brief summaries they provide cannot be entirely comprehensive. For instance, my ability to relay a performer’s look is hampered by an infrequent availability of photos. Regardless of such gaps, we can still chart certain differences between the way these shorts were characterized versus later comedy features. For every characteristic I discuss in this chapter, there will be shorts that prove to be exceptions. Instead of suggesting that every comedy short meets every single criteria, this analysis only seeks to identify common approaches that would generally differ from choices later made to appeal to the ‘respectable’ audiences for feature-length comedies.

“Bringing to the Houses Better People”: Features and ‘Legitimate’ Audiences

To understand comedy’s fraught transition to features, it is necessary to consider what purpose producers thought the ‘feature’ should serve. Producers hoped that the development of longer, higher budget features would expand the film industry’s profits while also enhancing its reputation. Though the feature’s higher expenses could appear risky, its distribution outside of weekly programs allowed for longer runs which could result in higher profits than shorts’ quick turnover.¹² The trade also touted features as more prestigious productions worthy of higher prices. They argued the longer lengths allowed for complex storytelling, such as the adaptation of beloved novels and plays. In particular, many feature producers copied legitimate theater in their source material and stars, along with exhibition in ornate theatrical palaces, in order to poach legitimate audiences willing to pay more expensive prices.¹³ Writers for film trade publications posited that while shorts represented a “motographic vaudeville,” the ‘long subject’ would serve as a ‘motographic legitimate.’¹⁴

Producers of feature films, comic or otherwise, were mindful of the class and gender implications of audiences that attended legitimate theater. ‘Legitimate theater’ referred to Broadway houses that showed plays exceeding an hour (three, four or five acts) with two-dollar pricing.¹⁵ The term dated back to the English Licensing Act of 1737, which separated spoken drama in licensed houses from unlicensed theaters seen as showing ‘lesser’ entertainment such as comedy, pantomime or melodrama.¹⁶ Usually ‘legitimate’ referred to plays, but some musicals played in legitimate houses. The classification helped distinguish plays from lower-priced variety formats such as burlesque, vaudeville and most musical comedy. As the industry sought to attract legitimate patrons during the feature’s early years, it saw them as distinctive from regular filmgoers. *The Moving Picture World* boasted in early 1914, “The new stuff, the big reel stuff, is

bringing to the houses better people.”¹⁷ The respectable audiences of legitimate theater were seen as higher class and ‘feminized’ compared to film or vaudeville audiences at large. Though scholars have previously analyzed class and gender’s influence on the silent film industry, how comedy adjusted to reflect the feature’s ties to legitimate audiences remains surprisingly underexplored.¹⁸

Scholars debate whether a gentrification and feminization of film audiences took place prior to the feature transition.¹⁹ Previous research illustrates that the industry sought higher class and female patrons well before 1913, but even this scholarship places women at only 30% of attendees or acknowledges that women made for fewer audience members at film showings.²⁰ Though evidence does suggest that some middle class and female patrons already attended film theaters by the early 1910s, research surveys of the period reported that film shorts and theatrical variety still played to a more working class and masculine consumer. Assessing entertainment venues throughout New York City, a Pew Research study in 1911 found that at film theaters, “the majority of the audiences are of the working class, a minority of the clerical, and a minute remainder is made up of vagrants and leisure class persons.”²¹ The same piece also observed, “the boys outnumber the girls two to one, and among the adults the men exceed the women by about the same ratio.”²²

Perceived audiences also affected industry behavior as much as actual breakdowns of audiences in the early 1910s. While some higher-class patrons and women visited nickelodeons, the film trade still portrayed attendees as primarily working class and masculine. Columnist Louis Reeves Harrison for *The Moving Picture World* characterized the average film fan in 1913 as “the workman who puts on his coat and shirt collar after dinner and goes out to the picture show.”²³ He complained that producers assumed workers would want low class content due to their

economic status; “If a certain class of people now kept in poverty and toil by lack of knowledge is given to spending hard-earned nickels and dimes at the little shows, is that any reason why pictures should be used to lower or corrupt them?”²⁴ Other trade commentators throughout 1913 and early 1914 also expressed annoyance about the lack of female patrons or film’s supposed accommodation to ‘boyish’ tastes. Writers continued to cite film’s appeal to men or young boys, calling the output ‘cheap’ or ‘puerile’ films that appealed to “small boys and the weak-brained adolescents.”²⁵ Another industry commentator lamented that any claims about more women attending film showings did not reflect actual screenings; “The writer has taken some pains to observe typical audiences in moving picture theaters, and in the daytime in downtown sections...it has been his observation that the average audience is composed very largely of men.”²⁶

Contemporary observers portrayed legitimate audiences quite differently. Theatrical and film publications distinguished legitimate clientele from both ‘low priced film theaters’ and the ‘popular pricing’ of both big and small-time vaudeville. The same 1911 Pew Research survey noted that in legitimate or ‘standard’ theaters, “the leisure class appears to be in a slight majority over the business or clerical, the working class figuring at about 2 per cent.”²⁷ In addition to containing a larger percentage of middle and upper class members, legitimate theater in the early 1910s had a reputation for being driven by female consumers. Historian Richard Butsch identifies an increase of female patrons at legitimate theaters over the second half of the 19th century as theatrical producers sought to present their spaces as safe and respectable.²⁸ By the early 1910s, women were variously estimated to make up three-fourths to four-fifths of legitimate audiences.²⁹ While one might be skeptical of these numbers, it is worth noting that theatrical magazines like *Green Book* and *The Theatre* primarily included advertisements for feminine products such as corsets, garters, and maternity care items. These magazines also foregrounded coverage of female

stars and their personal lives in a manner very similar to later film magazines aimed towards female fans. They contained full articles on ‘Matinee Girls,’ young women portrayed as starstruck consumers of the theater’s afternoon performances, and their tastes in plays.³⁰ One finds no corresponding articles discussing male theatergoers.

Articles covering the theater throughout the 1910s avowed that women determined the fortunes of legitimate plays, whether they saw this as a benefit or detriment to the drama. A 1910 article for *Women’s Home Companion* entitled “Women as Theater-Goers” presented them as the main audience and aligned men with vaudeville and musical comedies instead. For appraising legitimate audiences, the author contended, “It is not necessary to mention the American man at all.” He quotes a theatrical manager:

“Women not only form the main support of the drama, but half of the men who do come to see plays would, if left to themselves, either go to their club or drop in on a vaudeville show or a musical comedy. They come because their wives or sweethearts want to. Cut out the women from the audiences, and four fifths of the dramas in the country would shut up shop.”³¹

Thus, the film industry’s hope that feature adaptations of plays would lure legitimate audiences did not just represent an effort to attract higher class patrons, but *female* patrons above all.

Although the film industry sought to attract more ‘refined’ female patrons through the feature, its efforts should not be seen as a straightforward abandonment of the working class. Histories of silent comedy often presume that, as the decade proceeded, the industry simply ignored working class filmgoers in favor of the middle class. Actually, the industry feared that high class clientele might not become as reliable as the working-class moviegoers who initially made their profits possible. A *Motography* columnist worried in the fall of 1913,

“The big productions...they are in a virgin field; playing to a larger price; a more discriminating clientele—many of whom do not join the throngs who support the smaller houses. Should they find this initiation to motion pictures to their liking, which they must, they will meet disappointment should they join the visitors of the smaller houses.”³²

The industry's anxiety about the staying power of these new audiences led to a more cautious approach than simply adopting 'high class' material. Many exhibitors still complained if a feature was too 'elitist,' and some expressed the wish to keep the casual, drop-in approach and lower pricing that variety programs offered. Screenwriting manuals similarly advocated for appealing across classes as the feature rose. While *Writing the Photoplay* (1913) identified film audiences as increasingly "middle-class," the authors still insisted photoplaywrights must "write photoplays that will appeal to *every class* of photoplay patron."³³ A careful balance would have to be achieved whereby new features could earn a reputation for respectability *without* losing a substantial portion of habitual audiences. While producers did not dampen their emphasis on women as the decade progressed, they increasingly addressed women as a larger group across classes. This balance between respectability and inclusivity would prove vital for comedy's success in features.

The feature characteristics that the trade press presumed appealed to legitimate patrons presented hurdles for transferring types of comedy from shorts. Trade articles stressed greater plot development in features. Scenario advice columnist William Lord Wright proposed, "The plot of a two-reel must necessarily be stronger than that of a one-reel story...and then work up stronger and stronger toward the climax."³⁴ For a 'long play,' photoplay manuals insisted that there needed to be signs of complication or *change* from the beginning to the end. In the advice manual, *The Photodrama* (1914), author and lecturer Henry Albert Phillips stated, "in the Long Play each reel ends with the introduction of a new complication that necessitates an entirely new line of treatment...each reel must always advance; it can never go backward."³⁵ Though development seems like a natural concern for longer entertainments, the idea also had class implications. Critics held legitimate plays to a higher standard of narrative structure than other forms of entertainment, such as vaudeville sketches or musical comedies.³⁶ It was common for film columnists to mention

better classes and the feature's more sustained narrative structure in the same breath. W. Stephen Bush purported in 1914, "The man who but yesterday was satisfied with the single reel is today insistent upon the higher aims and missions and possibilities of the new art." He views longer development as higher-class storytelling, adding that by moving beyond the one reel, "the appeal of the motion picture is reaching out to the best and most cultured classes."³⁷

Critics and columnists also acknowledged that the feature film relied more heavily on the star system. Histories of silent film frequently discuss how the feature's increasing popularity accelerated an already initiated move away from brand to star advertising.³⁸ While shorts programs had promoted variety without sustained publicity, a name attraction in features afforded greater financial security by ensuring a fan base to fill out longer exhibition runs. As the salaries for the most popular leading men and women in film shorts grew, trade articles recounted how actors' rising salaries necessitated recouping the money through longer runs. Discussing Earle Williams and Anita Stewart's transition to features, an article explained, "Their salaries have reached such large proportions that it does not pay to employ them in one-part productions."³⁹

The film industry portrayed glamorous or likable stars as appealing to audiences across classes. The star emphasis could at first insinuate a contradiction with the feature's higher-class emphasis on plotting. However, though beneath 'high art,' film and theatrical critics deemed beautiful and romantic leads as safely middlebrow and socially justifiable by providing role models.⁴⁰ Film columnist Louis Reeves Harrison advocated for the importance of 'beauty' for the feature's improvement of the industry and its appeal across classes:

"It may be thought that I lay too much stress on beauty. What utility does it serve? We are dealing with plays written and produced for the purpose of attracting people of *all* classes to the little theater ...it is in us to love what is beautiful in Nature, and Art is at its best when it idealizes Nature's loveliness."⁴¹

Harrison thus proposes that attractive aesthetics and players could be a useful for expanding film audiences. Theatrical magazines had already highlighted the pleasing nature of a leading man or

woman's physique and personality, and the discourse around many feature stars followed suit. Of James Hackett, the theatrical player who brought his stage role to life in Famous Players' *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1913), the trade raved that his "personality and virile tones have set many a young heart fluttering."⁴² Once features stopped solely employing theatrical stars, producers usually selected conventionally attractive leads from their stock companies. For leading men and women' who worked in both comedies and dramas, industry profiles incorporated romantic and respectful rhetoric. Margarita Fischer, a leading woman in IMP's shorts who would later star in features, had her appearance lauded in profiles as "youthful" and as possessing "splendid eyes."⁴³

The feature film's growing reliance on appealing stars also marked a strong effort to attract further female consumers. Scholars note female fans' crucial role in encouraging the star system in the 1910s film industry, citing their interest in a star's style or personal life.⁴⁴ The association predated film, as producers of legitimate plays claimed it was primarily female consumers who bought their booklets containing performers' personal information.⁴⁵ In fact, scholars Diana Anselmo, Richard Butsch, Gaylyn Studlar trace how theatrical critics blamed the 'matinee girl' for ruining plays due to her interest in romantic leads.⁴⁶ Though critics seemed most irate with female fans' lust for male stars, *The Theatre* and other magazines targeting middle class women actually devoted more articles to female performers, such as Billie Burke or Marie Doro.⁴⁷ A weekly column for female readers in *Variety* commented entirely on actresses and their costuming (mostly from the legitimate stage) with scarce mention of the men in productions.⁴⁸ Though vaudeville relied on name recognition as well, the emphasis on program variety meant that a sole star did not provide the entire evening's entertainment the way stars did in plays and feature films. By the late 1800s, American legitimate theater became strongly associated with the 'star system,' with critics complaining bitterly that playwrights primarily designed their plays to exploit the

charm of a particular star.⁴⁹ Glamorous female stars came under especial scrutiny as critics decried their influence over American theater.⁵⁰ While some critics assumed women merely wanted to see clotheshorses, other comments attributed women's enjoyment of female leads to their desire to see cute and likable role models. In addition to style, Walter Prichard Eaton proposed to *Women's Home Companion* in 1910 that female fans cared about positive depictions of female characters. He claimed Charles Frohman chose not to put on plays if "he does not think the piece would please American women, because it is not complimentary to their sex...they go to see something that will please and flatter them."⁵¹ To target female fans with the feature, film producers and exhibitors reasoned that charismatic role models would appeal to them. Scholar Richard Abel cites how newspaper sections for women readers in the mid-1910s usually focused on female film stars.⁵² Articles detailed the stars' personal lives, played up their role as advice givers, and allowed them to serve as conduits for young women's aspirations to lead active, independent lives. *The Moving Picture World's* Louis Reeves Harrison opined in 1914 that for most producers of features, "one has a pretty actress to exploit" and elaborated "a woman of beauty and charming personality is a big factor in the matter of screen interpretation."⁵³

A final characteristic of the rhetoric surrounding features that would influence feature-length comedies was a sense of morality. Scholars acknowledge the 'respectable' feature's role in shielding the industry from censorship efforts during the 1910s,⁵⁴ and period critics specified that a feature release should be a "noninflammable film of American make."⁵⁵ The trade publicized the prestigious feature as a chance to improve the moral standing of the film industry, such as *The Moving Picture World* praising its "clean and wholesome influence."⁵⁶ A multitude of columns advised filmmakers to encourage morality through proper character behaviors or punishing immoral acts. Other columns purported that features would improve an audience's morals by

arousing sympathetic attachment. By 1912, Louis Reeves Harrison for *The Moving Picture World* declared that the protagonist in the feature “softens our sympathies for one another” and “enobles and beautifies human existence of today.”⁵⁷ Another trade publication, *Motography*, proposed that the audience’s emotional connection to central figures sustained a feature’s length. Writer Bennie Zeidman observed in 1913 that multiple-reel subjects required “dramatic characters to get sympathy and to arouse curiosity as to the outcome.”⁵⁸ Pointedly, he did not mention comic characters. Thus, respectability rhetoric underscored both the feature’s viewing appeals to ‘finer’ human emotions and the acceptability of plot incidents. This rhetoric helped to ward off external control of the industry, but also provided a business model to tout American entertainment products as ‘cleaner’ than European counterparts.⁵⁹

The higher class, female patrons that the industry hoped to engage through the feature had long been culturally affiliated with moral entertainment. As scholars of American history note, sentimental currents in 1800s art forms pushed clean tales that promoted sympathy with characters as best suited for the middle and upper classes.⁶⁰ By the early 1900s, those associations carried over into theater. For instance, actor Wilton Lackaye insisted that “people of high standing” in legitimate audiences should “get together to support good, respectable productions.”⁶¹ Theatrical publications suggested a divide between unrealistic, unsympathetic characters as ‘vulgar’ and sympathy as appropriate for ‘all classes.’ Another theatrical critic excused *Camille*, despite its depiction of prostitution, as still appropriate for all types of audiences since “the emotion of sympathy cannot be harmful to any human being.”⁶² Theatrical publications also spread the notion that women liked morally upright entertainment. Theater troupes run by women targeted female consumers by stressing morality.⁶³ The Federation of Women’s Clubs insisted that “There will be nothing furnished in that name that would blush to cross a hearthstone” as “women will protect

each other.”⁶⁴ Theatrical discourse also associated female patrons with strong emotional attachment. Actress Julia Dean in the article “What Women Like Best in Plays of Today” (1914) claimed that “the average woman of to-day prefers plays which touch a responsive chord in her own heart and experience. She does not go to the theatre merely to be amused.”⁶⁵

Several traits that the trade advocated for in feature films thus overlapped with the presumed tastes of higher class and female patrons: plot development, glamorous and admirable stars, and morality through character behaviors that promoted audience empathy. All of these components encouraged vast changes from dominant approaches in comedy shorts.

Worlds Apart: Disparities Between Comedy Shorts and Features

As shown in the opening of this chapter, producers hesitated to exploit comedies in feature form. Once they did, they almost never placed shorts comedians at the center of feature-length comedies, as we will explore further in Chapter Two.⁶⁶ The decision not to carry over prominent comic performers or series demands explanation, as manufacturers certainly carried over dramatic leads from their shorts. Prior to the release of feature comedies at the end of 1913, most licensed and unlicensed companies produced both dramatic and comedic shorts with regularity. Licensed Vitagraph Company released, for instance, 12 comedy shorts in September of 1913 while the unlicensed Crystal Company released 6 that same month.⁶⁷ Other unlicensed manufacturers acquired reputations as solely comic producers, such as Keystone Company, which released 7 comedies that same September.⁶⁸ In the following pages, I illustrate why trends in comedy shorts did not accord with the feature’s industrial purpose of satisfying higher class and feminized tastes. Particularly, the narrative construction, performers, and humor of many short comedies contradicted trade recommendations for the feature film. Producers needed to overcome significant

challenges in order to make feature comedies appeal to expanding audiences by the end of the decade.

Plotting and Comedy Shorts

The industry's assumption that features required narrative development created an obstacle for transferring comic strategies from shorts. Scholars have written about the links the industry made between well-constructed plots and higher-class audiences, yet how plots in feature comedies shifted remains vague.⁶⁹ This is understandable given that industry rhetoric often proffered the idea of 'more plot' without much specificity. I will first provide a brief overview of how film publications portrayed most comedy shorts as loosely-plotted 'farces' in contradiction with higher class and female viewers' preference for more developed 'light comedies.' Then I will ground these general commentaries by specifying in my actual statistical breakdown some ways that we could consider differences in development between comedy shorts and later comedy features.

Despite some efforts to produce 'high class' comedies, the trade press still characterized comedy shorts writ large as 'broad farces' with loose plotting. Theater historians note two distinctive uses of 'farce' at the turn-of-the-century. The term could apply to legitimate plays that stretched the bounds of credibility with the clockwork-like coincidences of their storylines, a usage that will describe the middlebrow play adaptations in Chapter 3.⁷⁰ Another use described shorter, rougher acts performed in lower class, variety theaters.⁷¹ Due to limited plotting and reliance on physicality, critics considered these shorter farces to be lowbrow entertainment.⁷² The film trade implied that they were referring to the second, broader variant of 'farce' for comedy shorts by bringing the term up in the context of shorts' rough-housing, outrageousness, or minimal plotting. *The Moving Picture World* advised scenario writers in January of 1914, "It cannot be said too often

that the present demand for comedy is almost wholly ‘rough stuff’...a broad farce or travesty.”⁷³ Patrick Loughney’s analysis of copyright records at the Library of Congress also found that most comedy shorts pulled from one to two act musical or vaudeville acts as opposed to legitimate plays known for greater plot development.⁷⁴ At the time of the feature transition, the industry used the label ‘farce’ more than any other to classify comedy shorts. Searches through digitized film publications from 1913 resulted in 745 appearances of the term ‘farce.’ In comparison, other terms scholars have used for 1910s film comedies, such as ‘refined comedy’ or ‘polite comedy,’ yielded fewer than twenty hits per piece.⁷⁵ While this is likely not a perfect illustration of each type’s presence (different phrases may appear to convey the same idea), closer textual analysis yields many individual articles insisting that ‘farce’ dominated comedy shorts. Even Vitagraph Company, a studio that historians associate with the production of polite comedies,⁷⁶ stated in a 1912 call for scenarios, “Farce comedies are more in demand than anything else.”⁷⁷

The general characterization of comedy shorts as ‘farces’ made them seemingly incompatible with the longer feature. *The Moving Picture World*’s critic Harrison argued, “Is it not true that a split-reel farce comedy is the kind of shack that can be built on scant framework, and that, as the drama rises in size and importance, the working plans require greater pains and attention to detail if the costly structure is to command general admiration?”⁷⁸ Harrison continued this opposition in the article “Photoplay Principles” (1913);

“It might be possible for the writer of a farce-comedy for split-reel use to begin his script with a synopsis of a dozen or two lines and thereafter confine himself to a few brief directions in each scene ...I have never, however, seen any scenarios accepted from authors outside of studios, those who provide most of the big plays, that were in other than narrative form, and many of them contained from five thousand to ten thousand words.”⁷⁹

While Harrison does not unpack how more ‘structure’ would impact narrative shifts, I believe it is instructive to compare the advice given to scenario writers of comedy shorts compared to feature dramas. Scenarios for comedy shorts focused very closely on ensuring gags in individual scenes

were logically motivated. In *Technique of the Photoplay* (1913), Epes Winthrop Sargent writes, “If you wish to remove a character from a scene by means of the grappling anchor of a balloon, you must account for the balloon and explain why it has an anchor out.”⁸⁰ While Sargent recommends that comic scenarios be casually motivated, the interactions he details repeat without illustrating changes to the characters, their relationships or their circumstances. Placing value on extending incidents as opposed to the story’s larger arc, Sargent even recommends that comic producers change the order of scenes to get the greatest laugh out of individual moments. He advises, “It is better to get your laugh, go to another scene and come back to the first one if necessary.” His rhetoric suggests that the exact ordering of scenes mattered less than each individual action ‘landing.’ That shuffling or cutting becomes more difficult when building a longer narrative where a character undergoes personal evolution or makes significant gains by the end of the piece.

A sample list of scenes for a comedy short that Sargent provides illustrates this strong interest in motivating and extending physical gags within scenes:

“14. *Parlor as in No. 3*—Bill and May on, spooning—he starts to kiss her just as Father appears in doorway—May has her mouth puckered for the kiss, but it does not land—Bill keeps on turning his head to see Father watching—Father comes down, waving cane—May rouses—Bill goes over the back of the sofa—only his head shows above—Father slashes at Bill’s head—Bill ducks—Father gets down on knees—pokes under sofa with cane—Bill climbs back over the top—slips—falls on Father—May picks Father up—pleads with him—he throws her from him—she falls into Bill’s arms—he kisses her—Father strikes at him—drags May from him—may turns her head for another kiss—Father lets go of her and grabs Bill by the neck—leads him out—May follows—weeping.

15. *Front of house as in No. 3*—Father enters from house with Bill—places him for a kick—as he is about to swing May comes from house with Bill’s hat—grabs Father’s coat tails—pulls him back as he kicks—kick falls short—father falls—May tosses Bill his hat—he throws her a kiss—out of scene—Father up and follows—May follows him—

16. *Front gate—gate closed*—Bill running down walk—Father and May in pursuit—Bill jumps over gate—Father runs into it—loses his wind—collapses, hanging on to gate—Bill kisses May over fence—tips hat to Father—exits.”⁸¹

In each of these scenes, the male lover and father quarrel without either’s opinion of the other evolving for the better. The young man does not prove himself by saving the father’s business. The girl does not leave her situation at home to run off and find new freedoms. The father interrupts the lover’s time together with physical meddling, and this continues to be the dynamic in all three

scenes. That structure differs from photoplay writing manuals' insistence that each reel in the feature 'must advance' and exhibit the structure 'of a play.'

These descriptions of comedy shorts as farces with an emphasis on individual gags differed from the perceived tastes of higher class, female patrons. In her study of silent comediennes, scholar Kristen Anderson Wagner recognizes that the film industry thought higher-class female viewers enjoyed light comedies containing more plot development.⁸² Trade discourse certainly supports her finding. Exhibitor Mrs. Hester Grant Giles announced she would show films exclusively for 'the feminine sex,' which only allowed for a "a few high class comedies."⁸³ Edward Dillon, a producer of comedy shorts, proposed, "Slapstick comedy is all right for a certain element of people, but the clean minded young girl, the faithful wife, and the intelligent class of motion picture attendants in general, are more in favor of the clean, refined, light comedy than the riff-raff or slap-stick comedy."⁸⁴ Relevantly, the industry described light comedies as containing a notable plot. Epes Winthrop Sargent, the scenario advisor for *The Moving Picture World*, similarly explained that "light comedies should contain a decided plot with a climax and no anti-climax, the same as if the story were a drama."⁸⁵ Interestingly, Sargent not only lists causality, but recommends some sort of development or build. We should note, however, that while women were presumed to prefer comedies with more plot, the *kinds* of cheerful plot developments seen as appealing to them earned dismissal from some male critics as trite fluff. Walter Prichard Eaton grouched that female audiences only judged and enjoyed theater "according as it tells a pretty story, with sufficient 'love interest,' and preferably a happy ending."⁸⁶ Though women were associated with 'story comedies,' the stories themselves did not always befit critics' notions of quality.

In the first half of the 1910s, we can find numerous expressions of concern in the trade press that comedy shorts were alienating higher class and female patrons with their limited plot

development. The trade press typically referred to film farces as “cheap comedy.”⁸⁷ The film trade posited that farces impeded the film industry’s efforts to attain cultural legitimacy. In a 1913 editorial for *The Moving Picture World*, critic W. Stephen Bush claimed that after viewing a series of shorts, he could boil the industry’s entire output down to two problematic types: melodrama and farce. Bush critiqued the comedies by noting, “there was the tramp in the freight car, there was the funny chase...here is the real enemy to the further upward course of the motion picture.”⁸⁸ Even by early 1915, scenario writer Maibelle Heikos bemoaned, “For my part I believe that audiences—refined audiences, at least—are tired of rapid slapstick, but there is sadly needed a school of good comedy writers to turn out stuff with stories to them.”⁸⁹ Complaints from female viewers about insufficient plots in comedy shorts also populated newspapers and fan magazines.⁹⁰

As one fan opined in 1915 to *Motion Picture Magazine*,

“Comedy films do act as a relief to tired minds and bodies. Nevertheless, if it is to be comedy, let it be good comedy, and not such ridiculous piffle as is given the public by Keystone Company. What is there funny about seeing Roscoe hit by a brick or Mabel fall into the lake, or the Keystone policemen, who do such meaningless stunts. There is no discoverable plot to their pictures, and to me they are nothing more or less than torture.”⁹¹

Discourse thus positioned the plots of comedy shorts as problematically unappealing to the higher class and feminine patrons that producers aimed to attract through the feature film.

Survey of Comedy Shorts from 1913: Plot Development

While observers mused about the lack of plot in comedy shorts, we should qualify this characterization with a consideration of the films’ actual storylines prior to the rise of feature comedy. When comedy scholars briefly mention ‘situation comedy’ becoming common in features, they explain that it relies more on a narrative circumstance, such as a miscommunication about a dinner party’s start time, than physical comedy.⁹² It hasn’t been clarified yet, however, how narrative circumstances generally differed between short and feature comedies. Purely focusing on a gag’s relationship to situation can also impose unhelpful divides on shorts comedies.

Contemporary observers sometimes credited slapstick producer Mack Sennett with inventing ‘situation comedy,’⁹³ and scholar Rob King contends that Keystone’s gags cannot simply be seen as independent from narrative context.⁹⁴ I have noted in film publications a seeming distinction between a feature’s larger story arc and the emphasis on making gags logically develop within individual scenes of comedy shorts. I believe this idea of positive growth marks a key distinction between strategies across comedy shorts versus most feature comedies by the end of the 1910s. Because theatrical critics believed that female audiences wanted ‘happy endings,’ it is also important to weigh if these shorts displayed a cheerful progression in their events.

Development could be illustrated through multiple means, but this analysis assesses change in three different respects. On average, comedy shorts did not display shifts in main characters’ behaviors, relationships or circumstances. A behavioral change signifies that a protagonist adjusts their attitude by the end of the film. For instance, a cowardly young man might develop courage. For a change in relationships, I consider if a lead’s fundamental feelings towards another character evolves from the start of the film. As an example, a character could initially hate their in-laws but come to value them. Finally, the category of ‘change in circumstance’ asks if a character’s social station radically alters from the beginning of the film to the end. A character could experience upward mobility, such as inheriting a fortune. They might also be placed in a new environment, like a rural character moving to New York City.

Out of 1,388 shorts released in 1913, 1,325 (95.5%) exhibited no change in the main characters’ personalities. Characters often end an activity due to external restraints rather than inner transformation. Many comedy series followed a character or characters as they fell into a particular mix up. Humor relied on the character repeating their antics from one film to the next, rendering character growth unnecessary. Some series followed the same characters as they

repeatedly made mischief, such as the two male tramps who steal or engage in imposture in Selig's *Bumps and Willie* or the older male who fails in his sexual pursuits and career ambitions in Crystal's *Baldy Belmont*.⁹⁵ Other series showed the same characters engaging in quarrels without character growth, illustrated by Essanay's Alkali Ike. In *Alkali Ike's Mother-in-Law* (1913), Ike already does not get along with his wife and is further irritated when her mother comes to visit.⁹⁶ The bullying mother-in-law forces him to carry her hatboxes, tugs his hair and scolds him, and prevents a night out of drinking with friends. He attempts to hypnotize her into leaving the house, but his wife catches him in the act. Alkali Ike does not change his behaviors or values throughout this episode. He does not see the light and decide that his mother-in-law was right about drinking or that he should alter his treatment of his wife. Part of the delight of a comedy series was that the audience could expect the same character to make the same kinds of humorous mistakes.

Self-contained comedies also tended to revolve around a single incident without character growth. In courtship comedies, couples eloped by tricking their guardians or physically escaping. The plots did not instill personality changes in the lovers or their guardians to make the union come about. In Thanhouser's *The Official Goat Protector* (1913), for example, a miserly old man trains an angry goat to drive his niece's suitors away from the house.⁹⁷ The friends of the girl's preferred lover pretend to be police officers and arrest the uncle for having no 'goat license' in order to get the uncle away from the house. Chased by these men through the woods, the uncle finally witnesses his niece and her lover boarding a train with a clergyman. The old man does not alter his methods of guardianship by the end of the narrative, and the suitors do not mature in order to overcome the old man's disapproval. Other types of quarrels also illustrated little character growth, as in comedies where multiple men competed against one another for the same woman. In Vitagraph's *There's Music in the Hair* (1913), two composers, one German and one Italian, fight

over the same woman.⁹⁸ The German finally triumphs by pulling the Italian's wig off, revealing that man's baldness. Neither man learns a moral lesson from this rivalry or is forced to mature in his courtship methods. The German man sustains a consistent goal of humiliating his rival and succeeds.

Relationships between characters generally remain unaltered as well. In the same sample, roughly 93% (1,288 titles) contained no major shift in the central characters' attitudes towards one another. This relationship aspect could be considered in the context of many different comedy subgenres, but I will draw examples from domestic and courtship comedies since these revolved around intimate relationships. Studies of romantic comedy often focus upon whether or not the couple begins the narrative separately or together,⁹⁹ but such a distinction of legal togetherness or separateness doesn't capture how married and single couples' relationships varied between short and feature comedy. For instance, very different plotlines could occur with married couples depending on the type of comedy. Spouses could play a series of pranks on one another without modifying their opinions, or on the other hand, could initially hold negative attitudes towards each other but evolve in their assessments.

In comedy shorts, couples were often preconstituted as opposed to falling in love or reassessing their affections. Couples commonly faced temporary, external obstacles such as escaping from authority figures to elope, as in *A House Boat Elopement* (Powers, 1913).¹⁰⁰ The film's main character, 'Old Mr. Grouch,' chases after his eloping daughter and her lover in a motorboat until he is assaulted by the owners for taking it. Even if physical hijinks did not unfold from a couple's elopement, other scenarios also kept relationships static. In *The Winning Loser* (Majestic, 1913), a track team captain is in love with a girl but must race against other suitors competing for her.¹⁰¹ She loves him in return. At the end of a race, he loses but receives a Daschund

hound for a smaller prize. The girl is happiest with this prize compared to those given to her by other suitors. The girl and track captain loved each other at the beginning of the film and continue to love one another by the end. She simply reaffirms her love by enjoying his present even without a competition victory. The captain did not have to fix a character flaw or a life circumstance that could have impeded his relationship with the girl.

Domestic comedies also present this relational consistency. Couples usually experience temporary disruptions before reverting to their status quo. Seldom does either spouse drastically adjust their perception of the other. A popular plot type involved a self-indulgent husband misbehaving but rarely learning to appreciate his wife. In *When He Wore Blue* (Nestor, 1913), a husband feigns gout so that he can miss his wife's suffragette meeting to attend a club with male friends.¹⁰² Narrowly evading arrest later that evening, he beats up a cop and steals his uniform. Managing to get home undetected, the husband fools his wife without altering his attitude toward their marriage. Instead, he gets away with his misbehavior and has no impetus to alter his approach to married life. Sometimes a comedy short will imply briefly that a 'lesson has been learned' by the husband or wife, but this ostensible change comes at the very end without seeing the relationship evolve during the actual running time. In *Sauce for the Goose* (Vitagraph, 1913), a husband goes out with his friends on a series of benders and keeps lying to his wife. At the end of the short, she pretends to get drunk herself,¹⁰³ and her horrified husband vows to end his outings. The short ends on the husband's promise without the audience actually witnessing a changed dynamic between the couple.

The final dimension of narrative development that I examined was whether or not a main character experienced a major change in circumstances, such as a location move, career promotion or class fluctuation. Out of 1,388 shorts, approximately 89% (1,235) show no change in

occupations or addresses. Usually a temporary misunderstanding did not substantially change the characters' lifestyles. For instance, in *Frayed Fagin's Adventures* (Kalem, 1913), a hobo experiences a bad day where he is attacked by a bulldog, a swarm of bees and eventually an angry mob.¹⁰⁴ The hobo does not meet a gentle benefactor along the way, stumble upon treasure or find romance, but rather, his economic destitution is maintained throughout. Characters pranks on one another also rarely altered anyone's town, career or social position. In *Interrupted Wedding Bells* (Edison, 1913), a man's groomsmen buy him explosive tobacco as a prank to ruin his appearance on his wedding day.¹⁰⁵ The wedding eventually proceeds with an unhappy bride and disheveled groom. While the prank causes a temporary delay of the ceremony, the couple is not forced, say, to move their wedding to a new location where the husband might meet a man who offers him a different, more lucrative career. In short, protagonists in comedy shorts frequently encountered disruption, but seldom of a sort that dramatically altered their initial state of affairs.

Comedy shorts occasionally followed characters who temporarily took on new occupations or received a boost in social station. While I did not include these shorts in the results for 'no change,' the few circumstantial changes these shorts depicted were typically fleeting. Significantly, these developments never lasted long enough to depict a character's successful adaptation. Some shorts showed a character briefly trying out a job before proving incompetent and having to abandon it. In *An 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' Troupe* (Biograph, 1913), a hotel proprietor attempts to become an actor but his experiences prove so disastrous that he dejectedly returns to hospitality.¹⁰⁶ Thus, if a character was placed in a new context, they often failed and returned to 'square one.' Characters also sometimes moved to different locales periodically before returning to their original situation. In *Algy Forfeits His Claim* (Nestor, 1913), a will bequeaths Algy a ranch if he marries.¹⁰⁷ Going out to see the property, he quickly tires of it and leaves.

Although comedy shorts certainly display motivated gags with situational reliance, overarching improvements to characters' behaviors, relationships or circumstances were less common. This lack of change seemingly placed comedy shorts at odds with prevailing conceptions regarding the structural requirements of the feature and how those would appeal to higher class and female patrons.

Performers in Comedy Shorts

The foregrounding of attractive performers in features of the early 1910s, particularly female leads, created another potential obstacle for transferring comedians from shorts. As we have seen, the industry associated higher class and feminine tastes with glamorous stars. The emphasis upon attractive stars, especially female stars, deviated from comedy shorts that predominately utilized a company brand or a male character comedian. Some scholars recognize that feature comedies relied less on exaggerated make up and funny costuming, but the larger shift in *types* of performers has yet to be considered.¹⁰⁸ Alluring and youthful performers, not just realistically costumed ones, suited notions of both middle class and feminized tastes. In particular, comedy scholarship has yet to consider how types of performers in silent comedy relate to the gender of audiences.

Trade publications treated features as the realm for individual stars, while comedy producers often promoted a group of comics or their company's style. For instance, publicity bulletins for Vitagraph in 1912 and 1913 mention all performers with equal font size and lettering, without giving any performers, even John Bunny or Sidney Drew, greater emphasis.¹⁰⁹ A comedy producer even bragged that it was harder to make a comedy short "go over" because in the feature "the name of a prominent star will carry it."¹¹⁰ By the end of the 1910s, some performers in comedy shorts would acquire their own star brand, such as Charles Chaplin or Fatty Arbuckle, but the industry's promotion of comedians still conflicted with the glamorous rhetoric around feature stars. While

coverage of performers in feature dramas typically presented them as attractive role models, comedians received less flattering characterizations.

Rob King and Kristen Anderson Wagner recognize the industry's dismissive treatment of shorts comedians in the 1910s.¹¹¹ This treatment extended to almost every major comedian, whether they engaged in slapstick or situation comedy. The negative connotations of being involved in a lesser craft proved to be a component of comedians' publicity. In an interview with *Motography* (1915), Charles Chaplin confessed he only became a comedian once his dreams of being a leading man were crushed. The article provided a tale that depicted Chaplin's 'fate' as an unhappy accident. Chaplin (though more likely a studio publicist) states,

"My greatest desire when I adopted the stage as a profession, was to become a leading man... it took me a long time to become reconciled to the fact that I was best fitted for comic work. I at once had visions of myself as a screen hero, hurling villains over cliffs and rescuing fair heroines from a thousand varieties of unknown danger. I was sure I had shaken off the 'comedy' hoodoo forever. It was a sad blow when I arrived to Los Angeles and learned that instead of being a hero I was to be the thing I had grown to detest—a funmaker."¹¹²

This piece attributes Chaplin's shorts career to his failure in conventionally attractive roles. Rather than characterizing his discovered ability as a surprisingly enjoyable alternative, the article frames Chaplin's occupation as something he 'detests.'

Shorts comedians likely received a negative stigma because they often played characters with physical or mental 'flaws' that correlated well with superiority theories of comedy.¹¹³ By 'flawed,' I mean that their character traits received overt mockery from critics and did not accord with conventions of admirable attributes in the historical moment of the 1910s (being culturally determined and subjective). Press coverage continually derided the looks or personal failings of comedians. John Bunny, one of Vitagraph's most popular comedians, had his overweight frame repeatedly commented upon. Press reports were sure to mention that John Bunny "will never grow thin."¹¹⁴ Articles described comediennes such as Flora Finch and Mae Hotely as well-suited for

‘old maid’ parts.¹¹⁵ Fan magazines drew attention to the unusual physiques of shorts comedians throughout the decade. An issue of *Film Fun* announced over photographs of six comedians and comediennes, “Last month we had the funny fats. Here are the six skinny screams.”¹¹⁶ Photoplay manuals also complained that comedy shorts often did not portray flattering personalities. The author claimed these “characters are cursed with all the earmarks of the deepest-dyed type they portray—the battle-browed villain, or the ludicrous Jew-Irishman-N-----.”¹¹⁷ That the author conjures villains or ethnic slurs to characterize leading types presumes a denigrating presentation of characters in comedy shorts.

The trade did not associate these character comedians with higher class or female viewers. Industry participants labeled comedians’ unflattering depictions of humanity as lowbrow. A screenwriting manual, *The Photoplay Author* (1915), claimed the “comedians with the aid of costumes weird make-ups...are gradually going out of fashion” and blamed this “low taste” on vaudeville and musical comedy.¹¹⁸ Echoing trade comments, the author positioned physically or behaviorally flawed leads against ‘American’ humor. The author continued that such types “are usually as far from being real national types as one could well imagine.”¹¹⁹ The trade also disassociated female fans from humorous-looking male comedians. An article for *Moving Picture News* presented a clearly gendered division of film content that paired female fans with attractive leads and male fans with comedians. The article claimed, “Ask the first department store girl who her idol is, and she will promptly say: ‘Costello.’ Who is Costello? He is the handsome man of the Vitagraph Company. Ask the office boy here about his favorite comic actor. ‘Bunny,’ he will say.”¹²⁰ By posing these disparate questions for female and male fans, the article presumes female fans would take an interest in an ‘idol’ like Maurice Costello, while a comically rotund, older comedian, such as John Bunny, would be of more interest to male viewers.

This focus on undesirable characters inhibited most female stars from establishing a reputation in comedy shorts. Contemporary comments already proposed that women were less naturally funny, something Kristen Anderson Wagner discusses thoroughly in her work on silent comediennes.¹²¹ She notes an additional difficulty compounding this bias—societal expectations that women be physically appealing and morally admirable. In broader forms like farce, the young, attractive women considered so critical for legitimate plays or feature films were rarely central heroines. The trade conveyed discomfort about showing a lovely, proper example of womanhood being comically humiliated, believing this upset higher class patrons. *The Moving Picture World* columnist Louis Reeves Harrison declared that “it does not please the better class to see her held up to scorn.”¹²² The few successful women in broad comedy tended to be older or portrayed as physically unattractive, making them apparently worthy of cultural ridicule. A 1913 column for *Variety* reported an identical trend in broad humor on the stage, positing, “Character comediennes have achieved something of a success in broad comedy, women like May Irwin, Florence Moore, Marie Dressler or Elizabeth Murray, but no young, pretty, girlish looking creature.”¹²³ In film shorts, Flora Finch’s spindly spinsters and Kate Price’s sturdy frame were objects of ridicule. Producers of comedy shorts found ways to include ingenues, but these women typically garnered supporting, nearly indistinguishable roles. Reviewers even commented upon this interchangeability. One said of Ford Sterling’s love interest in *Love and Vengeance* (Universal, 1914), “There will be many who see ‘Love and Vengeance’ who will believe that the young woman playing opposite Mr. Sterling is none other than the one with whom he appeared in so many pictures.”¹²⁴

Female performers and fans expressed annoyance about the misogynist atmosphere present in broad, comedian comedy. A chorus girl complained in a column for *Variety* (1903), “Every

show I went out with was a shine, and I never struck a comedian yet who didn't hog the lines of my best scenes." She aspired, however, to move on to her own vehicles, bragging that a manager said she was "more refined than Maud Adams in my light comedy."¹²⁵ Female fans also complained about unattractive male leads having undeservedly beautiful female companions. A columnist for *Motion Picture Magazine* scoffed, "These mirth foundries usually have one or more grotesque characters that we could never see in real life, and these curious persons are often made the husbands or the lovers of unusually charming girls."¹²⁶ Thus, both female performers and viewers balked at women's sidelining to misbehaving men within broad comedy. The dominance in shorts of broader forms limited the opportunities for female performers to anchor comedies and restricted how often female fans saw comedic stories that centered around women's experiences. The scarcity of female leads offered another potential hurdle for comedy producers to overcome if they hoped to appeal to female spectators from legitimate theater.

Survey of Comedy Shorts from 1913: Central Characters

When one statistically assesses comedy shorts, trade depictions of them as centering around physically or personally flawed characters find support. Out of 1,388 shorts released in 1913, 1,055 (76%) had physical deficiencies mentioned in reviews and synopses. That number might be greater if one could consistently view the actors' costumes and make up as opposed to relying primarily on written descriptions. As opposed to the appealing leading men and women often anchoring features, comedy shorts emphasized the physical eccentricities of main characters for humor. Sometimes discourse stressed a character's unusually large or small body size. "A fat middle-aged sailor" faced cannibals in *John Tobin's Sweetheart* (Vitagraph, 1913) according to reviews,¹²⁷ while a synopsis of *A Snakeville Courtship* (Essanay, 1913) referred to the female lead as "a three hundred pound debutante."¹²⁸ Conversely, other shorts stressed a person's diminutive size, such

as the “prim, little” male lawyer in *Lawyer, Dog and Baby* (Thanhouser, 1913)¹²⁹ or “little Tom” who dresses up as a cat to solve a case in *Tom, Dick and Harry* (Punch, 1913).¹³⁰ Other plots revolved around undesirable women, as with a bearded lady in *The Fickle Freak* (Kalem, 1913)¹³¹ or the ‘old maid’ in *She Must Elope* (Lubin, 1913).¹³² To underscore the grotesque nature of these women, large men sometimes played ‘old maid’ roles, such as Wallace Beery in *At the Old Maid’s Call* (Essanay, 1913).¹³³

When reviews and synopses did not mock a character’s natural attributes, they often relayed an external source ruining a character’s appearance, i.e. mud, flour or major tears. Comedy shorts frequently ruined looks as a central joke. While *Who is in the Box?* (Crystal, 1913) starred ingénue Pearl White, her character hides in a box to follow criminals and the ride ends up “badly marring Pearl’s neat appearance.”¹³⁴ Sometimes a character’s disheveled looks stemmed from being severely beaten. In *An Exclusive Pattern* (Lubin, 1913), the main characters attack each other for wearing the same vest and end the short “battered.”¹³⁵ It was not uncommon to find an entire plot premise around ridiculous or damaged clothing. *That Suit at Ten* (Vitagraph, 1913) featured a chubby man whose cheapness prompts him to buy an inexpensive suit that shrinks when it gets wet.¹³⁶ He helplessly waddles around the office, and his wife has to eventually cut him out of the suit with a saw and chisel. Scholars usually refer to Vitagraph’s comedy shorts as polite humor that anticipated the feature’s gentrified storytelling, but its shorts regularly displayed broad humor stemming from a character’s absurd or damaged looks. One of its most popular shorts performers, John Bunny, cross-dresses as a ‘fat widow’ in *Bunny’s Honeymoon* (1913) so that his niece’s alcoholic fiancé will think he married an ugly woman while drunk.¹³⁷ Even Sidney Drew dresses in women’s petticoats and trips into a horse trough in *When Women Go on the Warpath* (1913).¹³⁸

While written accounts consistently depicted comedic characters as physically unattractive, even more characters supposedly exhibited major personality flaws. With this classification, 86.5% of shorts (1,201) followed leads with personality flaws that remained unfixed by the end of the narrative. That is a large number considering that it excludes other characters that might be classified under this rubric if one could see the extant films. The attribute of incompetency abounded, and some comedian series structured themselves on a macro-scale around ineptitude. Essanay's Alkali Ike, IMP's Binks, or Vitagraph's Belinda repeatedly saw their escapades foiled. Failures extended to characters in self-contained narratives. In *Wanted-A-Plumber* (Kalem, 1913), plumber 'Fatty' accidentally connects a house's water pipes to the gas meter, destroying the kitchen and bathroom.¹³⁹ Incompetency extended to comedies with multiple men competing for one girl, as they often lost to a rival. *Pearl and the Poet* (Crystal, 1913) chronicles two men who scheme to win Pearl's affections but ultimately find her in a handsome football player's arms.¹⁴⁰ Even when the ineptness was minor, comedy shorts highlighted character's failures over purposeful action. In Vitagraph's *Pumps* (1913), a woman and man attend a party in uncomfortable new shoes, eventually having no choice but to end the party in their stockings.¹⁴¹

In addition to incompetency, other personality failings frequently remained unaltered. This stasis differentiated shorts characters from the heroes, or ambitious anti-heroes, in prestigious features. In *His Hoodoo* (Biograph, 1913), a womanizing masher attempts to hit on every lady who walks by.¹⁴² Their beaux beat him up, but the synopses do not mention the masher changing his ways. A similar pattern of uncorrected behavioral flaws can be found in *A Sleepy Romance* (Lubin, 1913). The Asian character in this film, referred to derogatorily in advertising as a 'gink,' sleeps constantly to the point of missing his own wedding. His rival marries the girl instead, but he passively returns to napping.¹⁴³

While these examples are fairly exaggerated due to the repetitive nature of the character's poor behavior, other shorts depicted characters who displayed unfixed defects in individual cases. In *A Sea Dog's Love* (Biograph, 1913), a sailor tries to impress a tavern widow by staging a brave act but thinks he sees a ghost and races back to his ship.¹⁴⁴ He never gets to demonstrate newfound courage. Similar cowardice can be witnessed in *Two Too Many* (Lubin, 1913) in which a man, while drunk, accidentally proposes to two women. They fight over him as he "hides under a couch."¹⁴⁵ Rather than the man helping to settle the dispute, the situation only resolves itself when one of the women reveals she is already married.

Likely due to the prominence of unflattering character types, one finds a dearth of female leads in comedy shorts. Out of 1,388 releases, only 10.2% (142) revolved around clear female protagonists. Common plotlines repeatedly subordinated female characters, especially young women. The 'male rivalry' model previously discussed left the female character fairly passive as men comically undermined one another. Ford Sterling's vehicles for Keystone or the Alkali Ike series for Essanay often utilized this formula.¹⁴⁶ Elopement comedies frequently adopted the perspective of a father or male lover. *A Shotgun Cupid* (Princess, 1913) followed a father who refuses to agree to his daughter's marriage because her suitor is poor. Hiding his own cash in a shotgun, when he later shoots the suitor, he accidentally gives the suitor money.¹⁴⁷ In Lubin's *The Constable's Daughter* (1913), a man and his friend conspire to lead a girl's father on a car chase so that the girl can be left alone in the house.¹⁴⁸

Domestic comedies also maintained a decidedly masculine perspective by typically expressing anxiety about women's influence over the household. Rather than stressing companionate marriages or the rationale of both spouses, comedy shorts depicted wives in such a consistently negative way that they could be labeled 'male domestic nightmare comedies.' Even

when husbands were portrayed as buffoons, the films encouraged audiences to see the wives as unreasonable. One finds many references to wives as tyrannical or physically abusive. Reviews of *With the Aid of Phrenology* (Biograph, 1913) describe the main character as “bossed around by his wife,” who even hits him on the head with a broomstick.¹⁴⁹ Other shorts emphasized the wife’s impracticality or irritating habits. In *Bound to Occur* (Essanay, 1913), a woman’s dog obsession brings her husband such turmoil that he eventually leaves her.¹⁵⁰ Titles such as *And Wife Came Back* (Vitagraph, 1913) or *She Slept Through it All* (IMP, 1913) portrayed wives as ‘spoil’ers’ of a good time. Men took comically extreme measures to flee ‘unpleasant’ domestic spaces. In *The Burglar and the Baby* (Kalem, 1913), a man decides he would rather spend a night in jail than return to his house.¹⁵¹ Some men even feigned death to secure peace and quiet. In Lubin’s *This Isn’t John* (1913), a man stages his drowning so that he can escape his family and go camping with friends. He only returns home when he runs out of money.¹⁵² While the shorts often framed such husbands as ‘gay deceivers,’ the wives who spent time away from their households were usually framed as deserving comeuppance. In John Bunny’s *The Pickpocket* (Vitagraph, 1913), a husband arranges his wife’s arrest so that he can blackmail her into giving up her suffrage activities. An illustrated magazine story of the film commented, “She had brought her punishment upon herself.”¹⁵³

The emphasis on buffoonish, masculine characters and perspectives in many comedy shorts presented further problems for comedy producers hoping to penetrate the feature market. What approaches to feature comedy could producers take if they felt pressured to place an attractive woman at a comedy’s center as opposed to using her as a foil for male comedians?

Comedy Shorts and Morality

Another risk for comedy producers considering feature-filmmaking lay in the industry's characterization of shorts as reliant upon unsympathetic, aggressive modes of humor. In keeping with humor studies, the term 'humor' in this project refers to qualities in characters and individual circumstances that industry discourses framed as amusing for audiences.¹⁵⁴ The literature contrasts humor from 'comedy' as an organized, planned structure, which is relevant to my later consideration of these shorts' overall plot development.¹⁵⁵ Comedy scholars already recognize the complicated relationship between humor and an audience's morals. Some humor theories propose that audiences laugh at characters' inferiority, which can make humor appear unethical.¹⁵⁶ Other scholars note that due to comedy's propensity for rule-breaking, the behaviors of characters can violate social protocols and incur controversy.¹⁵⁷ More particularly, scholars of silent comedy have deftly covered contemporaneous criticisms of silent slapstick for physical violence and immoral humor.¹⁵⁸ In contrast, feature discourse stressed 'sympathetic' engagement with protagonists and moral outcomes.

Though feature-length humor in the 1910s does not receive much analysis, the literature concurs that characters generally became 'better' behaved. How they did so isn't specified. Scholars also often position the actions of characters in non-slapstick comedies, across features and shorts, as equally 'polite' when there was a world of difference between them. In addition to the vagueness surrounding how character behaviors altered in feature comedy, discussions of morality usually rely on character conduct alone and do not assess the type of laughter engendered. Henry Jenkins usefully notes that supposedly higher forms of humor in the 19th century advocated for 'kind' laughter with emotional attachment to characters.¹⁵⁹ Audiences engaging in 'sympathetic humor' became just as crucial as character actions when critics assessed appropriate

morality for comedy features. Broadly examining the morals of comedy shorts versus comedy features allows us to trace how comic strategies for features evolved towards the sympathetic humor associated with women.

The film trade advocated higher class and feminized frameworks of morality and sympathy for early features, and they saw comedy shorts as thriving on emotional distance. In his 1913 discussion of screenwriting for comedy shorts, Epes Winthrop Sargent asserted that it was “human nature to laugh at the misfortune of others...there is a feeling of superiority.”¹⁶⁰ Columnist Louis Reeves Harrison also posited during the early teens that comedy shorts drew attention to people’s flaws and that audiences sought to see those flaws mocked. Harrison explained, “People nearly always enjoy a sparkling comedy that shows up certain primitive qualities man has brought along with him from his lower state of existence—egotism, hatred, avarice, hypocrisy—because we would like to kick those qualities out of ourselves if we could.”¹⁶¹ Worrying that the audience’s laughter at this punishment could be overly harsh, he cautioned, “where human kindness is victimized in the photoplay the theme has a tragic as well as a comic side...there is nothing funny in what is cruel.”¹⁶² Harrison was not alone in his concern that an emphasis on ‘deficiency’ would encourage troublesome meanness in audiences. Another trade publication, *Motography*, scolded filmmakers in 1912 that it was *possible* to produce “farce without a sting or nasty suggestion in it.”¹⁶³ Observers’ need to address this issue repeatedly hints that they did not see the industry as producing enough comedies without this ‘sting.’

Critics of comedy shorts in the early teens also signaled ethical wariness about laughing at certain ethnicities or nationalities. Ethnic stereotypes such as lazy Black men, angry Irish laundresses and conniving Jews populated comedy shorts.¹⁶⁴ While Rob King identifies frequent ethnic caricatures in his study of Keystone Company,¹⁶⁵ the trade criticized shorts beyond the

purview of slapstick. In a 1911 article entitled, “The Film Maker’s Responsibilities,” *The Moving Picture World* argued, “The oddities of certain nations are a legitimate subject for film comedy, but there are limits, beyond which it is not safe to venture.” Linking racism to the notion of cruel or mocking laughter, the piece continued, “Humor here degenerates too easily into ridicule and ridicule is both cruel and offensive.”¹⁶⁶ The beginning of 1913 still saw similar complaints. *Motion Picture News* scenario advisor William Lord Wright lamented that the previous year’s “ridiculing of national peculiarities” was a vogue to be checked: “The Irish policemen, the Dutch sausage maker, the Hebrew pawnbroker and the French pastry cook were too numerous.”¹⁶⁷

Commentators did not just fret over the type of laughter engendered. They also worried about characters’ unethical actions, and on this account, comedy shorts experienced censor troubles. Comedy was not the only type of film the trade considered risky enough to agitate censorship boards during the 1910s, as trade publications also lambasted Westerns, melodramas, sex plays and ‘problem plays.’¹⁶⁸ Yet comedy was a consistent offender. Scholars such as Lee Grieveson and Rob King recount slapstick shorts’ friction with middle-class morality,¹⁶⁹ but trade commentators also complained about comedy shorts more generally. Even by 1914, columnist W. Stephen Bush reported exhibitors’ dissatisfaction with comedy shorts that offended their patrons: “It is unfortunately true that too many directors confound humor with vulgarity...There is not the slightest affinity between humor and vulgarity or coarseness or indecency or malice.”¹⁷⁰ It was not always clear from such discussions what behavior qualified as vulgar or indecent. Some commentary seemed to find ‘rough housing’ objectionable.¹⁷¹ *Motion Picture News*’ William Lord Wright proposed, “Good pictures and low horse play can never dwell together satisfactorily.”¹⁷² He blamed comedy shorts’ ‘vaudeville’ inheritance, warning against “going back” to vaudeville’s “immoral offenses.”¹⁷³ Though Wright remained vague about what

vaudeville's exact offenses were, other critics cited its ethnic stereotyping, physical humor and aggressive mockery.¹⁷⁴ Complaining about characters' dishonesty and infidelity, the trade press mentioned husbands' deceptions as a distasteful trope. *Moving Picture News* complained of the repetitiveness and bad taste of "the old story of a frisky husband who fooled his wife in order to get out to dinner with a friend and two actresses."¹⁷⁵ Given how often attempted infidelity appeared in comedies from companies ranging from Keystone to Vitagraph, these criticisms also applied to non-slapstick shorts

As with character types, the trade framed the unsympathetic humor of comedy shorts as unappealing to higher class and female viewers. Critics dismissed harsh, aggressive humor as 'cheap' or 'low class,' arguing that cruelty or immorality demonstrated by comedy shorts would "antagonize the finer element in an audience."¹⁷⁶ The screenplay writing manual, *The Photodrama* (1913) also proposed that pathos would raise the class of film comedy. "Photoplay comedy has been in the hands of the Philistines since its inception," the author claimed.¹⁷⁷ He hoped for more 'polite comedies' that "mingle delighted smiles with pathetic tears."¹⁷⁸ Industry discourse also pitted women against immoral humor or characters. William Lord Wright of *Moving Picture News* again insisted, "Slap-stick comedy, and suggestive songs and monologue have no place in a refined moving picture show, catering to women and children."¹⁷⁹ While the trade undoubtedly projected tastes onto audience members, exhibitor comments revealed actual tensions between female filmgoers and comedy shorts. Exhibitors reported women walking out of theaters due to the insensitivity or cruel mockery of characters.¹⁸⁰ Describing a troubling screening of a 'comedy of bad taste,' Wright reported, "We saw one the other evening that burlesqued death. There was a lady in the audience who had recently lost her brother...the lady left the theater and went home. She was not entertained."¹⁸¹ Such comments remained consistent with how discourses of

legitimate theater had characterized feminine humor as sympathetic and well-intentioned. The French actor, Constant Coquelin defended American women from the notion that they did not have a sense of humor, and used adjectives highlighting their sympathetic humor by calling it ‘gentle,’ ‘sensitive’ and ‘magnanimous.’ 182

Women writers and viewers themselves communicated disdain for ‘immoral’ humor. Articles traced the efforts of women’s groups to censor inappropriate character actions in comedy shorts,¹⁸³ and many female writers also conveyed distaste for humiliation-based gags. *Motography* columnist Josephine Clement disliked the embarrassing physical nudity on display in an Alkali Ike short. Describing how a character’s pants were stolen, forcing him to walk around in his underwear, she dismissively remarked, “The picture made a sorry attempt at humor and succeeded only in being vulgar.”¹⁸⁴ Complaints about male comedians for their ‘obscene’ or aggressive humor carried over to female writers’ newspaper columns.¹⁸⁵ The opinions of trade press, exhibitors, and female writers therefore converged to frame immoral characters in comedy shorts as antithetical to feminine tastes.

While film publications hinted that clean, sympathetic humor befit middle-and-upper class femininity, they still engaged in a balancing act that tried to avoid specifying which audience demographics were to blame for ‘immoral’ content. The trade press carefully framed immorality as a producer problem. It suggested that producers insulted the working classes by feeding them lowbrow material. Countering assumptions of ‘higher class’ audiences having better taste, Reverend Herbert A. Jump lectured in *Motography*:

“We need to free ourselves from the superstition that virtue always wears a frock coat and a silk hat and that vice is generally dressed in overalls and a flannel shirt. As a matter of fact, the testimony of a theatrical manager with whom I recently conversed comes very close to the truth: ‘The poor people want clean shows; it is the rich people who like the smut.’”¹⁸⁶

In these discussions, the industry implied that a lack of sympathetic or moral humor was ‘lowbrow’ yet carefully avoided assigning outright blame that could alienate a robust working-class base. Rather, a viewer could associate with ‘good taste’ despite their actual class status.

Survey of Comedy Shorts from 1913: The Morality of Humor

Throughout trade discourse in the first half of the 1910s, worries lingered about comedy shorts encouraging laughter *at* characters as opposed to laughing *with* them. Columnists fretted over film comedies’ depiction of ‘fools,’ regarding this approach as incompatible with audience empathy.¹⁸⁷ Studying shorts releases from 1913 shows that these characterizations had some basis in actual production output. Synopses and reviews reveal a prevalence of unsympathetic structures. By ‘unsympathetic structures,’ I mean that plots’ comic incidents primarily stemmed from the troubles faced by main characters. Situations placed characters in embarrassing circumstances or showed plans backfiring, with characters punished or returned to their status quo by the end of the film. These scenarios could even delve into ‘nightmarish’ territory, where characters experienced severe mental torment. Out of 1,388 shorts, 84% (1,166) exhibited physical or mental humiliation regularly in their narratives. Many characters experienced severe psychological pain, such as thinking their husband is dead or that they have accidentally murdered someone.¹⁸⁸ While we should be cautious about extrapolating that the reviewers’ responses matched that of other viewers, these writings frequently relayed the character’s misery, social rejection and total humiliation as key to the film’s humor in ways that conflicted with the idea of ‘moral’ or ‘gentle’ humor. In Frontier’s *The Village Pest* (1913), a young man obsesses over a book on magic tricks. He annoys everyone at a party until he gets “soused in the horse trough” after which “left alone, he crawls away shivering.”¹⁸⁹ This type of public humiliation extended to female characters, though largely restricted to those deemed unattractive. In Lubin’s *His Reward* (1913), an old maid pretends to

drown so that handsome young men will rescue her. The men are horrified when she throws herself at them in gratitude. Finally, one recognizes her scheme and advises the others no longer save her. The film ends with the other characters laughing at her. A summary of the film states, “He, like the rest, is willing to let her drown...the crowd enjoys a good laugh at auntie’s expense.”¹⁹⁰ These descriptions repeatedly emphasize the lead character’s misery as humorous.

Related to characters’ humorous misery, a surprising number of comedy shorts evinced an unhappy ending from the main characters’ perspectives. Though determining ‘happy’ risks some subjectivity, the notion is critical to address since many definitions of comedy narratives posit a happy ending.¹⁹¹ My survey classified endings as unhappy if the main character endures punishment, extreme humiliation, or failure to achieve goal/hopes for gratification. Out of 1,388 shorts, 1,077 (77.6%) end with the lead’s punishment or return to an unsatisfactory status quo. In *The Bachelor’s Finish* (Crystal, 1913), a man ‘collapses’ at the end of the film when he finds out he drunkenly married an unattractive bride has eight children.¹⁹² The country boy in *Mabel’s Dramatic Career* (Keystone, 1913) similarly experiences an unpleasant ending when he realizes that the girl he loves is now a happily-married film star.¹⁹³

The discomfiture of these leads extended to comedy films produced by companies that scholars have deemed more ‘polite.’¹⁹⁴ In *Bedelia Becomes a Lady* (Vitagraph, 1913), a country girl consumes enough ‘trashy’ novels to develop aspirations for city life and high society. Convinced that she will become a society sensation, she attends a party in the city and horrifies guests with her inelegance. According to Vitagraph’s advertisement, Bedelia “makes the mistake of her life by trying to reach heights at which she grows dizzy and from which she falls to her own level again.”¹⁹⁵ Humor through a character’s routed plans also can be found in John Bunny’s comedies. In *Flaming Hearts* (1913), Bunny plays a vain writer who falls for a female fan but

eventually finds her in the arms of a friend pretending to be him.¹⁹⁶ Dejected, he goes to drink at a saloon. Even in the shorts of companies considered less aggressive than Keystone, humor often hinged upon a character's failure or unpleasant experiences.

A large percentage of comedy leads also reflected the trade press' concerns over 'immoral' humor by acting in ways that proved to be self-serving or harmful to other characters. The social violations I will discuss here goes beyond simple 'rule-breaking:' a character in a comedy film could break a rule for a socially benign purpose, such as driving down a closed road in order to rescue a relative. Out of 1,388 shorts, 84% (1,166) demonstrated explicitly anti-social behaviors from main characters. This category identifies behaviors American society in this era portrayed as harmful to, or as taking advantage of, other people or society at large. That would include lying to others for selfish purposes, acts of mental cruelty, nastiness, violence, infidelity attempts, or stealing.

As opposed to defending a loved one, violence usually manifests in 1913 comedy shorts for selfish reasons. Sexual competition motivated many fights, as in Majestic's *A Slight Misunderstanding* (1913). An Irish launderess gets a note from a man asking her to attend a theater show with him. When she arrives to meet him and discovers the note was meant for someone else, she jealously "pummels him with her umbrella."¹⁹⁷ Another common motif involved a character overreacting to another's mistake with physical violence. In *The Man with a Razor* (Komic, 1913), a barber distracted by organ music fails to complete shaving his client.¹⁹⁸ The furious customer chases the barber with a razor all over town. Physical aggression also stemmed from characters wishing to embarrass or pick on someone. In *Forced Bravery* (Keystone, 1913), cowboys repeatedly harass a boy until he snaps and shoots at them.¹⁹⁹ Other characters might not physically beat one another but pull pranks causing physical discomfort. In *Ma and the Boys* (Crystal, 1913),

one suitor sabotages another by sprinkling pepper spray on his gifts for their female love interest and her mother.²⁰⁰

Lying for anti-social purposes and mental cruelty appear the most often. Rather than dissembling to aid a spouse or for another innocent purpose, men and women lied to hide misbehaviors. In *Flirty Florence* (Frontier, 1913), a female circus performer targets married customers to improve business. One lawyer pursues her but keeps fibbing to his wife and mother about this infidelity attempt. When the circus performer is later arrested for blackmailing customers, the lawyer pretends that the woman was simply his client.²⁰¹ Characters might also lie for financial gain. In *A Painter's Ruse* (Powers, 1913), a painter makes the world think he has drowned so that his creations will be worth more money,²⁰² while a doctor pretends small pox is in the area so he can provide fake vaccinations for money in *Some Doctor* (Punch, 1913).²⁰³ My classification of 'mental cruelty' refers to a main character's willingness to harm the psychological health and happiness of another person—for example, severely scaring or traumatizing someone. In *Fooling Their Wives* (Lubin, 1913), several husbands are annoyed when their wives go on a camping trip. Wanting the wives back to cook, the husbands pose as tramps that attack the terrified women in their tents.²⁰⁴ Even courtship comedies incorporated mental cruelty. Men forced their lovers or lovers' parents to choose between potential death or marriage. *Mr. Dippy Dipped* (Essanay, 1913) ends with a young man refusing to rescue his lover's father from drowning until he consents to their marriage,²⁰⁵ while the suitor in *The Pursuit of Jane* (IMP, 1913) refuses to rescue a woman from an increasingly submerged rock until she will agree to their union.²⁰⁶

The only unconfirmed trade complaint involves the matter of ethnic and national caricatures. I found only 178 shorts (12.8%) with direct references to these types. More may have existed as supporting characters, and contemporaneous readers likely recognized certain traits or professions

as ethnically marked. On the other hand, it may be a sign that the forms of humor in comedy shorts, while still seen as too low class for features, had already eradicated most ‘ethnic types’ from lead roles. Another possible explanation is that the trade press could have also purposefully downplayed the presence of ethnic stereotypes in descriptions to enhance the industry’s respectability.

Between comic characters’ anti-social behaviors and humor stemming from discord or embarrassment, the trade’s claims about ‘unsympathetic’ humor find support on the whole. As we will see, these trends would be taken into account for longer comedies once producers conceived of wealthier and female patrons as crucial targets.

Enter Feature Comedy: Motivations for Production

In the early 1910s, multiple factors made comedy’s transference from shorts to features challenging. The shorts’ emphasis on individual gags, broad caricature and aggressive humor seemed incompatible with the pressures placed on feature producers to incorporate plot development, glamorous stars, and moral messaging. Tendencies in comedy shorts did not accord with the industry’s perceptions of higher class and feminine tastes—tastes they hoped to satisfy through the feature film.

Whatever reservations producers may have had, these ultimately proved insufficient to permanently prevent feature-length comedies. By the fall of 1913, multiple comedies or comedy dramas began to be offered through specialized distribution systems for feature films. In November, All Star Features Corporation released the six-reel comedy drama *Checkers* and Famous Players released the four-reel romantic comedy *Caprice*.²⁰⁷ Features labeled as just ‘comedies’ appeared by early 1914, such as Jesse L. Lasky’s *Brewster’s Millions* (March, 1914, 5 reels).²⁰⁸ No production company explicitly announced its rationale for this inauguration. Despite the lack of overt explanation, some possible reasons may be surmised. Once features became less

of an anomaly, exhibitors noted that audiences tired of only seeing prestige dramas. By 1913, one exhibitor complained to *Motion Picture News* that “patrons do not go to a motion picture show to be tired out with a long, overstretched film, but go to have a good time, an hour of rest. They call for much comedies.”²⁰⁹ This exhibitor not only requested more comedies, but also that comedy serve as the longer program offering:

“Nearly every program nowadays consists of a two-reel melodrama and a one-reel comedy. Reverse the program. Give the moving picture patrons an abundance of two-reel comedy and less long-drawn-out melodramatic misery.”²¹⁰

Despite early claims about the necessity of somber storylines for the feature, audiences apparently demonstrated restlessness in response to the monotony of this programming decision.

In addition to some exhibitors expressing a desire for lighter programs, financial practicality perhaps provided the strongest motivation for feature comedies’ arrival on release schedules. Theatrical producers such as Jesse L. Lasky or Oliver Morosco founded or partook in feature concerns so that they could exploit their stage properties among mass audiences.²¹¹ Given that numerous legitimate hits were comedies, theatrical producers logically moved to adapt humorous plays for the screen. Producers evidently saw comedy plays as providing a ready-made audience. When discussing his decision to rely on stage properties for feature comedies in early 1915, producer George Kleine rationalized, “the best guarantee of a successful picture is a successful play...a successful play is more widely advertised and better known to the masses than a novel of corresponding merit.”²¹² Another benefit that Kleine implies is the built-in followings for theatrical *performers*, and numerous feature comedies would showcase a stage star in one of their hits.

While it behooved film producers to exploit popular plays, feature comedies also served the benefit of being less costly to make. By 1913, trade articles questioned the financial practicality of only producing features of ‘epic’ proportions.²¹³ The arrival of comedies over three reels coordinated with producers’ efforts to offer enough features to fill year-round programs. Dramatic

features had such a continuous market presence by September of 1913 that Famous Players announced a year-round program of thirty feature films.²¹⁴ In order to balance the budget for this yearly output, founder Adolph Zukor recognized the necessity of variation. In his examination of Famous Players' early distribution, Michael Quinn observes that the production of only large budget, spectacular dramas year-round would have been financially untenable, leading Famous Players to incorporate 'B' and 'C' level productions with lesser budgets and rental costs.²¹⁵ The production documents for early features at Famous Players stratified them into A, B and C classes. Feature comedies such as *Caprice* (1913) or *An American Citizen* (1914) were both B productions with markedly lower rental prices than dramas such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1913) despite being adaptations of famous stage plays with popular actors such as Mary Pickford and John Barrymore respectively.²¹⁶ Feature comedies joined the fray with middling expenses that allowed companies to moderate their production schedules. Program variety, potential profits and lower costs all meant that the feature comedy could not be permanently forestalled despite the hefty adjustments producers might be forced to make.

Conclusion

In the early 1910s, the idea of a 'feature comedy' presented a conundrum for the film industry. The trade press disassociated comedy shorts from higher class women—mainstays of legitimate audiences that producers and exhibitors sought to attract through the feature film. Though trade publications likely exaggerated the distinctiveness of those patrons' preferences based on class or gender, the industry's conceptions of taste proved influential for its decisions about comedy features. Responses from critics, viewers and exhibitors also replicated producer fears that certain types of comedy might alienate higher-class women. On the whole, comedy shorts supposedly conflicted with the preferences of respectable female viewers by lacking plot

development, foregrounding buffoonish men, as well as encouraging aggressive and even immoral laughter. Though some scholars propose that more situation-based comedies simply carried over into features,²¹⁷ even non-slapstick shorts presented plot structures, characters and modes of humor that provided difficulties for feature adaptation.

Despite feature comedies' eventual production, producers' road to finding successful formulae wound through several years until particular forms attained consistent popularity. The industry's concerns about comedy and its relationship to class and gender would continue as feature comedies became more common. The 1910s was rife with experimentation as producers grappled with the challenges of crafting respectable, yet *bankable*, feature-length humor that would appeal to large swaths of female audiences. Over the course of the decade, the comedy feature went from a fledgling product to a staple of Hollywood entertainment. Let us examine how this radical transformation unfolded.

¹ Michael Quinn discusses this shifting definition in his dissertation, “Early Feature Distribution and the Development of the Motion Picture Industry, Famous Players and Paramount, 1912-1921.” (PhD Dissertation. University of Wisconsin Madison. 1998), 64-65.

² Quinn, 64-65. See also trade discussions of the feature. For instance, “Changing Trade Conditions.” George D. Proctor. MPN. 11/15/1913, 18.

³ I am indebted to Ben Singer’s statistics on feature versus shorts distribution in the 1910s (“Feature Films, Variety Programs, and the Crisis of the Small Exhibitor.” *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*. Eds. Charles Keil and Shelley Stamp. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 76-100).

⁴ See Elieen Bowser’s Chapter 12, “The Feature Film,” in *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁵ Many invaluable sources discuss the industry’s economic transition to feature length films. For general periodization and the early years of the transition, see Bowser, Chapter 12, Ben Brewster’s “Periodization of Early Cinema” in *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*. Ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 66-75, or Richard Abel’s *Americanizing the Movies and ‘Movie-Mad’ Audiences, 1910-1914*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), Chapter One: American Variety and/or Foreign Features: The Throes of Film Distribution” or for a more localized view, Entr’acte 1: Mapping the Local Terrain of Exhibition. For accounts that trace the feature film into the late 1910s and its influence on distribution and exhibition, see Richard Koszarski’s *An Evening’s Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) or William Paul’s *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Film*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), especially ‘Chapter Three: Palatial Architecture: Democratized Audience’ and ‘Chapter Four: Elite Taste in a Mass Medium.’

⁶ I came up with this percentage by comparing weekly outputs for the months of January, February, May, July and August in 1913. In, January 1913 (2 weeks from Jan 7-Jan 21), there were 79 unlicensed, 82 licensed releases, with 24 unlicensed, 30 licensed comedies (35%). (MPW, Feb 1, 1913, 512-514). In February 1913, there were 90 shorts releases by American companies in one week period-first week of February) and 41 comedy releases (45%). Between May 1st and May 15th, 1913, 75 independents, 83 licensed releases, with 57 comedy releases (36%). From July 7-21 1913, 87 unlicensed, 84 licensed (171 releases), 26 from unlicensed, 28 from licensed (54 comedies total, 30% of overall shorts output). In August 30, 1913 (Aug 15-30 weekly releases), 88 independent releases, 97 licensed releases (185 releases total), 29 unlicensed comedies, 33 licensed (62 comedy releases total, or about 30% of output).

⁷ The total number of features derives from AFI, except for the years prior to 1914, which stem from Ben Singer’s “Feature Films, Variety Programs, and the Crisis of the Small Exhibitor.” *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*. Ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 76-100.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ In 1918, they finally approximated the 1/3 percentage of shorts at 27.6% of all features (233 out of 844).

¹⁰ Geoff King calls the feature transition a move in comedy towards integration and ‘genteel forms’ (*Film Comedy*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002, 23). Frank Scheide and Kristen Anderson Wagner label it a shift to ‘polite comedy’ to appease genteel tastes. See Scheide’s “The Mark of the Ridiculous and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929” (29-33) and Wagner’s “Pie Queens and Virtuous (Vamps)” (53) both in *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). For other references to narratively-driven comedies, including feature comedies, as ‘genteel,’ ‘refined,’ or ‘comedy of manners,’ see Henry Jenkins’ *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New

York: Columbia University Press, 1992), Chapter Two or Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale's "The Case of Silent Slapstick." *Hollywood Comedians, the Film Reader*. Ed. Frank Krutnik. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 60.

¹¹ It is certainly possible that other shorts existed that were not included on the release schedule. There are also a few shorts that appeared on the exhibitor listings but had no surviving synopses or reviews. If that was the case, the film went under the classification of 'not having' a certain trait as part of my statistics, since I could not prove the film had it. So if my statistics later say that 75% of comedy shorts exhibited physically flawed characters, I am not including any films without available synopses in that number. Thus, the 25% remaining don't necessarily have proof of attractive appearances but include a combination of attractive main characters and shorts with 'no available evidence' of unattractive main characters.

¹² The shorts' quicker turnover created much more of a brand emphasis as opposed to sustained advertising for individual films and limited the profits per film, even though the steady supply of weekly programs offered stability. For a good discussion of shorts programs and their exhibition/distribution contrast from features, see Richard Abel's *Americanizing the Movies and 'Movie-Mad' Audiences*, 'Chapter One: American Variety and/or Foreign Features: The Throes of Film Distribution,' or Elieen Bowser's 'Chapter 7: Brand Names and Star Advertising' or 'Chapter 12: The Feature Film' in *The Transformation of Cinema*. Michael Quinn provides one of the most detailed discussions of the M.P.C.'s model of distribution for shorts and the problems their variety programs encountered when trying to suit the distribution strategy needed for features. See 'Chapter Two: The Motion Picture Patents Company: Responses to the Feature Film' in "Early Feature Distribution and the Development of the Motion Picture Industry: Famous Players and Paramount, 1912-1921." PhD Dissertation. University of Wisconsin-Madison. 1998.

¹³ The debt to legitimate source material and performers is discussed in Bowser, 204. See also Richard DeCordova's *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 45. For an overview of legitimate theater's influence on film distribution, see Quinn's "Early Feature Distribution," 105-130. For the feature's close ties to legitimate exhibition sites and move to picture palaces, even into the 1920s, see Ben Brewster's "Periodization of Early Cinema," William Paul's *When Movies Were Theater*, 'Chapter 4: Elite Taste in a Mass Medium,' Ben Singer's "Feature Films, Variety Programs, and the Crisis of the Small Exhibitor."

¹⁴ "The Backbone of the Business." *Motography*. 9/20/1913, 191.

¹⁵ See Richard Butsch's distinctions between Legitimate Theater and other theatrical spaces in Chapter 9 of *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Booth, Michael R. "Legitimate Drama." *The Companion to Theatre and Performance*. Ed. Dennis Kennedy. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Online Access.
<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199574193.001.0001/acref-9780199574193-e-2261?rskey=ygS6JN&result=1264>

¹⁷ Epes Winthrop Sargent. "Advertising for Exhibitors." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/14/1914, 1376.

¹⁸ Scholars certainly acknowledge the influence of theater on feature film concerns, but most books on silent comedy emphasize the overlap between comedy shorts and theatrical variety. As examples, see Rick DesRochers' analysis of Buster Keaton's vaudeville acts in *The New Humor in the Progressive Era: Americanization and the Vaudeville Comedian*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), Alan Dale's discussion of Chaplin and Keaton's vaudeville backgrounds in *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*, pages 31 and 77 respectively, or Rob King's emphasis on vaudeville for Keystone's New Humor in *The Fun Factory*, '110-111.

¹⁹ Robert Allen argues that nickelodeon theaters already attracted sizable middle class audiences. Allen has written about this topic since his dissertation, but one shorter iteration of his general argument surrounding the middle class' early entrance into nickelodeons is "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan, 1906- 1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon," *Cinema Journal* Vol. 18, No. 2, 2-15. He also adds some qualifications to this claim and provides further considerations of classes of silent audiences in "Manhattan Myopia: Or, Oh! Iowa! Robert C. Allen on Ben Singer's 'Manhattan Nickelodeons.: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors.'" *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 35, No. 3. (Spring, 1996), 75-103. Ben Singer counters that Manhattan nickelodeons between 1907 and the early 1910s were located in largely

working class or immigrant neighborhoods. See Ben Singer's "Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors." *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 34, No. 3. (Spring, 1995), 5-35. The gender make-up of audiences prior to the feature also provokes disagreement. Early histories highlighted the large presence of working class men, but Kathy Peiss shows how working class women also participated in these spaces.¹⁹ See Allen Ibid, and Kathy Peiss *Cheap Amusements: Working Class Women and Leisure Time in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

²⁰ For instance, Kathy Peiss posits that 75% of film audiences in 1910 were working class, with 40% of that 75% consisting of women, which accounts for roughly 30% of the total audience. Now how many women would exist for the remaining 25% of patrons is unclear, but as middle and upper class women still had more of a stigma going to nickelodeons than working class women, we could probably presume their percentage of the 25% would be lower. (143)

²¹ "Economics of Amusements." *The New York Times*. 5/28/1911, X2.

²² Ibid.

²³ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Why Is a Censor?" *The Moving Picture World*. 5/10/1913, 572.

²⁴ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Why Is a Censor?" *The Moving Picture World*. 5/10/1913, 572.

²⁵ "William Lord Wright's Page. *Moving Picture News*. 1/18/1913, 14.

²⁶ F. H. Richardson. "Women and Children." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/21/1914, 962.

²⁷ "Economics of Amusements." *The New York Times*. 5/28/1911, X2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Plays and Players." *The Theatre*. August, 1913, 38.

³⁰ As one example of contemporaneous articles on female theatrical patrons, see Julia Dean's article, "What Women Like Best in Plays of Today." *The Green Book Magazine*. July, 1914, 961-965. For good secondary source coverage of the 'matinee girl' and her parallels to female film fans, see Diana Anselmo's "Screen-Struck: The Invention of the Movie Girl Fan." *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 55, No. 1. Fall, 2015, Richard Butsch's *The Making of American Audiences*, 122-126, and Gaylyn Studlar's *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*, Chapter 2.

³¹ Eaton, Walter Pritchard. "Women as Theatergoers." *Women's Home Companion*. October 1910, 13.

³² The Goat Man. "On the Outside Looking In." *Motography*. 9/20/1913, 201.

³³ Esenwein, J. Berg and Arthur Leeds. *Writing the Photoplay*. (Springfield: The Home Correspondence School, 1913), 259.

³⁴ "For Those Who Worry O'er Plots and Plays." *Moving Picture News*. 9/27/1913, 22.

³⁵ Henry Albert Phillips. *The Photodrama* (Brooklyn: The William G. Hewitt Press, 1914), 190. The idea of development has also been emphasized in other studies examining Hollywood's changing storytelling practices by the end of the 1910s. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristen Thompson. *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). In discussing classical Hollywood's storytelling approach, Bordwell mentions the classical feature film's presentation of "character change or development." (37)

³⁶ Theatrical critics gave legitimate plays a hard time for not building a clear narrative arc but shrugged off its lack of presence in musical comedy. For instance, critics denounced the farce play *The Commuters* (1910) for being a "series of isolated incidents" for which "it may well be doubted whether the subject is susceptible of dramatic treatment."

(“Forbes’s New Play Acted at Criterion.” *The New York Times*. 8/16/1910, 7). Another review for the play *The Galloper* (1906) complained about it having the “defects” of being “uneven, disconnected and inconsequential.” (“The Galloper.” *The Theatre*. March, 1906, xiii-xvi). In contrast, critics would note a musical comedy’s lack of plot but dismiss that as not being necessary due to the appeal of its string of numbers or gags. Of DeWolf Hopper’s musical comedy, *The Charlatan* (1898) “What matters the plot” (“The Charlatan” *The New York Times*. 9/6/1898, 7) while another said of Marie Cahill’s *Judy Forgot* (1910) “not always subject to acid test as to cohesiveness or coherency—but brimful of amusing things with half a dozen or more talented people to get them over the footlights.” (“Marie Cahill Here; Broadway Livelier.” *The New York Times*. 10/7/1910, 11).

³⁷ W. Stephen Bush. “A Glimpse of the Golden Age.” *The Moving Picture World*. April 18, 1914, 333.

³⁸ See Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), Chapter 12 and Michael Quinn’s dissertation, 60-77 or 106.

³⁹ “Vitagraph Letter to Exhibitors.” *The Moving Picture World*, 4/3/1915, 35.

⁴⁰ “An American Citizen.” *New York Tribune*. 10/20/1897, 6

⁴¹ Louis Reeves Harrison. “Studio Saunterings.” *The Moving Picture World*, 3/30/1912, 1144

⁴² “Studio Saunterings.” *The Moving Picture World*, 1/4/1913, 27

⁴³ “Imp Players No. 2. Margarata Fischer.” *The Implet*. 1/27/1912, 4.

⁴⁴ Shelley Stamp’s book is the most relevant to considering female audiences’ relationship to the film industry in the early 1910s. She discusses these notions of glamour, romance and excitement along with their interest in the individual star’s offscreen persona and their strong connection to female stars. See Chapter Three in particular on female fans, fan magazine discourse and the serial in *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Other studies of female fans relationship to fan magazines have noted their particularly strong support for the star system, including Gaylyn Studlar’s analysis of 1920s fan magazines, “The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women’s Commodified Culture in the 1920s,” *Wide Angle* Vol. 13 (January, 1991).

⁴⁵ See Chapter Three of Shelley Stamp’s *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ Gaylyn Studlar discusses how female audiences’ drove the star system in both theater and film in Chapter Two of *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Butsch’s *The Making of American Audiences*, Chapter Five, also unpacks critics’ concerns about the influence of matinee girls on legitimate theater.

⁴⁷ In theatrical magazines of this period, it is typical to have twice as many main articles about actresses and their personal lives as the men. For instance, an edition for *The Green Book Magazine* contains detailed probes about Maud Adams’ family and Billie Burke’ fashion, along with four extended articles about female performers, with only two, briefer articles about a male matinee idol and a character actor (*The Green Book Magazine*. July, 1914).

⁴⁸ *Variety* ran a column entitled “All for the Ladies” authored by ‘Plain Mary’ between 1913-1915 that commented on female performers and their costumes, largely from the legitimate stage.

⁴⁹ See Sherry Engle’s “New Women Dramatists in American Theater, 1890-1920: Martha Morton and Madeleine Lucette Ryley.” PhD Dissertation. The University of Texas at Austin. 1996, and Benjamin MacArthur’s *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920*. University of Iowa Press: Iowa City. 2000. Ethan Mordden’s *The American Theatre*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981)

⁵⁰ Mordden, 27

⁵¹ Eaton, *Woman's Home Companion*, 13

⁵² Abel, *Menus for Movieland*, Chapter Four: "'Film Girls' and Their Fans in Front of the Screen."

⁵³ Louis Reeves Harrison. "When Features Are Failures." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/21/1914, 1505.

⁵⁴ See Lee Grieveson's work on censorship in the silent era, which points out the significance of middle class, women's groups (*Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ "A Forecast." *Moving Picture News*. 1/4/1913, 7.

⁵⁶ W. Stephen Bush. "New Functions of the Motion Picture." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/6/1912, 21

⁵⁷ Louis Reeves Harrison. "The Future of the Photodrama." *The Moving Picture World*, 6/30/1912, 1207

⁵⁸ Bennie Ziedman. "What is Comedy?" *Motography*. 10/30/1915, 907.

⁵⁹ The theme of American theater being more 'clean' than other forms of entertainment can be widely found in theatrical publications. See "With the First-Nighters." *Goodwin's Weekly: A Thinking Paper for Thinking People*. 4/29/1905, 8, or "The Theatre's Play Competition." *The Theatre*. Dec, 1903. 316.

⁶⁰ Women, especially middle-class women had already been associated with gentle humor and emotional attachment to characters in both genteel and sentimental literature of the 19th century. See *Sentimentalism in Nineteenth-Century America: Literary and Cultural Practices*. Ed. By Mary G. De Jong. (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 3-4 and *A Genteel Endeavor: American Culture and Politics in the Gilded Age*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 15.

⁶¹ Quoted in Marlis Schweitzer's *When Broadway was the Runway: Theater, Fashion and American Culture*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 14.

⁶² "Plays and Players." *The Theatre*. 136.

⁶³ "Plays and Players." *The Theatre*. August, 1913, 38.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

⁶⁵ Julia Dean. "What Women Like Best in Plays of Today." *The Green Book Magazine*. June, 1914, 963.

⁶⁶ These films can be found in Appendix I. Most were released by Vitagraph, with a few exceptions such as Keystone's *A Submarine Pirate* (1915) or Flamingo's *Without Love* (1914). Even this number is generous, however, as several of the films show no sign of release, such as Lubin's *The Battle of Gettysgoat* (1914) or were actually shorts strung together to make a profit (see Chaplin's lawsuits against Essanay for this practice in Chapter Two).

⁶⁷ See *The Moving Picture World's* "Licensed and Independent Release Dates" in the September issues (available through Media History Digital Library).

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ See these authors in footnotes 10 and 11.

⁷⁰ This term can often be found in reviews of legitimate stage productions as 'farce-like' or as a critique of the play's realism, even if it does not contain exaggerated physical humor or a variety format. This seems closer to definitions of legitimate stage farce that concern clocklike coincidences and manipulations of characters. See "Brewster's Millions." *New York Tribune*. 1/1/1907, 7. For secondary literature on the legitimate definition of farce, see Jeffrey Huberman's *Late Victorian Farce*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), Michael R. Booth's "Comedy

and Farce” chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. Ed. Kerry Powell. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129-144.

⁷¹ Milner Davis, 6.

⁷² Theater historians have noted lowbrow conception of farce. See Milner Davis, 6, Jeffrey Huberman’s *Late Victorian Farce*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), and Michael R. Booth’s “Comedy and Farce” chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. Ed. Kerry Powell. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129-144. Film screenwriting manuals also adopted a lowbrow framing. See William Lewis Gordon’s *How to Write Moving Picture Plays* (Cincinnati: Atlas Publishing Company, 1915), 7.

⁷³ “Comedy.” *The Moving Picture World*. 1/1914, 41.

⁷⁴ Patrick Loughney. “A Descriptive Analysis of the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection and Related Copyright Materials.” The George Washington University. PhD. 1988, 233.

⁷⁵ ‘Refined comedy’ resulted in 16 hits and ‘polite comedy’ yielded 7.

⁷⁶ This perspective has proved persistent, stemming back to Kalton Lahue’s *World of Laughter: The Motion Picture Comedy Short, 1910-1930*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972, 12. See this perspective more recently in Geoff King’s *Film Comedy*, 26, Henry Jenkins in Chapter Two of *What Made Pistachio Nuts?*, and in Frank Schiede’s “The Mark of the Ridiculous,” 29-31.

⁷⁷ “The Photoplay Mart.” *The Photo Playwright*. May, 1912, 26

⁷⁸ Louis Reeves Harrison. “Only a Story.” *The Moving Picture World*. April, 1914, 37.

⁷⁹ Louis Reeves Harrison. “Photoplay Principles.” *The Moving Picture World*, 9/13/1913, 1152

⁸⁰ Ibid, 279.

⁸¹ Ibid, 275-276.

⁸² Wagner, 34-42.

⁸³ “Los Angeles News.” *The Moving Picture World*. April, 1912, 641

⁸⁴ Dillon is quoted as claiming this in Bennie Zeidman’s article, “What is Comedy and Why?” *Picture-Play Weekly*. July 10, 1915. 29.

⁸⁵ Epes Winthrop Sargent. “The Photoplaywright.” *The Moving Picture World*. 12/13/1913, 1273

⁸⁶ Eaton, 13.

⁸⁷ W. Stephen Bush. “The Future of the Single Reel.” *The Moving Picture World*. 4/19/1913, 256

⁸⁸ W. Stephen Bush. “The Real Enemy.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/13/1913, 1153.

⁸⁹ Epes Winthrop Sargent. “Miss Justice on Comedy.” *The Moving Picture World*. 5/22/1915, 1253

⁹⁰ Abel, Richard. *Menus for Movieland: Newspapers and the Emergence of American Film Culture, 1913-1916* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). Sample complaints include ‘vulgarity’ in Keystone (92) and Chaplin shorts (222). Instead, the female columnists praise feature comedies such as Mary Pickford’s *Such a Little Queen* (Paramount, 1914) (188) or Cecil B. DeMille’s *Chimmie Fadden* (Paramount, 1915) (200)

⁹¹ “Letters to the Editor.” *Motion Picture Magazine*. August 1915, 167.

⁹² See Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale's Chapter Three, "Gags, Jokes, Wisecracks, and Comic Events" in *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. (London: Routledge, 1990). They argue that the first three forms produce humor in isolation while the other form, comic events, requires the viewer's prior knowledge of the plot to be amusing.

⁹³ Harry Carr. "What About Screen Comedy--Tomorrow?" *Photoplay*. October, 1918, 116.

⁹⁴ See Rob King's *The Fun Factory*, 107-108.

⁹⁵ See *Bumps and Willie* (Selig, 1913) (*The Moving Picture World*, 9/20/1913, 1312). For some *Mutt & Jeff* examples, see *Mutt & Jeff as Dog Catchers* (Nestor, 1913) (*The Moving Picture News*, 9/16/1911, 28-29), *Mutt & Jeff and the German Band* (Nestor, 1911), *The Moving Picture News*, 8/26/1911, 28 or *Mutt & Jeff and the Escaped Lunatic* (Nestor, 1911), *The Moving Picture World*, 9/9/1911, 732.

⁹⁶ "Alkali Ike's Mother-in-Law." *The Moving Picture World*. 5/10/1913, 603.

⁹⁷ "The Official Goat Protector." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/27/1913, 1430

⁹⁸ "There's Music in the Hair." *The Moving Picture World*. 5/10/1913, 595.

⁹⁹ See Kristina Karnick's "Commitment and Reaffirmation in Hollywood Romantic Comedy." *Classical Hollywood Comedy*. Eds. Henry Jenkins and Kristina Karnick. (London: Routledge, 1995), 123-148.

¹⁰⁰ "A House Boat Elopement." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/27/1913, 1422.

¹⁰¹ *The Winning Loser*. *The Moving Picture World*. 9/27/1913, 1393.

¹⁰² "When He Wore the Blue." *The Moving Picture News*. 6/28/1913, 27.

¹⁰³ "Sauce for the Goose." *Moving Picture News*. 9/6/1913, 25.

¹⁰⁴ "Frayed Fagin's Adventures." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/13/1913, 1316.

¹⁰⁵ "Interrupted Wedding Bells." *Cinema News and Property Gazette*. 3/5/1913, 82.

¹⁰⁶ "An 'Uncle Tom's Cabin Troupe.'" *The Moving Picture World*. 4/5/1913, 80.

¹⁰⁷ "Algy Forfeits His Claim." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/13/1913, 1177.

¹⁰⁸ Frank Scheide mentions a movement away from 'grotesque costuming' and bizarre appearances in "The Mark of the Ridiculous: and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929." Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. *A Companion to Film Comedy*. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 34.

¹⁰⁹ These Vitagraph bulletins can be found in Albert E. Smith's papers, Box 2 at Charles Young Library, University of California, Los Angeles. For a sample bulletin, see *Vitagraph Bulletin*, September, 1913, 15 for *When Women Go on the War Path*.

¹¹⁰ "O'Hara Talks of Comedy Films." *Motography*, 7/10/1915, 74

¹¹¹ See Rob King's discussion of comedienness' negative coverage in Chapter 6 of *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008) and Kristen Anderson Wagner's analysis of the same topic in her dissertation, "Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in Silent Films." PhD Diss. University of Southern California. 2009.

¹¹² Clarence J. Caine. "Charles Chaplin in a Serious Mood." *Motography* 1/16/1915, 95.

¹¹³ Versions of the superiority theory, particularly strains of Henri Bergson, are expressed in Andrew Horton's discussion of comic figures as often being 'butts of jokes' that we laugh at in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*. Ed/ Andrew Horton. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 10 as well as Alan Dale's *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2000), 5. Dale discusses slapstick as a form of comedy that "plays on our fears of physical and social maladjustment."

¹¹⁴ "Answers to Inquiries." *Motion Picture Story Magazine*. August, 1913, 137.

¹¹⁵ "Mae Hotely." *Motography*. 4/4/1914, 224

¹¹⁶ "Last Month We Had the Funny Fats. Here are the Six Skinny Screams." *Film Fun*. 6/30/1916, 239-240.

¹¹⁷ Henry Albert Phillips. *The Photodrama*. (Brooklyn: The William G. Hewitt Press, 1913), 186.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Berg Esenwein. *The Photoplay Author*. January 1915, 80-81.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 80-81.

¹²⁰ "Current Comment." *Moving Picture News*. 8/2/1913, 22.

¹²¹ Wagner, "Comic Venus." See Chapter One, "Have Women a Sense of Humor?"

¹²² Louis Reeves Harrison. "It is to Laugh." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/21/1912, 1166

¹²³ "Opinion." *Variety*. 11/1/1912, 44

¹²⁴ "Love and Vengeance." *The Moving Picture World*. 4/18/1914, 341.

¹²⁵ Roy I. McCardell. "Conversations of a Chorus Girl." *Variety*. "12/26/1903, 1044.

¹²⁶ "Musings of the Photoplay Philosopher." *Motion Picture Magazine*. April, 1915, 107, 108, 165

¹²⁷ "John Tobin's Sweetheart." *The Moving Picture World*, 9/13/1913, 1202.

¹²⁸ "A Snakeville Courtship." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/20/1913, 1464.

¹²⁹ "Lawyer, Dog and Baby." *Reel Life*. 12/6/1913, 16.

¹³⁰ "Tom, Dick and Harry." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/11/1913, 200.

¹³¹ "The Fickle Freak." *Kalem Kalendar*. 11/1/1913, 13.

¹³² "Lubin Films-Ad." *Motography*. 1/18/1913, 7.

¹³³ "At the Old Maid's Call." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/20/1913, 1462, 1464.

¹³⁴ "Who is in the Box?" *The Moving Picture World*. 6/28/1913, 1396.

¹³⁵ "An Exclusive Pattern." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/6/1913, 1084.

¹³⁶ "That Suit at Ten." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/6/1913, 1186.

¹³⁷ "Bunny's Honeymoon." *The Moving Picture World*. 4/5/1913, 76.

¹³⁸ "When Women Go on the War Path." *The Moving Picture World*., 8/30/1913, 984

¹³⁹ “Wanted-A Plumber.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/6/1913, 1084.

¹⁴⁰ “Pearl and the Poet.” *The Moving Picture World*, 9/20/1913, 1320.

¹⁴¹ “Pumps.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/13/1913, 1200.

¹⁴² “His Hoodoo.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/13/1913, 1,208.

¹⁴³ “A Sleepy Romance.” *The Motion Picture News*. 10/11/1913, 7.

¹⁴⁴ “A Sea Dog’s Love.” *The Moving Picture World*. 7/12/1913, 228.

¹⁴⁵ “Two Too Many.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/6/1913, 1094.

¹⁴⁶ See the films *Love and Vengeance* (Keystone, 1913) or *Alkali Ike’s Pants* (Essanay, 1912) for some examples of this trend.

¹⁴⁷ Bud Duncan. “A Shotgun Cupid.” *Reel Life*. 11/15/1913, 18.

¹⁴⁸ “The Constable’s Daughter.” *The Moving Picture World*, 9/27/1913, 1412.

¹⁴⁹ “With the Aid of Phrenology.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/27/1913, 1420.

¹⁵⁰ “Bound to Occur.” *The Moving Picture World*. 2/15/1913, 698.

¹⁵¹ “The Burglar and the Baby.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/6/1913, 1042.

¹⁵² “This Isn’t John.” *The Moving Picture World*, 9/20/1913, 1308.

¹⁵³ “The Pickpocket.” *Illustrated Films Monthly*. October, 1913. 79.

¹⁵⁴ While there is some disagreement in humor and comedy scholarship, humor tends to be portrayed as ‘inherently funny’ qualities or as ‘anything funny’ while comedy refers to a ‘pre-planned’ or organized structure such as gags or comic narratives (see John Morreall’s *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 28)

¹⁵⁵ Morreall, 47.

¹⁵⁶ See footnote 120.

¹⁵⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnivalesque concept is used to discuss comedy’s disruptive nature in regards to many aspects, including class (see Christopher Beach’s *Class, Language and American Film Comedy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Kathleen Rowe’s *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) also borrows this concept to assert comedy’s challenges to women’s prescribed social roles, especially governing sexuality.

¹⁵⁸ See Eileen Bowser’s *The Transformation of Cinema*, 179-184, Lee Grieveson’s *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America*, 104-105; Rob King’s *The Fun Factory*, Chapter One.

¹⁵⁹ Jenkins, 48-52.

¹⁶⁰ Epes Winthrop Sargent. *Techniques of the Photoplay* (New York: Chalmers Publishing Company, 1916), 274.

¹⁶¹ Louis Reeves Harrison. “Both Entertaining and Educational.” *The Moving Picture World*, 9/7/1912, 953

¹⁶² Louis Reeves Harrison. “What the People Want.” 2/3/1912, *The Moving Picture World*, 375

¹⁶³ “Pictures a Splendid Insitution.” *Motography*. 6/1912, 246

¹⁶⁴ See the old Negro man in *Mesmerizing Moe* (Yankee, 1911), the Irish laundress in *A Slight Misunderstanding* (Majestic, 1913), or the Jewish clothier in *Cohen’s Luck* (Keystone, 1912).

¹⁶⁵ King discusses the use of ethnic stereotypes in Keystone comedies in Chapter Two of his book, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008).

¹⁶⁶ “The Film Maker’s Responsibilities.” *The Moving Picture World*. 8/5/1911, 270.

¹⁶⁷ William Lord Wright. “William Lord Wright’s Page.” *Moving Picture News*. 1/11/1913, 14.

¹⁶⁸ “A Forecast.” *The Moving Picture News*, 1/4/1913, 7.

¹⁶⁹ See Eileen Bowser’s *The Transformation of Cinema*, 179-184, Lee Grieveson’s *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America*, 104-105, Rob King’s *The Fun Factory*, Chapters One and Two (Chapter One addresses Keystone’s overall deviations from genteel culture while Chapter Two addresses the ways in which Keystone’s broad ethnic caricatures in its early years challenged the industry’s hopes for ‘respectability’).

¹⁷⁰ W. Stephen Bush. “Just Complaints of Exhibitors.” *The Moving Picture World*. 2/14/1914, 784.

¹⁷¹ Bennie Ziedman. “What is Comedy and Why?” *Motography*. 10/30/1915, 907. In this article, Ziedman proclaims that slapstick is not appropriate for “the clean minded young girl, the tired business man, the faithful wife” stating these intelligent classes preferred “clean, refined” humor. Such insults were commonly directed towards slapstick.

¹⁷² “William Lord Wright’s Page.” *Moving Picture News*. 1/18/1913, 14

¹⁷³ “William Lord Wright’s Page.” *Moving Picture News* 1/18/1913, 14.

¹⁷⁴ See *The Photoplaywright*, 81, William Lord Wright’s “For Those Who Worry O’er Plots and Plays.” *Moving Picture News*. 12/20/1913, 33-34 or “Musings of the Photoplay Philosopher.” *Motion Picture Magazine*. April, 1915, 108.

¹⁷⁵ “William Lord Wright’s Page.” *Moving Picture News*. 6/15/1912, 16

¹⁷⁶ Louis Reeves Harrison. “What the People Want.” *The Moving Picture World*. 2/3/1912, 375

¹⁷⁷ Phillips, 187.

¹⁷⁸ Phillips, 187.

¹⁷⁹ William Lord Wright. “William Lord Wright’s Page.” *Moving Picture News*. 4/20/1912, 23

¹⁸⁰ William Lord Wright. “For Those Who Worry O’er Plots and Plays.” *Moving Picture News*. 1/22/1913, 13

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 13

¹⁸² Coquelin, Constant. “Have Women a Sense of Humor?” *Harper’s Bazaar*. Vol. 34, Issue 2. 1/12/1901, 2.

¹⁸³ For instance, *Motion Picture News* expressed irritation about comedy manufacturers being “much censored,” reporting that “influential club women” in Chicago complained to a censor that ‘Irish and Hebrew comedy’ “was a wanton insult to both the races in question” and “would engender race hatred” (“Justice and the Advocates of Censorship.” *Motion Picture News*. 6/26/1915, 37).

¹⁸⁴ Josephine Clement. “Standardizing the Picture Theater.” *Motography*. 12/21/1912, 457

¹⁸⁵ See Richard Abel's *Menus for Movieland*. Sample complaints include 'vulgarity' in Keystone (92) and Chaplin shorts (222). Instead, the female columnists would go on to praise happier, gentler feature comedies such as Mary Pickford's *Such a Little Queen* (Paramount, 1914) (188) or Cecil B. DeMille's *Chimmie Fadden* (Paramount, 1915) (200)

¹⁸⁶ Rev. Herbert A. Jump. "The Children's Leisure Hour." *Motography*. 3/1915, 115-117, 16

¹⁸⁷ For some expressions of this concern in the trade press, see Louis Reeves Harrison's "Both Entertaining and Educational." *The Moving Picture World*. (9/7/1912, 953), "Pictures a Splendid Insitution." *Motography*. (6/1912, 246), or "The Film Maker's Responsibilities." *The Moving Picture World*. (8/ 5/ 1911, 270).

¹⁸⁸ The Drews would try this 'dead husband' approach in their comedy feature, *Playing Dead* (VLSE, 1916), but that feature does not appear to have been successful and they did not make another feature together.

¹⁸⁹ "The Village Pest." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/20/1913, 24.

¹⁹⁰ "His Reward." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/13/1913, 1200.

¹⁹¹ See Stephen Neale and Frank Krtunik's *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. (London: Routledge, 1990, 11), Andrew Stott's *Comedy*. (London: Routledge, 2005, 1) or Andrew Horton's introduction in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*. Ed/ Andrew Horton. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 15.

¹⁹² "The Bachelor's Finish." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/13/1913, 1214.

¹⁹³ "Mabel's Dramatic Career." *The Moving Picture World*, 9/27/1913, 1393

¹⁹⁴ See Geoff King, 26, Eileen Bowser, 179-184, Henry Jenkins, 48-58 or Frank Scheide's article on silent comedy, "The Mark of the Ridiculous: and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929." Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. *A Companion to Film Comedy*. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 30.

¹⁹⁵ Vitagraph Ad. *The Moving Picture World*. 4/5/1913, 21

¹⁹⁶ "Flaming Hearts." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/1/1913, 512.

¹⁹⁷ "A Slight Misunderstanding." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/27/1913, 1428.

¹⁹⁸ "The Man with a Razor." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/29/1913, 1054.

¹⁹⁹ "Forced Bravery." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/1/1913, 930.

²⁰⁰ "Ma and the Boys." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/1/1913, 924.

²⁰¹ "Flirty Florence." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/23/1913, 28.

²⁰² "A Painter's Ruse." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/20/1913, 1285.

²⁰³ "Some Doctor." *The Moving Picture News*. 2/1/1913, 26.

²⁰⁴ "Fooling Their Wives." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/11/1913, 184.

²⁰⁵ "Mr. Dippy Dipped." *The Moving Picture World*, 8/30/1913, 986.

²⁰⁶ "The Pursuit of Jane." *The Moving Picture World*, 8/30/1913, 992.

²⁰⁷ See George Blaisdell. "Miss Pickford at Her Best." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/15/1913, 718 or "Special Film Reviews. *Motion Picture News*. 11/22/1913, 34-35

²⁰⁸ These numbers are derived from AFI Catalog and my own research through *The Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture News*.

²⁰⁹ "Advertising the Picture." *Motion Picture News*. 10/18/1913, 30.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 30

²¹¹ See Michael Quinn's discussion of Zukor and his utilization of stage producers, stars and properties for Paramount, 184-208.

²¹² "Kleine Will Soon Make Important Announcements; Hints at New Type of Comedies Now Under Way." *Motion Picture News*. 7/17/1915, 76

²¹³ "Feature Films." *Variety*, 12/25/1914, 7

²¹⁴ "Famous Players' Regular Releases." *The Moving Picture News*. 8/2/1913, 31.

²¹⁵ Quinn, 125.

²¹⁶ While *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1913) had rental costs ranging from \$2,00 to 1,375, *Caprice* (1913) only ranged from \$1,185.68 to 554.40. (W.W. Hodkinson Papers. Correspondence A, Box 11. Charles Young Library. University of California, Los Angeles).

²¹⁷ Geoff King calls it a move towards 'situation comedy' from shorts in the vein of John Bunny or Sidney Drew in (*Film Comedy*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002, 23). Frank Scheide and Kristen Anderson Wagner label it a shift to 'polite comedy' but do not distinguish between non-slapstick short and feature models. See Scheide's "The Mark of the Ridiculous and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929" (29-33) and Wagner's "Pie Queens and Virtuous (Vamps)" (53) both in *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Chapter Two- “Vulgar Clowning”: Broad Comedy in the Feature

Between 1914 and 1916, film companies pursued a wide array of strategies for developing feature-length comedies. These varied from occasionally using comedians from already existent shorts units to adapting previously untapped theatrical material. In these first few years, producers showed such rapidity and range in adopting and abandoning strategies that they seemed to demonstrate a willingness to ‘throw everything at the wall to see what would stick.’ Eventually, this trial and error period resulted in a winnowing process. Comedy forms that presented an awkward fit with middle class or female patrons were gradually sidelined from the feature field. One approach that declined was broad comedy. To illustrate that decline, 1915 saw the release of 20 out of 95 comedies over four reels (21%) that can be classified as ‘broad’ based on surviving footage, types of performers and written coverage. Two years later, by 1917, only 5 feature comedies adopted broad approaches out of 153 (3.2%).¹

This chapter traces how film producers came to the conclusion that broad comedy was unsuitable for features. Initially, they tried to incorporate this type of humor by two different means. Some producers carried over the same comedians from their shorts and simply extended their shorts’ stories, characters and style of humor to longer lengths. To befit the feature’s greater ‘prestige,’ other producers employed famous broad comedians from the stage who had become popular through similar characters and story structures. A highly paid name offered justification for the feature’s bigger budget, size, and lengthier theatrical run without forcing producers to completely abandon familiar characters and plot structures from film shorts. However, both approaches proved difficult to stylistically sustain across longer formats. In addition, neither

addressed the contradiction between low humor and the increasingly cross-class, female-friendly expectations for feature content.

By examining the failure of ‘broad’ or ‘low’ humor in feature comedies, this chapter complicates standard accounts of silent comedy. Silent comedy scholarship tends to presuppose two binaries. First, it creates a putative opposition between ‘slapstick’ and ‘situation comedy.’ While scholars characterize slapstick as relying on physical gags and having strong ties to working class culture, they posit that situation comedy targeted bourgeois patrons and derived humor from story scenarios.² In *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture*, Rob King encapsulates this perspective: “Slapstick and situation comedy constituted alien aesthetics, not merely because of their distinct formal practices, but because of the ties that bound those practices to the comic traditions of different classes.”³ In reality, the shorts that scholars often cite as ‘higher class’ situation comedies occupied a similar cultural space as slapstick in so far as proving too ‘lowbrow’ for feature films. Accounts claiming that features simply moved towards comedies “based around situations”⁴ are incorrect given that comedians from situation shorts failed to find success in features. The first half of this chapter examines Vitagraph’s quick abandonment of features centered around its ‘situation’ comedians, such as John Bunny and Sidney Drew.

The second questionable binary that this chapter problematizes involves pitting stage comedy against film slapstick as highbrow versus lowbrow humor. For instance, Rob King argues that theatrical comedians Sam Bernard, Raymond Hitchcock and DeWolf Hopper embodied Triangle Company’s ‘stage star experiment’ that sought “to produce motion pictures that articulated ‘highbrow’ cultural values.”⁵ This claim is erroneous, as Bernard, Hitchcock and Hopper became famous through ‘low’ or ‘broad’ character roles. Indeed, film critics complained about their approach being inappropriate for features. It is telling that film studios paired these theatrical

performers with their regular roster of shorts comedians. Evidently, the studios did not see these types of performers as vastly different. Following the failure of the stage comics' features, producers relegated them to less prestigious shorts. Later in this chapter, I home in on a feature comedy showcasing stage star De Wolf Hopper to illustrate that drawing on theatrical comedy did not automatically provide the cultural capital sought by feature producers.

Defining Broad Comedy in Early Twentieth-Century Theater and Film

The limitations of the above binaries point to the need to recognize broad humor as a major mode within silent comedy. The terms 'broad' and 'broad comedy' come up casually to describe film humor, but I have yet to see this treated as its own category. Scholars will describe Marie Dressler's performance in a slapstick film with the adjective 'broad,'⁶ but they favor 'slapstick' or 'situation' for making classifications. Scholars almost solely rely on the categorization of slapstick when they discuss low humor in silent comedy. Defaulting to slapstick for describing low humor suggests that a move away from slapstick's physical aggression is automatically a move away from the lowbrow (as with situation comedies). However, humor could be 'broad' or 'low' without being slapstick. Take this distinction in a review for a 1919 Fox comedy short: "you may define his methods as slapstick because it is broad burlesque or low comedy—but it isn't slapstick."⁷ The larger category of 'broad' better helps our film histories by more accurately distinguishing between the culturally lowbrow humor that became uncommon in features and the middlebrow, feminized forms that came to dominate.

Theatrical and film critics regularly employed this 'broad' identification for types of lower humor that subsequently struggled in features. I traced consistencies in critical usage to come up with a general conception of the term. For the purpose of considering broad comedy in features, I focused on reviews and publicity for film or theatrical comedians who later headlined feature-

length films. The reviews, publicity and other articles related to these productions span from 1885-1920. The traits for broad comedy will sound familiar, as many comedy shorts discussed in Chapter One exhibited broad characteristics.

Broad comedians usually thrived in more episodic stories often made up of disparate acts or numbers, such as vaudeville, film shorts or musical comedy. While today musical comedies typically have stronger story structure and integration than variety acts, American musicals until 1910 often pulled heavily from vaudeville.⁸ While having a very minimal ‘book,’ they frequently showcased a particular comedian or set of comics in sketches that had little to do with one another. Those sketches were interpolated with appearances by chorus girls, who also were rarely narratively integrated.⁹ Given this episodic quality and employment of broad comics, American musical comedy often was excluded from definitions of the legitimate or considered “the outlaw of the legitimate stage.”¹⁰ Though some musical comedies with more integrated plotlines or higher connotations appeared in this period,¹¹ those are not the shows I am discussing in this chapter.

Besides strong associations with episodic productions, broad performers usually displayed facets of the ‘grotesque,’ involving distorted and bawdy looks or behaviors. However, critics sometimes applied the term to comedians without bizarre costuming if the productions encouraged the audience to ‘laugh at’ the comic’s ineptness or humiliation. Critics also identified a prevalence of immoral actions at the center of broad comedies. These elements—loose story structure, grotesque performers, ostensibly vulgar humor—prompted commentators to align broad comedy with lower class and masculine tastes.¹² Higher classes were not excluded from enjoying such productions, but critics derided their participation as an occasional indulgence of ‘lower’ instincts. This cultural ‘lowness’ went far beyond slapstick, as it encompassed forms such as parody, episodic musical shows and routines foregrounding ethnic caricatures that did not necessarily

contain physical rough-housing. As feature producers moved towards respectable humor to solicit middle class and feminine patrons, broad comedy once again became relegated to shorter productions.

Vitagraph and the Brief Life of Short Comedians in Transitional Features

Film literature vastly overemphasizes the role of shorts comedians in developing feature-length comedy.¹³ By 1916, 231 comedies of three reels or longer had been released through specialized distribution outlets.¹⁴ Out of this number, only 9 used shorts comedians as main selling points as opposed to strenuously advertising a stage star.¹⁵ As many film companies already had production units devoted to comedy, it is revealing that they rarely deployed their shorts comedians for features. For comedies over three reels, manufacturers usually adapted legitimate shows or borrowed legitimate performers. An advertisement for George Kleine's feature comedy, *Stop Thief!* (Feb, 1915) hinted that film comedians were beneath theatrical performers. It declared proudly, "Kleine did not cheapen his production with the ordinary run of motion picture actors, but engaged all the members of the original 'Stop Thief' company."¹⁶ Only Vitagraph made repeated efforts to place its pre-established comedians in longer comedies. Between 1914 and 1916, the company released *Goodness Gracious* (February, 1914), *Love, Luck and Gasoline* (April, 1914) and *A Florida Enchantment* (August, 1914) through its Broadway Star Features program.¹⁷

Vitagraph may have felt more comfortable taking this step because the studio *did* see itself, within the spectrum of shorts producers, as being culturally superior to companies like Keystone.¹⁸ However, there was frequently a difference between Vitagraph's rhetoric and its results. Even by the mid-1910s, one column in *Motion Picture Magazine* pointed out, "Some time ago the Vitagraph Company announced that they would not accept any scenarios that introduced situations

or characters that could not exist and be seen in real life...a most excellent policy this was, in my judgment, but it has not been strictly adhered to. Some of their recent comedies have possessed all the elements of the standard Keystone comedies.”¹⁹ Similarly, while scholars propose that Vitagraph’s comedy shorts were meant for higher class patrons, some surviving accounts describe their viewers less prestigiously. Theater star Cissy Fitzgerald, who went on to work for Vitagraph, labeled the audience at a John Bunny and Flora Finch film as “horribly third class” and reported that the pianist played “music hall songs such as “Three Women to Every Man,” and “Can You Care, Wild Woman?””²⁰ The content Vitagraph adopted for their feature comedies suggested an interest in maintaining patrons from their shorts period as opposed to completely shifting towards legitimate audiences. Just as Vitagraph advertised high-class dressing rooms for their comedy unit without necessarily having ‘refined’ humor in the shorts themselves,²¹ the studio appeared to believe that simply altering exhibition practices for feature comedies was enough as opposed to making major content adjustments.

As there is only trade evidence of a single comedy over one reel released by American manufacturers before the summer of 1913,²² Vitagraph seems to have been the first to standardize multiple-reel comedies. In June of 1913, Vitagraph announced the studio’s decision to release “comedies in two parts” for August.²³ Implying the strategy was innovative, it explained, “Two-reel dramas are expected for special features, but two-reel comedies are the exception.”²⁴ By August, a notice proclaimed that a two-reel comedy would be released every Saturday.²⁵ These two-reelers served as ensemble efforts to showcase prominent shorts comedians, such as John Bunny, Flora Finch and Sidney Drew. The films continued the absurdist and anti-social behaviors commonly found in one-reelers. In *The Feudists* (August, 1913), two neighboring families engaged in prank warfare with one another.²⁶ For the premise of *When Women Go on the Warpath; or, How*

Jonesville Went Dry (September, 1913), wives stole their husbands' pants so that the men could not vote on election day.²⁷ Their action forced the men, including Sidney Drew, to hop around wearing women's petticoats in an attempt to get to the polls. As well as resembling one-reelers in style, Vitagraph released these comedies on the regular program with no specialized distribution.²⁸ Their two-reelers represented an interesting in-between step towards feature comedies.

By December, Vitagraph made a more significant push to offer 'long' comedies. According to the stock certificate, Vitagraph formed a special distribution outlet entitled 'Broadway Star Features on December 26, 1913 to service films of three reels or longer.'²⁹ To show these films, Vitagraph purchased a legitimate theater in the heart of New York City's Broadway district as a permanent exhibition site—a move heralded as unprecedented by the film trade and newspapers.³⁰ Prices ranged from 25 cents to a dollar, which was cheaper than two-dollar legitimate prices yet still above the 5-10 cent admission of regular movie houses.³¹ The new venue signaled an intention to compete against legitimate theaters and to play to higher class audiences. Each program offered a four-reel or longer drama accompanied by a three-reel comedy. The first comedy to be shown on the Broadway Star program was *Goodness, Gracious* (Feb, 1914), starring Sidney Drew and Clara Kimball Young.

Despite this exhibition shift, Vitagraph's three-reelers remained farcically broad and violated expectations for standard features as much as comedy shorts. As a shorter accompaniment to dramas, Vitagraph's three-reel comedies, such as *Goodness, Gracious* (Feb, 1914) or *Love, Luck and Gasoline* (April, 1914), maintained the episodic plots, caricatures and aggressive humor that thrived in shorts but proved less successful in longer features. The loose plot of *Goodness Gracious* parodied conventions popular in '10-20-30' stage melodramas such as *Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl* (1906), whereby an innocent girl encounters danger in the city such as lecherous employers

and millionaires.³² A young woman (Clara Kimball Young) sets out to find a job in the city. She soon excites the attention of a moustache-twirling villain (James Young), who eventually tries to frame her lover (Sidney Drew) for a murder. Instead of aligning with legitimate plays, *Goodness, Gracious* fell into the ‘burlesque’ tradition of taking existing material or character types and parodying them in episodic vignettes. One newspaper piece proclaimed about *Goodness, Gracious*, “With this bevy of impossible characters, portraying impossible parts in impossible situations, is it any wonder that melo-drama develops into a ludicrous burlesque?”³³ Theatrical and film critics distinguished between ‘satires’ that were original stories critiquing social problems versus ‘burlesques’ and ‘travesties’ that directly mimicked pre-existing texts in an exaggerated manner. While satire was highbrow (which I will explore in Chapter Three), burlesques and travesties were typically seen as ‘low’ humor. For instance, an article in *Variety* the following year called “low comedy” “the foundation of burlesque.”³⁴ Theatrical comedians Lew Fields and Joe Weber, famous for parodying other shows, had such parodies frequently labeled “low.”³⁵ Similarly, newspapers referred to *Goodness Gracious* as “broad farce”³⁶ and noted that “Drew never revealed himself as a low comedian to greater advantage.”³⁷ General summaries of the film mentioned its lack of ‘intellectual’ appeal. The *Janesville Daily Gazette* remarked, “There is no sense to their picture and it was never intended that there should be any.”³⁸ To refer to *Goodness, Gracious* as a ‘burlesque’ of melodrama placed it within the same tradition of Keystone’s burlesques.

Like other comedies that critics labeled lowbrow,³⁹ *Goodness Gracious* illustrated a looser structure than legitimate plays. Reviews linked the film to vaudeville forms, with *Variety* explaining that the film’s idea was “somewhat similar to that used by some of the travesty mellers in vaudeville.”⁴⁰ In an interview for *The Moving Picture World*, actress Clara Kimball Young

revealed, “‘Goodness Gracious’ never had a script. Mr. Blackton wrote the sub-titles, and that was all we had to go on. I lay awake nights thinking out the best action to follow them.”⁴¹ *Variety* critiqued the film on this score; “the picture is funny in spots with a lot of film space wasted.”⁴² The ‘impossible’ caricatures of a burlesque like *Goodness Gracious* did not encourage affection for realized characters. This differed from building audience concern for realistic persons achieving narrative goals. Reviewers pointed to the cruel edge of the film’s humor by saying “every idea in it is burlesqued unmercifully.”⁴³ The lack of sentiment in ‘burlesque’ and ‘travesty’ had prompted theatrical critics to disassociate it from feminine taste. For instance, a critic questioned the wisdom of Weber and Fields’ *The Big Little Princess* for parodying a sentimental text for women and children as the original was “a play seen only in the afternoon, and then mostly by an age and sex of people who do not frequent the Temple of Low Comedy.”⁴⁴ More directly, the advertisements for the film *Goodness Gracious* seemed to target men. Discourse in this period primarily presented ‘mother-in-laws’ as comic pests to husbands,⁴⁵ and adverts proposed, “If you possess a proverbial ‘mother-in-law,’ by all means see ‘Goodness Gracious.’”⁴⁶

The second three-reel comedy to be released through Broadway Star Features, *Love, Luck and Gasoline*, also showed continuity with the broader humor of many comedy shorts through its emphasis on physical stunts along with its humiliation humor at plump Bunny’s expense. In a clear illustration of the early continuity between Vitagraph’s short and feature comedy efforts, the film remade a 1910 comedy short with the same name.⁴⁷ The film followed an un-athletic father (John Bunny) who chases his daughter (Lillian Walker) and her lover (Wally Van) via various vehicles ranging from a yacht to an airplane. Like the elopement races in many comedy shorts, the film seems to have focused more on the humor of the physical pursuit than the couple’s relationship. Reviews and advertisements stressed the production’s stunts as opposed to the characters. *The*

Moving Picture World did not illuminate the plot, highlighting instead, “the chase that ensues involves the use of sailing yachts, steam yachts, motor boats that fly through the water, aeroplanes that fly through the air...the swiftest engines devised to annihilate time and space.”⁴⁸ Some newspapers openly stated that *Love, Luck and Gasoline* had “very little semblance of a story.”⁴⁹ *Love, Luck and Gasoline* similarly did not play up the attractive leads or sympathetic humor believed to appeal to higher class or female patrons. Descriptions either deployed unflattering language or referred to the leads as ‘types.’ Advertisements referred to Bunny as “the poor old fat man,” while other characters merely received categories, such as Lillian Walker’s ‘Miss Tomboy.’ Language choices such as “side-splittingly funny”⁵⁰ or “laughing oneself sick”⁵¹ also aligned the film with aggressive and bodily ‘New Humor’ rather than genteel chuckles. Like *Goodness Gracious*, publicity for *Love, Luck and Gasoline* also deployed gendered prompts. Given that gambling and investments were still largely associated with men in the 1910s, it is revealing that an advertisement for the film trumpeted, “If you owe money you can’t pay, or have lost \$1,000,000, see ‘Love, Luck and Gasoline.’”⁵²

Despite Vitagraph’s change in exhibition strategy for three-reel comedies, it seems that the films continued broad approaches that found favor in shorts. Vitagraph’s producers may have assumed that the popularity of their shorts comedians was so great that they would appeal to a cross-class audience and effectively balance the longer dramas on the Broadway Star Features program. It is hard to ascertain the exact moment when Vitagraph decided against starring shorts comedians in further features. By August, the company made a final effort with *A Florida Enchantment* (1914) before subsequently halting the strategy. Some evidence points to Vitagraph deciding that shorts performers brought down the ‘class’ of their A features and did not properly maintain a content hierarchy between the two formats. Distributor Benjamin Hampton expressed

concern to founder Albert E. Smith that Vitagraph's association with shorts productions hindered their features' reputations as 'A' products; "It seems that so long as Vitagraph specials, features, and shorts stuff all bear the same family name, our Class A will bear the brunt of our Class B and C."⁵³ While no evidence exists that *Goodness Gracious* and *Love, Luck and Gasoline* failed financially (in fact some evidence suggests *Goodness Gracious* found popularity⁵⁴), both were cut down to two reels shortly after distribution.⁵⁵ Producers may have decided that the plots were too similar to shorts to warrant spending extra money on longer productions. Following this redistribution strategy and the negative reception of *A Florida Enchantment*, by October of 1914, Vitagraph switched to placing theatrical performers at the center of their features.

Case Study: *A Florida Enchantment* (Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph, 1914)

The use of shorts comedians in features hit a notable bump with Vitagraph's five-reel *A Florida Enchantment*. This film marked the company's first attempt to extend comedies to the equivalent length of dramas on their Broadway Star program. In the film, the female protagonist (Edith Storey) grows angry with her fiancé (Sidney Drew) after she spots him with another woman. She consumes a magic seed that grants her masculine characteristics. Understandably, scholars of gender and silent cinema have been interested in this sexual fluidity, but *A Florida Enchantment* less readily receives unpacking as an early experiment in feature-length comedy. Some examinations refer to the film as 'high class' before moving on to its compelling sexual politics. Laura Horak calls the film a "wholesome, high-class comedy" when considering the film's depiction of same-sex attraction.⁵⁶ Studying race and gender dynamics in the film, Siobhan Sommerville views *A Florida Enchantment* as shaped by Vitagraph's hopes "to expand the class makeup of its audience"⁵⁷ and "representative of this larger shift in film production toward literary sources, feature films, and 'respectable' entertainment."⁵⁸ She is not wrong that Vitagraph *intended*

to sell its features on the Broadway Star Program to middle class patrons, but the question is did the actual material match the expectations for this developing market. Certain components of the film would at first seem to support scholars' 'high class' designation. The film was shot on location at the Ponce De Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, Florida,⁵⁹ and the reputable resort lends a prestigious aura to the film's *mise-en-scene*. A closer inspection of the film's source material, performers and onscreen events, however, places the film within broader traditions of loose plotting, unglamorous leads and aggressive humor. Such tendencies did not facilitate the industry's attempts to increase higher class and female patronage.

The film's unenthusiastic reception fit within a trend of broader plotting, character types and modes of humor struggling in 1910s features. Though few reviews survive for the film version of *A Florida Enchantment*, those that remain range from tepid to brutal. Horak proposes the film found some positive reception, but she problematically uses program descriptions or adverts.⁶⁰ Actual reviews found the film uninspiring. *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, despite borrowing many contributors from the film trade, peppered its review with criticisms and backhanded compliments.⁶¹ *Variety* torched the film, lamenting, "The picture should never have been put out, for there's no one with any sense of humor whatsoever, or intelligence either, who can force a smile while watching this sad 'comedy.'"⁶² It further observed that the Broadway Star Theater audience left part way through the screening, and only newspaper critics remained by force of their duty.⁶³ The account given by *Variety* is significant, because papers outside of the film trade were usually more frank about comedy features that trade commentaries politely recommended.⁶⁴

Beyond the comparative candor of *Variety*, it is also telling that comedy features with tepid non-trade reviews usually disappeared quickly, receiving almost no coverage after their release. Little evidence indicates how *A Florida Enchantment* or other early features fared financially, but

Vitagraph's actions suggest that it did not see the film as successful enough to prompt further features starring shorts comedians such as Drew. While Vitagraph initially pushed Drew in the first half of 1914 as a 'longer comedy' figure, he suddenly went back to shorts following the release of *A Florida Enchantment*. He would not attempt another feature comedy until *Playing Dead* (VLSE, 1915) over a year later. When that film was released, publicity did not mention a pre-existing successful foray into feature comedy. In fact, the studio seemed eager to hide that *Playing Dead* was comedic and called it a 'drama' instead.⁶⁵ Thus, multiple signs point to *A Florida Enchantment* failing to make critical or commercial headway.

Before contrasting the film from approaches that would prove more enduring in silent comedy features, I provide a detailed synopsis below:

A Florida Enchantment opens with Constancia (Grace Stevens) receiving a letter from her niece, Lillian Travers (Storey), announcing her upcoming visit to Florida. Constancia converses with neighbors Major Horton and his daughter Bessie (Jane Morrow, a soon-to-be Mrs. Drew) about her niece's impending arrival. This scene reveals that Constancia had a Southern ancestor named Captain Oglethorpe, who left behind a box with a 100-year-old note claiming a duplicate box exists containing "a secret for all women who suffer. Ha ha!" Next, Lillian arrives at the Florida hotel. Her timing proves unfortunate, for she finds her fiancé Dr. Fred (Drew) attending to a 'charming widow' who feigns injuries to gain his attention. Though Lillian is initially furious, Fred explains that the widow is an important hotel guest. Subsequently in her Aunt's living room, Lillian finds the note from Oglethorpe about the box with the secret for suffering women. Later shopping with Bessie, Lillian comes across the duplicate box in question. Lillian purchases the box and goes off to meet with Fred. Unfortunately, the flirtatious widow asks Fred to accompany her to a yacht party. Agreeing, Fred sends Lillian a note claiming he cannot make their outing until later. While out with the widow, a speedboat races by Fred and the widow's rowboat, sending the two into the water. Soaking wet, Fred sends Lillian another note explaining he cannot see her in his present condition. As she sits enraged, Lillian finds within her purchased box a bag from Oglethorpe. An accompanying note claims the bag contains magic seeds from Africa that change a person's gender. Sick of suffering from her fiancé's flirtations, Lillian decides to swallow a seed.



Lillian awakens to find she is now a man in *A Florida Enchantment* (1914) (stills from YouTube copy)

The second reel marks a drastic turn in the film's comic tone. The following morning Lillian sits down in front of her mirror to see her face sporting a fully-grown mustache. Though initially shocked, she then proceeds to calmly

shave. Lillian soon confuses her fiancé and friends by arriving at a group gathering and ignoring Fred. Instead, she lustfully kisses and flirts with Bessie and the widow. The rest of this reel follows Lillian as she adopts a masculine swagger, flirts with young women around her, and rebuffs her fiancé. Lillian also decides that she would prefer a male valet to a maid. She thrusts her black maid, Jane, (Ethel Lloyd, a white performer in black face) into a chair, throws her head back and pops into Jane's mouth a seed and liquor. Upon consuming the seed, Jane goes wild and starts drinking recklessly. Becoming violent, Jane destroys Lillian's room. Southerner Horton seizes this opportunity to violently dispense of Jane with a sword, but Lillian chloroforms her maid and explains that Jane was drunk. Lillian does not seem horrified at the violence, and there is a fade out as she laughs at a passed out Jane. The next scene shows Lillian preparing for a ball and continuing to ignore Fred. At the ball, Lillian only expresses interest in dancing with Bessie. Bessie's partner and Fred are left to dance with each other. As the two men attempt to dance, the host stops them. Abandoned, Fred drinks and sulks by the bar. Lillian continues to shock him by smoking and strutting about with masculine swagger. Back at the house, Jane sexually pursues a frightened black domestic.

Coming home from the ball, Lillian calls off her engagement to Fred. Meanwhile, Jane physically brawls with another man over the domestic. Lillian finds herself trapped in a concurrent situation of lust. The Hortons stay overnight, and Bessie expects to room with Lillian. As Bessie undresses, Lillian grows increasingly uncomfortable. Lillian drags her into a different bedroom, but Bessie begs Lillian not to as Bessie is 'afraid of burglars.' Lillian locks Bessie in the room alone so that Bessie cannot tempt her. However, Bessie hears Jane sneaking into the house through the window and becomes frightened. Lillian comes to her aid, and the two drag Jane through the window. Jane explains that the police are after her for public brawling. Bessie collapses in shock from the commotion. Jane runs off and steals a male driver's uniform, and Lillian is thrilled to see her in masculine attire. The pair leave the roiled household for New York. Once there, Lillian orders men's suits and crops her hair. She now goes by the name 'Lawrence.' Prior to departing for Europe, she takes a final trip back to Florida. Learning which ship she is sailing on, Fred decides to track her down. Though Fred locates her on board, Lillian flexes her biceps to intimidate him and threatens to push him into alligator infested waters. To escape from Fred's pestering, she dresses as Lawrence and throws her gowns overboard. Fred sees one of these frocks in the water and thinks she has been murdered. Meanwhile, Lawrence arrives at the same Florida hotel and now freely proposes to Bessie. Unfortunately, Lawrence becomes a suspect in Lillian's supposed murder and so Fred aggressively grabs Lawrence. Horton intervenes and suggests that Lawrence and Fred face off in a duel. Lawrence realizes Fred must be told the truth about the seeds.

In roughly the last reel, Lawrence shows Oglethorpe's note to Fred. Given Fred's disbelief, Lawrence suggests he swallow one of the seeds himself. Fred does so, and his behavior instantly shifts. He pats his hair, gives Lawrence pecks on the neck and saunters off with his hips swinging from side to side. Fred shows up to the duel in this feminized state, waving a handkerchief, playing with fallen apples, and complimenting the female spectators on their outfits. Fred finally faces trouble when he kisses a horrified Horton, who calls the police. Lifting an imaginary skirt to reveal his socks and lower ankles, Fred skips off to find safety. While hiding in a bedroom, Fred finds a dress and delightedly puts it on. As he leaves the house, townsmen disgusted by Fred's attire chase after him. They force Fred into the ocean, and he begins to drown. Suddenly, Lillian wakes up to find that her gender transformation was a dream.

Though scholars subsume *A Florida Enchantment* under general assumptions about Vitagraph's respectability,⁶⁶ the film and its source material both relied on a loose structure that critics considered too lowbrow for both legitimate theater and the feature. Laura Horak calls the production a legitimate play, but *A Florida Enchantment* seems to have been a musical farce. The stage production played at Charles Hoyt's Theater, a 'combination theatre and music hall,'⁶⁷ with producer Hoyt known for disjointed shows based on vaudeville sketches.⁶⁸ A newspaper mentioned that the show "introduced features foreign to the book but agreeable to those who like

singing and dancing.”⁶⁹ Marie Jansen, who played Lillian Travers, established her reputation playing broad servants and peddlers in musical comedies and comic operas.⁷⁰ Even film reviews of *A Florida Enchantment* connected it to a broad lineage. *Variety* compared the lead part to Della Fox’s travesty parts in musical burlesque.⁷¹ This lineage is relevant given the low reputation of musical farces in this period. Comments summarized the shows as “girls, glitter and gags” with stories “brought down to Rialto bedrock intelligence.”⁷² It is also common to find them referred to as ‘low comedy.’⁷³ Though some musicals with female leads, romance and more narrative integration gained feminine associations in this period,⁷⁴ many American musical comedies still had more masculine affiliations, especially musical shows with broad comics. As seen in Chapter One, theatrical magazines claimed that women preferred legitimate drama, but the men “if left to themselves, either go to their country club or drop in on a vaudeville show or a musical comedy.”⁷⁵ We see that notion borne out in reviews of musical comedies. Of Raymond Hitchcock’s *The Yankee Consul* (prod. 1904), a reviewer expressed, “Who was it who said that in these latter days of matinee girls and modistery musical comedy hadn’t a leg to stand on?” and “Man has rights, even in the theatre.”⁷⁶ *A Florida Enchantment*’s venue, structure and performers thus affiliated it with musical farces and not with the legitimate plays that other feature producers would tap.

Like other adaptations of musical farce, the film version of *A Florida Enchantment* exhibits an episodic quality and lack of development that critics did not forgive in feature-length productions aimed at respectable patrons. Period reviews and audience reactions presented this rationale for the film’s mediocre reception. *Variety* griped, “It lapsed into a weary, dreary, listless collection of foolish things.”⁷⁷ The less nasty review from *The New York Dramatic Mirror* still observed that the film was “somewhat long for a story of this weight.”⁷⁸ A female fan similarly scolded the film for its imperfect development and realism in *Motion Picture Magazine*, saying it

it lacked “an interesting climax” and “true to life probabilities.”⁷⁹ The first fifteen minutes introduce primary characters, Lillian’s motivation to swallow the seeds, and then her transformation and sudden distaste for Fred. After this first reel, character goals become muddled and actions do not alter the characters’ relationships. When women cross-dressed in plays, the masquerade typically led to romance with a male figure or advanced a specific goal. In this film, Lillian accomplishes her desired transformation within the first fifteen minutes and does not develop as a character. She flirts and ignores Fred, gives her black maid a seed so she will also demonstrate masculine behaviors (problematically depicting black masculinity as more unruly and uncivilized), and continues to showcase ‘male’ behaviors by trying on men’s clothes in New York. These various acts repeatedly enforce the same narrative point that Lillian is now behaving in a masculine manner. Development only occurs once Fred believes Lillian to be murdered and she must explain the truth to him about the seeds. Sharing this information, however, does not affect the couple’s relationship. Instead, the final reel produces humor from a series of physical gags to show Drew’s adoption of ‘effeminate’ qualities. Strikingly, the construction of the film as a ‘nightmare,’ in which a character engages in taboo behaviors and then wakes up, resembled many comedy shorts, ranging from *Never Again* (Lubin, 1912) to *The Desperate Condition of Mr. Boggs* (Edison, 1913). This dream structure returns the couple to their initial state while questions of Fred’s fidelity and Lillian’s dissatisfaction remain unresolved.

A Florida Enchantment also relates closely to comedic shorts through its lack of glamorous leads. As in their shorts, Vitagraph treated the actors as an ensemble rather than prioritizing a particular star. Publicity stressed that the film “casts nearly all of the Vitagraph Stock Company’s complement of comedians.”⁸⁰ Besides the film downplaying ‘stars’ in its marketing, the main performers in the film, Sidney Drew and Edith Storey, did not have the glamorous personae that

would become more common for leads in feature films. Though *Motion Picture Magazine* declared Storey best in “serious” parts,⁸¹ she fit within the broader conventions of *A Florida Enchantment* through her reputation for adopting roles that threw glamour out the window. According to *Motion Picture Magazine*, Storey was “noted more for beauty of acting than beauty of features.”⁸² Even Vitagraph producer J. Stuart Blackton acknowledged that Storey “wasn’t beautiful... evening gowns and anything modish made her look awkward.”⁸³ While later feature comedies gave female leads opportunities to dress fashionably or to still display physical appeal even while cross-dressing, Storey only wears two dresses in *A Florida Enchantment* and adopts masculine mannerisms while wearing them that distance her from conventional feminine ‘glamour.’ She spends much of the film in loosely fitted, male attire, and she actually adopts facial hair with a mustache and sideburns. Later female leads in feature comedies, if dressed as a boy, would play one as a temporary disguise where the actress still wore flattering make up or would simply play an active, tomboy. *Variety*’s confusion about Lillian’s transformation to “not so much a man in this instance as just mannish”⁸⁴ placed her character outside of comfortable tomboy femininity or legitimate traditions of a female actress clearly playing a young boy.

Though Vitagraph may have hoped the film would showcase Storey’s versatility, Sidney Drew’s comedic reputation and roles as director and producer make it likely that the project was chosen to enhance his comic stardom. Prior to *A Florida Enchantment*, Drew rose to prominence as a Vitagraph comedian. His film reputation in the early 1910s, however, stemmed from broader and more outlandish vehicles than he is typically given credit for.⁸⁵ Scholars inaccurately count Drew as a legitimate star due to his relation to John Drew and the Barrymores, yet his fame came from vaudeville. When Drew joined Kalem in 1912, a press release declared, “he early elected to cast his lot with vaudeville, in which field he has gained a reputation.”⁸⁶ Drew became best known

for *Billy's Tombstones* (1909), a 'broad farce' playlet that critics described as making audiences "laugh in superiority" because his character loses his four front teeth."⁸⁷ Although some acts were more polite than others, vaudeville performers still had lower cultural prestige and played before different crowds than legitimate actors.⁸⁸ In his study of vaudeville, scholar Andrew L. Erdman observes that despite vaudeville managers' claims that they presented more family-friendly entertainment, "men made up the majority of theatergoers, and it is clear that vaudeville producers made every effort to cater to patrons used to the 'rough and tumble background' of vaudeville's antecedent forms."⁸⁹ Erdman includes statistics of vaudeville audiences that closely mirror my own findings from Chapter One: sixty-four percent male, thirty-six percent female, along with sixty percent working class.⁹⁰ Drew's vaudeville background therefore distinguished him from the kinds of legitimate players associated with female patrons.



Sidney Drew as the cowardly husband in *Jerry's Mother-in-Law* (Vitagraph, 1913) (*Vitagraph Bulletin*, UCLA)

The broader content of Drew's vaudeville sketches carried over into his early film shorts. Scholars will likely find this statement surprising, but the film industry didn't strongly identify Drew with more 'refined' shorts until the second half of 1910s. Reviews for his shorts prior to *Florida Enchantment* described them as 'farces' or 'laugh riots' rather than polite comedies.⁹¹ In fact, plot synopses and extant shorts show Drew repeatedly engaging in broad humor, ranging from using a fishing hook to yank off unattractive people's wigs in *Beauty Unadorned* (1913) to passing

out drunkenly on his porch in a suit of armor during *Jerry's Mother-in-Law* (1913).⁹² Only by December of 1914 did some critics note his movement away from 'lower' forms. Of Drew's performance in *The Mysterious Mr. Davey*, a review pronounced, "He is improving in more than one respect, dispensing with crude slap-stick methods."⁹³ Even a review for *A Florida Enchantment* (1914), acknowledged that he still used it for portions with "burlesques as have demanded that form of humor."⁹⁴

Like other men in broad comedy, Drew was not known for being conventionally attractive or heroic coming into *A Florida Enchantment*. While scholars like Frank Schiede currently call Drew "charming and witty" with a "polished demeanor,"⁹⁵ he often received unflattering descriptions that distanced him from youthful, romantic leads. According to a review for *A Regiment of Two* (Vitagraph, 1913), Drew played "a character for which nature seems to have qualified him in advance, that of a sporty old husband who gets his second wind at fifty and manifests a 'Silk-Hat Harry' tendency to go gunning for squabs and wrens."⁹⁶ In addition to Drew's lack of physical attractiveness, reviews aligned him with characters that supposedly revealed 'low' elements of humanity. A review of *Pickles, Art and Sauerkraut* (1914) remarked Drew's character illustrated that "human nature that falls below the normal furnish[es] the comic side of this picturing."⁹⁷ In addition to older, indiscriminate skirt chasers, Drew often played effeminate characters emasculated by the women around them. As Drew cross-dressed several times in the shorts that proceeded *A Florida Enchantment*,⁹⁸ he may have seen his meek, cross-dressing character Fred in *A Florida Enchantment* as an opportunity to exploit this comic specialty.

Drew's portrayal of Fred in *A Florida Enchantment* can therefore be linked to his prior reputation for playing weak-willed or effeminate men in vaudeville skits and comedy shorts. Theatrical critics signaled Fred's deficient masculinity by referring to the plot's "so-called men."⁹⁹

In the extant film, Fred comically serves as a resigned, hen-pecked partner who gets helplessly rebuffed by Lillian. Merely acting confused by Lillian's behavior, Fred neither stands up for himself nor responds with indignation. Fred's immediate instinct to dance with a man at the ball, along with his simple resignation to let Lillian keep dancing with a woman while he downs drinks at the hotel bar, already comically emasculate him before his actual gender switch later in the film. Once Fred 'transforms,' he progresses from passivity to more explicitly feminized behavior, including swinging his hips and wearing women's clothes.



Sidney Drew in drag in *A Florida Enchantment*

Another way in which *A Florida Enchantment* differed from the supposed tastes of middle-class, female patrons was through its aggressive humor that foregrounds morally taboo behaviors. The novel and stage production of *A Florida Enchantment* already conflicted with expectations about appropriately moral content for higher class or female patrons. Author of both the novel and stage versions, Archibald Claverling Gunter, was viewed as a writer of 'penny dreadfuls' pitted against respectable, middle class literary circles.¹⁰⁰ An 1894 article in *The New York Times* reported that Gunter had been "blackballed" by an Author's Club on the grounds that his novels "were not considered to be up to the standard of literature which had prevailed as a qualification of membership in the club."¹⁰¹ Newspapers particularly expressed horror at the novel. *The Waco Evening News* (Texas) decried it as "about the wickedest thing that has appeared in print."¹⁰² When

Gunter transferred the novel to theater, critical reactions continued to align his work with lowbrow indecency. A reviewer claimed that theater owner Charles Hoyt “ought to have known what Gunter was going to do with his theatre before he let him use it.”¹⁰³ *The New York Times* bemoaned, “Theatricals have never before sunk quite so low in New-York” and that the play offered a “strange study in bad tastes.”¹⁰⁴ Though Laura Horak suggests that only New York audiences would have been sophisticated enough to recognize the potential lesbianism in the characters, newspapers outside of New York also labeled the book and play as “vulgarized,” “a very curious freak,”¹⁰⁵ and mentioned the Alice Mitchell court case that helped bring lesbianism into cultural consciousness.¹⁰⁶ The property’s supposed vulgarity not only prompted critics to dismiss its suitability for ‘decent audiences,’ but also for female patrons. One critic observed of the show, “There were few women in the audience and they were embarrassed.”¹⁰⁷

In addition to these reactions to the original property, reception of the film did not frame Lillian as a ‘well-behaved’ character. While we might not see Lillian’s actions as sexually risqué by today’s standards, reviews for the show characterized her male alter ego as an overly lustful lothario. *The New York Times* depicted Lawrence as someone who “says ‘dam’ and makes violent love to girls.”¹⁰⁸ Though less overtly, the film’s review in *Variety* also positioned Lawrence as having aggressively “made love to the women about.”¹⁰⁹ *The New York Daily Mirror* also intimated that her behavior extended past normal masculinity with its reference to her inexplicably ‘recklessly tossing about people and furniture.’¹¹⁰ Lawrence’s behaviors in the extant film support the idea that Lillian’s transformation did not accord with gentlemanly norms. Lawrence kisses unrelated women in public for extended periods, flirts with multiple women simultaneously, and hits and shoves Fred and Jane regularly. Much of the humor comes from Lawrence’s domination over Fred and other characters. He forces Jane to turn into a man without asking for Jane’s consent

by shoving a seed into her mouth. Lawrence also laughs frequently at other's suffering. He chuckles when his maid is almost murdered by Major Horton, and the film also cuts to him laughing when men chase Fred with pitchforks. Lawrence even jokes about killing Fred. As Fred tries to speak to him on the boat, Lawrence shoves a terrified Fred over the side towards the crocodile infested waters before pulling him back.

Through their anti-social behaviors, supporting characters also conflict with the trade's idea of moral humor. The maid Jane's transformation exemplifies this tendency. She engages in physical violence, throwing Lillian onto the couch and hitting her with pillows and later punching a rival servant. She also attempts sexual assault several times, chasing and grabbing another housemaid, and later presents a sexual threat to Bessie by climbing through her bedroom window. This caricature of black masculinity carried over broad characterizations of ethnic 'flaws' from comedy shorts. The desire to contain black violence receives overt treatment with the intertitle's reference to Major Horton's Southern traditionalism, which manifests when he attempts to murder Jane with a sword. Horton's racial animus continues the openly anti-social relationships commonly found in shorts.



Jane tries to assault another black maid in *A Florida Enchantment*

The film's humor also frequently hinges upon character suffering or humiliation in ways that contradicted the trade's belief that higher class and female patrons sought sympathetic

comedies. A film review disparaged Fred as “more or less a quack” and described his actions as “blunders.”¹¹¹ Much of the film’s design foregrounds Fred’s ineptitude or humiliation. Fred haplessly tries to woo back Lillian, repeatedly attempting to embrace her as she comically shoves him away. Beyond this sexual rejection, Fred suffers mental anguish from believing Lillian to be murdered. He then transforms into a woman, is chased by angry men into the sea, and is about to drown when Lillian’s dream ends. While film critics throughout the decade would propose that feature comedies should stress positive paths to accomplishing goals, Lillian’s gender transformation results in anti-social chaos. Lillian confirms that the film’s events take on a nightmarish rather than ‘wish-fulfillment’ quality. She declares upon waking up, “I’ve had such a horrible dream!”

A Florida Enchantment points to the difficulties shorts comedians experienced in features. Though usually analyzed for its gender politics, the film is equally significant as an early but rare approach to feature-length comedy. It illustrates one strategy of carrying over a shorts comedian, Sidney Drew, in ways that remained fairly consistent with the broader humor from his comedy shorts and stage career in the early 1910s. Producers quickly found that feature comedies would not automatically be found ‘high class’ if they maintained comedy shorts’ lack of plot development, unglamorous leads and anti-social humor. Those characteristics conflicted with what critics and exhibitors maintained higher class and female audiences sought from entertainment. Though feature vehicles soon abandoned shorts comedians, the dissonance between the higher budget for *A Florida Enchantment* and the lowbrow nature of the film’s content would prove nearly identical to studios’ struggles with comedians from the stage.

“Winks that Contort the Entire Visage”: Broad Stage Comedians in Feature Films

While scholars usually discuss theater as part of the film industry’s efforts at legitimization,¹¹² not all stage material and performers offered the same cultural cache. When *Motion Picture News*’s critic Peter Milne reviewed *The Fixer* (Kleine, 1916), a feature comedy starring vaudevillians George Bickel and Harry Watson Jr., he recognized the film as partaking in ‘low comedy’ traditions from the American stage:

“Many are familiar with the comedy style of George Bickel and Harry Watson, and although ancient and familiar that style still has a following—the old stage low comedy, winks that contort the entire visage, sly gesticulations at the audience and a seeming solid belief in their fun-making ability.”¹¹³

The following section dissects how film producers showcased broad or ‘low’ comedians from the stage in features. Between 1914 and 1916, film producers released at least twenty-six comedy features starring broad comedians from musical comedy or variety formats.¹¹⁴ Some producers directly adapted the comic’s shows like May Irwin’s *Mrs. Black is Back* (Famous Players, 1914). Others constructed original scenarios for the stars, such as Max Dill and Clarence Kolb’s *The Bluff* (Mutual, 1916).

For film producers, deploying broad stage comedians in feature comedies may have seemed like an ideal compromise. Despite coming from a different medium, broad comedy’s recognizable types with physical eccentricities resembled comedian’s caricatures in most film shorts. Their explicitly funny appearances would likely seem easier to communicate on film than wordier, narratively-driven plays. Nonetheless, the broad strategy once again proved unsuccessful due to its incompatibility with a feature market increasingly targeting cross-class and feminine consumers. Throughout this section, I will consistently contextualize the film vehicles of broad comedians with commentaries about their stage shows.

As we saw with Vitagraph’s feature efforts, more episodic forms like burlesques and musical farces often received critical characterizations as being ‘broad’ or ‘low’ humor. The stage

comedians discussed here anchored these kinds of shows. Of Frank Daniels, a pint-sized comic opera performer who would later headline original Vitagraph features, *The New York Times* framed his work in *The Tattooed Man* (1907) as “broad, low-comedy”¹¹⁵ Reviews of adaptations of these shows or their performers similarly characterized them as lowbrow. According to *The New York Clipper*, musical comedy star Marie Dressler’s *Tillie’s Punctured Romance* (Alco, 1914) contained “the most funny low comedy riots imaginable”¹¹⁶ while German caricaturists Clarence Kolb and Max Dill’s *A Million for Mary* (Mutual, 1916) evinced “very old style ‘hokum’ type of farce, with lots of slapstick and a fair amount of rough stuff.”¹¹⁷ Film critics framed this ‘low comedy’ as beneath certain patrons. *Variety* cautioned that “old burlesque bits” in *The Win(k)some Widow* (Vitagraph, 1914) would only appeal to some audience members while other classes, “will not be so enthusiastic.”¹¹⁸ As we saw in the first half of the chapter, women were culturally distanced from such episodic formats and lowbrow comedians. The occasional reference to higher classes indulging in these broad comedians’ stage shows still framed cultural consumption of lowbrow humor as an essentially masculine exercise. In an interview, purveyor of German caricatures Sam Bernard foregrounded his more limited success with female patrons, saying they only laughed at “the wrong places” or one would almost laugh “but get scared at herself and quit.”¹¹⁹ Rather, he identified his target as “tired businessmen” whose “inability to think except in percentages have evolved a style of entertainment which you are supposed to watch in a kind of fatuous daze.”¹²⁰

As opposed to leading men and women who adapted to different narrative contexts, broad comedians unabashedly repeated personae across shows with minimalist or episodic plots. Steve Seidman would likely include these performers under his designation “comedian comedy.”¹²¹ While broad comedians could be found in legitimate plays, they usually served as supporting characters.¹²² Theatrical critics distinguished the episodic shows prioritizing broad comedians

from tightly constructed plays. It was not uncommon for critics to say of a musical like Richard Carle's *Mary's Lamb* (prod. 1908) that "the story, however, is a matter of slight consequence."¹²³ The individual talents or attractions of a group of performers received emphasis over story quality. For instance, *The New York Times* observed that Marie Cahill's musical *Judy Forgot* (prod. 1910) was "not always consistent, not always subject to acid test as to cohesiveness or coherency—but brimful of amusing things with half a dozen or more talented people to get them over."¹²⁴ These productions elevated the individual performer in disparate 'routines' or 'numbers' over plotting, with broad comedians utilizing the same persona across shows regardless of which loose story surrounded them. Of May Robson's consistently ribald, elderly matrons, *The Evening World* joked, "Evidently Miss May Robson intends to play gay and festive old ladies to the end of her days."¹²⁵

The episodic nature of these productions made for a difficult adjustment when film producers crafted features for broad comedians. *Variety* disparaged *The Win(k)some Widow*: "There isn't much consistency to the story and all sorts of liberties are taken with the supposed foundation of the camera farce as an endeavor to evoke laughter."¹²⁶ For Frank Daniels' *What Happened to Father* (1915), *Variety* complained, "The story is 'all wrong.'"¹²⁷ Vitagraph was not alone in facing criticism for the plotting in broad comedians' feature vehicles. *The New York Clipper* characterized *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (Alco, 1914) as meagerly plotted, stating, "The picture is one long series of ludicrous situations."¹²⁸ Of George Bickel and Harry Watson Jr.'s feature *Keep Moving* (George Kleine, 1915), *Variety* considered it "a medley of absurd incidents"¹²⁹ with "lots of bits that are as old as the hills on the stage, and includes vaudeville, burlesque and musical comedy."¹³⁰ Critics also alluded to the films not containing *enough* incidents to fill the feature's longer time span. Though *Mrs. Black is Back* (Famous Players, 1914) fared better than other features starring

broad comics, reviewers still cited pacing as a problem. *The New York Clipper* observed, “There is quite a noticeable lack of action in the first two reels.”¹³¹ Reviews for *Judy Forgot* (Universal, 1915) also pointed out this difficulty, commenting “earlier reels offer less in the way of plot complications”¹³² and “it does seem a little long and drawn out after the fourth reel.”¹³³ Reviewers suggested cutting down these features into shorts to resolve the issue. *Variety* claimed of Kolb and Dill’s *A Million for Mary* (Mutual, 1916), “Produced as a two-reeler, ‘A Million for Mary’ might have aroused keen laughter.”¹³⁴

Critics most frequently brought up sparse plots and uneven pacing, but the buffoonish qualities of broad comedians also rendered them at odds with the feature. Like comics from shorts, these stage performers contradicted features’ reliance on attractive, youthful actors for middlebrow and feminized audiences. Theatrical critics stressed the comedians’ physical eccentricities and framed audiences as laughing at character deficiencies. As in film shorts, these laughable qualities ranged from atypical looks to severe personality flaws. Reviews for *Mary’s Lamb* derided Richard Carle’s physical appearance as “odd and without grace or refinement.”¹³⁵ In the musical comedy *A Black Sheep* (stage show 1896), Otis Harlan found fame from his oddly out-turned, “kidney feet.”¹³⁶ Frank Daniels occupied the petite end of the physical spectrum, with *The Theatre* unkindly characterizing him as “the unctuous little comedian.”¹³⁷ The comedy team of Joe Weber and Lew Fields combined a short, squat character and a tall, scrawny character for comic contrast and both wore oddly fitted clothing as part of their German caricatures.¹³⁸ The few successful female players in broad comedy, such as May Irwin, Marie Dressler and Marie Cahill, challenged standards of white feminine beauty. They were known for their large physiques and would perform minstrel songs in blackface.¹³⁹ A review for the musical *Roly Poly* (1912) usefully summarizes the interplay

of physical eccentricities for humor; “At the finale, the colossal Marie Dressler falls plump on the tall, thin Fields [Lew].”¹⁴⁰



Hall

FRANK DANIELS IN "THE TATTOOED MAN"

Frank Daniels in *The Tattooed Man* (prod. 1907) (*The Theatre*)

Once broad comics transferred to ‘respectable’ features, they continued to defy their era’s notions of attractiveness. Some critics expressed displeasure with their physical oddities and mannerisms. Reviews for *Mrs. Black is Back* (Famous Players, 1914) stressed May Irwin’s “ample”¹⁴¹ figure, with *Variety* quipping, “Irwin is not an exceptional subject for the camera.”¹⁴² Despite enjoying *Tillie’s Punctured Romance*, *Variety* still noted that Dressler “wears clothes that make her appear ridiculous” and “distorts her face in all directions.”¹⁴³ Because broad comedians had relied heavily on eccentric physicality or vocal affectations for humor, their feature films suffered when those quirks didn’t translate. Of Sam Bernard’s *Poor Schmaltz* (Famous Players, 1915), *The Moving Picture World* observed, “It is safe to say that in the original version a goodly proportion of the comedy rested on dialect” and that Bernard “shows the lack of moderation which is a mark of the uncamerawise; his lightning-like stage movements do not at all times show.”¹⁴⁴ Otis Harlan, who starred in both the stage and film versions of Charles Hoyt’s *A Black Sheep* (Selig, 1915), also had his inadaptability criticized. *Motion Picture News* remarked, “His screen humor is merely his stage humor, received through a Maxim silencer.”¹⁴⁵ For Frank Daniels’

vehicle, *What Happened to Father* (1915), reviews cast a jaundiced eye upon Daniels' "grimaces, posturings,"¹⁴⁶ while a newspaper called Daniels "grotesque"¹⁴⁷ in *Crooky* (Vitagraph, 1915). Fan magazines also singled out some of these comedians for being physically unappealing in their comic style. One female fan complained about Cissy Fitzgerald in *Motion Picture Magazine*, "If you persist in ogling your eyes so grotesquely wide open, you will catch many a speck in them, *but* not a 'speck' of our admiration."¹⁴⁸

The incompetent or misbehaving characters that broad comedians frequently portrayed also conflicted with the feature's respectability rhetoric. Such performers played exaggerated types that might best be designated as buffoons or miscreants. Raymond Hitchcock famously appeared as a "lazy and bibulous American" in *The Yankee Consul* (prod. 1903),¹⁴⁹ and his first feature-length comedy *The Ringtailed Rhinoceros* (Lubin, 1915) followed an alcoholic attempting to get sober. Other famous broad comedians similarly played characters exhibiting a lack of intelligence, greed or indiscriminate lust. Joe Weber played a gullible sidekick who Lew Fields unsuccessfully directed in schemes that resulted in the duo's "immediate disadvantage."¹⁵⁰ Known for his dense "Dutchmen,"¹⁵¹ Sam Bernard spent entire productions "maiming the English language."¹⁵² Beyond linguistic grappling, his characters would show other failings as well. In *Nearly a Hero* (prod. 1908), Bernard played a money-obsessed tailor who desperately tries to get into a rich man's graces by concocting a plan to deceive the man's wife about his numerous affairs.¹⁵³ Unflattering characterizations also applied to female comedians. Dismissing May Robson's unwise grandmother in *The Three Lights*, *The New York Tribune* griped, "'Granmum' turned out to be a very foolish old girl to whom it was a relief to say 'Goodnight.'"¹⁵⁴

According to reviews and synopses, the feature films for these broad comedians continued to foreground character misbehavior and to create humor from their incompetency or embarrassment.

In Frank Daniels' *Crooky* (Vitagraph, 1915), an escaped convict is mistaken for a wealthy man. Though temporarily affluent, Crooky cannot contain his urge to steal everything in sight or to encroach on every woman in his vicinity. Eventually deciding society life is not for him, Crooky willingly returns to prison. The joke of a man preferring a prison cell to a respectable existence was already present in shorts such as *The Trials of a Tall Traveler* (Kleine, 1911), *The Bicycle Bug's Dream* (Imp, 1911) or *The Burglar and the Baby* (Kalem, 1913).¹⁵⁵ *Crooky* thus chronicles a criminal who temporarily causes mischief but ultimately returns to his former life without any moral or material gains. Reviews mentioned his quarrels with other characters and his uncontrollable sexual urges. One newspaper noted Crooky's "chief characteristic seems to be nerve...he is flippant with the guards, shoves his way into the good graces of Colonel Roberts...proceeds to make violent love to everybody of the opposite sex that comes within his range."¹⁵⁶ As opposed to the 'sympathetic humor' that would be promoted for feature comedies throughout the decade, newspapers detailed Crooky's "painful escape from prison" or "the rough treatment he receives in the barrel."¹⁵⁷

Older female performers also misbehaved thoroughly. In *The Win(k)some Widow* (Vitagraph, 1914), Cissy Fitzgerald reflexively plays a musical comedy actress who seduces the men in her show by winking. Accepting marriage proposals from them all, she proceeds to invite them to her home. They compete to impress her with outrageous gifts such as a monkey or a bear. When her husband arrives home, the men are forced into hiding. The husband discovers the men, chases them around the house, and for reasons not entirely clear from reviews, the house eventually floods.¹⁵⁸ The plot matches many comedy shorts where multiple male suitors rendered themselves ridiculous through sexual competition. The film also emphasizes characters' immoral actions or embarrassing situations. The actress purposefully engages in infidelity, accepting proposals from

multiple men despite being married. Surviving synopses also foregrounded the characters' extreme incompetency. The men disguise themselves as servants but make 'such a mess' of cooking that the neighbors call the fire department.¹⁵⁹ The film's humor also relied on the men's repeated humiliation, as the suitors become covered with 'flour,' 'paste,' 'blackface,' and by the end the film doused with water.¹⁶⁰

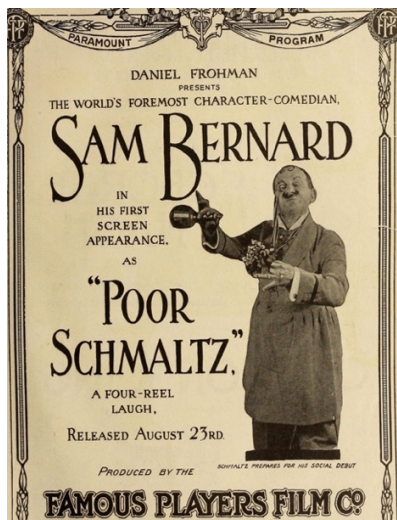


Cissy Fitzgerald in *The Win(k)some Widow* (Vitagraph, 1914) (*Vitagraph Bulletin*, UCLA)

Most of the studios to borrow these broad comedians, like Lubin, Keystone and Vitagraph, had produced shorts. They seem to have been more inclined to add a star 'name' while carrying over character types they had already worked with. This strategy is particularly logical if producers did not wish to lose the audience that they had already built up. In fact, they usually supported these stage stars with comedians from their shorts. Just as Charles Chaplin and Mabel Normand worked with Marie Dressler in *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (Keystone, 1914), Wally Van and Hughie Mack backed up Cissy Fitzgerald in *The Win(k)some Widow*. In contrast, feature-only companies rarely used this approach and reviewers expressed surprise when they did.¹⁶¹ Sukimo Higashi and other scholars recognize how feature-only producers such as Adolph Zukor's contracted to use the plays of legitimate producers like Charles and Daniel Frohman in order to attract higher class audiences, with Zukor regularly touting 'high class' ambition in publicity.¹⁶² These producers sought a 'different' model for the feature from the start of their studios as opposed

to attempting to carry over strategies that had proved popular in shorts. Their industry stake was primarily in differentiating themselves from pre-existing producers.

However, even studios like Famous Players tried borrowing a broad stage comic for features at least once. In Sam Bernard's *Poor Schmaltz* (Paramount, 1915), a greedy, squat German barber aspires "to the honors and privileges and possibilities of a wealthy alliance that fall to the bearer of a title."¹⁶³ Discovering he resembles a count, he poses as the man to marry a wealthy brewer's daughter. Unfortunately, she prefers a young man who turns out to be a member of an anarchist society. The film ends with "poor Schmaltz" returning to barbering, "finding it a much safer and saner business."¹⁶⁴ As in the previous examples, the buffoonish lead reverted to their dissatisfied existence with no notable gains. Humor came from his series of difficulties, failing to marry or to attain wealth.



Ad for Sam Bernard's *Poor Schmaltz* (1916) (MPN, 8/28/1915, 3)

It is difficult to authoritatively assess how well these broad comedians fared in early features, as exhibitor reports did not appear regularly in trade publications until the second half of the 1917. Nevertheless, the remaining evidence paints a dismal picture. *Variety* dismissed Richard Carle's *Mary's Lamb* (Pathé, 1915); "'Mary's Lamb' will get the exhibitor's goat...it is not a feature that will bring any return business."¹⁶⁵ Of Marie Dressler's *Tillie's Tomato Surprise* (Lubin, 1915)

Variety reported that “the Fox people threw out the attempted comedy feature as impossible”¹⁶⁶ and withdrew it from distribution. Frank Daniel’s *What Happened to Father* (Vitagraph, 1915) received this painful recounting from *Variety*: “‘If it had not been for the fact that the man sitting next to the reviewer snored so loudly it would have been a pleasant nap reviewing this film...it is a question whether his [Daniel’s] public will ever give him any return patronage.’”¹⁶⁷ Retrospective accounts second an unflattering view of these broader features. Vitagraph’s J. Stuart Blackton claimed *Tillie’s Punctured Romance* was “an awful flop” with “badly directed, vulgar clowning.”¹⁶⁸ While Blackton may have been motivated to dismiss Keystone’s feature because of industry rivalry, he was no less harsh on his own feature comedies. He called the May Robson feature, *A Night Out* (Jan, 1916), “the most ghastly comedy we ever made.”¹⁶⁹ Internal memos at Vitagraph also raised concerns that Cissy Fitzgerald’s *How Cissy Made Good* (1915) was not selling well.¹⁷⁰

By the second half of 1915, reviewers dismissed the possibility of broad comedians anchoring a feature-length project. Assessing Otis Harlan’s *A Black Sheep* (VLSE/Selig, 1915), *Variety* suggested that looser farces were not viable beyond two reels:

“It is the most difficult problem of modern motion picture photography to sustain farcical humor beyond two reels...Harlan is there with his famous ‘kidney feet’ and has ample opportunity for his ‘long suit’—sloshing around with a bunch of show girls. This is indeed funny, but even Rita Gould in tights cannot carry the picture along for five solid reels and maintain sufficient risibilities to warrant the decision that ‘A Black Sheep’ is a class A feature.”¹⁷¹

The reviewer’s comments are interesting, as he specifies ‘farcical humor’ being difficult to sustain as opposed to just ‘comedy’ or ‘humor.’ That the reviewer follows the claim with a description of grotesque caricature and episodic attractions implies that broad humor particularly struggled in the feature form. Producers apparently listened to critics’ complaints. Studios often recut broad comedians’ features and redistributed them as shorts. This fate befell *Tillie’s Punctured Romance* (Alco, 1914), *How Cissy Made Good* (Vitagraph, 1915), and *My Valet*, (Triangle, 1915).¹⁷² Soon

virtually all broad comedians from the stage transitioned to comedy shorts or exited film production altogether. Vitagraph placed Frank Daniels in numerous shorts throughout 1916 and 1917.¹⁷³ Harry Watson Jr.'s character from the feature *Keep Moving* (Kleine, 1915), Musty Suffer, was also moved to a series of one-reelers.¹⁷⁴ Other broad comedians from the stage, such as Sam Bernard, Carter De Haven and Raymond Hitchcock, likewise found themselves 'demoted.'¹⁷⁵

Case Study: *Sunshine Dad* (Triangle/Fine Arts, 1916)

The extant *Sunshine Dad* (Triangle/Fine Arts, 1916) demonstrates how producers implemented looser plotting, buffoonish characters and aggressive humor into stage comedians' features. The film showcases DeWolf Hopper, who scholars recognize as unsuccessful onscreen.¹⁷⁶ In his autobiography, Hopper himself admitted, "I was no earth-shaking success in the movies."¹⁷⁷ Though Hopper rarely garners more than a footnote to argue that stage stars didn't transfer well on film, Rob King more recently uses him for an important historiographic argument about silent comedy. He proposes that Triangle's problems with Hopper and other stage comics represent part of the "failure of highbrow cultural practice in an era of commercialized leisure."¹⁷⁸ King correctly identifies Triangle's assumption that stage stars would help justify higher ticket prices. What his analysis overlooks, however, was a studio's promotion of its content as 'high class' did not always accord with its practice. While stage names at Triangle like Billie Burke or Douglas Fairbanks had starred in legitimate light comedies, Hopper's reputation came from broad characters in musical comedies. Given Hopper's stage career and his extant film, it is more accurate to say he served as an example of lowbrow cultural practice failing in the feature.

While De Wolf Hopper cavorted offstage with legitimate players in the Lamb's Club,¹⁷⁹ his onstage appearances in comic operas and musical comedies between 1890 and 1910 were classified as 'low' and 'broad.' He was not the kind of musical comedy performer that producers

saw as a viable leading man in legitimate plays. Within operettas and musical comedies, attractive youths could transition to light comedy plays. Marguerite Clark, who would become wildly successful in feature comedies, played attractive foils in Hopper's musical shows. Critics described her humor as 'lovely' and as having a 'light touch.' When she moved to star in legitimate comedies like *Baby Mine* (1910), theatrical articles congratulated her for escaping "the horrors of musical comedy."¹⁸⁰ In contrast, critics characterized Hopper in his shows as "broad, low comedy"¹⁸¹ or "broadly amusing."¹⁸² In an interview for *The Green Book Magazine*, Hopper himself explained that his role of Dick Deadeye in *Pinafore* was "a very low-comedy character, with exaggerated make-up and dialogue."¹⁸³

Hopper's stage vehicles contained the same limited plotting as those of other broad comedians. A critic pronounced of Hopper's *The Charlatan* (1898), "What matters the plot?"¹⁸⁴ Other Hopper shows received labels like "a slight piece"¹⁸⁵ or "horseplay and burlesque."¹⁸⁶ In fact, critics stressed the disparate nature of how the shows were structured—from showgirls, to parodied scenes, to Hopper's improvisations. For instance, *A Matinee Idol* (1910) followed a struggling actor who poses as a doctor, yet the musical contained unrelated scenes of Hopper giving a "burlesque edition of William Elliott's courtroom speech from 'Madame X.'"¹⁸⁷ Spectacle took priority over consistent storylines, with critics regularly noting "the girls and the trappings."¹⁸⁸ In fact, Hopper often improvised. Reviews included remarks such as "his biggest laugh of the night came through an impromptu remark"¹⁸⁹ and "he is funniest when he departs from his given lines."¹⁹⁰ Hopper's persona unapologetically dominated the shows regardless of storyline. A review of the comic opera *Mr. Pickwick* noted that Hopper was "as little concerned with the spirit of Charles Dickens' Pickwick as it is possible to be."¹⁹¹ Hopper admitted in an

interview that he preferred to keep his persona at the forefront; “I always try, no matter what part I may be playing, to keep my own identity on the surface.”¹⁹²

In keeping with broad comedy’s unglamorous and buffoonish characters, Hopper almost always played older men in exaggerated make up. One interview summarized his career as ‘old kings in improbable kingdoms.’¹⁹³ His outlandish costumes were well known. A review of *Wang* (1904) mentioned his adoption of “a trowsled blonde wig and a somewhat moth-eaten beard of yellow horsehair”¹⁹⁴ while another for *A Matinee Idol* denoted his reputation for “wearing garish garb.”¹⁹⁵



Hopper in *The Pied Piper* (1902) (*The Theatre*)

In addition to outlandish costuming, shows often used Hopper’s 6’3 frame for comedic effect. Theatrical magazines remarked on his “long legs, which he uses to such good purpose in his grotesque and amusing dances.”¹⁹⁶ To produce further comedy from Hopper’s unusual stature, it was common for him to have “a diminutive person as a foil,”¹⁹⁷ such as comedian George Mack. Hopper also frequently played bumbling or immoral men where humor unfolded from their failings. He played a “portly, vainglorious gentleman”¹⁹⁸ in *Mr. Pickwick* (1903), a “con man” who causes ‘heaps of trouble’ in *The Charlatan* (1898),¹⁹⁹ an “over-grown schoolboy” King who “bumbles” his efforts to make the people in his kingdom unhappy in *HappyLand* (1905), and an

actor who flails at being a doctor in *A Matinee Idol* (1910).²⁰⁰ Hopper himself perceived his brand of humor as tapping into the audience's superiority over the characters: "Hopelessness...is the very essence of humor...We have all seen some comrade hurrying at top speed to some good fortune, and just as he was apparently winged for flight, stub his toe and fall in helplessness to the ground."²⁰¹

Hopper flirted with broad comedy's morally questionable behavior on and off the stage. Though he claimed to support 'decent theater' in some publicity pieces, Hopper's five divorces supposedly due to him chasing chorus girls made news repeatedly in the late 1800s and early 1910s.²⁰² Interviewed by the *The New York Times*, Hopper admitted, "I know I've got a reputation of being a high liver and a gay dog."²⁰³ He often played roles that alluded to philandering or distaste for marriage. In *HappyLand* (1905), Hopper's king believes that marriage makes one miserable and thus ends his kingdom's monotonous happiness by forcing everyone to wed. In other shows, Hopper's characters complained about the marital state, as in his song 'Damaged Goods' in *Hop-O-My-Thumb* (1913), which some critics considered 'in bad taste.'²⁰⁴ Triangle seemed just as eager to exploit this persona in the feature film *Sunshine Dad* (1916), as advertisements emphasized "the old gentleman's wild life with the chorus girls."²⁰⁵

Unfortunately for Triangle, *Sunshine Dad*' reception was disastrous. *Variety* deemed Hopper "a distinct failure as a motion picture comedian."²⁰⁶ He even suffered the embarrassment of being 'upstaged' by the film's lion. Of the lion, *The Moving Picture World* enthused, "His tricks bring hearty laughs, whereas much of the earlier part of the picture doesn't call forth anything more pronounced than smiles."²⁰⁷ Hopper relayed in his autobiography that the producers at Fine Arts engaged him for "clowning low comedy,"²⁰⁸ and reviews depicted *Sunshine Dad* in this manner. Bringing up "favorite slapstick pastimes such as cracking a bore over the head with a cello,"²⁰⁹

Motion Picture News left little doubt that it saw the film's humor as lowbrow. Reactions to the film expressed similar grievances to those we have seen against other broad comedies in feature form. Reviews mentioned issues with the meager story, which *Motography* branded as "weak" and *Motion Picture News* dismissed as "simply a string of capers."²¹⁰ Critics called Hopper's figure "bulky,"²¹¹ and *Motion Picture News* took issue with his broad acting as "lacking nothing of the strenuous."²¹² *Motography* also hinted at 'morality' issues by observing that the situations were 'racy,' leaning "toward the French style as anything else when it comes to national characteristics."²¹³

The surviving film displays the broad tendencies cited in reviews. I provide a detailed summary below:

Reel One opens at the temple of the Hinyat sect (white performers in brown face) who worship a jeweled necklace called the 'jewels of Junjab.' In what could well be a parody of Wilkie Collins's novel, *The Moonstone* (1868), a Russian Count (Chester Withey) steals the jewels and two Hinyats called the 'seer' and 'doer' attempt to recover them. The film then introduces Alonzo Evergreen (Hopper), "a retired Thespian" who "still persists in playing 'the juvenile.'" Alonzo visits his son (Eugene Pallette) in order to ask him for money. Intertitles joke, "It is entirely consistent that, with so youthful a father, the responsibilities of the family should fall upon the son." The film cuts to Alonzo's future object of lust, Widow Marrimore (Fay Tincher). She mopes and stares at her first husband's portrait. Intertitles explain that his will stipulated she could not marry again unless "victim No 2 shall be over fifty years of age." Presumably not knowing about this clause, the Count romances the widow. Unluckily for him, the 'seer' and 'doer' trail him successfully by following his dropped cigarette stubs. The two spy on the Count and Widow as they stroll outside of a café. Concurrently, Alonzo drops his cane on a pretty woman's foot to prompt an introduction to her and her friend.



Alonzo escorts two strangers off for drinks (Courtesy of Library of Congress for all stills)

Reel Two follows Alonzo's difficulties due to whisking these women off to a café. The group orders numerous drinks. When the women recognize the Count, he and the Widow join the party. Alonzo makes eyes at the Widow and she reciprocates. Once the bill arrives, Alonzo is horrified to see a total of 65 dollars (almost two thousand dollars today). As the waiter insists on payment, Alonzo races off to ask his son for money. Alonzo goes through elaborate efforts to procure this money. On his way, the Hinyats threaten him with a sword. Luckily, the 'seer' notes that "he's

the wrong gink,” so Alonzo keeps running to his son’s office. His displeased son threatens to cut him off, but the son’s fiancée, Charlotte (Jewel Carmen), falls for Alonzo’s feigned tears and the son reluctantly hands over more money. On his way back, Alonzo sees a blind man begging and pretends not to have any currency. Arriving at the café, he finds that the women left with another man. He initially gives a bell boy a tip but then takes some of it back.

Reel Three then opens with lead up to and the events of a ball. The Count and Widow court while the Hinyats hide in nearby bushes and gently pull the Count’s cigar out of his mouth. The ‘seer’ comes to ‘see’ that the cigar stubs match the trail left by the thief they have been looking for. Alonzo interrupts the courting pair, and the two men swat each other with handkerchiefs. Finally spotting the Hinyats, the Count runs away. Back in his chambers, the Count tries to protect the jewels by giving them to the unwitting Widow to wear as a garter. Later at a ball, Alonzo drunkenly stumbles across the two women he left at the café and pulls his crying routine to gain their sympathy. He quickly sees the Widow, however, and shoves the women out of the way to pursue her. As the Count and Widow dance, the jewels fall off of her leg and Alonzo happens to find them on the floor. One of Alonzo’s drunken friends then asks him to dance with the friend’s wife, who is large and middle-aged. Reluctantly agreeing, Alonzo sprains his back when he attempts to lift her.

At the beginning of Reel Four, Alonzo staggers straight from the party to his son’s office the following morning. To his son’s annoyance, he has to pay for Alonzo’s cab. As the cabbie attempts to hand back change, Alonzo swipes the change for himself. Later reaching into his pocket, Alonzo discovers the jewels. Seeing the Widow’s ad for the missing item, he wraps them in a box to send her. Charlotte later takes the package thinking it is from her fiancé. Discovering the mistake, Alonzo rushes off to retrieve the jewels. Meanwhile, Charlotte unwraps them and finds Alonzo’s love note. Since it is on his son’s business card, she assumes her fiancé has a secret lover and breaks off their engagement. When Alonzo arrives, he does not see the jewels and fears his future daughter-in-law might be wearing them as a garter as the Widow had. He tries out several methods to figure out if she is wearing them, including touching the sides of her legs and placing her in front of a window so he can see through her dress. When his son enters, he is alarmed to see Alonzo’s examination of Charlotte. Despite this awkwardness, Alonzo spots the jewels and races off with them.

In the final reel, Alonzo returns the necklace to the Widow. As the two flirt, the Hinyats enter her apartment and demand the jewels. The Count, however, steals the jewels from the Widow’s bedroom as she speaks to the Hinyats. The angry Hinyats tie up Alonzo, kidnap the Widow and claim they will sacrifice her unless Alonzo returns the jewels. He hops around the room towards a candle and lights it using his mouth. He burns off his ties and races to rescue the Widow. Finding her tied to a post next to a lion, Alonzo unties the Widow and carries her back to her apartment. Unfortunately, the lion follows them. Shocked to see the lion, the two run in circles through the hallway, living room and bathroom in attempts to flee. Once the Hinyats arrive, Alonzo spots the jewels lying in the Count’s neighboring apartment. The Hinyats take away the Count and lion, leaving Alonzo and the Widow in peace. Upon hearing that her husband’s will demands her second husband be over fifty, Alonzo gleefully informs her that he is fifty-one.

Though *Sunshine Dad* provides Alonzo with a happier ending than other features with broad comedians, shared tropes still persist. These tropes—limited plot development, grotesque character types, along with immoral humor—conflicted with what the industry promoted in most feature comedies by the end of the decade.

The film’s plot does not significantly alter characters or their circumstances, instead foregrounding gags. Alonzo persists in his extravagant spending and pursuit of women throughout. Just as Alonzo’s character does not evolve, neither do interpersonal relationships. The Count never appears to be a real obstacle for the Widow and Alonzo, since she is not engaged to the Count and

immediately expresses a preference for Alonzo. While the Hinyats' pursuit causes inconvenience in the final reel, the couple's union does not hinge on whether the jewels are returned. Alonzo does not even experience a hurdle from the will of the Widow's husband, since Alonzo is conveniently over fifty. Thus, interest does not derive from how Alonzo and the Widow will come together, but rather, from the outlandishness of Alonzo or the Hinyats' misbehaviors. Similarly, Alonzo never comes to an understanding with his son. The last glimpse of his son shows him scowling due to the belief that his father lusts after his fiancée. Along with an absence of character maturation or relationship evolution, Alonzo's social positioning remains static. He does not, say, leave to search for the jewels in India or through some fluke turn out to be a descendant of the jewels' rightful owners. Notwithstanding Alonzo's marriage to the Widow (which looks like it was well on its course without the Hinyat plot), *Sunshine Dad* exhibits a 'temporary disruption' structure not dissimilar to *A Florida Enchantment* (1914).

The film reveals more interest in extending gags. The first reel does set up a cause and effect chain by showing the jewel's initial theft and the Count's involvement. However, reels two and three largely follow Alonzo's daily misbehaviors as opposed to any upending of his life due to the Hinyat's arrival. For instance, much of reel two follows Alonzo's struggles to pay the restaurant bill. Alonzo sends the bill back and forth to the Count, pretends to have a hole in his pocket, gets into a physical altercation with the waiter, rushes off to get money from his son, and races back to the café to pay the bill. Many incidents, like Alonzo refusing to pay the blind man or to tip the waiter, do not advance the Hinyat or Widow storylines. Instead, the events showcase Alonzo's laughable character flaws. The Hinyats only grab Alonzo briefly before realizing they are mistaken, meaning their presence does not disrupt his life until the final reel of the film. Reel three similarly focuses more on Alonzo's character failings or laughable behavior than the stolen

jewelry. Alonzo does eventually find the jewels at the end of the ball, but before then, the ballroom sequence shows him getting drunk, flirting with the two women again from the café, whirling about the tiny Widow in the air, and then grimacing from dancing with an overweight partner. Until the final reel, the Hinyat and Alonzo strands operate as separate, parallel storylines only tangentially related. It feels as if a Keystone parody of *The Moonstone* (1868) unfolded side-by-side with one of Vitagraph's domestic shorts about a bumbling, old flirt.

Sunshine Dad also shares in the tradition of broad comedians playing unromantic characters in their vehicles. The film repeatedly stresses Alonzo's older age. Introduced as a 'retired' thespian, he later tells the Widow that he fulfills her first husband's specification that "victim No. 2 shall be over fifty years of age." In regards to lighting and make up, Hopper sports a grey wig (he wore wigs due to alopecia), has eyebrows painted to be much bushier than his natural brows, and wears dark lipstick. Rather than attempting to make Hopper look younger, his accessories grant him a cartoonish quality. Beyond styling, Hopper's performance provides many opportunities for him to look physically awkward or to deviate from typical leading men. As seen in the still below from Alonzo's first sighting of the Widow, Hopper rolls his eyes, purses his lips and raises eyebrows to comically distort his face. These reactions render their meet cute comically grotesque as opposed to sentimental. When his son will not loan him money, he bursts into tears



Alonzo reacting to his sighting of the Widow at the café

and rumples his chin. While courting the Widow, he sneezes repeatedly. Alonzo also displays physical inadequacy on multiple occasions. In the tracking shots of him rushing to retrieve money, he hobbles rather than displaying a normal gait. Upon being interrupted by the Count, the two men fight over the Widow by slapping one another ineffectively with their handkerchiefs. Even Alonzo's final 'rescue' of the Widow from the Hinyats, with both characters running from room to room in circles and failing to evade the lion, undermines any notion of his 'heroism.'

Fay Tincher's performance as the Widow also falls comfortably into broad comedy. Tincher carries over her trademark outlandish costuming from comedy shorts, and it is telling that the studio felt she was tonally correct as a partner for Hopper. Her hairstyle keeps a large, single curl at the center of her forehead. When Alonzo and the Count court her in the park, she wears a giant, rabbit eared hat. For the ballroom scene, the Widow strings together several long necklaces over a dress that patches together white and black strips of fabric like a nonsensical chessboard. Her physical movements also parody a seductress as opposed to legitimately attempting to depict a



The widow's checkerboard costume for the ball

lovely widow. When she walks, Tincher juts one shoulder up and the other one down to the point where she is almost off balance. The walk draws on images of women without 'class' in this period, such as prostitutes and vamps. Female leads in light comedies would briefly parody this type for a disguise, but Tincher uses this as a defining element of her actual character's presentation.

Further regarding character eccentricity, the film continually emphasizes Alonzo's irresponsible spending, selfishness, poor temper and uncontrollable lust. Alonzo spends money recklessly and pins the bills on his son. Demonstrating overt rudeness on several occasions, he pulls a handkerchief out of a woman's bosom, aggressively shakes a waiter and mocks the weight of his dance partner. While critics stressed 'romance' as attractive to cross-class and female viewers, Alonzo's interest in the Widow is placed in a larger context of indiscriminate pursuit. He chases two women in the film's first reel, flirts with the Widow despite being out with them, and attempts simultaneous flirtations with them all at the ball. Alonzo even exhibits quasi-incestuous behavior. We see him lengthily kiss his son's fiancée, Charlotte, on the mouth in gratitude for giving him money, and she looks shocked and discomfited. This earlier encounter lends a lascivious air to the later extended gag where Alonzo attempts to see through her dress. Multiple medium and medium close ups show Alonzo leering at her legs as he attempts to discover if she is wearing the jeweled garter. First, Alonzo hugs her and rubs his hands against the side of her thighs. Instead of giving up or asking her, Alonzo then tries to see through her skirt by opening a window and pouring more sunlight into the room. When she catches him eyeing her skirt, he pretends to have fainted. Trying to peer underneath her skirt as she leans over him, she eventually Notices so he pretends there is a mouse. As she leaps onto the table and pulls up her skirts,



Alonzo inspecting the legs of his son's fiancée for the garter

Alonzo places his head next to her legs to closely examine them. Alonzo resembles the broad characters in Hopper's stage vehicles, but also the lecherous, irresponsible older men in numerous comedy shorts.

With the foregrounding of his flaws, the film's humor can be classified as unsympathetic. As noted in the plot synopsis, lengthy sequences showcase Alonzo's indiscriminate flirting or his attempts to avoid paying bills. Rather than a comic mishap arising that is not Alonzo's fault, his troubles are typically self-inflicted. The film also invites laughter at his trials and humiliations, such as being abandoned by the girls at the café, nearly murdered by the sect, or chased by a lion. If the film does not position the audience to laugh at Alonzo's failings and troubles, it creates gags out of him taking advantage of others, such as his son or Charlotte. This dynamic is well-illustrated in his attempts to see up Charlotte's dress. Here, the humor stems more from the audience's illicit view of the woman rather than a hero's well-intentioned task.

The film also creates humor out of the incompetence and misbehaviors of the supporting characters. The Widow flirts equally with the Count and Alonzo, not showing a preference until the Count flees. Her indiscriminate flirting continues the broad tradition of 'inconstant' widows of comedy shorts that frequently pitted suitors against one another. Alonzo's son, while rightfully worried about his father's spending, merely treats him as a nuisance. The Count and the Hinyats are shown as a thief and aspiring murderers respectively who create humor through repetitive incompetence. The Count can be easily followed by the Hinyats because he leaves 'cigar' stubs in an obvious trail, and he does not notice when one Hinyat removes a cigar from his mouth. He even lays the jewel necklace on a couch right in front of an open door for the public to see. The Hinyats are designed to create humor through their supposed primitivism. They resemble the exotic villains presented in Keystone's parodies of action melodramas. Along with brown make up and faux facial

hair, the actors bulge their eyes widely and flail their arms up and down in expressions of rage. They are quick to threaten characters who are not involved in the jewel's theft with their swords, such as jabbing Alonzo the minute he walks by. Humor is attempted not just through their excessive violence but their lack of intelligence. They stalk the Count and threaten others in broad daylight, peeking their heads out of bushes while the Count remains only feet away. The film's lack of ethnic specificity, painting in their 'otherness' in broad strokes, is captured by a review reference to them as "a nameless but Orientally revengeful sect."²¹⁴ This was just the type of ethnic caricature that critics believed alienated respectable audiences.



The sect assaults Alonzo and the Widow in the film's climax

DeWolf Hopper provides a clear case of a stage performer who floundered in feature film. However, his failure should not be taken as a sign of 'highbrow' humor's inability to compete with slapstick. His lecherous loafs in musical comedies accorded with characters from farcical shorts. Contrary to Rob King's argument, Hopper actually did *not* accord with Triangle's higher class, feminized strategies for feature humor. Triangle only adopted this broad approach a few times without success. Hopper's disappointment correlated with Triangle's decision to quickly cut down Keystone's *My Valet* or *A Submarine Pirate* as shorts and redistribute them. The films did not match the middlebrow, culturally feminized humor that ultimately would dominate features.

Conclusion

Both experienced producers of shorts and new producers at feature-only concerns harnessed broad comedy for features in the mid-1910s. While the trade press advocated for higher class features, this opinion did not firmly dictate producers' initial choices for feature-length humor. Though producers rarely saw shorts comedians as prestigious, Vitagraph held enough confidence in John Bunny and Sidney Drew to place them in features. Despite these efforts, neither comedian found a steady career in feature comedies. More typically, film companies used broad comedians from the stage to continue the easily registered, physical humor that had flourished in shorts. The strategy seemed to combine consistency with the prestige of stage celebrity. Contrary to beliefs that these highly paid performers would bring appropriate cultural cache, their feature comedies exhibited types of humor with lowbrow associations. Not all forms of theater were created equal in the eyes of entertainment critics and even the public. As the industry increasingly advocated for certain middlebrow tastes, broad comedians from film shorts and theater alike found themselves on the outside looking in at the feature market. Their humor became marginalized as only acceptable for mass audiences in brief respites and as unsuitable for more prestigious feature-length entertainment.

This chapter offers several correctives to histories of silent comedy. Scholars pay copious attention to shorts comedians' feature efforts in the silent era, particularly those made by Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd. Shorts comedians typically prove more relevant, however, for understanding the discontinuity between the types of humor that dominated shorts versus features. Producers rarely judged shorts comics as appropriate for features, and the few attempts to transfer them in the 1910s proved unsuccessful. The remarkable nature of Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd's 1920s features is not that they invented or stabilized feature comedy, but that it had been so rare for

comedians from *shorts* to be able to successfully transfer. To understand producers' struggles to find middlebrow content for the feature market, it is not enough to say that slapstick contradicted the feature's respectability. An array of broad, non-slapstick comedies did as well. However, producers quickly found that more structured or respectable alternatives, such as legitimate plays, did not automatically fix comedy's difficulties in the feature either.

¹ These numbers stem from both the AFI Feature Film catalog and then the examination of trade press documentation between 1913 and 1920. Sometimes AFI includes shorts among its feature listings, so this crosschecking was important. The most consistent reportage of feature releases came from *The Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture News*. In some cases, additional information could be gleaned from studio pressbooks for exhibitors (such as the *Vitagraph Bulletin*, *Kalem Kalendar* or *Paramount Press Books*) or producer correspondence and autobiographical commentaries.

² In her study of American cinema between 1907 and 1915, Eileen Bowser describes the existence of ‘polite’ and ‘gentle’ forms of comedy in the early 1910s, mentioning John Bunny and Sidney Drew’s domestic shorts, as offering refined alternatives to slapstick (179-180) (in *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). That characterization carries over into studies in which ‘comedy’ is the primary focus. Henry Jenkins’s discussion of anarchic comedies classifies Sidney Drew as part of an opposing “shift toward a more ‘respectable’ style of comedy.” (49) (in *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

³ Rob King. *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), 112.

⁴ Kristen Anderson Wagner. “Pie Queens and Virtuous Vamps: The Funny Women of the Silent Screen.” *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 52. Also see Geoff King, *Film Comedy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002). King claims, “As films became longer, eventually reaching feature length, events tended to become more integrated and less episodic. This was true of some comedies, particularly in the development of more ‘genteel’ forms in the 1910s...Examples include *A Cure for Pokeritis* (1912) and *Foxtrot Finesse* (1915), featuring early comic stars John Bunny and Sidney Drew, respectively. Comedy emerges from situation in both cases” (23).

⁵ Rob King, *The Fun Factory*, 145.

⁶ Victoria Sturtevant. *A Great Big Girl Like Me: The Films of Marie Dressler*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 120.

⁷ “Three Sunshine Comedies.” *Motion Picture News*. 11/15/1919, 3639.

⁸ See “The Birth of Musical Comedy” in John Kernick’s *Musical Theatre: A History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 95-110. Another discussion of the culturally ‘low’ nature of musical comedy compared to operetta or the legitimate can also be found in Len Platt’s *Musical Comedy on the West End Stage, 1890-1939*. (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). He writes that it was considered more lowbrow than operetta and that it was a “‘moderate version of the carnivalesque ‘low culture that ‘troubles the high.’” (6)

⁹ For more on the episodic nature of many of these musical comedies, see the discussion of burlesque acts in musical comedy in Frank Cullen, Florence Hackman and Donald McNeilly’s *Vaudeville Old & New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performers in America, Vol. 1*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 161-162, or Michael Newbury’s “Polite Gaiety: Cultural Hierarchy and Musical Comedy.” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. Oct. 2005, 381-407.

¹⁰ Louis V. De Foe “Plays—the Greatest of All Gambles.” *The Green Book Magazine*. Feb, 1916, 206. Secondary sources also discuss musicals as falling outside the ‘legitimate’ until efforts like *Show Boat* and more ambitious musical dramas. See Larry Stempel’s *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 292.

¹¹ See Michael Newbury’s “Polite Gaiety: Cultural Hierarchy and Musical Comedy.” Newbury considers the ‘middling’ cultural status of musical comedy as it positioned itself above burlesque but as more populist than legitimate drama. Much of his focus though is on the kinds of pretty romances staged by George Edwardes, which do seem to have occupied a more middlebrow, feminized cultural space. I would argue based on my findings that the American musicals with broad comedians usually had a much more ‘lowbrow’ and masculine reputation than the kinds of shows he foregrounds. Discussions from the period also suggest that the promotional material he cites

positioning the Weber and Fields shows as clean, family entertainment may be more a marketing ruse than how the shows were actually received.

¹² Some of the traits I discuss, such as loose story structure, might be labeled by critics in later decades as a ‘highbrow’ method of challenging mainstream entertainment. It should not be presumed, thus, that what theatrical and film critics recognized as culturally low or masculine would remain static after the period of my analysis.

¹³ The emphasis on shorts comedians stems back to early studies, such as Gerald Mast’s *The Comic Mind: Comedy at the Movies*. (University of Chicago Press, 1978), where he solely discusses male comedians that came from comedy shorts (see chapters on Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harry Langdon and Harold Lloyd). One of the most detailed case studies of comedy’s attempt to transition into features is Rob King’s analysis of *Tillie’s Punctured Romance* in *The Fun Factory*, Chapter Four. In *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale also consider the transition from short to feature comedy through the lens of shorts comedians integrating slapstick into features in the 1920s (London: Routledge, 1990, 96-131). The prioritization of Mack Sennett or 1920s slapstick comedians in histories has had the effect of discussing how producers or performers from comedy shorts adapted to the feature when the phenomenon remained rare as a whole.

¹⁴ This number stems from the features of 4 reels or longer listed from AFI catalog, along with some additional three-reel comedies I have located from 1914 and 1915. In 1914, we see 30 comedies of three reels or longer, 95 releases in 1915 and 106 releases in 1916.

¹⁵ See Appendix I, Table A. Even this number is debatable. Chaplin sued Essanay because he had only produced a two-reel burlesque of ‘Carmen’ (*Charles Chaplin’s Burlesque on Carmen*) and they padded it with additional footage to sell it as a four-reeler through VLSE in 1916. An article in *The Moving Picture World* explained, “The actor charges that the picture as originally made by him was in two reels of one thousand feet each and that it is being released in four ‘padded’ reels of such quality as seriously to injure his fame.” It noted that this was a “unique” suit in motion picture litigation. Chaplin had proved so popular that Essanay released the padded feature “after he had completed the picture and left the employ of the company, employed one Ben Turpin and other actors to make additional pictures, with which ‘Carmen was padded’” (“Chaplin Seeks to Enjoin ‘Carmen.’” *The Moving Picture World*. 5/6/1916, 949). Other reviews that note the scenes without Chaplin that were added after he left Essanay’s employ can be found in *Motion Picture News* (Oscar Cooper. 4/22/1916, 2383) and *Variety* (Jolo. 4/14/1916, 24).

Some other films have publicity notices but show no signs of actual release. *The Battle of Gettysgoat* (Lubin, 1914), directed by Romaine Fielding, has several publicity articles in the trade and newspapers in May and June of 1914. (see “Staging Five Reel Comedy.” *Motography*. 5/2/1914, 302 or Romaine Fielding. “Queries and Comments.” *The Washington Herald*. 6/26/1914, 7). I could find no reviews for the film or any signs that it actually played in theaters.

Other features with shorts comedians were later cut down to two reels. *Love, Luck and Gasoline* (Vitagraph, 1914) appears to have been cut down to two reels sometime after release (“Love, Luck and Gasoline, Speed” *The Butte Miner*. 7/19/1914, 36). *A Submarine Pirate* (Triangle, 1915) also was originally described as ‘four reels’ but suddenly reviewed by some publications as a two-reeler (Louis Reeves Harrison. “A Submarine Pirate.” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/27/1915, 1681)

¹⁶ “Home Matters.” *Essex County Herald*. 11/12/1915, 1

¹⁷ The other release was Fred Mace’s *Without Hope* (Sawyer Inc./Flamingo Films, 1914).

¹⁸ This kind of marketing became particularly pronounced once they saw that their feature comedies were struggling by 1916. In *Vitagraph Bulletin*, an article discussing their releases for the season proclaimed, “the production by certain film concerns of pointless, slapstick burlesques, masquerading under the name of comedies, has brought forcibly to public attention an appreciation of the fact that the Vitagraph comedies have a distinction thoroughly their own.” (*Vitagraph Bulletin*. December, 1915, 7. Albert E. Smith Papers. Charles Young Library. University of California, Los Angeles)

¹⁹ “Musings of the Photoplay Philosopher.” *Motion Picture Magazine*. April, 1915, 107.

²⁰ Cissy Fitzgerald. “The First Movie Star.” *New Britain Herald*. 2/23/1923, 20.

²¹ See Siobhan Sommeville's discussion of Vitagraph's promotion of its high-class dressing rooms for its actresses in *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 50.

²² Selig released a two-reel comedy-drama in February of 1913, *The Millionaire Cowboy* (written by June Mathis).

²³ Albert E. Smith Papers. *Vitagraph Bulletin of Life Portrayals*. "Notes." June 1-June 31, 1913, 4. UCLA. Charles Young Library. Los Angeles, CA.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Albert E. Smith Papers. *Vitagraph Bulletin of Life Portrayals*. "Special Features Every Saturday." August, 1913, 8. UCLA. Charles Young Library. Los Angeles, CA.

²⁶ Albert E. Smith Papers. *Vitagraph Bulletin of Life Portrayals*. "The Feudists." August, 1913, 43. UCLA. Charles Young Library. Los Angeles, CA.

²⁷ Albert E. Smith Papers. *Vitagraph Bulletin of Life Portrayals*. "When Women Go on the Warpath." September, 1913, 15. UCLA. Charles Young Library. Los Angeles, CA.

²⁸ Albert E. Smith Papers. *Vitagraph Bulletin of Life Portrayals*. "Special Features Every Saturday." August, 1913, 8. UCLA. Charles Young Library. Los Angeles, CA.

²⁹ "Broadway Star Features-Stock Certificate." Box 2. Albert E. Smith Papers. UCLA. Charles Young Library. Los Angeles, CA.

³⁰ George D. Proctor. "Oh, It's an Interesting Life!" *The Motion Picture News*. 2/21/1914, 25.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Benjamin Singer's discussion of the 10-20-30 melodrama, which was associated with working class audiences in the 19th century, in Chapter Six of *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

³³ "Goodness, Gracious." *Evening Capital News*. 6/21/1914, 7.

³⁴ Frank Weisberg. "A Critic Confesses." *Variety*. 12/24/1915, 17.

³⁵ "A WeberField Burlesque." *The New York Times*. 2/27/1903, 6.

³⁶ "A Vitagraph Farce." *The Owensboro Messenger*. 8/4/1914, 2.

³⁷ Robert Grau. *The Theatre of Science: A Volume of Progress and Achievement in the Motion Picture Industry*. New York: Broadway Publishing Company. 1914, 126.

³⁸ "Goodness Gracious." *Janesville Daily Gazette*. 10/7/1914, 4.

³⁹ See articles in the mid-1910 about the need to 'clean up' burlesque shows for women and higher class patrons (Frederick McCoy."Burlesque." *Variety*. 10/10/1914, 13). Reviews for films and theater shows considered 'travesties' almost always described them as 'broad' or 'low' humor (see "Jewel Makes Travesty of 'The Kaiser.' *The Moving Picture Weekly*. 8/17/1918, 44. In a 1920, screenwriting manual, Frances Taylor Patterson complains that comedy shorts are typically lowbrow and should not have co-opted the term 'comedy,' saying they should instead be called 'farce' or "burlesque" due to their 'custard pie' variety of humor (*Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920, 135).

⁴⁰ "Vitagraph Theatre." *Variety*. 2/14/1914, 23.

⁴¹ George Blaisdell. "Clara Kimball Young, Artist." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/3/1914, 41.

⁴² "Goodness Gracious." *Variety*. 2/14/1914, 23.

⁴³ "Goodness Gracious." *Janesville Daily Gazette*. 10/8/1914, 4.

⁴⁴ "A WeberField Burlesque." *The New York Times*. 2/27/1903, 6.

⁴⁵ We see the mother-in-law portrayed as a nuisance for many masculine household heads throughout early 1910s comedy shorts, as in *Jerry's Mother-in-Law* (Vitagraph, 1913), *The Game That Failed* (Crystal, 1913) or *All On Account of Daisy* (Lubin, 1913).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Vitagraph produced *Love, Luck and Gasoline* (1910), which starred Florence Turner and currently survives at Library of Congress.

⁴⁸ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Love, Luck and Gasoline." *The Moving Picture World*. 4/25/1914, 496.

⁴⁹ "John Bunny Comedy at Pilot Tomorrow." *The Twin-City Daily Sentinel*. 11/5/1914, 8.

⁵⁰ "Royal Shows Great Comedy Production." *Bisbee Daily Review*. 8/21/1914, 5.

⁵¹ "Love, Luck and Gasoline." Ad. *The Hutchinson News*. 8/26/1914, 6.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Hampton to Smith." 5/19/1916. Box 2, Folder 1916. Albert E. Smith Papers. UCLA Library. Los Angeles, CA.

⁵⁴ Some newspaper articles noted that 'Goodness Gracious' was held over two months at Vitagraph's theater due to its popularity despite the company having other features ready to go the next month. ("A Million Bid' and 'Goodness Gracious' Win New York Endorsement." *Evening Journal*. 4/29/1914, 9).

⁵⁵ "Love, Luck and Gasoline, Speed" *The Butte Miner*. 7/19/1914, 36. Some later descriptions of 'Goodness, Gracious' amongst film scholars and in later trade articles call it a 'two-reeler,' suggesting versions exist that were cut down.

⁵⁶ See Chapter Three in Laura Horak's *Girls Will Be Boys: Cross-Dressed Women, Lesbians, and American Cinema, 1908-1934*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 93.

⁵⁷ Sommerville, 49.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁵⁹ The location shooting was publicized in newspaper advertisements ("A Visit to the Vitagraph Studio." *The Washington Herald*. 6/29/1914, 9)

⁶⁰ Horak cites *Motography* program description, which as no actual reviewer commenting on it ("Pleasing Variety at Vita Theater." *Motography*. 8/29/1914,300) and newspaper publicity pieces (see Horak, 93, where she cites a Wisconsin advertisement).

⁶¹ You can find columns from Robert Grau, William Lord Wright and George Blaisdell, who also regularly contributed to *The Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture News*.

⁶² Sime. "A Florida Enchantment." *Variety*. 8/14/1914, 21.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ To contrast the differing levels of honesty, the film trade rarely reported on the struggles of M.P.P.C members to keep up with feature concerns like Famous Players. In *Variety*, however, a review for *Midnight at Maxim's* (Kalem, 1915) commented, "These daily release manufacturers should commence to take this feature film proposition properly, either doing it well or not at all...The old line concerns perfected themselves in photography and then let the newcomers get the best of everything else." (Fred. "Midnight at Maxim's." *Variety*. 6/18/1915, 17).

⁶⁵ "Drew Rides Blooded Stock in 'Playing Dead.'" *The Moving Picture World*. 9/18/1915, 2013.

⁶⁶ Vitagraph did make efforts to reach out to middle-class audiences, from their adaptations of famous plays and novels (see William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson's *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1993), their advertising of their respectable studio layout and employee conduct (see Sommerville, *Quering the Color Line*, 46) or their efforts before any other shorts' producer to purchase legitimate theatrical houses ("Vitagraph Theatre's Success May Bring Concern Others." *Variety*. 2/13/1914, 3). Some scholars have noted, though not their main focus, that Vitagraph's respectability did not always spread to its comedy fare, which could be surprisingly raunchy (see Edward Wagenknecht's *The Movies in the Age of Innocence. Third Ed.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1962, 37 and more recently, Maggie Hennefeld's *Slapstick and Silent Film Comediennes*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018, 112).

⁶⁷ "Pliances of Bill in 'Combination Theatres and Music Halls.'" *The New York Times*. 10/25/1896, 11.

⁶⁸ As one example of Charles Hoyt's work being discussed as a hodge-podge of vaudeville and newspaper cartoons, see "A Tin Soldier" being dissected in "Standard Theatre." *The New York Times*. 5/4/1886, 4. Also see secondary literature accounts like Kernick, 103-107.

⁶⁹ "Local Gatherings." *St. Johnsbury Caledonian*. 10/22/1897, 1.

⁷⁰ For example, see "A New Version of 'Niniche.'" *The New York Times*. 11/13/1897, 4.

⁷¹ Sime. "A Florida Enchantment." *Variety*. 8/14/1914, 22.

⁷² "Frank Daniels in 'The Tattooed Man.'" *The New York Times*. 2/19/1907, 9.

⁷³ "Twirly-Whirly." *The New York Times*. 9/12/1902, 7.

⁷⁴ Newbury, 395. Newbury doesn't really provide evidence for women being seen as consumers of humor in musical comedies, but he is likely right that some of the gentler, fashion-driven musicals he describes would have had some marketing to this effect.

⁷⁵ Eaton, Walter Pritchard. "Women as Theatergoers." *Women's Home Companion*. October 1910, 13.

⁷⁶ "The Yankee Consul." *The New York Times*. 2/23/1904, 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "A Florida Enchantment." *The New York Dramatic Mirror*. 8/19/1914, 26.

⁷⁹ "The Spirit of the Play." *Motion Picture Magazine*. 10/1914, 124.

⁸⁰ "Notes Written on the Screen." *The New York Times*. 8/23/1914, X4.

⁸¹ "Expression of Emotions." *Motion Picture Magazine*. October, 1914. 119.

⁸² "Answer Department." *Motion Picture Magazine*. December, 1914, 158.

⁸³ J. Stuart Blackton. *Hollywood with its Hair Down: Forty Years of Movies.* Folder 31, 117. J. Stuart Blackton Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA.

⁸⁴ Sime. "A Florida Enchantment." *Variety*. 8/14/1914, 21

⁸⁵ "Notes." *Vitagraph Bulletin*. June 1-June 31, 1913, 4.

⁸⁶ "When Two Hearts Are Won." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/2/1911, 610

⁸⁷ "The Success of Billy." *The San Francisco Dramatic Review*. 9/4/1909, 2.

⁸⁸ See Patricia Bradley's *Making American Culture: A Social History*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 12-13. She notes that historian Robert Sydner recognizes vaudeville's claims of family-friendly, higher class audiences to often be exaggerated self-promotion when they still had a large working class and immigrant base with kinds of humor and acts still considered vulgar or broad.

⁸⁹ See Andrew L. Erdman's *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004), 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹¹ See farce description of *Jerry's Mother in Law* in "November Leaders." *Vitagraph Bulletin*. Nov 1-30, 1913. Drew's *Pickles, Art and Sauerkraut* (Jan, 1914) was described as a 'farce', cartoon,' with characters where "the spiritual side of human nature" "falls below the normal" and "Drew is enabled to caricature one of those moth-eaten theatrical traditions that have come down to s like an ancestral taint" "the revelation of an inferior side to his nature is intensified by imitation of all that is mean and low in human nature. His artistic aspirations become a joke." ("Pickles, Art and Sauerkraut." Louis Reeves Harrison. *The Moving Picture World*. 1/17/1914, 267).

⁹² For the fishing hook incident, see *Beauty Unadorned* (Vitagraph, 1913) and for the suit of armor, *Jerry's Mother in Law* (Vitagraph, 1913). The latter is available in portions on Youtube. He also plays a poor artist wo parties with models, cigars and wine while his "annoying wife" is away in *Pickles, Art and Sauerkraut* (Jan, 1914) ("Pickles, Art and Sauerkraut." *Vitagraph Bulletin*. January 1-31, 1914, 49).

⁹³ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Vitagraph Theater Program." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/5/1914, 1394.

⁹⁴ "A Florida Enchantment." *The New York Dramatic Mirror*. 8/19/1914, 26.

⁹⁵ Schiede, 30.

⁹⁶ "A Regiment of Two." Louis Reeves Harrison. *The Moving Picture World*. 5/24/1913, 792.

⁹⁷ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Pickles, Art and Sauerkraut." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/17/1914, 267.

⁹⁸ References to Drew crossdressing can be found in *When Women Go on the War Path* (1913) and in *Never Again* (1913).

⁹⁹ "A Silly and Vulgar Play." *The New York Times*. 10/13/1896, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Lieberman. "The Emergence of Lesbians." PhD Dissertation. City University of New York, 1981, 39.

¹⁰¹ "A.C. Gunter and Authors' Club." *The New York Times*. 5/6/1894, 4.

¹⁰² "Saunterings." *The Waco Evening News*. 2/24/1892, 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ “A Silly and Vulgar Play.” *The New York Times*. 10/13/1896, 5.

¹⁰⁵ “Dramatic.” *The St. Paul Globe*. 11/15/1896, 18.

¹⁰⁶ A Texas reviewer openly mentioned the Alice Mitchell trial, in which Mitchell killed her female love interest with a razor blade. “It is a peculiarity that is strongly presented in the Mitchell-Ward case in Memphis.” (“Saunterings.” *The Waco Evening News*. 2/24/1892, 2)

¹⁰⁷ “Things at the Theatre.” *The Sun*. 10/15/1896, 7.

¹⁰⁸ “A Silly and Vulgar Play.” *The New York Times*. 10/13/1896, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Sime. “A Florida Enchantment.” *Variety*. 8/14/1914, 21.

¹¹⁰ “A Florida Enchantment.” *The New York Dramatic Mirror*. 8/19/1914, 26.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Theater is almost always associated with cinema’s efforts to ‘legitimize’ itself. See Eileen Bowser’s *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson’s *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1993), or more recently William Paul’s *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition and the Evolution of American Film*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, Chapter Four “Elite Taste in a Mass Medium.”). This notion of legitimate theater’s ‘high class’ implications has extended to comedy, for Rob King claims Triangle’s use of theatrical stars singularly marked highbrow content in *The Fun Factory*, 145.

¹¹³ Peter Milne. “Playing Dead.” *Motion Picture News*. 9/25/1915, 118.

¹¹⁴ See Appendix I.

¹¹⁵ “Frank Daniels in ‘The Tattooed Man.’” *The New York Times*. 2/19/1907, 9.

¹¹⁶ Hex. “Tillie’s Punctured Romance.” *The New York Clipper*. 11/7/1914, 17.

¹¹⁷ “A Million for Mary.” *The New York Clipper*. 9/23/1916, 34.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ralph E. Renaud. “Sam Bernard, Funnyman.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. 11/5/1911, 21.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ See Steve Seidman’s definition of *Comedian Comedy: A Hollywood Tradition*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1981) in his introduction. He notes that ‘comedian comedies’ are “freed from limitations of character and representational constraints (7) and that many carry over a pre-established persona from arenas outside of Hollywood (theater, vaudeville, stand up, etc) (7).

¹²² For instance, Raymond Hitchcock and Lew Fields both appeared in legitimate farces on occasion despite being primarily known for their broader musical comedy turns (see “Hitchcock in ‘Easy Dawson.’” *The New York Times*. 8/15/1905, 7, or Lew Fields in “The High Cost of Loving.” *The Theatre*. October, 1914, 157.

¹²³ Mary’s Lamb.” *The Theatre*. July, 1908, V.

¹²⁴ “Marie Cahill Here; Broadway Livelier.” *The New York Times*. 10/7/1910, 11.

¹²⁵ Charles Darnton. “The New Play.” *The Evening World*. 11/1/1911, 19.

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- ¹²⁶ Mark. "The Win(k)Some Widow." *Variety*. 9/11/1914, 22.
- ¹²⁷ Fred. "What Happened to Father." *Variety*. 1/7/1916, 24
- ¹²⁸ Hex. "Tillie's Punctured Romance." *The New York Clipper*. 11/7/1914, 17.
- ¹²⁹ William Ressman Andrews. "Keep Moving." *Motion Picture News*. 12/4/1915, 92.
- ¹³⁰ Fred. "Keep Moving." *Variety*. 11/19/1915, 23
- ¹³¹ "Mrs. Black is Back." *The New York Clipper*. 12/5/1914, 13.
- ¹³² Lynde Denig. "Judy Forgot." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/14/1915, 1768.
- ¹³³ Fred. "Judy Forgot." *Variety*. /20/1915, 21.
- ¹³⁴ O.M. Samuel. 'A Million for Mary.' *Variety*. 8/18/1916, 25.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid.
- ¹³⁶ Jolo. "A Black Sheep." *Variety*. 10/8/1915, 22.
- ¹³⁷ "The Tattooed Man." *The Theatre*. April, 1907, 87.
- ¹³⁸ Their physical demeanors, shabby clothes and shambling walk are described in "Who Said That They Never Do Come Back?" *The New York Times*. 2/9/1912, 4.
- ¹³⁹ There is a reference to 'coon songs' in advertisements for Marie Cahill ("I Want a Little Lovin' Sometimes." *The New York Clipper*. 7/13/1912, 14).
- ¹⁴⁰ "Gags, Girls, Glare; Oh! Such a Gladness!" *The New York Times*. 11/22/1912, 5.
- ¹⁴¹ Mabel Condon. "May Irwin's Famous Players' Debut." *Motography*. 12/12/1914, 808.
- ¹⁴² Sisk. "Mrs. Black is Back." *Variety*. 12/1914, 26.
- ¹⁴³ 'Tillie's Punctured Romance." *Variety*. 1/1/1915, 29.
- ¹⁴⁴ George Blaisdell. "Poor Schmaltz." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/4/1915, 1664-1665.
- ¹⁴⁵ Harvey F. Thew. "A Black Sheep." *Motion Picture News*. 10/23/1915, 89.
- ¹⁴⁶ Oscar Cooper. "What Happened to Father." *Motion Picture News*. 12/18/1915, 84.
- ¹⁴⁷ "Frank Daniels to the Movies." *The Penascola Journal*. 7/4/1915, 7.
- ¹⁴⁸ Hazel Simpson Naylor. "As Others See You, or Gleanings from the Audience." *Motion Picture Magazine*. Dec, 1915, 122.
- ¹⁴⁹ "The Yankee Consul." *The New York Times*. 9/22/1903, 6.
- ¹⁵⁰ "Gags, Girls, Glare; Oh! Such a Gladness!" *The New York Times*. 11/22/1912, 5.
- ¹⁵¹ Contemporaneous accounts often described his characters as 'Dutch' but the characters spoke in German dialect. There may have been conflation of 'Deutsch' and 'Dutch' in descriptions.

¹⁵² Ralph E. Renaud. "Sam Bernard, Funnyman." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 11/5/1911, 21.

¹⁵³ "Sam Bernard's New Play." *The New York Times*. 2/4/1908, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Charles Darnton. "The New Play." *The Evening World*. 11/1/1911, 19.

¹⁵⁵ For descriptions of these films, see "The Burglar and the Baby." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/6/1913, 1042; "The Bicycle Bug's Dream." *The Moving Picture News*. 9/9/1911, 28; "The Trials of a Tall Traveler." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/23/1911, 905.

¹⁵⁶ "At the Auditorium." *South Bend News-Times*. 10/1/1915, 13.

¹⁵⁷ "Frank Daniels to the Movies." *The Penascola Journal*. 7/4/1915, 7.

¹⁵⁸ "New Bill at Vitagraph Theater." *Motography*. 9/26/1914, 436.

¹⁵⁹ "The Win(k)some Widow." *Motography*. 10/31/1914, 611.

¹⁶⁰ Mark. "The Win(k)Some Widow." *Variety*. 9/11/1914, 22.

¹⁶¹ George Blaisdell wrote in his review for *Poor Schmaltz* (Famous Players, 1915), "never before to our memory has Faous Players produced that sort of comedy." ("Big Stars on Famous Players Program for Next Quarter." *Motography*. 8/14/1915, 282)

¹⁶² Sukimo Higashi. *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 8.

¹⁶³ George Blaisdell. "Poor Schmaltz." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/4/1915, 1664-1665.

¹⁶⁴ Peter Milne. "Poor Schmaltz." *Motion Picture News*. 9/4/1915, 65.

¹⁶⁵ Fred. "Mary's Lamb." *Variety*. 12/3/1915, 21.

¹⁶⁶ "Tillie's Tomato Canned." *Variety*, 10/8/1915, 18.

¹⁶⁷ Fred. "What Happened to Father." *Variety*. 1/7/1916, 24.

¹⁶⁸ J. Stuart Blackton, Unpublished Manuscript: "Hollywood with its Hair Down: Forty Years of Movies," 345. J. Stuart Blackton Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA. There are also some *Variety* reports that the film "was primarily the cause of the Alco's late financial embarrassment," though they express that the film had been drawing some audiences so this could also be due to mishandling by the company ("Special Feature Service Organized by Famous Co." *Variety*. 1/30/1915, 3). It does not appear that Sennett or Triangle felt that Keystone's style of comedy was suitable to features, however, as they quickly demoted his second longer comedy, *My Valet*, down to two-reels for Keystone's premiere on Triangle's program.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 200.

¹⁷⁰ "Letter to Albert E. Smith From Paris Exchange, Ronald." 9/22/1915, 1 and then for Cissy, 2. Albert E. Smith Papers. Charles E. Young Library. UCLA. Los Angeles, CA.

¹⁷¹ Jolo. "A Black Sheep." *Variety*. 10/8/1915, 22

¹⁷² *How Cissy Made Good* (Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph, 1915) was cut down three-reels by February, 1915 ("Licensed Release Dates." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/6/1915, 910). Some reviewers saw *My Valet* (Triangle, 1915) as a two reeler (Harvey F. Thew. "The First Knickerbocker Triangle Program." *Motion Picture News*.

10/9/1915, 84). *Tillie's Punctured Romance* also appears to have been cut down to four reels or less by the middle of 1915 (Ad. The New Gem. *The Idaho Springs Siftings-News*. 5/1/1915, 8). Part of the difficulty of restoring 'Tillie' came from the spliced and cut down iterations of the film that had been distributed in the ensuing years (Susan King. "Another Chance for a Romance with 'Tillie.'" *Los Angeles Times*. 7/25/2004. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-jul-25-ca-cinefile25-story.html>)

¹⁷³ See Frank Daniels advertisements for his one-reel comedies by 1917 ("Greater Vitagraph Laugh! *Motion Picture News*. 3/31/1917, 1918).

¹⁷⁴ "Ad-The Mishaps of Musty Suffer." *The Moving Picture World*. 4/14/1917, 233.

¹⁷⁵ After his feature effort *From Broadway to a Throne* (Universal, 1916), Carter DeHaven was moved by Universal into Mr and Mrs. Drew styled shorts with his wife, Flora De Haven, by the end of the 1910s. Sam Bernard appears to have been moved into Keystone shorts by December of 1915 (according to King in 'The Fun Factory,' 153). Hitchcock also ended up in Keystone shorts after his features, *The Ring Tailed Rhinoceros* (VLSE/Lubin, 1915) and *My Valet* (Triangle/Keystone, 1915) (see King, "The Fun Factory," 152)

¹⁷⁶ For a typical account of Hopper's brief and unhappy time in pictures, see John C. Tibbetts' *The American Theatrical Film: Stages in Development*. (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985), 98.

¹⁷⁷ DeWolf Hopper. *Once a Clown, Always a Clown: Reminiscences of DeWolf Hopper*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1927), 135.

¹⁷⁸ Rob King, *The Fun Factory*, 145.

¹⁷⁹ See "Lambs' New Clubhouse." *The New York Times*. 3/27/1902, 9. Jeffrey Vance discusses legitimate players such as Douglas Fairbanks' involvement in the Lambs' club in *Douglas Fairbanks*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 30.

¹⁸⁰ Alan Dale. "Sensible, Sensible Marguerite Clark." *The Green Book Magazine*. July, 1916, 162.

¹⁸¹ "A Merry Monarch in a Merry Land" *The New York Times*. 10/3/1905, 9.

¹⁸² "The Theatres Last Night." *The New York Times*. 1/20/1903, 9.

¹⁸³ "DeWolf Hopper, Actor Vs. DeWolf Hopper, Man." *The Green Book Magazine*. Oct, 1911, 767.

¹⁸⁴ "The Charlatan" *The New York Times*. 9/6/1898, 7.

¹⁸⁵ "A Matinee Idol." *The Theatre*. June 1910, 177.

¹⁸⁶ "Mr. Pickwick." *The Theatre March*, 1903, 57.

¹⁸⁷ "Big Hit for Hopper in 'A Matinee Idol.'" *The New York Times*. 4/29/1910, 9.

¹⁸⁸ "A Merry Monarch in a Merry Land" *The New York Times*. 10/3/1905, 9.

¹⁸⁹ "Beggars Student' gladdens the heart" *The New York Times*. 3/23/1913, 8.

¹⁹⁰ "Lieber Augustin." *The Theatre*. October, 1913, xiii.

¹⁹¹ "The Theatres Last Night." *The New York Times*. 1/20/1903, 9.

¹⁹² "DeWolf Hopper, Actor Vs. DeWolf Hopper, Man." *The Green Book Magazine*. Oct, 1911, 769.

¹⁹³ "DeWolf Hopper Confesses." *The New York Times*. 5/10/1910, X7.

¹⁹⁴ “Wang Burlesques Parsifal.” *The New York Times*. 4/19/1904, 6.

¹⁹⁵ “DeWolf Hopper Confesses.” *The New York Times*. 5/15/1910, X7

¹⁹⁶ “The Legs of Hopper” *The Green Book Magazine*. Dec, 1910, 1240.

¹⁹⁷ “Big Hit for Hopper in ‘A Matinee Idol.’” *The New York Times*. 4/29/1910, 9.

¹⁹⁸ “Pickwick on the Stage” *The Theatre*. 1902, 20.

¹⁹⁹ “The Charlatan” *The New York Times*. 9/6/1898, 7.

²⁰⁰ For *Happyland* synopsis, see “A Merry Monarch in a Merry Land” *The New York Times*. 10/3/1905, 9. For *A Matinee Idol*, see “A Matinee Idol.” *The Theatre*. June 1910, 177, and for *The Charlatan*, see “The Charlatan” *The New York Times*. 9/6/1898, 7.

²⁰¹ DeWolf Hopper. “If I had Never Been an Actor” *The Theatre*. January, 1914, 10

²⁰² For one example of the press coverage and humor around Hopper’s repeated divorces (usually with women that had been chorus girls in his shows, see “Hopper and Goodwin Tied: Each is Reported to Have Taken Unto Himself a Fifth Wife.” *The New York Times*. 5/25/1913, C7.

²⁰³ “DeWolf Hopper Confesses.” *The New York Times*. 5/15/1910, X7

²⁰⁴ “Ballet of Statues in ‘Hop-O-My-Thumb.’” *The New York Times*. 11/27/1913, 13.

²⁰⁵ “American Theatre.” *Goodwin’s Weekly: A Thinking Paper for Thinking People*. 4/29/1916, 12.

²⁰⁶ Fred. “Sunshine Dad.” *Variety*. 4/21/1916, 31.

²⁰⁷ Oscar Cooper. “Sunshine Dad.” *Motion Picture News*. 4/8/1916, 2064.

²⁰⁸ Hopper, DeWolf. *Once a Clown, Always a Clown*, 151.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Oscar Cooper. “Sunshine Dad.” *Motion Picture News*. 4/8/1916, 2064.

²¹¹ Thomas C. Kennedy. “Sunshine Dad.” *Motography*. 4/8/1916, 828.

²¹² Oscar Cooper. “Sunshine Dad.” *Motion Picture News*. 4/8/1916, 2064.

²¹³ Thomas C. Kennedy. “Sunshine Dad.” *Motography*. 4/8/1916, 828.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter Three- “A Very Difficult Play to Put into Pictures”: Higher Humor in the Feature

Rather than taking comedians from shorts or episodic theatrical shows, most film producers turned to legitimate plays for feature-length humor. Through this strategy, producers saw two benefits. Such adaptations came from source material typically considered middle or highbrow, which seemed to address the problem of broad comedy being too ‘low class’ for features. Unlike looser modes of comedian comedy, the plays also offered more narrative structure to sustain the feature’s longer duration. As with the feature efforts of broad comedians, the greatest range of legitimate adaptations occurred between 1914 and 1916. However, middlebrow farces and high-class comedy plays lacking strong connections to the tastes of feminine patrons declined after 1916. In numbers eerily similar to broader vehicles, middlebrow farces and high-class material made up 20 out of 95 releases in 1915 (again around 21%). By 1917, that number reduced to 6 out of 153 films (about 4%).¹

To producers’ surprise, they found that adapting ‘higher class’ material did not guarantee critic or audience accolades. As a 1915 column for *The Moving Picture World* reported, “Many attempts have been made with little success to picturize some of the greatest comedies of the old school because they could be appreciated only by the ‘refined and intelligent people’ who made acquaintance with the lines, and situations through witnessing the stage productions.”² Exhibitors also expressed vexation that the industry could not find a balance between broad comedy’s crudeness and refined comedy’s stagnancy. That same year, an exhibitor complained that “comedy is the bane of his existence” and lamented “the lack of a happy medium between ‘vulgar comedies’ on the one hand and ‘tiresome’ comedy on the other.”³

The unenthusiastic reception of some legitimate comedies during the mid-1910s complicates a prevalent assumption in film scholarship that the transition to features involved a straightforward move towards higher class comedy. While scholars now acknowledge that there was more to silent comedy than slapstick, recent accounts still portray the transition to features as a seamless shift towards 'high class' or 'refined' humor.⁴ When we equate all 'higher class humor,' it remains unexplained why some narrative forms struggled in features whereas others succeeded. Theatrical and film critics made many distinctions among narratively-driven comedy plays. Film producers usually harnessed higher class stage humor for features, but not all of these proved equally suitable or popular. Middlebrow farces and highbrow satires struggled just as much as the vehicles showcasing broad comedians. The failure related to stylistic and content characteristics that proved troublesome for cultivating cross-class consumers, especially women.

In this chapter, I distinguish between two forms of legitimate plays considered higher class than the vehicles for broad comics: middlebrow farces and highbrow plays. Middlebrow farces befit the increasingly middle-class orientation of the film industry, yet they still encountered difficulties due to their complex plots, frenetic pacing and reliance on spoken dialogue and delivery. Moreover, these farces did not fit well with elements presumed crucial for attracting further female patrons with the feature. They were less compatible with the star system, foregrounded dislikable characters and had few female leads. Highbrow plays also presented hurdles, as they struggled to convey humor on film due to the minimal action and the subtleties of their dialogue. Lacking glamorous stars and sympathetic humor, they also failed to connect with a mass audience increasingly geared toward young women from across classes. To say that feature comedies found success by merely adopting higher class or 'refined' comedy vastly oversimplifies

the state of affairs. Only certain types of middlebrow, culturally feminine narratives were able to achieve stable success by the end of the decade.

“A Long Chain of Absurd Complications”: The Legitimate Farce

In the mid-1910s, the film industry experimented with adapting farce plays. Theatrical critics referred to these variously as ‘straight farces,’ ‘legitimate farces’ or ‘farcical comedies.’ The farces that film producers typically chose to adapt were safely middlebrow with American authors or altered for American audiences. The plays had complex plotting, large casts, and straight actors playing plausibly misbehaving characters. At least thirty films between 1914 and 1916 adapted or mimicked these kinds of legitimate farces.⁵ Unfortunately for producers, the adaptations experienced mixed reception at best. The quick drop off in this strategy by 1916 suggests producers became discouraged by the films’ cool critical responses and disappointing financial returns.

Though the approach found limited success across the 1910s, it is worth examining for several reasons. Straight farce was popular in legitimate theater, and thus, *should* have afforded film producers a bankable solution to feature comedy if this longer form simply required more situational humor. Also, its inconsistent reception points to factors beyond filmmakers’ stylistic limitations in early features, as some of these plays were unsuccessfully revisited once feature storytelling became more established.⁶ While the industry would not completely abandon its attempts to pull from legitimate farces, the few to find success by the early twenties starred youthful, affable character types or incorporated sympathetic, gentle humor. Throughout this section, I will interweave commentaries on both original stage productions and their first film adaptations to better encompass how middlebrow, Americanized farces were culturally ranked and dissected.

Since critics also applied the term ‘farce’ to shorts or broad comedies in the previous chapters, I should explain how theatrical critics distinguished legitimate farces from loosely plotted, variety vehicles. As ‘farce’ can refer to any type of comedy with outlandish, improbable events,⁷ the term is flexible. Theater histories usually employ ‘farce’ when characterizing shows of two types: shorter formats emphasizing low humor and farce plays (three acts typically) with clockwork stories built from intricate misunderstandings. The vehicles for broad comedians would fall in the former camp while legitimate farces described in this section would fall in the latter. Jessica Milner Davis notes the existence of both broader farces, such as ‘*commedia dell’arte*,’ along with ‘higher class’ farce plays with more extensive plots. She observes that as the “professional people among the audience continued to increase during the 19th century,” subject matter moved towards plots whereby “fun is derived from the way in which the normal train of domestic events is transformed into a whirlwind of confusions and mistaken identities.”⁸ She thus links an elevation in the class and education of audience members to more tightly structured farces in the longer format of the legitimate play. Jeffrey Huberman and Michael R. Booth similarly posit a difference in 19th century British theater between short farces that served as afterpieces in the first half of the century and ‘legitimate’ plays that borrowed plot structures from French farces and were initially distinguished as ‘farcical comedies.’⁹

No work appears to seriously analyze American farce plays in the late 19th to early 20th century, but the legitimate farces on Broadway later made into features closely match Booth and Huberman’s descriptions of British farce plays. Both authors claim British farces ‘deodorized’ the more risqué character actions of their French counterparts, added more physical humor and typically showcased large casts that portrayed passive, continually frustrated victims.¹⁰ They also note a ‘masculine’ emphasis, with male husbands typically serving as main vehicles for the farce’s

comic action due to Victorian morality's qualms about making women farcical victims.¹¹ These elements also appear to be relevant for the safely commercial farces either written by American playwrights or adapted and supposedly 'Americanized.' These safely commercial plays appeared to copy the British model and distinguished themselves from older types of farce or French farces seen as too sophisticated for middle-class audiences.

Both theatrical and film critics positioned Americanized legitimate farce as culturally middlebrow. Its complex but quickly paced plot structure, mixture of plausibility and implausibility, witty dialogue, as well as straight actors—enabled these plays to exist in a middling space. Critics depicted these shows as profitable and clean American entertainment. A reviewer disassociated *Over Night* (1912) from highbrow tastes by stating, "This is the right kind of commercial spirit."¹² Though enjoyable, reviewers admitted that the plays did not instill 'lessons' nor were they intellectual. While receiving praise for being "cleverly constructed,"¹³ the farce play *Stop Thief!* (1912) was dismissed as "not touched with the academic quality" and "not a classic" but simply "a ripping farce."¹⁴ *The Theatre* gave perhaps the most detailed characterization of the legitimate farce's middlebrow positioning. In discussing *Officer 666*, the reviewer claimed, "It is a play for that worthy, overworked person, 'the tired business man,' who has so little brains he has none left when his office hours are over...there is nothing to tax the mental powers, nor, on the other hand, does the piece contain anything to stimulate them."¹⁵ We will see very different descriptions for works that critics considered 'high class.'

Theatrical critics often distinguished farce plays from more episodic forms of humor by virtue of their careful and complex structure. Commentators noted that *Stop Thief!* (1913) had "a plot of extremely laughable and complex proportions"¹⁶ while *The Man from Mexico* (1897) similarly had "a long chain of absurd complications."¹⁷ These confusions were expected to build upon one

another. One review for *C.O.D.* (1912) specified, “like all good playwrights, Mr. Chapin has made these complications cumulative.”¹⁸ While critics expected incoherency in musical comedies, they rebuked legitimate farces if they displayed incidents that failed to connect properly. Of *The Galloper* (1906), a reviewer griped, “This author’s dramatic compositions have both the merits and the defects of all of his literary work—brilliant in spots, but uneven, disconnected and inconsequential.”¹⁹ Theatrical critics also cited quick pacing as essential for success. One review noted that *Officer 666* was “played with a speed and vim that presents its scenes with kaleidoscopic rapidity,”²⁰ while a reviewer for *Little Miss Brown* generalized “in a farce he who hesitates is lost.”²¹

These plots also delicately balanced plausibility with implausibility. Critics recognized that the series of mix-ups stretched the bounds of credibility. *The Theatre* said of *Officer 666*, “It is all nonsense of course; the situations are preposterous, but it is diverting nonsense, cleverly acted, and the interest is so well maintained that no one wants to go home until the denouement is reached.”²² Legitimate farces were still expected, however, to provide some rationale for the unlikely events or to include characters that reflected ‘accurate’ social types. While critics claimed low comedy openly disregarded realist motivation, they acknowledged events in straight farces to be *unlikely* but *possible*. A critic raved over the realistic depiction of social types found on train cars in *Excuse Me* (prod. 1911). *The New York Times* enthused, “The workings of the play did indicate that Mr. Hughes had experiences and observed fellow-passengers on such a trip to the extent of being able to exaggerate a lot of very common human weaknesses.”²³ *The Galloper* also drew from real life scenarios, as author Richard Harding Davis based the play on his experiences as a war correspondent. Though critics described the play’s incidents as “complicated,”²⁴ they also lauded it for being “sane.”²⁵ Thus, theatrical reviews acknowledged the exaggerated nature of legitimate

farces while simultaneously congratulating them for remaining in the realm of the feasible. This extended to performers, who were usually considered ‘straight’ actors in their makeup and costuming. A review for the film version of *Are You a Mason?* (Paramount, 1915) summarized this tendency well by noting, “The people introduced are not grotesque distortions.”²⁶



Still from the stage production of *Excuse Me* (1911) (*The Theatre*)

The complicated plotlines from legitimate farce carried over into feature films. One variety foregrounded a husband’s deception that snowballed into a range of misunderstandings affecting numerous characters. John Barrymore became strongly associated with this storyline in adaptations such as *The Man from Mexico* (1914), *Are You a Mason?* (1915) and *The Red Widow* (1916). The play and film versions of *The Man from Mexico* follow husband Fitzhew (Barrymore) through what one review labeled “misadventures.”²⁷ He sneaks out of the house for a night on the town with friends, gets drunk and ends up in a brothel. The police raid the brothel, and Fitzhew drunkenly punches a man as he is trying to escape. He goes to jail and gets into further tussles with police officers. He is sentenced to several months in a prison. Wanting to hide his evening out and subsequent jailtime, Fitzhew tells his wife that he is going on a ‘business’ trip to Mexico. He encounters many predicaments while in prison, including a hostile warden and tough prisoners. Though initially keeping up this ruse, he runs into further trouble when he returns home to find his spouse has conducted research on Mexican culture. He must then pretend to have learned about

Mexico while he was away. The film ends with Fitzhew escaping accountability by managing to keep his wife in the dark about his prison sentence.

Beyond the 'lying husband' storyline, other films appropriated the 'bedroom farce.' 'Bedroom farces' foregrounded the physical antics of multiple couples as they avoided being caught in compromising situations.²⁸ Films featuring groups of characters in these scenarios include *C.O.D.* (Vitagraph, 1914), *Over Night* (World, 1915) and *Little Miss Brown* (World, 1915). In *Over Night* (World, 1915), the film centers around two married couples who go on a boat trip for their honeymoons. The husband of one couple and the wife of the other are left behind when the boat leaves. Chasing the boat via train, the two pose as husband and wife to avoid scandal for staying overnight in the same cabin. The other mis-mated couple on the boat also pretend to be married. Both couples face a series of trials before being reunited at the same hotel.

The 'location farce' also was adapted multiple times, which emphasized a large group interacting within one setting. These include adaptations such as *Officer 666* (Kleine, 1914), *Excuse Me* (Pathé, 1915), and *Stop Thief!* (Kleine, 1915). In *Stop Thief!*, the action largely takes place in the library of a wealthy home. Jack, a young kleptomaniac, dates a housemaid, Mary, who wishes to get married. To afford their wedding, she lets him into the Carr household on the day Carr's daughter is getting married in order to steal valuables from the guests. Jack poses as a detective to explain his presence, which he cleverly justifies by saying items have been reported missing. Fortunately for Jack and Mary, two members of the wedding party possess coincidentally poor memories and impulses for kleptomania, creating paranoia that they might be the cause of the missing items. The Carrs eventually catch the couple, but the family is so afraid of scandal that they do not inform the police. With the addition of Jack and Mary's vows, multiple weddings end up occurring at the Carr home that day.

Though film producers hoped that the complex scenarios and large casts of farce plays would justify longer comedy lengths, these aspects caused difficulties when transferred to the screen. Sometimes plot points were lost. A reviewer commented on *Officer 666*, “Its visualization fails to convey sufficient reason for the secret return of Travers Gladwin to his home.”²⁹ A review for *The Million* (Lasky, 1914), an adaptation of the same play as Rene Clair’s famous *Le Million* (1931), mentioned “slip-ups in the general threading.”³⁰ Pacing also proved to be a persistent problem. A reviewer of *Over Night* noted, “the story is somewhat slow in unwinding itself.”³¹ *Variety* complained that *Are You a Mason?* (Famous Players, 1915) was “a period of monotonous picturing that serves little beyond keeping Barrymore well in the camera focus.”³² An additional problem for sustaining visual interest arose when these farces gathered people and action within one locale for comedic build. J.A. Berst, George Kleine’s scenario writer for *Officer 666*, observed the difficulty of the play having taken place largely in one location, stating, “I have added several scenes otherwise it would be too much sameness and too monotonous.”³³ The effort did not appear to be appreciated, as *Motion Picture News* still observed, “There is no great variety of scene. A greater part of the actions transpires in four or five rooms of one house.”³⁴ Kleine’s adaptation of *Stop Thief!* also evinced visual monotony. *Variety* mentioned the difficulty of the play’s action as it “took place entirely in a set that represented the library of the Carr home.”³⁵

Another component of legitimate farce that feature producers found strenuous to capture was its dialogue. While broad comedians often derived humor from their appearance, mannerisms or vocal quality, critics suggested that the scripts for farce plays played a greater role in their success. A theatrical review characterized *Officer 666* as having “considerable bright dialogue.”³⁶ In a similar vein, theater critics praised *The Man from Mexico* for its “clever lines.”³⁷ Producers did not immediately recognize how much fast-paced farces relied on dialogue for humor. The dependency

became all too clear as they ventured forth with adaptation. George Kleine's scenario writer J.A. Berst relayed the travails of capturing the humor of *Officer 666*; "It is a very difficult play to put in pictures as most of the funny parts are obtained by conversation."³⁸ Berst still seemed baffled in a later letter to Kleine about how best to adapt the piece. Berst admitted, "I am not quite satisfied with it...I found that it was much more hard than I expected on account of most of the comical situations being obtained more by the way of the acting of the characters and the funny wording than by comical actions."³⁹

Film reviewers seconded producers' concerns about this inability to translate humorous dialogue. While the play *Stop Thief!* had "a laugh a minute" according to *Variety*, its reviewer lamented that in the film, "as these laughs in a great measure came from the lines, the majority are lost in the picture."⁴⁰ Of *Little Miss Brown* (World, 1915), *The Moving Picture World* griped that "stripped of its dialogue," the film "provides rather slender farcical entertainment, despite the best efforts of Vivian Martin."⁴¹ Reviews remarked that the films either relied too much on dialogue intertitles or did not employ them often enough. Though *Variety* thought *Officer 666* succeeded occasionally in getting laughs, "it has the usual defects of the picturized stage piece...it was noticeable that more laughs come from the titles than from the action."⁴² In contrast, *Variety* proposed that *Over Night* "is not bringing more laughs because there are not enough captions...There are but few captions...and those are the most conventional sort, such as a bride asking the bridegroom if he had a license."⁴³ Film critics had not mentioned the necessity of witty or explanatory intertitles for broad comedians' features, but they cited intertitles as essential for legitimate farces' success.

Sometimes producers attempted to compensate for a lack of dialogue by adding further physical gags, but critics objected to injecting broader humor into the middlebrow farce. *Variety*

complained that if John Barrymore's *The Red Widow* (Famous Players, June, 1916) had been "legitimately interpreted, [it] would have made an excellent screen comedy. In its present form it is only a nickelodeon feature." They continued,

"Despite the presence of John Barrymore in the leading role the picture lacks 'class' for the reason that Mr. Barrymore constantly resorts to slapstick methods to get his laughs...as he starts upon his honeymoon a friend tosses an old shoe at him containing a horseshoe, knocking him down. Later the star stumbles over a pin, pulls a hair out of a waiter's whiskers, places his thumb to his nose and extending his hand, splashes some guests with food, performs a somersaulting comedy fall, is stabbed in the posterior."⁴⁴

Producers adapting straight farces thus found themselves in a bind. They were criticized for the inability to translate verbal humor, but also received censure when they tried to rectify sound limitations by integrating broader physicality into these higher-class efforts.

Though trade publications didn't regularly record exhibitor feedback or box office results until after 1916, most of these films quickly disappeared from the pages of trade journals after their initial reviews. When some, like *Officer 666* or *Stop Thief!* were remade in 1920, no publicity mentioned the popularity of previous adaptations.⁴⁵ This might not be proof in and of itself that the earlier films were not financially successful, but extant discourse indicates poor reactions from audiences as well as critics. The most evidence exists for the farces of producer George Kleine and actor John Barrymore. Kleine's correspondence with exhibitors, which I will detail more in my case study, contains complaints about losses on *The Commuters* and *Stop Thief!*.⁴⁶ Kleine also suggested the re-release of his mid-teens farces in the twenties on the basis that "moving picture comedies in feature length are becoming popular."⁴⁷ His framing suggests that his own early attempts were not successful at the time but that the 1920s could be a more fruitful environment for his products.

The struggles that John Barrymore's comedies experienced are also overtly stated or implied in surviving accounts. Paramount director J. Searle Dawley expressed in private papers that Zukor's early use of Barrymore as a "Charley Chaplin sort of proposition" was 'misguided.'⁴⁸ A

late 1910s review in *The Film Daily* also noted that Paramount previously “gave this very clever comedian some stories that placed him at a decided disadvantage.”⁴⁹ When John Barrymore’s feature farces were later re-released to promote his return to Paramount in the late 1910s, they received negative exhibitor reports. Comments included “pleased some, the greater percentage being dissatisfied”⁵⁰ and “story weak. Very little comedy. The driest Paramount I have ever shown.”⁵¹ Some exhibitors more specifically detailed which parts of the audience were unimpressed with Barrymore’s legitimate farces. An exhibitor who actually liked Barrymore’s *On the Quiet* explained: “a corking comedy that does not appeal to women.”⁵²

I want to home in on this last claim that the style of legitimate farce contained in Barrymore’s features did not satisfy female patrons. Theatrical reviews of legitimate farces shared this opinion that the productions appealed more to men than women. For instance, they referred to their humor as “masculine, boyishly American”⁵³ or made remarks such as “the piece, originally and now, might properly be considered a man’s show.”⁵⁴ Instead, theater critics mentioned feminine consumers in connection to light and romantic comedies penned by playwrights such as Clyde Fitch, Madame Luciette Ryley or Margaret Mayo.⁵⁵ Women’s magazines also tended to be more unkind to legitimate farces than general newspaper reviews.⁵⁶ I believe that the failure of these farces in feature film points not just to problems of stylistically adapting middlebrow farces, but also to the need to select the right kind of culturally *feminized* middlebrow content. As exhibitors, producers and the trade press increasingly made overt overtures to women in the audience, it is logical that producers shifted away from forms of stage comedy affiliated with masculine taste.

Now why did theatrical critics disassociate legitimate farces from women? A review for William Collier’s *Why Smith Left Home* (prod. 1899) is revealing in this respect, as it contrasts his previous work in farce plays from a new style that they predict will attract female patrons. Before

this production, the reviewer claims that Collier had previously confined himself to “extravagant and eccentric roles” as in the farce *The Man from Mexico*. Though in *The Man from Mexico* “he portrayed a young husband who did not have chin whiskers or wear a long coat of a queer cut,” he still “took up a Clown’s part.”⁵⁷ Thus, the main characters in a legitimate farce might not adopt a broad comedian’s grotesque appearance, but they still could be considered ‘clown-like’ or ‘eccentric’ in their behavior. The reviewer noted that since “it is the favorite policy of star comedians nowadays to select ‘sympathetic roles’ and to pose even in their drollest moments as heroes of romance,” in his new production Collier portrayed “a youth who is comic, to be sure, but never ridiculous; who is the actual hero.”⁵⁸ They continued, “the change, now that he has made it, will undoubtedly increase his popularity with the susceptible feminine portion of the playgoing public.”⁵⁹ Therefore, legitimate critics perceived feminine patrons as preferring comedies with romantically attractive, likable leads surrounded by sympathetic humor. It also emphasizes the idea that ‘stars’ or ‘star comedians’ would warrant this kind of treatment, connecting to critics’ belief that women encouraged the ‘star system’ with their deep attachments to individual performers.

I will more closely detail how these elements could be problematic for adaptations of legitimate farces when feature films were marketed to an increasingly important base of female fans. For instance, as opposed to promoting individual stars, these farce plays often relied on ensemble casts. The group emphasis did not exploit a glamorous individual’s charisma as had vehicles which proved popular with women theatergoers, such as the plays of Maude Adams or Ethel Barrymore.⁶⁰ While discussing the theatrical production of *Stop Thief!* (prod. 1912), *The New York Clipper* argued,

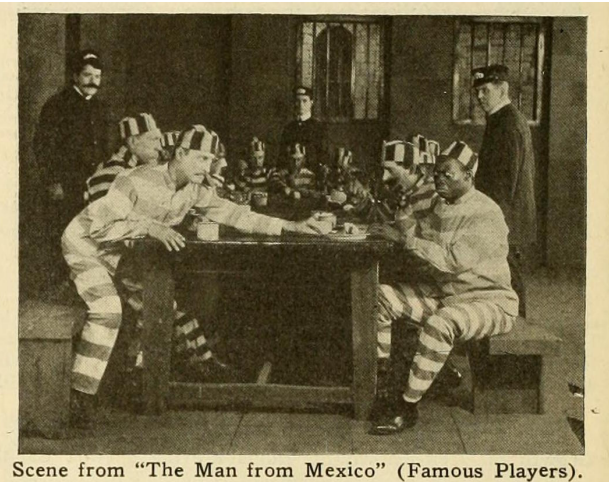
“It does not afford the appropriate setting for great talent, since the tendency of farce, of the elemental kind, is to efface—not to emphasize—the artist. The artist is swallowed up in the grotesqueness of the situation, and his personality is submerged.”⁶¹

This article was not alone in noting that straight farces rarely served as ‘star’ showcases. Other productions also had their ensemble nature mentioned. Of *Excuse Me* (stage prod. 1911), a theatrical reviewer noted, “there are, besides, a dozen other characters in the play, all of whom helped out the action.”⁶² Plotlines often revealed multiple sets of couples, as *Officer 666* (stage prod. 1912) ends in “a triple marriage.”⁶³

The feature adaptations of these stage productions carried over the ensemble nature of their plotlines. *Motion Picture News* said of *Officer 666*, “Individual and incidental actions, recorded by many of the able cast, are responsible for the many outbursts of appreciative laughter.”⁶⁴ Prioritizing its multitude of character sketches, a review for *Excuse Me* congratulated director George Marion for “the democratic mingling of all sorts and conditions of men and women in a sleeping car.”⁶⁵ The farce’s large casts could create storytelling obstacles, as well as impede the feature film’s star exploitation. *The Moving Picture World* suggested that *What Happened to Jones* (World, March, 1915) “might have benefited from the dropping of a few of the characters altogether; or, if not that, by following their adventures with less detail. As developed at present too many plot threads are carried along simultaneously with a diffusion of interest.”⁶⁶ The same publication complained about the jumbled and tedious nature of following four different businesses and their owners in *Father and Son* (Mutual, 1916): “To tell this story five reels are used by the usual device of depicting every movement of multiple characters, whether irrelevant or merely stupid.”⁶⁷

Besides a group approach at odds with the feature’s star system, these middlebrow efforts centered upon selfish or misbehaving characters as much as the vehicles of broad comedians. This commonality disconnects from theatrical reviewers’ claims that women liked ‘sympathetic humor’ or to see ‘heroes.’ Despite more conventional dress and behaviors, the middlebrow farce showed

no more heroism or likability than leads in low comedy. Though a stage and film heartthrob, John Barrymore in the mid-1910s played comedy characters depicted unflatteringly as alcoholics and selfish liars. A review for *The Man from Mexico* called Barrymore's husband "a bibulous gentleman" who "prides himself on his talents for lying."⁶⁸ Reviews stressed Barrymore's



Scene from "The Man from Mexico" (Famous Players).

John Barrymore suffering through jail with his inmates (*MPW*, 10/31/1914, 660)

passivity as opposed to active heroism. A review summarized *The Man from Mexico* as a series of "misadventures" and "laughable misfortunes."⁶⁹ Critics repeatedly noted the unheroic nature of deceptive husbands centralized in straight farces. *The Smugglers* (Famous Players, 1916) followed a husband who gives away his wife's pearl necklace to another pretty woman. The newspaper *Bryan Daily Eagle and Pilot* stated that he "loses partly through carelessness and partly through foolishness his wife's twenty-thousand-dollar necklace."⁷⁰ A review for *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* even more harshly proposed that this husband "might be considered a villain."⁷¹ This went beyond lying husbands to a 'bullying' suffragette spouse and her meek husband in *Over Night* or the kleptomaniac leads in *Stop Thief!* This censure extended to the infrequent female leads. *The Theatre* critiqued the young woman in *Little Miss Brown* as "selfish" and "dislikable,"⁷² while newspapers described the same character in the film version as "an egregious flirt."⁷³ Some women's and film magazines openly criticized the central characters' behaviors. *The Green Book*

Magazine lamented about the ‘tiredness’ of *The Man from Mexico* following “a man who is trying to keep his misdeeds from his wife,”⁷⁴ while *Motion Picture Magazine* critiqued that in the film version of *Are You a Mason*, “Too much space is devoted to his inebriate antics.”⁷⁵ The anti-heroic behavior of the characters did not accord with the gentle and ethical humor critics associated with women.

While some legitimate farces had a prominent female character, a final problem for attracting feminine patrons came from the straight farce not being viewed by critics as a hospitable realm for women’s stardom. This gender disparity created a potential issue for a feature market that often hinged upon physically glamorous women for box office returns. As noted in Chapter One, critics and producers saw leading women as essential for drawing feminine spectators. Conversely, actresses complained that straight farce marginalized them. Iona Bright, who played Helen Burton in *Officer 666*, criticized the famous farces of producers Cohan and Harris for being male-centric:

“No play that Mr. Cohan would produce could ever give a woman, young or old, a big chance. Mr. Cohan understands men, but he does not understand women. He is no Clyde Fitch, and no play that he will ever present will afford a woman star chances to become famous.”⁷⁶

She went on to dismayingly detail the casting practices for female parts in *Officer 666*, asserting that a stage manager told her, “Neither role calls for much intelligence, and I picked the two girls on account of their looks.”⁷⁷ Some commentaries hinted at why legitimate farces seldom centered around women. Though Marguerite Clark’s *Miss George Washington* (Famous Players, 1916) was more of a light comedy, *The New York Clipper* still expressed discomfort with its heroine engaging in what they identified as behaviors of men in ‘stage farces’; “Somehow it seemed decidedly humorous to witness a man extricate himself from a tight situation by lying glibly. In the case of a woman it’s different, especially when a woman is a dainty bit of femininity like Marguerite Clark.”⁷⁸ Thus, the cultural expectations for women to be better-behaved seemed to impede their

participation as more than sidelined love interests in straight farces, an observation supported by Jeffrey Huberman's work on British farce plays.⁷⁹ The lack of women as narrative drives created box office concerns as the film industry came to believe that its mass, feminized audiences preferred female stars. When discussing the financial failure of *Officer 666*, *The Commuters* and other adaptations, J.A. Berst lamented to George Kleine that he felt their lack of a feminine lead contributed; "The public are feature crazy, and anything, regardless of the quality of the film, as long as it has the name of an actress in it, seems to go down their throats."⁸⁰ The group emphasis, unheroic leads and dearth of young women in legitimate farces all placed them at odds with feminized audiences and how their tastes were perceived in the 1910s.

The underwhelming performance of straight farces in feature films illustrates that not all middlebrow forms of comedy proved equally serviceable as a safe bet for expanding audiences. The plays relied on complicated plotting and humorous dialogue that struggled to register on film. Their characters and plotlines also conflicted with public perceptions about culturally feminized tastes, which producers increasingly saw as crucial to the feature film's success. The farce's group emphasis did not provide opportunities for glamorous stars to stand out, while the unheroic central figures, often men, differed from female audiences' supposed penchant for sympathetic humor and glamorous women.

Case Study: *The Commuters* (George Kleine, 1915)

One of the few extant legitimate farces, *The Commuters* (Kleine, 1915), illustrates the challenge of translating some types of middlebrow stage humor to features. It also contrasts usefully from forms more strongly associated with female patrons that came to dominate feature comedies by the end of the decade. Written by James Forbes, *The Commuters* debuted on Broadway in August of 1910.⁸¹ The play followed a suburban couple, Mr. and Mrs. Brice, as they

deal with the fallout from Mr. Brice drunkenly bringing home a city bachelor who turns their household upside down. Theatrical critics used middling, commercial terminology to describe the production. They did not dismiss the farce as crude or lowbrow, instead complimenting it as “bright, witty and typically American.”⁸² They singled out the performance of Taylor Holmes (who would later find some success in comedy features) as the city bachelor.⁸³ Deeming the play ‘commercial’ as opposed to ‘highbrow,’ *The Theatre* declared, “It is the obvious and commonplace that the public likes...the result is a play which almost always keeps the box office busy.”⁸⁴



Taylor Holmes and May De Sousa in the stage production (*The Theatre*)

The play’s safe commerciality and dramatic structure likely seemed promising for film producers, but theatrical critics hinted at obstacles for adaptation. They felt that the witty lines of the piece were its saving grace and dismissed the plot. *The New York Times* noted, “The piece is more a series of isolated incidents...it may well be doubted whether the subject is susceptible of dramatic treatment.”⁸⁵ This review also made a compelling point about the vehicle’s lack of individual emphasis upon a star, stating, “It seeks to convey a general impression of a certain phase of society rather than the individual experiences of a well-marked character. This is at once its strength and its weakness.”⁸⁶ Reviews also characterized the main players unsympathetically, calling the main couple “overdone” and their actions “far-fetched.”⁸⁷ They did not give either the

husband or wife flattering descriptions, citing Mr. Brice's "undue" nights out and Mrs. Brice's tendency to display "a consequent state of nerves not particularly conducive to connubial bliss."⁸⁸

Film producer and distributor George Kleine purchased *The Commuters* as part of a major bid to regularize feature comedy. Kleine released *Officer 666* in December of 1914, and this was followed by *Stop Thief!* (Feb, 1915), *The Commuters* (April, 1915), and *Who's Who in Society?* (May, 1915). Despite theatrical critics referring to most of these plays as middlebrow farces, Kleine advertised his films as 'high class comedies.'⁸⁹ He recruited leading men and women from the stage, such as Harry Mestameyer and Mary Ryan for *Stop Thief!* and Irene Fenwick for *The Commuters*. Some critics responded enthusiastically to Kleine's farces. James S. McQuade for *The Moving Picture World* raved that *Stop Thief!* was the "perfect photocomedy" and "the finest I have yet seen."⁹⁰ Newspapers and non-trade reviews proved less kind and referenced Kleine's failure to capture the plays' humor.⁹¹ The two existing reviews for *The Commuters* reveal little, as they are both in the trade press and remain vaguely polite. Correspondence, however, suggests that *The Commuters* failed to draw audiences. One exhibitor, E. Wetheimer, griped to Kleine in 1916, "I can assure you I lost money on 'Who's Who in Society,' 'Commuters,' and I feel sure I shall lose money on 'Stop Thief.'"⁹² The extant *The Commuters* amply conveys the stylistic and content challenges facing legitimate farce in the feature film. Here is a synopsis of the film's events:

The Commuters opens by introducing a young married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Brice (George Le Guere and Irene Fenwick), who live in the suburbs outside of New York City. After work, Mr. Brice's friends persuade him to stay in the city and attend a cabaret. Lying to his wife, Brice says he must stay in the city for business. While at the cabaret, Mr. Brice befriends its eccentric French conductor, Sammy (Charles Judels). He drunkenly invites Sammy home for the evening. Mr. Brice and Sammy miss the train and are forced to walk all the way home, finally arriving at 4 am. Brice thinks he has successfully gotten away with his outing, but Mrs. Brice hears him come in and is furious. The following morning Brice nearly misses the commuter train. In his hurry, Brice fails to inform his wife about their guest. Mrs. Brice wakes up to find a strange man in one of the bedrooms, and she tries to remove him from the house. Sammy refuses to leave until he is given new clothes and food. The suffering Mrs. Brice must not only contend with the unwelcome guest, but also cope with a useless maid and a suffragette group. She hides Sammy upstairs and says he can depart after the suffrage gathering.

As the film proceeds, guest Sammy proves to be a 'royal pain.' He comes downstairs during the suffragette meeting despite Mrs. Brice's request. Thinking he is a burglar, the suffragettes initially attack him but then decide that he must be Mrs. Brice's lover. Meanwhile, Mr. Brice agrees to spend another night in the city with friends. After all

of Mrs. Brice's trials, her husband calls to inform her that he will once again not be coming home. A friend advises Mrs. Brice to pretend she is having an affair to give Mr. Brice a taste of his own medicine. Mrs. Brice adopts this plan, but her husband reacts with rage as opposed to regret. Later that evening, Sammy makes the mistake of getting into Mr. Brice's bed, and Mrs. Brice kisses him thinking he is her husband. She screams when she realizes her mistake. Thinking Sammy was making a pass at her, Mr. Brice finally restores order by ejecting Sammy from the house. The film ends with Sammy hobbling along the train tracks. He exclaims in relief, "Bah! For ze commute business. Me for zat dear Broadway."



Mrs. Brice rolling her eyes in dismay at her husband's guest (Courtesy of Library of Congress for all stills)

The Commuters is an ambitious film that weaves between multiple characters and conveys a snowballing of confusion that can be difficult to follow. The film utilizes both physical and verbal humor, with a combination of physical violence and humorous intertitles. The use of intertitles, however, reveals several limitations. The film features multiple phone conversations where lines are all crowded onto one title card. One example reads:

Hetty: "How dare you leave a strange man in this house?"
 Larry: "But, sweetheart..."
 Hetty: "He says he can't leave in evening clothes."
 Larry: "I'll send a suit home."

This construction forces the viewer to read the entire conversation at once without the back and forth, ping-pong pacing that could enliven it on the stage. In addition to this inelegant translation of verbal humor, the filmmakers made alterations from the play that suggest they felt that the play's urbane mockery of city versus suburbia wouldn't translate to mass audiences. In the play, the bothersome houseguest was a cynical, handsome city bachelor. Reviews claimed his urban digs at suburban life provided much of the play's humor. Yet the film version replaces this witty cynic

with Sam, a ‘boob foreigner.’ The filmmakers may have felt this character type could be understood more easily through shorter, broken intertitles, and the film uses Sammy’s accent and lack of intelligence as points of humor. They also may have theorized that a broader character would register more easily. He repeatedly stuffs food into his mouth during the cabaret sequence, and he trips over himself several times when he walks to and from the Brice home. Kleine’s



Sammy at the cabaret when he meets Mr. Brice

production team may have felt that the inclusion of a low comedy character could improve the film’s visual humor. Nonetheless, the alteration prompted its own clarity concerns. The film relays Sammy’s accent through intertitles, but his country of origin is unclear given that no one overtly identifies him as French. His intertitles frequently employ “ze” and “dat” but he does not use a recognizably French phrase until after two reels, when he calls Mr. Brice “monsieur.” Viewers at the time also seemed confused about Sammy’s national origins, with one newspaper calling him “Italian”⁹³ despite Mr. Brice referring to him in the film as “Frenchy.”

The film also has difficulty sustaining coherent development out of its complex story structure. Character motivations or reactions can be hard to discern. For instance, it is never explained why Mr. Brice feels comfortable defying his angry wife a second evening in a row. The prior evening Mrs. Brice catches her husband in a lie since she heard him come in after four am. He tries to argue that he came back by one am and she quips “You mean ten highballs after one.”

Since she caught her husband and later angrily called him at work to complain about the guest, one would think Brice would return home to deal with Sammy. Instead, Brice spends a second night out despite having been caught for the first evening. The first night out came from his friends' pressure, but it is not clear what motivates his second outing. That behavior doesn't accord with the film's opening that portrayed them as a happy couple. Other motivations also stay murky, as when Mrs. Brice pretends to have an affair to get her husband's attention. While she pretends to be 'out' but hides in a closet, her friend's husband calls Mr. Brice and informs him that Mrs. Brice is just putting on an act. Despite being told this information, Mr. Brice becomes infuriated when he sees the fake note she wrote from her 'lover' and starts throwing furniture. It is never clear why Mr. Brice is responding so angrily when he knows she is pretending. Has he decided to make her feel better by feigning jealousy? No intertitles or closer shots detail Mr. Brice's psychology.

The Commuters also demonstrates the circular construction of many domestic shorts that provided challenges for sustaining interest across five reels. The film presents a quarrel between spouses, but the film does not radically alter their attitudes, relationships or social circumstances. Mr. and Mrs. Brice face a temporary inconvenience in the form of Sammy, but his expulsion allows their lives to return to normalcy. Brice does not become more considerate and thoughtful, and Mrs. Brice does not learn to be a 'good time' girl. The couple do not turn a loveless marriage into a more romantic one, and Sammy does not form a lasting relationship with the couple that affects their approach to life. The film's two-day time span also fails to show a major shift in the characters' location or lifestyle. The film certainly has a cause and effect chain, but we should keep this lack of robust development in mind given the different strategies comedy features would favor by the end of the decade.

Beyond stylistic issues of clarity and development, the film promotes its ensemble at the expense of Irene Fenwick's stardom. Kleine railed against the star system in letters to exhibitors,⁹⁴ and he either touted the entire cast or altered the performer he was emphasizing in each advertisement. Some ads promoted Fenwick, others foregrounded Charles Judels as Sammy, while others gave the entire cast equal emphasis.⁹⁵ When viewing the film, the lack of star promotion is evident. One cannot tell who or if there is supposed to be a stand out player. Fenwick does not receive flattering backlighting or closer shot scales to emphasize her expressions. The film mostly uses long shot scales to capture all of the players interacting with minimal cutting. Take the suffragettes assault on Sammy as one example. When the suffragettes attack him, Mrs. Brice enters the room and tries to pull him away from them. The entire group is captured in LS and MLS framings as Mrs. Brice pulls Sammy on one side and the suffragettes pull him on the other. Despite having first billing, Fenwick's character is not positioned closer to the camera, made to 'pop' through staging, nor is she provided any reaction shots.



Medium long shots with crowded framing predominate the film

Beyond shot construction, the film shifts its focus so frequently that the central figures of the narrative stay unclear. Mr. and Mrs. Brice seem to be the most prominent characters in the opening, but Sammy provides the most humor as the film's central 'comedian' through his troublemaking. We witness him fighting with children in the street, flirting with the housemaid

and spying on the suffragette meeting. The film also ends with Sammy as he hobbles down the train tracks. The film also regularly cuts to characters besides the Brices or Sammy. Small vignettes show the housemaid reading romance novels in the kitchen or interactions between the couple's unhappily married neighbors. This dispersion of interest challenged the feature's increasing reliance on one or two central stars whose charisma was exploited to justify the film's length.

The Commuters does not only deviate from the feature film's increasing reliance on the star system through its ensemble approach. Like the vehicles of broader comedians, the film foregrounds dislikable characters taking anti-social actions. Though Kleine advertised his films as 'high class,' the characters in the film carried over broad ethnic or class stereotypes from shorts. As the 'foreigner,' Sammy has a large mustache, heavy eyebrows and weight frequently poked fun at, such as when Mr. Brice orders him a set of clothes "fat man's size." The film also mocks the housemaid's refusal to do any work, referring to her in intertitles as "the queen from Childs" (i.e. a Coney Island diner). The less exaggerated performances of middle-class Mr. and Mrs. Brice still foreground their personality shortcomings and do not offer much chance to demonstrate charm. Mr. Brice furnishes the film's complications through his selfishness. He lies to his wife for the self-serving purpose of drinking and seeing girls at a cabaret, and he continually breaks his promise to be home by a certain hour. Both the drunkenness and dishonesty of husbands had previously prompted criticism from trade commentators and female patrons in comedy shorts. The long-suffering Mrs. Brice similarly does not receive much opportunity to exploit her appeals. She spends the entire film enraged, with humor coming from her sitting alone and fuming during Mr. Brice's absences or throwing a food basket to the ground upon realizing he will not be home for dinner. She proves to be a hostess with little patience, as she immediately attempts to kick Sammy out of the house by physically dragging and shoving him. When he refuses to leave, she keeps

hiding him in an upstairs bedroom and won't let him emerge at any time. The characters' conflict or disdain is stressed throughout the piece. Order is restored, not through negotiation, but by Mr. Brice violently throwing Sammy out of the house.

While straight farce potentially proffered more structural saliency and cultural legitimacy to feature producers than broader short or stage comics, *The Commuters* illustrates other trials and tribulations. Straight farces did provide plot structure, yet they thrived on such complex circumstances that producers had difficulty translating them to the screen. The film adaptations also suffered from the loss of verbal humor that had complemented the plays' rapid-fire action. Beyond stylistic struggles, straight farces' group emphasis, unlikable characters and limited opportunities for female performers proved difficult for a feature format increasingly reliant on glamorous women to appeal to feminine patrons. By 1917, it would prove difficult to find more than several adaptations of legitimate farces per year, and thus the form failed to maintain a sustained presence in 1910s features.⁹⁶

“Not Exactly the Kind of Farce that Makes Americans Roar”: High Comedy

Producers' frustration with crafting feature comedies also encompassed 'highbrow' humor. Though most publicity for early four or five-reel comedies threw around the term 'high class,' film producers usually utilized material that theatrical critics had designated safely commercial. However, the industry made some attempts to adapt theatrical productions actually associated with elite tastes. While always a minority of film productions, producers showed more openness to this comic approach between 1915 and 1916. From April 1915 to June 1916, comedy adaptations associated with specialized patrons made for 11 out of 114 releases (10%).⁹⁷ By 1917, only one feature film fit this category, *The Divorce Game* (World), a French sophisticated comedy in the mode of *Divorçons*. I only include films adapted from plays which theatrical critics themselves

defined as ‘high class’ or for ‘sophisticated’ audiences. These critics distinguished certain plays as desirable to educated or worldly consumers. The highbrow plays these films adapted contained the following elements: a prioritization of characterization over action, sustained social criticism, witty dialogue, and moral daring. Such material posed problems for the feature market through both the obstacles of stylistic translation and their limited appeal to mass audiences.⁹⁸

Theatrical productions with the characteristics listed above received the specification of being favored by ‘high class,’ ‘intelligent’ or ‘sophisticated’ audiences. A newspaper discussed *The Education of Mr. Pipp* as “a society comedy of the highest sort.”⁹⁹ It explained, “This is a play which appeals to particularly bright people...the patronage of the Liberty Theatre since the opening of the play has been particularly distinguished for its large majority of fashionable people, evidenced by the beautiful costuming of the ladies in attendance.”¹⁰⁰ As can be seen by this reference, feminine patrons were not pitted against ‘high class’ plays as thoroughly as broad comedies or middlebrow farces. However, reviews for refined plays treated them as ‘gender neutral’ and did not mention any special appeal to women, instead defining these productions by class. Glamorous costuming from these plays can be found in wealthier women’s publications such as *Vanity Fair*, but not in middle class women’s magazines.¹⁰¹ Reviews made clear that the productions required special, cultivated knowledge often stemming from financial privilege. For *Father and the Boys*, a reviewer observed that the audience required knowledge of the urban upper class, as “Ade has devoted many of his lines to satirizing the smart set of New York.”¹⁰² Critics also noted that some sophisticated French plays could not be appreciated by the average viewer, particularly those unable to afford travel overseas. One commented that *Divorçons* would interest “the American that has long resided abroad”¹⁰³ as otherwise “for the average exhibition visitor the wit, the joke...will be a sealed mystery.”¹⁰⁴



Stage still from Grace George's revival of *Divorçons* (1913) (*The Theatre*)

When theatrical commentators discussed high class comedy, they usually highlighted characters' personalities as opposed to narrative action. A review for George Ade's *Father and the Boys* (1908) proposed that refined comedy would have a careful "light and shade" of characters.¹⁰⁵ Other accounts stressed the plays' delicate delineation of personalities for social criticism. Of *The Education of Mr. Pipp* (1905), a review observed, "the henpecked Mr. Pipp, his parvenue shrewish wife, another Mrs. Malaprop in her attempts at graceful speech, her two daughters, lovely Gibson types, their loves and the adventurers who lay siege to papa's money—all this is good material for legitimate comedy."¹⁰⁶ *Green Stockings* (1911) also primarily relied on nuanced social interactions for humor. *The Theatre* summarized: "The exposition offers nothing in the way of comic action, and the start is therefore effected by means of dialogue and the introduction of the various characters with their individual peculiarities."¹⁰⁷ Critics used these character studies to distinguish high class 'comedies of manners' from farce. One reviewer rationalized *Green Stockings* as a 'comedy of manners' as opposed to straight farce by explaining, "It would be easy to turn these scenes to farce. It is fortunate that Mr. Mason's play was allowed an interpretation so delicate and true...a comedy of incident and good manners in the lives of gentlefolk."¹⁰⁸ The term 'comedy of manners' was frequently applied to older comedies of renown from British and French playwrights, such as Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777)¹⁰⁹ or Victor Sardou's *Divorçons* (1880).¹¹⁰ The delineation of social types often came about through nuanced verbal

humor, with critics admiring *Jane* for its “adroitness”¹¹¹ of line construction and calling *Green Stockings* “the play of wits.”¹¹²

These detailed characterizations usually serviced social criticism. Reviews outright called the plays ‘satires’ or stressed a lesson the author sought to instill. Called ‘a satirical comedy,’ *The Education of Mr. Pipp* (1905) made “humorous comments on familiar American and foreign social institutions.”¹¹³ Other forms of comedy can be peppered with social criticism, such as silly supporting characters in romantic comedies, but critics suggested that satire provided the overarching purpose for high class plays.¹¹⁴ In *The Education of Mr. Pipp*, reviewers claimed “the little satire on title hunting” was “the basis of the play.”¹¹⁵ Other reviews also foregrounded this ridiculing of social classes and institutions. For instance, *Divorçons* contained “a modicum of philosophy” by mocking the recent divorce legalization in France and “the average Parisian middle-aged husband, the average Parisian wife, the average lover.”¹¹⁶ A newspaper article about the film adaption of the play *Snobs* used this notion of social critique to separate the film from ‘lower’ comedies. The article called it “a comedy based upon essentially a satirical idea, and which is, therefore, completely removed from slapstick farce.”¹¹⁷ Thus, legitimate comedies labeled ‘high class’ were believed to offer sustained commentary on social dynamics or institutions.

It is difficult to fully appreciate how these plays and their film adaptations operated because they relied on precise interactions that cannot be replicated in plot synopses. However, the films’ plots strongly imply social critique. Some took place in an upper class setting and mocked the superficial nature of its characters, as in *The School for Scandal* (Kalem, 1914) or *The Earl of Pawtucket* (Universal, 1915). In *The Earl of Pawtucket* (1915), a foppish, British Earl evacuates from his bathtub due to a fire and spots an attractive neighbor in his hotel hallway. Eager to pursue her without her knowing of his ‘title,’ but equally hoping to avoid a summons from the House of

Lords, he adopts the identity of his American friend, Putnam, who is currently abroad. As Putnam, he follows the young woman to America. Unfortunately for the Earl, he struggles to replicate American slang and to hide his upper-class British mannerisms. He also did not know Putnam had an ex-wife seeking alimony payments, or that the ex-wife happens to be the woman he followed to America. As she would realize he is not her husband, this makes the Earl's desire to pursue her impossible. The Earl as 'Putnam' also becomes suspected of the now missing Earl's murder. Putnam's relatives then show up to create additional nuisance by seeking permission for their marriages, so the Earl says he will consent if they give him money for the alimony. When Putnam's wife shows up to her lawyer's office, she is relieved to recognize the Earl as opposed to facing her actual ex-husband. The two stroll off together, leaving the lawyers and relatives in amazement. Other class satires centered around a wise, patriarch who observed his wife's social climbing with disdain. Films fitting this pattern include *The Education of Mr. Pipp* (All Star Film Co., 1914), *Who's Who in Society?* (Kleine, 1914), *Father and the Boys* (Universal, 1915) and *The Pretenders* (Metro, 1916). Feature comedies also explored class difference by following the mishaps of a lower-class character in an upper class setting as they struggled with complex social protocols, as in *Snobs* (Lasky, 1915) or *Jane* (Morosco, 1915).

Another strain of high-class comedy mocked institutions such as marriage or politics. Examples include *Divorçons* (Biograph, 1915), *Green Stockings* (Vitagraph, 1916), *Madame La Presidente* (Morosco, 1916), *The Upstart* (Rolfe, 1916) and *The Purple Lady* (Rolfe, 1916). In *The Upstart*, a young man leaves his own wife and child to wander the countryside fixing 'loveless marriages.' Arriving on the doorstep of a minister, he quickly involves himself in the minister's private life. The minister withholds physical affection from his wife, so the young man encourages the wife to run away with her chauffeur. He then tells the minister to give an indifferent response

to ‘win back’ the wife. This plan backfires and the only thing preventing the wife from running away is a rainstorm. The minister kicks the ‘upstart’ out of the house, and the young philosopher returns home to find that his own wife ran away with their chauffeur. *Divorçons* (Biograph, 1915) is useful for considering the plot overlaps between ‘sophisticated comedies’ and more accessible variants of middlebrow humor. Tiring of her husband, a woman seeks to divorce him in order to marry her lover. The husband agrees strategically to the divorce so that the wife will in turn get bored with her new beau. By legitimizing the lover, the husband dilutes the affair’s appeal and eventually reunites with his wife. Though remarriage plots later became common in feature comedies, they came to prioritize gentler humor and romance over more sustained analyses of marriage and divorce as institutions. The continuation of the ‘remarriage plot’ beyond certain sophisticated plays shows the term ‘highbrow’ did not mean that a play’s story had to vastly differ from middlebrow forms. The ‘high class’ designation seemed to stem not so much from the plots themselves, but from how much the plays and films relied on biting social criticism, verbal humor or moral sophistication.

Such attention to delineating characters and providing theoretical criticisms of social structures would engender problems of pacing and accessibility for film producers. Some theatrical critics already noted that these comedies’ slow pacing and reliance on dialogue could tax average audiences. One reviewer grumbled about *Green Stockings* “dragging to the point of dreariness.”¹¹⁸ Another critic echoed this annoyance about *The Upstart*, quipping, “the boredom of much talking—particularly in the first act—is more glaringly patent.”¹¹⁹ A related problem to inaction concerned how high class comedies needed an educated audience to pick up on their verbal subtleties. For appreciation, the play *The Education of Mr. Pipp* necessitated knowledge of proper grammar and pronunciation. One review noted, “Mrs. Pipp is a modern Mrs. Malaprop, who

bungles French as well as English and who is—most of the time—an ardent anti-grammarian.”¹²⁰ That the audience would be expected to recognize Mrs. Pipp’s blunders in *both* English and French hints that only consumers with certain educational access could appreciate the humor. While these plays received praise for their layered conversations, heavy reliance on verbal humor over narrative action created certain risks for broader spectatorship.

Film reviews suggested that the actual structure of high-class plays proved threadbare once producers removed most dialogue from their adaptations. *The Moving Picture World* considered *The Education of Mr. Pipp* (Alco, Dec 1914) largely uninteresting outside of stage actor Digby Bell’s performance; “Outside of his work [Bell’s], I find little in this picture to commend. Dialogue abounds, subtitles abound, but the action is mostly conspicuous in its absence.”¹²¹ While Victor Moore was praised for his performance in *Snobs* (Lasky, April 1915), a critic described the structure as “merely a string of laughable scenes held together by threads as thin as gossamer.”¹²² Another reviewer criticized the film *Divorçons* for a “somewhat slow development of the story.”¹²³

Film critics not only found that these adaptations lacked enough action or ‘substance’ once dialogue was removed, but that this removal significantly lessened the humor. *Motion Picture News* professed of *The Earl of Pawtucket* (Universal, 1915),

“On the boards all the subtle wit and humor of the offering, most of which was embodied in the character of the earl, was made effective by way of the clever dialogue. The voice taken away, the good old earl of Pawtucket loses much of his charm and mirth provoking qualities. In truth, the play has not lent itself as well to the screen as might be expected.”¹²⁴

Variety concurred with that assessment, claiming stage star Lawrence D’Orsay lost most of the humor from his particularly British vocalizations. The review noted, “All the work is given to the star, who loses his laugh provoking ability through being unable to resort to his ‘Englishism.’ One recalls the tremendous laughs he received in the stage production with ‘I’ve received a telegram

from Sarah—Sarah’s bettah.”¹²⁵ *Divorçons* (Biograph, 1915) similarly seemed unable to capture Sardou’s cleverness. The reviewer for *Motion Picture News* claimed,

“There is a subtlety in Victorien Sardou’s great play which the screen seems unable to catch... the truth is, the adaptor has not found sufficient material to make four strong reels. He has shown a reverence for Sardou himself, and has declined to dilute a pure stream of original drama with the grosser allow which the screen versions seem to demand.”¹²⁶

The reviewer suggests that such highbrow comedies could not be adapted successfully without some addition of action or alteration to less subtle comedy. Fans seconded critics’ claims about the loss of wit in film versions of highbrow humor. A fan remarked in *Motion Picture Magazine*, “It cannot be denied that ‘The School for Scandal’ loses much of its delightful satire in its film production, nor is this unexpected.”¹²⁷

The criticism that dialogue-driven humor could not work onscreen carried over into trade columns. In 1915, *The Moving Picture World* argued, “Thousands of the best comedies produced upon the stage in the past are of no value to the photoplay producers because of their ‘refined and pleasant comedy’ being almost wholly incorporated in the lines.”¹²⁸ Epes Winthrop Sargent, scenario advisor, lectured later that same year about the problem of higher class forms of comedy. He complained that writers for film comedies struggled to balance upper class characters in comedies of ‘ideas’ with the need for physical vigor in film humor;

“Because some companies announce that they are in the market for ‘polite’ or ‘parlor’ or other brands of comedy and do not desire slap-stick,’ do not get the impression that you must restrain the action and keep the comedy in the idea. That is not what they are trying to tell you. No matter by what name it goes, comedy MUST be lively in action. It must have rapid movement by the players and plot alike. It must offer material that can be laughed at because it looks funny. Putting a man in a dress shirt does not mean he must keep his shirt unwrinkled. It merely means that a man in evening clothes looks neater and more pleasing than a hod carrier with half a day’s mortar on his clothes.”¹²⁹

Sargent suggests here that the industry’s desire for parlor room or higher-class comedy could flounder on film if audiences weren’t *seeing* the humor physically manifested. Thus, he advances an interesting compromise. He encourages the use of wealthier characters by recommending a man in evening clothes, but that these characters demonstrate some physical

ruffling and energy. Throughout the decade, filmmakers complained about the need to balance realist characterizations in higher class comedy with visual dynamism.

Sargent touches on lethargy, and performers in high class comedies often did not fit the youthful vivaciousness of performers thought to attract cross-class, female viewership. Adaptations of highbrow humor regularly starred character actors selected for skill as opposed to charisma. They were usually older than the theatrical and non-theatrical performers that achieved success in later feature comedies. In order to convey wit and detailed characterization, theatrical critics insisted that only especially skilled and intelligent actors could play high comedy. These performers were singled out more often than those in middlebrow farce, who if mentioned at all, received less lofty praise for having ‘personality’ or ‘energy.’¹³⁰ In contrast, theatrical critics praised Digby Bell in the ‘high class’ *The Education of Mr. Pipp* as having “surely found a fixed place where acting intelligence and capacity are requisites.”¹³¹ The actors of *Jane* were labeled ‘refined,’¹³² while Dan Moyses in *Who’s Who in Society?* achieved acclaim for being “as perfect as art and experience can make” as his “fine, expressive countenance mirrors faithfully the whims and thoughts that seize him.”¹³³ Due to the perception that these plays required advanced craft, certain actors acquired fame for their interpretation of one high comedy character. Grace George became strongly identified with the wife Cyprienne in *Divorçons* when she revived the play in 1913 and critics declared the role “requires comedy talent of the highest order.”¹³⁴

In fact, film reviews rarely depicted these actors as matinee idols or ingenues. Of Digby Bell, famous for his role in *The Education of Mr. Pipp*, one newspaper noted, “Mr. Bell is about five feet nothing in height, while all the rest of the company, even the women, are dangerously close to six feet tall.”¹³⁵ As opposed to a young hero, the male lead of *The Earl of Pawtucket* was labeled a “silly-ass.”¹³⁶ Reviews also specified that humor in Charlotte Greenwood’s *Jane* came

from her lack of refinement and her low-class carriage while attempting to pose as her boss' wife.¹³⁷ Other reviews did not mention physical eccentricities of the main character, but simply commented upon the cast's capabilities as opposed to their magnetism. A review of *Divorçons* did not single out any individual as the star of the piece, but instead referred to the cast as "able and the characterizations are good."¹³⁸ Thus, high class comedies did not tap into a growing tendency among successful features to capitalize on youthful, charismatic heroes and heroines.

The one high-class comedy to receive rave reviews, *Green Stockings* (VLSE, 1916), starred a young woman and emphasized romantic comedy components. *Variety* enthused about actress Lillian Walker, "She is at all times clever and has one of those most elusive assets, known as screen personality." The review mentioned how the film capitalized on her physical appeal through visual humor: "The opening of the picture shows a pair of rather shapely nether limbs, fetchingly clad in green stockings, parading across the range of the camera's eyes."¹³⁹ This differed from the play's reliance upon dialogue and parlor room manners. The film's positive reception in comparison to other highbrow adaptations accords with appealing youths' consistent popularity in feature comedies by the end of the decade.

High comedy features did not just fail to meet film audiences' increasingly middlebrow, feminized enthusiasm for glamorous stars. The plays and later films also illustrated moral cynicism or sexual sophistication that differed from cultural perceptions that middle class and female viewers desired clean, sympathetic humor. To be effective targets of satire, characters often engaged in misbehaviors. Secondary literature on satire often uses phrases such as "cruel and aggressive"¹⁴⁰ or "an emotional astringent" due to the critical view of its characters.¹⁴¹ Similar sentiments characterize the discourse surrounding highbrow feature comedies. Reviewers presented the characters in *The School for Scandal* (Kalem, 1914) as mindless gossips, with one

referring to Lady Sneerwell's parlor room as the "scandal college."¹⁴² Another noted that the film showed "refinement even in the worst characters," suggesting that unflattering characters made up a significant part of the narrative.¹⁴³ In this vein, *The Earl of Pawtucket* relied on the "burlesquing of a slow-going, deliberating English aristocrat."¹⁴⁴ *Who's Who in Society* similarly emphasized character enmity within its central marriage, as reviews mentioned Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien's constant "spats" along with Mr. O'Brien's frequent drinking. Mrs. O'Brien hypocritically does not mind her husband sneaking out to drink, but she objects to him drinking at a 'low class's saloon rather than at a gentleman's club.¹⁴⁵

These wealthy misbehaviors apparently narrowed the properties' audience appeal. One reviewer of the play, *Green Stockings*, suggested that the in-depth study of aristocratic characters might irritate ordinary viewers. She remarked, "all the characters are from aristocracy...all are overdressed, all chatter amiably about nothing...all do the inane and unexciting things affected by people who live lives of luxury in England."¹⁴⁶ Film reviewers, despite expressing excitement at the industry's efforts to adopt high class material, expressed distaste towards the films' central figures. *The Moving Picture World* appreciated that the lead advocating for divorce in *The Upstart* (Metro, 1916) was "varying the monotony of conventional heroes," but admitted "most of the audience won't know how to take him for a while."¹⁴⁷ In *The Purple Lady*, a reviewer denounced its main male for being a member of an ethics society that nevertheless goes out to cabarets and pursues an artist's model. The reviewer complained, "one starts out with dislike for the leading character...whom the plot ill-advisedly made 'unpleasant.'"¹⁴⁸

With unadmirable leadings characters, highbrow humor actually mirrored the 'lowbrow' in its use of morally daring material. Theatrical critics often treated the work of George Bernard Shaw and other 'intellectual' playwrights in this manner: admirably skillful but too racy for mass

audiences.¹⁴⁹ Descriptions of highbrow adaptations painted the humor as ‘edgy,’ either through harsh critiques or unconventional behaviors. Reviews for *The School for Scandal* (Kalem, 1914) mentioned its “spice” along with the “cutting point of the comedy.”¹⁵⁰ One review detailed a husband slandering his own wife as unfaithful to get attention: “Sir Peter Teazle hears the tale of what happened when his wife was behind the curtain in the house of Joseph Surface. He says, “Oh, no, you have got it all wrong,” and tells a whopper even worse.”¹⁵¹



Alice Joyce and cast in Kalem’s adaptation of *The School for Scandal* (12/19/1914, 1645)

The Upstart also adapted an audacious play. *The Theater* had claimed the piece possessed “the kind of humor that has come to be designated as Shavian (Shaw influenced)” and thought to contain “that writer’s audacity in theories.”¹⁵² The upstart’s theoretical interest in reforming marital institutions bothered local papers. One Utah newspaper remarked, “Long life has been given to uncountable comedies and chaps as audacious as that, from romantic swashbucklers down to the latest American trade drummers and business schemers, but always they have been hearty lovers and never assailants of religion or advocates of immorality.”¹⁵³ Interestingly, the upstart’s intellectual challenges to religion and marriage as a social institution appeared to perturb viewers more than acts of infidelity. The article continued, “We might have disliked the upstart less if he had cuddled the young wife when her husband wouldn’t...he had no such saving grace of roguery.”¹⁵⁴

While American or British plays intended for elite audiences contained characters engaging in risky criticisms of social institutions, highbrow French farces became aligned with the sexually risqué. As noted previously, the characters in French farces were considered more sexually daring than those in the British and American iterations.¹⁵⁵ Theatrical critics described even the well-respected *Divorçons* as “racy, Gallic fun”¹⁵⁶ which “verges occasionally on questionable ground.”¹⁵⁷ In a similar vein, a film review for *The Purple Lady* referenced the “much-advertised French indecencies”¹⁵⁸ and warned that the film bordered on “smutty.”¹⁵⁹ Though critics noted the questioning of sexual mores, they still distinguished the titillation in sophisticated plays from broader depictions of lust or nudity in lowbrow farces. One theatrical commentator explained that the sexual innuendo in *Divorçons* was “constantly bubbling and never forced or really low”¹⁶⁰ due to it displaying “sparkling fireworks of wit.”¹⁶¹ While critics evaluated the cultural worth of lowbrow and highbrow theatrical comedies differently, the socially unusual or sexually explicit behaviors in both distinguished them from mainstream morality in middlebrow entertainments.

While evidence exists that these high class features engendered critical disappointment, these early years make it challenging to trace audience’s reactions or the films’ financial performance. Some evidence does point, however, to ‘high class’ features receiving negative exhibitor feedback. George Kleine received letters from exhibitors reporting that satires such as *Who’s Who in Society* (1915) had lost the theater money.¹⁶² When Victor Moore’s *Snobs* (Paramount, 1915) was a part of Paramount’s re-release series in 1918, an exhibitor vented, “This did not please and the patrons walked out.”¹⁶³ We will see a similar complaint about *Madame La Presidente* in my case study. Beyond these examples, the few attempts to make ‘satires’ later in the decade ran into disastrous exhibitor feedback. Reviewers had warned that *The Uplifters* (Metro, 1919), a satire critiquing communism as a ‘bunk’ philosophy for non-existent labor exploitation, would “please a highbrow

audience” but “it will not pull so heavily in theatres catering to a family or popular audience...and in a strictly working class neighborhood, they are quick to resent ridicule and it would possibly irritate instead of entertain the majority in these labor audiences.”¹⁶⁴ Exhibitors seconded that neighborhood patrons found it “poor subject matter,”¹⁶⁵ even making statements like “my patrons took this as a slap in the face.”¹⁶⁶

Some of these exhibitor comments also mentioned high-class theaters not taking to the films. Film producers appear to have miscalculated in hoping that the money from wealthier patrons could sustain high class adaptations. While critics often purported that intellectually stimulating comedies of social types or attitudes appealed to wealthier patrons, this did not always prove true. Theatrical commentators already recognized that wealth did not guarantee taste or discrimination. Writing a piece on the opening of *The Upstart's* theatrical production, George Jean Nathan wrote a quipped, “When typical first nighters learn to use their heads for purposes other than top hats and jeweled aigrettes, a play like Barry’s will stand a chance.”¹⁶⁷ Some of these commentaries pointed to an increasing recognition of ‘nouveau riche’ as a social category whereby one could acquire wealth without family ‘breeding.’¹⁶⁸ Others stressed that wealth did not necessitate intelligence or good taste even with older family money.¹⁶⁹ This individual variation and social fluidity hardly gave wealthier patrons uniform tastes. The distance between critical presumptions about taste and the actual ambivalence of some wealthy patrons towards ‘high class’ comedy could partially explain the form’s inability to acquire a loyal following in feature films.

In summary, narrative sustainment, dislikable characters, and dubious morality not only plagued broad comedy and middlebrow farces in features. Highbrow comedies shared these obstacles and ultimately did not find much success once filmed. A few more attempts would be made in the late teens to appeal to first run houses with this type of humor, but mass audiences

often balked. Throughout the decade, articles suggested satire and higher-class forms were unsuited to average American sensibilities. Detailing the history of film comedy for *Photoplay* in 1918, reporter Harry Carr wrote,

“This war may work important changes in our humor. I shouldn’t be surprised if the contact of millions of American soldier boys with the older civilization of Europe would bring us a taste of real satire. At present we are not ready for it. American humor is not satirical. Satire is old; finished; subtle; experienced; sophisticated. Our humor has every characteristic of the child—of raw youth.”¹⁷⁰

Commentaries not only framed American film humor as more rambunctious and youthful than the ‘elitist’ humor of satire, but also fretted over satire’s potential for mean-spiritedness. A screenplay writing manual, *Cinema Craftsmanship* (1920), specified, “satire, *if not too bitter and acrimonious*, has its place...it should be kindly, full of sunny laughter.”¹⁷¹ The insistence satire should be ‘kindly’ or ‘sunny’ could be difficult for a play criticizing deeply rooted social or political mores.

Case Study: *Madame La Presidente* (Paramount/Morosco, 1916)

Madame La Presidente (1916) epitomizes how comedies for elite or sophisticated viewers deviated from approaches that would later prove safe for feature comedies. Marking Anna Held’s first screen appearance, the film adapted the play *Madam President*, which opened on Broadway in September of 1913.¹⁷² Fannie Ward had starred as a French cabaret performer, Mademoiselle Gobette, who avenges herself on a stringent judge by seducing half of the French ministry. As with other French plays framed as sophisticated, reviewers displayed reservations about its sexual daring. *Variety* stated with astonishment, “A continental theatrical manager...declared the American adaptation of the French farce had been considerably toned down. What it must have been in the original is pretty hard to imagine.”¹⁷³ Reviews blamed the risqué content on ‘defects’ of the French nationality. *The Theatre* grouched, “One wonders at the susceptibility of that part of the Paris public which still goes to see such things.” They contrasted American mentality as a more

advanced civility, claiming this plot would only please “the Anglo-Saxon mind of twenty years ago.”¹⁷⁴ The main character, Gobette, transgressed sexual norms as an unapologetic seducer. *Variety* mentioned her “overweening desire to display her physical pulchritude to the male populace at very close range, one victim at a time. This she persists in, whether the poor dupe is willing or not.”¹⁷⁵

Despite these deviations from ‘respectability,’ critics noted that stylistic tendencies in sophisticated comedies usually allowed them to receive ‘higher class’ designations than the sexual frolics of broad comedians. *The Theatre* suggested that French plays in this vein seemed to escape condemnation due to “thinly veiled insinuations”¹⁷⁶ and by being “clever at least in construction.”¹⁷⁷ *Madam President* and Ward, unfortunately, provoked criticism for failing to demonstrate enough high-class wit to ‘justify’ its sexual titillation. Denigrating Ward’s lack of light touch to make it acceptable, *The Theatre* complained that “though designed naughty, [the play] was more often positively stupid.”¹⁷⁸ Though one might expect film producers to have been dissuaded by the play’s risky content and the transgressive woman at its center, *Variety* grudgingly admitted its spicy content would still draw legitimate crowds; “If authorities do not see it fit to censor the ‘close to the knuckle’ lines and situations...it should enjoy a profitable run.”¹⁷⁹

Oliver Morosco purchased rights to the play for Anna Held’s film debut. An enormously popular stage star at the turn of the century, Held was known primarily for her musical shows and marriage to Florenz Ziegfeld. Held’s pre-existing stage career both diverged from and converged with a sophisticated French comedy like *Madam President*. Held’s work with Ziegfeld catered to high-paying clientele,¹⁸⁰ but critics seldom framed the shows as ‘highbrow’ entertainment. However, film producers likely saw *Madam President* as still being an appropriate vehicle for her due to its French flavor and overt sexuality. Held’s stage productions, such as *The Parisian Model*

(1906) and *Miss Innocence* (1909), placed her in Parisian settings with “suggestive humor.”¹⁸¹ Despite this sexual flavor, critics did not describe these shows as ‘broad’ or ‘crude.’ Instead they used phrases like “sparkles with wit and fun” or claimed her shows were for audiences who “insist on getting the best.”¹⁸² Thus, Held’s theatrical reputation combined sexual teasing with European sophistication.



Anna Held, known for her sexual sophistication to higher class clientele, circa 1900 (Google Images)

Publicity for *Madame La Presidente* positioned the film as a clever and expensive comedy effort. It did not stress Held’s musical comedy background or the vehicle’s potential mass appeal. Advertisements harkened upon the film’s wit and delicate touch, calling the film a “sparkling European success,”¹⁸³ or “comedy that is subtle and clever.”¹⁸⁴ Press releases drew attention to Held’s sex appeal as “she of the naughty eyes,”¹⁸⁵ but carefully elevated that appeal above lowbrow vulgarity. A publicity piece in *The Pensacola Journal* claimed “her delicacy and taste” removed danger from scenes which “have been made to verge on the risqué.”¹⁸⁶ Unlike broad comedian and middlebrow farce features, the film’s cost was brought up repeatedly. Announcements referred to Held’s extravagant costumes and her 25,000 dollar-flat fee.¹⁸⁷

Despite the film’s vast expense, *Madame La Presidente* encountered the same challenges as other high-class adaptations. Even trade critics who provided gentler reviews hinted at concerns about the film’s failure to connect with mass audiences. *The Moving Picture World* specified, “its

story develops slowly giving the play the kind of humor that appeals to the intelligent and experienced.”¹⁸⁸ Other critics more openly cited the slow pacing as a detriment. *The New York Clipper* quipped, “the entire story, however, might have been told in two reels...if Anna Held is to continue to make eyes at the camera better vehicles will have to be secured.”¹⁸⁹ *Variety* concurred that “it is undoubtedly short of five reels, as a matter of fact it would seem a short four reels.”¹⁹⁰ Reviews also touched on a lack of physical or visually driven humor. *Variety* observed, “The leaders and titles of the picture in most cases are responsible for the laughs.”¹⁹¹ Others noted how ‘sound’ elements would have salvaged this lack of physical humor, such as Madam’s “delightful French accent.”¹⁹² *Motography* expressed uncertainty about which song Held was performing in one scene, saying, “there is a close-up of her singing what *appears to be* [emphasis mine] a typical Held song.”¹⁹³

Critics also seemed underwhelmed by Held’s physical charms and overwhelmed by the story’s immorality. *Madame La Presidente* featured Held at 44 years-old, and *Variety* suggested that the actress suffered from unflattering photography and signs of age. The reviewer postulated, “it might well be said that the former musical comedy star looks just as well as can be expected in a photoplay that hasn’t any too wonderful photography.” They harshly continued “the lines of age are visible.”¹⁹⁴ In addition to this dismissal of Held’s cinematographic appeal, some critics framed the film as dismayingly ‘French’ in its sexual emphasis. In a xenophobic tone, *Motography* wrote, “it is a Frenchy comedy and there is present the element that French playwrights consider the greatest of all for humorous purposes—lingerie. To the Frenchman there is nothing quite as funny.”¹⁹⁵ Sexually risqué humor, thus, connotes “Frenchman’s” taste rather than appropriately nationalist, American humor. *The Moving Picture World* more overtly pitted the film’s sexual sophistication against the American populace, commenting, “It is not exactly the kind of a farce

that makes American audiences roar with laughter.”¹⁹⁶ Reviewers thus positioned European sophistication as a hindrance to *Madame La Presidente* once it was introduced to larger film audiences. The only exhibitor report to survive points to the audience being insulted by the film: “I see no excuse for inflicting such pictures on the public. It should be rejected by all exhibitors.”¹⁹⁷

Here is a brief synopsis of the film:

The film’s first reel takes place in the home of Augustin Galipaux (Herbert Standing), head of the magistrates. Intertitles proclaim that Galipaux “boasts a spotless reputation.” He plays cards with three magistrates, who appear bored and asleep during this encounter. Despite their membership to the ‘morals’ cabinet, these magistrates sneak out to a cabaret in the second reel. There, these men meet Mlle. Gobette (Held), the “leading lady of the ‘Pet of the Harem’ Company.” She sings seductively, and the men compete for her attention. The next day, Galipaux reads in the newspaper that his subordinates partied with Mlle. Gobette. Furious, he has her thrown out of her hotel. She decides to enact revenge upon him, claiming “he must find me a place to sleep.”

In reel three, the other magistrates help Gobette sneak into Galipaux’s home so that she can embroil him in a scandal. Finding Gobette in his wife’s room, Galipaux is so beguiled that he does not make her leave. By reel four, the young Minister of Justice, Galipaux’s boss, arrives at Galipaux’s home. For mischief, Gobette introduces herself as Galipaux’s wife. The Minister and Gobette form an immediate attraction, seducing one another later that night while the household sleeps. The Minister initially feels a guilty about this sexual encounter since he believes her to be Galipaux’s wife.

In reel five, Mlle. Gobette visits the Minister at his office the following day. He grants Galipaux a promotion so the woman he believes to be Galipaux’s wife can be near him in Paris. The Minister gets so flirtatious that he accidentally rips open Gobette’s dress. Meanwhile, the real Mrs. Galipaux arrives at the ministry. Assuming she is a servant, the Minister pays Mrs. Galipaux to borrow her clothes for Gobette. Mrs. Galipaux reluctantly strips, and the minister’s underlings are horrified by the various half-dressed women running about his offices. Eventually, Galipaux arrives and sorts out the confusion. Gobette remarks that she will miss having a position in government as ‘Madame La Presidente.’ Once the Minister realizes Mlle. Gobette was simply posing as the Magistrate’s wife, he asks her to marry him and become ‘Madame Minister of Justice’ instead. She accepts, now engaged to one of the most powerful figures in French government.

Watching *Madame La Presidente* brings many of the critic’s comments to fruition, though the film offers much to interest modern viewers. The pacing is extremely gradual. The entire first reel shows a strong interest in establishing each character’s personality, even if they do not factor significantly into the rest of the picture. With an iris surrounding each magistrate, the camera pans from one to the other as they each lose at whisk or demonstrate boredom. As one nods off, there is a cut to another magistrate nudging him awake. Characterized as a ‘fuss pot,’ Mrs. Galipaux attempts to walk out of the door but then cannot resist rubbing a spot off of a dish before leaving. Much of this humor is conveyed through intertitles. Of Mrs. Galipaux, one notes “her ambition is

her husband's advancement; her hobby, spotless metal ware." We do not see Mlle. Gobette, the star attraction, until the second reel. Much of this reel establishes her sexual disruptiveness as opposed to forwarding the narrative. Gobette walks into the cabaret and sits alone at a table. The magistrates ogle her, and she spots them out of the corner of her eye. She picks up a rose and starts caressing her mouth with it, eventually nibbling on the end of it. The men slowly turn and look over in unison. She glances away from them and chuckles to herself, amused at how easily she won their attention. Each magistrate sends over a note pretending they know her from another social event, with inquiries such as, "Surely you have not forgotten? Did you not christen me 'Little Gumdrop'?" Rolling her eyes, she puts her hand to her forehead. Another magistrate sends over a similar note, again providing a scene structure of repetition as opposed to progression. She invites all three men to sit down with her, and several long shots show Gobette drinking and chatting with them. She then gets up to sing a number at the piano while looking towards the camera in medium close up with flirtatious sideways looks and upturned eyes. Thus, the first two reels illustrate character through subtle gestures and group staging, but do not advance the central, farcical situation of Gobette pretending to be Galipaux's wife. This pacing supports contemporaneous complaints about a lack of action. The observation that the only laughs stemmed from intertitles is also borne out. As seen above, verbal humor plays a prominent role in the film, with much of it coming from Gobette's racy lines in which she points out hypocrisy or evinces few ethics. After Galipaux kicks her out of her hotel, she characteristically quips, "Brace up, boys, when I get through with Galipaux, there won't be another reform magistrate in this village for a hundred years."

Mlle. Gobette makes for a fascinating character, resembling the sauntering leads later played by Mae West. Though modern audiences might enjoy Gobette immensely, she sharply contrasts

from the female performers that would achieve longer lasting popularity in feature comedies of the 1910s. Given Held's curvaceous maturity, Gobette does not convey childlike innocence or softened sexuality. The character struts her hips and makes direct eye contact with the men around her. The intertitles also clarify Gobette's intentions as selfish and perhaps 'immoral': she purposefully wants to get the magistrate in trouble and to seduce every man she meets. When Galipaux finds Gobette in his wife's bedroom, she blackmails him into letting her stay. She warns, "Have a little regard for your reputation." She enjoys sexually provoking him despite his married status. As Galipaux attempts to kick her out, she slides her nightgown slightly off her shoulder. She throws his organized papers onto the floor in order to rouse his passions, declaring, "Come on, give me a nighty-night kiss before I go to bed." He hesitates, and she motions him over with her finger. She forcefully grabs his shoulders, yanks him towards her and kisses him on the forehead. He smiles in spite of himself, admitting, "I'm afraid I'm beginning to like it."



Publicity still from *Madame La Presidente* with Gobette in her nightgown (*Motography*, 2/19/1916, 419)

Gobette's audacious allure continues to prove irresistible once the Minister arrives. Advertisements referred to an 'infamous' candle scene'¹⁹⁸ in which Gobette seduces the Minister. Believing her to be Galipaux's wife, the Minister later encounters Gobette in Galipaux's parlor after everyone else has gone to bed. Despite posing as Galipaux's wife, Gobette displays no qualms about seducing the younger minister. The scene has almost no intertitles, and the interaction is

largely sustained through gestures and eye contact. Gobette struts away from the Minister while he carefully watches her. As he glances away, she blows out her candle and asks to borrow his candle's light. Coming over, she seductively leans into the Minister as she lights her candle with his. He turns towards the audience and puts his hand to his head to show his helplessness in resisting her. As she walks away, he purposefully blows out his candle so that she will come back and provide him with her light. This flirtation continues back and forth, until the two stare at one another and blow out their candles simultaneously, resulting in a black screen. The film thus uses visual humor to illustrate Gobette's sexual allure, but it relies on physical flirtations that are less elaborate than the sight gags usually associated with Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin or other comedians from the silent era. That subtlety becomes difficult to appreciate in the film's MLS and LS shot scales.

Gobette is far from the only character to demonstrate atypical mores for 1910s American culture. Other characters misbehave just as thoroughly as those in many comedy shorts or broad comedian vehicles. The film portrays Galipaux as a hypocrite who easily falls for Gobette when placed alone with her for a few moments. The Minister also reveals his hypocrisy. He visits Galipaux's apartment to tell him, "I am determined to make a clean sweep of all those whose moral character is open to suspicion." Once the Minister meets Gobette, however, he pursues her despite believing her to be Galipaux's wife. Rather than nobly repressing those feelings, the Minister offers Galipaux a promotion so that the couple will move to where the Minister can more easily conduct an affair with Galipaux's wife. Others in the film are similarly dominated by ill will or selfish intentions. The magistrates sneak Gobette into their boss' bedroom to help her set him up for scandal. Workers in the Minister's office also desire to see him fall, with several attempting to blackmail him over the half-dressed women in his office. One worker gleefully tells Galipaux

about the Minister, “Pardon Monsieur, do you know that Cyprian Gaudet is in there making love to your wife?” The film’s ending especially challenged the feature market’s increasing emphasis on ‘respectability.’ Rather than being punished for her seduction of Galipaux, Gobette is rewarded by marrying a man in an exalted political position. Galipaux and the Minister also end the film in advantageous positions despite their unscrupulous pursuit of Gobette. Galipaux receives a promotion due to the Minister’s attempt to seduce Gobette, and the Minister’s behavior will go unpunished since he can blackmail Galipaux for lying about Gobette being his wife. Thus, central characters in this film are motivated either by uncontrollable lust or self-preservation but carry on without consequence.

Madame La Presidente provides points of interest for modern viewers. The film laid groundwork for Ernst Lubitsch’s subtle communications in his 1920s marital comedies, while Gobette’s sexual sophistication and unapologetic wisecracks anticipate Mae West and later risqué comediennes. The cultural context of the film’s release, however, discouraged its success. The film illustrates producers’ struggles with pacing and plotting in high class efforts, as well as the ways in which ‘sophisticated’ fare conflicted with the industry’s calls for sympathetic leading men and women in light features. The drama could allow for a ‘vamp’ in a rise and fall narrative arc. A ‘comedienne of vampire type,’ as Held’s character was described in one review,¹⁹⁹ presented an ethical concern through her playful treatment and happy ending.

Conclusion

Though film producers hoped adapting plays would justify comedy’s expansion into features, multiple types of legitimate humor encountered critical and financial woes. While these adaptations were in keeping with feature producers’ ambitions to move ‘upmarket,’ they faced issues of screen compatibility. These comedies also conflicted with the film industry’s increasing

emphasis on youthful, likable main characters and middle-class morality. The legitimate variants that failed either did not hold strong ties to female audiences or did not exhibit enough middlebrow appeal—elements that would both prove crucial for feature comedies. Not all plays were created equal in their compatibility with the film medium or its increasingly diverse audiences. Rather than the transition prompting a simplistic move towards ‘higher class’ humor, producers found that higher class material did not always result in a successful feature comedy.

As we have seen in Chapters Two and Three, producers initially adopted a wide array of theatrical performers and shows for comedy features. The hurdles faced by multiple forms of stage humor reflected both the industry’s capabilities and pre-existing cultural attitudes. The storytelling capacities of film producers in the mid-1910s partially accounted for which comedies floundered in features. Feature comedies often struggled with ‘plotting,’ either by having too little of it or experiencing difficulty in expressing it— complaints made for lower and higher humor respectively. Conveying the delivery and verbal humor of stage properties proved challenging for low, middle and highbrow forms. In addition to these stylistic struggles, producers precariously navigated a market which attempted to lure higher class and female patrons but also strove for mass appeal that would render the feature both respectable and profitable. The feature’s growing reliance on youthful and appealing stars for cross-class, feminine consumers presented a hindrance for broad comedians, legitimate farce and high-class comedy. These types of stage humor also strayed from industry and audience concerns over clean, ‘sympathetic’ laughter’ for middlebrow, feminized entertainment. Comedy features, ranging from lowbrow to highbrow, wrestled with the shared problem of how to culturally elevate comedy films while maintaining widespread appeal. Film producers of the mid-1910s struggled with a key question: how *could* one make a successful feature comedy?

¹ These numbers stem from both the AFI Feature Film catalog and then the examination of trade press documentation between 1913 and 1920. Sometimes AFI includes shorts among its feature listings, so this crosschecking was important. The most consistent reportage of feature releases came from *The Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture News*. In some cases, additional information could be gleaned from studio pressbooks for exhibitors (such as the *Vitagraph Bulletin*, *Kalem Kalendar* or *Paramount Press Books*) or producer correspondence and autobiographical commentaries.

² "Observations by Our Man About Town." *The Moving Picture World*. 5/1/1915, 735.

³ "Facts and Comments." *The Moving Picture World*. April 10, 1915, 207.

⁴ Kristen Anderson Wagner. "Pie Queens and Virtuous Vamps: The Funny Women of the Silent Screen." *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 52.

⁵ See Appendix II.

⁶ For instance, Tom Moore remade *Officer 666* in 1920, but this version still received mild reviews like "titles earn most of the laughs" (J.S. Dickerson. 11/13/1920, 3811) or exhibitor comments like "Tom Moore has made far better pictures than this." (*Exhibitor's Herald*. 7/16/1921, 66).

⁷ See Jessica Milner Davis' *Farce*. (London: Routledge, 1978), 6.

⁸ Milner Davis, 19-20.

⁹ See Jeffrey Huberman's *Late Victorian Farce*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986) and Michael R. Booth's "Comedy and Farce" chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. Ed. Kerry Powell. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129-144.

¹⁰ See Huberman, 39-66.

¹¹ Huberman, 55.

¹² "Over Night." *The Theatre*. Jan, 1911, xi.

¹³ 'Stop Thief,' Clever Farce, Coming to the Tulane." *The Herald*. 1/22/1914, 5.

¹⁴ "Historonic Art Unrequited." *The New York Clipper*. 10/25/1913, 3.

¹⁵ "Officer 666." *The Theatre*. March, 1912, xi.

¹⁶ "One of the Best Farces Ever Seen Here is 'Stop Thief!'" *The Tacoma Times*. 10/25/1913, 3.

¹⁷ "Amusemenets." *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*. 11/18/1897, 5.

¹⁸ "Opening of Opera Season Overshadows Broadway Plays." *El Paso Herald*. 11/16/1912, 11.

¹⁹ "The Galloper." *The Theatre*. March, 1906, xiii-xvi.

²⁰ "Officer 666." *Goodwin's Weekly: A Thinking Paper for Thinking People*. 9/7/1912, 11.

²¹ "Much that is Funny in this New Farce." *The New York Times*. 8/30/1912, 9.

²² "Officer 666." *The Theatre*. March, 1912, xi.

²³ “Sleeping Car Fun in ‘Excuse Me.’” *The New York Times*. 2/14/1911, 8.

²⁴ “Columbia—Raymond Hitchcock in ‘The Galloper.’” *The Washington Times*. 10/28/1906, 2.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lynde Denig. “Are You a Mason?” *The Moving Picture World*. 4/3/1915, 70.

²⁷ “The Man from Mexico.” *The New York Clipper*. 11/14/1914, 13.

²⁸ The mismatched couple became a trope in romantic comedies that accorded better with the star system in features as well. However, those tended to focus on one couple and their process of falling in love. These group farces did not illustrate relationship change and prioritized the physical maneuvers and complications over one couple’s shifting dynamic.

²⁹ James S. McQuade. “Officer 666.” *The Moving Picture World*. 1/2/1915, 53.

³⁰ “Famous Players to Present Edward Abeles in ‘The Million.’” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/21/1911, 1093.

³¹ Harvey F. Thew. “Over Night.” *Motion Picture News*. 12/25/1915, 120.

³² Wynn. “Are You a Mason?” *Variety*. 3/26/1915, 24.

³³ Letter from J.A. Berst to George Kleine. 6/20/1914. Box 42, Folder: Officer 666. George Kleine Papers. Library of Congress. Washington D.C.

³⁴ Peter Milne. “Officer 666.” *Motion Picture News*. 1/2/1915, 46.

³⁵ “Stop Thief!” *Variety*. 2/12/1915, 23.

³⁶ “‘Officer 666’ Farce of Many Surprises.” *Variety*. 1/30/1912, 7.

³⁷ “Author Du Souchet.” *Iowa State Bystander*. 6/11/1897, 4.

³⁸ “Letter from J.A. Berst to George Kleine.” 6/20/1914. Box 42. Folder: Officer 666. George Kleine Papers. Library of Congress. Washington D.C.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Stop Thief!” *Variety*. 2/12/1915, 23.

⁴¹ Lynde Denig. “Little Miss Brown.” *The Moving Picture World*. 6/12/1915, 1790.

⁴² “Office 666.” *Variety*. 12/19/1914. 26.

⁴³ Sime. “Over Night.” *Variety*. 12/31/1915, 24.

⁴⁴ “The Red Widow.” *Variety*. 9/9/1911, 18.

⁴⁵ For instance, *The Moving Picture World* expressed pleasant surprise that the “famous farce readily lends itself to screen adaptation,” failing to mention that the play had already been adapted onto film (Mary Kelly. “Officer 666.” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/6/1920, 112).

⁴⁶ E. Wetheimer to George Kleine. 7/22/1916. Cartoons and Comedies Folder. Box 5. George Kleine Papers. Library of Congress. Washington D.C.

⁴⁷ Letter from George Kleine. 4/29/1925. Box 8. George Kleine Papers. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴⁸ Telephone Conversation Transcript-J. Searle Dawley and Henry Irving Dodge. Page 11. J. Searle Dawley Papers. Book One, Folder 18. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA.

⁴⁹ "On the Quiet." *The Film Daily*. 8/18/1918, no page number.

⁵⁰ See exhibitor comment for *The Man from Mexico* in "What the Picture Did for Me." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 6/28/1919, 62.

⁵¹ See exhibitor comment for "The Red Widow" in "What the Picture Did for Me." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 8/10/1918, 56.

⁵² "Exhibitors Box Office Reports." *Motion Picture News*. 11/2/1918, 2765.

⁵³ "'The Dictator' Scores." *The New York Times*. 4/5/1904, 3.

⁵⁴ This comes from a review for the musical adaptation of the legitimate fare "What Happened to Jones." "The Girl and the Drummer" *Variety*. 9/17/1910, 18.

⁵⁵ See Ethan Mordden's *The American Theatre*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 27, and Sherry Engle's "New Women Dramatists in American Theater, 1890-1920: Martha Morton and Madeleine Lucette Ryley." PhD Dissertation. The University of Texas at Austin. 1996, 10.

⁵⁶ Reviews in women's publications usually were more dismissive than newspapers like *The New York Times*. See the review for *The Man from Mexico* in "The Flickering White Lights." *The Green Book Magazine*. July, 1909, 197, or for *Stop Thief* in "Channing Pollock's Review. *The Green Book Magazine*. March, 1913, 432.

⁵⁷ "Willie Collier in Congenial Role at the Manhattan Theatre." *The New York Times*. 9/3/1899, 7.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See footnote 53.

⁶¹ "Historonic Art Unrequited." *The New York Clipper*. 10/25/1913, 3.

⁶² "Sleeping Car Fun in 'Excuse Me.'" *The New York Times*. 2/14/1911, 8.

⁶³ "Stop Thief!" *The Theatre*. Jan, 1913, xi.

⁶⁴ Peter Milne. "Officer 666." *Motion Picture News*. 1/2/1915, 46.

⁶⁵ Lynde Denig. "Excuse Me." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/8/1916, 253.

⁶⁶ Lynde Denig. "What Happened to Jones." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/27/1915, 1914.

⁶⁷ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Father and Son." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/5/1916, 942.

⁶⁸ "The Theater." *The Daily Missoulian*. 11/22/1914, 2.

⁶⁹ "Laughs Aplenty in Bijou Bill of Present Week." *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. 4/10/1915, 10.

⁷⁰ "The Smugglers." *Bryan Daily Eagle and Pilot*. 9/29/1916, 5.

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- ⁷¹ 'Smugglers' is Rich in Comedy." *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. 12/14/1916, 8.
- ⁷² "Little Miss Brown." *The Theatre*. October, 1912. xi-xii.
- ⁷³ "Little Miss Brown at Grand Tonight." *Carson City Daily Appeal*. 10/12/1915, 4.
- ⁷⁴ "The Flickering of White Lights." *The Green Book Magazine*. July, 1909, 197.
- ⁷⁵ Tarleton Winchester. What's What—and Why." *Motion Picture Magazine*. 4/29/1915, 126.
- ⁷⁶ Walter Anthony. "A Bright Interview." *The San Francisco Call*. 9/22/1912, 31.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ "Miss George Washington." *The New York Clipper*. 11/22/1916, 34.
- ⁷⁹ Huberman, 55.
- ⁸⁰ "Letter from Kleine to J.A. Berst." 3/18/1916. Box 42. George Kleine Papers. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.
- ⁸¹ "Forbes's New Play Acted at Criterion." *The New York Times*. 8/16/1910, 7.
- ⁸² "The Commuters." *The Theatre*. Sept, 1910. XV.
- ⁸³ "The Commuters." *The Theatre*. Sept, 1910. XV.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ "Forbes's New Play Acted at Criterion." *The New York Times*. 8/16/1910, 7.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ "Kleine Will Soon Make Important Announcements; Hints at New Type of Comedies Now Under Way." *Motion Picture News*. 7/17/1915, 76.
- ⁹⁰ "Stop Thief!" *The Moving Picture World*. 2/20/1915. 1123.
- ⁹¹ See *Variety* reviews for "Officer 666" ("Office 666." *Variety*. 12/19/1914. 26) or "Stop Thief." ("Stop Thief!" *Variety*. 2/12/1915, 23).
- ⁹² "Letter to George Kleine from E. Wetheimer." 7/22/1916. George Kleine Papers. Cartoons and Comedies Folder. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.
- ⁹³ "Amusements." *Grand Fork Daily Herald*. 6/14/1915, 2.
- ⁹⁴ "What's Wrong with the Film Business?" 12/20/1917. Box 4. George Kleine Papers. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C. In this piece, Kleine wants lower salaries to be paid for stars, less star advertising and more attention to story properties. This was a losing battle for Kleine.
- ⁹⁵ Advertisements revealed uncertainty about who to play up and did not foreground Irene Fenwick consistently. For instance, some advertisements stress the story and list all the actors' names in small font (*The Moving Picture World*).

5/15/1915, 1036-1037) while others have full page spreads picturing Charles Judels' character Sammy instead of Fenwick (*Pictures and the Picturegoer*. 2/12/1916, 464).

⁹⁶ I found no adaptations of these kinds of ensemble, supposedly boyish American farce plays in 1917 or 1918, but we do see the reappearance of several titles discussed here in 1920. If we see a play adaptation with the 'complications' of a farce structure in the late teens, they usually foreground young people who mean well and their romances, such as Rudolph Valentino and Carmel Meyers' *All Night* (Universal, 1919).

⁹⁷ See Appendix II.

⁹⁸ These oppositions match work done on 'comedies of manners,' 'satire' and French farces in secondary literature. For work on 'comedies of manners,' which many of the British plays in this section would likely qualify as, see David L. Hirst's "Comedy of Manners." (London: Routledge, 1979). He defines the 'comedy of manners' as "'the way people behave, the manners they employ in a social context, the chief concerns of the characters are sex and money'" (1). He touches on the 'lack of action' I discuss in this section and the emphasis on verbal wit, noting "the style is distinguished by the refinement of raw emotional expression and action in the subtlety of wit and intrigue" and "actions are unimportant; what matters is the way in which they are performed" (1). He notes the discord with mainstream audience tastes and the form's lack of conventional morality, calling it "an 'anti-romantic form of comedy,' 'immoral and unpleasant'" and observing that "the conventional moral standards are superseded by the criterion of taste" (1) actions are unimportant. Also see Steve Vineberg's *High Comedy in American Movies: Class and Humor from the 1920s to the Present*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

Satire has less specific 'class' associations, but this term typically was used by American critics in the early 1900s as a compliment or suggestion of 'higher purpose' than other comic plays. Scholarship on satire tends to note it could be treated as either too lowbrow or too highbrow for middle-class tastes, but concern over its 'cruelty' or 'anti-sentimentalism' for the middle-classes seems consistent. See Matthew J. Kinservik's *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century Stage*. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), in which he notes how satires in 1700s brought about the ire of censors, which encouraged a shift towards the production 'sympathetic satires' more appropriate for the middle-classes (23). Jonathan Greenberg also mentions how "middle-class sensibility was moving away from the harsh, punitive laughter associated with Augustan satire" in *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 192.

For discussions of French farces being treated as antithetical to middle-class tastes, see earlier references in my footnotes to Huberman and Booth.

⁹⁹ "The Spokane." *The Spokane Press*. 10/20/1906, 3.

¹⁰⁰ 'Mr. Pipp' a Hit." *Perth Amboy Evening News*. 3/29/1905, 7.

¹⁰¹ "Fanny Ward Sumptuously Gowned as Madam President." *Vanity Fair*. November, 1913, 30.

¹⁰² "W.H Crane's Success." *Lewiston Evening Teller*. 5/14/1908, 6.

¹⁰³ "Wallack's Theatre." *The New York Times*. 10/20/1885, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Paris Plays and Players: An Old Work Revived and Two New Ones Ready." *The New York Times*. 9/8/1889, 6.

¹⁰⁵ "Drama." *Life*. 3/19/1908, 300.

¹⁰⁶ "The Current Plays." *The Theatre*. March, 1905, 60.

¹⁰⁷ "Green Stockings." *The Theatre*. July 1911, 148-149.

¹⁰⁸ The Playgoer." *New-York Tribune*. 10/15/1911, 6.

¹⁰⁹ "A Busy Week in the Theatres." *The Sun*. 4/12/1914, 9.

¹¹⁰ Mus in Urbe. "Cleopatre—Divorcons." *The Musical World*. 11/1/1890, 870-871.

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- ¹¹¹ “Jane.” *The Saturday Review*. 12/27/1890, 734.
- ¹¹² “The Playgoer.” *New-York Tribune*. 10/15/1911, 6.
- ¹¹³ “Digby Bell in ‘The Education of Mr. Pipp.’” *The Evening Statesman*. 10/15/1906, 4.
- ¹¹⁴ The word ‘satirical’ or ‘brilliant’ satire comes up repeatedly. See reviews for ‘Divorcons’ and ‘School for Scandal’ in “Some Recent Plays Which Have Scored Hits.” *The Theatre*. June, 1910, 178.
- ¹¹⁵ “Digby Bell is Good.” *The Evening Statesman*. 10/19/1906, 4.
- ¹¹⁶ Mus in Urbe. “Cleopatre—Divorcons.” *The Musical World*. 11/1/1890, 870-871.
- ¹¹⁷ “Another Star of Comedy Makes Debut at Strand.” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. 4/25/1915, 33.
- ¹¹⁸ Julia Murdock. “Green Stockings.” *The Washington Times*. 1/9/1912, 9.
- ¹¹⁹ “The Drama.” *New York Tribune*. 9/2/1910, 7.
- ¹²⁰ “Digby Bell in the ‘Education of Mr. Pipp.’” *Bismarck Daily Tribune*. 10/25/1906, 4.
- ¹²¹ W. Stephen Bush. “The Education of Mr. Pipp.” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/28/1914, 1246.
- ¹²² W. Stephen Bush. “Snobs.” *The Moving Picture World*. 4/24/1915, 570.
- ¹²³ Lynde Denig. “Divorcons.” *The Moving Picture World*. 12/4/1915, 1844.
- ¹²⁴ Pete Milne. “The Earl of Pawtucket.” *Motion Picture News*. 7/24/1915, 63.
- ¹²⁵ Fred. “The Earl of Pawtucket.” *Variety*. 7/16/1915, 18.
- ¹²⁶ Harvey F. Thew. “Divorcons.” *Motion Picture News*. 12/18/1915, 86.
- ¹²⁷ “What’s What—and Why.” *Motion Picture Magazine*. February, 1915, 124.
- ¹²⁸ “Observations by Our Man About Town.” *The Moving Picture World*. 5/1/1915, 735.
- ¹²⁹ Epes Winthrop Sargeant. “New Comedy.” *The Moving Picture World*. April 3, 1915, 58.
- ¹³⁰ For instance, Madge Kennedy is praised for her “good looks” and “marked sense of fun” in the farce *Little Miss Brown* (“Much That is Funny in this New Farce.” *The New York Times*. 8/30/1912).
- ¹³¹ “Digby Bell in the ‘Education of Mr. Pipp.’” *Bismarck Daily Tribune*. 10/25/1906, 4.
- ¹³² “Jane.” *The Saturday Review*. 12/27/1890, 734.
- ¹³³ James S. McQuade. “Who’s Who in Society?” *The Moving Picture World*. 4/24/1915, 567.
- ¹³⁴ “Fifth- Avenue Theatre. *The New York Times*. 10/2/1883, 4.
- ¹³⁵ “The Spokane.” *The Spokane Press*. 10/20/1906, 3.
- ¹³⁶ “The Earl of Pawtucket.” *The Richmond Palladium and Sun Telegram*. 8/21/1915, 3.
- ¹³⁷ Lynde Denig. “Jane.” *The Moving Picture World*. 12/11/1915, 2022.

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- ¹³⁸ Harvey F. Thew. "Divorcons." *Motion Picture News*. 12/18/1915, 86.
- ¹³⁹ Fred. "Green Stockings." *Variety*. 1/14/1916, 19.
- ¹⁴⁰ Eds. Kirk Combe and Brian A. Connery. *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, 3-4.
- ¹⁴¹ Jonathan Greenberg. *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 21.
- ¹⁴² Hanford C. Judson. "The School for Scandal." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/19/1914, 1663.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁴ Margaret I. MacDonald. "The Earl of Pawtucket." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/24/1915, 667.
- ¹⁴⁵ James S. McQuade. "Who's Who in Society?" *The Moving Picture World*. 4/24/1915, 567.
- ¹⁴⁶ Julia Murdock. "Green Stockings." *The Washington Times*. 1/9/1912, 9.
- ¹⁴⁷ Lynde Denig. "The Upstart." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/12/1916, 971.
- ¹⁴⁸ Hanford C. Judson. "The Purple Lady." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/1/1916, 100.
- ¹⁴⁹ See "The Upstart." *The Theatre*. October, 1910, 102 for discussions of 'Shavian' humor as daring. Also see footnote 95 for secondary literature concerning 'high humor' and its moral conflicts with middle-class audiences and taste arbiters.
- ¹⁵⁰ Hanford C. Judson. "The School for Scandal." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/19/1914, 1663.
- ¹⁵¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁵² "The Upstart." *The Theatre*. October, 1910, 102.
- ¹⁵³ "Not a Knee Bent in a Vista of Straightened Legs." *Goodwin's Weekly: A Thinking Paper for Thinking People*. 9/17/1910, 6.
- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁵ Huberman, 39-66.
- ¹⁵⁶ "Paris Plays and Players: An Old Work Revived and Two New Ones Ready." *The New York Times*. 9/8/1889, 6.
- ¹⁵⁷ "Fifth- Avenue Theatre. *The New York Times*. 10/2/1883, 4.
- ¹⁵⁸ "English's 'The Purple Lady.'" *The Indianapolis Journal*. 9/9/1899, 3.
- ¹⁵⁹ "Ralph Herz is Added to the Metro Stars." *Bisbee Daily Review*. 10/18/1916, 2.
- ¹⁶⁰ "Paris Plays and Players: An Old Work Revived and Two New Ones Ready." *The New York Times*. 9/8/1889, 6.
- ¹⁶¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁶² "Letter to George Kleine from E. Wetheimer." 7/22/1916. George Kleine Papers. Cartoons and Comedies Folder. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

¹⁶³ “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 7/12/1919, 63.

¹⁶⁴ Tom Hamlin. “The Uplifters.” *Motion Picture News*. 7/12/1919, 595.

¹⁶⁵ “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 8/23/1919, 66.

¹⁶⁶ “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 6/26/1920, 91.

¹⁶⁷ George Jean Nathan. “About a Song-and-Dance Man. *Variety*. 10/22/1910, 6.

¹⁶⁸ An article in the late teens noted that ‘highbrows’ or intellectuals often did enjoy a baseball game or Chaplin film just as much as ‘lowbrow’ viewers, and claimed all audiences wanted “clean, real entertainment, we are all common people.” (“Highbrow and Lowbrow.” *Motography*. 4/27/1918, 803).

¹⁶⁹ For instance, some articles in the trade press insisted that “it is the rich people who like the smut.” Rev. Herbert A. Jump. “The Children’s Leisure Hour.” *Motography*. 3/1915, 115-117, 16.

¹⁷⁰ Harry Carr. “What About Screen Comedy—Tomorrow?” *Photoplay*. October, 1918. 117.

¹⁷¹ Frances Taylor Patterson. *Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 137.

¹⁷² Jolo. “Madam President.” *Variety*. 9/19/1913, 22.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ “Madam President.” *The Theatre*. Nov, 1913, xiv.

¹⁷⁵ Jolo. “Madam President.” *Variety*. 9/19/1913, 22.

¹⁷⁶ “Madam President.” *The Theatre*. Nov, 1913, xiv.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Jolo. “Madam President.” *Variety*. 9/19/1913, 22.

¹⁸⁰ See Marion E. Wilson’s analysis of Florenz Ziegfeld’s efforts to target upper middle-class men with his shows. (“‘Such Fantasy, Such Harlequinade’: Ziegfeld, Class and Cultural Hierarchy.” PhD Dissertation. The City University of New York. 2005). She specifies the –upper-middle class professionals as the target audience on page 12, but class is relevant throughout her entire project.

¹⁸¹ “Miss Innocence.” *The Theatre*. Jan, 1909, xiii.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ “Anna Held at Isis in Morosco Play.” *Evening Capital News*. 3/12/1916, 11.

¹⁸⁴ “Anna Held Has Fine Wardrobe.” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. 6/17/1916, 7.

¹⁸⁵ “Anna Held at Isis Today.” *The Pensacola Journal*. 4/17/1916, 6.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ “Anna Held in ‘Mme La Presidente.’” *Carson City Daily Appeal*. 9/15/1916, 1.

¹⁸⁸ Hanford C. Judson. "Madame La Presidente." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/19/1916, 1149.

¹⁸⁹ "Madame La Presidente." *The New York Clipper*. 2/26/1916, 35.

¹⁹⁰ Fred. "Madame La Presidente." *Variety*. 2/19/1916, 22.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Thomas C. Kennedy. "Madame La Presidente." *Motography*. 2/19/1916, 419-420.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Fred. "Madame La Presidente." *Variety*. 2/19/1916, 22.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas C. Kennedy. "Madame La Presidente." *Motography*. 2/19/1916, 419-420.

¹⁹⁶ Hanford C. Judson. "Madame La Presidente." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/19/1916, 1149.

¹⁹⁷ "What the Picture Did for Me." *Motography*. 9/8/1917, 488.

¹⁹⁸ Ad. *The Pensacola Journal*. 4/17/1916, 6.

¹⁹⁹ J.C. Jessen. "Madame La Presidente." *Motion Picture News*. 2/19/1916, 1024.

Chapter Four- The Ascent of Affirmative Comedy

By the end of the 1910s, nation-wide exhibitor surveys attested to the popularity of comedy features at the box office.¹ Such opinions illustrated a radical change in disposition. Back in 1916, an exhibitor had lamented to George Kleine that “four reel comedies are not wanted. One and two reelers only.”² In 1918, however, after receiving feedback from hundreds of theaters, *Motography* pronounced that patrons didn’t want “cheap two-reel so-called comedy subjects” but preferred comedies “with a pleasing climax, of five to seven reels.”³ The report elevated feature comedies above other types of features as well, saying “most of the exhibitors mention them specifically as the leaders in desirability.”⁴ In accord with this survey finding, weekly round ups of exhibitors’ incidental comments frequently included claims about comedy features as being ‘the thing’ or ‘the kind the public likes.’⁵

What factors contributed to feature-length comedy’s improved status by the end of the 1910s? How did the industry’s opinion of feature comedies evolve from seeing them as risky propositions to business imperatives? The reversal in feature comedy’s fortunes hardly stemmed from the sudden discovery of a new formula. The industry in the mid-1910s had experimented with numerous strategies for the feature comedy simultaneously. As we’ve seen, some of these were less successful, like those showcasing broad comedians or high-class humor. At the same time, producers released more successful iterations that illustrated the approach they came to rely upon more and more by the end of the decade. By 1917, producers increasingly gravitated towards this approach, which I will be calling *affirmative comedy*.

While scholars have used other terms to describe how the feature transition affected film humor, prior chapters noted how these either represent failed strategies (situation and refined

comedy) or remain too broad to adequately distinguish between what did and did not succeed (polite comedy). The label *affirmative comedy* seeks to better encapsulate several trends across feature comedies by the late 1910s. The first was a shift towards youthful, appealing stars. By ‘appealing,’ I mean actors considered physically attractive who played characters with amiable and vivacious personalities (and often projected those qualities in offscreen publicity). Some comedians in shorts could exhibit these qualities as well, but as we saw in Chapter One, this was less often a major component of their personae. The second trend was a movement towards so-called ‘sympathetic humor.’ Reviews and publicity increasingly stressed the notion of kind laughter, where the audience laughed with, instead of at, the characters. The films usually showed leads having a good time, illustrating ingenuity or making mistakes that the audience could supposedly relate to on some level. This strategy differed from many comedy shorts, which used a character’s unattractiveness, personality flaws or ineptitude for laughs. Sympathetic humor also emphasized wholesome conduct in the films. These comedies largely did not show character behavior that would raise the ire of censors. Critics and producers believed that the audience could remain sympathetic to the characters in feature comedies due to the wholesome nature of their actions. Finally, feature comedies tended towards plots with upward trajectories of well-being. Narratives emphasized wish-fulfillment, with characters ending up in a better place financially, morally or romantically than where they began. The films highlighted reward as opposed to failure.

Affirmative comedies can be seen as appropriate for classifying these films in multiple respects. Critics often used the word ‘affirms’ or other language that suggested an encouraging view of society. Phrases such as “joy of living comedies” and “plays dealing with the more cheerful aspects of life” pop up with regularity.⁶ Through their appealing leading men and women, these films confirmed social notions of desirable qualities and behaviors. The films also reinforced

modes of congenial laughter that critics advocated as true American humor. In addition, the plots of the films further supported the viewer's faith in American life. The lead was not simply reconciled with or forced to acquiesce to society's norms, but rather experienced a world of possibility and social mobility. This affirmative coloration fit well with producer's aspirations for the comedy feature. As a main attraction anchoring film programs, producers became concerned that features attain cross-class popularity. In addition, the industry believed these features would please female patrons who producers and exhibitors increasingly recognized as essential to financial success. With feature comedies, the industry 'affirmed' the importance of multiple sectors of the general public as producers strove to find security at the box office.

I am not the first scholar to use the term *affirmative comedy*. The term appears briefly in Henry Jenkins' typology of tamer comedy categories that he contrasts from *anarchic comedies* in the early sound period.⁷ I expand his consideration of this term in a few respects. As opposed to anarchic comedy, Jenkins proposes that affirmative comedy better matches Steve Seidman and Frank Krutnik's discussions of 'comedian comedy,' where a comic character eventually moves from dysfunctional eccentricity towards social integration.⁸ He uses the films of vaudeville comedian Joe E. Brown as examples. In contrast, the films I discuss in this chapter usually starred leading men and women who do not match Jenkins' characterization of comedians like Brown as 'ill-adjusted'.⁹ Rather, they were typically considered attractive examples of youth despite any temporary mistakes they made. The affirmative features I discuss also do not typically acknowledge extrafictional elements, like the comic's offscreen persona or famous routines, that Seidman proposes as essential to comedian comedy.¹⁰ Therefore my chapter treats affirmative comedy as a larger approach that often incorporates conventionally attractive men and women, and thus, cannot fit neatly under this notion of comedian comedy. I also differ from Jenkins'

portrayal of affirmative comedies as ‘social integration’ where the comic protagonist works through their eccentricities to be accepted by the social order. This construction frames the comic protagonist as ‘selling out’ to normativity, granting this type of comedy a solely repressive function. Jenkins is right to point out that alongside anarchic forms, other strains of comedy reconcile characters with norms of their community. However, the feature comedies characterized here as affirmative do not fit a single ideological agenda. Some films would fit the integration idea by showing youths reconciling with their parents’ point of view, but others show young people successfully challenging conventions and constraints. Thus, some characters transform their environment to their liking as opposed to being forced to conform. The social optimism in the comedy features I call affirmative does not necessarily result from reining in the lead. Instead, the films allowed for various iterations of upbeat, wish-fulfillment that promoted the idea of ‘possibility’ in American life.

This chapter aims to better our understanding of how feature comedies evolved over the decade. However, prominent strategies for comedy features cannot be discussed without clarifying the industry’s own labeling shifts across the 1910s. The industry frequently used the term *comedy drama* for feature-length comedies, so some explanation of this terminology is called for. Then I will delineate themes in the discourse surrounding comedy features to show how the films trended towards an affirmative mode.¹¹ The chapter will end by surveying how this strategy appeared to succeed in attracting the cross-class, female patrons the industry sought, as well as the industry’s own disappointment that the films crafted for women hadn’t resulted in artistic ‘legitimation.’

Feature Comedies and Limitations of Industry Labeling

Before addressing notable motifs in the rhetoric around comedy features, it is crucial to explain a point of potential confusion for researchers. The term *affirmative comedy* did not appear in the 1910s trade press, despite reviewers and columnists using word choices that correlated with this idea of an optimistic worldview. Instead, the industry called most features containing humor *comedy dramas*. It would be difficult to assess comedy at the feature level without addressing this label and how the classification differed from current use. For numerous quotes in this chapter, exhibitors and trade columnists reference *comedy drama* when they are in fact discussing features that reviewers characterized as light comedies, action comedies or even farces. Rick Altman notes the fluidity of genre classifications in the film industry,¹² and comedy features in the 1910s experienced flexible labeling as the industry determined the most lucrative marketing strategy. Labeling inconsistencies may explain why scholars currently underplay the role comedy features played in this decade, even to the point of claiming comedy ‘features’ did not exist.¹³ Sometimes *comedy drama* described actual dramedies, but the trade press more typically applied it to films called ‘comedies’ in the actual reviews. ‘Light comedy’ frequently appeared as a sub-descriptor for these films, but did not mean ‘refined’ humor in the way some scholars use the phrase now.¹⁴ Instead, critics used the phrase to denote commercially accessible comedies with ‘light,’ cheerful perspectives.¹⁵ To avoid confusion with present day conceptions of ‘light comedy,’ I rely on the concept of affirmative comedy instead to better capture the qualities of these features. By the end of the 1910s, *comedy dramas* referred to feature-length comedies that would largely fit the affirmative model set forth in this chapter.

Comedy drama preexisted the feature film as an entertainment classification for both theatrical productions and film shorts. Theatrical critics applied the term to a range of productions— from straight dramas with moments of comic relief to plays that had their humor emphasized as the most

salient component.¹⁶ Photoplay manuals and trade columns by the early 1910s, however, suggested that comedy dramas more consistently represented a ‘comedy’ classification for films. In 1911, *Moving Picture News* brought up the term when criticizing the state of film comedy. The column listed “old slap stick, the chase, the type represented by Foolshead and Max are others, and then there is the comedy drama.”¹⁷ The anonymous author critiqued slapstick for “a great deal of smashing of furniture” but also noted that non-slapstick shorts suffered from unsympathetic characters, complaining, “they are both unreasonable and foolish.”¹⁸ In contrast, the author argued that “in comedy dramas, the effect is beneficial” and expressed hope that while the form was currently rare in shorts, “gradually audiences are being educated up to the higher and more enjoyable forms of humor.”¹⁹ Thus, the industry used the term to separate narratively-driven or gentle comedy shorts from others that emphasized violence or buffoonish behaviors. Comedy drama similarly appeared under ‘comedy’ in *Writing the Photoplay* (1913). The photoplay manual devoted a whole chapter to straight comedy and farce, only briefly mentioning comedy drama as an additional category. The few sentences devoted to it specified “there is a strict regard for dramatic values in handling the different scenes...but in which the comedy element remains comedy from first to last.”²⁰ This characterization seems to equate comedy drama’s ‘dramatic’ components with its storytelling structure as opposed to somber content or less consistent laughs.

Within the film industry, the term comedy drama rarely appeared before the feature transition. Before 1909, trade journals carry no more than 4 references in any year. By 1913, that number expands to 44 individual films.²¹ Exhibitor listings show one odd peak in July of 1912 (25 comedy dramas compared to 83 comedies) but most months averaged 10 or fewer comedy dramas compared to over 100 comedy releases.²² Articles from the period noted that comedy dramas were not very common amongst shorts. The same 1911 article in *Moving Picture News* that had

complained about the state of comedy, while recommending the comedy drama, pointed out its rarity. The column regretfully noted that slapstick was “accounted funny by most audiences” while “comedy dramas are not so numerous.”²³

Though comedy dramas proved rare before the rise of feature distribution, they dramatically increased with the influx of longer comedies. Within the first full year of feature comedies appearing on the market, references to comedy drama within *The Moving Picture World* rose from 44 in 1913 to 318 by 1914.²⁴ When discussing Carlyle Blackwell’s five-reel *The Man Who Could Not Lose* (Alliance, Nov 1914), a reviewer noted, “the picture is a comedy–drama, of which class we have been honored with many of late.”²⁵ Indeed, this film was among a surge of films over four reels to be released in October and November that were labeled comedy dramas.²⁶ The label comedy drama continued to increase over the next several years as the industry produced further feature comedies. By 1917, one receives 495 hits for comedy drama.²⁷ The term’s prominence could at first be assumed to reflect a general gentrification of the industry that might have affected shorts as much as comedy features. However, when one looks at shorts listings from 1914 to 1917, the number of shorts to be called comedy dramas actually decreases. In December of 1914, only five shorts were listed as comedy dramas and by December of 1917 only three shorts had this label.²⁸ Therefore, comedy drama largely referred to humorous films over four reels.

Once feature producers acquired shorts to round out their yearly programs, the term comedy drama became even more interchangeable with the feature-length comedy. In the first few years of comedy features being released, producers attempted to make some distinctions between different types of feature comedies. Romantic comedies garnered the comedy drama label early on, such as *Caprice* (1913) or *An American Citizen* (1914). In contrast, feature comedies prioritizing a male comedian or containing more outrageous plot circumstances initially received

the ‘comedy’ designation, such as *Brewster’s Millions* (1914). Once feature companies released both comedy features and shorts by 1916, however, they re-labeled their humorous features as comedy dramas. The film industry often referred to features as ‘photo-dramas’ to align them with plays from legitimate theater. The decision to label all features ‘dramas’ despite their genre was likely to avoid confusion on programs with comedy shorts. Once distribution companies such as Paramount or Triangle regularly offered comedy shorts (Black Diamond Comedies for Paramount and Keystone Comedies for Triangle), exhibitor listings no longer identified that company’s features as ‘comedies’ on exhibitor listings.²⁹ Only producers that solely provided features in the late 1910s continued to distinguish between their comedic and dramatic features, such as Selznick and Goldwyn.³⁰ Critics made clear, however, that comedy features still thrived under the comedy drama heading. Review after review mentioned that the films adapted ‘famous stage comedies’ or called them ‘light comedies’ and ‘farces.’³¹ Thus, the comedy drama label primarily made clear to exhibitors and audiences that a comedy film was feature-length rather than a short.

In Frances Taylor Patterson’s 1920 book on the art of photoplay writing, *Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights*, she explicitly states that feature comedies acquired the label ‘comedy dramas’ to distinguish them from comedy shorts. She explains:

“Every new art or new invention must build up a nomenclature of its own...In the same way in motion pictures the term ‘comedy-drama’ has come into accepted usage in spite of the fact that it is tautology plain and simple. In the course of the growth of the photoplay it became necessary to distinguish a five reel photoplay based upon comedy of situation from the two reel ‘slapstick’ which had appropriated the word ‘comedy.’ The term will probably remain, for commercial designation, if for nothing else.”³²

Patterson seems to confirm in this passage that the ‘comedy drama’ and ‘feature-length comedy’ were essentially interchangeable by 1920. Even the famous feature comedies of Charles Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, and Buster Keaton were classified as ‘comedy dramas’ at their time of release.³³ For instance, *Exhibitor’s Herald* proclaimed that Harold Lloyd’s *Grandma’s Boy* (Associated

Exhibitors, 1922) was a “comedy drama” because “the comedy predominates throughout, but the theme has a substantial basis.”³⁴

Despite comedy drama being applied to films we would now label ‘comedies,’ the term denoted more than length. The industry used the category to encompass forms of comedy perceived as more realistic, humanist or substantive in their plots or themes. It also referred to comedies seen as artistically superior to broad farce or slapstick. Yet strictly adhering to the industry’s label of comedy drama for analyzing comedy features would prove problematic, as it would imply that ‘pure comedies’ or primarily humorous features did not exist in this period. The industry also deployed the term so indiscriminately as to become unhelpful in tracing tendencies in comedy features. For instance, some features considered ‘slapstick’ or ‘rough and tumble’ in reviews had producers advertising them as ‘comedy dramas,’ such as Mack Sennett’s *Yankee Doodle in Berlin* (Mack Sennett Corp., 1919).³⁵ Thus, I adopt the term *affirmative comedies* to recognize trends that became common amongst the industry’s output of humorous features without painting them all with a comedy drama brush that equated extremely dissimilar productions.

Given the vagueness of this industry labeling, I use the term *affirmative comedy* to identify shared tendencies across popular comic features of this period. Producers increasingly utilized youthful leads, sympathetic laughter and wish-fulfillment plots. In addition to encapsulating the films accurately, the label has the benefit of avoiding industry designations that miss out on these traits’ applicability across formats and time frames. While feature comedies became particularly affiliated with the affirmative approach I describe here, comedy shorts could certainly adopt this mode as well. There were indeed some shorts that starred attractive leads in stories of this nature (some of Gloria Swanson’s shorts could qualify).³⁶ The label could also extend to comedies in other mediums (many legitimate plays incorporated these strategies) or even film comedies across

decades. The label describes a common comic approach across formats and periods, but I believe it most succinctly explains how comedy features became standardized in the film industry. While comedy shorts could employ this mode, the press increasingly differentiated successful comedy dramas from shorts for their use of an affirmative approach that supposedly provided disparate pleasures for film audiences.

Symbols of Youth, Vigor and Progress: Feature Comedies and the Star System

The growth of feature comedy encouraged an intermingling of humor with the star system. Its promotion of appealing leads provided one method of social affirmation through the depiction of pleasing attributes, such as physical or personality desirability. Many scholars recognize the growing prominence of the star system that accompanied feature filmmaking,³⁷ but comedy rarely gets connected to the idea of glamorous stars. Discussions of Keystone or Vitagraph surely mention their comic players, but these analyses stress the studio brands and their respective styles.³⁸ Performers in comedy shorts certainly attained widespread reputations in the 1910s, such as Charles Chaplin or Roscoe Arbuckle. However, these reputations were still in tension with ‘star’ discourse, as the industry framed shorts comedians as eccentric-looking or inferior to leading men and women. The division between ‘film comedy’ and ‘appealing stars’ increasingly gave way as young, physically attractive performers came to dominate feature comedies. In contrast to 76% of comedy shorts containing leads described as physically unattractive and 86.5% with major personality deficiencies before the rise of feature comedy, by 1917, 94% of leads in comedy features were praised for physical or personal appeal in written coverage.³⁹

The first few years of the feature transition presented a variety of comic types and performers. Producers’ attempts to capitalize on popular stage performers initially ranged from broad, ethnic caricatures in Kolb and Dill’s *The Bluff* (Mutual, 1916) to respectable, older character actors like

William H. Crane in *David Harum* (Famous Players, 1915). Gradually, feature comedies largely moved away from grotesque make up or older leads towards youthful and comely stars. Hundreds of comedy features and their leads could be cited to illustrate this shift in rhetoric. Reviews for Billie Burke's *Peggy* (Triangle, 1916) listed her desirable physical attributes and personality traits repeatedly. Peter Milne, reviewer for *Motion Picture News*, called her a 'pert, attractive, pretty and lively.'⁴⁰ Milne went on to stress the camera's obsessive affection for Burke's beauty, remarking, "Miss Burke's head is shown from every angle. There are close-ups, which display her full face, profile, back and intermediate views in something of a monopolistic way."⁴¹ This trend extended to the men. Almost to the point of laughable excess, an advertisement of Goldwyn's Tom Moore declared, "Youth. Manliness. Cheerfulness. Cleanliness. Tom Moore brings you all of these."⁴²

The shift towards enviable leading men and women meant that a largely different set of performers found popularity than those that had established a reputation in comedy shorts. A few performers from comedy shorts transitioned with success when they fit this more romantic model. Douglas Fairbanks certainly fell under the movement towards appealing leads in the affirmative mode, yet he is often treated by scholars as a unique persona as opposed to a larger trend in feature-length comedy.⁴³ By the second half of the 1910s, nearly every studio employed a stable of performers for feature comedies. Certain male leads found fame by mimicking Fairbanks' combination of action-adventure heroism and humor, including George Walsh at Fox, Carlyle Blackwell at World and Wallace Reid at Paramount. Other youthful men found success in comedies that emphasized recognizable American 'types.' Charles Ray, an extremely successful comedic performer in the 1910s, played awkward, rural youths in country comedies. By 1920, Ray was ranked the most popular male lead in the United States, with Fairbanks coming in at number two.⁴⁴ There were also the 'charmners' who often, though not always, appeared in romantic

comedies. Heartthrob Harold Lockwood starred in romantic comedies for Metro in the late 1910s. He was voted the fourth most popular star by readers of *Motion Picture Magazine* at the time of his death from the Spanish Influenza in 1918.⁴⁵ Not far behind Lockwood in sex appeal was Tom Moore. Goldwyn Studios elevated Moore from a reliable co-star for female leads such as Madge Kennedy and Mabel Normand to top billing in features such as *Just for Tonight* (Goldwyn, 1918). Moore slowly built his following, becoming one of the top ten box office performers for 1920 in national popularity contests.⁴⁶



Tom Moore, *Who's Who on the Screen* (1920)

While male leads certainly found success through feature comedies in the 1910s, female performers thrived exponentially from this transition. As noted in Chapter One, women had represented roughly 10% of leads in comedy shorts. Scholars who examine the few comediennes in shorts note the difficulties of balancing society's emphasis on women's physical or moral virtues with broad comedy's dependency upon defects and embarrassment. Kristen Anderson Wagner duly notes in her study on silent comediennes how they either complained about the humiliation they endured onscreen or had the press frame their comic degradation in tragic terms.⁴⁷

Accordingly, the number of female leads grew vastly once the feature moved towards comedy forms promoting physically attractive stars. Women could now dominate humorous narratives without having to ‘sacrifice’ their physical charms.

By 1915, a combination of female performers from theater and film stock companies comprised the leads of nearly 50% of feature comedies (47 films out of 95). By 1918, 68% of feature comedies starred female leads (158 films out of 233 films).⁴⁸ The rise is remarkable, but correlates with general claims during the feature era that female stars were particularly successful. The fan magazine *Film Fun* purported in 1917, “practically all of the highest-priced stars—with few exceptions—are women.”⁴⁹ The large percentage of female leads in these features significantly affected the contents of film comedy, as film producers now had to repeatedly engineer humorous vehicles of length around female characters. Though few production memos survive from the 1910s to document specific directions in studio output, some evidence survives illustrating that producers of feature comedies recognized the need for female stars. In contrast to George Kleine’s more masculine group farces in the mid-1910s, by 1917 Kleine now identified the exigency for a female lead. In a letter to Edison’s distributor, Kleine advised producing future comedies with theatrical star Marie Doro. He urged, “It is increasingly impressed upon us that we must have female stars.”⁵⁰



Enid Bennett in *The Girl Glory* (Triangle, 1917) (Courtesy of Cinémathèque Française)

Whenever exhibitors listed their most successful feature comedies, these tended to have female leads. A 1918 compilation of exhibitor comments in *Motography* largely recommended feature comedies with female leads, with one exhibitor from Ann Arbor noting audiences' pleasure with "pictures such as Madge Kennedy in 'Baby Mine' and 'Nearly Married,' Constance Talmadge in 'Scandal' and 'The Honeymoon,' Mabel Normand in 'Dodging a Million,' [and] Mae Marsh in 'The Cinderella Man.'"⁵¹ By 1920, *The Moving Picture World* published results of a nationwide survey it conducted asking exhibitors which types of films performed best. Its headline underscored its key finding, "Light society comedy starring a woman is voted most popular of all features."⁵² This category beat out all other options, including every other drama and comedy choice. Interestingly, the survey felt the need to gender all types of comedy. Other categories the feature-length light comedy with a woman beat included 'stunt comedy (male star),' and 'slapstick comedy (two reels, male star).'⁵³ There was no female star option for the comedy two-reeler and no male star option listed for feature-length light comedy. Trade discourse evidently linked feature-length, non-slapstick comedies directly to female performers and saw these films as even more successful on average than two-reelers showcasing male comics.

One of the biggest stars of this period, Marguerite Clark, consistently anchored comedy vehicles for Lasky Studios. Clark's *Miss George Washington* (Paramount, 1916) made more money than any other film in the United States for eighteen months.⁵⁴ Mary Pickford, also one of the major moneymakers of the 1910s, made comedy features for Famous Players such as *Caprice* (Famous Players, 1913), *A Girl of Yesterday* (Paramount, 1915), and *Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley* (Paramount, 1918). Constance Talmadge popularized romantic comedies for Select Studios in the late 1910s, starting with *Scandal* (Select, 1917). Her popularity built to be ranked in the top five of fan contests consistently throughout 1919 and 1920.⁵⁵ While Pickford, Clark and Talmadge

resided alongside Fairbanks as superstars, there were still other actresses showcased in successful feature comedies more regularly than male performers. These performers fell within the top 5-20 spots within fan contests⁵⁶ and received recognition as reliable draws. Billie Burke for Famous Players, Peggy Hyland for Fox studios and Madge Kennedy for Goldwyn built up followings for their portrayals of young married women. While Talmadge and the players above often produced romantic comedies, other female performers found success in affirmative comedies where romance was an element but not the primary narrative thrust. Those performers include May Allison, Bessie Barriscale, June Caprice, Viola Dana, Margarita Fischer, Gladys Hulette, Madge Kennedy, Vivian Martin, Mabel Normand, Jackie Saunders and Olive Thomas.⁵⁷

It should be noted that this trend towards younger, physically attractive male and female performers permeated the industry more generally. But the relationship between ‘leading men and women’ and film comedy remains extremely underexplored. When scholars mention leading men and women in comedies, their personae are rarely parsed out as any different from leading men and women in dramas.⁵⁸ It remains unclear what characteristics would make some attractive leading men or women star frequently in comedy features as opposed to those who star in very few. However, trade discourse in the 1910s helpfully stressed particular attributes in the leads that commonly anchored comedy features.

Youth

Industry discourse around stars in comedy features foregrounded the young age of their characters or the performer’s youthfulness. This association held even if the actor was considerably older than their part. The titles of the films often highlighted adolescence, such as *Young Romance* (Paramount, 1915) or *The Gilded Youth* (Mutual, 1916). Descriptions of the characters emphasized their early stage in life. An advertisement for Marguerite Clark’s *Seven Sisters* (Paramount, 1916)

promoted the film as “a captivating comedy of romantic youth.”⁵⁹ Reviewers claimed Clark herself illustrated “irresistible girlishness.”⁶⁰ A review for *The Flight of the Duchess* (Pathé, 1916) similarly praised lead Gladys Hulette as “a veritable flower of a girl, the symbol of youth, vigor and progress.”⁶¹ Scholars would likely classify these women as ‘ingenues.’ In a comic context, however, these young women typically operated with more spunk and freedom than the harassed ingenues populating D.W. Griffith’s dramatic works.⁶²

Youthful men similarly formed strong ties with the comic feature. Trade articles continually described Douglas Fairbanks’ comedic characters as ‘boys’ or young men. For instance, in *The Habit of Happiness* (Triangle, 1916), *Variety* called him the “young comedian” while the same paper referred to him as a ‘boy’ in *His Picture in the Papers* (Triangle, 1916). A review *The Clodhopper* (Triangle, 1917) characterized Charles Ray a “a poor country boy who makes good”⁶³ while an advertisement for *The Son of His Father* (Paramount, 1918) deemed it “a typical Ray picture, bubbling over with youth and high spirits.”⁶⁴ The element of youth helps to distinguish leading men and women who seamlessly moved from dramas to comedies from those who struggled. When William S. Hart released the comedic *John Petticoats* (Paramount, 1919), *Variety* complained that he was “middle aged and quite homely.” Interestingly, reviewers had not made these complaints about Hart’s dramatic westerns. The *Variety* reviewer suggested his advanced age was more notable in light comedy. The review continued, “Hart needs to be kept in the wild and untrimmed to get the most effect out of his characterizations, for his mock heroics and juggling of a couple of 45s make him eligible to social honors only in that atmosphere.”⁶⁵

Emphasis on a lead’s youth can be found in the extant films as well. In *Plain Jane* (Triangle, 1916), the heroine (Bessie Barriscale) is a young chamberlady introduced as “nobody’s child.” After frustrating efforts to woo a clueless college student (Charles Ray) in her boarding house, he

finally informs her, “You’re too young to think of marriage—yet—but I’d like the first chance at you when you’re thru school.” Similarly, in *Up the Road with Sallie* (Select, 1918) Constance Talmadge’s young female lead serves as a catalyst for her older aunt finding excitement and adventure. The aunt laments to her in the opening scene of the film, “I was once young and pretty like you—and looking for the romance that—somehow it never came.” Intertitles also stressed the youth of male leads. In *The Roaring Road* (Paramount, 1919) Wallace Reid plays a young man frustrated by the stodginess of his fiancée’s father. He complains, “Just because he’s forgotten he was ever young is no reason why they should play ‘Silver Threads Among the Gold’ at our wedding!” The opening intertitles for Carlyle Blackwell’s *The Beloved Blackmailer* (World, 1918) also position the mollycoddle male lead as ‘childlike’ due to his parents’ overprotectiveness. Introductory intertitles relay, “Bobby Briggs, an only child, who is suffering severely from loss of nerve, lack of backbone, and too much of Pa and Ma.” They go on to joke that the mother “still regards her six-foot son as her baby.”

By the end of the 1910s, exhibitor surveys observed that audiences liked seeing young people at the center of comedies. In the article, “More Exhibitors Tell Us What They Want,” *Motography* aligned this shift towards young characters with the general move towards comedy drama features. The report specified, “Vulgar slapstick is appreciated by a few, but the majority prefer the comedian to be a *young* [emphasis mine] person who gets in wrong.”⁶⁶ Thus, a move towards younger characters was rhetorically connected to a shift away from broader forms of comedy. Indeed, trade discourse suggested that ‘youth’ added sympathy by making the character’s mistakes understandable. One reviewer felt that foibles of youth served as a source of the realism in Jack Pickford’s *Seventeen* (Paramount, 1916). The reviewer declared, “His unphilosophic treatment of the stumbling blocks which are bound to come the way of an unsophisticated boy, is so remarkably

true.”⁶⁷ The young age of the characters not only made their mistakes more understandable or sympathetic, but also helped ward off censorship. Characters’ inexperience allowed them to get into compromising situations while maintaining an element of innocence that kept the encounters comic. For instance, one review for Constance Talmadge’s *Scandal* (Select, 1917) mentioned that she was a “virgin playing with fire and not realizing that fire burns.”⁶⁸

Some observers also suggested that youth provided appropriate content for happy storylines, proposing that audiences would nostalgically remember that period of their lives as a moment of promise. Harry Carr’s “What About Screen Comedy—Tomorrow?” (*Photoplay*, 1918) cited young, attractive women as staples of comedy features for this reason. Carr wrote, “the real pull of this kind of girl show lies in the spectacle of free and glorious youth—youth that has deserted most of us. It is a wistful sort of humor.”⁶⁹ Other reviewers echoed the idea that the joys of youth made that time of life well-suited to optimistic comedies. For instance, critics noted the “youthful good humor, untouched by weighty problems” in May Allison’s *Peggy Does her Darnedest* (Metro, 1919).⁷⁰ Thus, the young ages of central characters in these feature comedies served multiple purposes. Youth rendered characters more sympathetic and alleviated censorship concerns by adding innocence to their comic errors. In addition, the circumstances of youth encouraged cheerful narratives by covering moments in life that offered fewer responsibilities.

Energy and Vitality

In addition to youth, reviews and publicity persistently reiterated these stars’ physical energy and zest. The leads of comedy features were expected to deliver mannerisms in a quick and vigorous fashion. This performance style differed from the slow, languorous movements often foregrounded in dramas, ranging from Theda Bara’s vamp in *A Fool There Was* (Fox, 1915) to the fluid work of the European ‘divas’ in dramas of the silent screen.⁷¹ Comedy scholars note the

importance of ‘pep’ and quick pacing as part of comic tone. Surprisingly though, scholarship on silent comedy implies that non-slapstick forms merely relied on situation in opposition to slapstick’s use of the body.⁷² For instance, Maggie Hennefeld suggests that slapstick comediennes in the transitional period lost much of their bodily vitality once the industry moved towards narratively-driven features. She argues, “the codified grammar of narrative filmmaking rigidly constrained the comedienne’s bodily fluidity.”⁷³ While body fluidity may have been *reshaped* by the industry’s desires for realist narratives, the differing uses of the body should not lead us to presume that main performers in feature comedies lacked physical zest.

Review after review praised the vigor and vitality of performers in comedy features. Gaylyn Studlar already identifies how the discourses surrounding Douglas Fairbanks were preoccupied with his physical energy.⁷⁴ The interest in physical vigor extended to other performers associated with comedy features. A review of *The Spitfire* (Famous Players, 1914) observed that Carlyle Blackwell “moves sprightly and athletically.”⁷⁵ Similarly, Fox advertised George Walsh, an action comedy rival to Douglas Fairbanks, as “having youth, good looks, and an inexhaustible supply of vigor.”⁷⁶ Female leads were not left out of this equation. In a review for Billie Burke’s *Peggy* (Triangle, 1916), the reviewer mused, “she was probably a tomboy earlier in life. Back of her fascinating vivacity are the high spirits of sound health—she is a fountain of natural energy and seemingly exhaustless vigor. Every movement, however nicely balanced by training, springs from the natural impulses of a woman to whom mere existence is a pleasure.”⁷⁷ One publicity piece for Margarita Fischer’s *The Primitive Woman* (Pathé, 1918) was tellingly entitled, “Miss Fisher Proves Agile” (the ‘c’ was removed due to anti-German sentiment).⁷⁸ The piece bragged, “Miss Fisher turns somersaults one after another so rapidly that the audience follows with a prolonged, ‘o-o-o-h-h-h-h!’”⁷⁹

What exactly did critics mean by ‘energy’ or ‘liveliness’? Serial queens certainly illustrated energy as did action performers in dramas. While there was overlap in how these leading men and women were used in comedy features, emphasis in reviews and in the surviving films tended to be on the use of movement for harmless fun. The performers illustrated physical feats such as climbing, leaping over couches, or racing across rooms. This behavior often befitted the young characters. Douglas Fairbanks meets this description in films such as *American Aristocracy* (Triangle, 1916). He climbs trees, scales walls, and vaults over rocks despite holding the fairly non-athletic occupation of bug collector. Other surviving films similarly illustrate the youthful energy of male leads. In *Betty Takes a Hand* (Triangle, 1918), Betty’s romantic interest (Charles Gunn) first appears to the audience by spinning his chair around and propping his feet up on his father’s desk. Female leads shared this physical dynamism. In the same film, *Betty Takes a Hand* (Triangle, 1918), Betty (Olive Thomas) is so excited to have a large boarding house to herself that she runs into the living room and leaps over the couch to sit on it. She utilizes quick, abrupt movements for humor, such as frantically shaking her head back and forth and shuffling her feet together to mimic the snobbish posturing of an older boarder. The surviving portions of musical comedy star Elsie Janis’ *The Caprices of Kitty* (Paramount, 1915) also emphasize her physical playfulness. The film introduces Janis’ character, Kitty, by showing her crawling through a window after sneaking out of the house. The camera lingers as she throws one leg over the window sill. She smiles into the camera as she does so, holding her leg in this stretched position for ten seconds before finishing her climb. Between extant films and physical descriptions from reviews, it seems evident that the stars of feature comedies did not merely lounge and pose. Their performances required pep and physical agility.

Likability and Charisma

Along with affirmative performers embodying youth and physical energy, they crucially profited on ‘likability.’ Scholarship on romantic comedy mentions the ‘lovable’ nature of the leads, but comedy studies on the whole stress the comedian’s outsider status.⁸⁰ The interest in comic deviance rarely prompts investigation into the likability of leading men and women in feature comedies. Leafing through the 1910s trade press, one finds that ‘likability’ or ‘personality’ were more prominent motifs in the reviews for feature comedies than dramas. The dramatic performer was versatile, dislikable at times, and prized for their responses to varied narrative circumstances. As opposed to charisma, reviews highlighted dramatic actors’ versatility, realism or emotive accuracy. We can observe this difference in a review for Pauline Frederick’s drama about a good and bad sister, *Ashes of the Embers* (Paramount, 1916). The reviewer for *The Moving Picture World* noted that Frederick “carries her impersonation of Laura to the nth degree of realism” and that she “experiences no difficulty in giving life and expression to the character.”⁸¹

The leads in comedy features, however, especially in light comedies, had their likability and personality obsessively highlighted. In fact, one reviewer mentioned that performers who were not inherently comic in appearance (funny-looking) could be suitable for comedy films through charming personae. Though a review for *The Sudden Gentleman* (Triangle, 1916) observed that William Desmond “is not by nature comic,” it continued to say he “can get away with comedy by reason of his physical force, his sunny smile and great good nature.”⁸² There is certainly overlap here between ‘light drama’ and light comedy.’ Dramas also classified as ‘light entertainment,’ such as action pictures, also frequently contained wise-cracking, charismatic leads. Those familiar with Douglas Fairbanks, who performed in both light comedies and light dramas, would recognize this emphasis upon a likable persona. In a review for Fairbanks’ hit, *His Picture in the Papers*

(Triangle, 1916), *The Moving Picture World* marveled that Fairbanks' "personality is so all-pervading that he is like the sun."⁸³ Other male and female leads starring in feature comedies also had their personalities lauded. Reviewers complimented Carlyle Blackwell in *The Man Who Could Not Lose* (Alco, 1914) for having a "quick, good natured and sharp personality."⁸⁴ Charles Ray also received praise for making "a lovable and likable character out of the young country boy" in *The Clodhopper* (Triangle, 1917).⁸⁵ Female leads shared platitudes for their 'likability' in light comedies. Reviewers framed Billie Burke's personality in *Peggy* (Triangle, 1916) as "the sweet and lovable one of our Southern girl."⁸⁶ In a succinct summary of these types of comedy leads, Madge Kennedy, was said by one reviewer to "possess the art of making you like her."⁸⁷

Extant films also reveal how leads were positioned as charming to those around them. Intertitles inform the audience in Douglas Fairbanks' *A Modern Musketeer* (Paramount, 1918) that despite the hesitation of his character's potential in laws, "Ned's natural boyishness charms Mrs. Dodge." At the opening of *The Sudden Gentleman* (Triangle, 1917), a young Irishman (William Desmond) is surrounded by a group of fawning women. He playfully pats them on the back and twirls one in circles to her delight. The films similarly showcase the charm of female leads. In *Up the Road with Sallie* (Select, 1918), Constance Talmadge plays a young woman arrested for speeding. She smiles flirtatiously at the judge and insists, "it's all the fault of the town for having such lovely roads." The theme of young women winning over snobbish older men before they realized the woman was engaged to their son proved common. In *Betty Takes a Hand* (Triangle, 1918), Betty (Olive Thomas) runs into her fiance's father when both of their cars get stuck in mud. Not knowing he ruined her father's business or that she is engaged to his son, the two spend the night in the woods. Betty proceeds to make the grouch smile by cooking chicken legs and laughing

off his complaints about sleeping on hay. By the end of the night, he declares “you’re a little wonder” and begs her to marry his son.

Critics noted that there was a fine line between charming and grating, which meant the performance required careful calibration. Female stars not irregularly received criticism from reviewers who seemed annoyed if these leading ladies appeared to be enjoying themselves *too* much. A review for June Caprice’s *Patsy* (Fox, 1917) griped:

“She has a very good time, it seems, in her pictures. She laughs profusely when there is nothing particular to laugh about and she rushes hither and yon animated to her very fingertips. But the secret to success as a capricious maid is not in laughing all the time. Look pleasant, yes, but a laugh when the point is all obscure from the audience is rather boring when employed constantly.”⁸⁸

Thus, the reviewer points to a certain nuance available within comedy characterizations from attractive leads. The character must provide a sense of warmth without resorting to repetitious gestures like smiling or laughing in every scene. Male stars were not immune from this criticism. A review of William Desmond in *The Sudden Gentleman* (Triangle, 1916) complained that he “laughs rather annoyingly during the first half of the picture.”⁸⁹ Despite the ‘fluffy’ nature of such films, critics proposed that performers required a special touch to keep characterizations endearing. Sometimes critics referred to this as a ‘light touch’— terminology well suited to the affirmative comedies these leads so often starred in. One critic noted that light comedy stage heartthrob Willie Collier and Douglas Fairbanks shared “just the requisite amount of ‘lightness.’”⁹⁰

Rebellion

While comedy features positioned their young stars to gain the audience’s affections, the leads still exhibited a rebellious streak. This rebellion placed them firmly in line with comic chaos, yet critics and audiences did not frame the characters as deviants or social outsiders. As discussed in Chapter One, the discourse around comedy shorts often emphasized the characters’ anti-social behavior or how their actions wreaked havoc upon themselves and others. Successful feature

comedies framed the rebellions of young leads as harmless fun that would either provide a learning experience or improve American society. The youths in these films constructively disrupted social customs, especially the protocols of the upper classes or older generations portrayed as restrictive or passé.

Multiple reviews documented the young characters' oppositions to authority figures. One review of Billie Burke's *Peggy* (Triangle, 1916) depicted her entrance into a staid, Scottish village as a rowdy intrusion. It recounts "a whirl of dust and white streak, Peggy speeding the limit in her raceabout...Such is warm-hearted and impulsive Peggy...She dares in the end to smash provincial egotism."⁹¹ A review of Charles Ray's *A Nine O'Clock Town* (Paramount, 1919) expressed bemusement at the forward-thinking rebellions of Ray's small-town lad against his conservative father's staid business methods. The reviewer mused, "He starts radical innovations in the place, such as band concerts, sales, and a beauteous corset model—a New York importation."⁹²

The rebellions of these characters certainly survive through extant films. A favorite convention presented the young male lead as the 'fun-loving' contrast to his father or other authoritarian figures. This can certainly be seen in Pete Pringle's (Douglas Fairbanks) cocktail-making while at 'work' for his father's company in *His Picture in the Papers* (Triangle, 1916). Other performers received ample opportunities to display this kind of spunk. In *Mr. Dolan of New York* (Universal, 1917), Dolan (Jack Mulhall) sees a stodgy Englishman in a car with his love interest. He runs behind the car, pulls the man out and leaps into the car to replace him. As another example, Jack Pickford repeatedly played young men irritated by the conventions of his small town. During *In Wrong* (First National, 1919), the film derives humor from Jack (Pickford) refusing to politely applaud and listen to the talentless acts at the local show, instead shuddering and scrunching his face in disbelief.

Young women who rebelled against prudish authoritarians also proved popular. In *Waifs* (Mutual, 1918), humor stems from a “a very, very independent miss who refuses to be general managed by her Dad,” (Gladys Hulette) shimmying down the side of her family manor and hiding on top of a car. Her chauffeur unwittingly aids her escape to a boarding house downtown. Similarly, in *The Fair Barbarian* (Paramount, 1917), Octavia (Vivian Martin) horrifies an English town by driving her own car, using slang and dancing while showing her ankles. Perhaps her most memorable defiance comes when her male and female friend are locked in a church together. To save the two from village gossip, she sacrilegiously, but with a shrug, throws a brick through the church window so that the two can escape. As described above, these rebellions did not stain the characters as problematic misfits. These films positioned their rebellions as reasonable reactions against patriarchal stasis, provincialism, and cultural sectors perceived as lagging behind the times.

Sympathetic Laughter: The Move Towards Wholesome Humor

Beyond foregrounding youthful and likable performers, the discourses surrounding comedy features strongly differentiated their humor from comedy shorts. As examined in Chapter One, critics, trade press columnists and even fan magazines often emphasized the comic humiliation of characters in comedy shorts. Commentators claimed that the films engendered superiority over characters and provoked laughter that contained a sting of cruelty. Their characterizations of comedic shorts match much of the literature on film comedy, where laughter and sentiment have been placed at odds (with the notable exception of romantic comedy). Cultural critics and scholars alike have regularly praised slapstick comedians for their lack of sentiment. Critic Gilbert Seldes railed against the moving picture being ‘prettified’ by the 1920s. He observed happily of Mack Sennett’s shorts, “I do not remember one single moment of sentimentality.”⁹³ More recent scholarship by Alan Dale portrays pathos as detrimental to Charles Chaplin’s humor.⁹⁴ The

antithesis forged between comedy and sentiment in these accounts, however, fails to capture how often the two worked in tandem in feature comedies. Contemporaneous descriptions stressed the audience's intermingling of amusement and emotional attachment to the character—a notion some referred to as 'sympathetic laughter.' This idea encompassed both sympathy for characters due to their goodness but also that the audience itself would demonstrate morality through kind-hearted laughter. Critics encouraged 'clean' content for both comedy shorts and features, but the insistence on moral and sympathetic humor proved emphatic and nearly uniform in the industry's formulae for successful feature comedies. As the main attraction in film showings, comedy features received especial pressure to appease broad audience sectors with humor that presented Americans in the 'best' light. In contrast to 84% of comedy shorts prior to the rise of feature comedies foregrounding physical and mental humiliation for humor, by 1917, 90% of comedy features had their humor characterized as sympathetic with playful, harmless misunderstandings for leads.⁹⁵

Empathy combined with laughter becomes a prominent theme in the reviews for many feature comedies. In a review for Cecil B. DeMille's romantic comedy, *Young Romance* (Lasky, 1915), Louis Reeves Harrison explicitly demarcated 'usual' comedy shorts from the film's sympathetic mode. He said the film "is comedy, but not the comedy of the farcical, knock-about variety usual to the screen." He went on to differentiate the film's humor by claiming "one does not laugh at the characters on the curtain but with them."⁹⁶ Since up to this film's release in January of 1915, the industry's comedy output had largely been shorts, it is telling that this notion of laughing 'with' characters was still seen as substantially new for screen comedy. Reviews for later features carried forward this concept. When assessing Cecil B. DeMille's *The Heir to the Hoorah* (Paramount, 1916), *Motion Picture News*'s George N. Shorey specified, "this is more comedy than drama, but comedy of the sympathetic kind, where you don't laugh at but with the hero."⁹⁷ Another review

for *Merely Mary Ann* (Fox, 1916) seconded this notion of comedy mixed with ‘sentiment’ or pathos for the characters. Hanford Judson for *The Moving Picture World* praised, “There’s always a laugh coming, but the laugh is closely related to the sentiment.”⁹⁸ This idea repeats in a later review of the feature comedy, *The Lady in the Photograph* (KESE/Edison, 1917). A reviewer complained that the society people had “wretched manners” and that “this would perhaps go in straight comedy, but in a comedy drama, when the story calls for a certain sympathetic appeal, it is puzzling.”⁹⁹ As comedy shorts were typically described as ‘straight comedy’ and feature comedies as ‘comedy dramas,’ the author implies that comedy in features had a separate responsibility to promote sympathy.

Why did critics view the comedy narratives in features as more sympathetic? Unlike burlesque or broad caricature, reviewers consistently praised successful comedy features for their humanized characters. Feature comedies emphasized a lead’s ‘good’ qualities and/or framed their mistakes as understandable. Trade articles had advocated for ‘humanist’ forms of humor in the early 1910s. Columnist Louis Reeves Harrison for *The Moving Picture World* openly addressed the need for film comedies that encouraged audience empathy writ large by 1915. He wrote, “It should not be forgotten that he (man) is a thinking animal, and we must learn to sympathize with him, to like him for all his humanness. To show him as he is, to bare his heart and soul, is the higher form of comedy.”¹⁰⁰

Reviewers seemed to feel that many comedy features had taken up this mantle. For instance, a review of *Efficiency Edgar’s Courtship* (KESE, 1917) noted that lead Taylor Holmes was “human enough in meeting his many obstacles to be at all times pleasantly attractive.”¹⁰¹ Another review for *The Social Secretary* (Triangle, 1916), starring Norma Talmadge and written by Anita Loos, commented that her leading character “makes an irresistible bid for the affection and

sympathy of the spectator.”¹⁰² Douglas Fairbanks also had his roles characterized in this fashion. A review for *His Picture in the Papers* (Triangle, 1916) characterized Fairbanks as “a subtle interpreter of the amusing side of human nature as revealed in everyday experience by plain ordinary man attempting to be good.”¹⁰³ Unlike many characters in comedy shorts, who synopses detailed attempting to be ‘bad,’ characters in comedy features ‘attempted to be good’ even if they adopted unconventional methods for helping themselves and others.

As opposed to humor coming from repeated humiliation, publications framed the world of the films as a happy one. A reviewer for *Merely Mary Ann* (Fox, 1916) tellingly observed that the story portrayed “things as we should like to think they are.”¹⁰⁴ Critics sometimes joked about how the narrative conflicts for characters in these comedy features tended to be envy-inducing situations that would hardly constitute a real concern. For *An American Citizen* (Famous Players, 1914), one critic mocked the difficulty of a young American who is forced to choose between either maintaining his American citizenship, or inheriting an English estate by marrying an attractive British cousin. *Variety* joked, “then comes an offer of relief in the bequest of a fabulous fortune to young Cruger...if he’ll but come home to his ancestors’ British marble halls, bid good-bye forever to the American flag and marry an English gell for his wife. Some offer and some problem.”¹⁰⁵ Of course, Cruger ends up finding a way to both maintain his American citizenship and the marriage, achieving romance while sustaining his nationalist fervor. Publicity and reviews claimed the audience would feel joy for the characters as opposed to deriving pleasure from crumbling circumstances. *Motography* praised that Douglas Fairbanks’ *The Habits of Happiness* (Triangle, 1916) “would cure any case of a grouch which is brought into a theater.”¹⁰⁶ Another review for Bessie Love’s *Hell- to-Pay Austin* (Triangle, 1916) proposed that the film “puts one in a happy frame of mind.”¹⁰⁷ Margarita Fischer’s *Miss Jackie of the Navy* (Mutual, 1916) achieved

similar approval as a “sure cure for nervous depression.”¹⁰⁸ *The Spender* (Metro, 1919) was advertised as “a comedy-drama that radiates with happiness and good will...a picture that reflects the joy of living.”¹⁰⁹ The term ‘joy of living’ was repeatedly used to characterize the films’ appeal. Reviews suggested that the characters in the films had as much fun as the audience members. A review for *Happiness* (Triangle, 1917) remarked, “the audience is sure to derive just as much fun from it as do the certain characters in the story.”¹¹⁰



Betty Takes a Hand (Triangle, 1918) (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

Despite occasional complaints from critics that the young leads’ exuberance led to ‘too much’ smiling, the gentle humor of these films largely safe-guarded them against censorship and calls for ‘respectability’ in film comedy. Scholars acknowledge how demands from women’s groups and censorship bureaus for ‘clean comedy,’ particularly by the end of the 1910s, created difficulties for slapstick producers.¹¹¹ Less often considered is the prominent role feature-length comedies played in reinforcing notions of ‘clean’ comedy that appealed to all patrons. The films’ youthful, likable leads, the gentle laughter, and the optimistic depiction of society, all protected feature comedies from censors. One review for Douglas Fairbanks’ *His Picture in the Papers* (Triangle, 1916) remarked, “the plot is as clean as a whistle.”¹¹² Another review used the same exact expression, “clean as a proverbial whistle,” for *It Happened in Honolulu* (Universal, 1916).¹¹³ Reviews contrasted the films from more aggressive comedy forms or sordid depictions of society

found in problem plays. A review for Gladys Hulette's *Prudence the Pirate* (Mutual, 1916) saw the picture's focus on a young tomboy and her high seas adventures as a welcome relief from melodramas. The reviewer stated, "We are more than pleased to find Mr. Thanhouser among the producers who believe that a picture can get over minus sex, murder and companion elements."¹¹⁴ Critics generally approved of the characters in comedy features as supposedly 'normal' Americans. Of *The Beloved Blackmailer* (World, 1918) a reviewer declared, "it is a pleasant relief to get away from the usual run of vamps and villains and see a picture in which the characters are ordinary human beings."¹¹⁵

By the end of the decade, screenplays and screenwriting manuals reflected this interest in sympathy and humanized characters for comedy features. Behind the scenes, continuity scripts and correspondence for feature comedies displayed a shift towards gentle and flattering descriptions of characters, such as 'hard working,' 'a jolly companion,' or 'timid but with potential.'¹¹⁶ Production documents conveyed that the young leads in these features needed to remain in the audience's good graces along with creating humor. In adapting Ann Murdock's *The Imposter* (1918) for the screen, typed notes fretted that her part in earlier script drafts "would have no chance whatever to gain the sympathy of an audience. She should not be a shrew nor should she be a liar."¹¹⁷ Screenwriting manuals also reflected a shift towards laughter that stemmed from sympathizing with a character as opposed to ridiculing them. While Epes Winthrop Sargent had stressed the 'sense of superiority' towards characters in comedy shorts in his 1913 guide to photoplay writing, screenplay manuals by the early 1920s took a different tack. In *Cinema Craftsmanship* (1921), Frances Taylor Paterson advised, "the writer of comedy must be careful not to make the hero or heroine of the story ridiculous. If he makes a fool of his protagonist the audience immediately loses sympathy with him."¹¹⁸ By World War I, exhibitors claimed audiences

wanted this kind of cheerful play. Paramount announced in July of 1918 that due to exhibitor feedback, they would primarily produce “comedy dramas and plays dealing with the more cheerful aspects of life.”¹¹⁹ Surveys that year listed the desires of audiences to include “lighter plays, the bright and cheery kind. AMUSEMENT—happiness,” “comedy-drama with a pleasing climax” and “more quaint and lovable characters.”¹²⁰

The characters’ mirth can be witnessed in many of the surviving films. Characters dance, put on disguises for pleasure and flirt with lovers as opposed to suffering comic humiliation. In *Phil-for-Short* (World, 1919), Evelyn Greeley’s character Phil is obsessed with Grecian culture. Phil performs dances in Greek attire despite this scanty outfit shocking members of her rural town. Multiple scenes show her leaping about joyously and even teaching other girls at school how to perform this dance style. She never experiences embarrassment at the reactions of other town members. Rather, the audience laughs at the community’s shock rather than any lack of skill on her part. Phil later performs the dance with great success at a ball where her new husband, initially trapped into marrying her, begins to realize he is in love with her. Young women joyously dance in other comedy features of this period as well, as in *Madcap Madge* (Triangle, 1917) or *Johanna Enlists* (Paramount, 1918). The trope could also be employed for male characters, such as Charles Ray’s unexpectedly successful country dance in *The Clodhopper* (Triangle, 1917). In addition to dancing, characters in these films typically adopt disguises and enjoy themselves thoroughly in the process of their deception. In *The Caprices of Kitty* (Paramount, 1915), Kitty (Elsie Janis) has been banned from seeing her fiancée yet wants to sneak off to be with him. She tries on various disguises, dressing as a ‘gypsy,’ an artist’s model and a young man. She incorporates each disguise with enthusiasm, clapping her hands in glee when she sees a woman cross-dressing on stage and realizes she could borrow this approach. Jean Southern’s character in *Miss Deception* (1917)

exhibits similar excitement, pretending to be an uncouth, rustic from the west to annoy her snobbish New York relatives. Olive Thomas in *The Flapper* (Select, 1920) also adopts a black dress and walking stick to trick her acquaintances into believing she is a ‘vamp.’ In addition to characters having fun on their own, couples are shown enjoying themselves as part of the courtship process. In *The Madcap* (Universal, 1916), Flora (Flora DeHaven) and her love interest race in her automobile, travel the countryside unchaperoned, and pretend to be members of a musical troupe. Whether engaging in playful romance, enjoying the freedoms of disguises or displaying physically exuberant behavior, the young leads in these films experienced fun at a variety of levels.

The industry’s claims that comedy features’ harnessed sympathetic laughter should not imply that all characters were treated equally. For the most part, young, white characters received the privilege of kinder laughter. Those leads have moments in the films where they mock their old maid aunts, overweight characters or servants of different ethnicities. Today’s audiences would likely not find the humor kind in these moments. Thus, while the critics found this form of comedy more ‘sympathetic’ than many popular forms of comedy shorts, the term can be deceptive. Equally humanist treatment did not extend to every character in comedy features. Period critics did feel, however, that successful comedy features tended away from the overtly cruel presentations towards members of society deemed lesser that had been a strain in comedy shorts. While comedy features might contain characters laughing at the stuffy expressions of an old maid or the linguistic struggles of their Asian valet, those leads still worked to help these supporting characters or were portrayed as their ‘friends.’ As one instance, in *Madcap Madge* (Triangle, 1917), Madge (Olive Thomas) and a group of classmates are in gym class. One student’s weight causes her to struggle with some of the gym exercises. Madge laughs at her and points in a manner that modern audiences would hardly find ‘sympathetic.’ Yet she invites the girl to her party at the end of class, and later

the girl appears at the party happily eating cake with the other students. This ‘gentler cruelty’ extended to old maids, who still received mockery from young characters in features but usually were given a happy narrative result or were not as physically humiliated as they had been in shorts.

This notion of ‘gentler cruelty’ in comedy features extends to ethnic stereotypes. The films still reinforced some racist presumptions of difference for humor, but some Black and Asian performers began to find roles where they could create laughter by reacting to or criticizing the poor behaviors of white leads as opposed to being mocked for their own supposed inferiority. In *Satan Junior* (Metro, 1919), the Asian valet has intertitles which do clearly mock his linguistic twists. However, much of the film utilizes him as a likable character who helps the female lead romantically woo his boss. Comedy often comes from his horrified reactions to the male and female lead breaking furniture and quarreling. Supporting companions of a different ethnicity became a recurring trope in comedy features. Baby Marie Osborne, one of the biggest child stars of the 1910s, was supported in many of her films by African American performer Ernest Morrison.



Ernest Morrison in *Captain Kiddo* (Pathé, 1917) (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

Morrison went on to become one of the founding members of Hal Roach’s *Our Gang*, but he already earned a following for his work with Osborne. His appearances contained racial insensitivity, such as when Baby Marie tries to scrub his skin because she assumes he is just ‘dirty’

and needs a bath. However, the two played friends across multiple films, prompting critics to praise Morrison for his amiable, scene-stealing performances (mirroring the discourse around 1930s Black performers like Hattie McDaniel that Miriam J. Petty analyzes).¹²¹ In fact, many exhibitors began to give Morrison co-billing with Baby Marie and featured them side-by-side in theatrical posters.

Maligned social sectors that experienced physical violence or overt humiliation in the shorts rarely underwent this kind of open hostility in comedy features. They either tolerated jostling from leads framed within the film as ‘friendly’ or no longer served as the main subject for mockery. One could perhaps view this as an improvement upon extremely derogatory ethnic stereotypes that served as generators of humor in shorts. However, the relegation of the socially subordinated to supporting roles provided another method of marginalization: erasure. Critics of the period ignored this potential effect, however, and only saw the change as an improvement. Typical was one reviewer’s response to Bryant Washburn’s comedy feature, *Filling His Own Shoes* (KESE/Essanay, 1917), for its handling of German and Turkish nationalities. The reviewer touted, “It should be placed to the credit of this picture that the different nationalities which appear in the story are all shown in a favorable light.”¹²²

In addition to remaining social hierarchies, the shift towards supposedly moral humor in these features notably did not eliminate sexual elements or social improprieties. While discussions of feature comedy tend to assume that a move away from slapstick lead to simplistically ‘polite humor,’ viewing the films reveals a careful interplay between daring behaviors and moral justification. Critics themselves noted how delicate the line between proper and improper conduct was, particularly regarding couples’ romantic interactions or young women’s transgressions. The performer’s good intentions or implied innocence often allowed them to frolic through risky

situations unscathed. For instance, one review of *The Beloved Blackmailer* (World, 1918) excused the behavior of Carlyle Blackwell's onscreen lover, who arranges to have him kidnapped in order to blackmail his father and save her own father's railroad. The reviewer proclaimed, "Blackmailing is a heinous crime, but when it is carried on by Corinne Norris you not only condone the offense, you even enjoy her success."¹²³

Other reviewers praised the female performers for their ability to weave through potentially risqué or sexualized content without offending the audience. One reviewer complimented Constance Talmadge in *Scandal* (Select, 1917); "her actions are free from any passionate feeling that would, in an instant, transform suspenseful though delicately humorous situations into more or less disgusting scenes with the sex element predominating."¹²⁴ Marguerite Clark received a similar 'pass' due to her delicate appearance and mannerisms in her smash hit, *Miss George Washington* (Paramount, 1916), which featured her being trapped in a man's chambers. A reviewer cautioned, "In the hands of any but so dainty a little creature as Miss Clark, this scene might be vulgar."¹²⁵ Thus, while many comedy features received praise in this period for their wholesome approach, the characters still flirted with the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior. The delicate balance comedy performers struck in their features to both create laughs and maintain audience sympathy will be analyzed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Overall, both the discourse around successful comedy features and the surviving films illustrate an audience-character relationship predicated on sympathetic engagement. The audience is positioned to like the characters, relate to their mistakes, and enjoy watching characters at play. These elements prompted the trade press to regard these films as suitable for the feature market's higher class and feminized audiences. The industry's employment of term 'sympathetic humor,'

however, belied the remaining social tensions in these works. In spite of the rise of ‘gentle’ humor, aspects of unrest surrounding race and sexuality still remained.

“The Romance of Having a Million Dollars: Feature Comedies and Beneficial Plots

Perhaps no other theory about the development of feature-length comedy has attained as much widespread acceptance as the one that it relied on more ‘narratively-driven’ humor. What constitutes more plot remains vague, though the idea seems to be that slapstick relied on exhibitionist gags while plotted comedies would rely on humor that stemmed from particular narrative contexts.¹²⁶ As we have seen from critics’ complaints, feature comedies often prioritized the star over logical plots. This would seem to contradict the assertion that feature comedies had more highly structured narratives. Scholars are not wrong, however, to observe a shift between the story structures that appeared in shorts and features. I would argue that the shift did not suddenly result in perfect coherence, but rather, in particular narrative developments. The overall narrative arc mattered more than the events’ interconnectedness. So what differences are visible? As opposed to many comedy shorts where characters received punishment or saw schemes fail, feature comedies largely adopted wish-fulfillment plotlines. ‘Wish-fulfillment’ is an important distinction from the idea of upholding social norms. After all, ‘social reconciliation’ could technically occur in a comedy short by a wife calling the police on a husband’s poker game. However, if the couple’s relationship does not actually improve, this does not depict American society as a place of hope and personal progress. In contrast to roughly 90% of comedy shorts prior to feature comedies conveying no beneficial changes for their characters (either in personality, relationship or circumstances), about 91% of comedy features contained those plot components by 1917.¹²⁷

We can see several alterations in the scenario advice for comedy shorts versus comedy dramas. As a reminder, here is the list of scenes for a short from Epes Winthrop Sargent's

Technique of the Photoplay (1913), previously quoted in Chapter One:

"14. *Parlor as in No. 3*—Bill and May on, spooning—he starts to kiss her just as Father appears in doorway—May has her mouth puckered for the kiss, but it does not land—Bill keeps on turning his head to see Father watching—Father comes down, waving cane—May rouses—Bill goes over the back of the sofa—only his head shows above—Father slashes at Bill's head—Bill ducks—Father gets down on knees—pokes under sofa with cane—Bill climbs back over the top—slips—falls on Father—May picks Father up—pleads with him—he throws her from him—she falls into Bill's arms—he kisses her—Father strikes at him—drags May from him—may turns her head for another kiss—Father lets go of her and grabs Bill by the neck—leads him out—May follows—weeping.

15. *Front of house as in No. 3*—Father enters from house with Bill—places him for a kick—as he is about to swing May comes from house with Bill's hat—grabs Father's coat tails—pulls him back as he kicks—kick falls short—father falls—May tosses Bill his hat—he throws her a kiss—out of scene—Father up and follows—May follows him—

16. *Front gate—gate closed*—Bill running down walk—Father and May in pursuit—Bill jumps over gate—Father runs into it—loses his wind—collapses, hanging on to gate—Bill kisses May over fence—tips hat to Father—exits."¹²⁸

As previously noted, the scene repeats the tension between father and lover without development or reconciliation. The lover has temporarily outsmarted the father, but the lover did not have to prove himself nor did the father did soften his heart. The daughter does not escape her restrictive circumstances at home to go on an adventure. The status quo situation within the home and these three characters remains constant, which gives it more of a sitcom format than a beneficial trajectory for the characters.

Contrast this narrative from the sample in Sargent's 1916 updated manual, which includes a section on the 'comedy drama.' Sargent provides an example of a proper 'comedy drama' plot.

Sargent's synopsis goes as follows:

"Aunt Louisa is rich and she is also a pest in general, and her almost total deafness does not make her anymore welcome when she makes the rounds of her relatives on her semi-annual visits. Among those she visits are the Buddens, a family consisting of the father, mother and three daughters. Two of the girls are proud and greedy. The third, Maude, is the direct opposite. Aunt Louisa in the course of time makes her appearance with her huge tin ear trumpet. She is flattered by the parents and elder sisters, who find some relief for their exasperation by calling her names and then shouting flatteries in to the trumpet when she asks them to repeat the remark. Maude alone serves her ungrudgingly and reproves the others for their cruel remarks. In the end Aunt Louis explains that since her last visit she has studied lip reading and is making the rounds with the trumpet again for no other purpose than that of unmasking the treatment she has felt. Maude is adopted as her heiress and taken from her drudgery to live with the aunt."¹²⁹

This plot description would match many comedy features of this era. A kind, young woman treats the aunt with respect and is clearly our heroine, a contrast to her greedy relatives. In accordance with an idealized view of society, Maude is rewarded for her good behavior and ‘taken from her drudgery’ to become an heiress. She is therefore granted an improved change in circumstances. The wish-fulfillment trajectory is also embodied by Aunt Louisa. The aunt is initially a figure of ridicule to her relatives for her peskiness and poor hearing, but she turns out to have merely pretended to have poor hearing as a ruse. Sargent stresses that this plotline provides ample comedy opportunities if the spectator knows about Aunt Louisa, due to the “contrast between what is said and what they [the relatives] say they say.”¹³⁰ The audience’s knowledge removes pity from the aunt’s disability and allows pleasure at her successful ruse to properly bestow her money. Her character, thus, does not become an object of mockery but a figure who attains her goal to unmask unworthy relatives. The Aunt’s path illustrates a social milieu in which people do not actually suffer from physical disability and where wealth is properly bestowed on deserving recipients. Through Maude’s ability to escape her previous life and acquire a fortune, along with the Aunt’s ability to have fun with her prank and find an heiress, goals are attained in a positive trajectory. It should be noted that there is room for an episodic structure within this general arc. For instance, multiple scenes might create humor out of the same ruse of Louisa asking a question and relatives lying about what they have said without necessitating some narrative development stem from each situation. Thus, comedy features in this era were distinguished from shorts in screenwriting manuals through the wish-fulfillment atmosphere and happy arcs of the narratives rather than through clear cut instructions for each scene’s minute-by-minute causality.

The type of fortuitous trajectory for characters varied, but a range can be discerned from reviews, publicity and the extant films. Character change for the better could frequently be found.

A review for the early feature comedy, *The Country Mouse* (Paramount, 1914), emphasized the female lead's transformation from dowdy rural wife to belle of Washington D.C. It surmises, "one of the most interesting situations for dramatic development that a great civilized republic offers is the position of a rural legislator's wife elected with her husband to leave the farm...she has to break loose from old things that were once enough and make a new person of herself."¹³¹ The transformation trope carried over to male leads. The mollycoddle proved to be a popular male character type in comedy features. A young man (typically wealthy) lacked courage or vitality expected from youthful masculinity but attained it by the end of the film. A review for Carlyle Blackwell's *The Beloved Blackmailer* (World, 1918) described the leading male as "a son hampered by a too loving father and mother, who finally breaks away and makes a man of himself."¹³² Plotlines could also follow a character's attempts to transform those around them. Douglas Fairbanks had multiple films that fell into this format, such as *The Habit of Happiness* (Triangle, 1916). In this feature, Fairbanks' character attempts to "brighten dull lives" by making a wide variety of people, ranging from homeless men to society snobs, cheerful.¹³³ 'Do gooding' extended to female leads. In *Home* (Triangle, 1916), Bessie Barriscale plays a young woman disgusted by her family's pretenses and snobbery. She decides to reflect their own obnoxious behaviors even more extremely in order to reform them. As one review summarized, "This young lady takes it upon herself to hold a mirror up to her four relatives and beat them at their respective games of cynicism, snobbishness and foolery."¹³⁴

If characters' personalities and behaviors did not alter over the course of the film, their relationships or circumstances benefited. Romance became a common outcome for male and female leads. While critics associated this component with female viewers, the strategy also worked as insurance in case the pure comedy failed to sustain a longer feature. For instance, a

review for Mabel Normand's *Mickey* (Western Import, 1918) presumed that elements like romance and adventure were necessary to complement laughs in the feature. The reviewer opined, "For of course there are other ingredients besides comedy. Sennett is too wise a producer to offer such an abundance of footage offering a single type of entertainment. There is pathos, just a little of it, romance in a pleasing quantity and thrills."¹³⁵ Another review even more explicitly mentioned the need for romance in the feature comedy: "It has been said that no story is entirely satisfactory unless it has 'heart interest.'"¹³⁶ Unlike the couples escaping from parents to elope in shorts, the couples in these films typically meet during the course of the film as an exciting new development. When Douglas Fairbanks comes to America to help a family in *Mr. Fix It* (Paramount, 1918), he also "has his own affair with the big sister of the six youngsters and all ends happily."¹³⁷ For female leads, a comic adventure also regularly led to romance. In Jackie Saunders' *Betty Be Good* (Mutual, 1917), a wealthy girl takes the car out on multiple occasions to defy her overbearing father. On one of her trips, a young man mistakenly detains Betty for stealing the car and the two fall in love.¹³⁸ Sometimes character change and romance combined. In *Her Shattered Idol* (Mutual, 1915), a young woman fantasizes about a rough, caveman lover and falls for a blacksmith. She quickly realizes that his uncouth behavior is less desirable in practice and falls again for her mild-mannered fiancée. A change in the male character could also accompany new romance. The asexual or misogynist male often succumbed to a female lead. In *At First Sight* (Paramount, 1917), a man reviews labeled an "absent-minded, absorbed novelist"¹³⁹ initially uses an adoring female fan for her story ideas but finally "realizes that she will make a fine heroine to own permanently as his wife."¹⁴⁰

In addition to personality maturation or new romance, characters often improved their living circumstances by the end of the narrative. As we saw in the story example from Sargent's

screenwriting manual, acquired fortune created a Cinderella structure for both male and female leads. One early and enduring example of this trend was the adaptation of the popular play *Brewster's Millions* (Paramount, 1914). A clerk named Monty Brewster begins the story as an ordinary clerk, "a good deal like a great many thousand young fellows his age."¹⁴¹ However, over the course of the narrative, Monty inherits a million dollars from his grandfather. To avoid accepting money from this man who disowned Monty's mother, an uncle offers Monty the chance to earn another seven million if he can spend the grandfather's million in one year. After repeated frustration that his irresponsible actions only make him richer, Monty eventually succeeds and inherits the seven million. *Variety* called the story a "fairy-like tale."¹⁴² Other films also reflected this narrative of acquisition. In *Heiress for a Day* (1918), Olive Thomas plays a manicurist who accidentally inherits a fortune through a legal mistake. She has a field day enjoying the wealth for several days, and in the process, a wealthy man falls for her. When her cousin who was supposed to inherit violates terms of the will, the manicurist ends up acquiring a wealthy husband and her own, independent fortune.

Beyond inheritance, other circumstantial benefits could include career promotion. For workplace advancement, Bryant Washburn's *Skinner's Dress Suit* (KESE, 1917) offers an illuminating example. In the film, a young man hopes to receive a promotion but does not. He can't bear to tell his wife, so she proceeds to buy expensive items he cannot afford, including a dress suit. Fortunately, he wears the suit to a work dinner and succeeds in impressing new clients. He wins his promotion after all. Reviews aptly described the film's fit within the beneficial plotlines of the most popular comedy features of this decade. The review for *The Moving Picture World* stated, "It has a beneficent atmosphere throughout. When one is not smiling inwardly or laughing outwardly at the situations, his heart is stirred by some trait of character that shows the

best in human nature.”¹⁴³ In Edith Roberts’ *Beans* (Universal, 1918), the female lead proves to her father that she deserves a share in his business by racing across the country to deliver important papers to a client. As one review summarized, “she proves her ability as a business woman.”¹⁴⁴

Outside of workplace advancement, characters could accomplish other goals through circumstantial change. In *Naughty, Naughty* (Paramount, 1918), a girl (Enid Bennett) returns to her hometown in Kansas after years of living in New York City. Determined to enliven the town through her urban knowledge, she gradually wins over the townspeople and blackmails the deacon into holding church dances when she discovers him drinking.¹⁴⁵ A local newspaperman, who initially disapproved of her behavior, falls for her as well. Sometimes location shifts could bring positive developments by offering opportunities for adventure and character growth. *Prudence, the Pirate* (Pathé, 1916) follows a wealthy, rebellious young woman (Gladys Hulette) who wants to live a pirate’s lifestyle. She rents an old ship and kidnaps her snobbish, wimpy fiancé and aunt. Enjoying herself immensely on the high seas, she puts her fiancé and aunt to work. The fiancé eventually “proves himself a man when put to the test” by saving Prudence from a burning cabin.¹⁴⁶



Prudence the Pirate (1916) (MPW, 10/21/1916, 377)

By the time comedy dramas dominated box office reports in 1918, exhibitors listed the optimistic narratives as a reason for their success. They felt this cheerfulness made for suitable wartime entertainment. One exhibitor mused, “In view of war conditions, we believe that light

comedy, with snap and life and lots of pretty girls, would be an appropriate offering to the public.”¹⁴⁷ Echoing the interest in ‘light comedy’ with pleasant story components over characters’ comic failures, exhibitor demands specified, “lighter plays, the bright and cheery kind.”¹⁴⁸ Producers responded to these requests, with Paramount announcing that same year that a series of comedy dramas “dealing with the more cheerful aspects of life will exclusively be chosen for production.”¹⁴⁹ Essanay similarly publicized its Skinner features with Bryant Washburn as prompted by wartime conditions, announcing they would make “light comedy pictures, plays that will not depress, but cheer.”¹⁵⁰ The studios’ publicity and advertising continually stressed the idealized worlds in these films. A tagline for *Brewster’s Millions* (1914) promoted it as “the romance of spending a million dollars.”¹⁵¹ An advertisement for Constance Talmadge’s *Up the Road With Sallie* (Select, 1918) also depicted the film’s narrative world as idyllic: “Here are youth and beauty and romance and adventure combined with consummate art in one of the most pleasing comedy-dramas ever presented.”¹⁵²

Overall, discourses surrounding comedy features, ranging from screenwriting manuals to advertisements, came to stress plotlines of advancement and fortuitous developments for the leads. Character change, romance and fortune acquisition could often all be found within one film summary. For instance, a critic described Douglas Fairbanks’ *His Picture in the Papers* (Triangle, 1916) plot as, “He gets his picture on the front page, and also the promised business share and the pretty girl.”¹⁵³ These happy encapsulations carried over to the productions with female leads. A review for Olive Thomas’ *Betty Takes a Hand* (Triangle, 1918) explained that the female lead “snares the ‘catch’ of the season, who is the son of man who made the millions out of the mine in which her father was once a shareholder.”¹⁵⁴ The wish-fulfillment plotlines for comedy features can thus be seen as more pervasive than an emphasis on strong causality and the comparative

strength of ‘situation’ versus gags. Rather, the type of narrative situation—its compatibility with appealing leads and gentle humor—proved more determinative for the plots of comedy features.

“A Ripple of Mirth, Feminine in Sound”: Audiences for Comedy Features

As the feature comedy moved towards attractive leads, sympathetic humor and beneficial plotlines, the trade reported greater success at expanding comedy’s appeal across classes and to women in particular. While earlier comedy features received critiques for being too low or highbrow, exhibitors now designated these features as appealing to ‘any audience’ or ‘any class.’ An exhibitor called Douglas Fairbanks’ *The Matrimaniac* (Triangle, 1916) “suitable for any class of house”¹⁵⁵ while a reviewer for Viola Dana’s *Satan Junior* (Metro, 1919) called it a “bright comedy to amuse any sort of crowd.”¹⁵⁶ Beyond a cross-class approach, reviews, advertisements and reports increasingly stressed female viewers. One reviewer of Marguerite Clark’s feature comedy *Mice and Men* (Paramount, 1916) was struck by “the ripple of mirth, feminine in sound, that passed over the big house in the Strand,”¹⁵⁷ while an exhibitor for Madge Kennedy’s *Baby Mine* (Goldwyn, 1917) characterized the film as “especially pleasing to the women; the house was full of giggles.”¹⁵⁸ Advertisements for feature comedies stressed that exhibitors should play to them. For instance, a tagline for Margarita Fischer’s *Charge it to Me* (Pathé, 1919) read “Did you ever try to earn your own spending money without confiding in your husband? Margarita Fisher does in her most amusing comedy.”¹⁵⁹ Crucially, when exhibitor surveys listed comedy dramas as the most popular form of entertainment, they did so at a time when women were believed to make up a majority of audiences. A 1918 exhibitor survey that declared the ‘five to seven reel’ comedy the most pleasing type of film simultaneously claimed that women made up over 60% of audiences. The summation of their remarks asserted, “It is the fair sex who bring the men out evenings to see the movie plays. They study our weekly programs, and it is they who generally are

the ones who pick the nights he and she will attend out theater.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, by the end of the decade, it appears that the feature comedy came into its own and finally drew in the higher class and feminine patrons producers had sought.

All of the approaches increasingly adopted by producers for comedy features accorded with how theatrical critics had portrayed higher class and feminine tastes. The connection continued to be made explicit. The shift towards youthful and attractive leads mirrored the industry’s belief that glamorous stars appealed across classes. A review for the feature comedy *The Bluff* (Mutual, 1916) laid out the class divide between character comedians and younger leading men and women. Calling the comedians ‘low comedy talents,’ the review goes on to say that another character, “a handsome young chap,” “lends a touch of class to the festivities.”¹⁶¹ A review for Douglas Fairbanks’ *The Lamb* (Triangle, 1915) suggested that his physical and personality attributes would curry favor with all audiences. Calling him a “delight to the eye” and as possessing a “humanness that warms one to the story and to its leading character,” the review goes on to claim that the film “belongs in a class of moving pictures which firmly established the new art in popular favor, a story to charm all who watch it.”¹⁶²

The trend corresponded even more with culturally feminized tastes. Handsome young men who starred in feature comedies had their appeal to women specifically mentioned, though not their appeal to men. Take for instance a review’s remark that male lead Forrest Stanley in *The Yankee Girl* (Paramount, 1915) “is quite the ideal matinee idol type” or that Harold Lockwood possessed “boyish good looks” in *The River of Romance* (Metro, 1916).¹⁶³ Female fans even came up in discussions of Charles Ray, who modern scholars may think of as a gender neutral star in baseball comedies. One publicity piece for *The Busher* (Paramount, 1919) cited “his appeal to the younger girls.”¹⁶⁴ As female stars began to increasingly populate comedy features, critics also

linked this rise to women consumers. Films with female leads more often had female audiences mentioned in reviews. A reviewer pegged Clara Kimball Young's *Marrying Money* (World, 1915) as "a very girly picture"¹⁶⁵ while another called Vivian Martin's *Her Father's Son* (Paramount, 1916) "a picture for young women."¹⁶⁶ Exhibitors also made this connection, with one calling Marguerite Clark's *Bab's Matinee Idol* (Paramount, 1917) a "big hit with old ladies and flappers."¹⁶⁷ Far more female stars from feature comedies than men made up the top twenty results in fan magazines targeting women. An association between the female fans and female stars was made overt in one 1918 exhibitor report declaring comedy dramas the most popular type of film. The report declared, "Girl stars are bigger box office attractions than the men because the women like to see the pretty clothes they wear."¹⁶⁸ Of course, the idea of women only wanting to see female leads due to fashion was likely a narrow and condescending assessment. However, industry discourse also mentioned that women appreciated the likable nature of female leads along with the topical issues they encountered in the film's narratives. A reviewer of Marguerite Clark's *Mice and Men* (Paramount, 1916) noted, "There are women who carry their market baskets on Saturday night to revel in the delights of Miss Clark's 'cuteness.'"¹⁶⁹ Reviews repeatedly suggested that women sought female stars as role models, an idea carried over from legitimate theater. *Film Daily* pronounced of *Peggy Does Her Darnedest* (Metro, 1919), "Many of your women folk will term it a 'cute' story and they are sure to like May Allison in another interpretation of the ultra-modern and resourceful girl."¹⁷⁰ While the idea of starring attractive, likable leads in comedy features would at first seem to simply broaden the film's appeal to the widest sector, the decision also held particular gender connotations.

Critics and columnists also affiliated the sympathetic humor in features with the ability to appeal across classes as well as to women. A review for Douglas Fairbanks' *The Lamb* (Triangle,

1915) made sure to morally separate his wholesome humor from ‘low’ comedy. *The Moving Picture World* called it “a delightful comedy, clean, wholesome, not catering to low tastes at the risk of nauseating minds not primitive.”¹⁷¹ The notion of kindly, good-natured humor also connected to the industry’s conceptions of class, though even more so to gender. When comedians Kolb and Dill attempted to elevate their vaudeville caricatures with comedy drama plotlines for features, critics framed their new approach as an appeal to better audiences. *Motography* observed, “there is a spirit of kindliness and gentleness throughout the story which is extremely rare in comedies of this kind and which will appeal to the more intelligent class of audience.”¹⁷² However, female patrons, regardless of class, also had strong associations with morality and kind humor. An exhibitor happily endorsed Constance Talmadge’s *Sauce for the Goose* (Select, 1918) as a “good, clean, wholesome subject that the women folks will rave about.”¹⁷³ In an assessment of Gladys Leslie’s *A Stitch in Time* (Vitagraph, 1919), the reviewer opined, “Women and children are certain to respond to the sympathetic qualities of Miss Leslie’s personality.”¹⁷⁴ These commentaries were seconded by fan magazines and female writers, who often praised feature comedies for sympathetic characters and expressed discontent when this component was absent. A female newspaper critic praised *Betty of Graystone* (Triangle, 1916) for being a “charming comedy of character”¹⁷⁵ while another female writer for *Motion Picture Magazine* felt disappointed that Fairbanks’ *When the Clouds Roll By* “no more touches your emotions or heart than an ordinary two-reel slapstick comedy.”¹⁷⁶ If a feature comedy’s descriptions referred to its humor as ‘good natured,’ ‘human,’ ‘light’ and ‘happy,’ female audiences usually came up as a target audience. Commentators also positioned optimistic storylines as ways to widening their audience base to include further higher-class and female patrons. One for Franklyn Farnum’s *Fast Company* (Universal, 1918) proposed that the character’s “transformation from a mollicoddle to a

conquering hero is amusing and will delight the average comedy-loving audience.”¹⁷⁷ Reviews also associated women with the happy, cheerful plots. Of *Her Father's Son* (Paramount, 1916), the reviewer labeled it a picture for young women and continued, “there is nothing ugly in it at all, and the tale is attractive rather than strong.”¹⁷⁸

While these production decisions elevated the cultural respectability of feature comedies above shorts, the films did not attain a high class or highbrow reputation. In particular, male critics appeared resentful of the influence of female audiences by the end of the decade. Though the industry had initially targeted middle-class attendees from legitimate theater, they now regularly lumped women together as a problematic viewing demographic, regardless of class. While entertainment industries in the late 19th and early 20th century often sought women to improve their reputations, industry rhetoric typically became more dismissive, bordering on resentful, once female consumers achieved considerable presence.¹⁷⁹ The films became more middlebrow and feminized than tastemakers had hoped for.

Critics griped that the movement towards attractive, charismatic stars came at the expense of story structure. Even when critics enjoyed a feature comedy, they noted how the star's charisma took precedent over the narrative. A reviewer for Viola Dana's *Satan Jr* (Metro, 1919) dismissed the story as “ridiculously inconsistent” but still noted that “the audience howled with delight over the hoydenish antics of Viola Dana.”¹⁸⁰ The films' strong reliance on the star's persona can be seen as part of a broader cultural shift from 19th century discourses that highlighted internal virtues to 20th century discourses that praised external projections of personality.¹⁸¹ Usually harsher complaints came during reviews for films that the trade aligned with female fans. Of Ann Murdock's *The Richest Girl* (Mutual, 1918), a critic complained that it simply “gives her a chance to wear a number of fetching costumes and to be ‘cute.’”¹⁸² Overlapping with the reliance on star

over logical plots, critics blamed women for the ‘fluffy’ and flimsy wish-fulfillment plots that sustained many of the films. A reviewer for June Caprice’s *A Modern Cinderella* (Fox, 1917) dismissively wrote, “The story is as unsubstantial a a Chocolate Sundae” but “a satisfactory meal for the female appetite.”¹⁸³ The characterization of wish-fulfillment plots as designed for feminine viewers crossed class boundaries. *Variety* noted that Tom Moore’s film, *Thirty a Week* (Goldwyn, 1918) would appeal to women, especially of the working class, due to the positive trajectory of a working girl who marries a wealthy suitor. The reviewer quipped, “The sentimental shopgirls and ‘kitchen mechanics’ who enjoy novels where the rich young man marries the poor working girl, vice versa, will revel in the development of ‘Thirty a Week.’”¹⁸⁴

Women also bore the brunt of blame for overly sentimental humor that some critics worried ‘over-domesticated’ the comedy feature. Despite sympathetic humor also holding general ties to middle class tastes, critics laid the blame for overly saccharine comedies specifically at women’s feet. The *Variety* reviewer for Marguerite Clark’s *Mice and Men* (Paramount, 1916) sniped, “To borrow an expression from the women, and those women who see the picture very likely unhesitatingly will loan it—it is a ‘sweet’ picture; it is satisfying.” They dismissed the comedy as “being an F.P. [Famous Players] of the mushy kind, you know what to expect before you see it.”¹⁸⁵ Some male critics also implied that the objection to ‘vile content’ or comedic rough housing could result in dull pictures, even though extant films often show young women engaged in many athletic activities. A review for Alice Brady’s *The Indestructible Wife* (Select, 1919), decried, “Women, and those men who abhor ‘vile’ rapid action, or sternly object to having their slumbering emotions disturbed, may enjoy it immensely; but for anybody who looks for life and vigor in photoplays may beg and pray for the Sennett comedy that might be next on the bill.”¹⁸⁶ Though sympathetic

humor was considered more morally appropriate than slapstick, it became distanced from highbrow sophistication precisely because of its association with female viewers.

The feature comedy occupied an intriguing middling cultural space. The films affirmative strategy elevated comedy for middle class audiences and provided safe, widely appealing entertainment. However, the broadness of this appeal, and its servicing of more female consumers, bothered some critics and intellectuals. Though the feature had advertised itself as ‘high class’ in its early years, the label did not comfortably apply by the end of the decade.

Conclusion

That by 1918 American exhibitors demanded comedy dramas over two-reel comedies attests to the remarkable change in the fortunes of the comedy feature within five years of being introduced. As previous chapters illustrate, feature producers initially struggled to craft comedies that would extend to women and higher classes without alienating film comedy’s original audience base. With the modes of affirmative comedy explored in this chapter, the industry finally achieved a balance that attracted mass audiences. By the end of the 1910s, comedy features increasingly employed youthful and attractive stars, optimistic and good-natured humor, along with wish-fulfillment plot trajectories. The industry’s attempts to solicit higher class and female patrons engendered this approach, and those audiences seemingly responded with their attendance and support.

Affirmative comedy in features profoundly reconfigured film comedy’s relationship to class and gender by moving towards strategies contemporary observers culturally positioned as middlebrow and feminized. Women’s consumption is often culturally tied to middlebrow taste or respectability rhetoric, which tends to be derided by critics or scholars who valorize the ‘highbrow’ or fetishize the ‘lowbrow.’¹⁸⁷ Accounts of silent comedy often mimic this tendency. Scholars

praise the inventiveness of ‘sophisticated’ comedies, such as those directed by Ernst Lubitsch, or rehabilitate comic forms deemed crude by period critics, such as slapstick.¹⁸⁸ This aversion to middlebrow forms of comedy in scholarship not only limits our ability to understand how many mainstream comedy films operated, but also removes forms of comedy from history that targeted female audiences and frequently starred female performers. This avoidance neglects the significant role women played in prompting industry strategies for crafting broadly appealing, American humor. The comedy feature’s eventual ability to both popularize and legitimize certain forms of humor did not result in a mere move towards further causality or refinement. Rather, these films attempted to meet the desires of diverse United States’ consumers, though this process of affirmation still prioritized white, middle-class visions of the country at the expense of others.

The rise of *affirmative comedies* in the film industry was simultaneously a cultural tale of exclusion and inclusion. The feature comedy came to avoid forms of humor that would provoke controversy, which streamlined the kinds of leads at their center. Concurrently, producers of feature comedies attempted to balance the desires of many different types of patrons, expanding film comedy’s appeal to multiple classes and to women. As the industry *excluded* certain types of comic characters or actions from the feature, it also strove to find forms of humor that would *include* a wider range of viewers. It was a mixed legacy, but a vastly influential one that secured comedy’s survival in the feature realm.

¹ For some articles and individual exhibitor reports citing this trend, see “Cut Out the Sobs, Exhibitors Say.” *Motography*. 3/2/1918, 393-395; “Look at Vaudeville.” *Motography*. 3/30/1918, 607; “What the Picture Did for Me-Baby Mine.” *Motography*. 5/25/1918, 981; “Waifs.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 8/3/1918, 31; “Exhibitors Know the Public Does Discriminate.” *The Moving Picture World*. 7/6/1918, 53; “Box Office Reports-Betty Takes a Hand.” *Motion Picture News*. 3/30/1918, 1873. If one looks at individual exhibitor listings for each feature comedy drama release, you will see comments like “the type of picture to please the majority” or requests for more comedy dramas. The films are assumed to be general crowd pleasers or in demand.

² “Letter to George Kleine from E. Wetheimer.” 7/22/1916. George Kleine Papers. Cartoons and Comedies Folder. Library of Congress.

³ “Cut Out the Sobs, Exhibitors Say.” *Motography*. 3/2/1918. 393.

⁴ “The Exhibitor’s Tell What They Want.” *Motography*. 3/9/1918, 455.

⁵ For example, one said Olive Thomas’ comedy drama *Betty Takes a Hand* (Triangle, 1918) was “the kind the public likes.” (“What the Picture Did for Me.”” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 3/30/1918, 1873). Another remarked “comedy dramas are the thing” in response to Madge Kennedy’s *Nearly Married* (Goldwyn, 1918) (“What the Picture Did for Me.” *Motography*. 5/25/1918, 981)

⁶ As one example, Paramount announced its plan to release primarily comedy dramas in the midst of 1918 as “plays dealing with the more cheerful aspects of life will be exclusively chosen for production” (“Radical Change in F.P.L. Policy” By Jesse L. Lasky. *Motography*. 6/15/1918, 1121).

⁷ Jenkins, “What Made Pistachio Nuts?”, 148.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jenkins, 149.

¹⁰ See Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1981), 8.

¹¹ As a note, when I describe affirmative films and their stars as ‘successful’ or popular, I rely on both reviews as well as box office reports. For critical responses, I considered the aggregate of reviews from *The Moving Picture World*, *Motion Picture News*, *Motography* (later *Exhibitor’s Herald*), *The Film Daily*, *The New York Clipper* and *Variety*. For exhibitor feedback, I primarily relied on box office reports listed in *Motion Picture News* as well as individual exhibitors’ responses in *Motography* and later *Exhibitor’s Herald*.

¹² Rick Altman. *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 82.

¹³ In his history of silent film between 1915-1928, Richard Koszarski claims “Relatively few feature comedies were produced before 1920.” He writes of the 1910s, “Fairbanks Fairbanks was a one-man show against the shorts talent of Arbuckles, Chaplins and Lloyds.” (*An Evening’s Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1990, 174-175). David Robinson replicates this perspective in his overview of silent comedy, claiming that *Tillie’s Punctured Romance* (1914) was the “first multi-reel comedy” and that “it was to be several more years before the feature-length comedy was established.” He then implies this started with Chaplin and others by continuing, “not until 1918 and *A Dog’s Life* did he embark on feature-length films.” (David Robinson. “Comedy.” in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 82-83) Other accounts do not so explicitly propose there were ‘no’ feature comedies in the 1910s but imply as much by waiting to discuss feature comedies until the 1920s.

¹⁴ Kristen Anderson Wagner. "Pie Queens and Virtuous Vamps: The Funny Women of the Silent Screen." *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 52. Wagner equates 'light comedy' with 'refined comedy', but light comedy often referred to the style of comedy and its content as opposed to being considered necessarily 'high class.' It was considered classier than slapstick, but it occupied a more middlebrow space than satire or other types of humor.

¹⁵ For descriptions of light comedy that define it by its 'light' treatment of events and align it with cheerful comedies matching my affirmative concept, here are just several instances. In *Writing the Photoplay* (Springfield: The Home Correspondence School, 1913), author J. Berg Bsenwein says light comedies were still rare at this time but represented "the kind of photo-comedies that approximate the plays usually employed as vehicles by Mr. John Drew and M. Willie Collier" (284). Drew was known for romantic comedies and cheerful plays with Billie Burke, while Collier by this point in his career was known for playing likable male protagonists in energetic middlebrow vehicles similar to Douglas Fairbanks' films, like *The Dictator* (prod. 1904). He also points to their examination of daily life and realism by saying "they may teat of society, of business life, or of life in the home, but on account of the light, airy and subtly humorous way in which the situations are developed they take higher artistic rank than may be accorded to farce." (284). Another discussion in *The Moving Picture World* was even more explicit. Epes Winthrop Sargent separated farce from light comedy by paring down the focus in light comedy to fewer characters, making them more likable and giving both romance and the female lead a more prominent, active role in the narrative (see "The Photoplaywright." *The Moving Picture World*. 5/30/1914, 1255). Reviews for Owen Moore's *Rolling Stones* (Paramount, 1916) said he played the role with 'light comedy values' but noted his middling cultural classification as "neither a low comedian nor yet a polite comedian." (Jolo. "Rolling Stones." *Variety*. 9/15/1916, 18). Other reviews called films light comedies with attractive leads and pleasant storylines but disassociated them from 'high class' or 'refined' audiences. A review for the romantic comedy *The Chaperon* (KESE, 1916) called it "light comedy" but said "the improbability of the story will also mitigate against its acceptance by the better class of audiences." (*The New York Clipper*. 11/29/1916, 9). Similarly, reviews rarely defined the films as edifying, but said "the picture will be well liked by those who prefer to be amused by a picture rather than enlightened." (Helen Rockwell. "Betty Takes a Hand." *Motography*. 1/12/1918, 88). By the war, descriptions of 'light comedy' appeared to have little connection with 'refinement' or subtle playing. Exhibitors said, "in view of war conditions, we believe that light comedy, with snap and life and lots of pretty girls would be an appropriate offering to the public." ("Anglo Secures Foreign Rights for Pyramids." *The Moving Picture World*, 3/30/1918, 1835).

Publicity and reviews also used the term 'light' more in regards to the happy, fluffy substance of the narratives than the delicate style of performers. Take the ad that calls a film a 'light comedy' and follows this with "the sum and light fluffy substance of which is excellent." The humanity and sympathy is acknowledged as well: "Its complications contain an abundant supply of humor and the author has shown a keen knowledge of human nature in his four principal characterizations that makes them beings of flesh and blood instead of rather impossible puppets; often the encumbrances of a farce." (Peter Milne. "Up the Road with Sallie." *Motion Picture News*. 4/27/1918, 2555). The 'attractiveness' of characters also became associated with light comedy. Take a publicity piece for Bryant Washburn that noted his "youth, good looks, genial disposition and a mastery of the art of light comedy." ("Announcement of the Plans of The Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, Season 1918-1919." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/6/1918, 11) The 'agreeableness' of light comedy and its gentle humor also find reference in reviews, such as one calling a feature a 'light comedy' and then specifying "an agreeable vein of light humor runs through this pleasing project." (Robert McElravy. "The Beloved Blackmailer." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/10/1918, 882-883). Another review makes this link in pleasantness explicit as well: "pleasing light comedy which presents a delicate little plot of a fresh, enjoyable sort." (McElravy. "Waifs." *The Moving Picture World*. 9/3/1918, 720) The 'light comedy' also was linked to moral cleanliness with films labeled light comedies also being called "clean and wholesome entertainment." ("Johanna Enlists." *Motion Picture News*. find citation) Another review similarly described a "simple little story of the home spun type with a wholesome atmosphere and affording pleasant entertainment of the light comedy order." (Tom Hamlin. "In Wrong." *Motion Picture News*. 10/25/1919, 3203).

¹⁶ For instance, productions such as *Cyrano De Bergerac* were sometimes called comedy drama even though that play ends with the deaths of several main characters. ("Edmond Rostand's Pans for the Future." *The Theatre*. 9/1903, 225). However, many productions with consistently light plots or plays with their humor primarily emphasized also received this label, such as *Him and Me* (1903 prod.), which was called "a strong and excruciatingly funny comedy drama." ("Him and Me." *The New York Clipper*. 2/28/1903, 28).

¹⁷ “Comedies.” *Motion Picture News*, 8/19/1911, 15

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ J. Berg Bsenwein. *Writing the Photoplay*. (Springfield: The Home Correspondence School, 1913), 284.

²¹ These results come from using ‘Arclight,’ a search platform on the Media History Project site, run by Eric Hoyt. The platform searches through thousands of newspapers, trade press publications and books by year to provide a list of references per year. These results should be checked by looking at the actual article references, however, as sometimes these results refer to theater productions rather than films or repeated references to a single film. So for 1913, there are 75 hits in MPW, but there are some repeated references to the same film, making the actual amount of separate films referred to by this term 44.

²² July 1912 had the largest percentage of comedy dramas I could find (MPW, 7/27/1912, 390). For more typical examples, see June, 1913 (MPW, 6/28/1913, 1408, 1410), in which there were 7 comedy dramas compared to 126 comedy shorts, or December 1913, (MPW, 12/27/1913, 1616, 1618) in which there were 9 comedy dramas out of 100 comedies.

²³ “Comedies.” *Motion Picture News*. 8/19/1911, 15

²⁴ See Lantern application on *Media History Digital Library*. <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

²⁵ Peter Milne. “The Man Who Could Not Lose.” *Motion Picture News*. 11/28/1914, 43

²⁶ Some of these releases included Mary Pickford’s *Such a Little Queen* (Famous Players, September 1914), Andrew Mack’s *The Ragged Earl* (Alco, October 1914), Macklyn Arbuckle’s *The County Chairman* (Famous Players, Oct 1914), Max Figman’s *What’s His Name?* (Lasky, Oct, 1914), Adele Farrington’s *The Country Mouse* (Bosworth, Nov, 1914), and *The Chocolate Soldier* (Daisy Feature Co., Nov 1914).)

²⁷ See Lantern application on *Media History Digital Library*. <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

²⁸ These numbers stem from examining the Licensed and Independent release dates in *The Moving Picture World* for each edition of that publication from December in both 1914 and 1917 and counting the total number of shorts with the ‘com. dr.’ designation. This excluded films over three reels with this designation.

²⁹ For comparison, view Paramount’s early 1915 listings (“Miscellaneous and Feature Releases.” *The Moving Picture World*. 3/13/1915, 1688) against the end of 1916 once Black Diamond comedies have been added to the releases (“List of Current Film Release Dates.” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/11/1916, 926).

³⁰ For example, Goldwyn heavily advertised its films like *Baby Mine* (1917) as ‘comedy’ with ‘comedienne’ Madge Kennedy, and they also released other, less prestigious features as ‘comedy’ on their release schedule as late as the end of 1917 (“List of Current Film Release Dates.” *The Moving Picture World*, 11/24/1917, 1240).

³¹ See “Biggest Literary Men Contribute to Paramount.” *The Moving Picture World*. 7/7/1917, 89.

³² Frances Taylor Patterson. *Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 135.

³³ “Grandma’s Boy.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 8/5/1922, 47.

³⁴ Ibid, 47.

³⁵ “Yankee Doodle’ Film Plays to Record Business in West.” *The Moving Picture World*. 6/7/1919, 1480.

³⁶ See Gloria Swanson's *Haystacks and Steeples* (Triangle, 1916), which Rob King discusses in his examination of Keystone Company. Other Swanson and Bobby Vernon vehicles would potentially meet the 'affirmative' definition as well (Rob King. *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, 172).

³⁷ See Richard deCordova's pivotal study of the star system's development, *Picture Personalities* (1991), to more recent considerations of female fan culture and their interest in film stars of the 1910s, such as Shelley Stamp's *Movie-Struck Girls* (2000).

³⁸ See Rob King's *The Fun Factory* or Anthony Slide's *The Big V: A History of the Vitagraph Company*. (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 1987).

³⁹ See Appendix III. Also evaluates affirmative traits in all feature comedies for the years 1918 and 1919, and these traits remain dominant.

⁴⁰ Peter Milne. "Peggy." *Motion Picture News*. 1/29/1916, 563.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Just for Tonight." *Exhibitors Herald*. 8/17/1918, 20

⁴³ Richard Koszarski. *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 175.

⁴⁴ "Star Popularity Contests Are Arousing the Nation." *The Moving Picture World*, 1/1/1921, 32-33.

⁴⁵ "The Motion Picture Hall of Fame." *Motion Picture Magazine*. March, 1918. 102.

⁴⁶ "Norma Talmadge and Wallace Reid Win National Star Popularity Contest." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/19/1921, 247.

⁴⁷ See the entirety of Kristen Ann Wagner's Chapter Two in *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018).

⁴⁸ See Appendix III. Women also make up more than 60% of leads in the years 1917 and 1919.

⁴⁹ "Women at Work." *Film Fun*. August, 1917, 1.

⁵⁰ "Letter from George Kleine to Leo McChesney." 7/24/1917. Box 16. George Kleine Papers. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

⁵¹ "Cut Out the Sobs, Exhibitors Say." *Motography*. 3/2/1918, 393.

⁵² "Light Society Comedy Starring a Woman is Voted Most Popular of All Features." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/23/1920. 1068

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "Notes on Motion Picture Record of J. Searle Dawley." Folder 18, p. 17. J. Searle Dawley Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, California.

⁵⁵ See *Motion Picture Magazine's* "Enthusiasm Great in Popularity Contest." August, 1920, 98 or "Norma Talmadge and Wallace Reid Win National Star Popularity Contest." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/19/1921, 247.

⁵⁶ For some examples of popularity contests where you will see all of these female stars' names present, see the results for *Motion Picture Magazine*'s "Enthusiasm Great in Popularity Contest." August, 1920, 98 or "What a Picture Earns." *Picture-Play Magazine*. June, 1920, 96.

⁵⁷ By studio, May Allison and Viola Dana worked for Metro, Bessie Barriscale and Olive Thomas for Triangle (though Thomas later moved to join Constance Talmadge at Select), June Caprice and Peggy Hyland for Fox, Margarita Fischer and Gladys Hulette both had films distributed through Pathe, Madge Kennedy and Mabel Normand worked for Goldwyn, Billie Burke, Marguerite Clark, Mary Pickford and Vivian Martin were distributed through Paramount, and Jackie Saunders worked for Balboa.

⁵⁸ See Steve Seidman's only briefly references to leading men and women and 'conventional' Hollywood comedies in *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 107. Instead of considering attractive leads in comedies, many analyses of film comedy focus on comedians seen as 'eccentric' or 'maladjusted.' See Steve Balcerzak's *Buffoon Men: Classic Hollywood Comedians and Queered Masculinity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), or Alan Dale's *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Work on women in comedy continues to demonstrate an interest in the comedienne's 'defiance' of normative femininity. See Kathleen Rowe's *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick of Silent Film Comediennes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), or the anthology *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy*. Eds. Linda Mizejewski and Victoria Sturtevant. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

⁵⁹ "7 Sisters." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/17/1915, 434.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Louis Reeves Harrison. "The Flight of the Duchess." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/18/1916, 1846.

⁶² The 'ingenue' is discussed primarily in Griffith's dramas and usually in a dismissive fashion. See Sukimo Higashi's *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine*. Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978). That perspective continues in more recent texts. In her consideration discourses around women's sexuality in 1910s cinema, Janet Staiger notes that ingenues in Griffith's films "could be quite old-fashioned, imitating the dated Victorian images of the pious and domestic woman." (*Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995, 181).

⁶³ "The Clodhopper." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 6/30/1917, 23.

⁶⁴ "Advertisement- 'The Son of His Father.'" *The Moving Picture World*. 10/20/1917, 325.

⁶⁵ Fred. "John Petticoats." *Variety*. 11/7/1919, 97.

⁶⁶ "More Exhibitors Tell What They Want." *Motography*. 3/9/1918, 445.

⁶⁷ Margaret I. MacDonald. "Seventeen." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/18/1916, 997.

⁶⁸ Edward Weitzel. Scandal." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/10/1917, 878

⁶⁹ Harry Carr. "What About Screen Comedy--Tomorrow?" *Photoplay*. 1918, 117.

⁷⁰ "Peggy Does Her Darnedest." *Film Daily*. 2/23/1919, 13.

⁷¹ See Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs's analysis of diva performances in relation to Bara's performance style in *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 131-132.

⁷² There is little discussion of the actor's physicality in 'situation comedy' or silent comedies seen as more narratively-driven. See Frank Scheide's "The Mark of the Ridiculous and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929" (*A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 29-33 or Kristen Anderson Wagner's "Pie Queens and Virtuous Vamps" in the same anthology (53). Also see Henry Jenkins' division between slapstick's physicality and situation comedy in Chapter Two of *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) or Rob King's discussion of situation comedy in *The Fun Factory* (111-112).

⁷³ Hennefield, *Specters of Slapstick*, 2018, 16.

⁷⁴ See Gaylyn Studlar's chapter on Douglas Fairbanks in *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ Emil. "The Spitfire." *The New York Clipper*. 7/4/1914, 12.

⁷⁶ "Stars Are of Proved Ability." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 8/11/1918, 43

⁷⁷ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Peggy." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/22/1916, 620.

⁷⁸ Theresa St. Romain. *Margarita Fischer: A Biography of the Silent Film Star*. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2008), 93.

⁷⁹ "Miss Fisher Proves Agile." *Motography*. 4/20/1918, 763.

⁸⁰ See Tamara Jeffers MacDonald's *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2007) for discussions of romantic leads and their likable, innocent nature. For the 'outsider' or eccentric comedian, see Steve Seidman's *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981) and the other works cited in footnote 54.

⁸¹ Edward Weitzel. "Ashes of the Embers." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/7/1916, 63.

⁸² "The Shadow Stage." *Photoplay*. April, 1917, 80.

⁸³ Louis Reeves Harrison. "His Picture in the Papers." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/12/1916, 973.

⁸⁴ Peter Milne. "The Man Who Could Not Lose." *Motion Picture News*. 11/28/1914, 43.

⁸⁵ George W. Graves. "The Clodhopper." *Motography*. 7/7/1917, 46.

⁸⁶ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Peggy." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/22/1916, 620.

⁸⁷ "Nearly Married." *Exhibitor's Herald*. Nov, 1917, 30.

⁸⁸ Peter Milne. "Patsy." *Motion Picture News*. 7/21/1917, 435.

⁸⁹ Helen Rockwell "The Sudden Gentleman." *Motography*. 12/8/1917, 1208.

⁹⁰ Jolo. "The Lamb." *Variety*. 10/1/1915, 18.

⁹¹ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Peggy." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/22/1916, 620.

⁹² "A Nine O'Clock Town." *Variety*. 8/2/1919, 39.

⁹³ Gilbert Seldes. *The Seven Lively Arts*. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1924), 12.

⁹⁴ Alan Dale. *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 41. Dale complains that Chaplin's film *The Kid* (1921) "is far too often sentimental" (41) and also notes that to praise a comedy for its sentiment is to "praise a comedy for the moments in which it ceases to be comic." (17).

⁹⁵ See Appendix III.

⁹⁶ W. Stephen Bush. "Young Romance." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/6/1915, 837.

⁹⁷ George N. Shorey. "The Heir to the Hoorah." *Motion Picture News*. 11/11/1916, 3017.

⁹⁸ Hanford Judson. "Merely Mary Ann." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/26/1916, 1309.

⁹⁹ Genevieve Harris. "The Lady of the Photograph." *Motography*. 9/8/1917, 530.

¹⁰⁰ Louis Reeves Harrison. "The Laugh is On Us." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/24/1915, 624.

¹⁰¹ Peter Milne. "Efficiency Edgar's Courtship." *Motion Picture News*. 9/22/1917, 2037.

¹⁰² Thomas C. Kennedy. "The Social Secretary." *Motography*. 9/16/1916, 671.

¹⁰³ Louis Reeves Harrison. "His Picture in the Papers." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/12/1916, 973.

¹⁰⁴ Hanford Judson. "Merely Mary Ann." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/26/1916, 1309.

¹⁰⁵ Corb. "An American Citizen." *Variety*. 1/9/1914, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Genevieve Harris. "The Habits of Happiness." *Motography*. 3/25/1916, 713-714.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas C. Kennedy. "Hell to Pay Austin." *Motography*. 8/26/1916, 500-501.

¹⁰⁸ Agnes D. Camp. "Miss Jackie of the Navy." *Motion Picture News*. 12/23/1916, 4044.

¹⁰⁹ "Advertising Aids for Busy Managers." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/4/1919, 119.

¹¹⁰ "Peter Milne. "Happiness." *Motion Picture News*. 5/19/1917, 3159.

¹¹¹ See Lee Grieveson's *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 104. Comedy scholars also note the worsening industry atmosphere for slapstick at the end of the 1910s as features adjusted to middle class norms. See Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale's *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. (London: Routledge, 1990), 110, or Kristen Anderson Wagner's "Pie Queens Virtuous Vamps" in *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 53.

¹¹² Neil G. Coward. "The Current Triangle Bill." *Motography*. 2/12/1916, 368-369.

¹¹³ Peter Milne. "It Happened in Honolulu." *Motion Picture News*. 6/17/1916, 3768.

¹¹⁴ Peter Milne. "Prudence the Pirate." *Motion Picture News*. 10/21/1916, 2555.

¹¹⁵ "The Beloved Blackmailer." *Variety*. 8/2/1918, 39.

¹¹⁶ "The Clodhopper." Scenario, 1. Box 2. Harry and Roy Aitken Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society for Film and Theater Research. Madison, WI. Character called 'hardworking.' For 'a jolly companion' characterization, see "Madcap Madge." Continuity Script. p. 9. Box 7. Harry and Roy Aitken Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society for Film and Theater Research. Madison, WI.

For 'timid but full of potential,' see "Alarm Clock Andy." Continuity Script. Title Page, Shot One. Agnes C. Johnston and Frank Dazey Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA.

¹¹⁷ "The Imposter." Undated. Box 68. R.H. Burnside Papers. The New York Public Library. New York City.

¹¹⁸ Frances Taylor Patterson. *Cinema Craftsmanship* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), 137.

¹¹⁹ "Exhibitors Know the Public Does Discriminate." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/6/1918, 53.

¹²⁰ "The Exhibitor's Tell What They Want." *Motography*. 3/9/1918, 455.

¹²¹ Miriam Petty. *Stealing the Show: African American Performers and Audiences in 1930s Hollywood*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

¹²² Arthur W. Courtney. "Filling His Own Shoes." *The Moving Picture World*. 6/23/1917, 1950.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Peter Milne. "Scandal." *Motion Picture News*. 11/10/1917, 3309.

¹²⁵ Jolo. "Miss George Washington." *Variety*. 11/24/1916, 28.

¹²⁶ Here is a list of sources which seem to define situation comedy in this way: See Eileen Bowser's *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 179-180, Henry Jenkins' *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic*, 48-54, Geoff King's *Film Comedy*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 23, Rob King's *The Fun Factory*, 111-112, Frank Scheide's "The Mark of the Ridiculous and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929" (29-33) and Kristen Andereson Wagner's "Pie Queens and Virtuous Vamps" (53) both in *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

¹²⁷ See Appendix III.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 275-276.

¹²⁹ Sargent, 271-272.

¹³⁰ Sargent, 272.

¹³¹ Hanford C. Judson. "The Country Mouse." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/21/1914, 1084.

¹³² "The Beloved Blackmailer." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 8/10/1918, 52.

¹³³ Louis Reeves Harrison "Triangle Program." 3/25/1916, 2028.

¹³⁴ Peter Milne. "Home." *Motion Picture News*. 8/19/1916, 1096.

¹³⁵ Peter Milne. "Mickey." *Motion Picture News*. 8/3/1918, 790.

¹³⁶ 'Mickey,' Big Sensation—Shepard." *Motion Picture News*. 8/3/1918, 767.

¹³⁷ Peter Milne. "Mr. Fix-It." *Motion Picture News*. 4/20/1918, 2417.

¹³⁸ Genevieve Harris. "Betty Be Good." *Motography*. 7/21/1917, 159.

¹³⁹ George W. Graves. "At First Sight." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/7/1917. 46.

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- ¹⁴⁰ George N. Shorey. "At First Sight." *Motion Picture News* 7/7/1917, 117.
- ¹⁴¹ "Brewster's Millions." *Picture Stories Magazine*. September, 1914, 81.
- ¹⁴² Sime. "Brewster's Millions." *Variety*. 5/1/1914, 21.
- ¹⁴³ James S. MacQuade. "Skinner's Dress Suit." *The Moving Picture* 2/17/1917, 1033.
- ¹⁴⁴ P.S. Harrison. "Beans." *Motion Picture News*. 9/14/1918, 1756.
- ¹⁴⁵ Genevieve Harris. "Naughty, Naughty." *Motography*. 4/13/1918, 722-723.
- ¹⁴⁶ Thomas C. Kennedy. "Prudence the Pirate." *Motography*. 10/21/1916, 940.
- ¹⁴⁷ "Anglo Secures Foreign Rights for Pyramids." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/30/1918, 1835.
- ¹⁴⁸ The Exhibitor's Tell What They Want." *Motography*. 3/9/1918, 455.
- ¹⁴⁹ "Radical Change in F.P.L. Policy" By Jesse L. Lasky. *Motography*. 6/15/1918, 1121.
- ¹⁵⁰ George K. Spoor. "Public Needs Pictures with Humor." *Motography*. 9/8/1917, 500.
- ¹⁵¹ "Brewster's Millions." *Picture Stories Magazine*. September, 1914, 81.
- ¹⁵² "Ad-Up the Road with Sallie." *Motion Picture News*. 5/4/1918, 2600.
- ¹⁵³ Peter Milne. "His Picture in the Papers." *Motion Picture News*. 2/12/1916, 872.
- ¹⁵⁴ Fred. "Betty Takes a Hand." *Variety*. 1/4/1918, 44.
- ¹⁵⁵ "The Matrimaniac." *The New York Clipper*. 12/13/1916, 33.
- ¹⁵⁶ "Satan Junior." *The Film Daily*. 3/9/1919, 3.
- ¹⁵⁷ George Blaisdell. "Mice and Men." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/15/1916, 440.
- ¹⁵⁸ "What the Picture Did for Me." *Motography*. 6/22/1918, 1157
- ¹⁵⁹ "Charge it to Me." *The Film Daily*. 4/23/1919, no page number
- ¹⁶⁰ "Cut Out the Sobs, Exhibitors Say." *Motography*. 3/2/1918, 393.
- ¹⁶¹ "Bluff." *The New York Clipper*. 11/15/1916, 33.
- ¹⁶² "Triangle's Auspicious Opening." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/9/1915, 233-234.
- ¹⁶³ Lynde Denig. "River of Romance." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/29/1916, 802.
- ¹⁶⁴ "Special Service Section on Charles Ray in 'The Busher.'" *Motion Picture News*. 5/31/1919, 3625.
- ¹⁶⁵ Hugh Hoffman. "Marrying Money." *Motography*. 8/7/1915, 258.
- ¹⁶⁶ Hanford C. Judson. "Her Father's Son." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/21/1916, 380.

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- ¹⁶⁷ “Box Office Reports.” *Motion Picture News*. 12/29/1917, 4515.
- ¹⁶⁸ “Cut Out the Sobs, Exhibitors Say.” *Motography*. 3/2/1918, 394.
- ¹⁶⁹ Sime. “Mice and Men.” *Variety*. 1/14/1916, 19.
- ¹⁷⁰ “Peggy Does Her Darnedest.” *The Film Daily*. 2/23/1919, 13.
- ¹⁷¹ Louis Reeves Harrison. “Triangle’s Auspicious Opening.” *The Moving Picture World*. 10/9/1915, 233-234.
- ¹⁷² Genevieve Harris. “A Million for Mary.” *Motography*. 8/26/1916, 501-502.
- ¹⁷³ P.S. Harrison. “Sauce for the Goose.” *Motion Picture News*. 9/7/1918, 1595.
- ¹⁷⁴ “A Stitch in Time.” *The Film Daily*. 4/24/1919, no page number
- ¹⁷⁵ Abel, 231
- ¹⁷⁶ Hazel Simpson Naylor. “Across the Silver Sheet.” *Motion Picture Magazine*. April-May, 1920 74-75.
- ¹⁷⁷ Genevieve Harris. “Fast Company.” *Motography*. 4/13/1918, 722.
- ¹⁷⁸ Hanford C. Judson. “Her Father’s Son.” 10/21/1916, 380.
- ¹⁷⁹ See the entirety of Kibler’s *Rank Ladies* for pushback against the ‘feminization’ of vaudeville or Butsch’s *The Making of American Audiences*, Chapter Five, for critics’ concerns about the influence of matinee girls on legitimate theater.
- ¹⁸⁰ Jolo. “Satan Jr.” *Variety*. 3/7/1919, 66
- ¹⁸¹ See Warren Susman’s *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), Chapter Fourteen.
- ¹⁸² Genevieve Harris. “The Richest Girl.” *Motography*. 4/13/1918, 722.
- ¹⁸³ “A Modern Cinderella.” *The Moving Picture World*. 1/20/1917, 357.
- ¹⁸⁴ “Thirty a Week.” *Variety*. 10/18/1918, 39.
- ¹⁸⁵ Sime. “Mice and Men.” *Variety*. 1/14/1916, 19.
- ¹⁸⁶ P.S. Harrison. “The Indestructible Wife.” *Motion Picture News*. 3/1/1919, 1387.
- ¹⁸⁷ See discussions of women’s relationship to middlebrow literature, including Jamie Harker’s *America the Middlebrow: Women’s Novels, Progressivism and Middlebrow Authorship between the Wars*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 2.
- ¹⁸⁸ Current studies of silent comedy have praised slapstick for its lowbrow or working-class defiance of ‘genteel’ culture, such as Gilbert Seldes (see *The Seven Lively Arts*) or Rob King’s *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Some scholars have instead praised directors such as Ernest Lubitsch or Charles Chaplin for their ‘sophistication’ and appeal to ‘sophisticated audiences,’ such as Lea Jacob’s analysis of the discourse around ‘sophisticated comedy’ in Chapter Three of *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

Chapter Five- **“I Always Knew I Could Make You Love Me”: Enter Romantic Comedy**

The development of feature-length comedy in the 1910s established romantic comedy as a commercially influential film genre. By 1918, over half of feature comedies contain plotlines that foregrounded a couple's progressing romance.¹ Its prominence demonstrates that comedy's shift towards affirmative, middlebrow approaches in the feature film were significantly shaped by producers' efforts to appeal to female patrons. Scholars Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale maintain that romantic comedy is probably the most common form of narratively-driven film humor. However, they situate romantic comedy specifically as a “staple product of classical Hollywood cinema between 1934 and 1942.”² Their account mirrors how other analyses of romantic comedy typically overlook films prior to the early 1930s.³ The rationale for starting histories of romantic comedy with the coming of sound seems to stem from an assumption that romantic comedies require dialogue. In a study of language in American film comedy, for example, Christopher Beach argues that after years of silent slapstick, “the sound era brought to the fore an essentially new genre of dialogue-based romantic comedy.”⁴ While sound certainly added means to convey a couple's sparring, romantic comedies already thrived by the 1910s.

To the extent that scholars acknowledge the existence of silent romantic comedies, they nearly always cite the same few films by Cecil B. DeMille or Ernst Lubitsch.⁵ This emphasis on only two directors reinforces the misconception that, as Leger Grindon maintains, “the genre was a minor current” in silent film.⁶ More recently, scholars such as Kristen Anderson Wagner have begun to look beyond those two directors to explore romantic comedies starring comediennes Marion Davies and Constance Talmadge.⁷ However, since Wagner's study focuses on individual

comediennes' contributions, we still have little sense of the scope and conventions of romantic comedies in silent film.

In this chapter, I argue that romantic comedy was a key form of silent humor, attaining a major presence in 1910s feature films. I consider industrial and social factors that may account for why romantic comedy became so prevalent. The development of feature comedies as a product strongly encouraged the growth of romantic comedy as a film genre. While romantic comedies only made up a small percentage of comedy shorts, they made up a much greater portion of feature comedies. The condensed, broad humor in comedy shorts made depictions of romantic maturation less likely. In contrast, romantic comedy accorded well with feature comedies' increasingly affirmative approach of employing appealing young leads, making humor sympathetic, and conveying social optimism. It crucially advanced feature producers' goal to attract female patrons as well. The increased prominence of the genre also reflected changing public perspectives about courtship and marriage during the Progressive era. Though the films show in some respects how little is truly 'new' in romantic comedy, they also reveal certain preoccupations emblematic of their 1910s context. Variants with singles and married couples both laid groundwork for romantic comedies in the sound era.

“Why Are So Few Screen Romances Shown?”: Romantic Comedy Before Features

From its origins, film comedy depicted lovers. One of the earliest films to be shown commercially captured a kiss between May Irwin and John Rice in *The Widow Jones* (1896).⁸ However, to say that *romantic comedy* always existed in film oversimplifies the form's development. Romantic comedies foreground a couple's evolving relationship with humor stemming from their changing sentiments.⁹ Comedy shorts, in contrast, usually emphasized physical conflict and pranks. In one of the few essays on romantic comedy to acknowledge silent

iterations, Sarah Kozloff contends the genre was well-established in silent shorts.¹⁰ Kozloff is correct that romantic comedies can be found, ranging from Maurice Costello and Florence Turner's *The Romance of the Umbrella* (Vitagraph, 1909) to Alice Guy Blanche's *A House Divided* (Solax, 1913). However, most comedy shorts featured lovers as cogs in a larger, farcical machine. Typically, comical chases ensued from a father pursuing an eloping couple or spousal misbehavior without an arc to a pair's relationship.

If we simply apply a romantic comedy formula to shorts—a single couple or married couple not starting the narrative in love but falling in love over the course of the narrative—few comedy shorts meet that criteria. In 1913, the year before the first influx of comedies over three reels, about 6% of shorts contain such a narrative trajectory.¹¹ The rareness is likely because, as discussed in Chapter One, the main characters were seldom treated sympathetically, which provided few opportunities to build audience investment in a couple. Instead, shorts foregrounded characters' humiliation as schemes went awry. The infrequency also probably resulted from the brevity of the films. It is difficult to show a relationship gradually changing over the course of 10-12 minutes. In fact, writers for the film trade felt that romance helped justify the feature's longer form. A report in *The Moving Picture World* on distributing multi-reel films in Germany noted that romance required greater lengths.¹² Screenwriting manuals also argued that romance or pathos could salvage a feature comedy if its humor did not sustain interest in and of itself. Epes Winthrop Sargent, writing in a 1916 screenplay manual, insisted that feature comedies rarely relied solely on humor, or else “the action strikes a dead level along in the second reel after which it becomes first tiresome and then tedious.”¹³ Instead, reviews emphasized that feature comedies did not solely offer humor but other attractions as well. The reviewer for *The New York Clipper* praised *Brewster's Millions* (Paramount/Lasky, 1914) as “howlingly funny,” but also asserted that “the

spirit of adventure and romance is cleverly interwoven.”¹⁴ Reviewers regularly depicted romance as a means for feature comedies to add substance. Later that same year, critics lauded the romantic comedy, *The Country Mouse* (Paramount, 1914) as appropriate for feature-length since its evolving relationship between a rural couple offered a “situation for dramatic development.”¹⁵ The pleasant nature of romance made it more compatible with comedy drama than other means of adding emotional interest. Scenario writers noted the hazard of adding material too dark or incompatible with laughs in the comedy feature. Epes Winthrop Sargent clarified that ‘comedy drama’ should not be “an alternation of raw farce and tense tragedy.”¹⁶ Romance thus offered a means of emotional attachment without ruining the relative lightness of the comedy features.

In addition to justifying longer film lengths, the trade discussed ‘romance’ as essential for attracting multi-class contingents. In a 1913 discussion of the attempt to draw different classes through features, *The Moving Picture World* columnist Louis Reeves Harrison complained that romance was sadly lacking in the industry. He queried, “Why are so few screen romances shown,” suggesting that feature filmmakers focus on “a fascinating romance, a delightful bit of characterization that we all recognize.”¹⁷ In Harrison’s view, romance was an emotional experience nearly everyone could relate to, and thus, could be used as a tool to broaden the industry’s appeal. Once romantic comedies began to pervade the feature market, critics would indeed claim that the ‘pleasantness’ made them safe bets. Reviews and exhibitor reports frequently described feature-length romantic comedies as “good for kiddies and grownups too”¹⁸ or “appropriate for any class of house.”¹⁹

Romance was associated most strongly, however, with female patrons. The association between female audiences and romance, in both comedy and drama, pre-dated film. Theatrical critics regularly attributed the prominence of stage romances to women, particularly light

romances. Walter Prichard Eaton complained in 1910 that female audiences enjoyed theater “only according as it tells a pretty story, with sufficient ‘love interest,’ and preferably a happy ending.”²⁰ Feature producers carried forwards this wisdom and designed feature programs accordingly. When Triangle Corporation decided to debut their service, they swapped out Thomas Ince’s *The Coward* (Triangle, 1915) and explained it was “too much of a man’s play for this introduction to the great Triangle service.”²¹ Female spectatorship continued to be vital to these romantic comedies as the decade progressed. Advertising for Julia Dean’s *Matrimony* (Triangle, 1915) emphasized her “ready audience of girls,”²² while a review for Fannie Ward’s *A School for Husbands* (Paramount, 1917) presumed it would appeal to “especially the women folk.”²³ That extended to romantic comedies with single female leads, as a review for *The Kiss* (Paramount, 1916) said “the result will be especially liked by the feminine contingent of the house.”²⁴ Regarding Constance Talmadge’s *The Veiled Adventure* (1918), *The New York Clipper* quipped, “The exhibitor shouldn’t worry about the men. They’ll have to come whether they like it or not.”²⁵ As pressbooks and publicity strategies became more pronounced by the end of the teens, advertising suggestions addressed women with questions such as “to young house-wives: are you content to remain a household drudge and press your husband’s trousers, wash his shirts, etc. etc.? Or would you rather ‘step out’ and see some life?”²⁶ or “women-haters—bold, bare-faced despisers of the fair sex—did you ever meet one? The sort of fellow who professes to detest the very rustle of your petticoat?”²⁷

While domestic strife or elopement hijinks already provided ample comic material for shorts, feature-length romantic comedies adopted an affirmative approach by emphasizing an appealing lead’s perspective (usually female) as they achieved happiness. An early example of this strategy can be found in Adele Farrington’s *The Country Mouse* (Paramount, 1914). The film

follows Addie, wife of a rural politician, and her adjustment to her new life on Capitol Hill. She understands little of her husband's political operations, and he becomes embarrassed by her rural mannerisms and dowdy attire. Realizing her husband is spending ample time with another politician's wife, Addie asks the female owner of a beauty parlor to help her become chic. Transformed, Addie arrives at a ball, impresses another politician enough to secure a deal, and makes her husband incredibly jealous. The film ends with Addie offering to teach her husband the tango. The film anticipates *Why Change Your Wife?* (Paramount, 1920) in the wife's glamorous metamorphosis into a modernized, appropriate partner. In fact, publicity emphasized how Adele's value extended past 'domestic caretaker,' observing "she can 'do much more than cook.'"²⁸ Publicity overtly targeted women and suggested the film could improve their own lives. One advertisement declared, "Wives!! Bring the husbands to see 'The Country Mouse,'" because the film supposedly offered "a forceful lesson for many a man, perhaps YOUR husband."²⁹

As with other affirmative features that targeted women, industry discourse referenced the audience's 'sympathy' for the leads as well as the stories' positive trajectories. Some publicity directly pitted the films' romantic marriages against a more cynical perspective ascribed to 'vaudeville comedians' and masculine jokers. An advertisement for *Happy Though Married* (1919) insisted, "Matrimony, of course, isn't as bad as the cynics and vaudeville comedians and Joe Miller's joke book would make it out to be."³⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, many comedy shorts had presented wives as unpleasant nags or attractive young women as objects for male competition. While a short might focus on the husband's infatuation with a stenographer, the feature comedy was more likely to follow the wife's success in winning her husband back. The sympathetic framing of wives accorded with larger feature trends. Publicity for *The Country Mouse* (1914) noted that Adele Farrington "starts a sympathetic laugh, and keeps it right on going"

and that while “there is nothing improbable about the offering,” the film still presented “a modicum of idealism for the necessary sympathy with the characters with which we are meant to side.”³¹ That combination of realistic behavior with a ‘modicum of idealism’ captures how sympathetic humor in features framed the wives and husbands’ errors as reasonable but also offered a ‘fantasy’ of possibilities for romantic revival. The script for *Matrimony* (Triangle, 1915) insisted about its female lead, “it must be made apparent that it cannot be because she is not pretty or has faded that her husband is growing indifferent to her—she is about 24 and her nature should stand out.”³² Similarly, publicity for *Women’s Weapons* (Paramount, 1918) made it clear that the female lead was “a lovable woman, clever and attractive” and therefore goes about “winning sympathy from the start.”³³ If the female lead had foibles, reviews stressed how any audience member could relate to them. A review for Billie Burke’s *Let’s Get a Divorce* (Paramount, 1918) proposed that her character’s frustration with her husband’s lack of passion “is a state of mind that every being passes through.”³⁴ Advertisements and reviews for these films also highlighted the triumph of improved romantic relations. A review for Fannie Ward’s *A School for Husbands* (Paramount, 1917) claimed the husband “is transformed from a dominating head of a household to a more or less properly restrained and considerate lieutenant and aid”³⁵ while *How to Capture a Misogynist* (Essanay, 1915), according to press descriptions, portrayed a woman hater who through love “becomes such an ardent feminist.”³⁶

As film producers borrowed plays for the feature that had succeeded with a predominately feminine audience, we see an influx of romantic comedies. While the plot of a young couple falling in love could be found in musical comedies and operettas (though the couple often shared the show with larger ensembles),³⁷ most early features adapted comic romances from legitimate plays. The plays from which these features derived suggest the ‘romantic comedy’ should not just be viewed

as a historically constant genre across mediums. When the term ‘romantic comedy’ was used by newspapers and theatrical publications in the second half of the 1800s, it often referred to the ‘romance’ of a play’s historical or fantastical setting in swashbuckling epics such as *Don Caesar De Bazin* (1892) or *If I Were King* (1901).³⁸ Only some of those productions, such as *David Garrick* (1883), featured the central couple within a comic plotline envisioned for romantic comedy today. Plays that meet both the central romance and light comedy expectations seem to have taken off in the early 1900s. Ethel Barrymore achieved a great hit in *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines* (1901), as did Minnie Fiske in *The New York Idea* (1906) and Maude Adams in *What Every Woman Knows* (1908). Billie Burke found consistent fame in light comedies about romance, such as *Love Watches* (1908) and *Jerry* (1914). Many romantic comedies that appeared on the legitimate stage between 1895 and 1915 would later be adapted as comedy features in the 1910s. A sample of those later adapted to features include *An American Citizen* (1897), *The Marriage of Kitty* (1903), *Gretna Green* (1903), *The Man on the Box* (1905), *Love Watches* (1908), *The Caveman* (1911), *Nearly Married* (1913) *A Pair of Silk Stockings* (1914), and *Pretty Mrs. Smith* (1914). When considering the rise of romantic comedy as a film genre, the success of comic romances in early 1900s plays should be included as a significant causal factor. Even later in the decade, original scenarios overlapped significantly with plotlines and character types that appeared in legitimate productions.

As feature comedies became fixtures on companies’ release schedules, the percentage of romantic comedies rose significantly. Out of 33 features of three reels or longer released between November of 1913 and December of 1914, 8 follow a central romance (24%).³⁹ The percentage of romantic comedies out of all comedy features remained steady and even increased as the decade progressed, remaining above 25% every year and reaching percentages as high as 52%.⁴⁰ For

comparison, 25% of feature comedies in 1938 contain a developing romance as the central plotline, despite that being a pivotal year for screwball comedy.⁴¹ Far beyond Cecil B. DeMille or Ernst Lubitsch's films, romantic comedy was established in silent features. A wide array of both reaffirmation and commitment comedies illustrated changing attitudes towards women's marital and dating experiences during the Progressive era.

Reaffirmation Comedies in the 1910s

As scholars are probably most familiar with Cecil B. DeMille's *Don't Change Your Husband* (Paramount, 1919) and *Why Change Your Wife?* (Paramount, 1920) as romantic comedies from the silent era, I will first discuss reaffirmation romances in 1910s comedy features. By reaffirmation, I mean plotlines where a couple (usually married but not always) faces dissolution but proceeds to rekindle their love. Kristine Karnick's "reaffirmation" category for romantic comedy serves my purposes better than 'remarriage,'⁴² for there are examples in this decade of unmarried couples reviving lost interest through identical means as married couples. The category also helps to avoid confusion with films where a couple barely knows one another, marry 'in name only' and find out they are perfect for one another. That variant places singles together and provides an excuse for them to achieve intimacy. The narrative trouble stems not from living incompatibility but from a non-couple pretending to be a couple. My reaffirmation category, thus, largely focuses on married couples but prioritizes the relationship issue of sustaining sexual and romantic interest.

While Billy Budd Vermillion usefully identifies the existence of 'remarriage plots' across theater and film throughout the 1910s, I more narrowly consider the affirmative, romantic comedy framework that extensively targeted female viewers. As discussed in Chapter Four, the industry closely aligned cross-class, feminine tastes with affirmative comedies that emphasized young

female stars, sympathetic humor, and positive transformations. Reaffirmation comedies that had women regularly mentioned in publicity, reviews and exhibitor reports stressed the female star and possibility of romantic satisfaction in marriage. These films can be parsed out from some of the examples Vermillion mentions, such as *Judy Forgot* (Universal, 1915) and *Divorçons* (Biograph, 1915). *Judy Forgot*, adapted from a musical revue, foregrounds the broad humor of comedienne Marie Cahill, such as her uncontrollable ‘wink.’ The advertisements and reviews did not point out the film’s appeal for women and did not treat the plot as a rumination on how couples could attain happiness. *Divorçons* (Biograph, 1915), while containing a very similar plotline to reaffirmation romantic comedies (so much so that it was later adapted into the romantic comedy *Let’s Get a Divorce* (Paramount, 1918)), received very different treatment. Reviews and publicity placed emphasis on its dialogue, satirical qualities and prestigious playwright as opposed to strategies for attaining romance. It is crucial to recognize that difference in emphasis when feature comedies sought female viewership.

Although romantic comedy suited the industry’s goals for clean, widely appealing feature-length humor, changing cultural attitudes about marriage during the Progressive era also made comedies with a romantic view of married life more feasible. Plotlines and publicity echoed the advice offered in a proliferation of marital handbooks and magazines for middle-class women that reflected shifting expectations about marriage. Though the term ‘companionate marriage’ did not appear in print until the 1920s,⁴³ historians recognize that the idea of a spouse being an ideal sexual and social partner emerged by the early 1900s. John C. Spurlock effectively summarizes this new model: “the ideal of the modern companionate marriage that appeared around the turn of the twentieth century offered white middle-class men and women partnerships of warmth and affection...women in particular, expected to benefit from a more equal relationship, from the free

play of sexual intimacy within marriage, and from disciplined consumption.”⁴⁴ Historians trace how smaller family sizes, industrialization, and a rise in leisure culture in the Progressive era all engendered further reliance on one’s spouse for emotional fulfillment.⁴⁵ As industrialization and urbanization led to a decline in separate spheres, lowered birthrates and moves away from extended family networks, husbands and wives spent more time together.⁴⁶ Outside of the home, stricter gender segregation of public entertainments in the 1800s gave way to family-friendly, leisure culture in which husbands and wives could go out together to restaurants and cabarets.⁴⁷

By the turn of the century, intellectuals and cultural critics extended the Progressive era’s ‘reform’ idealism into marriage. Scholar Clare Virginia Eby observes that reformers advocated for ‘voluntary monogamy’—a fluid process whereby a couple continues to choose each other as partners each day.⁴⁸ They saw this as different from state or church sanctioned ‘compulsory monogamy.’ These debates over the ethics of church and legal ‘compulsion’ accompanied a growing frequency of divorces by the end of the 1800s. Divorce rates rose from only 11,000 in 1870 to 55,000 by 1900.⁴⁹ By 1906, a survey conducted by the U.S. government claimed one in twelve couples were divorced.⁵⁰ Though some religious leagues strongly advocated against divorce by the late 1800s, such as Samuel W. Dike’s National Divorce Reform League, most marital handbooks suggested that divorce was necessary in some circumstances and more satisfying marriages would lower divorce rates.⁵¹

Woman’s changing role within marriage is pertinent to reaffirmation comedies’ extensive targeting of female spectators. Historian Kristin Celello notes that contemporaneous observers presumed the rise of the ‘New Woman’ fostered the companion mode due to women no longer being satisfied with “traditional, patriarchal patterns: they wanted marriages based on love, sexual gratification and equality.”⁵² That certainly was the assumption of magazines targeting middle-

class women in the 1910s. A 1914 article in *Ladies Home Journal*, “Is Any Man Easy to Live With?” suggested that current women’s queries about how to be satisfied by their husbands was a generational shift from the mid-1800s. The article claimed, “fifty years ago not many women asked themselves if men were easy to live with...incompatibility is a comparatively new word in human relations.” The article directly tied women’s earlier acquiescence to what historian Leigh Ann Wheeler describes as “a fraying ideal of separate spheres” where women’s “‘piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity’ nurtured children, preserved virtue and provided a haven for men.”⁵³ The author of the magazine article writes, “Women were not only taught self-sacrifice as a duty; it was a necessity. A dependent creature must be accommodating...There is no conflict of will where a woman dare not have a will of her own.”⁵⁴

The plotlines for reaffirmation features were in keeping with these shifting expectations for young wives, as many films hinged upon the importance of sustained sexual attraction for both partners. Wheeler notes that, in contrast to the Victorian ideal of the “passionless” woman, Progressive culture recognized the “pleasure as the purpose of sex” for both men and women.⁵⁵ The theory that sexual prudity was causing strife in wives’ marriages was echoed across such handbooks, even in works from earlier in the decade like Mary Stephens’ *Women and Marriage* (1910).⁵⁶ Marital handbooks such as *Sex Education* (1916) suggested that women’s sexual satisfaction in marriage was “an essential part of the feministic movement.”⁵⁷ Though these books illustrated a more generous approach to middle-class, white women’s sexuality, that benefit stemmed from a eugenics purpose. Authors repeatedly argued that women’s sexual fulfillment would prevent “race suicide,” making white wives’ more eager to engage in marital sex and supposedly discouraging husbands from turning to prostitutes and transmitting sexual diseases.⁵⁸ While the films clearly did not adopt the frank language of marital guides, their narrative tropes

correlated with the period's interest in maintaining a sexual spark as opposed to complacent cohabitation. Sexual jealousy has been an ageless motif in comedies, but these features particularly deployed jealousy to revive a marriage's romantic excitement. One example of this plotline is *Journey's End* (Paramount, 1918). Aline (Ethel Clayton) learns her husband has been flirting with a musical comedy actress. Instead of fighting for the marriage, she and her uncle force the husband to sign a contract that gives them both complete freedom for three months. During that interim, she flirts with Phil's college friend and Phil grows weary of the actress. He follows Aline down to Florida, becomes thoroughly jealous, and the two eventually reunite. This plotline accorded with advice for women about the healthiness and benefits of jealousy within marriage. A newspaper article entitled "Make Your Husbands Jealous" (1914) reported a female playwright's treatise that "a little jealousy is an excellent thing in marriage" and "the spice of domesticity." The playwright compared the benefit of sexual competition to anti-trust movements, stating, "Jealousy is to marriage what competition is to trade or was until the trusts did away with competition!"⁵⁹ Female stars in film magazines also suggested that staying in touch with one's sexual appeal was more valuable than wifely dedication. Constance Talmadge supposedly quipped in an interview "Of course there are women as steadfast as the pyramids. But who the deuce wants to be a pyramid?"⁶⁰

Jealousy related closely to another marital problem foregrounded in reaffirmation comedies of this decade—neglect. Instead of assuming that a couple would stay fulfilled once married, Progressive era discourse insisted that marriage had to be continually chosen and worked on. As opposed to just accepting a spouse's faded passion, reformers and handbooks proposed a romantic view of marriage where one partner could completely satisfy the other's sexual and emotional health through hard work and flexibility. Marital guides claimed women could lose touch with their sensuality, "refusing to join him in the recreations which he craved and needed and so

contributed toward making life such a dull, drab affair.”⁶¹ The ‘style transformations’ apparent in films such as *The Country Mouse* (1914) or *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920) did not just touch on the benefit of making a husband jealous but on the need to see oneself as less of a motherly figure and more a sexual playmate. Husbands also received criticism for ‘boring’ their wives, but the films focused more on his emotional neglect than physical appearance. To regain wives’ affections, men often learned to woo them anew with the same attention as their pre-marital courtship. In *Let’s Elope* (Paramount, 1919), Eloise (Marguerite Clark) resents that her husband Hilary (Frank Mills) spends most of his time working on novels. When Hilary leaves on yet another trip without inviting her, she runs off with a friend named Darrell. Hilary is devastated, but he concocts a plan with Darrell’s fiancée to win Eloise back. He tells the couple that he will not stand in their way, offering them his bungalow to stay in before they elope. Eloise is uncomfortable with this situation, and she begins to suspect that Hilary is not objecting because he has another woman. She also discovers Darrell is a cad when he tries to sleep with her before marrying. Eloise reunites with Hilary, who learns to pay more attention to her. These plotlines accorded with marital handbooks that warned “the man who is completely absorbed in business generally lacks the time and interest to pay continuous attention to the gentler side of life.”⁶² Advertisements for the films gestured to that loss of husbands’ attentiveness, with one for *Happy Though Married* (1919) joking “her Husband is just like yours, newspaper and all.”⁶³

Though jealousy plotlines seldom addressed the institution of marriage itself, other films considered the radical notions of ‘free love’ or ‘unconventional marriage’ espoused by artists and intellectuals in Greenwich Village.⁶⁴ While monogamous, married sex was the romantic mode still advocated for as ideal for respectable, middle-class couples, 1910s sex education and marital handbooks acknowledged the cultural influence of Bohemian groups advocating ‘free love’ and

non-marital partnerships. In *Sex Education* (1916), the author admitted that “the problem of pre-marital continence is not limited to young men” and he griped about “a certain number of well-educated young women” learning about free love through “radical printed matter.”⁶⁵ The reaffirmation comedies of this period demonstrated how concepts of free love and experimental marriage increasingly penetrated popular culture yet still critiqued Bohemian skepticism about monogamy. In *A Square Deal* (Mutual/American, 1918), Alys Gibson (Margarita Fischer) moves to the big city and falls under the influence of what publicity referred to as “highbrow theories of marital freedom.”⁶⁶ A professor at the Culture Club preaches that marriage should be based entirely on free will, which enables partners to see others and to exit the marriage at any moment. Alys receives a proposal from a young man named Thurston, and Alys will only accept his offer on these ‘free’ terms. Thurston agrees, and the two wed. Thurston soon becomes annoyed, however, with the intellectual gatherings at their apartment, in a manner reminiscent of Spencer Tracy’s beleaguered husband in *Woman of the Year* (MGM, 1942). Thurston finally tells Alys he is leaving her for a secretary who has agreed to love him unconditionally. Devastated, Alys returns to her parents’ home to find Thurston waiting for her. He tells her that he made up the story so that she could see how it feels when one partner has an affair or can leave at any time. Relieved, Alys happily reunites with Thurston.

A similar formula of a woman recommitting to her partner after Bohemian experimentation appears in films with couples who are engaged but not married. In a fascinating extant film, *The Hater of Men* (Triangle, 1917), Janice (Bessie Barriscale) is a female reporter who grows weary of covering divorce trials involving faithless husbands and their showgirl mistresses. She complains to her fiancée Billy (John Gilbert) that in marriage “a man marries her, labels her ‘mine’ and then forgets she’s alive.” Believing that “the only sure way to lose the friendship of any man

is to marry him,” she ends her engagement with Billy and decides to become a ‘good time girl.’ A series of scenes show her hosting large groups of men at her apartment, drinking and dancing with them, and being their sole female companion at restaurants and clubs. Meanwhile, her male friend Phillip, described as a “bachelor known as the ‘drawing room philosopher,’” provides her with advice. With the potential to be read as gay by modern audiences, Phillip spends ample time alone with Janice throughout the film and never expresses romantic interest in her despite his bachelor status. He warns her that despite her cynical view of marriage the men spending time with her will be unreliable friends. Sure enough, the men avoid her in public when they are with their wives. Janice then sees that, despite her belief that respect could only be attained by avoiding marriage, the new men she meets only view her as ‘frivolous.’ Billy later hides in Janice’s apartment and asks her to reconsider their engagement. His intertitles reflect the romanticized view of marriage in the Progressive era: “It’s not the symbol of slavery or ownership, but of fidelity and friendship.” The final shot of the film shows Janice and Billy kissing through her open apartment door and the door then slowly closes. In both its acknowledgment of Bohemian skepticism as well as its reaffirmation of marriage’s emotional comfort, the film anticipates Norma Shearer’s *The Divorcee* (MGM, 1930).

Other films did not just address radical reformers’ notions of marriage as a fluid, easily relinquished arrangement. The films also dealt with the idea of independence through unconventional living arrangements. In *Experimental Marriage* (Select, 1919), Suzanne (Constance Talmadge) openly identifies as a feminist, and her faithful husband, Foxcroft (Harrison Ford), agrees to her stipulation that they only live together on the weekend. During weekdays, they are free to live as they please (including with other partners). Shortly after initiating this arrangement, Suzanne sees a woman leaving Foxcroft’s apartment. Though the woman was just

an acquaintance, Suzanne thinks Foxcroft already has other partners. She attempts to arouse his jealousy by arranging for him to find her in a playwright's home. Unperturbed, Foxcroft sees through her plan. Suzanne assumes that he is unbothered by her affairs because he is having his own. She begs him to end their separate living arrangement, and he happily agrees. In such films, radical reform found its way into mainstream content, but the films offered a moderate perspective that sympathized with the characters' desire for romantic excitement, but ultimately advocated for fidelity and conventional living arrangements. The films essentially argued against the radical reforms of Greenwich village by assuming that too loose of a marital arrangement would not emotionally protect members of the couple.

While the prominence of jealousy in these plotlines often focused on sexual satisfaction or excitement within marriage, other reaffirmation comedies moved past wives' sexual experience to consider issues ranging from household control to personality compatibility. Discourses about marriage during the Progressive era not only asserted women's right to sexual satisfaction within marriage, but also growing economic independence. Hendrik Hartog notes that complaints about wives' economic dependency on their spouses had already started by the 1850s but became louder by the end of the 19th century.⁶⁷ Progressive era writers and reformers argued that a wife's lack of economic power forced her to remain with her spouse despite incompatibilities. In *Women and Economics* (1898), Charlotte Perkins Gilman framed wives as equivalent to prostitutes, seeing both as engaging in intercourse for economic survival.⁶⁸ Though most middle-class publications targeting women did not treat separate careers as a norm, they admitted that the increased presence of women in the workforce provided more freedom to leave or avoid unpleasant marriages. An article in *Ladies Home Journal* (1914) displayed this argument. It told female readers, "you do not have to think so far back to recall the husband who gave his wife money as a gift, never as a salary

she had earned, whose permission had to be obtained for every little thing his wife did.”⁶⁹ Some articles praised the ability of actresses to keep up their careers and marriages simultaneously, but more common in women’s magazines was the idea that even non-working wives should have independent control over household funds and an independent bank account. An earlier article from the same publication, “How to Make Marriage a Success” (1905), presented results from a survey that seventy-nine out of one hundred women wanted separate allowances to spend independently. Readers complained about the “humiliation” of being “compelled to ask her husband for pin-money” and made suggestions such as “together they should plan out his income...if she chooses to keep a bank account with this, so much the better.”⁷⁰

The issue of women’s allowances and charge accounts thus appears in multiple reaffirmation comedies. In *Charge it to Me* (Pathé, 1918). Winnie (Margarita Fischer) grows frustrated with her husband’s insistence that she charge everything to his account. To earn money independently, she turns their car into a taxi and works as a driver. She has no trouble attracting male customers, and Elmer becomes incredibly jealous of the men that appear around his home. His anxiety prompts him to finally give Winnie her own charge account. While Winnie only earns her financial independence through her husband’s jealousy, the film does underwrite the necessity of women maintaining finances that are separate from their husband’s oversight. Other films explored husbands grappling with their wives’ independent earnings. *I’ll Get Him Yet* (Paramount, 1919) follows Susy (Dorothy Gish), whose beau Bradford resists marrying her because she is wealthy. She convinces him to marry her by saying they can live on his salary. In secret, she continues to own a railroad line and to make exorbitant profits. Meanwhile, Bradford begins to protest her railroad line for not stopping in their town. Forced to conduct meetings in secret, she keeps coming up with explanations for why various businessmen wander through their home. Finally, she

confesses to Bradford to prevent him from thinking she is having an affair. She offers him the position of the railroad's general manager, and he learns to accept her millions.

Beyond addressing the tension of who controlled household finances, some films tapped into period critiques that wives lack of economic power or knowledge led to frivolous spending that could also strain marriages. Thorstein Veblen in his economic treatise, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), complained that women's exclusion from the workforce led to 'vicarious spending' in which they could only participate economically second-hand. He posited that women gained reputations as 'useless' or 'impractical' through consumption even though economic disparities structured this behavior.⁷¹ Some middle-class publications, like *Ladies Home Journal*, contained theories that "if every woman knew to a penny how much money she had each week men would seldom complain of extravagant wives."⁷² The wives in some reaffirmation comedies embodied Thorstein Veblen's critique, but rarely explored the motivation for these wives' frivolous spending. In *Good Gracious Annabelle* (Paramount, 1919), Annabelle (Billie Burke) marries a miner as a young girl, but he sees that she does not love him and lets her go live in the city. He continues to send her money, but she spends it lavishly. In annoyance, he comes to the city to lecture her. No longer receiving funds, Annabelle begins to work as a cook. The miner meets her as a cook and falls in love with her, not realizing she is his wife. Similarly, she falls in love with him not recognizing the shaven and more couth miner. The two eventually realize they are in fact each other's spouses and happily reunite.

The economic independence of wives was sometimes folded into larger arguments about loosening patriarchal control over household decisions. In *Persuasive Peggy* (Fox, 1917), Peggy (Peggy Hyland) marries a farmer who expects her to unquestioningly adapt to his lifestyle. He insists they go to the County Fair for their honeymoon as opposed to Niagara Falls. To teach him

a lesson, Peggy goes on a trip to Niagara Falls without him. Eventually, she returns home to find that he expects her to live in his mother's house. While he is away on a trip, she completely redecorates it. He is puzzled by her desire to provide input but gradually starts to submit, even granting her a separate checking account. When she visits an artist friend in the city, her husband suspects an affair and kicks her out of the house. He later realizes that she was merely posing for a portrait for his birthday, and he begs forgiveness. He agrees to no longer question her judgment. Trade publications suggested that the film would “appeal to the suffragist and feminist sections of the community.”⁷³

In addition to probing ways to improve women's economic participation within households, other 1910s feature comedies sustained a beneficial trajectory of couples' learning to accept or adjust to potentially marriage-ending personality differences. Historians have traced the rise of 'intimacy' and 'companion' rhetoric in Progressive era discourse.⁷⁴ Marital handbooks and magazines described marriage as a union between two partners with a deep emotional attachment and compatible personalities. By the turn of the century, an article entitled “What it Means to Be a Wife” (1899) in *Ladies Home Journal* proposed that a married couple “must like to do the same things, to go to the same places, like the same people, find the same things funny and the same things interesting.”⁷⁵ Marriage manuals stressed emotional intimacy. *The Psychology of Marriage* (1918) stated that “Married lovers enjoy the finest example of human intimacy...there is an interdependence and sympathy that is unrealized in any other association.”⁷⁶ *Womanhood and Marriage* (1918) similarly proposed that, in addition to strong physical attraction, “there must also be mental companionship...they must have common aims, ideals and a common attitude towards life.”⁷⁷

In keeping with this growing companionship ideal, some reaffirmation comedies explored a married couple overcoming their personality differences to fall in love again. In *Caprice* (1913), class difference creates tensions between a newlywed husband and wife. A rural tomboy in the Adirondacks, Mercy (Mary Pickford), falls for a wealthy society man, Jack (Owen Moore), who loves her despite her lack of schooling or civility. The two marry, and she desperately attempts to become a 'refined' woman. Her efforts keep misfiring, and Jack decides he has made a mistake. After the two separate, Mercy sends herself off to boarding school to be educated. While there, she meets Jack's sister and wheedles her way back into Jack's social circle. Jack has come to regret his classism, and he searches in vain for Mercy. In a plot device repeated by later romantic comedies, such as *The Lady Eve* (1940), he falls in love with Mercy all over again in her new guise as a society woman. Finally realizing she is the same woman he married, the two happily reunite. Other films suggested that husbands needed to adjust to the New Woman by keeping up with her energy. The rise of the 'Cave Man' extended to romantic comedies with married couples, as popular discourses advised that New Women would be bored with mild mannered men. One of the strangest films to cover this topic is the partially extant *The Indestructible Wife* (Select, 1919).⁷⁸ The film follows the honeymoon of Charlotte (Alice Brady) and Jimmy (Saxon King). Charlotte is an athletic woman with ceaseless energy. She exhausts Jimmy throughout their honeymoon with golfing, racing, mountain climbing and dancing. Jimmy plots to tire her out with one of his athletic friends, Brandy. When Brandy becomes interested in Charlotte himself, Jimmy fears losing her and decides to prove that he can be physically vigorous. Jimmy kidnaps Charlotte and ties her up in a boathouse, which she finds arousing. Brandy later finds Charlotte and attempts to seduce her, but Charlotte beats him with a whip and throws him into the water. Jimmy is relieved to see that her athleticism can be useful. She rows their boat back across the river as they head off to prepare

dinner for their friends. The message of the film seems extremely mixed, as the film suggests that subduing Charlotte regained her respect, yet Jimmy also learns to appreciate Charlotte's athleticism when she prevents sexual assault. The balance overall encourages the husband to respond to the New Wife's independence, not with fear, but by matching her vitality through his own confidence and physical prowess.

Reaffirmation comedies of the 1910s exhibited a simultaneous interest in upholding the importance of marriage while promoting the latest approaches advocated for in handbooks and magazines during the Progressive era. The narratives could appease cultural conservatives by proffering hope that divorce could be prevented through behavioral adjustments. However, the films still embodied evolutions in marital expectations for wives. The films illustrated how discourses targeting middle-class women increasingly lauded companionate relationships with more sexual, economic and personal satisfaction. Their films affirmed fantasies of marital fulfillment that the film industry would further perpetuate in the sound era.

Case Study: *A Pair of Silk Stockings* (Select, 1918)

Constance Talmadge's *A Pair of Silk Stockings* (Select, 1918) serves as one useful, extant example of a reaffirmation feature. Talmadge deserves a good deal of credit for popularizing romantic comedy in the film industry. Though she first acquired recognition through D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (Triangle, 1916), Talmadge developed a more clearly defined persona as a light comedienne by the end of the 1910s. Between 1917 and 1920, Talmadge arguably produced successful feature comedies more consistently than any other star besides Marguerite Clark, Douglas Fairbanks or Charles Ray. Upon joining Selznick's Select in 1917, the studio cast her in a series of romantic and light comedies that garnered praise from critics and exhibitors. These films included *Scandal* (1917), *The Honeymooners* (1917), *A Pair of Silk Stockings* (1918), *Mrs.*

Leffingwell's Boots (1918), *Sauce for the Goose* (1918), *A Temperamental Wife* (1919), *Happiness A La Mode* (1919), and *Experimental Marriage* (1919). She sustained this romantic comedy reputation to great profits through the mid-1920s.

A Pair of Silk Stockings remains the one marital comedy from Talmadge's first few years at Select that is available for viewing.⁷⁹ The film was based on Cyril Harcourt's 1914 play and adapted for the screen by Edith Kennedy. Advertisements capitalized on the property's stage connection, asserting that it was "based on the well-remembered comedy hit."⁸⁰ The play and film follow a couple who divorce after the wife mistakenly believes the husband to be unfaithful. Attempting to win her back, he hides himself in her room at a friend's house but is mistaken for a burglar. Eventually, the confusion is sorted and he explains himself to his wife at last. Critics saw the film as befitting Talmadge's penchant for playing beautiful and charismatic young wives. *Variety* mentioned that Talmadge had the "style of role that suits her best, that of an attractive young married woman who inadvertently is always getting herself into compromising positions and coming out of them flying."⁸¹ In fact, critics regularly praised Talmadge for her uncanny ability to flirt with sexually edgy situations while maintaining mainstream appeal. In her first film *Scandal* (1917), *The Moving Picture World* had called her "another Madge Kennedy in her ability to circle around and leap over a risqué situation and arouse no thought in the spectator but admiration for her skill."⁸²

Despite the borderline risqué entanglements of Talmadge's heroines, critics' flattering descriptions of her character in *A Pair of Silk Stockings* accorded with affirmative trends in comedy features. *Motion Picture News* called her "a thoroughly charming young woman" while *The Film Daily* praised Talmadge for getting "enough of her youthful, carefree unloosed energy into her action in this to keep it interesting."⁸³ Though the story took place in British society,

advertisements and reviews aligned the film with the nationalist discourse surrounding many affirmative comedies. Advertisements called the film “an American story of current times,” while *The Moving Picture World* claimed of the characters, “None of them is the least bit English.”⁸⁴ Exhibitor reports seconded reviewers’ predictions that the film would appeal to mainstream audiences despite its infidelity plotline and British setting. Exhibitors made comments such as “pleased them all, which is something unusual,” and “pleasing picture, satisfied audience. Good business.”⁸⁵

Here is a brief overview of the film’s events:

The film introduces us to spouses Molly (Talmadge) and Sam (Harrison Ford) Thornhill as they read about cars to purchase. Molly desires a ‘sporty roadster’ while Sam would prefer a ‘roomy and dependable’ touring car. To test his wife’s love, Sam gives her money to purchase a car and hopes she will heed his advice. His plan does not work, and Sam is peeved to find a roadster outside of his home the next day. However, Molly notices the look on his face and decides to exchange the roadster for the touring car. Unaware of her change of heart, Sam becomes convinced that Molly no longer cares for him. He determines to make her jealous by purchasing a fur coat for another woman. He also buys the woman opera tickets for the box next to the Thornhills so that she will be seen wearing the coat. While sitting at the opera, Sam behaves nervously to convince Molly he is having an affair. Molly evinces no worries, so Sam arranges for her to find the coat’s receipt. Once Molly discovers the receipt, the film shows Sam’s fantasy of Molly tearfully running into his arms in shame over her neglect. The film follows his reverie with Molly’s actual reaction of unmitigated rage. The film then cuts forward in time to the couple’s divorce trial. Molly has apparently refused to see Sam in the interim for any kind of explanation. Sam considers telling the truth about his harebrained scheme to the courtroom, but his pride prevents him.



Sam attempting to convince his wife he is having an affair while at the opera (*MPW*, 7/27/1918, 574)

Roughly starting around reel two, the film again chronologically jumps forward to a month after the divorce, where Sam attends a house party thrown by Sir John Gower. Sam explains to his friend Irene that he has sent Molly letters trying to explain the fake affair, but she returns them unopened. The parlor room also contains a young couple who are engaged, Pamela and Jack. The group discusses putting on an Ibsen play. Sam’s performance of a drunk character leaves much to be desired, so a friend encourages him to get into the spirit of his role through costume. As Sam goes upstairs to put on makeup, Molly arrives at the Gower home. Her car has broken down on the road nearby, so Molly exclaims that she will have to stay the night. Molly chats with Captain Jack, and he teases her not to tell

Pamela about their former engagement. Jack leaves for a trip to the War Office, so Molly takes his room. When Sam returns downstairs in his guise as an old man, he sees Molly briefly before guests whisk her away. Irene tells Sam he should get Molly alone to force her to hear the truth, and she informs him that Molly is staying in Jack's room.

Approximately at the start of reel three, with newly acquired boldness, Sam sneaks into Molly's room and hides in her wardrobe. Meanwhile, Jack misses his train and heads back towards the Gower residence. Molly retires to her room, and while in the room next door Pamela wonders if Jack was previously involved with Molly. In the meantime, Mrs. Gower helps Molly to bed and informs her about a string of neighborhood burglaries. As Sam eavesdrops in her wardrobe, Molly inquires how he is doing. Gower says Sam is drinking too much, and Sam is pleased to hear Molly's concern. Sam sneezes, prompting Molly and Gower to think there is a burglar in the bathroom. Holding her heel in hand for protection, Molly attempts to confront the burglar but only finds an owl hooting near the window. Molly goes to bed, but she keeps the heel under her pillow just in case. Sam emerges from the closet to talk to Molly, but he hears Jack climbing through the window in an attempt not to wake up the household. Molly discovers the intruder is Jack, and he tells her he will go sleep somewhere else once he retrieves a jacket in the wardrobe. Jack feels Sam in the wardrobe and presumes Sam is a burglar. Molly and Jack wrestle a still-bearded Sam to the ground, cover his head with a robe (making it difficult for Sam to speak), and tie him up with Molly's silk stockings. Not wishing to disturb the other guests, Molly and Jack decide to turn the 'burglar' over to the police in the morning. Unfortunately for Jack, his fiancée Pamela decides to go chat with Molly about Molly's past engagement to Jack. Pamela overhears the two and is convinced they are having an affair until Jack explains the burglar situation. They offer to show her the burglar, and Pamela goes to wake up Sir John. Meanwhile, Sam escapes, prompting the group to assume Jack and Molly were fibbing to cover up romantic involvement. The two become determined to catch the burglar to prove their innocence.

Amused by his power to clear Molly's reputation, Sam lets the household search aimlessly for the burglar the next day during reels four and five. He puts on his wife's silk stockings to keep them from being found. Pamela breaks her engagement to Jack, who then proposes to Molly as a solution to their scandal. She refuses as she is still in love with Sam. The rest of the household remains convinced that Molly and Jack were up to illicit activities and gossip about it during breakfast. Molly comes down for breakfast and is surprised to find Sam. The two are left alone in the dining room to avoid an awkward scene. Sam offers advice about how to catch the burglar but is rebuffed. The guests catch the real burglar, but Molly admits that it is not the same man that was in her room. A scandalized Mrs. Gower then suggests that she and Jack both leave the house. To attract Molly's attention, Sam pretends to have several glasses of whiskey and soda (actually ginger ale). Concerned over his drinking, Molly eventually can't resist intervening. Sam uses this interaction to finally address the fake mistress. Molly asks why he didn't tell her previously, and he explains that he tried but she and Jack nearly killed him. He crosses his legs to reveal that he is wearing her stockings. Amused by his efforts to see her, Molly reveals that her car didn't really break down. She only pretended it had so she could stay in the same house as him. Sam asks Molly to come home, but she reminds him that they are not married. She then happily notes that Mrs. Gower invited a vicar to lunch. The two laugh and embrace.

The film's central issues for its young couple both accord with, and notably differ from, other reaffirmation comedies in this decade. Reviews referred to the couple as "mis-mated,"⁸⁶ and their personalities are a study in opposites. Their differences tap into multiple strains of conversation surrounding marriage in the Progressive era. The film suggests that the young wife, Molly, possesses two characteristics that contribute to marital discord: lavish spending and romantic disinterest. Molly's desire for a 'sporty roadster' that only seats two as opposed to a larger, family car correlated with contemporary concerns that women's oversight of domestic purse strings could be used impractically. The film's first argument coalesces around Sam's annoyance that Molly

followed her own desires in using the family purse. However, the film downplays the economic consequences of Sam's irritation. It reframes their argument not as a desire to control the household, but as Sam's sadness over Molly's romantic neglect. He gives her money for the car, hoping she will be pleased and pay more attention to him. He leans towards her on the couch expecting a kiss, but Molly merely smiles upon getting the check and runs out of the room. He comments to their dog, "She hasn't been nice to me for a week." In this sense, Molly's interest in a smaller, less family-oriented car could also signal a lack of sexual interest in Sam. The film provides other signs that Molly does not think of Sam as exciting enough to stimulate jealousy. As he obviously glances at his faux mistress during the opera, Molly confusedly remarks, "Sam, I could almost accuse you of flirting if it weren't you."

While Molly's neglect might seem minor to twenty-first century viewers, reviews for the original theatrical production referred to Molly's character as "selfish" and "self-absorbed."⁸⁷ The couple's separation allows Molly to remedy her previous indifference to Sam by proving her steadfast feelings. She stages a car accident to stay in the same house, continues to inquire about his health, and turns down a proposal from another suitor. In fact, the film creates humor from Molly's inability to suppress her concern for Sam. While hiding in the closet, Sam overhears Molly's worries that he may be drinking too much now that he is alone. To force her to speak to him later in the film, Sam attempts to evoke her compassion by appearing to over-imbibe. He fills a large glass from a decanter, chugs it in one go, and immediately refills. Meanwhile, he glances over to see her reactions. The film cuts back and forth between Sam and Molly as she watches him drink. Molly opens her mouth wide in shock, scrunches her face in repulsion and taps her foot impatiently as she tries to restrain herself from saying something to him. She finally cannot resist and starts mouthing at him to 'stop it!'

However, the film adaptation places more blame for the couple's separation at Sam's feet than other reaffirmation variants (such as the wife's 'make over' plot). Sam's initial passivity and 'old-fashioned' attitudes conflicted with notions of the 'New Man' and assertive, modern American masculinity by the early 1900s.⁸⁸ Reviews for the stage production portrayed Sam as initially comical due to his overly passive, British masculinity. They described Sam as "possessing 'English diffidence'" and as someone so uncomfortable with showing his emotions that "the very thought of having to express it raises havoc with his composure."⁸⁹ They explain that he would never openly ask for what he wants, but rather, 'sit and wait for breakfast to appear.'⁹⁰ Though the film's intertitles do not analyze Sam's masculinity through a British lens, the film utilizes markers of passive, pretentious masculinity to poke fun at him. Throughout the first fifteen minutes, Sam is contrasted as a stuffy relic to Molly's modernity. Molly reads about the roadster in a glossy magazine and glances over at her husband in annoyance. Sam is given accoutrements coded for effeminate, dated British masculinity in this period: a monocle and a pipe. A monocle signaled a man's inappropriateness for the female protagonist in romantic comedies throughout the decade.⁹¹ Intertitles mock Sam's unromantic practicality in comparison to Molly's desire for a sportier, smaller vehicle. He argues, "Anyone with any sense would prefer a good, roomy, substantial, solid, dependable, dignified touring car." The repetitive series of adjectives point to Sam's stodginess. Like other men in affirmative features who initially displayed prudishness, the press' emphasis on Ford's sexually appealing masculinity made it clear his characters would ultimately be romantically successful. Reviews mentioned Ford's appeal to female fans as "just the type to attract young women."⁹²

The film consistently aligns Molly with up-to-date zest that Sam must match. It is not evident that the play stressed these qualities in Molly, but her portrayal in the film further advanced

Constance Talmadge's star persona of safely 'all-American,' yet modern, femininity. Select aggressively marketed Talmadge as "Portrayer of 'Regular' American Girls,"⁹³ and both publicity and reviews presented her as a playmate for her spouse as opposed to a comforting domestic caretaker. One review for Talmadge's *Two Weeks* (First National, 1920) insisted that for a husband, she "would never lay out his slippers—no, she'd be dragging him off to the theater, then to supper, cabaret, and all."⁹⁴ In accord with this image, Talmadge's character gets aligned with informal, less prudish behaviors throughout the film. Along with wanting a sporty car, Molly consistently uses slang throughout the film that differs from Sam's verbose intertitles. Refusing to marry Jack, she scrawls on top of his note, "Nothing doing." She similarly adopts slang for humorous effect when she is tying up the presumed burglar, Sam. She shouts at him, "Hi there, you blighter, can you breathe?" She also illustrates the New Woman's assertiveness, striding into Lady Gower's house in driving attire and holding her hand up to say, "Now don't say you can't put me up. I've got to stay the night anyway—and I'm starving!" While Molly's slang and informality are incongruous to Lady Gower's household, the film positions her as a desirable character. The film shows that both Sam and Jack are romantically invested in her, and the film consistently aligns Molly's silk stockings with modern sensuality. She describes the stockings to Lady Gower by noting, "What is it about silk that makes it seem so wicked? Two hundred years ago my stockings would have led me to the stake." The film then suggests that this new sensuality is unattainable by older women such as Lady Gower, who jokes, "No one could say that about me."

Though the transformation is subtle, the film traces Sam's evolution into an appropriate partner for Molly's modernity. He begins to show signs of the New Man by risking uncomfortable situations to go after what he wants. When the couple first divorces, the intertitles note that Sam's

sense of pride ultimately ends the marriage since Sam is too embarrassed to explain to the court that his affair was feigned. The pride ties to classism, as the intertitle details “It seems a sacrilege to Sam to be asked to reveal the workings of his tortured soul to seven grocers, four tailors and a plumber.” Despite this early reluctance to fight for his wife, Sam shows more fortitude as the film progresses. At the house party, Sam tells Irene that he has shown up at Molly’s doorstep numerous times to apologize. With the failure of these efforts, he takes the more audacious approach of hiding in Molly’s bedroom to force her to speak to him. In addition to this newfound audacity, Sam’s adventures in Molly’s bedroom subtly modernize him. He overhears her describing her ‘wicked’ silk stockings, and the film cuts to him grinning at this intimate discussion. As Sam gets ready for bed after the burglar confusion, he continues to reveal signs of a sensuality that seemed dormant in the film’s opening scenes, gently stroking Molly’s silk stockings then tucking them under his pillow. The playfulness of the sensual stockings seemingly transfers over to Sam. Instead of immediately identifying himself as the burglar, Sam keeps Molly’s stockings and sits back to enjoy the chaos in the Gower household. His enjoyment in this confusion contrasts from his practical rhetoric in the film’s opening. Sam even wears a visual marker of his conversion by actually putting on Molly’s ‘wicked’ silk stockings for humor. He crosses his legs so that she will see the stockings and smiles at her flirtatiously. The newfound interest in play greatly differs from Sam’s horror at appearing undignified during the couple’s divorce proceedings.



Sam’s humorous reveal of her stockings (*EH*, 7/20/1918, 30)

While Molly's neglect and Sam's dullness correlate with complaints about wives and husbands in this period, the film is unusual for the period in suggesting that feigning infidelity is *not* the solution for marital troubles. As we have seen, feature comedies often promoted jealousy as a healthy and practical strategy for husbands and wives to rekindle each other's interest. Usually, the films expressed some sympathy for a husband's flirtations with other women by suggesting the wife had grown dowdy. *A Pair of Silk Stockings*, however, offers numerous criticisms of Sam and his staged infidelity. The framing of Sam as primarily at fault may stem from Constance Talmadge's star power. While stage reviews had called Molly 'self-absorbed' and even 'frigid,' reviews of the film more flatteringly described Talmadge's character as "the pretty young wife," and a "thoroughly charming young woman."⁹⁵ The film's intertitles repeatedly undermine Sam's judgment, which depict his infidelity scheme as a ridiculous overreaction to Molly's purchase. Sam continually fails to understand his wife. He expects her to initially purchase the touring car to please him, but the next morning walks out to see the roadster. The intertitles mock this defiance of his expectations, saying, "but the check doesn't get her, and she doesn't say what he expected." The undermining of Sam's ideas continues when the intertitles report "One idea going wrong never discouraged Sam, and he immediately hatched another, which for colossal idiocy set a new altitude record." Sam's 'idiotic' plan for pretend infidelity again reveals his inability to understand his wife. As Molly discovers a bill for another woman's coat, a scene plays out according to Sam's fantasy in which he imagines Molly's reaction. She heaves her chest with exaggerated sobs and reaches out her arms while saying, "My poor, devoted husband! I have driven him to this with my heartlessness!" She rushes into his arms as he pats her head in comfort. However, another intertitle following this scene qualifies "But this is what actually happened..." The film cuts to Molly facing towards the camera in growing anger, brows furrowing, and she quickly snaps her head to the side

to glare at Sam. Humor derives from Sam's repeated failure to anticipate his wife's feelings. Additional humor comes from the film already undermining Sam's depiction of her 'heartlessness.' Molly has previously shown a desire to please Sam by immediately regretting her roadster purchase and telling Irene that she will return it for Sam's preferred car. Sam's lack of communication with his wife, thus, prompts him to make a series of mistakes which almost permanently end their union.

Though feigned infidelity, wives' disinterest, and husbands' passivity appear in other reaffirmation comedies of the 1910s, *A Pair of Silk Stockings* is unusually nuanced in its depiction of a husband misunderstanding his wife's needs and its move past sexual jealousy as a solution for marital malaise. While marital handbooks addressed the issue of husbands misunderstanding their wives' personalities, romantic comedies of this decade explored that topic with less regularity than jealousy. However, the film adopts the general affirmative strategy in feature comedies of following youthful, attractive leads. Those leads accord with a realignment towards sympathetic modes of humor, as the film makes clear that Sam has not truly had an affair and Molly did care about his opinions. Most of the humor stems from misinterpretation rather than the characters exhibiting physical eccentricities or moral transgressions. Like other reaffirmation features, the film provides a beneficial trajectory of improved marital romance. These reaffirmation features revealed many preoccupations with 'romantic' marriage that solidified or emerged in the Progressive era. While scholars acknowledge Cecil B. DeMille's remarriage features, those films fit within a larger context of affirmative feature-length comedies that showed couples falling back in love throughout the 1910s.

Courtship Comedies in the 1910s

Though reaffirmation films from the silent era have garnered the lion's share of scholarly attention, most romantic comedies still revolved around singles who fell in love for the first time. While 'reaffirmation' and 'remarriage' regularly identify romantic comedies with married couples, plotlines with singles (likely because they are more common) don't share a consistent label.⁹⁶ I call these films 'courtship comedies' to capture a couple falling in love for the first time, whether staying single throughout or marrying as strangers. As with remarriage comedies, these features targeted female patrons with desirable and sympathetic leads in beneficial arcs. While reaffirmation comedies reflected turn-of-the-century discourses about improving marriage, the greater number of courtship comedies contained an admixture of formulae present across historical periods along with those reliant on more immediate cultural contexts.

It is helpful to consider shifting social practices for single women when examining which variants of courtship comedy feature producers selected. Scholars note the rise of 'dating' culture in the early twentieth century and the decreased presence of family oversight in a young person's pre-marital courtship.⁹⁷ Historian James McGovern referred to this waning influence as a "vast dissolution of moral authority."⁹⁸ As previously noted, the collapse of separate spheres due to urban growth, the rise in leisure culture and women's increased participation in the workforce or social movements allowed men and women to spend more time together. Those factors affected pre-marital intimacy. In her study of working-class women in turn-of-the-century Chicago, Lauren Rabinowitz explains that women's appearances in public prior to the 1880s had been "codified and regulated according to a set of well-defined conventions" such as upper and middle-class women being publicly escorted by a gentleman.⁹⁹ Now, the Victorian versus modernity thesis can be overly simplistic,¹⁰⁰ for couples did spend some time alone together during the Gilded Age.

However, by 1900, E. K Rothman identifies a change in pre-marital couples from excursions near the home like private walks and community dances toward ‘going somewhere’ via bikes or automobiles.¹⁰¹

That leisure culture promoted extended time away from the watchful eye of family members as young men and women participated in independent consumer spending.¹⁰² While working women experienced these evenings out sooner than more carefully guarded middle and upper class women,¹⁰³ by the mid-1910s, the heroines of stories contained in middle-class publications for women used phrases such as “I’m going to keep a date” or “I just made a date with him” to refer to evenings out alone with men.¹⁰⁴ Even conservative marital guidebooks published during the Progressive era used examples of couples spending unchaperoned outings together, suggesting “at no period during life is it good for male or female to be long separated from the other.”¹⁰⁵ That extensive time alone with peers coexisted with articles suggesting a decline in parental authority. In “Is Any Man Easy to Live With?” (*Ladies Home Journal*, 1914), the author harkened back to a by-gone period of “the stern father who enforced his manner of living and thinking upon his family; whose disapproval was domestic tragedy.”¹⁰⁶ The author insisted that “the fearful daughters of a past generation are today going their own way to college and to work and to play.”¹⁰⁷ While these developments gave young women more independence from familial interference, some scholars qualify that the rise of ‘dating’ culture made women *more* dependent through the unequal monetary dynamic of men paying for outings.¹⁰⁸ That conflict over control, however, still significantly reconfigured from parental figures to sexual partners.

Those dating patterns are relevant when comparing plotlines in 1910s feature comedies, as some formulae seem disconnected from these social shifts while others suggest a response. One storyline that carried over from earlier historical periods was the romantic comedy with a class

obstacle. Given persistent inequalities within American society despite Progressive reform,¹⁰⁹ class remained a pertinent issue. While comedy shorts often focused on an eloping couple fooling their parents, the emphasis on sympathy and beneficial trajectories in feature-length comedies explicitly resolved parents' objections to their child's romantic partner. Sometimes this resolution simply amounted to fairy-tale coincidence whereby one partner suddenly came into wealth. In *Merely Mary Ann* (Fox, 1916), Mary Ann (Vivian Martin) falls in love with a kind but poor musician. He gets her off the streets through a job as his landlady's maid. She suddenly inherits a fortune and must leave the musician to live with a wealthy couple that adopts her. Years later, the musician is a guest at her foster parents' party. She learns that he has become a famous composer. Due to his success, the two are now able to wed. The formula of 'discovered' or 'acquired' wealth or pedigree extends back to Roman comedies by Meander,¹¹⁰ but some films tweaked this formula to pit American capitalism against European bloodline inheritance that accorded with strong nationalist sentiments in the 1910s.¹¹¹ At the end of Edison's *When Love is King* (1916), a king is expected to marry the princess of Trepizond but has fallen for the daughter of an American businessman. Seeing the misery of his daughter, the businessman pays off Trepizond's debts so that the ruler steps down in order to make the businessman's daughter that country's princess. Reviewers appreciated the film's satirization of how easily royal status could be acquired through American capitalism. *The Moving Picture World* noted that in the "humorous glorification of Yankee aggressiveness, at the expense of aristocratic snobbery...an audience may find a satirical quality in these scenes."¹¹²

There were some narratives, however, where a couple overcame class difference without abrupt financial acquisition. These films seem more closely connected to their 1910s context by acknowledging increased social mixing as working and upper-class youths coexisted in public

spaces. In keeping with later romantic comedies such as *It Happened One Night* (Columbia, 1934), rich parents came to accept the child's partner without their change in status. In *Happiness* (Triangle, 1917),¹¹³ wealthy Doris (Enid Bennett) attends college where other students presume that she will be a snob. Without friends, she spends time alone in a boarding house. She eventually befriends working-class Robert (Charles Gunn) and a little girl living below her. She fends off a comically pretentious suitor from her own class (John Gilbert), mockingly described in an intertitle as "willing to share his glittering personality with one of a less-gifted sex." As opposed to Robert achieving class rise, the film frequently mocks the fears of Doris' family and her snobbish suitor that mixing with other students at Hadley College will expose her to "white slavers." When her uncle threatens to remove her from the college, Doris and Robert decide to marry, and with the help of a fake gun, force her other suitor to be their witness. Her uncle and aunt discover the two, but Doris moves her uncle with a speech about being "browbeaten" long enough. The adults accept the marriage and the group embraces.

Beyond class, another old but common formula lay in mistaken identity. Clearly the trope goes back to Shakespearean plays such as *Twelfth Night* (1601 or 1602). Mistaken identity abounded in comedy shorts as well, but that confusion often motivated comical violence or anger between characters. Feature-length romantic comedies typically used mistaken identity to engineer a meeting between partners that otherwise would not meet. The disguised encounters provided opportunities for intimacy but gave innocent intentions for the disguises. Sometimes mistaken identity simply upheld parental authority or class appropriateness, as two royals might object to a betrothal but then fall for one another while in disguise. That formula had proved popular in plays like *A Royal Family* (prod. 1900) and later appeared in films such as *The Wild Goose Chase* (1915). In other cases, a wealthy man might disguise himself as a servant to gain intimate access to a

wealthy woman's household, as in *The Man on the Box* (Paramount, 1914) or a wealthy woman might run away in disguise only to meet an equally wealthy man as in *The Ragged Earl* (Alco, 1914). There are signs that this 'royalty' approach to mistaken identity felt cliché to film critics by World War I. *The Film Daily* complained *The Golden Wall* (World, 1918) was "very ancient material" with "our old friend the 'incog prince.'"¹¹⁴ Like class, however, the use of mistaken identity ranged from older iterations to variants that relied on 1910s cultural concerns. Some films exploited interest in young women's loosening 'morals,' including letting older men 'treat' them with gifts in exchange for sexual favors.¹¹⁵ A case of identity confusion that seems to anticipate *Easy Living* (Paramount, 1937) occurs in *A Rich Man's Darling* (Universal, 1918). The film follows Julie (Louise Lovely), who becomes mistaken for a wealthy man's mistress. The mistress asks her to exchange places, as the mistress' husband is arriving in town. While Julie poses as the mistress, the son of the man having the affair, Lee (Philo McCullough), arrives to woo the mistress away from his father. Lee falls for Julie and marries her. However, he soon discovers that the mistress had a husband and thinks Julie is already a married woman. Eventually, the mistaken identities are sorted out, and Lee reunites with Julie.

While class and mistaken identity provided protagonists with opportunities to escape parental control, other romantic comedies spoke to the increased choice that young people experienced in selecting romantic partners during the Progressive era. Though the 'wrong partner' may seem like a natural obstacle within romantic comedy, the Progressive era made this narrative more likely as young people became exposed to a wider range of potential partners. E. K. Rothman traces "the wider range of occupational and mate choice" due to urbanization by the dawn of the twentieth century where couples were less likely to mate with a cousin or familiar member of their childhood community.¹¹⁶ While the exposure to strangers expanded options, it also increased the odds of

making a decision on insufficient evidence. In some courtship comedies of the 1910s, protagonists are stuck with improper matches of their own making. *A Camouflage Kiss* (Fox, 1918) takes place at a house party thrown by Martha's (June Caprice) family in honor of Kingston (Pell Trenton), who sells pork and beans to the U.S. army. Martha's fiancé Rudolph wants to kiss her, but she dismisses kissing as unsanitary. He asks the more experienced Kingston to kiss Martha in a darkened closet, pretending to be Rudolph. Kingston goes into the closet, kisses Martha, and she is thrilled. Rudolph claims credit, but Martha figures out that it was in fact Kingston. She falls for Kingston, but he is also pursued by a married woman. He cannot immediately fend off the woman's advances since she is married to an important bean contractor. During a moment of chaos between the guests, Martha and Kingston sneak out of the house and run off together.

Another motif that pointed to couples' increasingly independent decision-making was the 'deception turned real.' In these plots, parents did not force together unwilling partners, but rather, a couple married or feigned marriage to inherit money or escape a compromising situation. To the couple's surprise, but rarely the audience's, the deception becomes reality. The films could appease more traditional audience members by preventing divorce, but the protagonists' treatment of marriage as temporary spoke to the increasing public acceptance of divorce by the 1910s.¹¹⁷ The industry's interest in the 'in name only' marriages increases from 25 references in film publications before 1915 to over 400 results between 1916 and 1920.¹¹⁸ By 1918, a review for Mutual's *My Wife* identified the "frequently used but seemingly popular dramatic situation, a marriage in name only from which a real romance develops."¹¹⁹ One notable example of this dynamic can be found in the film that launched Constance Talmadge's career as a romantic comedy star, *Scandal* (Select, 1917). Irresponsible heiress Beatrix (Talmadge) keeps visiting an artist's apartment unaccompanied. To prevent others from finding out that she was visiting him

alone, she pretends she was visiting her ‘husband,’ Pelham (Harry C. Browne), a friend of hers who lives in the same building. Pelham agrees to go along with the ruse to save Beatrix’s reputation. Annoyed at her exploitation of him, Pelham treats her brusquely, but the two must live together to avoid scandal. They fall in love, and the film ends with Pelham kidnapping her on a yacht and insisting they really elope.

As the word ‘scandal’ suggests, ‘in name only’ films often placed characters in sexually evocative situations despite their sympathetic innocence. A reviewer for the play *Arms and the Girl* (prod. 1916), later adapted into a 1917 film by Paramount, quipped, “in any play that involves a mistaken assumption that a couple are man and wife, everyone must enter into an immediate conspiracy to get them into one room.”¹²⁰ The interest in getting strangers into intimate situations, such as sharing the same bedroom, prompted critics to note the comedies’ fine-walk between raciness and wholesome humor. The reviewer for *Motography* cautioned that Constance Talmadge’s *Scandal* (1917) “borders very near the danger line” but still “strikes a sympathetic note.”¹²¹ Similarly, critics labeled *The Make-Believe Wife* (Paramount, 1918) “one of those delicious little boudoir comedies”¹²² but advertisements asserted the wealthy young heroine’s innocence as someone “caught in adventitious circumstances.”¹²³ In fact, some of the plays from which the films derived borrowed situations from French farces but ‘toned them down.’ One review for the play *My Wife* claimed it was “as innocuous as a soda cocktail, though still managing to retain a good deal of the original French sparkle.”¹²⁴

While plotlines highlighting ‘in name only’ marriages may have been encouraged by young people’s increased exposure to multiple partners and heightened divorce rates, other courtship comedies more overtly demonstrated emerging models of sexuality and courtship that laid groundwork for the 1920s. A very notable development was a rise in ‘battle between the sexes’

plots. As opposed to utilizing external obstacles such as a wrong partner or feigned relationship, some feature comedies relied on personality conflicts. Quarreling couples in romantic comedies certainly pre-date 1910s features, famously in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-1599) or *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590). However, a 'battle of the sexes' dynamic is much more apparent in feature adaptations of stage plays produced after 1905.¹²⁵ Growing intimacy between couples and declining familial influence make this shift towards internal struggle logical. The couple's playful conflicts aligned with a less reverent treatment of women that accompanied their increased interaction and competition with men in public life. Historian E. K. Rothman observes a change in advice to young couples between the late 19th and early 20th century from emphasizing knowing one another spiritually to viewing one another as a 'catch' with an element of mystery.¹²⁶ A marital guidebook from 1918, *The Psychology of Sex*, presumed courtship would be "a mingled state of joy and torment" that would cause "a high-strung condition which leads to lovers' quarrels."¹²⁷ Articles in middle-class magazines noted a transition towards viewing members of the opposite sex, particularly women, as 'opponents.' In the article "Are We Women or Are We Slaves?" (1912), an author theorized,

"All this railing against woman as a destroying angel seems modern. But the answer is, it is only in modern times that women has succeeded in getting man under her thumb. In ancient days when a man thumped a woman into doing her duty, he had no illusions as to her being a vampire on his life."

The author implies that women have men under their thumbs, or achieved a form of cultural equality in the age of first-wave feminism, that prompts a perception of victimhood from men that previous power dynamics did not engender. Titles of feature-length romantic comedies in this decade emphasized this sexual struggle with titles such as *The Man Hater* (Triangle, 1917), *The Man Hunt* (World, 1918), *More Deadly Than the Male* (Paramount, 1919), or *The Deadlier Sex* (Pathé, 1920). Even in films without such overt titles, we can see narrative conflict and humor created out of a couple's initial animosity. In *A Corner in Colleens* (Triangle, 1916), an Irish girl,

Shamrock (Bessie Barriscale), is suspicious of Americans. Angry that young American Richard (Charles Ray) has taken control of her family's land, Shamrock directs her wrath at Richard until he proves himself. He eventually saves her from British authorities and gains her trust.

Certain distinctive character types appeared within romantic comedies depicting a struggle for domination. Gaylyn Studlar has discussed how the 'cavemen' embodied by matinee idols such as Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik* (Paramount, 1921) reflected broader trends in 1920s female-oriented media,¹²⁸ but the figure already appeared in 1910s comedy features. The caveman adopted rough tactics such as kidnapping or temporary imprisonment to arouse the woman of his dreams. The films framed this sexual aggression as a response to romantic fantasies proposed by a modernized female lead. In *The Sentimental Lady* (Kleine-Edison, 1915), Amy (Irene Fenwick) is an independent woman who owns interest in the People's Gas Company. Despite her independence, she has romantic fantasies about being kidnapped by a 'cave man.' Bob (Jack Devereaux) is a lawyer who falls for Amy and sees that she is being manipulated by her fiancé into buying bad stocks. When Amy refuses to listen to Bob, he decides to save her by kidnapping her and taking her to an island. Thrilled at being abducted, she falls in love.

As opposed to hoping male partners would simply demonstrate good character, the films now acknowledged that physical dominance might be sexually stimulating to women. For *The Misleading Lady* (VLSE, 1916), exhibitors offered prizes for female viewers who wrote the best essays on whether "women prefer the cave man methods of making love."¹²⁹ These films related to the period's emphasis on the New Man's assertiveness as well as a need for male mollicoddles to prove their masculinity.¹³⁰ Some publicity also laid bare the racist belief that overly pampered upper-class men could benefit from the 'primitive' sexuality of African cultures. A publicity article for *The Misleading Lady* mentioned lead Henry Walthall's admiration for Herbert Spencer, an

influential proponent of social Darwinism,¹³¹ while the 1920 re-make contained scenes of African men to “illustrate the superiority of the black man’s method over his white brother’s.”¹³² Like *The Sheik*, reviews suggested that the white, upper-class male’s adoption of ‘primitive’ sexuality needed to give signs that this was a ‘masquerade’ hiding an Anglo-Saxon gentleman beneath. One reviewer for the 1913 play upon which the film was based stressed that the hero’s “natural gentlemanliness and genuine regard for her were always revealed” and gave “the pleasant suggestion of a civilized personality behind it.”¹³³

While the ‘cave man’ could be seen as one response to declining genteel sentiment towards femininity, another response was to pit romantic comedy heroines against the misogynist. The rise of the ‘misogynist’ as a cultural figure paralleled women’s newfound assertiveness in public life. Mining the Library of Congress newspaper database shows a striking shift in the frequency and conception of the terms ‘misogynist’ and ‘woman hater.’ The identifiers can be found less than 200 times in newspapers prior to 1870 ¹³⁴ but increase to over 5,000 results between 1890 and 1910 and over 8,000 between 1910 and 1920. That increased prevalence is not a reflection of more newspapers being added as decades progressed. Between 1920 and 1930, the number goes down to less than 1,000 results and shrinks further to about 200 between 1930 and 1950. That the terms ‘misogynist’ and ‘woman hater’ peak in the same time window as women’s suffrage suggests a cultural interest in the backlash women were receiving due to changing gender roles. Prior to 1880, the phrases usually described an older bachelor who avoided marriage but did not necessitate a hostile view towards all women.¹³⁵ As the misogynist increasingly became tied to resentment of the entire female sex, articles explicitly connected his animosity to women’s increased participation in the public sphere. For instance, one article in 1887 covered the emergence of a men’s periodical entitled *The Woman Hater* and attributed it to the suffragette in Henry James’

The Bostonians (1886) having “alarmed the males of Europe with the prospect of the American woman’s ways.”¹³⁶ A more sympathetic article to the New Woman that same year proclaimed the “misogynist is to be implacable” because women were “steadily invading the realm of the other sex” and “giving acceptable service in what she undertakes.”¹³⁷

Films such as *The Bachelor’s Romance* (Paramount, 1915) or *Impossible Susan* (Mutual, 1918) did not simply present their male leads as grouches or ‘girl shy’ but as “*hating* (emphasis mine) the opposite sex” or believing in “the superiority of the ‘sterner sex.’”¹³⁸ Screenwriting manuals noted that in order to be redeemable, the woman hater could only express his resentment in passive-aggressive contexts. Scenario advisor Epes Winthrop Sargent observed, “you cannot have him come tearing down the street pushing women into a gutter or throwing them down and trampling on them”¹³⁹ Therefore the misogynist expressed his resentment not through violence but through avoidance, such as three men hiding from all womenkind on an island in *Three Men and a Girl* (Paramount, 1919). The plot of these films always contained a transformation that mocked the misogynist’s views as easily changeable. For instance, adverts for *A Regular Fellow* (Triangle, 1919) joked, ““Women have ruined the world,” he gasped tragically at one moment and ten minutes later he was vowing “I only want to feast my eyes on that beautiful lady.””¹⁴⁰ While the films offered a refreshing counterpoint to mockeries of suffragettes in this period,¹⁴¹ critiques of the misogynist often contained traces of homophobia. In depicting bachelors as ‘woman haters,’ the films portrayed the men’s opposition to heterosexual romance as unhealthy. The woman’s conversion of the misogynist may have shown the superfluous nature of his animosity, but it also eliminated questions of who he preferred. Anxiety underpinned discussions of the misogynist’s disinterest in ways that anticipated the concerns surrounding the sexuality of bachelors in early 60s sex comedies like *Pillow Talk* (Gordon, 1959).¹⁴² In fact, reviews and publicity in the 1910s

implied that misogynists' distaste for women made them 'irregular.' A publicity piece for *A Regular Fellow* (Triangle, 1919) claimed that while the protagonist proved "timid as a woman hater," ultimately "beauty reformed him and he became a regular fellow."¹⁴³ These films showcasing the misogynist's conversion were consistently marketed to women. Publicity for *The Woman Hater* (Essanay, 1915) boasted that, by particularly examining the misogynist, "the Essanay Company have earned the eternal gratitude of women"¹⁴⁴ To advertise for *Three Men and a Girl* (Paramount, 1919), letters to female patrons posed, "you'll know how to treat a woman hater if you come to Paramount theatre."¹⁴⁵ While some discourse merely tied the films to women's larger presumed interest in comic romance, others suggested the film's theme would appeal to the politics of women's movements. Some advertising aids referenced an "appeal to the suffragist and feminist sections of the community"¹⁴⁶ or "an especial appeal to women's organizations."¹⁴⁷

A compelling figure that sometimes coexisted with the misogynist in romantic comedies was 'the pursuing woman.' As types of New Women made themselves felt in the public sphere, historian Leigh Ann Wheeler notes that in contrast to the Victorian woman's 'passionlessness,' the New Woman was "sexually savvy, available, and potentially manipulative."¹⁴⁸ A view of woman as 'manipulator' pervaded in films where the heroines doggedly courted a hesitant or unavailable man until he submitted. Sometimes the man's reluctance stemmed from misogyny, but on other occasions he was already engaged, oblivious, or felt the woman was unsuitable. The plots sometimes gave pursuing women shocking leeway with what they could acceptably do to persuade their love interest into matrimony. Pursuing women followed their men around relentlessly, sexual teased and touched them, broke into their houses, kidnapped them, told people they were already together, or forced the men to spend time alone in an isolated locale. There are even occasions where the female lead incorporated a disguise, knowing that her true identity would

be rejected. The pursuing woman's comically extreme measures to get her man anticipated later screwball comedies such as *My Man Godfrey* (Universal, 1936) or *Bringing Up Baby* (RKO, 1938). We see this character type in Constance Talmadge's *The Studio Girl* (Select, 1918). Celia (Talmadge) lives with her old maid aunts in a New England village. She is bored until she falls for New York City artist Frazer (Earle Fox). Though Frazer is attracted to Celia, he has a fiancée. Celia decides to follow Frazer until he will have her. She hides in the back of Frazer's car when he heads to New York. He asks her to leave and puts her on a train home. Instead, she gets on a train for New York City and goes to wait at his studio apartment. He finds her in his easy chair, and he lets her stay the night. The next day, Celia answers the phone to his apartment and so Frazer's fiancée on the other end of the line dumps him. When Celia's aunts find her at Frazer's, they become resigned to the fact that the two must be married to avoid scandal. Luckily, Frazer realizes he is in love with Celia and all ends happily.

Despite the heroine's sexual aggression, reviews and publicity portrayed her as attractive. In *Bettina Loved a Soldier* (Universal, 1916), Louise Lovely's protagonist who chases a reluctant soldier was described as one of the "prettiest girls in photoplays."¹⁴⁹ Mae Murray targets a young writer in *At First Sight* (Paramount, 1917), but reviews flatteringly characterized her as "vivacious"¹⁵⁰ and "a delightfully piquant little creature."¹⁵¹ Lauding a woman's sexual pursuit marked a notable change from comedy shorts in the early 1910s. In my survey of comedy shorts from 1913, only one film (*Polly at the Ranch*, Vitagraph) portrayed an attractive young woman successfully winning over a passive male. Other shorts portrayed a sexually aggressive woman as physically unattractive or unsuccessful. For instance, *A Snakeville Courtship* (Essanay, 1913) created humor out of a 'fat woman' seeking a husband with all the men in her village trying to elude her.¹⁵² Descriptions of these shorts made clear that it would be a punishment for the male

characters if they ended up with these women. For instance, a man tries to feign death to escape a 'hefty widow' in *The Widow's Might* (Vitagraph, 1913) but is "carried off against his will."¹⁵³ Though not every female pursuer had their physical appearance derided, they were rarely rewarded for chasing a male partner. Grotesqueness could come from large hordes of women chasing a man unsuccessfully, as in *Bashful Bachelor Bill* (Essanay, 1913) or *What Girls Will Do* (Gem, 1913).¹⁵⁴ Some shorts had an attractive, individual pursuer who was shown to be ill-intentioned or misguided. For instance, in *An Aesthetic Match* (Majestic, 1913) a determined woman falls for a man she sees in the woods and drags him back to her house, but he prefers her sister instead.¹⁵⁵

In feature-length romantic comedies with the 'pursuing woman,' however, the man was seen as a fool for resisting her. A magazine noted of Ethel Clayton's *The Man Hunt* (World, 1918), "the man, foolish enough to resist Miss Clayton for a while, eventually capitulates,"¹⁵⁶ while a review for *Satan Junior* (Metro, 1919) claimed Viola Dana "manages to make her [Diana] look so attractive that when she traps the hero into marrying her the spectator will look upon him as a lucky fellow."¹⁵⁷ The films often qualified the heroine's aggression with the idea of her youthful innocence or romantic intentions towards the male lead, a balancing act I will discuss in my case study, *Satan Junior*. Significantly though, the sexually assertive woman now received more flattering, gentler frameworks such as "the polite vampire"¹⁵⁸ or the "gentle cave woman."¹⁵⁹ Reviews, advertisements and the films themselves connected these films to the 'modern' woman and changing courtship practices. Publicity for Mae Murray in *At First Sight* (Paramount, 1917) labeled her "a highly modern young woman"¹⁶⁰ while *The Man Hunt* (World, 1918) described the female pursuer as someone through whom we find "women's equal opportunity expressed."¹⁶¹ Advertising lines suggested that the heroines could provide models for young women. A catchline for *Satan Junior* (1919) declared, "you don't have to wait for him to take the initiative"¹⁶² and

another for *She Loves and Lies* (1920) insisted “girls you can take a lesson from this resourceful young woman.”¹⁶³

The trends in feature-length courtship comedies released between 1914 and 1920 reveal how 19th and 20th century influences comingled. Older theatrical traditions of class difference and mistaken identity carried over unimpeded, but newer plotlines of converted misogynists, cavemen, or pursuing women, became more common. The films reveal how the industry established a breadth of romantic comedy formulae prior to the sound era. In particular, I will further consider the pursuing woman’s groundwork for later screwball heroines in my case study.

Case Study- *Satan Junior* (Metro, 1919)

Viola Dana’s *Satan Junior* (Metro, 1919) provides one of the more bizarre yet enjoyable viewing experiences of any 1910s comedy feature.¹⁶⁴ Dana’s skill as a comedienne escapes histories of silent comedy. Even Kristen Anderson Wagner’s excellent *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film* (2018) excludes Dana. If one examines the late 1910s trade press, Dana gained immense popularity in a series of comedy features. Though Metro initially alternated her between dramas and comedies, her success in comedy features such as *Lady Barnacle* (Metro, 1917) and *Opportunity* (Metro, 1918) prompted the trade press to encourage the studio to keep her in comic fare. *The Film Daily* opined about a drama she had been placed in, “Don’t give her sob stuff like this for the duration of the war,” and contended “‘Opportunity’ will be playing return dates when this film is lying on the shelves.... She has shown us that she can do light comedy-dramas and put them over with a bang—and audiences would rather have them.”¹⁶⁵ Luckily for Dana’s screen popularity, the studio listened to this advice. By early 1919, she was placed in a series of comedy features.¹⁶⁶ One of those pictures, *Satan Junior* (March, 1919), confirmed the wisdom of that decision.

Ironically, Dana's comic cornerstone corresponded with a moment of personal tragedy. Her husband, director John H. Collins, died from the Spanish influenza during the filming of *Satan Junior* and had to be replaced by Hebert Blaché. Despite this trauma, Dana experienced a career high as an aggressive youth who romances a reluctant playwright. *Motion Picture News* said the film "takes its place along with the best in picture comedy" and *Exhibitor's Herald* complimented it as "a thoroughly funny photoplay."¹⁶⁷ Dana's performance and comic abilities received the most praise. *The Film Daily* said the film "shows the star at her best" while *Variety* observed that "the audience howled with delight over the hoydenish antics of Viola Dana."¹⁶⁸ *Photoplay* specified that the film's success came from Dana adopting an up-to-date form of assertive sexuality. The fan magazine raved,

"Gone is the brooding little sad-eyed thing of the regular Dana photoplay. Gone is the meekness. The gentleness went too. So did the unsophistication. In their place appears a silk-stockinged whirlwind, a total of adolescent and healthy girl, a suave practical joker, a cunning and altogether modern master of men."¹⁶⁹

Reviewers encouraged exhibitors to advertise to women by using the character's 'modern' courtship as a selling point. A typical advertisement suggestion read, "To all girls and other unmarried ladies, hark ye...You don't have to wait for him to take the initiative after all."¹⁷⁰ Exhibitors confirmed that the film constituted a hit. Comments included, "This is a scream. Viola Dana at her best, which is saying something,"¹⁷¹ and "Great! Get it. A regular knockout. Don't pass this up."¹⁷² The film's success led to *Some Bride* (1919), *The Microbe* (1919) and more feature comedies from Dana that year. She continued into the 1920s to star in feature comedies such as *Open All Night* (Paramount, 1924).

Satan Junior was based on a 1913 novel, *Diana Ardway*, but reviews for the novel reveal little in common with the film adaptation.¹⁷³ While the novel focused more on the Bohemian writer's promiscuous lifestyle, the film recast the story as a pursuing woman vehicle that capitalized on the rise of the 'baby vamp' as a 1910s cultural figure.¹⁷⁴ Publicity openly referred

to Dana as a ‘baby vamp’ or ‘vampire flapper,’¹⁷⁵ an ingénue who attempted to seduce a male character but did not share the evil intentions or foreign ‘exoticism’ of earlier vamps like Theda Bara. Usually wealthy and bored, the baby vamp often revealed spunk in her dogged pursuit of men.

Here is an overview of the film’s events:

Satan Junior takes place in the Catskill Mountains. An extreme long shot introduces the audience to the vacation home of Paul Warden (Milton Sills), described by intertitles as “a Broadway playwright and Bohemian, looked upon askance by the ‘Summer Colony.’” He dates a sophisticated actress, and his Asian servant Juan-Kai (George King) smirks at the two as they make love. The film follows this establishment of Paul’s sophistication with a shot of an enormous mansion owned by the ‘Copper King.’ The Copper King’s daughter, Diana Ardway (Viola Dana), prepares to go out horseback riding. Intertitles explain: “If she cried for the moon, the willful spoilt heiress to the Ardway millions would expect to have it.” Despite the objections of her aunt, she insists on riding the fastest horse in the stable. Overhead shots capture Diana and Paul riding on horses towards each other in the mountains. Eventually, Diana speeds past him and Paul assumes her horse has lost control. He catches up to her and drags her off of her horse. Furious at his patronizing assumption, Diana shouts, “How dare you! My horse wasn’t running away! Are you trying to be some kind of hero?” Due to her small height (4’11), Paul assumes she is a child. Paul helps her back onto her horse, and Diana becomes interested when she realizes he is the scandalous subject of her neighbors’ gossip. She smiles at him flirtatiously and rides off.

The second reel follows the initiation of Diana’s pursuit of Paul. Diana determines to witness a playwright’s ‘scandalous’ lifestyle. Breaking into Paul’s house, she hides under his couch cushions and observes him as he types. Paul becomes frustrated over his writing and picks up a cushion to throw in rage. Accidentally grabbing her ankle, he discovers her. Diana explains that she “wanted to find out if the neighbors are right. They say you’re very wicked.” Juan-Kai enters to announce lunch and Diana invites herself. She exclaims, “How jolly! I’ve never had luncheon alone with a wicked man.” Paul and Diana proceed to eat an uncomfortable luncheon together. Paul gazes at Diana as she sensually sucks on fruit and stares back, and he fidgets nervously due to his attraction to her. She informs him that she is nineteen and not as young as he believes. She races off to eat on his couch, and Paul scolds her. Looking at her on the couch, he imagines her in a devil’s costume complete with pitchfork and devil horns. He jokingly threatens to box her ears, but she hits him several times before he can even grab her. Paul seems simultaneously irritated and aroused by her feistiness. He states, “You want to be treated like a grown woman? Well, I’ll show you what I’d do to a *woman* who boxed my ears.” He kisses her, and Diana is so shocked by this physical intimacy that she bites him. In anger at his physical domination, she proceeds to destroy his entire living room. To prevent him from retaliating, she pretends to faint. He fetches Diana’s aunt to come help. To make it appear that Paul lied about her fainting, Diana pops up when the aunt arrives and insists, “I never felt better in my life.”



Diana biting Paul after he kisses her (Courtesy of BFI Archives for all stills)

The third and fourth reels follow Paul's efforts to get rid of Diana. Paul complains to his girlfriend that his manservant, Juan-Kai, has taken a liking to Diana and has repeatedly helped her sneak into Paul's home. Paul begins to imagine Diana in every room. Meanwhile, Diana enters the house again without permission and encounters Paul's girlfriend. The actress tells Diana, "You're a dear little girl—but children should be seen and not heard." Diana finally snaps, snatches the hat off of the actress' head and starts stamping on it. She chases the woman out of the house, and Paul returns to find the actress gone. He realizes what must have happened and collapses into a chair. Diana apologizes, but Paul merely responds, "I'll forgive anything if you'll only go home and leave me in peace." She starts to leave, but then rejoins, "I'll come again tomorrow." Paul then comes up with a new plan to end Diana's pursuit. He arranges for her to spend time with his younger brother, Tad. Continually rejecting Tad, Diana finally gets him to give up by dedicating a picture of herself to him as her "future brother-in-law." Tad rants about her to Paul, who starts to seem amused by her antics. Tad rips up Diana's picture in rage and leaves to go pursue other girls at the seashore. Picking up the pieces of Diana's picture and affectionately puts them together, Paul becomes horrified by her inscription's implication that he will be her future husband.

In the fifth and final reel, Diana discovers that her frustrated aunt has called Diana's father home to help discipline her. Diana realizes that he may intervene with her romantic agenda, so she stages a last-ditch effort to force Paul into marriage. She calls a newspaper to inform them that Paul and she are eloping. She then drives to Paul's house, asks him to help search her car, and kidnaps him. She stops at a secluded, woodland and throws the car's distributor block into a lake. She proudly informs him, "The papers have been notified we've eloped. Aunt Emmeline knows it by this time—so you're *beautifully* compromised." When her aunt finds the couple, Diana fibs, "He lured me away from home—and now—he's trying to desert me!" At this point, Paul has little choice but to preserve both of their reputations and marry her. In a final scene at Diana's mansion, Paul resignedly tells Diana he hopes she is satisfied. Looking unhappy, she does an about-face and insists, "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on Earth. I wouldn't marry any man—who didn't love me!" She runs away, but Paul chases after her to reveal that he has actually fallen in love with her. He admits, "You little imp of Satan! You've tortured me—tormented me—you've stuck a pitchfork in my heart—and now you're not going to get away!" The two share a passionate embrace.

The film displays some striking evolutions from earlier courtship comedies in the teens. Dana is more overtly eroticized than earlier female leads, and her flirtation with Paul exhibits far more physical intimacy. In the earlier courtship comedy, *Young Romance* (Paramount, 1915), the couple primarily interacts in public and only physically touch in one scene on a boat when they rest their heads on each other's shoulders. In accord with loosening regulations around dating in the late 1910s, Diana and Paul receive many opportunities to physically interact and spar in private. Though Diana expresses excitement at being alone with a 'wicked man,' an unmarried couple's private time together had become less taboo during the Progressive era.

The entire second reel shows Diana and Paul alone in his home, often touching or grabbing one another. When Paul first discovers Diana, he does so by accidentally grabbing her ankle. The film focuses on this intimacy by showing his hand grasp her stockinged ankle in close up. Once Diana sits down for lunch with Paul, she attempts to seduce him. She plops down at the table and

flexes her fingers in a come-hither fashion. Once he reluctantly sits down at the table, the film cuts back and forth between Diana sensually eating her food and Paul staring at her with discomfort. She sucks on her fruit with her head lowered, eyes boring into him, and the camera even provides extreme close ups of her mouth as she consumes the fruit. Her strategy works, as he states, “There is something fascinating about you, Diana.” The sexual tension later culminates with Paul grabbing Diana for a forceful kiss to which she responds by biting his hand. Beyond this dining scene, Diana continues to be more sexually aggressive with Paul than prior heroines in 1910s courtship comedies. When Diana goes fishing with Paul and his younger brother, she keeps accidentally hooking the line onto Paul’s jacket and nearly rips it off. To apologize, she keeps smothering his hands with kisses. Diana’s sexual aggression and physical intimacy with Paul point to quickly changing representations of courtship in romantic comedies.



Diana attempting to seduce Paul while eating her lunch

Of course, the film still had to balance innocence or good intentions with Diana’s seduction efforts in order to render her a comic rather than threatening figure. Reviewers discussed how the baby vamp capitalized on youth or actual inexperience to tamper down the social threat of her wielding sexuality as a weapon.¹⁷⁶ The combination of a sexually aggressive figure with naivete, however, was something reviewers occasionally recognized as unrealistic. *Variety* observed of Diana, “It is a combination of sophisticatedness and ingenuousness, constantly alternating and as

totally divergent as ‘Dr. Jekyll’ and Mr. Hyde.”¹⁷⁷ Of course, that inconsistent drawing of female leads could be found in later romantic comedies as well. Humor stemmed from a young woman playing at adult sensuality while being unaware of its power. Diana simultaneously exhibits both surprising sensual knowledge and ignorance. She clearly knows that utilizing her mouth in certain ways will arouse Paul, and she has enough adult knowledge to ascertain that going off alone with Paul in the woods will force him to marry her due to the implication that they have been sexually active. However, Diana’s thrill at being alone with a man suggests that she has not had this opportunity before. Diana similarly appears so shocked and angered by Paul’s kiss that she proceeds to smash his artwork and wreck his living room. The film also attempts to portray her sexual pursuit of Paul as ‘purer’ than his relationship with the older actress. As the actress races away from a physical altercation with Diana, Diana shouts after her, “Blonde heart-crusher! Try your wiles on someone else!” Furthermore, Diana continually exhibits childlike behavior. She stamps her feet in anger, crawls on the floor to play peekaboo with Paul, and jumps up and down on Paul’s couch. Like other baby vamps in this period, the threat of Diana’s sensuality is softened by her childish behavior and lack of sexual experience.

Though Diana is meant to be seductive, the female pursuer was also designed to create humor. Diana prompts laughter through her surprisingly aggressive dialogue, her physical playfulness and the ingenuity of her deceptions. Her intertitles regularly mock the people around her and express surprising audacity. After overhearing lines from Paul’s play, she both insults his writing and openly expresses her intention to pursue him. She remarks, “You rave beautifully! Only I think your heroine was an awful simp. If *I* loved a man—he wouldn’t get away from *me*.” Her physical behaviors also provide much of the amusement. Some of the humor relates to her refusal to heed Paul’s pleas to leave him alone. When Paul ignores Diana after the departure of his

fiancée, Diana crawls on the floor and attempts to distract him from his book. She crawls closer and closer to his chair, and when this doesn't work, she pokes her head out from behind the chair and then hides back behind the chair again. Diana also shows gestures of affection humorously incongruous to Paul's moment of rage. When she informs him that she has trapped him into a scandal, he stands silently in fury but she scoots beside him, rests her head on his shoulder, and peers up at him with a giddy smile.



Diana plays peekaboo with Paul

Viola Dana's set pieces as a comedienne, however, stem more from her impish personality as opposed to her sexual pursuit. When she feigns fainting to avoid punishment for destroying Paul's apartment, he leaves the room to go fetch her aunt. Once she is alone, Diana leaps up from the couch. She performs a self-satisfied dance, raising her arms and twirling back and forth several times. The minute Paul begins to open the door behind her, she exhibits a humorously quick transformation. She stops abruptly in her tracks, leaps with both feet off the ground back onto the couch, and slowly leans back into her prior flattened position—all in continuous motion. Actress Dana's physical skill as she carries out prankster behaviors carries over to other scenes. When Ted courts Diana, the camera captures her face in medium close ups as she listens to him play the ukulele. She finds the lyrics to his song mushy, and her body language illustrates her irritation. She rests her face on her hand and glances offscreen right with her eyebrows raised in skepticism

at his romantic efforts. She then rolls her eyes in boredom. She finally decides she has had enough and shoves a candy into his throat while he is still in the midst of singing. He immediately chokes and stops playing. She feigns shock, clasping her hands and then gently stroking his head. Viola Dana's facial reactions and impressive body control bear out the contemporary praise she received for her comic abilities. It is a great loss that only a few of her feature comedies survive.¹⁷⁸

Satan Junior illustrates that courtship comedies in the silent era developed popular tropes that would continue to be utilized in later decades. More specific to this film, the pursuing woman carried over to screwball comedies such as *My Man Godfrey* (Universal, 1936) as well as more recent iterations like *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012). Despite the film's status as a romantic comedy as opposed to slapstick, the pursuing woman moved far beyond the 19th century's genteel strictures for female behavior. This modern femininity was comic rather than threatening.

Conclusion

Comedy features in the 1910s standardized many storyline and character conventions for romantic comedies. This was true of both courtship and reaffirmation plotlines. Though scholars have acknowledged that certain films by Cecil B. DeMille or Ernst Lubitsch anticipate romantic comedies in the sound era, those films are rarely situated within a larger narrative of the industry's rampant production of the genre after the rise of the feature. Romantic comedy's growth in 1910s features befit the industrial context of feature films as well as the cultural context of evolving perspectives about romance in the twilight of the Progressive era. The longer length of the feature granted comedies more time to develop relationships, and romantic comedies accorded with the industry's efforts to appeal to increasingly cross-class and feminized audiences. They also suited feature comedies' widespread reliance on youthful leads and sympathetic humor. In addition to this industry shift, changing attitudes around courtship and marriage in the Progressive era made

the exploration of romantic compatibility in feature-length comedies more likely. Loosening mores around singles spending time alone allowed for increasingly intimate depictions of pre-marital courtship, while growing calls for marital reform encouraged the idea of further ‘developing’ a relationship once married. The solidification of romantic comedy in this decade suggests that the affirmative approach of 1910s features, and the industry’s efforts to tailor respectable comedies to women, had ramifications for the industry’s comedy production after the silent era. The optimism and attractive leads in these comedies continued well past this decade, and the enduring presence of romantic comedy in feature films serves as one powerful reminder of this legacy.

¹ 122 feature comedies out of 233 would qualify as romantic comedies based on their synopses or by reviewing the existing films. This number comes from taking the comedies and comedy dramas listed in AFI catalog for that year and cross-checking them with billing and publicity in the trade press for that same year.

² Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale. *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 133.

³ Leger Grindon's *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History, Controversies*. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) starts with cycles in the early 1930s. James Harvey's *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood, from Lubitsch to Sturges*. New York: De Capo Press, 1987) begins with Lubitsch's sound operettas. Tamar Jeffers MacDonald's *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007) begins with the 1930s screwball cycle. Other books that focus on a particular period in history tend to fixate on the classical Hollywood sound era. See Kathrina Glitre's *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of Union, 1934-1965*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

⁴ Christopher Beach. *Class, Language and American Film Comedy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1

⁵ See "Before Screwball." *Film History*. (Volume 13, No. 4), 2001. The issue largely focuses on Lubitsch or DeMille. Billy Vermillion does usefully note that *Divorcons* (Biograph, 1915) predated DeMille's films with the remarriage plot, and Sara Ross discusses flapper films from the 1920s (not all comic, but some of the films would count as romantic comedies).

⁶ Grindon, 26.

⁷ See Kirsten Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018).

⁸ Charles Musser. *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 80.

⁹ In his overview of Hollywood romantic comedy, Leger Grindon notes that American Film Institute defines romantic comedy as "a genre in which the *development* [emphasis mine] of romance leads to comic situations" and that screenwriter Billy Mernit in a guide to writing romantic comedies dictates, "*romance* must be the primary story element." Grindon himself writes that "romantic comedy portrays the *transforming* power of love." (*The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History, Controversies*), 1-2.

¹⁰ Sarah Kozloff. "Romantic Comedy." *An Introduction to Film Genres*. Eds. David Desser, Lester Friedman, Sarah Kozloff, Martha Nochimson, and Stephen Prince (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 125.

¹¹ This comes from examining the plot synopses and reviews or 1388 comedy shorts from American manufacturing companies in 1913. Out of 1388 shorts, 82 met these criteria for a romantic comedy.

¹² "Picture Situation in Germany." *The Moving Picture World*. 5/29/1915, 1434.

¹³ Sargent, 296.

¹⁴ Dizon. "Brewster's Millions." *The New York Clipper*. 4/18/1914, 10.

¹⁵ Hanford C. Judson. "The Country Mouse." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/21/1914, 1084.

¹⁶ Epes Winthrop Sargent. "The Photoplaywright." *The Moving Picture World*. 5/2/1914, 665.

¹⁷ Louis Reeves Harrison. "Pleasing the People." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/18/1913, 242.

¹⁸ “At First Sight.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 7/7/1917, 26.

¹⁹ “Social Quicksands.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 6/29/1918, 44.

²⁰ Eaton, 13.

²¹ Triangle’s Opening Bill Improved.” *Motography*. 9/11/1915, 519

²² “Matrimony: Advance Stories of Triangle Play Released On and After November 28.” Box 8. Harry and Roy Aitken Papers. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Madison. WI.

²³ George N. Shorey. “A School for Husbands.” *Motion Picture News*. 4/21/1917, 2156.

²⁴ George Blaisdell. “The Kiss.” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/4/1916, 688

²⁵ “The Veiled Adventure.” *The New York Clipper*. 5/14/1919, 34.

²⁶ “Program Reader- ‘Stepping Out.’” *Motion Picture News*. 10/4/1919, 2875.

²⁷ “Mail Campaign.” *Paramount Press Book*. Vol. 9, March-April, 1919, 19.

²⁸ “Wives!! Bring the Husbands to See ‘The Country Mouse.’” *The Tallygram*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 12/17/1914. Scrapbook #2. Hobart Bosworth Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Happy Though Married.” *Paramount Exhibitor’s Press Book*. January, 1919, 19.

³¹ “Feature Films- ‘The Country Mouse.’” Scrapbook #2. Hobart Bosworth Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA.

³² “Matrimony-Intertitle List.” Box 8. Harry and Roy Aitken Papers. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Madison, WI.

³³ “Woman’s Weapons.” *Paramount Exhibitor’s Press Book*. November, 1918, 3.

³⁴ Peter Milne. “Let’s Get a Divorce.” *Motion Picture News*. 5/4/1918, 2718.

³⁵ George Blaisdell. “Two Good Paramounts.” *The Moving Picture World*. 4/21/1917, 448.

³⁶ “How to Capture a Misogynist.” *Pictures and the Picturegoer*. 12/25/1915, 280.

³⁷ See “The Birth of Musical Comedy” in John Kernick’s *Musical Theatre: A History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 95-110. More discussions of operetta and musical comedy can also be found in Michael Newbury’s “Polite Gaiety: Cultural Hierarchy and Musical Comedy.” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. Oct. 2005, 381-407, Len Platt’s *Musical Comedy on the West End Stage, 1890-1939*. (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), or Larry Stempel’s *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010)

³⁸ This older definition can be traced through examining newspaper use from 1870-1910 on Library of Congress’ *Chronicling America* newspaper database or by searching for the term through theatrical publications like *The Theatre* (1901-1918).

³⁹ Early comedy dramas that foregrounded a romance included Mary Pickford's *Caprice* (Famous Players, 1913), John Barrymore's *An American Citizen* (Famous Players, 1914), Dustin Farnum's *The Lightning Conductor* (Hefco Films, 1914), Max Figman and Lolita Robertson's *The Man on the Box* (Lasky, 1914) and *What's His Name?* (Lasky, 1914), Andrew Mack's *The Ragged Earl* (Lubin, 1914), *The Chocolate Soldier* (Daisy Feature Film Co., 1914) and *The Country Mouse* (Bosworth, 1914).

⁴⁰ The peak seems to have been 52% of all feature comedies in 1918 (numbers come from AFI list. Also see Appendix IV).

⁴¹ As mentioned in the introduction, 1938's AFI listings for feature comedies includes about 25%, or 41 titles out of 161, that revolve around a central romance and the growth of that relationship.

⁴² Kristine Karnick. "Commitment and Reaffirmation in Hollywood Romantic Comedy." *Classical Hollywood Comedy*. Eds. Kristine Karnick and Henry Jenkins. Routledge: New York, 1995, 123-148.

⁴³ Christina Simmons. *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War I*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). See Chapter Three's discussion of the term 'companionate marriage' and its use in the 1920s.

⁴⁴ John C. Spurlock. "The Problem of Modern Married Love for Middle-Class Women." *An Emotional History of the United States*. Eds. Peter M. Stearns and Jan Lewis. New York: New York University Press, 1998, 319.

⁴⁵ There are a variety of books that usefully address the shifts from mid-19th century marital expectations to more 'modern' views by the early 1920s. In addition to Simmons and Spurlock, see Kristen Celello. *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2005); Nancy F. Cott's *Public Vows: and the Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000; Claire Virginia Eby's *Until Choice Do Us Part: Marriage Reform in the Progressive Era*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014; Elaine Tyler May's *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), and David Shumway's "Something Old, Something New: Romance and Marital Advice in the 1920s" in *An Emotional History of the United States*. Eds. Peter M. Stearns and Jan Lewis. New York: New York University Press, 1998, 305-318; Leigh Ann Wheeler's "Inventing Sexuality: Ideologies, Identities and Practices in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era." Eds. Christopher McKnight Nichols and Nancy C. Unger. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 102-115.

For a closer look at marital law and attitudes in the 19th century, see Hendrik Hartog's *Man and Wife in America: A History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002 or Karen Lystra's *Searching the Heart: Women, Men and Romantic Love in Nineteenth Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

⁴⁶ For discussions of declining birthrates and enhanced focus on sex for non-reproductive purposes, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman's *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed. 1997), 172; Spurlock, 320; Wheeler, 108. For shift away from all-female and male support systems and extended families, see Coontz, 214 and Celello, 16.

⁴⁷ See Simmons, 11; Elaine Tyler May's *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 62-63; Julie Berebitsky. *Sex and the Office: A History of Gender, Power and Desire*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁴⁸ Eby, 51-55.

⁴⁹ See Chapter One of William O'Neill. *Divorce in the Progressive Era*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Elaine Tyle May also notes the rapid rise in divorce rates between the late 1800s and 1920 (*Great Expectations*, 2-3).

⁵⁰ Eby, 28.

⁵¹ Eby, xviii. We can also find this rhetoric about better compatibility as a “remedy for divorce” in women’s columns from the 1910s, such as “An Ideal Home.” M.T. True. *The North Mississippi Herald*. 3/5/1915, 1.

⁵² Kristen Celello. *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 22.

⁵³ Leigh Ann Wheeler. “Inventing Sexuality: Ideologies, Identities and Practices in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.” Eds. Christopher McKnight Nichols and Nancy C. Unger. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 102.

⁵⁴ “Is Any Man Easy to Live With?” *Ladies’ Home Journal*. May, 1914, 12.

⁵⁵ Wheeler, 108-109.

⁵⁶ Stephens, Margaret. *Women and Marriage*. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910).

⁵⁷ M. A. Bigelow. *Sex Education*. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1916, 198.

⁵⁸ For good secondary summaries, Eby, 97, May, 30, or Courtney Q. Shah’s *Sex Ed, Segregated: The Quest for Sexual Knowledge in Progressive-Era America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 9. We can also find marital handbooks from the 1910s concerned about wives’ ignorance leading to the contraction of venereal diseases (Stephens’ *Women and Marriage*, xi or Gallichan, vii-viii).

⁵⁹ Greeley, Smith, Nixola. “Make Your Husbands Jealous.” *The Tacoma Times*. 2/17/1914, 7.

⁶⁰ “Matrimony and Meringue.” Adela Rogers St. John. *Photoplay*, July, 1919, 82.

⁶¹ MacFadden, 214-215.

⁶² MacFadden, 26.

⁶³ “Happy Though Married.” *Paramount Exhibitor’s Press Book*. January, 1919, 9.

⁶⁴ See Simmons, Chapter 2.

⁶⁵ Bigelow, 194-195.

⁶⁶ “New Margarita Fisher Picture June 10.” *Motography*. 6/15/1918, 1133.

⁶⁷ Hartog, Hendrik. *Man and Wife in America*, 113.

⁶⁸ Eby, 40.

⁶⁹ “Is Any Many Easy to Live With?” *Ladies Home Journal*, May, 1914, 12.

⁷⁰ “How to Make Marriage a Success: One Hundred Different Girls Express Their Frank Opinions.” Collated by Carolyn Halsted. *Ladies Home Journal*. March, 1905, 10.

⁷¹ Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. 1912), 179.

⁷² “How to Make Marriage a Success: One Hundred Different Girls Express Their Frank Opinions.” Collated by Carolyn Halsted. *Ladies Home Journal*. March, 1905, 10.

⁷³ “Advertising Aids for Busy Managers.” *The Moving Picture World*. 2/9/1918, 872.

⁷⁴ See Celello, 16; Eby, 51-55; Simmons, all of Chapter 3; Shumway, 305; Spurlock, 319-320.

⁷⁵ Moody, Helen Watterson. “What it Means to Be a Wife.” *Ladies Home Journal*. 1899, 26.

⁷⁶ Gallichan, 87.

⁷⁷ MacFadden, 29.

⁷⁸ Partially extant (last reel) at the British Film Institute in London.

⁷⁹ *A Temperamental Wife* (1919) survives on nitrate at Library of Congress and several reels of *Scandal* (1917) survives at MOMA.

⁸⁰ “Select Gets Another Stage Success.” *The Moving Picture World*. 3/30/1918, 1846

⁸¹ “A Pair of Silk Stockings.” *Variety*. 7/19/1918, 38.

⁸² Edward Weitzel, “Scandal.” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/10/1917, 878.

⁸³ See Peter Milne’s “A Pair of Silk Stockings.” *Motion Picture News*. 7/27/1918, 642 and “A Pair of Silk Stockings.” *The Film Daily*. 7/14/1918, 10.

⁸⁴ Advertisement-‘A Pair of Silk Stockings.’ *The Moving Picture World*. 8/3/1918, 724 and Edward Weitzel. “A Pair of Silk Stockings.” *The Moving Picture World*. 7/27/1918, 587.

⁸⁵ “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 9/6/1918, 74, and “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 4/5/1919, 45

⁸⁶ “A Pair of Silk Stockings.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 8/24/1918, 27.

⁸⁷ “Agreeable Comedy Gracefully Given.” *The New York Times*. 10/19/1914, 9.

⁸⁸ For strong summaries of the ‘New Man’ in the Progressive Era, E. Anthony Rotundo’s *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 222-246, Gaylyn Studlar’s chapter on Douglas Fairbanks in *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1996), 10-89, as well as the entirety of Kevin P. Murphy. *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, & the Politics of Progressive Era Reform*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ A monocle is used to signify snobbish, inferior masculinity repeatedly, such as in *The Lady in the Photograph* (1917), *Madcap Madge* (1917), or *Happiness* (1917).

⁹² “The Veiled Adventure.” *The Film Daily*. 5/19/1919, 21.

⁹³ “Constance Talmadge, Portrayer of ‘Regular’ American Girls.” *Select Pictures Magazine*. Vol. 3, No. 3, 1918, 3.

⁹⁴ “A Tabloid Review.” *Picture-Play Magazine*. April, 1920, 93.

⁹⁵ See "A Pair of Silk Stockings." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 8/24/1918, 27; Peter Milne."A Pair of Silk Stockings." 7/27/1918, 642, respectively.

⁹⁶ The only attempt I have seen to 'label' romantic comedies with singles is Kristina Karnick's identification of 'commitment' comedies that focus 'on the establishment of a central couple' as opposed to 'reaffirmation' screwball ("Commitment and Reaffirmation in Hollywood Romantic Comedy." *Classical Hollywood Comedy*. Eds. Henry Jenkins and Kristina Karnick. London: Routledge. 1995, 131.

⁹⁷ See Bailey, 5; D'Emilio, 172; Odem, 3; Rothman, 203-204; Wheeler, 108.

⁹⁸ McGovern, James. "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals." *Journal of American History*. (Vol. 55, No. 2. 1968), 318.

⁹⁹ Rabinovitz, Lauren. *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 6.

¹⁰⁰ Cocks, Catherine. "Rethinking Sexuality in the Progressive Era." *Journal of Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. Vol. 5, No. 2. 2006.

¹⁰¹ Rothman, 204-206.

¹⁰² Bailey, 16

¹⁰³ Clements, Elizabeth Alice. *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 17.

¹⁰⁴ "I'm going out to keep a date" comes from Julian Johnson's "A Geranium in Boheme." *The Green Book Magazine*. April, 1916, 729, while "I just made a date with him" comes from Mary M. Finn's "The Stuffed Shirt," *The Green Book Magazine*. August, 1917, 311. Now both heroines are actresses, so the suggestion may be that these women are unusually daring in their dating lives. However, Beth Bailey also has traced the word 'date' to an upper-class society girl in *Ladies Home Journal* by 1914 (16).

¹⁰⁵ Macfadden, 83.

¹⁰⁶ "Is Any Man Easy to Live With?", 12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Clements, 3.

¹⁰⁹ As just some of examples of the unequal application of reform movements based on race or class during the Progressive era, see Courtney Q. Shah's *Sex Ed, Segregated: The Quest for Sexual Knowledge in Progressive-Era America*, Mary E. Odem's *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

¹¹⁰ See either R.L. Hunter's *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 11, or Alan Hughes' *Performing Greek Comedy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 215.

¹¹¹ For one analysis of fervid American nationalism's influence on 1910s film production, see Ben Singer's "1919-Movies and Righteous Americanism" in *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations*. Ed. Charlie Keil and Ben Singer. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 225-248.

¹¹² Lynde Denig. "When Love is King." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/19/1916, 1146

¹¹³ All five reels survive at Library of Congress.

¹¹⁴ "The Golden Wall." *The Film Daily*. 7/21/1918, 5.

¹¹⁵ There were concerns in the early twentieth century, especially about working class women, that accepting "treating" or gifts in the dating process led to exchanges for petting, kissing or even sex with male partners, creating some slippage between courtship practices and prostitution. (Elizabeth Alice Clements. *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 145).

¹¹⁶ Rothman, 192.

¹¹⁷ May, 2-3; Eby, 27-32.

¹¹⁸ See Lantern application on *Media History Digital Library*. <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

¹¹⁹ Genevieve Harris. "My Wife." *Motography*. 2/23/1918, 375

¹²⁰ "'Arms and the Girl' Another War Play." *The New York Times*. 9/28/1916, 7.

¹²¹ Helen Rockwell. *Motography*. 11/10/1917, 1001.

¹²² "The Make-Believe Wife." *Picture-Play Magazine*. February, 1919, 266.

¹²³ "Bille Burke's New Paramount Photoplay," *Paramount Press Books*. Nov, 1918, 3.

¹²⁴ "Drew Has Success in 'My Wife' at Empire." *The New York Times*. 9/1/1907, 7.

¹²⁵ For 'battle of the sexes' pieces such as the caveman in *The Misleading Lady* (Essanay, 1915) or the pursuing woman in *The Runaway* (Mutual, 1917) were adapted from 1913 and 1916 productions respectively or original scenarios. In contrast, feature comedies with material prior to 1905, *An American Citizen* (Famous Players, 1914, stage prod. 1899), *Mice and Men* (1901), *The Man on the Box* (Paramount, 1914, stage prod. 1905) keep the couples separated through external complications such as distance, a rival suitor or disguise.

¹²⁶ Rothman, 225.

¹²⁷ Gallichan, 77.

¹²⁸ Studlar, Gaylyn. "Discourses of Gender and Ethnicity: The Construction and De (con) struction of Rudolph Valentino as Other." *Film Criticism*. Vol. 13, No. 2. (Winter, 1989), 20.

¹²⁹ "What Theater Men are Doing." *Motography*. 5/27/1916, 1201.

¹³⁰ See footnote 94 for good secondary surveys of this era's conceptions of appropriate masculinity and denigration of the 'mollycoddle.'

¹³¹ "Notes from All Over." *Motography*. 5/27/1916, 1201.

¹³² Edward Weitzel. "The Misleading Lady." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/1/1921, 98.

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- ¹³³ Sad Fate of a Careless Siren.” *New York Tribune*. 11/26/1913, 9
- ¹³⁴ “Chronicling America.” *Library of Congress*. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
- ¹³⁵ Townbridge, George. “How I Got Married.” *The Albany Register*. 5/28/1870, 1.
- ¹³⁶ “The Woman Hater.” *Mineral Point Tribune*. 2/3/1887, 4.
- ¹³⁷ “She Must Go.” *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*. 2/12/1887, 2.
- ¹³⁸ For ‘hating the opposite sex,’ see “Brief Stories of the Week’s Film Releases,” *Motography*. 2/20/1915, 305. For “sterner sex” quote, see “Mutual Announces American Series.” *Motography*. 6/1/1918, 1047.
- ¹³⁹ Sargent, Epes Winthrop. *Technique of the Photoplay*. 3rd Edition. (New York: Chalmers Publishing Company, 1916), 214.
- ¹⁴⁰ “Light Comedy Stuff is Needed in Your Exploitation.” *Motion Picture News*. 4/5/1919, 2156-2157.
- ¹⁴¹ For discussion of suffragettes’ mockery in silent comedies, see Maggie Hennefeld’s *Specters of Slapstick & Silent Film Comediennes*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 174, or Kristen Anderson Wagner’s *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 227-228.
- ¹⁴² Cohan, Steven. *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- ¹⁴³ “A Regular Guy.” *Motion Picture News*. 4/5/1919, 2074.
- ¹⁴⁴ “How to Capture a Misogynist.” *Pictures and the Picturegoer*. 12/25/1915, 280.
- ¹⁴⁵ “Mail Campaign.” *Paramount Press Book*. Vol. 9, March-April, 1919, 19.
- ¹⁴⁶ “Advertising Aids for Busy Managers.” *The Moving Picture World*. 2/9/1918, 872.
- ¹⁴⁷ “Special Service Section on ‘The Weaker Vessel.’” *Motion Picture News*. 7/5/1919, 334
- ¹⁴⁸ Wheeler, 109.
- ¹⁴⁹ “Bettina Loved a Soldier.” *The Moving Picture World*. 7/29/1916, 812.
- ¹⁵⁰ George W. Graves. “At First Sight.” *Motography*. 7/7/1917, 46.
- ¹⁵¹ “At First Sight.” *The New York Clipper*. 6/27/1917, 34.
- ¹⁵² “A Snakeville Courtship.” *The Moving Picture World*. 12/20/1913, 1464.
- ¹⁵³ “The Widow’s Might” *The Moving Picture World*. 1/18/1913, 286.
- ¹⁵⁴ See “What Girls Will Do.” *The Moving Picture News*. 8/16/1913, 28, and “Bashful Bachelor Bill.” *The Moving Picture World*. 8/23/1913, 882.
- ¹⁵⁵ “An Aesthetic Match.” *The Moving Picture World*. 9/27/1913, 1428.
- ¹⁵⁶ Peter Milne. “The Screen in Review.” *Picture Play Magazine*. Sept, 1918, 118.

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- ¹⁵⁷ Edward Weitzel. "Satan Junior." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/15/1919, 1526.
- ¹⁵⁸ Laurence Reid. "More Deadly than the Male." *Motion Picture News*. 12/20/1919, 4530.
- ¹⁵⁹ Randolph Bartlett. "The Shadow Stage." *Photoplay*. August, 1918, 102. He is using 'gentle cave woman' to describe the female lead in *The Man Hunt* (World, 1918).
- ¹⁶⁰ "'At First Sight' at the Rialto." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/14/1917, 250.
- ¹⁶¹ "Advertising Aids for Busy Managers." *The Moving Picture World*. 6/22/1918, 1760.
- ¹⁶² Peter Milne. "Satan Junior." *Motion Picture News*. 3/15/1919, 1703.
- ¹⁶³ Laurence Reid. "She Loves and Lies." *Motion Picture News*. 1/17/1920, 919.
- ¹⁶⁴ The complete five-reel film survives at the British Film Institute in London.
- ¹⁶⁵ *The Film Daily*. 9/1/1918, 10
- ¹⁶⁶ "Comedy Drama is Now Viola Dana's Specialty." *Motion Picture News*. 2/8/1919, 876
- ¹⁶⁷ See Peter Milne's "Satan Junior." *Motion Picture News*. 3/15/1919, 1703; "Satan Junior." *The Film Daily*. 3/9/1919, 3; or "Satan Junior." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 3/22/1919, 32.
- ¹⁶⁸ See "Satan Junior." *The Film Daily*. 3/9/1919, 3; Jolo. "Satan Junior." *Variety*. 3/7/1919, 66
- ¹⁶⁹ "The Shadow Stage." *Photoplay*. June, 1919, 72.
- ¹⁷⁰ Peter Milne. "Satan Junior." *Motion Picture News*. 3/15/1919, 1703.
- ¹⁷¹ "What the Picture Did for Me." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 8/2/1919, 55.
- ¹⁷² "What the Picture Did for Me." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 12/13/1919, 97
- ¹⁷³ "Critical Reviews of the Season's Latest Books." *The Sun*. 11/22/1913, 8
- ¹⁷⁴ See Sara Ross' discussion of the 'baby vamp' as a precedent for the flapper ("Banking the Flames of Youth: The Hollywood Flapper, 1920-1930." PhD Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2000), 60-65.
- ¹⁷⁵ "Viola Dana is Baby Vamp." *Motion Picture News*. 2/2/1919, 875
- ¹⁷⁶ We can see an emphasis on 'youth' or 'inexperience' to make her pursuit more innocent in numerous reviews. For instance, reviews for June Caprice's *Patsy* (Fox, 1917) excused her behavior as "an ingenuous maiden making love" (Hanford C. Judson. "Patsy." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/21/1917, 473) while a review for *The Studio Girl* (Select, 1918) excused, "Talmadge is so real, so spirited, so full of youth and the mere joy of living that she is able to put all suggestions of sex appeal to rout." (Peter Milne. *Motion Picture News*. 2/9/1918, 886).
- ¹⁷⁷ Jolo. "Satan Junior." *Variety*. 3/7/1919, 66
- ¹⁷⁸ In addition to *Satan Junior*, Dana's *Opportunity* (Metro, 1918) survives at George Eastman House while *The Chorus Girl's Romance* (Metro, 1920) survives at Cinemateca Brasileira. Some of her later 1920s efforts survive as well. These include *Seeing's Believing* (Metro, 1922) and *Her Fatal Millions* (First National, 1923) at George Eastman House, while *June Madness* (Metro, 1922), *Open All Night* (Paramount, 1924) and *Kosher Kitty Kelly* (FBO, 1926) can be found at Library of Congress.

Chapter Six- **“The Right Degree of Irresponsible Daring”: Female Leads in the Feature Comedy**

When historians reference the development of feature-length comedy, male performers such as Douglas Fairbanks loom large in their accounts. Those figures are undoubtedly important representatives of the affirmative comedy approach features adopted, but their prioritization in historical narratives regrettably overlooks female performers' pivotal role in popularizing the form. Women's centrality in many romantic comedies, as seen in Chapter Five, fit within a larger pattern of dominance within comedy features. Producers, critics and exhibitors all openly discussed promoting female stars to attract feminine patrons. As previously noted, the number of women garnering first billing in feature comedies mushroomed to 68% by 1918.¹ In a 1920 nationwide exhibitor survey, 'a light society comedy starring a woman' beat out all other types of drama and comedy shorts.²

Scholars frequently place comedies centered around women into the category of romantic comedy. This designation can occur even if a woman's romantic relationship occupies little narrative space.³ Romantic comedies were just one of the ways in which feature-length humor became culturally 'feminized' in this period. Feminization also hinged upon the prominence of female performers in affirmative comedy more generally. Some comic narratives starring women primarily showcased their individual antics, even if the films concluded with a successful coupling (in a similar manner to a Fairbanks action comedy).

Recognizing this fact expands and nuances ongoing work on humorous women outside of romantic comedy. Kristen Anderson Wagner took a crucial step in identifying a wide array of silent comediennes and the ways in which they exemplified the athleticism or sexual assertiveness

of the New Woman.⁴ Now I aim to further explore distinctions between different types of comediennes and how the affirmative comedies targeting women presented humorous female protagonists. The athleticism or assertiveness Wagner cites could take on many forms, and we still have much to learn about the variance in characters and plots for comic women. Constance Talmadge or Olive Thomas' representations of femininity differed markedly from those of Marie Dressler or Louise Fazenda. Female stars in affirmative features struck a precarious balance between engaging in comic rebellion and maintaining their status as attractive, sympathetic figures. One reviewer hinted at this balance by reassuring that Constance Talmadge's protagonist in *Scandal* (Select, 1917) displayed "the right degree of irresponsible daring to make the character a wonderfully appealing one."⁵ Looking at what this 'right degree' entailed for female performers sheds light on which methods of comic upheaval and playfulness could be exhibited without raising misgivings about these women crossing over into immorality or grotesquery.

This chapter focuses on three female types, all identified by the trade press, who anchored feature comedies with a non-romantic primary storyline: 'the hoyden,' the 'shero' and the 'madcap.' I discuss them in this order, because I see these figures as related to different historical movements. The hoyden was a tomboy, typically rural or poor, who created humor through her unfettered behavior and disruption of upscale settings. She moved from a derisive to a beloved figure in response to the tomboy movement and cultural changes in the late 1800s. In contrast, the shero represented a role model who worked through comic obstacles thereby displaying 'American excellence.' She became particularly pertinent to the film industry's promotion of American patriotism during World War I. While the hoyden and heroine personified athletic and nationalist movements, the madcap anticipated the rebellious flapper of the 1920s. She was a wealthy, defiant boarding school girl who played pranks, ran away from home, and experimented with alternative

social identities. All three characters exemplified how young women's lives had changed in the twentieth century. Their embodiment of shifting roles should help nuance scholarship's characterization of silent comedienues' modernity as tied to their participation in aggressive 'New Humor.' This current association presumes that only the adoption of culturally masculine humor and sensibilities allowed comedienues to illustrate modern femininity. Feature comedies offered a different tack. Through figures like the hoyden, heroine, and madcap, female performers presented versions of modernity palatable to multi-class, feminized audiences.

Women in Silent Comedy: The New Woman Outside of New Humor

Observing these female leads expands our understanding of women's participation in silent comedy. Recent work by scholars such as Maggie Hennefeld, Victoria Sturtevant and Kristen Anderson Wagner positions comedienues as archetypes of the New Woman.⁶ The New Woman encompasses a wide spectrum of feminine representations but historians typically use the term to describe challenges to genteel womanhood in the late 19th century.⁷ In the mid-1800s, a value system prevailed among the middle and upper classes that stressed genteel, or 'true womanhood,' with women serving as moral guardians of the home. The notion of separate spheres predominated, where men structured the public realm whereas women structured the private.⁸ True womanhood embodied piety, purity, and submissiveness.⁹ In contrast, the New Woman arose by the late 1800s as an alternative version of femininity. This cultural figure responded to growing feminist movements and their concerns, including but not limited to, women's health complications from domestic confinement, economic dependency on their husbands, and a lack of access to education and voting rights.¹⁰ The New Woman could variously refer to those who participated in sports, higher education or earned wages. It could also refer simply to women who spent more time in the

public sphere. The New Woman pervades many studies of silent cinema, and it is not a surprise this extends to comediennes.

While these analyses of silent comediennes are long overdue, current scholarship overconflates comediennes' New Womanhood with participation in the New Humor. Critics at the turn of the century coined 'New Humor' to describe vulgar or aggressive forms of comedy that they associated with working class and immigrant males.¹¹ Scholars acknowledge that Keystone's success conflicted with culturally feminized humor. Rob King argues that Keystone "faced a genteel assault on laughter from a feminized concept of culture."¹² Despite this tension, scholars continue to examine comediennes' modernity in relation to the New Humor.¹³ Wagner makes an explicit connection, writing of the New Humor, "Just as the icon of the New Woman was gaining prominence in the early twentieth century, a new type of comedy was similarly displacing older forms. This comedy was tantamount to performed modernity, full of speed and thrills." She goes on to frame comediennes of the 1910s as now being "armed with a new style of humor" through which they "engaged in and ultimately triumphed over the shocks and thrills of the modern landscape."¹⁴ Hennefeld also describes female modernity through the lens of slapstick's visceral physicality; "Slapstick, the exaggerated performance of make-believe violence, provided a gateway into the untapped and previously unimaginable possibilities of female identity in modern society."¹⁵ Victoria Sturtevant's study of Marie Dressler sees her maternal figures in slapstick films as connected to the New Woman by defying "'sentimental' depictions of motherhood stemming from the Victorian separation of spheres."¹⁶

Solely focusing on women's relationship to New Humor imposes two main troubles for feminist historiography. First, because women did not participate in New Humor as thoroughly as affirmative comedies, such histories can inadvertently perpetuate the notion that women's

influence paled in comparison to male comics. Second, equating women performing New Humor with the New Woman allows culturally masculinized forms of comedy to dictate what constitutes feminine modernity. Though female performers who participated in the New Humor presented important challenges to cultural prescriptions for women's behavior, the continued preoccupation with this area of feminine modernity tacitly accepts the devaluation of feminine taste cultures within comedy studies. In *The Gender of Modernity* (1996), Rita Felski argues that forward progress and the 'modern' often take on gendered connotations. She writes that "new forms of bourgeois and working-class male subjectivity" shaped conceptions of modernity.¹⁷ New Humor's current linkage to the New Woman in scholarship on silent comedy ironically limits women's relevance to culturally masculinized modes of humor. The hoyden, shero and madcap examined in this chapter, running rampant in 'gentler' comedies associated with feminine tastes, also illustrated modernity by depicting women's shifting social roles in the early twentieth century.

"Freckled and Impudent": Hoydens and the Decline of the Lady

A theatrical review for Elsie Janis' play *The Hoyden* (1907) punchily summarized, "a hoyden is a tomboy."¹⁸ Apt in some respects, the simplicity of this definition belies how other contemporary commentators adopted the term more expansively to include any unpolished young woman who lacked 'acculturation.' A short story called "Grandma's Pet" (1914) described the character in more detail as a young woman who exhibits athletic and 'wild' behaviors. The story opens as follows:

"When a person is referred to as a hoyden, one knows that a girl is meant. No boy is ever referred to by that epithet... She has a gypsy face and figure. She has very short dresses and very long legs. She has long hair flying in the wind. She is sunburned and freckled and impudent... A hoyden romps, she climbs trees, she jumps fences, she throws stones and clubs, she breaks windows."¹⁹

Based on this description, we see the hoyden conceived not simply adopting 'boyish' traits, but more generally as a woman engaged in outdoorsy, athletic and 'uncivilized' behaviors. These

young women were not only compared to men, but also to ‘gypsies,’ ‘heathens’ and persons not displaying the elegant comportment that had been expected from middle- and upper-class women by the mid-1800s. The hoyden became a common choice for young female stars of comedy features, and the character’s popularity reflected the broader cultural acceptance of deviations from genteel femininity by the 1910s.

During the mid-1800s, ‘hoyden’ was a term of disparagement for overly masculine or uncouth young women who did not meet expectations for genteel womanhood. In *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (1982), Deborah Gorham cites the hoyden as a negative image of female adolescence that cultural critics contrasted from the properly genteel daughter who was a homemaker, dutiful and self-sacrificial.²⁰ In fact, Gorham explains that contemporary observers applied the term to modern girls who supposedly adopted the ‘roughness of men’ due to their expanding participation outside of the home. This included seeking higher education, increasing physical activity and appearing at more mixed sex, public events. In fact, she argues the term’s use in the 19th century was “an expression of antagonism towards the nascent women’s movement.”²¹ Indeed, newspaper columns on ‘female manners’ lamented the hoyden’s contrasts from ideal femininity. An 1829 article entitled ‘Female Education’ stressed the importance of “grace of manner and elegance of deportment.” Without proper education and guidance from guardians, the article fretted that “the delicate female is lost in the boisterous hoyden, her gestures are rustic, her expressions inelegant.”²²

Cultural assessments of the ‘hoyden’ figure improved by the turn of the century. In newspaper stories, theatrical productions and eventually films, the hoyden became a welcome alternative to the over-refined gentility of the higher classes.²³ Her growing acceptance as a positive cultural figure accorded with evolving expectations surrounding women’s comportment by the end of the

19th century. Due to women's encouraged frailness in the mid-1800s leading to pregnancy complications, Michelle Abate notes that a new focus on physical fitness made it more acceptable for young women to rough-house and adopt supposedly masculine behaviors.²⁴ A young woman's exhibition of tomboy traits, like physical rigor and energetic behavior, became permissible during her adolescence as a form of preparation for childbearing. This new acceptance even extended to young women adopting male clothing as this gave them more freedom to climb trees and engage in other outdoor activities. The growing tolerance of the New Woman as a cultural figure also made the adoption of masculine mannerisms and rebellion against 'ladylike' behaviors less shocking.²⁵ Whether advocated for the purpose of healthy motherhood or conversely for challenging women's domesticity (primarily middle-class), this change in attitude encouraged young women to leave parlor rooms for fresh air in a similar fashion to the physically vigorous New Man.²⁶

The hoyden appeared as a protagonist in plays and musical comedies by the 1890s, such as Katie Putnam's *The Little Maverick* (1893).²⁷ These pieces presented the hoyden as a likable counterpoint to genteel patricians in the United States or European aristocracy. By the 1910s, the hoyden anchored some of the biggest stage hits. Laurette Taylor's *Peg O' My Heart* (prod. 1912) revolved around a hoydenish, Irish American who invaded the English estate of her wealthy relatives and interrupted their "state of unsettled, irritable intolerance."²⁸ The hoyden, with Peg being no exception, often warmed the hearts of some in the aristocratic circle, and eventually attracted a wealthy man. Despite Peg serving as the center of 'heart interest' and affection, she still exhibited a rebellious streak. Peg calls herself 'full of original sin,' and reviews detailed how she "flips insults into the faces of her adversaries so neatly that the only marvel is they can keep straight."²⁹ Her wisecracks prompted critics to call Taylor a "comedy actress of very remarkable

flavor and variety.”³⁰



Laurette Taylor in *Peg O' My Heart* (prod. still, 1912) (*The Theatre*)

Given the hoyden's popularity in theater, it is unsurprising that the character quickly traipsed over into comedy features. The tomboyish or uncouth hoyden appeared in numerous films across the course of the 1910s, peaking around 1918. Only three references to 'hoyden' can be found in the film trade in 1913, before the ascendance of feature comedies. In contrast, by 1917, 62 feature comedies contained the hoyden as sole lead.³¹ Popular stars played the role on screen to box office success and acclaim, including Viola Dana, Vivian Martin, Margarita Fischer, Mabel Normand, Mary Pickford, and Jackie Saunders.

Covering a wide range from the All-American tomboy to an Indian princess, variants of the unpolished hoyden all created humor through similar means. One method contrasted the hoyden's naturalness with the puritanical and restrictive measures of upper-class society. A review for Elsie Janis' *Nearly a Lady* (Paramount, 1915) observed that her western tomboy was "disgusted by the general artificiality of the effete civilization of the East."³² For Viola Dana's *Lady Barnacle* (1917), in which a Hindu girl follows a wealthy man to the United States to locate her fiancé, a reviewer noted how humor came from the Boston's "'Codfish Aristocracy' whose 'Puritan morality is unthinkably shocked.'"³³ Similarly, a reviewer for *The Morals of Marcus* (Paramount, 1915)

condescendingly described its Harem girl from Turkey as representing the “contact of childlike innocence with adult puritanism.”³⁴

Most of the films placed the hoyden in a fish-out-of-water scenario to mock the snobbish and arbitrary elements of upper class living. Sometimes this humor came from the hoyden’s unintentional errors. For instance, the hoyden commonly did not understand the sexual implications of her behaviors due to her less formal upbringing. In *A Girl of Yesterday* (1915), Jane shocks “the prim Miss Stuart” and her wealthy neighbors with her “short-skirted riding habit.”³⁵ Similarly, the Grecian statue brought to life in *Niobe* (Paramount, 1915) scandalizes onlookers by “scampering through a park with a man in drenched clothes.”³⁶ Beyond sexual impropriety, the hoyden often displayed behaviors that created humor through her unfamiliarity with how to behave in a highly regulated, wealthy household. A girl raised in the circus at the center of *The Little Terror* (Universal, 1917) does not recognize the inappropriateness of her pet ‘pig’ in the household of her wealthy grandfather. Some laughter therefore came from how the hoyden’s lack of knowledge discomfited overly-stuffy, wealthy onlookers.

However, the films also frequently derived humor from the hoyden’s fun as she engaged in masculine behaviors antithetical to ‘true womanhood.’ In Marguerite Clark’s *The Amazons* (Paramount, 1918), humor stemmed from her character smoking cigars, dressing in men’s clothes, lifting weights in a gymnasium and slapping men on the back. The hoyden also engaged in boxing and got laughs by being unusually ‘good’ at this despite her gender, as in Viola Dana’s *Opportunity* (Metro, 1918) or Margarita Fischer’s *Put Up Your Hands* (Pathé, 1919). The young women also partook in other activities considered to be the province of men, such as playing craps with young males in Jackie Saunders’ *Bab the Fixer* (Mutual, 1917). The hoyden could create pleasure and humor from violations of ‘lady-like’ comportment and civility. The first shots of *The Demon*

(1918) introduce the audience to the gypsy heroine, Perdita (Edith Storey), as she throws rocks at the convent nuns attempting to look after her.³⁷ Later when her poor, elderly friend needs a place to sit, Perdita shoves a wealthy lady out of the front seat of the car to make room.

The hoyden's purposeful rejection of high society life through wisecracks, rule-breaking and mischief-making also lent humor. When the tomboyish working girl Amarilly (Mary Pickford) visits a wealthy artist's studio in *Amarilly of Clothesline Alley* (Paramount, 1918), she notices that he has heaps of rock and marble on the ground from sculpting. Examining the dust on his fireplace, she quips, "There ain't this much dirt in clothesline alley!" Similarly, the tomboy in *Put Up Your Hands* shocks her aunt with her criticism of a social gathering. She declares, "I prefer boxing to tea!"³⁸ In addition to purposefully berating the wealthy socialites around her, the hoyden also engendered humor through her own practical jokes. To agitate her grandfather, the circus heroine in *The Little Terror* (1917) slides down the stairwell bannister on a tray and leaps over couches.³⁹ In *The Demon* (1918), Perdita wants to stop a car so she lies in the middle of the road, pretending to be ill. She cracks one eye open to watch those around her as they get out of the car to check on her. Elsie Janis uses her boyishness in *Nearly a Lady* (1915) to her advantage by dressing as a man to pull one over on her unfaithful fiancée

Here are a few sample plots with hoyden protagonists. As early as 1915, a poor tomboy invades a wealthy home in Mary Pickford's *A Girl of Yesterday* (Paramount, 1915), which the actress authored herself. Jane (Pickford) and her brother Jack (Jack Pickford) are orphans raised by a puritanical aunt. Their dated clothing and lack of society manners cause a gap between the two siblings and the high society family next door. Eventually, Jane inherits money from her uncle and proceeds to shock her socialite neighbors with her riding habit, golfing and sailing skills, as well as a lack of fear about going up in an airship.⁴⁰ Eventually, the neighbors' son falls for Jane's

refreshing lack of pretense.

Other hoyden plots exploited regional as opposed to class difference. In *Put Up Your Hands* (Pathé, 1919), Olive Barton (Margarita Fisher) does not fit into society on the East coast, appalls her aunt by holding boxing matches during a minister's visit. When her father heads out West to inspect some mining interests, she stows herself on a train to accompany him. Once she arrives in the Western town, she meets a mining engineer but mistakes him for a bandit. She proceeds to turn a saloon into a gymnasium, spoils a plan to ruin her father's mine and falls for the same man that she believed was a bandit.



Put Up Your Hands (Pathé, 1919) (MPN, 3/22/1919, 1749)

Examples where the hoyden seemed ethnically at odds with the Anglo-Saxon upper classes can be found as well. In *Kilmeny* (Paramount, 1915), the eponymous protagonist (Leonore Ulrich) is an English aristocrat kidnapped by gypsies as a child. Facing the prospect of marrying an unappealing tribe member, she runs away and encounters Lord Leigh (Frederick Wilson), who takes Kilmeny under his wing. She proceeds to cause a ruckus at his estate, such as mocking their cold showers and humorless butler. Both Lord Leigh's wife and brother-in-law, Bob (William Desmond) become jealous of Lord Leigh's fascination with Kilmeny. Upset at creating tension within the family, Kilmeny returns to the gypsies to marry. Luckily, Kilmeny's friend Pierre, a

crippled gypsy boy, finds Kilmeny's real father to stop the wedding. Having her title reclaimed, Kilmeny alleviates Bob's jealousy and the two become a couple. As the heroines were considered attractive enough to attain romance with a wealthy British or American man, the films often utilized revelations whereby the female lead was truly a child of nobility with the same cultural lineage. This reveal enabled the white actress to comically showcase less inhibited behaviors without experiencing the racist cultural cost of being deemed ethnically 'other' by primarily white, middle-class audiences.



Kilmeny (Paramount, 1915) (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

The hoyden evolved from a potentially dangerous challenger of 1800s genteel femininity to a popular female lead in 1910s feature comedies. The character came to represent a welcome challenge to class snobbery and overly restrictive social mores. She elicited laughs through her own mockery of genteel strictures without being presented as undesirable. Her growing acceptance as a sympathetic protagonist in these affirmative, light comedies signaled a significant transformation in notions of acceptable womanhood as the film industry selected comic heroines that could appeal to broad sectors of the American public.

Case Study: Mabel Normand in *Mickey* (Western Import/W.H. Productions, 1918)

One notable case of the hoyden is Mabel Normand's *Mickey* (Western Import, 1918). Histories of silent comedy laud Normand's contributions to the field of slapstick shorts, but her feature efforts receive less attention. Normand established her reputation in the early 1910s as a member

of Keystone Company. Some analysts note that despite her popularity, Normand often served as a prop or support for the antics of male comics.⁴¹ Though Normand often held supporting roles in shorts, Rob King observes how she challenged common divides between unfeminine comediennes or unfunny objects of lust. He claims she went “beyond these antinomies, to yoke her beauty *to* her comicality.”⁴² This combination enabled Normand to transition to features, where female leads were increasingly expected to combine beauty and comedic skill.

By 1915, scholars identify a change in Normand’s career as she expressed a desire for upward mobility and respect. She advocated for more plot, saying she was ‘tired of slapstick.’⁴³ Like many female performers of the period, she expressed the wish to star in comedies that accorded with middle class tastes. When Mabel Normand’s separate production company came into existence in 1916, it was supposed to be a subsidiary of Kay-Bee. This alliance made sense given Ince’s consistent production of light comedies with performers such as Bessie Barriscale and Charles Ray. Due to Normand’s health problems and issues with finding a director, the production took several years until *Mickey* was picked up for distribution by Western Import in 1918.

Reportedly raking in eight million dollars, the film was one of the biggest hits of 1918.⁴⁴ Critics openly recognized Normand as the ‘hoyden’ character type. *Variety* proclaimed, “If there ever was a hoyden in pictures, it is this young star. And yet, with all her tomboy pranks and cutting up, she is a wonderful little actress.”⁴⁵ The reviews revealed a careful balance between recognizing Normand’s comic ability and praising her physical charms. *The Moving Picture World* heralded her as “the feminine and artistically concentrated essence of a Chaplin Fairbanks combination of humor and agility”⁴⁶ but as “lively as a cluster of hairsprings, supple as a rubber band, and as charming as the pretty girl she is.”⁴⁷ Reviews and publicity also stressed the sympathetic nature of the comedy. A trade article in *The Moving Picture World* tellingly compared the film to vehicles

for Maud Adams, a reported favorite among female theatergoers; “it is a delicious little play—as sweet and quaint as *Peter Pan*.”⁴⁸ Critics treated the film as a promotion for Normand and implied that she now had a chance to be more than a lust object for Keystone’s male comics. *Motion Picture News* mentions that while Sennett “first saw her possibilities in a bathing suit,” in *Mickey* “Normand does some real acting that makes one sit up and take notice.”⁴⁹

Despite the film’s popularity, scholarship rarely unpacks *Mickey* in great depth. Accounts skim over Normand’s feature films to describe personal scandals (such as the William Desmond Taylor murder) or present the features as less influential than her shorts.⁵⁰ If the film is analyzed, it is portrayed as an unfortunate acquiescence to higher class tastes and old-fashioned sentimentality. King characterizes Normand’s role in *Mickey* as a regression to “older ideals of women’s propriety”⁵¹ within a “framework of Victorian gender ideologies.”⁵² When describing *Mickey*, Maggie Hennefeld suggests that the narrative function of Normand’s comic style represses the comedienne’s expressive ability. She writes, “*Mickey* uses the star’s physical agility primarily for coordinating suspenseful stunt work rather than for provoking uproarious laughter.”⁵³ Hennefeld, King and other scholars often assess Normand within larger studies of slapstick, so this may be why her performance is seen as a dilution.

These evaluations of Normand’s performance in *Mickey* as detrimental to female comedienues may inadvertently delegitimize female performers’ own desires. As discussed previously in this dissertation, actresses expressed frustration with broader forms of comedy that often were infused with misogynistic practices.⁵⁴ King notes that Normand requested ‘more dignified situations,’⁵⁵ and he tracks her departure from Keystone as immediately following domestic abuse perpetuated by Sennett that left Normand unable to work for months.⁵⁶ Her departure from Keystone for features marked an attempted flight from mistreatment. This is not to

say her feature vehicles never reflected social restrictions on women's behaviors, but her move to feature comedies marked an effort to gain more say in her career. Our dismissal of her efforts, and the attempts of female performers to move towards respectable modes of humor, ignores how the women themselves sought to work along these lines. It is also problematic to characterize Normand's hoyden as a straightforward representation of genteel culture. We have already seen that in some respects the hoyden was in fact the *antithesis* of genteel femininity. Normand's role in *Mickey* reflected the experience of other female leads in comedy features who achieved popularity when they played likable, middlebrow characters who defied genteel strictures.

While some scholars may already be familiar with the film, here is a summary of the film's events:

The film opens by introducing the viewer to the California miner Joe Meadows (George Nichols) and his housekeeper Minnie (Minnie Devereaux). Meadows has raised a young orphan named Mickey (Normand) since childhood. As his Minnie helps him shave, a shot shows Mickey's hand deftly stealing Joe's hat from the wall. Joe inquires as to where his hat has gone, and he sends the housekeeper to locate it. She finds the hat but sees that Mickey may have fallen down a mine shaft. As mine workers hurry to the rescue, Mickey emerges from a completely different tunnel carrying a cat. She sits nonchalantly in the entrance of the tunnel, dressed in a boxy vest, worker's pants, and a shirt with rolled up sleeves. As she wipes coal dust off of the cat, Minnie spots her and attacks her with kisses. Though Minnie aims to keep Mickey out of trouble, Joe spots them and threatens to punish Mickey with his belt. Mickey proceeds to hide Joe's belt, attempt an escape out of a window, and finally wins Joe over by feigning tears. Still not wanting to take chances, Mickey leaves Joe to try to feed the belt to a donkey. As she attempts this, Joe reads a letter from Mickey's dead father mentioning Mickey's wealthy aunt on the East Coast, Mrs. Drake (Laura La Varnie). He decides to write to the Aunt to take in Mickey temporarily, as "its time she had sum women folks grown her."



Mickey's mine entrance (stills from YouTube copy)

The film then cuts to the Drakes, who are financially struggling despite an appearance of wealth. Mrs. Drake's son, Reggie (Lew Cody), is an irresponsible gambler and her daughter, Elsie, hopes to marry mining executive Herbert Thornhill (Wheeler Oakman) for his money. As Elsie and Herbert court, he receives a telegram insisting that he is needed at the same mines where Joe works. The film cuts back to Mickey further disrupting her rural community. First, she accidentally spooks a horse into running off by trying to swat away flies. She then goes into town to fetch

ginger for Joe, but her dog destroys the store. To save her dog from being shot, Mickey runs away with him as the store manager shoots at them. Things take a positive turn when Herbert spots Mickey outside of her home, and the two begin to flirt. Joe sees this display and comes out to interrupt. Herbert later goes out into the woods to view the scenery with binoculars, through which he sees Mickey diving nude into a lake. He rushes over to speak with her. Once dressed, a squirrel goes up her leg as the two chat and Herbert helps her shake it out. The two rendezvous in the woods later that evening. Herbert tries to kiss her, but she runs back home just before he gets his chance. The two become separated when Joe receives a response from Mickey's aunt allowing her to come stay with them. Joe claims, "Yom' auntie'll learn yer ter be a lady, Mickey."

The film's midpoint delivers Mickey to the Drake's grandiose home. Emphasizing Mickey's fish out of water status, the Drake mansion is introduced as, "The doors of another world." She enters and immediately gawks at the lavish hallway. The butler looks at her and Joe with disdain. Once her Aunt enters, Mickey immediately contorts her face to mock her Aunt's affected manners. Mickey quickly changes her expression into a smile when her Aunt catches her gaze. The Aunt soon discovers that Joe and Mickey's father's mine hasn't made money for years, so she decides to keep on Mickey as a domestic. Given that Mickey has never had to do any housekeeping, she struggles with basic tasks. She sweeps dirt under rugs, almost knocks over a grandfather clock and eats the family's food before serving it. Fate fortunately brings Mickey and Herbert together again when he attends a ball at the Drake home. With the Drakes distracted, Mickey uses the opportunity to wear one of Elsie's dresses. The gambling son, Reggie, enters the room to sleep off his drunkenness. When Mickey realizes he will discover her, she begs him not to tell anyone. The two playfully chase each other around the bedroom, but when he attempts to kiss her, she decides this goes too far. She climbs out on the roof and down to the party below, where she lands upon Herbert. He is thrilled to see her again, but he has already proposed to Elsie. The Drake women grow upset that Mickey has crashed the party and stolen attention away from Elsie. They demand Mickey go back to the mines.

In a comic twist, Mrs. Drake learns just after Mickey's departure that her mine 'struck a vein' and is now worth a million dollars. The Aunt frantically scurries after her to induce Mickey's return to the house. Meanwhile, Herbert laments to a friend that he only proposed to Elsie because he never thought he would see Mickey again. Now that Mickey is wealthy, Reggie tries to court her but she remains uninterested. As Herbert plans for his loveless wedding, a telegram arrives informing him that his mining claims are now worthless. Due to Elsie's sole interest in his fortune, she breaks off their engagement. Herbert immediately pursues Mickey, and they kiss. When Herbert attempts to re-earn money by placing a bet on a horse race, Reggie conspires with the horse's jockey to cheat Herbert out of his money. Overhearing their scheme, Mickey sneaks into jockey quarters and disguises herself as a male rider. She knocks the crooked jockey off of his horse and leaps down to take his place. Though Mickey outpaces the other riders and appears poised to win, she inexplicably falls off of her horse right before the finish line. The film uses this accident to reveal her gender to a surprised crowd. She tells Herbert, "I did it for you" as he attends to her.

The final reel of the film offers an extended example of physical spectacle and capitalizes upon Normand's previous casting in parodies of melodramatic thrillers for Sennett's shorts. Mickey goes horseback riding with Reggie, who attempts to molest her. She escapes him and hides in an abandoned house. Herbert finds the two horses wandering outside and grows suspicious. Cornered by Reggie, Mickey flirts with him to bide time. When he turns his back, she climbs onto the roof to escape. Herbert rushes to her rescue and fights Reggie as she dangles from the side of the building. Winning the fight, Herbert helps Mickey back in through the window. An intertitle informs the audience that the couple are now going on their honeymoon back to the Tomboy Mine. The couple learn as a final wedding present from Herbert's friend that the 'troubles' of Herbert's mine were a ruse to get him out of marriage to Elsie. Now both individually wealthy, Herbert and Mickey depart for their honeymoon.

The film employs multiple tactics to render Mickey a desirable and likable figure. Mickey is positioned as an object of affection from the opening. Her introduction builds suspense over her welfare as housekeeper Minnie frantically searches at the mines. When Mickey emerges from a shaft, Minnie hugs her fiercely. Once Mickey returns home, she also irresistibly charms Joe. When

Joe attempts to punish Mickey with a belt, her feigned tears tug at his heartstrings and he places her in his lap instead. He remarks with affection, “See them grey hairs? You give me them!” Instead of mocking him, Mickey examines his head and opens her mouth in shock and remorse. She grabs his head and pulls it to her chest. The bonding moment between the two promotes sentimental attachment towards the loving family unit.

As the film continues, it strives to generate sympathy to Mickey’s coarse behaviors. When Mickey and her dog disrupt the general store, the series of events place the audience on Mickey’s side. Her dog follows her into the general store, and the manager yells at her that ‘no dogs are allowed.’ As opposed to adopting a nasty rebuttal, she tries to reason with him. Unprompted, the manager cruelly kicks her dog, which causes the dog to attack his leg. As the manager attempts to fend off the dog, the store devolves into chaos. Given the manager’s provocation of the dog, the audience is able to take pleasure in the man getting his comeuppance. Each stage of the chaos aligns the audience with Mickey, for the manager then overreacts to the dog’s rough-housing by insisting it be shot. Medium close ups of both Mickey and the sheriff grant the audience a chance to see both her attachment to the dog and the sheriff’s pity for her. When Mickey comically evades the gunshots of the manager, the audience has been primed to root for this escape.



Mickey hides with her canine companion

The film further encourages sympathy for Mickey when she arrives at the Drake household. Since Mrs. Drake’s only interest in her niece is monetary, the film creates amusement from

Mickey's failed housekeeping. Mickey's rebellions never cause harm to other household members, but simply demonstrate a lack of domestic skill. Because of Mickey's tomboy upbringing, her ignorance is granted a logical rationale as opposed to casting her character as unintelligent or purposefully lazy (which differed from failed domestics in many comedy shorts). Though she rebels when she borrows Elsie's clothing or climbs down the building to attend the ball, her relatives' snobbishness positions her rebellion as a justified escape fitting into popular Cinderella tropes. Mickey's defiance of orders within the household remain morally warranted.

The film not only strives to earn sympathy for Mickey, but to emphasize her sex appeal. While Normand had aspects of her sexuality brought out in some Keystone shorts, critics seemed to feel that her attractiveness was more foregrounded in her feature work. One review for her feature *Dodging a Million* (Goldwyn, 1918), lamented that why she had spent "three of four years concealed under grotesque makeup is a puzzle."⁵⁷ The song released to help publicize *Mickey* emphasized the romantic appeal of its lead. The lyrics declared, "Pretty Mickey, Pretty Mickey/Can you blame anyone for falling in love with you?"⁵⁸ The film itself presents Mickey as a desirable figure during her humorous antics. When dressed in boy's overalls, Normand still wears flattering make up and lipstick. The film also presents Mickey as sexually appealing to multiple men over the course of the narrative. She attracts the male lead, who is charmed memorably by spotting her nude dive into a lake. Her lecherous cousin is interested in her fortune but also shows himself unable to resist Mickey sexually in the finale. The film exploits Mickey's hoydenish qualities with multiple pant outfits, but this persona is balanced with later opportunities for Mickey to illustrate her ability to wear fashionable clothing. Her gown to the ball draws the attention of guests, and once her wealthy relatives realize the worth of her father's mine, she is allowed fashionable hats and skirts. By these means, the film carefully balances the humor of her tomboy

antics with opportunities for its female star to display conventionally feminized glamour. This balancing would become common in many feature comedies with female stars, where the lead expressed physical zest and tomboyish qualities without those factors impeding her femininity.



Mickey remains wary of her aggressive cousin

Though the film incorporates sympathetic humor and feminine attractiveness in alignment with the feature's respectability, this middlebrow approach should not be conflated with genteel femininity. Mickey's character type did not fit with the 'genteel tradition,' but rather, pointed to a broadening of what character types could appeal to middle class tastes. Genteel critics promoted Anglo-Saxon, Protestant visions of culture, yet Mickey was strongly marketed as an Irish lass. The song publicizing the film claimed that in her "there's a bit of Killarney, bit of Blarney."⁵⁹ The positioning of Mickey's Irishness as desirable reflected the improved cultural status of the Irish since genteel culture's peak in the mid-1800s. A *Photoplay* article the same year as Mickey's release noted the predominance of Irish actors in the film industry. The article suggested that the prominence of attractive Irish actresses in Hollywood had removed any stigma from Irish ethnicity. It claimed, "The Irish dominate the production side of the motion picture business...I dare to say that a majority of the screen's pretty women are Irish."⁶⁰ Mickey's Irish persona thereby illustrated changing standards of desirable womanhood for the middle class.

Mickey's character also followed a lineage of rustic pranksters that genteel critics objected to in 1800s literature. Those critics attacked Mark Twain's novel *Tom Sawyer* for its provincialism

and slangy realism.⁶¹ In contrast, the film elevates Mickey's rural community over her high society relatives. The final scene confirms that Mickey and her lover happily journey back to Tomboy mine, "leaving behind all bitter memories of the East's tinsel glitter and heartless society." Normand's physicality for humor throughout the film distinguishes her from the grace and languid movements encouraged in genteel handbooks from the 19th century. Her tomboyish poses certainly differentiate from those suggested postures, with her legs straddled apart in her opening shot in the mining shaft. She continues to illustrate less than dignified physicality throughout the film. She struggles to get her donkey to move, waddles through the general store with her dog standing between her legs, shimmies to get a squirrel out of her pants, and desperately struggles to keep a large clock upright in her aunt's home. Mickey also deviates from the conversational rule of discretion encouraged in genteel handbooks. When Minnie embraces Mickey tightly upon finding her, Mickey sniffs and speculates, "Minnie, you've been drinkin' again." The lack of discretion continues when Mickey gapes and comments on her Aunt's luxury in a breach of self-restraint. Mickey's rural, unrefined behaviors in movement and speaking hardly evince genteel femininity.

In addition to physicality, Mickey's unladylike rebellion does not accord with genteel discourses. Scholars note that upper- and middle-class women in the 1800s were expected to be demure and respectful.⁶² Mickey defies this deference to elders on multiple fronts. To escape punishment from Joe with a belt, Mickey attempts to climb out the window. Joe hoists her back inside, so she then tries to hide the belt from him. When this strategy doesn't work, she kicks the belt to the side of the room. This uncooperativeness continues when she arrives to her Aunt's household. She sees her Aunt's judgmental sneer and raised chin, which Mickey then impertinently mimics. As Mickey spends more time in her Aunt's household, she demonstrates disinterest in the domesticity and homemaking strongly associated with genteel femininity. She shows no affinity

for maintaining a home, with one review calling her a “rank failure.”⁶³ As previously noted in the film’s synopsis, she sweeps dirt under a rug in an unsanitary fashion, nearly knocks over a grandfather clock and dips her fingers into the guests’ cake before serving it. None of these behaviors befitted ‘genteel’ femininity, and yet Mickey is presented as an attractive, charismatic version of young womanhood. Mickey’s constant movement outdoors, her time spent away from family and her racing a jockey’s horse in public also align her with the New Woman’s increasing independence and mobility outside of the private sphere. The character of Mickey, thus, blended the 19th century’s sentimental culture with shifting expectations for idealized, youthful femininity in the United States by the 1910s. The film provides a useful example of how the humor of comedy features presented their female leads as desirable while still deriving pleasure from unladylike behaviors that had evolved past genteel culture.



Mickey stealing some cake at her Aunt's

Following *Mickey*, Normand experienced mixed results in comedy features at Goldwyn. Rather than replicating her lovable tomboy from *Mickey*, Goldwyn’s studio specialized in light society comedies with Madge Kennedy and Tom Moore. Exhibitors complained that Normand was not believable in society parts.⁶⁴ Goldwyn attempted to revert her to broader farces resembling her work at Keystone but conversely received complaints that this was too lowbrow for features.⁶⁵ Normand still had hits in *The Venus Model* (1918) and other late 1910s features, but the inconsistency of her success shows the fine line actresses needed to walk between behavior that

was too genteel or too undignified. Rather than reflecting waning ideologies of the 19th century, middlebrow feature comedies negotiated modern femininity in ways that sometimes proved precarious.

“A Pretty Girl Who Outsmarted All the Men Folk”: Sheros and American Nationalism

While hoydens tapped more particularly into discourses about femininity, other leading women fit under the hero rubric. Some period critics referred to these leads, who cheerfully worked through comic obstacles, by the nickname ‘sheros.’⁶⁶ Heroic vehicles for both male and female stars coexisted in the 1910s, with male examples like Douglas Fairbanks’ *Mr. Fix It* (Paramount, 1918) or Wallace Reid’s *Hawthorne of the U.S.A.* (Paramount, 1919). These films presented supposed ideals of youthful Americanism without the eccentricity seen in other comic characters, such as the female hoyden or male mollicoddle. Given the feature comedy’s ties to respectability rhetoric, the prominence of sheros is logical. However, presenting a heroic lead in a *comedy* could prove complicated, making it interesting for comedy and gender studies. Considering how often comedy as a genre relies on eccentricity or mishaps, it was not a ‘given’ that this balance between humor and attractive personhood could be sustained. Steve Seidman’s influential work, *Comedian Comedy: A Hollywood Tradition* (1981), portrayed male comedians as ‘dysfunctional’ or ‘aberrant,’⁶⁷ and more recent scholarship is still preoccupied with how comedian and comediennes deviate from socially idealized masculinity and femininity.⁶⁸ The interest in maladjustment ignores how many comedies rely on depictions of human attractiveness, ingenuity or wit. ‘Shero’ comedies crucially engaged with 1910s gender politics by demonstrating women’s abilities to positively shape American public life without provoking comic caricature.⁶⁹

Philosopher and educator Susanne Langer used the term ‘heroic comedy’ in *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953) to discuss a narrative structure that is ‘serious’ but not a tragedy.

She states, “Comedy may be serious; there is heroic drama...the protagonists ‘live happily ever after’—on earth or in heaven.”⁷⁰ In this explanation, Langer seems to be discussing light dramas with a heroic lead, such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Warner Brothers, 1938). Langer is right to note that a heroic narrative can occur without foregrounding humor, as the likable heroes of comedy features strongly resemble those in light dramas. In fact, many action films with charming leads include occasional quips or moments of humorous relief. This overlap can be seen in Douglas Fairbanks’ roles across action dramas and feature comedies. However, features classified as ‘comedies’ by the film industry also incorporated role models. Langer also genders the protagonists of ‘heroic comedy’ male.⁷¹ She writes of the hero, “his fight is with obstacles and enemies, which his strength, wisdom, virtue, or other assets let him overcome.”⁷² However, we will see that many sheros in feature comedies illustrated the productive energy, optimism or strong will advocated for by Progressive, nationalist discourses.

Differing from the hoyden’s roots in rural nostalgia, the shero could be seen as a temporal bridge between the hoyden and madcap. She fit more firmly within ideas of modern womanhood in the 1910s, stressing competency as suffrage and nationalist movements peaked, but did not exhibit the flirtatiousness or rebelliousness of the 1920s flapper. Only five references to the shero can be found in trade papers before 1914. In contrast, between 1915 and 1920, that number grows swiftly to 290.⁷³ *The Film Daily* used the phrase more consistently than other publications, but the timing correlates with newspapers, where the term appears around 1915 as well.⁷⁴ This timing reflects how the character encouraged American national fervor in the 1910s. We have already seen affirmative comedies exhibit nationalist strains, but critics applauded these sheros as ideal Americans due to their sense of humor and problem-solving within a joyous narrative framework.⁷⁵ Either bluntly or indirectly, these sheros advanced notions of American superiority

by merrily triumphing over obstacles. They played a key role in the trade press' general touting of affirmative comedies as a key way to promote American exceptionalism during World War I.

Throughout the war, exhibitors insisted that audiences wanted light films that would not hit them over the head with moralist propaganda. Scholar Leslie DeBauche notes that the film industry during World War I did not produce as many war dramas or overt propaganda pieces as one might expect.⁷⁶ Rather, it encouraged nationalism through cheerful films that illustrated American life in a positive fashion. In January of 1918, *The Moving Picture World* reported that exhibitors were "crying for comedy features as against the sob stories" and that this demand was "on account of war conditions."⁷⁷ Exhibitors' tunes had not changed by March, when one pronounced, "In view of war conditions, we believe that light comedy, with snap and life and lots of pretty girls would be an appropriate offering to the public."⁷⁸ In keeping with a desire to be patriotic without depressing, producers often peppered light comedies with nationalist themes. Publicity pieces promoted comedy dramas as best suited due to their sunny portrayals of day-to-day American life. Producer George Spoor for Essanay specifically argued that his company would move towards releasing comedy features with Bryant Washburn and Taylor Holmes due to their war-time appropriateness. He insisted,

"Cheering photoplays are also needed for the men at the front. They must have something to laugh at to divert their minds from the gloom of the surroundings in which they are fighting the battles of the world. Essanay already is striving along this line. It has aimed in the past few months, and still is aiming, to produce, not tragedies, but the light comedy pictures, plays that will not depress, but cheer. It is not aiming at slapstick, though this may have its place, but the homey, comedy-drama pictures, which carry heart interest, fascinating plots, and at the same time a vein of genuine humor, photoplays that present normal life, life sane and real."⁷⁹

Spoor's commentary makes clear that not all forms of humor were created equal for this war time moment. As opposed to slapstick or broader forms, he proposes the cheer, heart interest and 'sane' events of comedy dramas as more suitable for promoting American optimism at such a dire national moment. Other companies also reflected this production strategy. Paramount's high-end

distribution branch, Artcraft, announced a policy move towards ‘light comedy’ due to the public being “most in need of diversion.”⁸⁰ Actors also promoted this notion of light comedy’s suitability for conveying American nationalism. Feature comedy star Tom Moore stated in an interview, “‘The American spirit...is what I like to reflect on screen, and the American character without an ever-present sense of humor is not true to type. It is for this reason that I do not think American photoplays dealing with heavy, tragic themes reveal Americans at their best.’”⁸¹

The feature comedies starring sheros can be thought of in two veins, which can also apply to comedies featuring heroic men. One vein, ‘do gooder’ narratives, explicitly foregrounded women who sought to aide or improve American society. The female lead who openly fought for American business or military dominance can be found in early feature adaptations of stage shows, such as Blanche Ring’s *The Yankee Girl* (Paramount, 1915),⁸² but proved particularly popular onscreen during World War I.⁸³ In these films, the shero typically expressed an unusual plan or unfettered optimism that prompted laughter. The strategy applies to Mary Pickford’s *Johanna Enlists* (Paramount, 1918), Vivian Martin’s *Her Country First* (Paramount, 1918) or Mabel Normand’s *Joan of Plattsburg* (Goldwyn, 1918). In *Her Country First*, Dorothy (Martin) feels so patriotic that she organizes a Girls’ Aviation Corps. Problematically, the town has no planes which renders the Corps quite ineffective. Looking for spies, she keeps an eye on her butler due to his suspicious actions. In reality, the butler is a secret agent and her chauffeur is the spy. Sensing that she is getting too close, the chauffeur kidnaps her to get the password to her father’s munitions factory. She outwits the spy and inspires her wimpy boyfriend to join the military. Despite Dorothy’s early efforts at patriotic aid proving ineffective, reviews still referred to her as a ‘real heroine.’⁸⁴ Often, humor stemmed from the foiling of the shero’s early efforts or misunderstandings, such as Dorothy noticing the butler’s suspicious behavior but not realizing the true reason behind it. Later humor

comes from her ability to save herself from her kidnappers by using ‘wig-wag,’ or military signals, which seemed of no use in the context of her small town but unexpectedly come in handy.



Vivian Martin in *Her Country First* (Paramount, 1918) (*Paramount Press Books*, 11/1918)

Female stars also anchored narratives in which their ‘do gooder’ activities tied less overtly to American nationalism. They sought to improve individual households, and the young woman who revitalized families by adding cheer or correcting behaviors became commonplace. In *Charity Castle* (Mutual, 1918), Charity (Mary Miles Minter) and her brother are orphans temporarily taken in by the wealthy Merlin (Allan Forrest), whose father, Simon, has disowned him. When Charity and her little brother later sneak into Simon’s home, she invites a burglar, a bum and an unemployed actor to join them. Initially dismayed at the commune his household has become, Simon is eventually charmed by Charity. He reconciles with Merlin and allows the visitors to remain in his care. The formula of a grumpy elder being transformed by the kind lead proved popular in feature comedies showcasing child stars such as Baby Marie Osborne, Gloria Joy, the Lee sisters or Mary McAlister (and later Shirley Temple). Not every film with a female lead, however, limited household reforms to additional ‘cheer.’ In *Pots-and-Pans Peggy* (Pathé, 1917), an Irish maid (Gladys Hulette) aids a wealthy family in several ways. She rehabilitates her employer’s drunken son, saves the daughter from a loveless marriage to a millionaire and retrieves government documents from a German spy at the son’s workplace. She does so, according to a review, by sucking them out of the villain’s room with “the tube of a vacuum cleaner.”⁸⁵

A second vein presented ‘sheros’ in a less didactic fashion as ‘resourceful individuals.’ In these plots, the role models did not actively set out to improve society, but the film still provided opportunities for the lead to showcase competency. A series of comic mishaps, circumstantial rather than of the lead’s own making, could force them to respond with ingenuity, flexibility, physical vigor and optimism. In *Beans* (Universal, 1918), Betty (Edith Roberts) wants a business career, but her father simply hopes for her to marry a wealthy society man. Betty’s chance to prove herself comes when her father needs someone to deliver important business papers to San Francisco. She speeds across the country in her car, dealing with a business rival’s ludicrous sabotage attempts and the misguided efforts of her father’s male secretary to ‘assist’ her. Betty delivers the papers successfully, and her father finally makes her the manager of his business. Reviews called lead actress Edith Roberts “an entertaining comedienne” and remarked on how the film told “the story of a pretty girl who outsmarted all of the men folk.”⁸⁶



Though in jail, Betty appears unperturbed in *Beans* (Universal, 1918) (*MPN*, 9/14/1918, 1721)

When actress Bessie Barriscale formed her own production company, she released several comedies where a female lead playfully outwitted others to accomplish her goal. In *All of a Sudden Norma* (Robertson-Cole, 1919), society girl Norma finds herself without a fortune once her father dies. She determines to find out how his financial crash came about, and also hopes to earn money by defeating the wealthy social set at gambling. She ends up not only succeeding at the gambling table, but also serving as a thief for a Duke who hires her to steal papers from the same business

rival who ruined her family. She is satisfactorily restored to her former lifestyle due to the Duke's reward. Though comedy scholars may not view the heroic women in these features as transgressive, critics repeatedly connected the leads to women's changing social roles. *Motion Picture News* observed that Norma gambled "in the fashion of men."⁸⁷ One exhibitor even expressed irritation at what they saw as the film's aggressively feminist agenda. "It was too much of a picture showing what women can do and showing man as her inferior,"⁸⁸ he griped. We can find similar concerns about other 'shero' comedies that capitalized on women's sense of competency in public life to attract female viewers. For instance, publicity for the saleswoman in *The Homebreaker* (Paramount, 1919) observed that the film touched on "whether the women who went to work to win the war should continue to hold men's places" and that it would have a "strong appeal to all business women."⁸⁹ However, that same article advised to "not turn the exploitation too strong toward the suffragette end."⁹⁰

The light comedy feature, particularly those comedies featuring 'Americans at their best,' thus became especially relevant by World War I and the peak of the suffrage movement. One could identify social acceptance and intolerance simultaneously in this promotion. The success of sheros leant more support to women's participation in public life, but also displayed potentially pernicious overconfidence in American superiority. The following case study, *Little Miss Hoover* (Paramount, 1918), illustrates both.

Case Study- Marguerite Clark in *Little Miss Hoover* (Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky, 1918)

Marguerite Clark's *Little Miss Hoover* suited her star persona while providing feel-good propaganda for World War I. The film offers an opportunity to consider how strategies of affirmative comedies, such as beneficial plot trajectories, attractive leads and sympathetic humor, could be used to stoke nationalist support for the war effort.

Marguerite Clark is surely one of the most neglected silent stars. Scholars mention her as a close competitor to Mary Pickford, but her career remains a footnote in silent histories.⁹¹ Clark first attained popularity as a companion for De Wolf Hopper in comic operas and musical comedies at the turn of the century. By 1910, she moved on to legitimate farce and light comedies. She starred in Margaret Mayo's hit play, *Baby Mine* (1910), as a naïve young wife who steals a neighbor's baby in order to fulfill her husband's desire for children. Based on her legitimate successes, Clark signed a contract with Lasky Company in 1914. She went on to build screen fame in multiple feature comedies based off of plays, such as *Gretna Green* (1915), *Still Waters* (1915), *Seven Sisters* (1915), *Mice and Men* (1916), *Miss George Washington* (1916), and *Molly Make Believe* (1916). Even *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1916) adapted her earlier stage version. Clark, however, also achieved success in feature comedies that were not stage adaptations. She starred in what may be the first teen comedy series throughout 1917, as teenager 'Bab' from Mary Roberts Rhinehart's stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*.⁹² Despite pleading letters from Adolph Zukor insisting that she still had a large fanbase, Clark lost interest in her career by 1920.⁹³

In spite of Clark consistently vying with Pickford for the top slot in fan magazines of the mid-1910s,⁹⁴ Clark's neglect is logical from several standpoints. Stars such as Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks earned an important place in silent scholarship due to their aggressive promotion of their own careers and their impact on film distribution through the formation of United Artists.⁹⁵ In contrast, directors and producers apparently found Clark extremely easy to work with and rarely pushy in her salary demands.⁹⁶ In addition to Clark's distance from actor-producer power struggles, she maintained a wholesome, likable persona on and offscreen. Scholars express greater fascination with the sexual influence of vamps such as Theda Bara or the tumultuous personal lives of silent stars such as Clara Bow.⁹⁷ Another difficulty stems from the

low survival rate of her films. Her few extant comedies mostly come from the end of the teens when Clark's career was not at its peak.⁹⁸

Despite Clark's neglect and limited extant material, her wholesome screen appearances helped popularize feature comedy and reflect the dominant approach taken by producers. Clark starred more regularly in light and romantic comedies than Pickford, making her more relevant to comedy studies. She appears to have been one of the first consistently successful women in this regard. Her feature comedy, *Miss George Washington* (1916) proved to be one of the major hits of the 1910s, holding the box office record over all other pictures throughout the United States for 18 months.⁹⁹ Her extant propaganda comedy, *Little Miss Hoover* (1918), offers a useful case study for her persona from a time when Clark still provided reliable box office.

Little Miss Hoover perfectly illustrates the critical role of feature comedy in the industry's war efforts. Although Marguerite Clark's *Little Miss Hoover* (written by Maria Thompson Davies, directed by John S. Robertson) refers to the war effort more explicitly than most feature comedies, the film fit the industry's general suggestions for light comedies with cheerful themes. The film promoted the efficient production of beans among American farmers to help feed hungry troops and suffering European allies abroad. The policy idea came from Herbert Hoover, at the time head of the United States Food Administration, explaining the film's title.¹⁰⁰ Despite openly advocating for farmers to direct most of their production towards the war, reviewers praised the film for avoiding the heavy-handed didacticism that might have typified a war drama. *The Film Daily* congratulated the film and its "shero", saying it "doesn't seem like propaganda at all." Its review continued, "They just go ahead with the story and let the moral take care of itself, which after all is the best way to treat a moral in a screen entertainment."¹⁰¹ As opposed to dramatically breaking from Clark's typical fare to suit the war, the reviewer stressed the film's continuity with Clark's

overall persona in light comedies. They called it “the kind of thing Marguerite Clark fans are looking for” and was “in keeping with the girlish sweetness of the star who is rather definitely typed in the minds of most fans.”¹⁰² The reviewer for *Motion Picture News* described her character as someone who “makes everybody happy,”¹⁰³ while *The Moving Picture World* joked that her “style of farmerette would make life in the rural districts very attractive.”¹⁰⁴

Here is a summary of how the film proceeds:

The film opens with an intertitle reflexively joking, “In the world today there are three golden birds of paramount importance,” accompanied by painted images of the American eagle, the French rooster (America’s war ally) and Paramount’s Marguerite Clark. The film’s first shot shows a man with a megaphone promoting Hoover’s policy. The film then cuts to Ann Craddock (Clark), a smartly dressed young woman standing up to watch from her vehicle. The man encourages the women of America to help the food conservation effort in any way they can. The film cuts to close ups of Ann listening, her eyes wide with enthusiasm and her hands clutched to her chest. She looks over at a bored looking young man in a top hat who is introduced as her long-time suitor, Matt (Alfred Hickman). She exclaims, “I do so want to do something useful!” Matt unhelpfully offers, “Why not marry me? I’ve asked you a thousand times.” She shoots him a look of irritation and quips back, “No, Matt. I said...something useful.” She hits on the idea of raising chickens. She drives off in her motor car with Washington D.C. buildings scenically behind her. Arriving at the farmer’s market, she goes through several mishaps trying to buy chickens. The chickens nip at her, she struggles to understand the seemingly complicated strategy for determining which chicks to buy, and is shocked by the high cost of the rooster needed to impregnate hens. Learning to her horror that a male rooster is worth a thousand dollars compared to five dollars for each hen, she quickly decides to just go with one and lets the hens round out the rest of her purchase.

In the second reel, Ann initiates her journey to convince her relatives to join the farm plan. Intertitles inform the audience that her grandfather is “a gentleman of the old school...which wasn’t a business school.” The grandfather risks losing their family home. Ann assures him that they will make money by raising chickens on a farm. She recommends that they go to her great-uncle’s farm. The grandfather objects to this plan since he fought for the North in the Civil War, whereas the great-uncle fought for the South. Ann argues, “But granddaddy, we’re all Americans now.” The two travel down to see her great-uncle, who intertitles describe as “a Southerner to the last julep.” The two men are reluctant to interact, nevertheless Ann motions for them to come closer and winks at them. They finally



Ann reconciling her relatives (Courtesy of Library of Congress for all stills)

stagger towards one another and shake hands as she beams in between them. Ann then sets about on finding a place to keep the chickens. As she drives with multiple chicken cages in her car, bumps in the road prompt the cages to open. The birds scurry off into the woods. As she and a black servant attempt to recover the birds, Ann meets Major Adam (Eugene O’Brien). Adam is temporarily living in the rural community to encourage the farmers in Harpeth Valley to contribute their share of food products to the war effort, but the government has asked him to keep his

mission a secret. He works with Ann and her servant to catch the chickens. Meanwhile, the film cuts to some town members lounging outside of a general store. Multiple shots reveal the men to be asleep in easy chairs or on the steps. Ann races by in her car and halts to a stop. The car awakens the men. Excited by a newcomer, a badly put together town band attempts to serenade her in her car.

The film's third reel shows Ann, who Major Adam calls 'city girl,' adjusting to rural life. She goes through several struggles, including getting accustomed to the neighing of horses, mice in the barns and the holes in the barn's floor, one of which she falls through. After the barn mishap, she switches into a more practical farm outfit of overalls and carries out large pieces of wood to construct chicken coops. Adam stops by to visit, and Ann expresses worry to Adam that running the farm may take a lot of workers. He claims, "Riverfield men have not been awakened to their duty, but a girl like you could do it." She hits on the idea of asking local men to come work on her farm. Her great-uncle exclaims, "Those loafers? You can't do it!" Undeterred, Ann races back into town and sees the men playing cards in front of the general store. They ignore her until she shouts, "We have an excellent farm...but nobody to work on it. You are all farmers without farms, so...can't we get together?" Eager to earn money, the men excitedly agree. She takes her hat off in a cheer and the men pile into her vehicle to head back to the farm. To her relatives' amazement, she returns with half the town in tow.

In the fourth reel, Ann doles out tools to the men and works on construction herself. Starting to fall for her, Adam gets jealous when Ann's city suitor, Matt arrives to contribute. Matt forms a flirtation with a farm girl, Polly, so both Polly and Adam express irritation when Matt and Ann flirt as they work. Other comic incidents ensue, such as Ann trying to keep eggs warm in her bed when the incubator breaks down. She awakens in the morning to be surrounded by baby chicks. By talking to the farmers, Ann and Adam learn that the men are not really unpatriotic, but they haven't been eager to work because middlemen have been siphoning off most of their earnings. Unfortunately for Adam, he must keep his work for the government a secret so the local farmers come to believe he is a slacker. The confusion causes Ann to lose respect for him, while Adam worries about Ann's former suitor Matt as a romantic rival. The farmers' resentment for slackers prompts them to angrily head towards Adam's home to lynch him. This is the one serious threat presented in the film, and one that a reviewer complained "simply didn't belong in the story."¹⁰⁵ Ann races to warn Adam. Humor stems from Adam trying to embrace her and Ann's anger with him. She tells him she only saved him so that the farmers wouldn't get in trouble. She helps him escape and tells him he should enlist. The audience already knows he is a major, adding humor to his insistence that the next time she sees him, "I'll be in uniform." Once the farmers arrive, Ann scolds, "Mob rule never gets anywhere. Do you want to make another Russia out of America?" The farmers quickly abandon their plan, and she tells them Adam has gone off to enlist.

In the final reel, the comic confusion resolves. Back from his army fighting, her former suitor Matt insists that they must speak. When he returns, he races towards Polly to kiss her on the lips but stops himself since all the surrounding farmers expect him to go to Ann first. He tries to tell Ann that he loves Polly, but Ann thinks he is going to propose. She tries to stop him from speaking and keeps running away with her hands over her ears. At a celebratory event for their massive food production on the farm, Adam is introduced on stage as a war hero. In shock, Ann nearly faints but pops back up to her senses. Adam thanks Ann on stage for all her work in revitalizing farming in Harpeth Valley. Embarrassed, Ann merely mutters 'thank you' before sprinting off. Matt finally tells her that he is engaged to Polly. Adam seeks Ann out, and he asks if she will let him ask her something important. Anticipating a proposal, Ann invites him to sit in a carriage next to her. He kisses her hand, and she buries her face into his chest. The screen fades to black.

Critics praised the film for tucking its propaganda within a pleasant, humorous narrative. Indeed, the film follows other affirmative comedies through its beneficial plot trajectory, admirable lead and sympathetic humor. It is particularly interesting to consider how the heroic lead could both represent the nation's conscience but also experience comic mishaps. As in other heroic comedies, the narrative of *Little Miss Hoover* contains plot development that moves in a

wish-fulfillment trajectory. Like other heroic leads, Ann does not evince a change in attitude but her relationships shift and she motivates those around her to change. Ann starts the narrative being courted by an unpatriotic, wealthy snob. She meets and forms an attachment to Adam, but their relationship is not an immediate given. The two must overcome Ann's previous involvement with Matt, and Adam's seeming lack of military participation. These obstacles create opportunities for development. A similar growth occurs for Ann's former fiancé, Matt, whose affections transfer from Ann to Polly. Beyond relationships shifting, Ann promotes development in supporting characters. She reconciles the North and South metaphorically by ending her Grandfather and Great Uncle's feud. Ann's patriotism encourages Matt to enlist in the army, and her leadership converts the farmers from 'slackers' into productive workers.



Ann riling the farmers to join her farm

In addition to changing relationships and the evolution of supporting characters, heroic comedies often relied on changes in circumstance that prove productive. Ann's move allows the city girl to learn about farming and to meet rural types. The 'fish out of water' narrative formula is a common one in film comedy, but it can be used to different purposes. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the emphasis can be on the fish out of water's failures and inadequacy (common in broader forms) or on the pleasures of a character's disruptive skills (hoyden). The heroic

comedy's use of location change, however, tends to foreground the lead's ability to positively transform their new environment and the people in it.

In accordance with affirmative comedy, the film positions Ann as an attractive lead despite her comic performance. She wears fashionable clothing for most of her scenes in the film. She receives very equal, frontal lighting or a strong backlight for a halo effect behind her hair. The film regularly includes MS and MCUs of her surrounded by flowers or floral wallpaper. In fact, several scenes in the film appear to be included just to admire Clark's feminine charms. The audience receives multiple shots of her snuggled in bed and waking up in the morning. She walks over to the window several times to look out over the farm. These moments do not advance the narrative, but allow the audience to admire Clark's contemplating face and undone hair in closer shots scales.



Intimate moments with Ann in her bedroom

Beyond Clark's glamour treatment, most scenes in the film stress Ann's competency or kindness. Multiple intertitles encourage the audience to see Ann as a role model. Even when she is undergoing a minor setback, intertitles frame her mistakes as ones that do not lessen her appeal. As she hammers some nails in her overalls, she keeps accidentally hitting her fingers. Shaking out her hands and wincing, Adam sneaks up behind her to state, "You're wonderful...more wonderful than I can tell you." Adam's speech at the end of the film also ensures that the audience views Ann as a heroine for her actions. He praises, "I suggest a vote of thanks to the young lady who, by her energy, has been responsible for the wonderful work done in Harpeth Valley." The film uses more

than intertitles, however, to establish Ann as a desirable and likable figure. Scenes show Ann carrying heavy farm equipment, giving rousing speeches to the farmers and saving Adam from a potential lynching. Importantly, despite Ann's annoyance with what she perceives to be Matt and Adam's insufficient patriotism, she does not punish them for this belief. Rather, she still jokes playfully with Matt when he comes down to join her farm experiment, and she saves Adam from the farmers' ire despite her disgust at his assumed cowardice. The film also showcases Ann's good humor, which discourses around American leads in comedy dramas emphasized. She laughs at others regularly in the film. She teases her relatives for their initial refusal to shake hands, playfully motioning for them to come closer and winking at them. She chuckles good naturedly at the poor playing of the village band but tries to stifle the laughter with her gloves to be polite. She also finds amusement in herself. When she falls through the barn floor into the haystack, she appears shocked for a moment but then bursts into laughter. Her good humor ties into discourses of the period, but also helps the film temper its hero to avoid self-righteousness.

Like other affirmative comedies, the film's shero and wish-fulfillment trajectory exhibit sympathetic modes of humor. As opposed to laughing at severe character misbehavior, the film more typically relies on misunderstandings created by circumstance, reasonable knowledge gaps, or verbal and physical humor. These approaches rarely denigrate the lead. Comic confusion in the film stems from character's reasonably misconstruing a circumstance as opposed to displaying socially deviant or outrageous behavior. For instance, Adam's jealousy over Matt is logical given Matt's previous status as Ann's fiancé. Ann's belief that Matt wants to propose to her is also logical given his announced intentions to do so in the past. Even Ann and the farmers' assumption about Adam are rendered rational. He is of age to join the military, but he remains the one young man in

the area. He cannot inform them of his actual military position since his mission is to inspect the farmer's efforts undercover (why this needed to be kept secret remains unclear).

Other points of humor in the film stem from Ann's efforts to adjust to rural life and to learn about what it takes to run a large farm. Ann does exhibit moments of ignorance or struggle on her path to establishing the farm, but her urban upbringing explains her lack of awareness about rural life. In fact, the film includes moments of humor to side with Ann's surprise at certain aspects of farming, as when she goes to buy chickens. She is told she has to buy a rooster as well as a hen to impregnate them. When the seller informs her that a rooster is one thousand dollars as opposed to five dollars for a hen, Ann widens her eyes, collapses against a fence and fans herself with her checkbook. Given the huge price difference, her surprise is understandable. Similarly, Ann's first night at the farm illustrates frustration logical to an urbanite relocating. She curls up under the covers, but then opens her eyes in bewilderment. The film cuts to a horse neighing out in the barn. The intercutting between her and the horse, along with her looks of irritation, point to some downsides of country life without stressing any incompetency on Ann's part. Humor also comes from Ann's unexpected successes on the farm. When the incubator breaks and Ann warms eggs in bed, the camera shows her eyes widen the next morning in medium close up as she glances over to notice a baby chick next to her face. The multiple chicks in her bed create humorous incongruity, but so does her unusual approach's surprising pay off. In fact, much of the humor comes from the incongruity of a small, feminine figure (Clark was only 4'11) instructing groups of older men with the authority of a military drill instructor. Instead of serving as a 'buffoon,' Ann creates humor through her surprising optimism. When her Great Uncle tells Ann she can't get the 'loafers' in town to do anything, she merely shakes her head and pats his hand dismissively. When she arrives,

the men ignore her efforts at speechmaking to play cards. Undeterred, she starts shouting at them to their great surprise and inspires them to pile into her car.



Ann's horror at the price of roosters

Beyond the sympathetic structure of narrative incidents, humor also stems from Ann's wit or physical quickness as opposed to verbal misstatements or eccentric contortions. An example of this occurs when Ann is buying the chickens. A man rambles about the qualities of a rooster she is buying: "This is Golden Bird, the prize white leghorn rooster of America. Full brother to Lady Rosecomb, world's champion egg hen, also brother of..." She cuts him off to say, "Never mind his relatives." When the men inform her of the huge price difference between the male rooster and female hen, she rolls her eyes to the sky and makes a seeming reference to the necessity of women's suffrage. She announces, "One thousand for a rooster and only five for a hen! Oh, if hens could vote!" Other scenes in the film include witty comebacks from Ann. In the closing scene, Adam claims he has to ask her something important. Ann teases, "If it's as important as all that hadn't you better sit down?"

In addition to her witty intertitles, Clark's physical performance relies on the incongruities of her bodily performance as opposed to distorting her face or body. When she receives a letter from her former fiancé Matt, his language implies a proposal. Initially reading with a slight smile, after the intertitle suggesting an important question, she widens her eyes, pops her hand onto her

hip and rolls her eyes in disgust. The abrupt change in body language proves surprising to the audience, even if they understand her reaction. When Adam reveals his true identity as a major, Marguerite Clark similarly employs incongruous, speedy shifts in body language to humorous effect. Her vast shift in facial expression within one medium close up shot is remarkable. She first



Ann's shifts in response to learning about Adam's true identity

furrows her brows in confusion. She then opens her mouth into an 'o' shape of sheer shock. She then temporarily collapses against the back of her chair, as if she is going to faint. Realizing quickly that she is being watched by the crowd, she pops back up immediately and attempts to rest her head against her hand. Though her shocked reactions make sense, Clark uses the quick modulations of her movements and expressions to prompt amusement from audience members. Both the character's dialogue and Clark's physical performance therefore encourage humor without an unflattering depiction of Ann.

Little Miss Hoover illustrates the intersection between wartime patriotism and the prominence of 'sheros' in the feature. As opposed to slapstick or satire, lowbrow and highbrow modes of humor respectively, exhibitors and critics claimed the socially reconciliatory humor of *Little Miss Hoover* "will appeal to all classes of film fans."¹⁰⁶ The film offers insight into how the

film industry utilized light comedy to promote perceived Americanism and patriotism. The film also illustrates that the heroic model for American film comedy extended past male performers like Fairbanks. As opposed to the mockery of female suffragists in many comedy shorts, comedy features frequently celebrated their heroines' public interventions. Of course, references to women getting the right to vote or Ann's leadership in the farming community should not be taken as examples of unencumbered feminism. Though feature comedies during World War I encouraged women to help the war on the Homefront, they did not show heroines fighting for political office. Women could prove heroic and enjoy themselves in a comedy feature within certain bounds.

Rollicking on Rollerskates: The Madcap and Privileged Rebellion

While the hoyden's tomboy tendencies and the shero's ambition challenged genteel femininity in certain respects, the 'madcap' was more firmly rooted in modern cultural currents that would come to full fruition in the 1920s. The madcap could be broadly conceived of as a wealthy young woman who pushed against her restrictive upbringing. As means of rebellion, she raced about in her motorcar, played pranks on stodgy society members, ran away from home, and adopted different personae for fun. Humor usually came not from androgynous or rustic mannerisms, but from other means of defying high society. The madcap anticipated the ways in which flapper films of the 1920s would express interest in young women's self-definition but simultaneously reflect cultural anxieties about their desire for worldly experience.

The term madcap stems back to the 1500s, but United States newspapers do not illustrate widespread use of the term until the second half of the 19th century.¹⁰⁷ It frequently appeared in political discourse of the mid-1800s to mean eccentric or crazed. For instance, American newspapers used the label to critique European leaders and abolitionists.¹⁰⁸ The word was not initially as gendered as hoyden. However, once madcap began to refer to women in the mid-1800s,

it came to be applied under similar circumstances. It connoted female characters who were wealthy, disobedient, and purveyors of pranks. At the height of discourses encouraging genteel femininity in the 1800s, the madcap was placed in direct opposition to ‘true’ womanhood. An article on courtship in 1850 griped that some young women are “not the girl of sense, refinement and personal neatness who reigns as belle of the place; but some silly, mad-cap creature.”¹⁰⁹ Given the madcap’s opposition to the useful, sensible women of genteel, middle class households, 1800s literature presented the madcap as a selfish and problematic figure to be tamed, evoking Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. A short story called “Married in Jest” (1850) featured the spoiled Delilah, a “mischievous little madcap.”¹¹⁰ Delilah’s father prays that she will someday settle down into proper womanhood: “Walter preached himself into forbearance, and lived along in the hope that she would someday see the impropriety of her conduct, and settle down finally to love, honor and obey, in sober earnestness, as a sensible woman should.”¹¹¹ Indeed, Delilah is persuaded into ‘sober earnestness’ when her family makes her think she has accidentally married a lecherous Frenchman. In this instance, the madcap ‘learns a lesson’ and settles down into a proper and loving example of a genteel wife.

Like the hoyden, the female madcap underwent image revision towards the end of the 19th century.¹¹² The madcap’s move from selfish shrew to playful protagonist makes sense when placed in the context of cultural shifts between 1850 and 1910. The madcap’s attempts to escape authority and gain independence became less controversial as women of all classes roamed more freely through public spaces by the 1910s. Young women increasingly moved beyond domestic life in several respects. Beth Bailey observes that, by the mid-1910s, magazines catering to middle-class clientele discussed ‘dating’ and unchaperoned outings without stigma.¹¹³ Though these excursions had been more common for working class women at the turn of the century, middle- and upper-

class youth sought to copy many of these unchaperoned explorations as they envied “those beyond the constraints of respectability.”¹¹⁴ Urbanization aided the efforts of higher-class women to mirror working class behaviors. Crossing paths increasingly through urban nightlife, higher class youths bragged about it being ‘smart’ to go to low cultural spaces for dates by the mid-1910s.¹¹⁵ Wealthier women’s access to automobiles also enabled them to spend more time away from their homes for leisure activities or careers.¹¹⁶ While working class women made up most female workers in the early 1900s, higher class women leaving home or voluntarily joining the workforce became less sparse by the 1910s. Articles in middle-class publications throughout the 1910s reported on the pleasure theatrical and film actresses took in being working women.¹¹⁷ Such articles appear to have inspired hordes of young women from all classes, as the film trade noted that they flocked to Los Angeles in the 1910s to seek jobs in the film industry.¹¹⁸

As young women moved away from sheltered home lives, cultural commentators framed their loss of innocence as either unwelcome or refreshing. Cultural paranoia about women moving through public spaces unchaperoned could be witnessed in multiple contexts: the public obsession over white sex trafficking, reformers who fretted over young couples in movie theaters or the film trade’s concerns that single women would be taken advantage of once they moved to Hollywood.¹¹⁹ Other commentators reacted to young women’s lost innocence more nonchalantly. H. L. Mencken, writer for the highbrow magazine *The Smart Set*, bemusedly considered the modern young woman circa 1915 as a “charming young creature” even if she is “as devoid of ingenuousness as a newspaper reporter, bartender or midwife”¹²⁰ or “saw ‘Damaged Goods’ without batting an eye.”¹²¹

Now that the madcap’s rebellious independence fit more seamlessly into contemporary conceptions of young womanhood, she evolved into the unapologetic heroine of comedic theatrical

and film productions. By the early 1900s, plays and musical comedies such as *A Madcap Princess* (1904) followed female royals who rebelled against their parents and adopted disguises.¹²² In her last play before signing a film contract with Thomas Ince, Billie Burke made a hit as a modern madcap in the play *Jerry* (1914). Her madcap was characterized in the script as “a beautiful girl of 18 whose education reeks with up-to-date topics, and whose flashes of psychological gleanings, and references to ‘pre-natal influence’ and other such topics takes one’s breath.”¹²³ She brags at one point in the play, “Now-a-days girls of fifteen know more than their grandmothers did when they died!”¹²⁴ She finds it ridiculous that her aunt and the aunt’s suitor have not tied the knot after years of being engaged. She decides to break them up to save her aunt from a loveless marriage, but she then falls for the aunt’s fiancé herself. She engages in acts to disrupt their engagement for the rest of the play, including false reports to newspapers, lying that her Aunt has eloped, and later feigning swallowing sleeping pills. All of these behaviors distanced her from gentility. Jerry expresses this sentiment with the line, “I’ve been called many things, but never, thank God, ladylike.”¹²⁵



Billie Burke in *Jerry* (prod. still, 1914) (*The Theatre*)

The madcap carried over from these pre-existing representations into film. The character served as more of a secondary figure in comedy shorts where fathers attempted to stop their

daughters from eloping.¹²⁶ Once young women became more common as leads in comedy features, the madcap became a consistent strategy for presentation. There were only 12 references to ‘madcap’ in the film trade publications from 1912. In contrast, the term ‘madcap’ peaks in the publications between 1916 and 1917—168 and 142 references respectively.¹²⁷ There are some references to male characters where the term operates as an adjective, such as Fatty Arbuckle’s *Madcap Ambrose* (1916). It more often appears in the 1910s film industry, however, to describe female characters surrounded by similar tropes.

As was the case with offscreen madcaps, the film heroines had their wealth emphasized. They represented a challenge to genteel strictures from above rather than below, signaling a social restlessness among women most expected to uphold expectations of well-bred femininity. A review of *The Madcap* (1916) specified that the heroine Flora is “a young rich girl in search of happiness”¹²⁸ while *Madcap Madge* was summarized as “a pilgrim’s progress of the up-to-the-minute-debutante.”¹²⁹ Other reviews strongly implied the character’s wealth by the madcap’s consistent association with boarding school. *The Antics of Ann* (1917) described its heroine as “a pupil at Bredwell Seminary.”¹³⁰ Names like “Bredwell” provided puns emphasizing the privilege of the female protagonist, but the fact that the madcap could attend boarding school at all pointed to her class status. Even by 1920, high school or college education was only available to one-fifth of American teenagers, which consigned the madcap to at minimum middle-class status.¹³¹ The inference is confirmed in viewing the surviving madcap films, where the set design and costuming usually denotes upper class or upper middle-class milieu. Despite the madcap’s wealth, she overlapped with the hoyden’s distaste for restrictive, high society. Descriptions of the films portray these wealthy young women as reluctant prisoners, Rapunzels in a modern tower, who contain enough energy and lack of pretense to fit into a more democratic world outside of society life. A

publicity piece for *Indiscreet Corinne* calls the character “a protected little butterfly of the upper social strata who tires of the quiet, conservative safety of her position”¹³² while *Betty Be Good* (Mutual, 1917) claimed its madcap was “weary of being lectured” by her wealthy father.”¹³³ A review summed up this purposeful aversion to authority well in assessing the lead of *Madcap Madge* (1917); “Her vivacious nature is not in conformity with the regulations concerning discipline.”¹³⁴

The madcap rebelled against the expectation that she be a lady in a number of ways. One common motif showed the madcap rushing along in her automobile to physically escape from authority. For instance, in *The Caprices of Kitty* (Paramount, 1915) the madcap races off in an auto to avoid going to class. In *Peggy* (Triangle, 1916), Billie Burke’s character disturbs a staid, Scottish village by speeding into the town center, kicking up enormous dirt clouds that choke the villagers. The film plays up the villagers outdated horror at her fast driving, with cuts to multiple reactions that include a woman fainting. The madcap’s manic driving style, with her hair blowing in the wind, signaled both independence and social disruptiveness. The madcap also defied ladylike expectations with modern slang that mocked her elders. In *The Fair Barbarian* (Paramount, 1917), a well-off young woman (Vivian Martin) visits a British village and horrifies them with her expressions. When they play ‘Maiden’s Prayer,’ a religious hymn, at a parlor party, she shouts “Ee Gad! What is that horror?” The heroine in *Peggy* also uses snappy dialogue to critique those she deems old fashioned. Expressing disdain for joining her uncle in Scotland, she quips, “I could never get used to seeing old men walking about in skirts.”

In addition to speeding and snarky comments, the madcap adopted an array of pranks. A review for Marguerite Clark’s *Seven Sisters* (Paramount, 1915) described her as “into all sorts of mischief,”¹³⁵ and a reviewer for *Betty Be Good* (Mutual, 1917) observed that actress Jackie

Saunders' role "suits her admirably because it calls for a full display of her prankish tricks."¹³⁶ These practical jokes include: bringing animals into dorm rooms, interrupting courting couples, tricking undesired suitors, holding parties in dormitories after hours, or sneaking into men's rooms at night. For instance, *The Madcap* (Universal, 1916) contains a scene in which the lead, previously hidden above frame, suddenly jumps down between two courting lovers. Sometimes these pranks were taken to extremes to get the madcap out of a tricky situation. In *Bab's Diary* (Paramount, 1917), Bab gets stuck in an apartment with a lecherous, older man. To get out of it, she feigns a suicide attempt so she will be removed and taken to a hospital. These tricks were typically treated as harmless or in the case of Bab, as serving a morally useful purpose.



Flora surprises two lovers in *The Madcap* (Universal, 1916) (LOC)

Much as the madcap's pranks were hardly raunchy or devastating, comedy scholar Geoff King notes that it is extraordinarily rare outside of romantic comedy to find female tricksters as protagonists in film comedies.¹³⁷ That the madcap had time to engage in pranks without consequence pointed to her class status and the fantasy she offered to audiences. Unlike working women supporting their families, the madcap had endless amounts of free time in these films. As Wes Gehring notes in his study of screwball comedy, characters in films like *The Awful Truth* (RKO, 1937) had enough wealth to indulge 'eccentricity,'¹³⁸ and the youthful madcap of the 1910s anticipated this comedy trope.

Defiance of authority could also include the heroine running away from home. The films'

content mirrored flocks of young women leaving their hometowns for city life and careers, and the stars' publicity often pointed out how their own lives fit within this narrative. An article discussed Olive Thomas' abandonment of her first husband and small-town life for New York and divulged, "her parents were very much opposed."¹³⁹ *Betty in Search of a Thrill* (Paramount, 1915) notes that its protagonist "has no desire so great as that of seeing the world"¹⁴⁰ while a review of *Indiscreet Corinne* (Triangle, 1917) noted the heroine's need to "escape the boredom of high society."¹⁴¹ Madcaps snuck out of the house or away from the watchful eyes of guardians for an array of purposes. Some wanted to attend parties unaccompanied, such as in *Seven Sisters* (Paramount, 1915) or *The Girl Who Couldn't Grow Up* (Mutual, 1917). Others wanted to go to seedy or primarily masculine spaces, such as a cabaret or bar in *Please Help Emily* (Mutual, 1917) and *Peggy* (Triangle, 1916) respectively.

Often the madcap accomplished her desire to explore different social spaces through various disguises. Literature and theater long contained the device of a wealthy young woman adopting a different persona, typically a royal who wanted to escape an unwanted marriage. The notion of aristocratic men and women adopting feigned identities to escape royal obligations can be seen in romantic plays such as *The Royal Family* (first run, 1900) or films like *When Love is King* (Edison, 1916).¹⁴² The distinctive feature of the madcap films is the *function* of the disguise. Earlier characters in plays and cinema masqueraded for a key *purpose*, whereas the madcap adopted different identities for the sole purpose of enjoyment. Rarely did an immediate circumstance necessitate the madcap's flight from home and adoption of disguise. For instance, Corinne in *Indiscreet Corinne* faces no unwanted engagement to a suitor, but simply craves "to be a 'regular vampire with a past.'"¹⁴³ Similarly, the heroine in *Chicken Casey* (Triangle, 1917) is a successful actress with no dire need to masquerade as a Bowery street urchin. She does so simply to prove to

herself that she can pull off the part successfully.

The disguises frequently conveyed the desire to move more easily through public spaces or to be less sexually restrained. For instance, the young woman in *The Caprices of Kitty* (1915) “arrayed herself in all the paraphernalia of an up-to-the-minute ‘chap’...proceeds to win the affections of the beautiful blonde who has been flirting with Cameron [her fiancé].”¹⁴⁴ The male disguise served as a way to explore public spaces unchaperoned, but so did lower class garb of a slavey (maidservant), gypsy or Bowery urchin. Other guises had less to do with class and more with sexuality, such as worldly showgirls, artists’ models or vamps. The self-serving, playful nature of the madcap’s deception is also apparent through their frequent adoption of not just one, but *multiple* disguises. *The Caprices of Kitty* also contains a lead who pretends to be a gypsy, an artist’s model and a handsome bachelor among many attempts to spend time unchaperoned. In *Betty in Search of a Thrill* (1915), the heroine leaves home and variously ‘tries on’ the roles of department store girl, chorus girl and eventually “dons boy’s clothing.”¹⁴⁵

This multiplicity pointed to the instability of women’s social roles in the 1910s. The madcap’s mischief-making, unchaperoned outings and identity play gave her a sexualized edge that toyed with boundaries of moral acceptability. Reviews and publicity excused the madcap’s rebellions as youthfully innocent, in keeping with other leads in affirmative comedies. A review for *The Antics of Ann* (Paramount, 1917) declared, “Ann is a mischievous person, yet in her unconventionalities there is naught of malice or evil. Indiscretion there is in chunks; the turbulent outcroppings of a healthy and a youthful—and a female—nature.”¹⁴⁶ Despite claims that the films would generally ‘take,’ some critics warned they presented potential suggestiveness. One review for *The Mischief Maker* claimed it held a “slight suggestion of the salacious,”¹⁴⁷ while another for *Indiscreet Corinne* admitted the story “might strike some picture patrons as being a bit risqué.”¹⁴⁸

Ilana Nash's work on female teenagers in film and television usefully relays both the cultural interest in and anxieties about young women and identity play. Nash argues that the female teenager's liminal age displays "enough malleability to keep their ultimate destiny somewhat uncertain and hence an object of fascination."¹⁴⁹ She further posits, "the same onset of sexuality that intrigues patriarchs can also worry them because it signals the girl's entrance into public circulation, at which point her fascinating body can be used for potentially mutinous purposes."¹⁵⁰ Both this 'fascination' and fear are amply captured in an advertisement for Flora De Haven's *The Madcap* (Universal, 1916). The advertisement teases, "It's a dangerous thing for a girl as pretty as Flora to throw conventions to the wind, no matter how innocent her intentions might be."¹⁵¹

We can witness examples of madcaps in feature comedies as early as 1915. In *The Caprices of Kitty* (Paramount, 1915), the wealthy Kitty (Elsie Janis) attends boarding school and is admired by her peers for her ability to play men in their stage shows. She escapes school one day by racing off in her automobile. On her way back, one of her tires punctures and a young artist, Jerry



Elsie Janis ditching school in *The Caprices of Kitty* (Paramount, 1915) (LOC)

Cameron (Courtenay Foote), provides her with assistance. He proceeds to help her skip school and play pranks. When the two become engaged, they discover Kitty's father stipulated in his will that she cannot see any fiancé for six months after the engagement. Rather than just wearing one disguise to achieve a single purpose of seeing Jerry, the rest of the film follows Kitty's escapades

as she adopts a series of disguises for fun. She dresses up variously as a slavey, a Spanish/Italian dancer (reviews disagreed on the ethnicity), and finally as a handsome young 'swell.' Kitty and Jerry eventually decide to elope despite her father's will, and they discover that the will was written simply to test her affection for her lover.

Not every madcap film emphasized masquerade to an equal degree. Some emphasized the wealthy mischief-maker but had more sporadic usage of disguise. In *The Antics of Ann* (Paramount, 1917), Ann (Ann Pennington) wreaks havoc at her boarding school with tricks on the head matron. She dresses up as a football player and sneaks onto the field to play with college boys. The matron later sees Ann entering her own room in boys' clothes and believes she has had a male visitor. Ann is expelled, and she runs away to intercept the expulsion letter before it reaches her father. She succeeds by arriving at the summer resort where her sister and father are staying. She embarrasses them by appearing in a one-piece bathing suit and by later impersonating a Russian ballet star. At the hotel, Ann becomes suspicious of her older sister's suitor. Viewing him as a fortune hunter, she decides to compromise the suitor by being found in his room. She then runs away to find her love interest, Tom, so that she can force him to marry her and save her reputation. The two wed, and Ann's sister does not marry the fortune hunter.



Ann Pennington as a Russian dancer in *The Antics of Ann* (Paramount, 1917) (*The Photoplay-Journal*, 12/1917, 35)

We see also madcap variations that placed more emphasis on her escape from home than boarding school. In *Indiscreet Corinne* (Triangle, 1917), Corinne (Olive Thomas) is dissatisfied

with her restrictive, high society lifestyle and wants to be “a vampire with a past.” Her fantasies of being a woman of the world are indulged by her French maid. Coincidentally, Corinne sees an advertisement in the paper for a woman with a lurid history. Answering the ad, she is hired to elicit a marriage proposal from a South American millionaire, Nicholas Fenwick (George Chesebro). Corinne disguises herself as a masked cabaret dancer to make a living away from her parents. Despite being disowned, she enjoys herself in a series of escapades and Fenwick falls for her. He proposes to Corinne, who finds out he is not actually a millionaire and that the ad was a publicity stunt. Fenwick and Corinne then persuade her parents to reconcile with her.

The madcap offered an intriguing predecessor to the flapper and screwball heroine. While her pranks were mild and sexual transgressions mostly feigned, she rebelled and sought adventure without experiencing retribution. Unlike dramas, the comic context provided a safety net despite the madcap’s misbehaviors and unchaperoned outings. Implying potential dangers, the madcap’s quest for independence nevertheless led to fun and romance. The madcap’s marriage hinted at containment, but madcap films devoted less time to her romance than to her individual antics and vitality.

Case Study: Olive Thomas in *Madcap Madge* (Triangle/Kay-Bee, 1917)

As it possible to glean from the 1910s madcap cycle, there were both regressive and transgressive elements that are worthy of further investigation. How did madcap films position the female protagonist as both attractive and comically disruptive? To explore these questions, I will consider Olive Thomas’ *Madcap Madge* (1917), which has all five reels available at George Eastman House.

Thomas does not typically receive her due as a comic talent. The actress has avoided obscurity due to her reputation as ‘the most beautiful girl in the world’ and her sordid demise.¹⁵²

Thomas experienced a gruesome death by accidentally swallowing her husband Jack Pickford's mercury bichloride tablets (used to treat syphilis infections) instead of sleeping pills. Since the accident capped off a wild night out in Paris, newspapers used Thomas' death to lambast Hollywood's supposedly lurid lifestyles.¹⁵³ Even though biographers appreciate Thomas as a scandalous figure of silent Hollywood, popular and academic histories rarely address her importance as a silent comedienne. Sara Ross acknowledges Thomas' pivotal role as an early onscreen depiction of the 'flapper' (*The Flapper* (Select, 1920)) but does not view Thomas' career through a comic lens.¹⁵⁴ Thomas is not mentioned in Kirsten Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film* (2018). If Thomas' name appears on a list of comediennes, she is mistakenly affiliated with 'slapstick.'¹⁵⁵ Thomas was a light comedienne in affirmative films of a similar vein to Constance Talmadge's vehicles, and Thomas achieved consistent success in comedy features of the late 1910s.



Thomas in *Betty Takes a Hand* (Triangle, 1918) (LOC)

Olive Thomas rose to prominence as a star in Florenz Ziegfeld's risqué, *Midnight Frolic* located on the rooftop of the New Amsterdam Theatre. Despite many musicals' lingering lowbrow associations during the early 1900s, Ziegfeld's shows were known for attracting upper middle class and high-class patrons (particularly men of wealth and circumstance).¹⁵⁶ That Ziegfeld's girls were known for having affairs with wealthy Manhattanites provided an edge to her screen persona that she and other madcap actresses had to navigate for middlebrow audiences. The review for *Madcap*

Madge in *Motion Picture News* claimed that the film would achieve popularity with “even those to whom the names of Olive Thomas and Ziegfeld’s *Midnight Frolic* are alien or alien enemies.”¹⁵⁷ That comment suggests that her showgirl persona could appear immoral to some patrons. Despite exhibitors noting that her films were crafted for women,¹⁵⁸ publicity also explicitly spelled out her sexual lure for men. An announcement for *Madcap Madge* in *The Moving Picture World* called her the “consolation of the tired business man.”¹⁵⁹ Reviewers even joked about the uneasy balance between Thomas’ morally acceptable characters crafted for mass audiences and urbanites aware of the love affairs of Broadway performers. A review for *An Even Break* (Triangle, 1917) quipped that the film was “a story of the life led by one Broadway showgirl which, if popular report is to be believed, is not at all the existence of the rest of the sisterhood.”¹⁶⁰ Thomas and other madcaps can be seen as a more risqué alternative to the hoyden or shero within affirmative comedies.

Thomas appeared briefly in small film roles in the mid-1910s, but her major opportunity came when she signed with Thomas Ince at Triangle in 1917. The light comedy *Madcap Madge* (Kay Bee, June 1917) served as her star debut. Reviews for *Madcap Madge* largely praised the film and Thomas’ performance. *The Moving Picture World* called it a “rollicking comedy”¹⁶¹ and *Exhibitor’s Herald* proclaimed that the film “literally convulsed the audience.”¹⁶² Even the begrudging *Variety*, who did not understand Thomas’ later popularity, still admitted *Madcap Madge* was “a fairly good film.”¹⁶³ Other reviews singled out Thomas as a charismatic screen personality. Louis Reeves Harrison for *The Moving Picture World* noted, “This character and the capers of Miss Thomas furnish practically all the amusement.”¹⁶⁴ Peter Milne for *Motion Picture News* raved, “Miss Thomas makes her debut with a fetching smile, a charming personality and a carefree manner, all of which, combined with her beauty, spell CAPTIVATING in letters quite too large to fit this page.”¹⁶⁵ Exhibitor reports were also positive, with comments such as, “This went

over big. The audience was enthusiastic over it.”¹⁶⁶ Thomas’ popularity grew in the late 1910s despite Triangle’s business troubles. Like Charles Ray and other Triangle stars, she left the company to sign a more lucrative contract, in her case with Selznick’s Select Studios.¹⁶⁷ Her acquisition by Selznick suggested a desire to continue in a light comedy vein, as Select had become known for Constance Talmadge’s films.¹⁶⁸ Box office reports for her films with both companies consistently characterized them as ‘big business.’¹⁶⁹ Individual exhibitors made remarks such as “Olive Thomas always draws,”¹⁷⁰ and even “Miss Thomas has the greatest drawing power of any star in comedy dramas.”¹⁷¹

Here is a description of the film’s events:

Madcap Madge (1917) opens by introducing the wealthy Flower family. We meet the eldest daughter, Julia Flower (Dorcas Matthews), who sits at the dining room table examining society columns. An intertitle informs us that she is “in danger of becoming a perennial.” The film then cuts to Mrs. Flower, of the “climbing variety,” and Mr. Flower, “the supporting trellis” who is “at present financially shaky.” Mr. Flower is worried about the firm Denham & Sons calling in his loans. Julia spots in the paper that the wealthy Earl of Larsdale will be spending the winter in Palm Beach. She begs her parents to go, and her ambitious mother seconds her suggestion. Despite the father’s financial woes, he sheepishly agrees. Mrs. Flower brings up Madge joining them in Palm Beach, but Julia worries that Madge will distract from Julia’s potential suitors. She expresses embarrassment at Madge potentially getting married before she does, so the two women agree that Madge should spend the holidays with a friend from school.

Continuing the flower metaphor, the film introduces Madge as the screen irises out with her smiling face interposed over a blooming rose. Then a long shot shows Madge rocking back and forth joyfully on a swing in her school gymnasium. An intertitle describes the school as “an intellectual veneering plant where the final high gloss is applied to the unseasoned timber of youth.” The priggish teacher, Letitia Jane Adams (Gertrude Claire) is introduced as the “foreman.” She tries to pull Madge off of the swing, but Madge promptly kicks her in the face. Madge then runs amok around the gym. She mocks the other girls doing exercises with weights by recklessly pumping hers up and down above her head. She then throws them to the side and jumps onto a pommel horse. Another teacher brings her a letter from Mrs. Flower asking Madge to stay with friends for the holidays. Having hoped to spend some time in a city, Madge is indignant. She quickly decides, “They can’t put anything like this across on me! I’ll wire Dad.” Meanwhile, Julia and Mrs. Flowers arrive in Florida. They spot a distinguished looking man with the initials “C.L.” on his suitcase and presume it is Earl Larsdale. Julia proceeds to flirt with him.

The film returns to Madge’s boarding school in the midst of her throwing a secret party in the girls’ dormitory. She finds out when Letitia is attending a poetry reading and then sneaks in food along with a cow. Madge dresses the cow in a bonnet and wire glasses to resemble Letitia, much to the amusement of the other girls. Unfortunately, Letitia walks in on this display. The next morning Letitia expels Madge, who pretends to be remorseful but is secretly thrilled to leave. She shows up unexpectedly in Florida to Julia’s annoyance. Refusing to go back, Madge complains, “Do you suppose that I am going to bury myself up there in a tank town, while you are all down here having a grand old time? Nothing doing.” She threatens to wire Mr. Flower, so Julia and Mrs. Flower attempt to reason with her. Madge insists she isn’t there to find a husband but simply “to have a good time.” Mrs. Flower bribes Madge with a social debut in Europe the next year, and Julia comes up with the idea of letting Madge stay if she dresses as a younger girl. Initially annoyed by this prospect, Madge eventually agrees it would be a “good joke.” She wears her hair down, puts a bow in it, and cuts several inches off of her dresses. She immediately decides to take advantage of her childish costume and searches the hotel for “any madcap mischief that might come up.”



Dormitory party (WCFTR)

Dressed in this attire, Madge overhears two boys admiring an expensive roadster. She hops into the driver's seat and yells, "Come on, kids, we will have one ride if we die for it." They speed away in the stranger's vehicle. Once she has dropped the boys off, Madge gets stuck in a rain storm and is forced off the side of the road. The film cuts to the owner of the car, a handsome young man (Charles Gunn), looking frantically for his missing property. He steals someone's bike to search for his car and finds it with a soaking Madge hiding underneath. She asks him for a wrench so that she can fix the transmission, and he reveals himself to be the owner of the car. His anger dissolves at her soaked, miserable face, so he remarks, "Now, look here, Miss Bandit, I should take you to the lock-up, but I won't this time if you promise never to do it again." Madge agrees, and the two drive off together. The film cuts back to Julia's pursuit of the Earl, seemingly going as planned as he raves to her about the "beauties of English country life." Meanwhile, Madge is reading on the hotel porch and invited to go play tennis with other children. The young man whose car she stole spots her leaving. He walks over to see what she was reading and finds that it is Ibsen's "Ghosts." He grows confused, as "in his mind Ibsen and fourteen years were not commensurable." The film then returns to Julia and the Earl's courtship, but they are interrupted by a lecherous man they nickname the 'Old Doddard.' Later that evening, Julia lets Madge join the group down in the hotel's lounge. However, she keeps encouraging Madge to hide her age with comments like "For Heaven's sake, sit down or people will see how tall you are." Madge complains, "When I agreed to play a little girl, I didn't agree to be a wallflower." To add insult to injury, Julia's suitor presents Madge with a candy cane. Madge then spots the handsome young man from the car incident with a woman and becomes even more irritated that she can't reveal her age.

The next morning, however, Madge comes to realize the benefits of her disguise. The young man invites her to take a spin in his car, and the film's scenario specified that she "took advantage of her apparent youthful innocence" to go on this unchaperoned outing.¹⁷² The two tear around the roads excitedly, but whenever Madge's conversation gets too sophisticated, she lapses into girlish prattle to keep her disguise believable. The film cuts back and forth between the two racing along the road, taking turns driving, and Julia's chaperoned date with the Earl. The couples' contrasting time together is followed by a major ball at the hotel. Julia does not want Madge to go unless she maintains her disguise. Madge decides to attend in a form-fitting, Grecian costume but wears a mask so no one will recognize her. She races into the ballroom on rollerskates, which disrupts the slow dancing. She attracts attention from the men, who escort her to a chaise. She eventually tries dancing with one of the older men but finds his style dull. She bursts into a folk dance she learned at school and the audience clamors for more. During this same party, Julia discovers that her 'Earl' is actually a New York businessman named "Charles Lunkin." Julia decides she still loves him, but she wants to keep their engagement a secret so as to not disappoint her mother.

Madge finally takes a break from the ball in the conservatory and removes her mask. A man enters wearing Lunkin's costume. He calls her little girl, and she shouts, "Don't little girl me! I am nearly nineteen!" When the man professes his love for her, she is insulted since Lunkin has been courting her sister. The man then takes his mask off to reveal himself as her friend from the car rides. He reiterates his love and how he suspected she was older than she let on. He then asks her to run off and elope, playfully saying, "I dare you." Having always prided herself on the ability to take a dare, she responds, "You are on." The two rush off and marry in a parsonage. Back at the hotel, Mrs. Flower discovers that Julia's fiancé is not the Earl of Largsdale, and Mr. Flower learns that Denham & Sons is collecting on his loans. A telegram subsequently arrives from Madge stating that she has "Married Earl tonight." Mrs. Flower is shocked but thrilled that at least one of her daughters ensnared the Earl. This reveal does not solve Mr. Flower's loan

issue, however, so he heads to his room and pulls out a gun. Luckily, Madge and her husband barge in right at this moment. Her father congratulates them and expresses confusion as to why 'his lordship' had to stoop to a hasty elopement. The young man remarks that he is not an Earl, but his name is Earl Denham. He is the junior partner at Denham & Sons. Mr. Flower declares in relief, "Young man, I would rather have you for a son-in-law than any other Earl in the world." Mrs. Flower and Julia express confusion. "Who is the Earl of Larsdale?" Denham points to the 'Old Doddard' that had been stalking Julia earlier. Mrs. Flower sighs regretfully as Madge and Julia smile at their American businessmen.

The film positions Madge as a charming version of femininity in several respects. In contrast to her sister Julia's introduction as someone 'in danger of becoming a perennial,' a blossoming rose reveals Madge's face and suggests she is in full bloom. The petals remain on the edges of the frame as Madge's laughing face dominates the center. The men in the film continually respond to Madge's allure. After she enters the ballroom, a large group of men surround her on the chaise and vie for a dance with her. Similarly, the only man who spends time alone with her, Earl, falls in love. The film also uses costuming to take advantage of actress Olive Thomas' famed sexual appeal. The film generates humor from Madge obviously being older than fourteen, yet wearing her hair down and displaying her calves. Despite Madge's sister and mother desperately trying to hide that she has been through puberty, the film makes little attempt to render her illusion of childhood convincing. She continues to wear dark lipstick and notable make up, she does not alter her body language to mimic a younger girl, and the audience is treated to comical shots of Madge dressed in youthful attire yet reading Ibsen. Her costuming, like other madcaps, provided an excuse for a beautiful young woman to wear her hair down and to showcase more of her legs than normal society fashions would have allowed. Her other costumes in the film also appear to be selected to show Madge in modish or sexualized attire. When Madge arrives to Florida, the continuity script notes "her outfit must be stylish and fashionable to show she is fully grown."¹⁷³ Other apparel include pajamas at her dormitory party, a costume choice for female stars that theatrical and film critics claimed was a strategy to titillate audiences.¹⁷⁴ Finally, Madge's Ancient Grecian robes and her unrestrained dancing affiliated her with modern dancers such as Isadora Duncan who

scandalized some audiences with their revealing garb.¹⁷⁵ In fact, other feature comedies contained scenes of the female leads horrifying older citizens by wearing Greek fashions. Madge's wardrobe aligned with modes of dress for young women that were becoming more common but still seen as 'edgy.'



Madge annoyed at her Pickford-esque attire (WCFTR)

Besides the sexual connotations of Madge's costumes, the film establishes Madge as a figure that other characters, outside of stodgy teachers, are jealous of or admire. An intertitle notes that Madge is "the idol of all the girls in the school," and she is shown surrounded by schoolmates laughing at her jokes. Other characters are also instantly charmed. When she provides a fun outing for the two boys admiring Earl's automobile, the three are shown laughing and chatting as she drives. Earl had planned on arresting her before becoming amused by her nerve to ask for a wrench to fix his stolen car. Her approach is conveyed as a fun, modern approach to living. As she drives Earl's vehicle with zest, a cut back to Julia's chaperoned date on a slow-moving golf cart is mocked with an illustrated intertitle of snails and the sarcastic text "Other joy riders." Another important factor for Madge's positive portrayal is the harmless nature of her rebellions. Her plan to put a cow in the school church will not physically harm any of the faculty. She takes Earl's car for the purpose of giving the young boys a good time. She elopes without her family's knowledge, but to a

respectable businessman who proves to be her father's financial salvation. Instead of prompting dangerous chaos with her rebellions, madcaps inspired others with physical zest, spontaneity and humor.

Madge's fairly tame rebellions are still notable for allowing a female trickster to create humor through her mockery of genteel prescriptions. Like other madcaps, her role as comic idol illustrates significant shifts since 19th century in the expectations regarding young women's behaviors. The madcap created laughter through insolence and self-centered pleasure-seeking that genteel critics found distasteful. Despite the suggested containment of the madcap through marriage, critics made clear that the pleasure of films like *Madcap Madge* came from the heroine's rebellious antics throughout. To illustrate how Madge's humorous actions and verbal quips deviate from genteel femininity, Madge's introduction in the film serves as a crucial case in point. Despite being introduced as a lovely flower, Madge proceeds to purposefully kick her schoolteacher directly in the face. Her physical assault of the instructor belies genteel culture's belief that older female figures should be respected by younger women.¹⁷⁶ Dressing up the cow to resemble her instructor similarly betrays that notion. Madge's disregard for authority figures extends to her own family. As opposed to playing the dutiful daughter, Madge defies her mother's request that she stay at school and informs classmates of her father, "He'll do anything I ask him to."



Irritable Madge in gym class (WCFTR)

Olive Thomas' physical performance skillfully incorporates insolent mannerisms to create humor. When Madge is expelled from boarding school, she has the right side of her face turned towards the headmistress while the left side of her face remains visible to the camera. The side facing the headmistress is covered in a handkerchief, conveying her wish to portray remorse. With Madge's face partly exposed to the audience, actress Olive Thomas makes direct eye contact with the camera and winks. This gesture allows the actress to flirt with the audience and let them in on the joke, emphasizing Madge's status as trickster along with the affirmative notion of laughing with leads, not at them. As she is leaving, Madge further deceives the headmistress by mocking her through the closing door. Still visible to the audience, Madge crooks her hand and back to mimic the woman's shriveled posture and scrunches up her nose. The film later creates humor through Madge's distaste for Julia's older suitor. She is horrified by his childish gift of a candy cane and his condescending pat of her head. A medium shot captures Madge staring in wide eyed horror at the candy cane. She begins the shot stunned with her mouth slightly apart, and her face then transitions into a scowl. She proceeds to take an angry bite out of the candy cane. The script described how her rage should be used for comic effect; "Play this for comedy, get across that her one deep regret is that it is not Lunkin that she is biting."¹⁷⁷

Madge defies genteel behaviors during her interactions with suitors as well. When an elder man asks Madge to dance, he leads her into the same, uniform waltz step as other couples. She partakes for a few moments, then suddenly faces towards the camera with a bored expression. She then pushes him to the side and bursts into quicker, less structured movements; engaging in fast, kick steps around him in a circle before abandoning him. Though Madge's romance could be seen as a form of narrative containment, her courtship aides her comic rebellions. Her outings with Earl show the two engaging in rule-breaking together. In one scene, they park directly in front of a sign

that says “Autos Do Not Park in Front of this Entrance.” His proposal to Madge is even phrased as a childlike, defiance of authority, challenging, “I dare you.” Thus, her rule-breaking is egged on by her partner as opposed to him hoping she will calm down. Madge’s lack of gentility is further encouraged by her love interest as a willing co-conspirator.



Madge disrupts the ball on rollerskates (WCFTR)

The ‘madcap’ designation for female characters faded away around 1920 as rebellious, slangy young women modified into the flapper. Olive Thomas went on to star in *The Flapper* (Select, 1920), a film nearly identical to her madcap films. Flapper films shared many commonalities with the 1910s madcap cycle, to the point where historians’ emphasis on accoutrements like the flapper’s cigarettes or bobbed hair may bely larger tropes surrounding comic young women who seek worldly experience. However, while the formula of rebellious young women experimenting with identity play remained, flapper comedies transferred emphasis from female protagonists exploring the world unchaperoned towards a narrower interest in sexual exploration.¹⁷⁸ Although the madcap’s behaviors may seem tamer than the flapper’s partying, the madcap vehicles could also be viewed as more radical for studies of women in comedy. The madcap films prioritized the lead’s antics over the narrative’s romantic subplot, and her rebellions and pranks touched on a broader range of social concerns beyond romance.

Conclusion

The 1910s proved to be an unusually rich decade for comedy features with female leads. In

this chapter, I explored three characters that populated feature comedies which did not prioritize romance—the hoyden, shero and madcap. These types reveal how notions of attractive womanhood had evolved significantly from genteel notions in the 19th century. Modern femininity was not the sole property of women who engaged in aggressive forms of New Humor. Middlebrow features and their purportedly likable leads challenged fading gentility in different respects. In contrast to scholarship's exploration of how women in comedy conflict with modes of desirable femininity, the hoyden, shero and madcap offered careful balancing acts in affirmative comedy features—simultaneously creating pleasure out of humorous women without sacrificing their social appeal.

This balance could be seen as liberating for female performers by enabling them to be simultaneously pretty and funny.¹⁷⁹ However, important restrictions remained on which types of young women met this standard. The hoyden, shero and madcap adopted strains of New Womanhood through their non-gentility and independence, but they did not take on aspects that more directly challenged men's social powers. None of these characters showed interest in academics, even though women's access to higher education helped to define New Womanhood in the late 1800s. With the exception of some sheros, they rarely expressed an interest in careers or suffrage. Instead, all served as models for making life 'more fun' without presenting reformist threats to patriarchal control. However, these comedies presented women who were not themselves mocked or expected to 'reform' by the narrative's end. Their freedom to run rampant, without a moral reckoning, provides opportunities to witness female performers unabashedly at play.

¹ See AFI's 'Feature Film Catalog.' This is supplemented by examining publicity and film reviews, as AFI does not always list the characters in order of importance or who was the star attraction. Trade analysis from the 1910s reveal that many of the films' gave more emphasis to the female star.

² "Light Society Comedy Starring a Woman is Voted Most Popular of All Features." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/23/1920. 1068

³ Despite the romance of *Mickey* (Western Import, 1918) occupying little screentime in comparison to her general antics to a new home, multiple scholarly works on silent humor refer to it as a romantic comedy (see Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and the Silent Comedienne*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018, 233). Similarly, comedies with women in other decades (*She Done Him Wrong* (1933), *Born Yesterday* (1950), *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) or *Working Girl* (1988) are labeled 'rom coms' despite a primary crime or self-growth plot with romance as a B-storyline (see Chapter 2 of Leger Grindon's *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History, Controversies*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell. 2011). One continues to find this slippage between romantic comedies and comedies with female leads and a supporting romantic plotline in coverage of the comedy *Bridesmaids* (Universal, 2011) (Alexandra Pollard. "How Bridesmaids Paved the Way for Female-Fronted Comedy." *Independent*. 2/14/2020. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/bridesmaids-like-a-boss-movie-kristin-wiig-booksmart-girls-trip-hangover-a9335781.html>>).

⁴ See Kristen Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 2018). Chapter 3 deals with the sexual assertiveness of many different types of silent comedienness while Chapter 4 considers their 'movement' and athleticism in public spaces.

⁵ Helen Rockwell. "Scandal." *Motography*. 11/10/1917, 1001.

⁶ See Victoria Sturtevant's *A Great Big Girl Like Me: The Films of Marie Dressler*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) and Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and the Silent Comedienne*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018)

⁷ Martha H. Patterson, Ed. *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

⁸ John Tomisch. *A Genteel Endeavor: American Culture and Politics in the Gilded Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 15.

⁹ Natasha Kraus. *A New Type of Womanhood: Discursive Politics and Social Change in Antebellum America*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 30-31.

¹⁰ See Patterson. For more immediate connections between the New Woman and film, see Hillary Hallett's *Go West, Young Woman!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), Laura Horak's *Girls Will Be Boys: Cross-Dressed Women, Lesbians, and American Cinema, 1908-1934*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), or Shelley Stamp's *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)). Other discussions more narrowly discuss subtypes of New Women, such as chorus girls or serial queens. For chorus girls and the New Woman, see Linda Mizejewski's *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). For working girls in sex trafficking films, see Janet Staiger's *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995). Ben Singer links the Serial Queen to the New Woman in Chapter 8 of *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹¹ See Rich DesRochers' *The New Humor in the Progressive Era: Americanization and the Vaudeville Comedian*. or Rob King's *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley University of California Press, 2008).

¹² King, 10.

¹³ It is somewhat ironic that this ‘New Humor’ actually resembles the rebellious, bodily emphasis of Grecian ‘Old Comedy,’ showing how this idea of ‘old versus new’ in comedy can be a limiting framework (See Andrew Horton’s introduction to *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1991, 10-12, or R.L. Hunter. *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 1).

¹⁴ Wagner, 188.

¹⁵ Hennefeld, 3.

¹⁶ Sturtevant, 71.

¹⁷ Felski, 2.

¹⁸ “The Hoyden.” *Variety*. November 2, 1907. 12.

¹⁹ Bryant C. Rogers “Grandma’s Pet.” *Forest City Press*. 6/3/1914, 5.

²⁰ Deborah Gorham. *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*. (New York: Routledge, 1982), 37.

²¹ *Ibid*, 56.

²² “Female Education.” *The Delaware Register*. 3/21/1829, 1. For an additional example, see of these advice columns and their discussion of the hoyden, see “Girls Manners.” *The Albany Register*. 8/20/1880, 4.

²³ For instance, the hoyden heroine of a 1905 short story, “Honor Bright,” which appeared in newspapers, positions herself against older modes of femininity and rejects aristocratic behaviors. In response to a teacher telling her a real lady shouldn’t go horseback riding without gloves, she quips, “I should like to throw the gloves in Miss Jefferson’s face and wear the whip out over her patrician shoulders!”²³ (“Honor Bright.” Isabel Ball. *The Savannah Morning News*. 9/4/1904, 21)

²⁴ See Michelle Ann Abate’s *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2008), 6.

²⁵ Gorham, 55-57.

²⁶ For analyses of the increased emphasis on exercise and outdoor vigor for the New Man compared to Victorian ideals of masculinity, see E. Anthony Rotundo’s *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 222-246, as well as Gaylyn Studlar’s chapter on Douglas Fairbanks in *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1996), 10-89.

²⁷ “Arizona on the Stage: Playhouses, Plays, and Players in the Territory, 1879-1912, 36.

²⁸ “Peg O’ My Heart.” *Variety*. 12/27/1912, 20.

²⁹ “Peg O’ My Heart.” *Variety*. 12/27/1912, 20.

³⁰ “‘Peg O’ My Heart’ Charms at Cort.” *The New York Times*. 12/21/1912, 13.

³¹ Pre-1913 references to hoyden come from “Arclight,” the digital search engine for the Media History Digital Library, run by Eric Hoyt. See Appendix V for list of hoyden films. The majority stem from 1917 and 1918. This does not include romantic comedies with a tomboyish character, which would add to the number.

³² W. Stephen Bush. "Nearly a Lady." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/21/1915, 1325.

³³ George N. Shorey. "Lady Barnacle." *Motion Picture News*. 6/30/1917, 4114.

³⁴ George Blaisdell. "The Morals of Marcus." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/30/1915, 681.

³⁵ George Blaisdell. "A Girl of Yesterday." *The Moving Picture World*. 10/23/1915, 632.

³⁶ Wynn. "Niobe." *Variety*. 4/9/1915, 20.

³⁷ All five reels are available for viewing at the British Film Institute.

³⁸ Film available at The Museum of Modern Art.

³⁹ Edward Weitzel. "The Little Terror." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/11/1917, 957.

⁴⁰ "A Girl of Yesterday." *Variety*. 10/15/1915, 21.

⁴¹ Dale, 102. Contemporary critics also framed her move to feature comedies as a 'promotion' from 'supporting' male comics, with the *Variety* review for *Dodging a Million* (Goldwyn, 1918) stating "it's a pity she missed it [straight comedy] for so long while making a name for herself in slap bang film comedies when supporting male stars" (Sime. *Variety*. 2/1/1918, 44).

⁴² King, Rob. *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture*. (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), 222

⁴³ *Ibid*, 227-229.

⁴⁴ King, 232. See also the report that *Mickey* grossed \$8 million on a \$250,000 production in Robbin Coon's newspaper article "Hollywood Chatter." *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*. 6/20/1939, 6.

⁴⁵ "Mickey." *Variety*. 12/6/1918, 39.

⁴⁶ Walter K. Hill. "Mickey." *The Moving Picture World*. 8/10/1918, 880.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ "Mabel Normand in 'Mickey.'" *The Moving Picture World*. 1/6/1917, 66.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ Simon Joyce and Jennifer Putzi's summary of Mabel Normand's career on the excellent online library for women in early hollywood, "Women Film Pioneers Project" primarily focuses on her career in shorts and notes how biographers tend to focus on her personal scandals by the time we reach the feature phase of her career (Joyce, Simon; Jennifer Putzi. "Mabel Normand." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013. <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-mabel-normand/>)

⁵¹ King, 228.

⁵² King, 230.

⁵³ Hennefeld, 233

⁵⁴ King notes multiple cases of female bodily exposure that Chicago censors objected to (221-222).

⁵⁵ King, 228.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ "Praise Mabel Normand in New Film." *Motography*. 2/16/1918, 315.

⁵⁸ Ad. *Motion Picture News*. 5/4/1918, 2633.

⁵⁹ Ad. *Motion Picture News*. 5/4/1918, 2633.

⁶⁰ Johnstone Craig. "The Dominant Race." *Photoplay*. October, 1918. 48, 112.

⁶¹ For discussions of Twain's 'realism' and rural, boyish humor receiving the ire of genteel critics, see Peter Stoneley's *Mark Twain and the Feminine Aesthetic*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 78, or Joe B. Fulton's *Mark Twain Under Fire: Reception and Reputation, Criticism and Controversy, 1851-2015*. New York: Camden House, 2018), Chapter One.

⁶² See Gorham, 50. Also, see Carroll Rosenberg-Smith's *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 199.

⁶³ "Mickey." *Variety*. 12/6/1918, 39

⁶⁴ For instance, some fans complained she was moving too much in the opposite direction from her comedienne roots ("What the Picture Did for Me." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 9/20/1919, 82) while critics said she was ill-suited for Goldwyn's attempts to place her in sweeter ingenue parts (Peter Milne. "Joan of Plattsburg." *Motion Picture News*. 5/18/1918, 2999). However, as you can see in the footnote below, broader comedy was criticized in her features as well.

⁶⁵ *The Film Daily* characterized Peck's *Bad Girl* (Goldwyn, 1918) as "hokum," "some spots played too broadly" and warned "some of the titles may jar very decidedly with your highbrows." (*The Film Daily*. 9/22/1918, 2.

⁶⁶ "Her Country First. *The Film Daily*. 9/1/1918, 13.

⁶⁷ Steve Seidman. *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1981), 8.

⁶⁸ Scott Balcerzak frames male comedians as "challenging their own membership in the club of 'traditional' maleness, disrupting or neurotically deconstructing its norms." (*Buffoon Men: Classic Hollywood Comedians and Queered Masculinity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 4. Studies of women in comedy also emphasize comedienness' challenges to strictures surrounding female behaviors, ranging from Kathleen Rowe's *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) to the anthology *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy* (Eds. Linda Mizejewski and Victoria Sturtevant. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).⁶⁸ The interest in eccentricity extends to silent comedy, with Alan Dale proposing that male comedians who engaged in physical, slapstick humor played on "our fears of physical and social maladjustment." (*Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 5.

⁶⁹ For discussions of suffragette treatment in comedy shorts, see Hennefeld, Chapter 6, and Wagner, 227-231.

⁷⁰ Langer, Susanne. *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art..* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1953), 334.

⁷¹ Langer, 338.

⁷² Langer, 335.

⁷³ These results come from searching film trade journals on Media History Digital Library's Lantern platform. For list of shero films released between 1915 and 1920, see Appendix V.

⁷⁴ These results come from the Library of Congress newspaper database. Between 1900 and 1914, I could only find 'shero' in newspapers as a last name. By 1915, however, the term can be found in articles about 'heros and sheros' in the movies ("Our Movie Lessons." *The Tacoma Times*. 6/3/1915, 4).

⁷⁵ See 'patriotic American girl' in "Her Country First" review (*The Moving Picture World*), or even in less overtly nationalist pieces like "The Homebreaker" where the heroine is described as 'typically American' (*The Film Daily*, 5/4/1919, 5).

⁷⁶ Leslie DeBauche. *Reel Patriotism: The Movies and World War I*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 36.

⁷⁷ Abraham Nelson. "Comedies are in Big Demand." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/5/1918, 130.

⁷⁸ "Anglo Secures Foreign Rights for Pyramids." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/30/1918, 1835.

⁷⁹ George K. Spoor. "Public Needs Pictures with Humor." *Motography*. 9/8/1917, 500.

⁸⁰ "Artcraft Plays Strong Card." *Motography*. 6/29/1918, 1211

⁸¹ "Deploring Tragic Themes." *Motography*. 6/29/1918, 1212.

⁸² See Lynde Denig's review in *The Moving Picture World*. 10/30/1915, 984 or Jolo's review in *Variety*. 10/22/1915, 23.

⁸³ See Elizabeth Clarke's "War and the Sexes: Gender and American Film, 1898-1927." PhD Dissertation. Wilfrid Laurier University. 2013.

⁸⁴ "Her Country First. *The Film Daily*. 9/1/1918, 13.

⁸⁵ Genevieve Harris. "Pots-and-Pans Peggy." *Motography*. 3/31/1917, 697.

⁸⁶ P.S. Harrison. "Beans." *Motion Picture News*. 9/14/1918, 1756.

⁸⁷ Peter Milne. "All of a Sudden Norma." *Motion Picture News*. 12/28/1918, 3960.

⁸⁸ "What the Picture Did for Me." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 12/13/1919, 98.

⁸⁹ "Special Service Section on Dorothy Dalton in "The Homewrecker." *Motion Picture News*. 4/26/1919, 2679-2681.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 2679.

⁹¹ William Curtis Nunn's biography of Clark is the one extended work to address Clark's career. See *Marguerite Clark: America's Darling of Broadway and the Silent Screen*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1981. Sometimes authors give Clark a chapter in informal collections biographing silent stars, such as DeWitt Bodeen's *From Hollywood: The Careers of 15 Great American Stars*. South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes Publishers, 1976. No scholarly history or article uses Clark as a case study.

⁹² These films include the first of the series, *Bab's Diary* (Paramount, Oct, 1917) followed by *Bab's Burglar* (Oct, 1917), and then *Bab's Matinee Idol* (Nov, 1917).

⁹³ Several letters and telegrams between Adolph Zukor and Marguerite Clark in 1919 show Zukor's determination for her not to retire (see "Telegram from Marguerite Clark to Adolph Zukor." 7/15/1919, and "Letter from Adolph Zukor to Marguerite Clark." 7/20/1919). In other correspondence, Zukor and exhibitors stress the financial success of recent feature comedies such as *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and *Widow by Proxy* ("Telegram from Oscar A. Morgan to Adolph Zukor." 2/24/1919, and "Letter from Adolph Zukor to Marguerite Clark." 8/7/1919). These exchanges can all be found in the Adolph Zukor Papers at Margaret Herrick Library (Los Angeles, CA).

⁹⁴ In popularity contests for *Motion Picture Magazine*, Marguerite Clark came in third after Pickford and Francis X. Bushman in 1917 (see "Here Are All the Winners of the Great Popular Player Contest." February, 1917, 126) and then came in second to Pickford's top slot in both 1916 and 1918 (see "Popular Player Contest." November, 1916, 133, and "The Motion Picture Hall of Fame." June, 1918, 100).

⁹⁵ For instance, the importance of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford to stars' financial power and efforts to control distribution have been influentially examined in Tino Balio's *United Artists: The Company that Changed the Film Industry*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). Other scholars have analyzed the significance of Fairbanks or Pickford's star personae as well. Gaylyn Studlar assesses Fairbanks' boyish masculinity in Chapter One of *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) as well as Pickford's adolescent girlhood in Chapter One of *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

⁹⁶ Director J. Searle Dawley, who was paired frequently with Clark, described her in interview notes as "talented to the extreme, but without temperament." He framed other stage stars as self-destructive or overly demanding, including John Barrymore, Billie Burke, and Ann Pennington. ("Notes on Motion Picture Record of J. Searle Dawley." Folder 18, p. 16. J. Searle Dawley Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA).

⁹⁷ See Sukimo Higashi's *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine*. Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978. For more recent analyses of Bara, see Eve Golden's *Vamp: The Rise and Fall of Theda Bara* (Lanham: Vestal Press, 1996) or Gaylyn Studlar's "Theda Bara: Orientalism, Sexual Anarchy, and the Jewish Star." *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*. Ed. Jennifer M. Bean. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011, 113-136). Some studies of Clara Bow include David Stenn's biography *Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild* (New York: First Cooper Square Press, 2000) along with recent scholarly considerations of her persona both nationally (Mary Desjardins. "An Appetite for Living: Gloria Swanson, Colleen Moore, and Clara Bow." *Idols of Modernity: Movie Stars of the 1920s*. Ed. Patrice Petro. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010, 108-136) and internationally (Hideaki Fujiki. *Making Personas: Transnational Film Stardom in Modern Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013, 249-278).

⁹⁸ Her surviving comedy features include: *Little Miss Hoover* (Paramount, 1918), *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (Paramount, 1919), and a fragment from *Luck in Pawn* (Paramount, 1919) (all at Library of Congress). She has dramas to survive as well, notably *Snow White* (1916).

⁹⁹ "Notes on Motion Picture Record of J. Searle Dawley." Folder 18, p. 17. J. Searle Dawley Papers. Margaret Herrick Library. Los Angeles, CA.

¹⁰⁰ Leuchtenburg, William E. *Herbert Hoover*. (New York: Times Books, 2009), 41-43.

¹⁰¹ "Little Miss Hoover." *The Film Daily*. 12/23/1918, 911.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ P.S. Harrison, "Little Miss Hoover." *Motion Picture News*. 1/4/1919, 156.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Weitzel. "Little Miss Hoover." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/28/1918, 1553.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “Little Miss Hoover.” *Variety*. 1/3/1919, 38.

¹⁰⁷ This finding stems from search results on Library of Congress’ newspaper database, “Chronicling America.” Between 1800-1820, there are only 2 results for ‘madcap.’ This number grows to 54 between 1820-1840, but explodes to 1,500 results between 1861-1880.

¹⁰⁸ “The Peers of France.” *Alexandria Gazette*. 3/17/1838, 2.

¹⁰⁹ “Courtship.” *The Prairie News*. 12/2/1858, 1.

¹¹⁰ “Married in Jest.” *The Mountain Sentinel*. 11/21/1850, 2-3.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Consider the praise given to the ‘madcap’ in the poem “Mary, You Madcap” (1903). The poem effuses platitudes about the madcap’s jolly spirits. It reads, “Mary, you madcap, happy and free/ dancing and skipping and romping with glee.” It continues to cite her privileged access to beauty and money, stating, “Mary you madcap, great is your wealth/ Beauty and sprightliness, freedom and health.” In an ultimate assertion of the madcap as desirable femininity, the poem ends, “Oh, Mary you Madcap, who wouldn’t be you! (P. Maurice McMahon. *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. 12/13/1903, 7)

¹¹³ See Beth L. Bailey’s *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 16.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 18.

¹¹⁶ Articles throughout the early teens described women increasingly striving to escape domestic space and using automobiles to do so. See the 1911 article entitled “The Passing of the Home Daughter” that observed a cross-class movement of young women away from domestic spaces and their feeling of “dying of asphyxiation at home.” (Quoted in Shelley Stamp’s *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture*, 49).

¹¹⁷ See Hallett’s discussion of actresses democratizing and modeling career success for female fans in Chapter One of *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 26-68.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 12-13.

¹¹⁹ For fears over sex trafficking, see Stamp’s “Movie-Struck Girls, 50. Kathy Peiss discusses reformers’ efforts to regulate the sexual interactions of working-class couples at nickelodeons in *Cheap Amusements: Working Class Women and Leisure Time in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 151.

Hillary Hallett observes the fretful comments over young women’s vulnerabilities once they left home to participate in the film industry (*Go West Young Woman*, 152-153), and Diana Anselmo notes this discouraging rhetoric about female fans aspiring to join stage and screen industries (“Screen-Struck: The Invention of the Movie Girl Fan.” *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 55, No. 1. Fall, 2015, 9-12).

¹²⁰ H.L. Mencken. “The Flapper.” Reprinted in *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930*. Ed. By Martha H. Patterson. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 85.

¹²¹ Ibid, 86.

¹²² “Plays and Players.” *The Theatre*. October, 1904. 245.

¹²³ Script for *Jerry*. P. 2. Box 2. Billie Burke and Florenz Ziegfeld Papers. Billy Rose Theatre Division. New York Public Library.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 15.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 21.

¹²⁶ See the description of Lillian Walker's teen daughter as the "rebellious, madcap" in the magazine story version of Vitagraph's elopement comedy *Love, Luck and Gasoline* (1913) ("The Adventures of Miss Tomboy." *Picture Stories Magazine*. September, 1914, 140).

¹²⁷ These statistics come from performing digital searches through film publications between 1900 and 1920. Arclight. Media History Digital Library. For list of madcap features released between 1915-1920, see Appendix V.

¹²⁸ "The Madcap." *The Moving Picture World*. 6/16/1916, 1936.

¹²⁹ "Triangle's Interesting." *Motography*. 6/23/1917, 1323.

¹³⁰ "The Antics of Ann." *Variety*. 11/ 23/1917, 46.

¹³¹ David Blanke. *The 1910s*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 26.

¹³² "Olive Thomas in Siren Role." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/17/1917, 1048.

¹³³ "Stories of the Films." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/21/1917, 536.

¹³⁴ "Olive Thomas, Beauty of Ziegfeld Follies." *Motion Picture News*. 6/30/1917, 4069.

¹³⁵ Fred. "Seven Sisters." *Variety*. 6/30/1915, 19.

¹³⁶ "Betty Be Good." *The Moving Picture World*. 7/21/1917, 485.

¹³⁷ Geoff King. *Film Comedy*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 64.

¹³⁸ Wes D. Gehring. *Romantic Vs. Screwball Comedy: Charting the Difference*. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 30-31.

¹³⁹ "Olive Thomas." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/23/1918, 1642.

¹⁴⁰ Charles R. Condon. "Betty in Search of a Thrill." *Motography*. 6/5/1915, 927

¹⁴¹ "Indiscreet Corinne." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 12/1/1917, 29.

¹⁴² In *A Royal Family* (1900), two royals run away and disguise themselves as commoners only to meet and fall in love ("A Royal Family' a Great Hit at the Lyceum Theatre." *The New York Times*. 9/6/1900, 12), while in *When Love is King* (Edison, 1916), a young king pretends to be an average American citizen (Lynde Denig. "When Love is King." *The Moving Picture World*. 2/19/1916, 1146).

¹⁴³ "Indiscreet Corinne-AD." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/17/1917, 982.

¹⁴⁴ "The Caprices of Kitty." *The Moving Picture World*. 3/13/1915, 1680.

¹⁴⁵ “Madcap Betty.” *Variety*. 6/18/1915, 17.

¹⁴⁶ George Blaisdell. “The Antics of Ann.” *The Moving Picture World*. 11/24/1917, 1184.

¹⁴⁷ Fred. “The Mischief Maker.” 12/1/1916, 29

¹⁴⁸ “Indiscreet Corinne.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 12/1/1917, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Nash, Ilana. *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 10.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁵¹ “Universal’s Programs.” *The Moving Picture World*. 5/27/1916, 1434.

¹⁵² See thorough coverage of Olive Thomas’ tragic end and its consequences for Hollywood’s reputation in Michelle Vogel’s biography *Olive Thomas: The Life and Death of a Silent Film Beauty* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2007, 75-120). Thomas also is mentioned briefly in more general histories of Hollywood scandals and the attempts of reformers to crack down on Hollywood’s supposedly immoral influence. See William J. Mann’s *Tinseltown: Murder, Morphine and Madness at the Dawn of Hollywood*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).

¹⁵³ “What Olive Thomas Saw in Gay Paris Before She Killed Herself: How the Tragic Death of the American Actress in Paris Has Given Impetus to the Movements to Wipe Out the ‘Palaces of Shame.’” *The Syracuse Herald*. 10/31/1920, no page number.

¹⁵⁴ Sara Ross. “Banking the Flames of Youth: The Hollywood Flapper, 1920-1930.” PhD Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2000. For information about Thomas and her screen persona, see pages 47-72.

¹⁵⁵ Hennefeld, *Specters of Slapstick and Silent Comediennes*, 23.

¹⁵⁶ See Marion E. Wilson’s analysis of Florenz Ziegfeld’s efforts to target upper middle-class men with his shows in “‘Such Fantasy, Such Harlequinade’: Ziegfeld, Class and Cultural Hierarchy.” (PhD Dissertation. The City University of New York. 2005).

¹⁵⁷ Peter Milne. “Madcap Madge.” *Motion Picture News*. 6/30/1917, 4108.

¹⁵⁸ Cite ‘Limousine Life’ review and another review (Betty Takes a Hand)

¹⁵⁹ “Manufacturer’s Advanced Notes.” *The Moving Picture World*. 6/23/1917, 1961.

¹⁶⁰ Edward Weitzel. “An Even Break.” *The Moving Picture World*. 8/18/1917, 1083.

¹⁶¹ Louis Reeves Harrison. “Madcap Madge.” *The Moving Picture World*. 6/30/1917, 2117.

¹⁶² “Madcap Madge.” *Exhibitor’s Herald*. 7/7/ 1917, 25.

¹⁶³ Fred. “Madcap Madge.” *Variety*. 6/22/1917, 22.

¹⁶⁴ Louis Reeves Harrison. “Madcap Madge.” *The Moving Picture World*. 6/30/1917, 2117.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Milne. “Madcap Madge.” *Motion Picture News*. 6/30/1917, 4108.

¹⁶⁶ “What the Picture Did for Me-Ashland Theater.” *Motography*. 7/21/1917, 115.

¹⁶⁷ Vogel, 51.

¹⁶⁸ As previously discussed in Chapter Five, Constance Talmadge released a series of influential romantic comedies through Selznick in 1917 and 1918, starting with *Scandal* (November, 1917) and ending with *Happiness a La Mode* (June, 1919). Select Pictures also showed a strong reliance on light comedies for its other stars in the late teens and early twenties, such as Alice Brady, Marion Davies, Elsie Janis, Elaine Hammerstein, and Owen Moore.

¹⁶⁹ See across country results for *Broadway Arizona* (Triangle, 1917) ("Exhibitors' Box Office Reports." *Motion Picture News*. 12/29/1917, 4515) or *Limousine Life* (Triangle, 1918) ("Exhibitors' Box Office Reports." *Motion Picture News*. 3/30/1918, 1872). Reports of Thomas' financial success for theaters continued into her phase with Selznick. One exhibitor reported for *The Flapper* (Selznick, 1920) that "as usual, Olive Thomas is a drawing card for us" ("What the Picture Did for Me." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 5/7/1921, 84.

¹⁷⁰ "What the Picture Did for Me." *Motography*. 3/16/1918, 500.

¹⁷¹ "What the Picture Did for Me-Betty Takes a Hand." *Motography*. 2/16/1918, 300.

¹⁷² "Madcap Madge-Scenario." p.2. Box 7. Harry and Roy Aitken Papers. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Madison, WI.

¹⁷³ "Madcap Madge-Continuity Script." p. 6. Box 7. Harry and Roy Aitken Papers. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Madison, WI.

¹⁷⁴ Descriptions of women's pajamas as sexually stimulating often appeared in comedy reviews (Jolo. "Peggy." *Variety*. 1/21/1916, 27; Edward Weitzel. "The Mischief Maker." *The Moving Picture World*. 12/9/1916, 1509)

¹⁷⁵ Francis, Elizabeth. "From Event to Monument: Modernism, Feminism and Isadora Duncan." *American Studies*. Vol. 35, No. 1, Spring, 1994, 25-45.

¹⁷⁶ Gorham, 47.

¹⁷⁷ Scene List. Scene 142. "Madcap Madge." Box 7. Harry and Roy Aitken Papers. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Madison, WI.

¹⁷⁸ Wagner, *Comic Venus*, 191-214. The discussion is not chronological, but this theme of disguise in pursuit of romance or for the sake of a lover or to romantically impress is apparent across the 1920s examples analyzed by Wagner, such as *The Duchess of Buffalo* (1926).

¹⁷⁹ Scholar Linda Mizejewski observes that female comics are rarely allowed to be both 'pretty' and 'funny'—a divide recent female performers in comedy have sought to complicate (see her introduction to *Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics*. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2014).

Conclusion

Female viewers and cultural perceptions of their tastes profoundly shaped the comedy genre's movement from shorts to features in the 1910s American film industry. While previous histories have acknowledged comedy's need to move 'upmarket' for feature films, that move has been positioned within a framework of disappointment at comedy's submission to narrative norms. The gendered nature of this history remained unpacked. Surveying these lost years of feature comedy's development, however, offers a rich opportunity to consider female audiences and performers' relationship to film comedy. We can study forms that allowed their greater presence and input as well as assess how their engagement was dictated by cultural expectations and norms.

Though scholars such as Diana Anselmo and Gaylyn Studlar previously recognized the continuities between female fans of the legitimate stage and screen,¹ scholarship on silent comedy largely ignored the 'feminine' slant of feature comedy's strong reliance on plays. This dissertation sought to illustrate the influence of feminine tastes on silent comedy but also to parse them out as distinguishable from general notions of genteel or higher-class humor. Scholarly references to film comedy in the 1910s often present a two-way divide between slapstick and situation comedy.² That division reflects many producers' efforts to tout their material as 'full of situations' in opposition to 'low humor.' In contrast, I discerned that many non-slapstick shorts at the time of the feature transition, and the early feature-length efforts of shorts comedians, conflicted with the kinds of attractive leads, sympathetic humor and beneficial plot developments considered appealing to cross-class, female viewership. Many shorts fit within conventions of 'broad comedy,' even when they were not slapstick vehicles. Broad comedians from the stage also

struggled in features due to being considered too lowbrow and masculine for respectable female patrons. Past assumptions that shorts comedians such as Sidney Drew or stage comedians such as DeWolf Hopper accurately reflect ‘polite comedy’ in this period indirectly obscure how much successful feature comedies in this decade relied upon feminized forms of comic entertainment. They also provide a false impression that feature comedies did not perform well in the 1910s, as Drew and Hopper are often held up as variants of ‘less successful’ respectable humor. Similarly, the frequent flattening of non-slapstick efforts in the 1910s as ‘polite’ misses how more masculine middlebrow types of farce, as well as high-class humor, also struggled in features. Only particular approaches in comedy-dramas primarily appealing to women across classes, which I label ‘affirmative comedies,’ succeeded at the box office. That led to a major shift in character and plot types, as well as a dramatic increase in female-driven content—both in romantic comedies and other affirmative vehicles. Now, female audiences were certainly not the only factor affecting which feature comedies succeeded in this decade. Stylistic limitations also affected producers’ decision making, as they would attempt middlebrow, masculine farces with more regularity once storytelling strategies developed further in the 1920s. Pacing and structuring gags over longer lengths has been explored by other scholars,³ but the equally crucial component of feminine taste cultures was not treated as its own element worthy of study.

Female viewers continued to be relevant for the decision-making of feature comedy producers and performers in the 1920s. When Charles Chaplin released *The Kid* (1921), a review for *The Film Daily* asserted the story “is going to make the women love it.”⁴ That statement contrasted from female columnists’ earlier complaints about Chaplin’s vulgarity in 1910s shorts. Another review in *Picture-Play Magazine* claimed Chaplin “was a little doubtful about the success of the picture” and therefore “showed it before an audience of women in Salt Lake City just to try

it out.”⁵ Once Harold Lloyd followed Chaplin’s foray into features, articles stressed his sexual appeal to female fans—as they had for Douglas Fairbanks, Harrison Ford, Tom Moore, or Harold Lockwood in the 1910s. A 1924 article in *Motion Picture* commented, “A great deal of Harold Lloyd’s popularity has been due to a certain type of sex appeal.”⁶ Beyond these direct references to women’s tastes, reviews for early Chaplin and Lloyd features emphasized the same affirmative elements as feature comedies targeting women in the teens. Articles and publicity remarked upon the attractiveness or likability of these performers, such as *Motion Picture Magazine*’s claim that Lloyd’s star appeal derived from him being “a fine, charming young fellow”⁷ or *The Moving Picture World*’s rave that Chaplin’s tramp in *The Kid* was “intensely human.”⁸ The theme of sympathetic laughter also pervaded Chaplin and Lloyd’s coverage (sometimes Keaton’s but to a lesser extent). Reviews repeatedly pointed out that *The Kid* proved Chaplin to be a storyteller of ‘deep sympathies’⁹ while Lloyd argued in a publicity piece for his early feature comedy, *Grandma’s Boy* (1922) that “the humor still retains a clear idea of and a strong sympathy for the character.”¹⁰ Some reviewers even identified how these comedians’ features owed a debt to earlier character and plot types seen as popular with women in the 1910s. They mentioned Lloyd’s pilfering of Charles Ray’s “gawky country boy type”¹¹ as well as Chaplin’s “delicious humor and whimsical pathos” belonging in J.M. Barrie’s gentle, legitimate plays.¹²

While formulae established for female patrons during feature comedy’s early years remained pertinent to its later developments, one can trace an apparent industrial impetus to no longer foreground feminine influence by the 1920s. Though scholars believe that women still made up the majority of American moviegoers in the twenties, with estimates ranging from 60 to 83%,¹³ women’s presence seems to be taken for granted in the discourses surrounding classic feature comedies. Instead of mentioning matinees or the need to appeal to women, most reviews for

comedy features in the 1920s spoke of their audiences in less feminized terms. For instance, reviews claimed that Lloyd's *Grandma's Boy* (1922) would "win favor with any and every type of audience."¹⁴ Compellingly, some of this general audience rhetoric removed women from the 'driver's seat' in determining the family's movie-viewing. In contrast to the 1910s repeated motif of women dragging their partners and families along to their desired comedies, a review for Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921) proposed that it would delight "girls and their mothers" but only "after their fathers have sampled the picture for themselves and put up the money for a treat for the rest of the family."¹⁵ Correlating with these more gender-neutral framings, the casting of female leads in comedy features decreases from its over 60% peak in the late-1910s, to ranges from 40-53% between 1921 and 1925.¹⁶

This decline in the overt attention paid to female audiences accords with other scholars' analyses of the silent industry's shifting relationship to feminine taste cultures between the 1910s and 1920s. Scholars crucially identify a 'remasculinization' of the American movie business by the twenties in regards to creators as well as consumers.¹⁷ Shelley Stamp notes in her work on female audiences that the story that "female viewers and female subject matter were marginal to the box office" was one "Hollywood began telling itself in the 1920s."¹⁸ The industry's decreased interest in so aggressively courting female fans has been linked to its comfortable establishment with middle-class audiences by the 1920s. In addition, Karen Mahar and other scholars point to women gaining the right to vote in 1920 as a pivotal cultural turning point, as the notion that women "took a moralistic view of life disappeared at the same time as the threat of a woman's voting bloc."¹⁹ Historians outside of film studies also recount a more general 'backlash' against women's changing sexual and social mores after World War I.²⁰ That backlash resulted in women's influence no longer being touted as respectable, but rather, as driving a corrosive mass

culture. As discussed in Chapter 4, women's tastes already received some dismissive treatment when their influence over feature comedy peaked in the late teens, but scholars identify misogynist currents strongly pervading critics and academics' assessments of film culture by the 1920s. In her examination of changing taste cultures in twenties film reception, Lea Jacobs notes that "the intellectuals of the 1920s set an agenda that is still with us" that valorized the masculine in art and entertainment forms.²¹

As Shelley Stamp notes in her work on female director Lois Weber, many histories of women's involvement in early Hollywood offer narratives of 'loss' or 'erasure.'²² To some extent, my recounting of the industrial forces that shaped silent comedy fits within this narrative. However, female audiences' initial influence upon the development of feature comedy could be felt for decades after the transition. The importance of appealing leads, sympathetic humor and beneficial plot trajectories continues to be on display in the American film industry's crafting of longer comedies. This dynamic is observable when a stand-up comedian makes adjustments from their stage routines to narrative, feature comedies, such as in Amy Schumer's *Trainwreck* (2015).²³ While female leads lessened in the 1920s, their roughly 50% make up still offered more parity than they had received in comedy shorts before the rise of humorous features. Popular narratives and comic characters established in the 1910s to attract female viewers across classes linger in later decades. Take the continued legacy of the hoyden in films such as *Tammy and the Bachelor* (1957) or *Miss Congeniality* (2000), the shero in films like *Sister Act* (1992) or *Legally Blonde* (2001), or the madcap in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) or *Wild Child* (2008). Though the rhetoric stressing the importance of female audiences to silent comedy subsided overtime, the ramifications of the industry's initial attempts to target them continue to be felt.

While this dissertation limits itself to the early years of feature-length comedy between 1913 and 1920, it offers several approaches that could aid the scholarly exploration of women's relationship to the comedy genre in general. This study brings up several points about the perceived tastes of female audiences in this period that offer foundations for future research. By applying the term 'affirmative comedy' to comedy features with appealing stars, sympathetic humor and beneficial plot developments, we can explore female audiences' relationship to film comedy outside the category of romantic comedy. Studies of film humor have either focused on forms of comedian comedy that prioritize the performer or the gender politics of romantic comedy. Recognizing that gentle, narratively-driven humor extends past romantic comedy allows for feminine taste to connect to larger histories of film comedy without being 'ghettoized' as a unique subgenre. It can also help us substantially engage with female performers in comedy films, as many appeared in affirmative comedies that are not primarily romances in later decades, such as *A Date with Judy* (MGM, 1948) or *My Sister Eileen* (Columbia, 1942). We can then ask how this production of affirmative comedies impacts female performers' opportunities. Do we tend to see an increase in female leads during years or decades when more of these comedies are made?

This project also foregrounds the importance of comedy films' source material and how it can carry gendered connotations. Due to middle-class women's strong association with legitimate theater by the turn of the century, it could be fruitful for studies of women and comedy to continue investigating comedy producers' ongoing relationship with legitimate adaptations. Did a belief that women dominated legitimate audiences persist? Did different types of theatrical productions still garner distinct audience presumptions in later decades and did those presumptions fluctuate? Studies of film comedy have already usefully considered comedians and comedienues' prior involvement in stand up or vaudeville contexts.²⁴ Further studies of film comedies that adapted

legitimate productions, novels or magazine source material targeting female consumers could crucially complement those accounts. It also seems extremely likely that this emphasis on female patrons, particularly from legitimate theater, could play out in other national contexts. British film publicity in the late teens also touted ‘study the women!’ for determining production decisions.²⁵ Therefore, female patrons’ influence on 1910s comedies may be observable in silent film industries outside of the United States.

Finally, a major goal of this study was to reorient current methods for examining gender and comedic media. Publications by Maggie Hennefeld, Linda Mizejewski, Kathleen Rowe, Victoria Sturtevant and Kristen Anderson Wagner, among others, provide groundbreaking recognition of comedienues and insightfully engage with their politics of representation.²⁶ These studies analyze performers and their texts, but the fundamental ‘values’ within studies of film comedy that indirectly stigmatize culturally feminized tastes in humor remained unchallenged. Comedy studies often exhibits significant overlap with the interests of twentieth-century critics who praised modernist art as the admirable counter to a bourgeois, mass culture. In *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), Andreas Huyssen notes the repeated motif of critics positioning masculine modernism against a ‘feminine,’ bourgeois mass culture, with those of the Frankfurt School using language such as “mass culture, in her mirror, is always the most beautiful in the land.”²⁷ While historians have long understood this gendering of modernism versus mass culture, studies of comedy still often replicate this values system. Historians write that modernism valorizes self-consciousness, elaborates the medium itself, and rejects classical systems of representation.²⁸ We still see these strains in analyses of film comedy, even those of women in comedy, which express interest in comedy’s defiance of narrative norms and disruptiveness as opposed to classical Hollywood story structures or absorbing sentiment.²⁹

The lingering suspicion of narrative and sentiment limits analyses of women in comedy to forms of humor in which they were less likely to be used. This tendency often results in them occupying a chapter in general histories of comedy as opposed to being identified as integral causal actors.³⁰ Norms for feminine engagement with film humor can tell us much about how female performers receive opportunities as well as how vehicles for women's laughter are constructed. Though some may deem it 'less exciting' at first to discuss typical approaches to women's consumption of, and representation within, film comedy, women's humor can never be 'taken seriously' if we do not treat it as an object of cultural importance. We can then see the broader relevance of women's taste cultures to the comedy genre's transitions across media formats. Women need not simply be 'added' to comedy histories—major evolutions in comic entertainment forms cannot be explained without them.

¹ See Diana Anselmo's "Screen-Struck: The Invention of the Movie Girl Fan." *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 55, No. 1. Fall, 2015, 1-28, and Gaylyn Studlar's chapter on John Barrymore's relationship to female theatrical patrons in *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. (New York: Columbia University Press. 1996), 90-149.

² The most comprehensive overview of silent comedy, Kalton C. Lahue's *World of Laughter: Motion Picture Comedy Short, 1910-1930*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), primarily describes shorts as 'rough farces' or 'polite,' 'situation comedies' (find page numbers if possible. More recent studies also carry over a rough slapstick versus polite/situation comedy divide. Eileen Bowser describes the existence of 'polite' and 'gentle' forms of comedy in the early 1910s, mentioning John Bunny and Sidney Drew's domestic shorts, as offering refined alternatives to slapstick (179-180) (in *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Henry Jenkins's discussion of anarchic comedies classifies Sidney Drew as part of an opposing "shift toward a more 'respectable' style of comedy." (49) (in *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Frank Scheide also discusses slapstick, buffoonish humor versus polite comedians in "The Mark of the Ridiculous and Silent Celluloid: Some Trends in American and European Film Comedy from 1894 to 1929" in *A Companion to Film Comedy*. Eds. Andrew Horton and Joanna E. Rapf. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 29-33. Frank Neale and Stephen Neale also make the slapstick versus genteel, narratively-driven distinction in *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. (London: Routledge, 1990), 96-131. Also see Rob King. *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), 112. More recent accounts of women and comedy during the silent era also carry forward this distinction. See Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and the Silent Comedienne*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 22-24, or Kristen Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 2018), 41-42.

³ Rob King offers a thorough consideration of how Mack Sennett dealt with the challenge of feature-length construction in the particular case of *Tillie's Punctured Romance* in Chapter 3 of *The Fun Factory: Keystone and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley University of California Press, 2008). Frank Krutnik and Stephen Neale also provide a good summary of how slapstick comedians' adapted to the longer structural demands and respectability expectations of the feature film in 'case of slapstick.' (see *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. London: Routledge, 1990, 96-131). Robert Knopf also considers the structural demands of carrying over gags into the feature film's narrative context in *The Theater and Cinema of Buster Keaton*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 76-111.

⁴ "The Kid—A Knockout." *The Film Daily*. 1/16/1921, 5.

⁵ Agnes Smith. "The Screen in Review." *Picture-Play Magazine*. April, 1921, 62.

⁶ "The Sex Appeal of Harold Lloyd." *Motion Picture Magazine*. October, 1924, 57.

⁷ *Ibid*, 57.

⁸ "The Kid." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/22/1921, 390.

⁹ Agnes Smith. "The Screen in Review." *Picture-Play Magazine*. April, 1921, 62.

¹⁰ "Harold Lloyd, a Real Showman, Discusses Comical Comedy." *The Moving Picture World*. 11/25/1922, 316.

¹¹ E.E. Barrett. "Stellar Supports." *Pictures and the Picturegoer*. November, 1924, 15.

¹² Smith, 62.

¹³ See Shelley Stamp's chapter "Women and the Silent Screen." *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film, Vol. I*. Eds. Roy Grundmann, Cynthia Lucia, and Art Simon. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 2.

¹⁴ "Grandma's Boy." *Exhibitor's Herald*. 8/5/1922, 47.

¹⁵ "The Kid." *The Moving Picture World*. 1/22/1921, 391.

¹⁶ Numbers derived from AFI catalog listings for comedies, romantic comedies and comedy dramas released in the years 1921-1925. The highest year was 53.5% in 1921 while the lowest was 1923.

¹⁷ For the denigration to female consumers and creators, see Shelley Stamp's *Lois Weber in Early Hollywood*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 216-283, Karen Ward Mahar's *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 135-153, Hillary Hallett's *Go West, Young Woman!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 180-212, as well as Elizabeth Clarke's *War and the Sexes: Gender and American Film, 1898-1927*. PhD Dissertation. Wilfrid Laurier University, 2013. 201-241.

¹⁸ Stamp, *Lois Weber in Early Hollywood*, 283.

¹⁹ Karen Ward Mahar. *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*. 147.

²⁰ Other scholars note the decline in interest in women's respectability and cultural contributions along with efforts to place restraints on their public participation. See Lois Banner's *American Beauty: A Social History Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman*. (New York: Knopf, 1983), 279, Ann Douglas' *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. (New York: The Noonday Press, 1995), 246-253, Carolyn Kitch's *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 121-135. However, some historians have pointed out that women did not simply 'stop' their attempts for political gain in the twenties despite any cultural backlash or conflicts between women's groups with different agendas and approaches to feminism. See Nancy F. Cott's *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

²¹ Jacobs, 17.

²² Stamp, *Lois Weber in Early Hollywood*, 282.

²³ Reviews described Schumer's first feature film as "softening her standup turn into what is basically a regular romantic comedy." See Peter Bradshaw. "Trainwreck Review—Funny but Unthreatening Romcom." *The Guardian*. 8/13/2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/aug/13/trainwreck-review-judd-apatow-funny-but-unthreatening-alt-romcom>

²⁴ Throughout Rob King's *The Fun Factory*, he makes useful connections between Keystone's approaches and vaudeville/musical comedy stage contexts, and Robert Knopf provides a detailed consideration of Keaton's vaudeville to film relationship in *The Theater and Cinema of Buster Keaton*. Henry Jenkins also assesses the strong influence of vaudeville on early 1930s film comedy in *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

²⁵ "The Amazing Mr. Fellman." *The Bioscope*. January 21, 1915, 383.

²⁶ See Maggie Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and the Silent Comedienne*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), Linda Mizejewski's *Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), Mizejewski and Victoria Sturtevant's edited anthology *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), Kathleen Rowe's *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), Sturtevant's *A Great Big Girl Like Me: The Films of Marie Dressler*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), and Kristen Anderson Wagner's *Comic Venus: Women and Comedy in American Silent Film*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 2018).

²⁷ Andreas Huyssen. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 48.

²⁸ Ibid, 54.

²⁹ An interest in comedy's defiance of narrative norms in favor of the 'gag' or comedian can be found in Tom Gunning's "Crazy Machines in the Garden of Forking Paths: Mischief Gags and the Origins of American Film Comedy." In *Classical Hollywood Comedy*. Eds. Kristine Karnick and Henry Jenkins. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 87-105, Henry Jenkins' *What Made Pistachio Nuts*, Rob King's *The Fun Factory*, Hennefeld's *Specters of Slapstick and Silent Film Comediennes*, or Steve Seidman's *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981). The valorizing of disruption can also be seen in the popularity of the 'carnavalesque' in comedy studies. Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque concept is used to discuss comedy's disruptive nature in regards to many aspects, including class (see Christopher Beach's *Class, Language and American Film Comedy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), narrative structure (see Henry Jenkins' *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) or gender (famously outlined in Kathleen Rowe's *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995). In relation to 'sentiment,' we can see the idea of 'sentiment' looked down upon in multiple works. Bergson's notion of emotional distance is repeated in Andrew Horton's introduction for *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 9. Linda Mizejewski notes that Bergson's view of comedy would indirectly exclude women due to its unsympathetic aggression ("Introduction." *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017, 13). Other scholars express a distaste for sentiment or sympathetic humor in film comedy. Alan Dale criticizes Chaplin's 'pathos' in *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 20, Rob King expresses disappointment at Mabel Normand's adoption of a 'cute' persona for Mickey in *The Fun Factory*, 228-230, Peter Kramer tracks other scholars' disappointment with Keaton's more emotionally expressive, likable character in *The Saphead* ("The Making of a Comic Star: Buster Keaton and *The Saphead*." *Classical Hollywood Comedy*. Eds. Kristine Karnick and Henry Jenkins. New York: Routledge, 1995, 190-210,) while Kristen Anderson Wagner seems to present sympathetic humor as a limiting construct that female comediennes worked against in *Comic Venus*, 41-42, 187-190.

³⁰ For instance, Alan Dale's study of slapstick has one chapter on women entitled "Girl Heroes." (see *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 92-131). Rob King also has a single chapter devoted to female representation in Keystone's films, entitled "From 'Diving Venus' to 'Bathing Beauties': Reification and Feminine Spectacle, 1916-1917" (210-246). Henry Jenkins also has a single chapter devoted to women such as Charlotte Greenwood that partook in the anarchic sound comedies called "'Don't Become Too Intimate with That Terrible Woman!': Unruly Wives, Female Performance, and Gendered Laughter in Early Sound Comedy" (245-276).

Appendix I: Low Comedy Features (1914-1916)

Table A: Shorts Comedians in Features		
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Shorts Comedian/Costars
<i>Goodness, Gracious</i> (Feb, 1914)	Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph	Sidney Drew/Clara Kimball Young
<i>Love, Luck and Gasoline</i> (April, 1914)	Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph	John Bunny/Lillian Walker/Wally Van
<i>The Battle of Gettysgoat</i> (May, 1914)	General Film Company/Lubin	Romine Fielding
<i>A Florida Enchantment</i> (Aug, 1914)	Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph	Sidney Drew/Edith Storey
<i>Without Hope</i> (Dec, 1914)	Sawyer Inc./Flamingo Films	Marguerite Loveridge
<i>Playing Dead</i> (Sept., 1915)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Sidney Drew/Lucille McVey Drew
<i>A Submarine Pirate</i> (Nov., 1915)	Triangle/Keystone	Sydney Chaplin
<i>Charlie Chaplin's Burlesque on Carmen</i> (April, 1916)	VLSE/Essanay	Charles Chaplin
<i>Essanay-Chaplin Revue of 1916</i> (October, 1916)	VLSE/Essanay	Charles Chaplin

Table B: Broad Comedians in Stage Adaptations		
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Comedian/Broad Farce creator
<i>Mrs. Black is Back</i> (Dec 1914)	Paramount/Famous Players	May Irwin
<i>Tillie's Punctured Romance</i> (Dec, 1914)	Alco/Keystone	Marie Dressler
<i>Old Dutch</i> (March, 1915)	World/Shubert	Lew Fields
<i>A Bunch of Keys</i> (Aug, 1915)	VLSE/Essanay	No star/Charles Hoyt
<i>Poor Schmaltz</i> (Aug, 1915)	Paramount/Famous Players	Sam Bernard
<i>Judy Forgot</i> (Aug, 1915)	Universal/Broadway Universal	Marie Cahill
<i>Tillie's Tomato Surprise</i> (Sept, 1915)	VLSE/Lubin	Marie Dressler
<i>Mary's Lamb</i> (Oct, 1915)	Pathé//Gold Rooster	Richard Carle
<i>A Black Sheep</i> (Oct, 1915)	VLSE/Selig	Otis Harlan
<i>A Night Out</i> (Vitagraph, Jan, 1916)	VLSE/Vitagraph	May Robson
<i>Energetic Eva</i> (July, 1916)	Eva Tanguay Films	Eva Tanguay

Table C: Broad Comedians Placed in Different Stage Productions or Original Scenarios		
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Comedian/Broad Farce creator
<i>The Win(k)some Widow</i> (October 1914)	Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph	Cissy Fitzgerald
<i>How Cissy Made Good</i> (January 1915)	Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph	Cissy Fitzgerald
<i>Crooky</i> (July, 1915)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Frank Daniels
<i>Midnight at Maxim's</i> (July 1915)	General Film Co./Kalem	Frank Wunderlee
<i>The Ring Tailed Rhinoceros</i> (July, 1915)	VLSE/Lubin	Raymond Hitchcock
<i>The Fixer</i> (September, 1915)	George Kleine Dist./Kleine Prod.	George Bickel and Harry Watson Jr.
<i>Keep Moving</i> (November, 1915)	George Kleine Dist./Kleine Prod.	George Bickel and Harry Watson Jr.
<i>The Politicians</i> (November, 1915)	George Kleine Dist./Kleine Prod.	George Bickel and Harry Watson Jr.
<i>My Valet</i> (December, 1915)	Triangle/Keystone	Raymond Hitchcock
<i>What Happened to Father</i> (December, 1915)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Frank Daniels
<i>From Broadway to a Throne</i> (April, 1916)	Universal/Red Feather	Carter DeHaven
<i>Sunshine Dad</i> (April, 1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	DeWolf Hopper
<i>A Million for Mary</i> (August, 1916),	Mutual/American	Clarence Kolb and Max Dill
<i>Three Pals</i> (September, 1916)	Mutual/American	Clarence Kolb and Max Dill
<i>The Bluff</i> (October, 1916).	Mutual/American	Clarence Kolb and Max Dill

Appendix II- Ensemble Farces and Highbrow Comedies

Ensemble Farces		
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Author/Original Production Date
<i>Uncle Bill</i> (July, 1914)	Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph	Marguerite Bertsch (orig. scen)
<i>My Friend from India</i> (Aug, 1914)	General Film Co./Edison	Henry A. DuSouchet/1896
<i>The Man from Mexico</i> (Nov, 1914)	Paramount/Famous Players	Henry A. DuSouchet/1897
<i>Officer 666</i> (Dec, 1914)	George Kleine Attractions/George Kleine	Augustin MacHugh/1912
<i>The Man Behind the Door</i> (Dec, 1914)	Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph	Archibald Claverling Gunter (book)/1907
<i>COD</i> (Dec, 1914)	Broadway Star Features/ Vitagraph	Frederic Chapin/1912
<i>The Million</i> (Dec, 1914)	Paramount/Lasky	Georges Berr and Marcel Guillemaud/1910
<i>After Five</i> (Jan, 1915)	Paramount/Lasky	William and Cecil DeMille/1913
<i>Stop, Thief!</i> (Feb, 1915)	George Kleine Attractions/George Kleine	Carlyle Moore/1912
<i>Are You a Mason?</i> (March, 1915)	Paramount/Famous Players	Leo Ditrichstein/1901
<i>What Happened to Jones</i> (March 1915)	World/Brady	George Broadhurst/1897
<i>The Commuters</i> (April, 1915)	George Kleine Attractions/George Kleine	James Forbes/1910
<i>The Dictator</i> (June, 1915)	Paramount/Famous Players	Richard Harding Davis/1904
<i>Little Miss Brown</i> (June, 1915)	World/Brady	Philip Bartholomae/1912
<i>The Galloper</i> (Sept, 1915)	Pathé//Gold Rooster	Richard Harding Davis/1906
<i>The Tale of the Night Before</i> (Sept, 1915)	National Film Corp.	A.W. Coldewey (orig. scen)
<i>The Morning After</i> (Oct., 1915)	Knickerbocker Features/Balboa	Unknown/Stars Bill Parsons
<i>Over Night</i> (Dec, 1915)	World/Brady	Philip Bartholomae/1911
<i>Excuse Me</i> (Dec, 1915)	Pathé//Gold Rooster	Rupert Hughes/1911
<i>The Red Widow*</i> (May 1916)	Paramount/Famous Players	Channing Pollock and Rennold Wolf/1911
<i>The Smugglers</i> (July, 1916)	Paramount/Famous Players	Charles F. Horne (orig. scen)

<i>Father and Son</i> (Aug, 1916)	Mutual Masterpieces/Mutual	Uncredited/Starring stage performer Henry E. Dixey

Highbrow Comedies		
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Author/Stage Production Date
<i>The Education of Mr. Pipp</i> (Nov, 1914)	Alco/All Star Film Co.	Augustus Thomas/1905
<i>The School for Scandal</i> (Dec, 1914)	General Film Co./Kalem	Richard B. Sheridan/1777
<i>Snobs</i> (April, 1915)	Paramount/Lasky	George Bronson Howard/1911
<i>Who's Who in Society</i> (May, 1915)	George Kleine Attractions/George Kleine Prod.	Possibly George Fitzmaurice (orig. scen)
<i>The Earl of Pawtucket</i> (July, 1915)	Broadway Universal Features/Universal	Augustus Thomas/1903
<i>Father and the Boys</i> (Dec, 1915)	Broadway Universal Features/Universal	George Ade/1908
<i>Jane</i> (Dec, 1915)	Paramount/Morosco	W.H. Lestocq/1890
<i>Divorcons</i> (Dec, 1915)	General Film Co./Biograph	Victorien Sardou/1880
<i>Green Stockings</i> (Jan, 1916)	VLSE/Vitagraph	A.E.W. Mason/1909
<i>The Pretenders</i> (Aug, 1916)	Metro/Rolfe	Channing Pollock and George D Baker (possibly orig. scenario)
<i>Madame La Presidente</i> (Feb, 1916)	Paramount/Morosco	Maurice Hennequin, Pierre Veber and Jose G. Levy/1898
<i>The Upstart</i> (Feb, 1916)	Metro/Rolfe	Thomas Barry/1910
<i>The Purple Lady</i> (June, 1916)	Metro/Rolfe	Sydney Rosenfeld/1899

*Almost all of these films listed as legitimate farce derive from plays or from original scenarios that closely mimic the structure of legitimate farce. However, I did include the musical *The Red Widow*, as critics discussed the musical as 'unusually well plotted' and as having the structure of a legitimate farce. The husband's series of misunderstandings, and John Barrymore playing the role, speak to its similarity to legitimate farces such as *The Man from Mexico*.

Appendix III: Presence of Affirmative Traits in Feature-Length Comedies, 1917-1919

Key: V= Has affirmative trait in column

X=Does not have affirmative trait in column

*=Films that seem more like true comedy dramas based on reviews, with more touches of humor than straight comedy

1917 (153 comedy drama/comedy features)

Film Title/Distribution Company	Stars in order of billing	Attractive Leads	Sympathetic Humor	Beneficial Plotline (change in character, relationship or circumstance)
<i>A Daughter of the Poor</i> (Triangle)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>A Game of Wits</i> (Mutual)	Gail Kane	V	V	V
<i>A Girl's Folly</i> (World)	June Elvidge	V	V	X
<i>A Kiss for Susie</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V
<i>A Modern Cinderella</i> (Fox)	June Caprice	V	V	V
<i>A Modern Musketeer</i> (Artcraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>A Phantom Husband</i> (Triangle)	Ruth Stonehouse	V	V	V
<i>A School for Husbands</i> (Paramount)	Fannie Ward	V	V	V
<i>A Self-Made Widow</i> (World)	Alice Brady	V	V	V
<i>A Stormy Knight</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>Aladdin's Other Lamp</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	V
<i>All for a Husband</i> (Fox)	Virginia Pearson	V	V	V
<i>Alma, Where Do You Live?</i> (States Rights/Newfields Producing Comp.)	Ruth MacTammany	V	X	X
<i>American—That's All</i> (Triangle)	Jack Devereaux	V	V	V
<i>An Amateur Orphan</i> (Pathé)	Gladys Leslie	V	V	V
<i>An American Widow</i> (Metro)	Ethel Barrymore	X	V	V
<i>An Even Break</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Anything Once</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>Arms and the Girl</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>At First Sight</i> (Paramount)	Mae Murray	V	V	V

<i>Bab the Fixer</i> (Mutual)	Jackie Saunders	V	V	V
<i>Bab's Burglar</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Bab's Diary</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Bab's Matinee Idol</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	X
<i>Baby Mine</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>Beloved Rogues</i> (Mutual)	Clarence Kolb and Max Dill	X	X	V
<i>Betsy's Burglar</i> (Triangle)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>Betty Be Good</i> (Mutual)	Jackie Saunders	V	V	V
<i>Billy and the Big Stick</i> (Conquest)	Raymond McKee	V	X	V
<i>Bringing Home Father</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	X	X
<i>Broadway Arizona</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Broadway Jones</i> (Artcraft)	George M. Cohan	V	V	V
<i>Captain Kiddo</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>Charity Castle</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>Cheerful Givers</i> (Triangle)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>Chicken Casey</i> (Triangle)	Dorothy Dalton	V	V	V
<i>Chris and His Wonderful Lamp</i> (Conquest)	Thomas Carnahan	V	V	X
<i>Clover's Rebellion</i> (VLSE)	Anita Stewart	V	V	V
<i>Down to Earth</i> (Artcraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Durand of the Badlands</i> (Fox)	Dustin Farnum	V	X	V
<i>Efficiency Edgar's Courtship</i> (KESE)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>Fighting for Love</i> (Universal)	Ruth Stonehouse	V	V	V
<i>Filling His Own Shoes</i> (KESE)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Flirting with Death</i> (Universal)	Brownie Vernon	V	V	V
<i>Fools for Luck</i> (Kleine)	Taylor Holmes	X	X	X
<i>Framing Framers</i> (Triangle)	Charles Gunn	V	V	V
<i>Gift O' Gab</i> (Kleine)	Jack Gardner	V	V	V
<i>Glory</i> (States Rights, M.L.B. Film Co.)	Clarence Kolb and Max Dill	X	V	V
<i>Happiness</i> (Triangle)	Enid Bennett	V	V	V

<i>Hashimura Togo</i> (Paramount)	Sessue Hayakawa	V	V	V
<i>Her Official Fathers</i> (Triangle)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>High Speed</i> (Universal)	Jack Mulhall	V	V	V
<i>His Father's Son</i> (Metro)	Lionel Barrymore	V	V	V
<i>In Again—Out Again</i> (Arctcraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>In Bad</i> (Mutual)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Indiscreet Corinne</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Kitty MacKay</i> (VLSE)	Lillian Walker	V	V	V
<i>Lady Barnacle</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	V
<i>Like Wildfire</i> (Universal)	Neva Gerber	V	V	V
<i>Little Miss Optimist</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V
<i>Love Aflame</i> (Universal)	Ruth Stonehouse	V	V	V
<i>Madame Bo-Peep</i> (Triangle)	Seena Owen	V	V	V
<i>Madame Sherry</i> (M.M. Hoffman, Inc)	Gertrude McCoy	V	V	V
<i>Madcap Madge</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Miss Deception</i> (Art Dramas)	Jean Sothern	V	V	V
<i>Miss Jackie of the Army</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>Miss Robinson Crusoe</i> (Metro)	Emmy Wehlen	V	V	V
<i>Mountain Dew</i> (Triangle)	Margery Wilson	V	V	V
<i>Mr. Dolan of New York</i> (Universal)	Jack Mulhall	V	V	V
<i>Nearly Married</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>One Touch of Nature</i> (KESE)	John McGraw	V	V	V
<i>Our Little Wife</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>Pants</i> (KESE)	Mary McAlister	V	V	V
<i>Patsy</i> (Fox)	June Caprice	V	V	V
<i>Persuasive Peggy</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>Please Help Emily</i> (Mutual)	Ann Murdock	V	V	V
<i>Polly Ann</i> (Triangle)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>Polly Redhead</i> (Universal)	Ella Hall	V	V	V
<i>Pots-and-Pans Peggy</i> (Pathé)	Gladys Hulette	V	V	V

<i>Putting the Bee in Herbert</i> (KESE)	Harry Benham	V	V	V
<i>Reaching for the Moon</i> (Artcraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	X	V
<i>Real Folks</i> (Triangle)	Jack Mulhall	V	V	V
<i>Red, White and Blue Blood</i> (Metro)	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>Richard the Brazen</i> (VLSE)	Harry T. Morey	V	V	V
<i>Royal Romance</i> (Fox)	Virginia Pearson	V	V	V
<i>Sadie Goes to Heaven</i> (Kleine)	Mary McAllister	V	V	X
<i>Sally in a Hurry</i> (VLSE)	Lillian Walker	V	V	V
<i>Scandal</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>Skinner's Dress Suit</i> (KESE)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Snap Judgment</i> (Mutual)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Some Boy!</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>Sunny Jane</i> (Mutual)	Jackie Saunders	V	V	V
<i>Sunshine and Gold</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>The Amazons</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>The Antics of Ann</i> (Paramount)	Ann Pennington	V	V	V
<i>The Book Agent</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>The Broadway Sport</i> (Fox)	Stuart Holmes	X	X	X
<i>The Calendar Girl</i> (Mutual)	Juliette Day	V	V	X
<i>The Car of Chance</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>The Cinderella Man</i> (Goldwyn)	Mae Marsh	V	V	V
<i>The Clean-Up</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>The Clever Mrs. Carfax</i> (Paramount)	Julian Eltinge	V	V	V
<i>The Clock</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>The Clodhopper</i> (Triangle)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>The Countess Charming</i> (Paramount)	Julian Eltinge	V	V	V
<i>The Customary Two Weeks</i> (Conquest)	Craig Ward	V	V	V
<i>The Divorce Game</i> (World)	Alice Brady	V	X	V
<i>The Divorcee</i> (VLSE)	Mary Anderson	V	V	V
<i>The Duchess of Doubt</i> (Metro)	Emmy Wehlen	V	V	V
<i>The Fair Barbarian</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V

<i>The Fibbers</i> (Kleine)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>The Frame Up</i> (Mutual)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>The Gentle Intruder</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>The Ghost House</i> (Paramount)	Louise Huff	V	V	V
<i>The Gilded Youth</i> (Mutual)	Richard Bennett	V	V	V
<i>The Girl Glory</i> (Triangle)	Enid Bennett	V	V	V
<i>The Girl Who Couldn't Grow Up</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>The Golden Idiot</i> (KESE)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>The Hater of Men</i> (Triangle)	Bessie Barriscale	V	V	V
<i>The Haunted Pajamas</i> (Metro)	Harold Lockwood	V	V	V
<i>The Hero of the Hour</i> (Universal)	Jack Mulhall	V	V	V
<i>The Honeymoon</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>The Iced Bullet</i> (Triangle)	William Desmond	V	X	V
<i>The Kill-Joy</i> (Kleine)	Mary McAllister	V	V	V
<i>The Lady of the Photograph</i> (Perfection Pictures)	Raymond McKee	X	X	V
<i>The Little Terror</i> (Universal)	Violet Mersereau	V	V	V
<i>The Magnificent Meddler</i> (VLSE)	Antonio Moreno	V	V	V
<i>The Man Who Made Good</i> (Triangle) *	Jack Devereaux	V	V	V
<i>The Man Who Took a Chance</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>The Man Hater</i> (Triangle)	Winifred Allyn	V	V	V
<i>The Marriage Speculation</i> (VLSE)	Mildred Manning	V	V	V
<i>The Mate of Sally Ann</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>The Mystery of Number 47</i> (KESE)	Ralph Herz	X	X	X
<i>The Mysterious Miss Terry</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>The Pinch Hitter</i> (Triangle)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>The Poor Little Rich Girl</i> (Artcraft) *	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>The Princess of Park Row</i> (VLSE)	Mildred Manning	V	V	V
<i>The Runaway</i> (Mutual)	Julia Sanderson	V	V	V
<i>The Sixteenth Wife</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	X	V
<i>The Small Town Guy</i> (Perfection Pictures)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>The Son of His Father</i> (Paramount)*	Charles Ray	V	V	V

<i>The Sudden Gentleman</i> (Triangle)	William Desmond	V	V	V
<i>The Square Deceiver</i> (Metro)	Harold Lockwood	V	V	V
<i>The Upper Crust</i> (Mutual)	Gail Kane	V	V	V
<i>The Varmint</i> (Paramount)	Jack Pickford	V	V	V
<i>The Wildcat</i> (Mutual)	Jackie Saunders	V	V	V
<i>The Yankee Way</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>This is the Life</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	X	X
<i>Tillie Wakes Up</i> (World)	Marie Dressler	X	X	V
<i>Tom Sawyer</i> (Paramount)	Jack Pickford	V	V	X
<i>Two-Bit Seats</i> (Kleine)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>Two Little Imps</i> (Fox)	Jane and Katherine Lee	V	V	V
<i>Wild and Woolly</i> (Artcraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Wild Winship's Widow</i> (Triangle)	Dorothy Dalton	V	V	V

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Film Title/Distribution Company	Stars in order of billing	Attractive Leads	Sympathetic Humor	Beneficial Plotline (change in character, relationship or circumstance)
<i>A Bit of Jade</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>A Broadway Scandal</i> (Universal)*	Carmel Myers	V	V	V
<i>A Burglar for the Night</i> (W.W. Hodkinson Corp.)	J. Warren Kerrigan	V	V	V
<i>A Camouflage Kiss</i> (Fox)	June Caprice	V	V	V
<i>A Diplomatic Mission</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Earle Williams	V	V	V
<i>A Hoosier Romance</i> (Mutual)	Colleen Moore	V	V	X
<i>A Lady's Name</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>A Little Sister of Everybody</i> (Pathé)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>A Nine O'Clock Town</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>A Pair of Cupids</i> (Metro)	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>A Pair of Silk Stockings</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>A Pair of Sixes</i> (Kleine)	Taylor Holmes	X	X	X

<i>A Perfect 36</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	X	X
<i>A Perfect Lady</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>A Petticoat Pilot</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V
<i>A Rich Man's Darling</i> (Universal)	Louise Lovely	V	V	V
<i>A Society Sensation</i> (Universal)	Carmel Meyers	V	V	V
<i>A Square Deal</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>A Successful Adventure</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	V	V
<i>All Night</i> (Universal)	Carmel Meyers	V	V	V
<i>All the World to Nothing</i> (Pathé)*	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley</i> (Artcraft)	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>American Buds</i> (Fox)	Katherine and Jane Lee	V	V	V
<i>An American Live Wire</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Earle Williams	V	V	V
<i>An Honest Man</i> (Triangle)	William Desmond	V	V	V
<i>Angel Child</i> (W.W. Hodkinson)	Kathleen Clifford	V	V	V
<i>Annexing Bill</i> (Pathé)	Gladys Hulette	V	V	V
<i>Ann's Finish</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>Back to the Woods</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>Battling Jane</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>Beans</i> (Universal)	Edith Roberts	V	V	V
<i>Beauty and the Rogue</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>Believe Me, Xantippe</i> (Paramount)	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>Betty Takes a Hand</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Bound in Morocco</i> (Paramount)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Branding Broadway</i> (Artcraft)	William S. Hart	X	V	V
<i>Brass Check</i> (Metro)	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>Brave and Bold</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>By Hook or Crook</i> (World)	Carlyle Blackwell	V	V	V
<i>By Proxy</i> (Triangle)	Roy Stewart	V	V	V
<i>Caught in the Act</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>Come on In</i> (Paramount)	Shirley Mason/Ernest Truex	X	X	V

<i>Cupid by Proxy</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>Cyclone Higgins, D.D.</i> (Metro) *	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>Danger- Go Slow</i> (Universal)	Mae Murray	V	V	V
<i>Denny from Ireland</i> (States Rights/W. H. Clifford)	Shorty Hamilton	X	V	V
<i>Dodging a Million</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>Dolly Does Her Bit</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>Doing Their Bit</i> (Fox)	Katherine and Jane Lee	V	V	V
<i>Dolly's Vacation</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>Eight Bells</i> (World)	Andrew Byrne, James Byrne, and John F. Byrne	X	X	X
<i>Eve's Daughter</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	X
<i>Everybody's Girl</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Alice Joyce	V	V	V
<i>Fair Enough</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>Fan Fan</i> (Fox)	Virginia Lee Corbin	V	V	V
<i>Fast Company</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>Five Thousand an Hour</i> (Metro)	Hale Hamilton	V	V	V
<i>Friend Husband</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>For Husbands Only</i> (Universal)	Mildred Harris	V	V	V
<i>From Two to Six</i> (Triangle)	Winifred Allen	V	V	V
<i>Fuss and Feathers</i> (Paramount)	Enid Bennett	V	V	V
<i>Go West, Young Man</i> (Goldwyn)	Tom Moore	V	V	V
<i>Good-bye, Bill</i> (Paramount)	Shirley Mason/Ernest Truex	V	V	V
<i>Good Night, Paul</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>He Comes Up Smiling</i> (Artcraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Headin' South</i> (Artcraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Heiress for a Day</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Her Country First</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V
<i>Hidden Fires</i> (Goldwyn)	Mae Marsh	V	V	V
<i>His Bonded Wife</i> (Metro)	Emmy Wehlen	V	V	V
<i>His Majesty, Bunker Bean</i> (Paramount)	Jack Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Hit the Trail Halliday</i> (Paramount)	George M. Cohan	V	V	V
<i>Hitting the High Spots</i> (Metro)	Bert Lytell	V	V	V
<i>Hobbs in a Hurry</i> (Pathé)	William Russell	V	V	V

<i>How Could You, Caroline?</i> (Pathé)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>How Could You, Jean?</i> (Paramount)	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Huck and Tom</i> (Paramount)	Jack Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Humdrum Brown</i> (Parlata Plays)	Henry B. Walthall	V	V	V
<i>I'll Say So</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>Impossible Susan</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>In Pursuit of Polly</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>Jack Spurlock, Prodigal</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>Jilted Janet</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>Joan of Plattsburg</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>Johanna Enlists</i> (Artcraft)	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Journey's End</i> (World)	Ethel Clayton	V	V	V
<i>Just for Tonight</i> (Goldwyn)	Tom Moore	V	V	V
<i>Just Sylvia</i> (World)	Barbara Castleton	V	V	V
<i>Kidder and Ko.</i> (Pathé)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Lawless Love</i> (Fox)	Jewel Carmen	V	V	V
<i>Leap to Fame</i> (World)	Carlyle Blackwell	V	V	V
<i>Lend Me Your Name</i> (Metro)	Harold Lockwood	V	V	V
<i>Less Than Kin</i> (Paramount) *	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>Let's Get a Divorce</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>Limousine Life</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Little Miss Grown-Up</i> (General)	Gloria Joy	V	V	X
<i>Little Miss Hoover</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Little Miss No-Account</i> (Vitagraph)	Gladys Leslie	V	V	V
<i>Little Red Decides</i> (Triangle)	Barbara Connolly	V	V	V
<i>Love Watches</i> (Vitagraph)	Corinne Griffith	V	V	V
<i>Madame Spy</i> (Universal)	Jack Mulhall	V	V	V
<i>Mickey</i> (Western Import)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>Milady O' the Beanstalk</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>Marriages are Made</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	X	V
<i>Mile-A-Minute Kendall</i> (Paramount)	Jack Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Mirandy Smiles</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V

<i>Miss Mischief Maker</i> (General)	Gloria Joy	V	V	V
<i>Mlle. Paulette</i> (Triangle)	Claire Anderson	V	V	V
<i>Molly Go Get 'Em</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>Money isn't Everything</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>More Trouble</i> (Paramount)	Frank Keenan	X	X	X
<i>Mr Fix-It</i> (Artercraft)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Mrs. Leffingwell's Boots</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	X
<i>Mrs. Slacker</i> (Pathé)	Gladys Hulette	V	V	V
<i>My Cousin</i> (Paramount)	Enrico Caruso	X	V	V
<i>My Unmarried Wife</i> (Universal)	Carmel Myers	V	V	V
<i>My Wife</i> (Mutual)	Ann Murdock	V	V	V
<i>Mystic Faces</i> (Triangle)	Jack Abbe	V	V	V
<i>Nancy Comes Home</i> (Triangle)	Myrtle Lind	V	V	V
<i>Naughty, Naughty</i> (Paramount)	Enid Bennett	V	V	V
<i>Neighbors</i> (World)	Madge Evans	V	V	V
<i>Oh, Johnny!</i> (Goldwyn)	Louis Bennison	V	V	V
<i>On the Jump</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>On the Quiet</i> (Paramount)	John Barrymore	X	X	V
<i>One Thousand Dollars</i> (Vitagraph)	Edward Earle	V	V	V
<i>Opportunity</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	V
<i>Our Mrs. McChesney</i> (Metro)	Ethel Barrymore	X	V	V
<i>Pay-Day</i> (Metro)	Sidney Drew and Lucille McVey	X	X	X
<i>Peck's Bad Girl</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>Peg of the Pirates</i> (Fox)*	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>Petticoats and Politics</i> (Plaza Pictures)	Anita King	V	V	V
<i>Playing the Game</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>Powers That Prey</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>Ruggles of Red Gap</i> (Kleine)	Taylor Holmes	X	V	V
<i>Sauce for the Goose</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>Say, Young Fellow!</i> (Paramount)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Set Free</i> (Universal)	Edith Roberts	V	V	V
<i>Social Briars</i> (Mutual)*	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V

<i>Social Quicksands</i> (Metro)	Beverly Bayne/Francis X. Bushman	V	V	V
<i>String Beans</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>Sunshine Nan</i> (Paramount)	Ann Pennington	V	V	V
<i>Swat the Spy</i> (Fox)	Katherine and Jane Lee	V	X	X
<i>Sylvia on a Spree</i> (Metro)	Emmy Wehlen	V	V	V
<i>T'Other Charmer</i> (World)	Louise Huff	V	V	V
<i>Tell it to the Marines</i> (Fox)	Katherine and Jane Lee	V	X	X
<i>The Accidental Honeymoon</i> (States Rights/High Art Productions Inc.)	Elaine Hammerstein	V	V	V
<i>The Beloved Blackmailer</i> (World)	Carlyle Blackwell	V	V	V
<i>The Beloved Imposter</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Gladys Leslie	V	V	V
<i>The Blind Adventure</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Edward Earle	V	V	V
<i>The Brazen Beauty</i> (Universal)	Priscilla Dean	V	V	V
<i>The Changing Woman</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Hedda Nova	V	V	X
<i>The Danger Game</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>The Demon</i> (Metro)	Edith Storey	V	V	V
<i>The Dream Lady</i> (Universal)	Carmel Meyers	V	V	V
<i>The Embarrassment of Riches</i> (W.W. Hodkinson Corp.)	Lillian Walker	V	V	V
<i>The Eyes of Julia Deep</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>The Fair Pretender</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>The Fighting Grin</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>The Floor Below</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>The Flames of Chance</i> (Triangle)	Margery Wilson	V	V	V
<i>The Ghost of the Rancho</i> (Pathé)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>The Girl from Bohemia</i> (Pathé) *	Irene Castle	V	V	V
<i>The Goat</i> (Artcraft)	Fred Stone	X	X	V
<i>The Golden Fleece</i> (Triangle)	Joe Bennett	X	X	V
<i>The Golden Wall</i> (World)	Carlyle Blackwell	V	V	V
<i>The Great Adventure</i> (Pathé)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>The Gulf Between</i> (Technicolor Motion Picture Corp.)	Grace Darmond	V	V	V
<i>The Gypsy Trail</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V

<i>The Heart of Romance</i> (Fox)	June Caprice	V	V	V
<i>The Hired Man</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>The Hope Chest</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>The Hopper</i> (Triangle)	Walt Whitman	X	V	V
<i>The Imposter</i> (Mutual)	Ann Murdock	V	V	V
<i>The Kid is Clever</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	X
<i>The Kingdom of Youth</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>The Lesson</i> (Select)*	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>The Little Runaway</i> (Vitagraph)	Gladys Leslie	V	V	V
<i>The Love Swindle</i> (Universal)	Edith Roberts	V	V	V
<i>The Make-Believe Wife</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>The Man Hunt</i> (World)	Ethel Clayton	V	V	V
<i>The Mantle of Charity</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>The Marionettes</i> (Select)	Clara Kimball Young	V	V	V
<i>The Mask</i> (Triangle)	Claire Anderson	V	X	X
<i>The Mating</i> (Vitagraph)	Gladys Leslie	V	V	V
<i>The Midnight Burglar</i> (General)	Gloria Joy	V	V	V
<i>The Midnight Trail</i> (Mutual)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>The Million Dollar Dollies</i> (Metro)	Jenny and Rosie Dolly	V	V	V
<i>The Mysterious Client</i> (Pathé)*	Irene Castle	V	X	V
<i>The Poor Rich Man</i> (Metro)	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>The Pretender</i> (Triangle)	William Desmond	V	V	V
<i>The Primitive Woman</i> (Mutual)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>The Red-Haired Cupid</i> (Triangle)	Roy Stewart	V	V	V
<i>The Richest Girl</i> (Mutual)	Ann Murdock	V	V	V
<i>The Rough Lover</i> (Universal)	Franklyn Farnum	V	V	V
<i>The Soap Girl</i> (Vitagraph)	Gladys Leslie	V	V	V
<i>The Studio Girl</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>The Turn of a Card</i> (W.W. Hodkinson Corp.)	J. Warren Kerrigan	V	V	V
<i>The Vamp</i> (Paramount)	Enid Bennett	V	V	V
<i>The Venus Model</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>The Wasp</i> (World)	Kitty Gordon	V	V	V

<i>The Way of a Man with a Maid</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>The Widow's Might</i> (Paramount)	Julian Eltinge	V	V	V
<i>The Wild Strain</i> (Vitagraph)	Nell Shipman	V	V	V
<i>Thirty a Week</i> (Goldwyn)	Tom Moore	V	V	V
<i>Three X Gordon</i> (W.W. Hodkinson Corp.)	J. Warren Kerrigan	V	V	V
<i>Together</i> (Universal)	Violet Mersereau	V	V	V
<i>Too Fat to Fight</i> (Goldwyn)	Frank McIntyre	X	V	V
<i>Too Many Millions</i> (Paramount)	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>Trouble Makers</i> (Fox)*	Katherine and Jane Lee	V	X	V
<i>Twenty-One</i> (Pathé)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Two-Gun Betty</i> (Pathé)	Bessie Barriscale	V	V	V
<i>Unclaimed Goods</i> (Paramount) *	Vivian Martin	V	X	V
<i>Unexpected Places</i> (Metro)	Bert Lytell	V	V	V
<i>Up the Road with Sallie</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>Under Suspicion</i> (Metro)	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i> (Artcraft)	Elsie Ferguson	V	V	V
<i>Uneasy Money</i> (Kleine)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>Up Romance Road</i> (Mutual)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Waifs</i> (Pathé)	Gladys Hulette	V	V	V
<i>We Can't Have Everything</i> (Paramount)*	Kathlyn Williams	V	X	V
<i>We Should Worry</i> (Fox)	Katherine and Jane Lee	V	X	X
<i>When Do We Eat?</i> (Paramount)	Enid Bennett	V	V	V
<i>Which Woman?</i> (Universal)	Ella Hall	V	V	V
<i>Wild Women</i> (Universal)	Harry Carey	V	X	X
<i>With Neatness and Dispatch</i> (Metro)	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>Winning Grandma</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>Winning of Beatrice</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	V	V
<i>Wives and Other Wives</i> (Mutual)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	X
<i>Why I Would Not Marry</i> (Fox)	Lucy Fox	V	V	V
<i>Women's Weapons</i> (Paramount)	Ethel Clayton	V	V	V

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Film Title/Distribution Company	Stars in order of billing	Attractive Leads	Sympathetic Humor	Beneficial Plotline (change in character, relationship or circumstance)
<i>23 ½ Hours' Leave</i>	Douglas MacLean	V	V	V
<i>A Bachelor's Wife</i> (Pathé)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>A Broadway Saint</i> (World)	Montagu Love	X	V	V
<i>A Damsel in Distress</i> (Pathé)	June Caprice	V	V	V
<i>A Favor to a Friend</i> (Metro)	Emmy Wehlen	V	V	V
<i>A Fugitive from Matrimony</i> (Pathé)	H.B. Warner	V	V	V
<i>A Man and His Money</i> (Goldwyn)	Tom Moore	V	V	V
<i>A Misfit Earl</i> (Goldwyn)	Louis Bennison	V	V	V
<i>A Regular Fellow</i> (Triangle)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>A Regular Girl</i> (Select)	Elsie Janis	V	V	V
<i>A Sporting Chance</i> (Paramount)	Ethel Clayton	V	V	V
<i>A Sporting Chance</i> (Pathé)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>A Stitch in Time</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Gladys Leslie	V	V	V
<i>A Taste of Life</i> (Universal)	Edith Roberts	V	V	X
<i>A Temperamental Wife</i> (First National)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>A Very Good Young Man</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>A Virtuous Vamp</i> (First National)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>A Yankee Princess</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>All of a Sudden Norma</i> (Robertson-Cole)	Bessie Barriscale	V	V	V
<i>After His Own Heart</i> (Metro)	Hale Hamilton	X	X	V
<i>All Wrong</i> (Pathé)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Almost a Husband</i> (Goldwyn)	Will Rogers	X	V	V
<i>Almost Married</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	V	V
<i>An Amateur Widow</i> (World)	Zeena Keefe	V	V	V
<i>An Innocent Adventuress</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	X
<i>Anne of Green Gables</i> (Realart Pictures Corp.)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>Be A Little Sport</i> (Fox)	Albert Ray/Elinor Fair	V	V	V
<i>Bill Henry</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>Bonnie, Bonnie Lassie</i> (Universal)	Mary MacLaren	V	V	V

<i>Boots</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>Brass Buttons</i> (Pathé)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Bringing Up Betty</i> (World)	Evelyn Greeley	V	V	V
<i>Bullin' the Bullshevik</i> (States Rights/Eff & Eff Co.)	Marguerite Clayton	X	X	V
<i>Burglar by Proxy</i> (First National)	Jack Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Caleb Piper's Girl</i> (Pathé)	Helene Chadwick	V	V	V
<i>Captain Kidd, Jr.</i> (Artcraft)	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Castles in the Air</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	V	V
<i>Charge it to Me</i> (Pathé)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>Cheating Herself</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>Coax Me</i> (World)	June Elvidge	V	V	V
<i>Come Again Smith</i> (Pathé)	J. Warren Kerrigan	V	V	V
<i>Come Out of the Kitchen</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Courage for Two</i> (World)	Carlyle Blackwell	V	V	V
<i>Cowardice Court</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>Daddy-Long-Legs</i> (First National)	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Don't Change Your Husband</i> (Artcraft)	Gloria Swanson	V	V	V
<i>Easy to Make Money</i> (Metro)	Bert Lytell	V	V	V
<i>Experimental Marriage</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>Fair and Warmer</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	V	V
<i>Fools and Their Money</i> (Metro)	Emmy Wehlen	V	V	V
<i>Full of Pep</i> (Metro)	Hale Hamilton	X	X	V
<i>Getting Mary Married</i> (Select)	Marion Davies	V	V	V
<i>Girls</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>God's Outlaw</i> (Metro)	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	V	V	V
<i>Good Gracious, Annabelle</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>Greased Lightning</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>Happiness A La Mode</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>Happy Though Married</i> (Paramount)	Enid Bennett	V	V	X
<i>Hard Boiled</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Dalton	V	V	V
<i>Hawthorne of the U.S.A.</i> (Paramount)	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>Hay Foot, Straw Foot</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>Heart O' the Hills</i> (First National)	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>Heart of Gold</i> (World)	Louise Huff	V	V	V
<i>Help! Help! Police!</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>Here Comes the Bride</i> (Paramount)	John Barrymore	V	X	V

<i>His Bridal Night</i> (Select)	Alice Brady	V	V	V
<i>His Official Fiancée</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V
<i>Hit or Miss</i> (World)	Carlyle Blackwell	V	V	V
<i>Home Wanted</i> (World)	Madge Evans	V	V	V
<i>Hoop-La</i> (Robertson-Cole)	Billie Rhodes	V	V	V
<i>I'll Get Him Yet</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>Impossible Catherine</i> (Pathé)	Virginia Pearson	V	V	V
<i>In for Thirty Days</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	V	V
<i>In His Brother's Place</i> (Metro)	Hale Hamilton	V	V	V
<i>In Search of Arcady</i> (Robertson-Cole)	Billie Rhodes	V	V	V
<i>In Wrong</i> (First National)	Jack Pickford	V	V	V
<i>It Pays to Advertise</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>It's a Bear</i> (Triangle)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>Jinx</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>John Petticoats</i> (Artaft)	William S. Hart	X	V	V
<i>Johnny Get Your Gun</i> (Paramount)	Fred Stone	X	V	V
<i>Johnny-on-the-Spot</i> (Metro)	Hale Hamilton	X	X	V
<i>Jubilo</i> (Goldwyn)	Will Rogers	X	V	V
<i>Kitty Kelly, M.D.</i> (Robertson-Cole) *	Bessie Barriscale	V	V	V
<i>Leave it to Susan</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>Let's Elope</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Life's A Funny Proposition</i> (Pathé)	William Desmond	V	V	X
<i>Little Comrade</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V
<i>Lombardi, Ltd.</i> (Metro)	Bert Lytell	V	V	V
<i>Lord and Lady Algy</i> (Goldwyn)	Tom Moore	V	V	V
<i>Love Insurance</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Luck in Pawn</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Maggie Pepper</i> (Paramount)	Ethel Clayton	V	V	V
<i>Marie, Ltd.</i> (Select)	Alice Brady	V	V	V

<i>Married in Haste</i> (Fox)	Albert Ray/Elinor Fair	V	V	V
<i>Me and Captain Kidd</i> (World)	Evelyn Greeley	V	V	V
<i>Miss Crusoe</i> (World)	Virginia Hammond	V	V	V
<i>Molly of the Follies</i> (Pathé)	Margarita Fischer	V	X	X
<i>More Deadly Than the Male</i> (Paramount)	Ethel Clayton	V	V	V
<i>Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Muggsy</i> (Triangle)	Jackie Saunders	V	V	V
<i>Never Say Quit</i> (Fox)	George Walsh	V	V	V
<i>Nobody Home</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>Nugget Nell</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>Oh, Boy!</i> (Pathé)	June Caprice	V	X	X
<i>Oh, You Women</i>	Ernest Truex	X	X	X
<i>One of the Finest</i> (Goldwyn)	Tom Moore	V	V	V
<i>One-Thing-At-a-Time-O' Day</i> (Metro)	Bert Lytell	V	V	V
<i>Over the Garden Wall</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Bessie Love	V	V	V
<i>Peg O' My Heart</i> (Paramount)	Wanda Hawley	V	V	V
<i>Peggy Does Her Darndest</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	V	V
<i>Peppy Polly</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>Phil-for-Short</i> (World)	Evelyn Greeley	V	V	V
<i>Piccadilly Jim</i> (Select)	Owen Moore	V	V	V
<i>Please Get Married</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	X
<i>Pretty Smooth</i> (Universal)	Priscilla Dean	X	X	X
<i>Prudence on Broadway</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>Puppy Love</i> (Paramount)	Lila Lee	V	V	V
<i>Put Up Your Hands</i> (Pathé)	Margarita Fischer	V	V	V
<i>Putting it Over</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Red Hot Dollars</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>Romance and Arabella</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>Rustling a Bride</i> (Paramount)	Lila Lee	V	V	V

<i>Sadie Love</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>Satan Junior</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	V
<i>Sis Hopkins</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	X	X	X
<i>Smiles</i> (Fox)	Katherine and Jane Lee	V	V	V
<i>Some Bride</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	V
<i>Some Liar</i> (Pathé)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Something to Do</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Spotlight Sadie</i> (Goldwyn)	Mae Marsh	V	V	V
<i>Stepping Out</i> (Paramount)	Enid Bennett	V	V	V
<i>Strictly Confidential</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>Stripped for a Million</i> (States Rights/Victor Kremer Film Features)	Crane Wilbur	V	V	V
<i>Taxi</i> (Triangle)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>That's Good</i> (Metro)	Hale Hamilton	X	V	V
<i>The Adventure Shop</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Corinne Griffith	V	V	V
<i>The Amateur Adventuress</i> (Metro)	Emmy Wehlen	V	V	V
<i>The Amazing Imposter</i> (Pathé)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>The American Way</i> (World)	Arthur Ashley	V	V	V
<i>The Beloved Cheater</i> (Robertson-Cole)	Lew Cody	V	V	V
<i>The Best Man</i> (Pathé)	J. Warren Kerrigan	V	V	V
<i>The Busher</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>The Captain's Captain</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Alice Joyce	V	V	V
<i>The Common Cause</i> (Vitagraph)*	Effie Shannon	V	V	V
<i>The Delicious Little Devil</i> (Universal)	Mae Murray	V	V	V
<i>The Dub</i> (Paramount)	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>The Egg Crate Wallop</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>The Final Close-Up</i> (Paramount)	Shirley Mason	V	V	V
<i>The Follies Girl</i> (Triangle)	Olive Thomas	V	V	V
<i>The Four-Flusher</i> (Metro)	Hale Hamilton	X	X	V
<i>The Game's Up</i> (Universal)	Ruth Cliffords	V	V	V
<i>The Girl Dodger</i> (Paramount)	Charles Ray	V	V	V
<i>The Gold Cure</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	V
<i>The Heart of Youth</i> (Paramount)	Lila Lee	V	V	V
<i>The Home Town Girl</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V

<i>The Homebreaker</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Dalton	V	V	V
<i>The Hoodlum</i> (First National)	Mary Pickford	V	V	V
<i>The Indestructible Wife</i> (Select)	Alice Brady	V	V	V
<i>The Intrusion of Isabel</i> (Pathé)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V
<i>The Joyous Liar</i> (Pathé)	J. Warren Kerrigan	V	V	V
<i>The Lamb and the Lion</i> (Robertson-Cole)	Billie Rhodes	V	V	V
<i>The Little Diplomat</i> (Pathé)	Baby Marie Osborne	V	V	V
<i>The Little Intruder</i> (World)	Louise Huff	V	V	V
<i>The Little Rowdy</i> (Triangle)	Hazel Daly	V	V	V
<i>The Little White Savage</i> (Universal)	Carmel Meyers	V	V	V
<i>The Lord Loves the Irish</i> (Pathé)	J. Warren Kerrigan	V	V	V
<i>The Lost Princess</i> (Fox)	Albert Ray/Elinor Fair	V	V	V
<i>The Lottery Man</i> (Paramount)	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>The Love Call</i> (Robertson-Cole)	Billie Rhodes	V	V	V
<i>The Love Cheat</i> (Pathé)	June Caprice	V	V	V
<i>The Love Hunger</i> (Pathé)	Lillian Walker	V	V	V
<i>The Merry-Go-Round</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>The Microbe</i> (Metro)	Viola Dana	V	V	V
<i>The Misleading Widow</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>The Pest</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	X	X	V
<i>The Poor Boob</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>The Praise Agent</i> (World)	Arthur Ashley	V	V	V
<i>The Prince and Betty</i> (Pathé)	William Desmond	V	V	V
<i>The Probation Wife</i> (Select)	Norma Talmadge	V	V	V
<i>The Prodigal Liar</i> (Pathé)	William Desmond	V	V	V
<i>The Rebellious Bride</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>The Rescuing Angel</i> (Paramount)	Shirley Mason	V	V	V
<i>The Road Called Straight</i> (Goldwyn)	Louis Bennison	V	V	V
<i>The Roaring Road</i> (Paramount)	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>The Scarlet Shadow</i> (Universal)	Mae Murray	V	X	X
<i>The Spender</i> (Metro)	Bert Lytell	V	V	V
<i>The Third Kiss</i> (Paramount)	Vivian Martin	V	V	V
<i>The Uplifters</i> (Metro)	May Allison	V	X	V
<i>The Veiled Adventure</i> (Select)	Constance Talmadge	V	V	V

<i>The Weaker Vessel</i> (Universal)	Mary MacLaren	V	V	V
<i>The Web of Chance</i> (Fox)	Peggy Hyland	V	V	V
<i>The Winning Girl</i> (Paramount)	Shirley Mason	V	V	V
<i>This Hero Stuff</i> (Pathé)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Three Black Eyes</i> (Triangle)	Taylor Holmes	V	X	V
<i>Three Green Eyes</i> (World)	Carlyle Blackwell	V	V	V
<i>Three Men and a Girl</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Through the Wrong Door</i> (Goldwyn)	Madge Kennedy	V	V	V
<i>Tin Pan Alley</i> (Fox)	Albert Ray/Elinor Fair	V	V	V
<i>Toby's Bow</i> (Goldwyn)	Tom Moore	V	V	V
<i>Todd of the Times</i> (Pathé)	Frank Keenan	X	V	V
<i>Too Many Crooks</i> (Greater Vitagraph)	Gladys Leslie	V	X	V
<i>Turning the Tables</i> (Paramount)	Dorothy Gish	V	V	V
<i>Under Suspicion</i> (Universal)	Ora Carew	V	V	V
<i>Under the Top</i> (Paramount)	Fred Stone	X	V	V
<i>Upside Down</i> (Triangle)	Taylor Holmes	V	V	V
<i>Upstairs</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	V	V	V
<i>Upstairs and Down</i> (Select)	Olive Thomas	V	X	V
<i>Vagabond Luck</i> (Fox)	Albert Ray/Elinor Fair	X	V	V
<i>Venus in the East</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	V
<i>Wanted: A Husband</i> (Paramount)	Billie Burke	V	V	V
<i>When Doctors Disagree</i> (Goldwyn)	Mabel Normand	X	X	V
<i>When the Clouds Roll By</i> (United Artists)	Douglas Fairbanks	V	V	V
<i>Where the West Begins</i> (Pathé)	William Russell	V	V	V
<i>Whitewashed Walls</i> (Robertson-Cole)	William Desmond	V	V	V
<i>Why Smith Left Home</i> (Paramount)	Bryant Washburn	V	V	X
<i>Widow by Proxy</i> (Paramount)	Marguerite Clark	V	V	V
<i>Yankee Doodle in Berlin</i> (States Rights/Mack Sennett Co.)	Ford Sterling	X	X	X
<i>You're Fired</i> (Paramount)	Wallace Reid	V	V	V
<i>Yvonne from Paris</i> (Pathé)	Mary Miles Minter	V	V	V

Appendix IV-Romantic Comedy

Courtship Comedies			
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Stars in order of billing	Director
<i>An American Citizen</i> (1914)	Paramount/Famous Players	John Barrymore/Evelyn Moore	J. Searle Dawley
<i>The Lightning Conductor</i> (1914)	Arthur H. Sawyer Company/Hefco Films	Dustin Farnum/Helen Bertram	William Elliott
<i>The Man on the Box</i> (1914)	Paramount/Lasky	Max Figman/Lolita Robertson	Oscar Apfel
<i>Such a Little Queen</i> (1914)	Paramount/Famous Players	Mary Pickford/Carlyle Blackwell	Edwin S. Porter
<i>The Ragged Earl</i> (1914)	Alco/Lubin	Andrew Mack/Ormi Hawley	Lloyd B. Carleton
<i>Young Romance</i> (1915)	Paramount/Lasky	Edith Taliaferro/Tom Forman	George Melford
<i>The Bachelor's Romance</i> (1915)	Paramount/Famous Players	John Emerson/Lorraine Huling	John Emerson
<i>Gretna Green</i> (1915)	Paramount/Lasky	Marguerite Clark/W. Merkyl	Thomas Heffron
<i>Sunshine Molly</i> (1915)	Paramount/Bosworth	Lois Weber/Phillips Smalley	Lois Weber/Phillips Smalley
<i>The Arrival of Perpetua</i> (1915)	World/Shubert	Vivian Martin/Milton Sills	Emile Chautard
<i>The College Widow</i> (1915)	VLSE/Lubin	Ethel Clayton/George Soule Spencer	Barry O'Neill
<i>The Slim Princess</i> (1915)	VLSE/Essanay	Ruth Stonehouse/Francis X. Bushman	E.H. Calvert
<i>The Wild Goose Chase</i> (1915)	Paramount/Lasky	Ina Claire/Tom Forman	Cecil B. DeMille
<i>Her Shattered Idol</i> (1915)	Mutual Masterpiece/Majestic	Mae Marsh/Robert Harron	John D. O'Brien
<i>All for a Girl</i> (1915)	States Rights/Mirograph Corp.	Renee Kelly/Edward G. Longman	Roy Applegate
<i>Marrying Money</i> (1915)	World/Shubert	Clara Kimball Young/Chester Barnett	James Young
<i>The Rugmaker's Daughter</i> (1915)	Paramount/Morosco	Maud Allan/Forrest Stanley	Oscar Apfel
<i>The Marriage of Kitty</i> (1915)	Paramount/Lasky	Fannie Ward/Jack Dean	George Melford
<i>The College Orphan</i> (1915)	Universal/Red Feather	Carter and Flora DeHaven	William C. Dowlan
<i>The Pretenders</i> (1915)	General Film/Kalem	Marguerite Courtot/Crauford Kent	Robert G. Vignola
<i>The Whirl of Life</i> (1915)	States Rights/Cort Film Corp.	Vernon and Irene Castle	Oliver D. Bailey
<i>The Sentimental Lady</i> (1915)	Kleine-Edison/Kleine	Irene Fenwick/Jack Devereaux	Walter Edwin

<i>The Caveman</i> (1915)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Fay Wallace/Robert Edeson	Theodore Marston
<i>Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines</i> (1916)	VLSE/Essanay	Ann Murdock/Richard C. Travers	Fred E. Wright
<i>Green Stockings</i> (1916)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Lillian Walker/Stanley Dark	Wilfrid North
<i>Lord Loveland Discovers America</i> (1916)	Mutual/American	Arthur Maude/Constance Crawley	Arthur Maude
<i>Mice and Men</i> (1916)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marguerite Clark/Marshall Neilan	J. Searle Dawley
<i>The Misleading Lady</i> (1916)	VLSE/Essanay	Edna Mayo/Henry Walthall	Arthur Berthelet
<i>Daphne and the Pirate</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Lillian Gish/Elliott Dexter	Christy Cabanne
<i>Merely Mary Ann</i> (1916)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Vivian Martin/Harry Hilliard	John G. Adolfi
<i>When Love is King</i> (1916)	Kleine-Edison/Edison	Richard Tucker/Carroll McComas	Ben Turbett
<i>Little Meena's Romance</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Dorothy Gish/Owen Moore	Paul Powell
<i>Molly Make-Believe</i> (1916)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marguerite Clark/Mahlon Hamilton	J. Searle Dawley
<i>The Race</i> (1916)	Paramount/Lasky	Anita King/Victor Moore	George Melford
<i>It Happened in Honolulu</i> (1916)	Universal/Red Feather	Myrtle Gonzalez/Val Paul	Lynn Reynolds
<i>The Madcap</i> (1916)	Universal/Red Feather	Flora Parker DeHaven/John Markham	William Dowlan
<i>The Thousand Dollar Husband</i> (1916)	Paramount/Lasky	Blanche Sweet/Tom Forman	James Young
<i>An International Marriage</i> (1916)	Paramount/Morosco	Rita Jolivet/Elliott Dexter	Frank Lloyd
<i>The River of Romance</i> (1916)	Metro/Rolfe	Harold Lockwood/May Allison	Henry Otto
<i>The Beast</i> (1916)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	George Walsh/Anna Luther	Richard Stanton
<i>Hell-to-Pay-Austin</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Bessie Love/Wilfred Lucas	Paul Powell
<i>Little Eva Edgerton</i> (1916)	Universal/Bluebird	Ella Hall/Herbert Rawlinson	Robert Leonard
<i>The Marriage Molly-O</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Mae Marsh/Robert Harron	Paul Powell
<i>The Summer Girl</i> (1916)	World/Peerless	Mollie King/Arthur Ashley	Edwin August
<i>Bettina Loved a Soldier</i> (1916)	Universal/Bluebird	Louise Lovely/Rupert Julian	Rupert Julian
<i>The Social Secretary</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Norma Talmadge/Gladden James	John Emerson
<i>A Corner in Colleens</i> (1916)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Bessie Barriscale	Charles Miller

<i>Plain Jane</i> (1916)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Bessie Barriscale/Charles Ray	Charles Miller
<i>Prudence the Pirate</i> (1916)	Pathé/Thanhouser	Gladys Hulette/Barnett Parker	William Parke
<i>The Kiss</i> (1916)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marguerite Courtot/Owen Moore	Del Henderson
<i>The Chaperon</i> (1916)	KESE/Essanay	Edna Mayo/Eugene O'Brien	Arthur Berthelet
<i>The Ocean Waif</i> (1916)	International Films Inc./Golden Eagle Features	Doris Kenyon/Carlyle Blackwell	Alice Guy Blanche
<i>A Modern Cinderella</i> (1917)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	June Caprice/Frank Morgan	John G. Adolphi
<i>Chicken Casey</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Dorothy Dalton/Charles Gunn	Raymond B. West
<i>Love Aflame</i> (1917)	Universal/Red Feather	Ruth Stonehouse/Jack Mulhall	Raymond Wells
<i>Kitty MacKay</i> (1917)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Lillian Walker/Don Cameron	Wilfred North
<i>Royal Romance</i> (1917)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Virginia Pearson/Irving Cummings	James Vincent
<i>Sally in a Hurry</i> (1917)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Lillian Walker/Don Cameron	Wilfred North
<i>The Wildcat</i> (1917)	Mutual/E.D. Horkheimer	Jackie Saunders/Arthur Shirley	Sherwood McDonald
<i>Happiness</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Enid Bennett/Charles Gunn	Reginald Barker
<i>Madame Bo-Peep</i> (1917)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Seena Owen/A.D. Sears	Chester Withey
<i>The Duchess of Doubt</i> (1917)	Metro/Rolfe	Emmy Whelen/George Stuart Christie	George D. Baker
<i>Wild Winship's Widow</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Dorothy Dalton/Joseph King	Charles Miller
<i>The Upper Crust</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Gail Kane/Douglas MacLean	Rollin Sturgeon
<i>A Self-Made Widow</i> (1917)	World/Peerless	Alice Brady/John Bowers	Travers Vale
<i>At First Sight</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Mae Murray/Sam T. Hardy	Robert Z. Leonard
<i>Miss Robinson Crusoe</i> (1917)	Metro/Rolfe	Emmy Whelen/Walter C. Miller	William Christy Cabanne
<i>Patsy</i> (1917)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	June Caprice/Harry Hilliard	John G. Adolphi
<i>An Even Break</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Olive Thomas/Charles Gunn	Lambert Hillyer
<i>The Divorcee</i> (1917)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Mary Anderson/Alfred Vosburgh	William Wolbert
<i>The Lady of the Photograph</i> (1917)	Perfection Pictures/Edison	Raymond McKee/Shirley Mason	Ben Turpet
<i>Broadway Arizona</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Olive Thomas/George Chesebro	Lynn Reynolds
<i>Efficiency Edgar's Courtship</i> (1917)	KESE/Essanay	Taylor Holmes/Virginia Valli	L.C. Windom

<i>The Mysterious Miss Terry</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Billie Burke/Thomas Meighan	J. Searle Dawley
<i>The Runaway</i> (1917)	Mutual/Empire	Julia Sanderson/Norman Trevor	Del Henderson
<i>A Phantom Husband</i> (1917)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Ruth Stonehouse/Charles Gunn	Ferris Hartman
<i>Arms and the Girl</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Billie Burke/Thomas Meighan	Joe Kaufman
<i>The Princess of Park Row</i> (1917)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Mildred Manning/Wallace MacDonald	Ashley Miller
<i>All for a Husband</i> (1917)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Virginia Pearson/Herbert Evans	Carl Harbaugh
<i>Scandal</i> (1917)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harry C. Browne	Charles Giblyn
<i>Red, White and Blue Blood</i> (1917)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	Charles Brabin
<i>The Cinderella Man</i> (1917)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mae Marsh/Tom Moore	George Loane Tucker
<i>The Square Deceiver</i> (1917)	Metro/Yorke	Harold Lockwood/Pauline Curley	Fred J. Balshofer
<i>Betty Takes a Hand</i> (1918)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Olive Thomas/Charles Gunn	Jack Dillon
<i>The Blind Adventure</i> (1918)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Edward Earle/Betty Howe	Welsey Ruggles
<i>The Flames of Chance</i> (1918)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Margery Wilson/Jack Mulhall	Raymond Wells
<i>The Little Runaway</i> (1918)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Gladys Leslie/Edward Earle	William P.S. Earle
<i>The Studio Girl</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Earle Foxe	Charles Giblyn
<i>Uneasy Money</i> (1918)	Kleine System/Essanay	Taylor Holmes/Virginia Valli	Lawrence C. Windom
<i>From Two to Six</i> (1918)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Winifred Allen/Earle Foxe	Albert Parker
<i>Jilted Janet</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer/Jack Mower	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Gulf Between</i> (1918)	States Rights/Technicolor Motion Picture Corp.	Grace Darmond/Niles Welch	Wray Physioc
<i>The Turn of a Card</i> (1918)	W.W. Hodkinson Corp./Parlata Plays	J. Warren Kerrigan/Lois Wilson	Oscar Apfel
<i>Under Suspicion</i> (1918)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	Will S. Davis
<i>Heiress for a Day</i> (1918)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Olive Thomas/Joseph King	John Francis Dillon
<i>Mrs. Slacker</i> (1918)	Pathé/Astra	Gladys Hulette/Creighton Hale	Hobart Henley
<i>Powers That Prey</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter/Allan Forrest	Henry King
<i>The Wasp</i> (1918)	World/World Film Corp.	Kitty Gordon/Rockcliffe Fellowes	Lionel Belmore

<i>The Accidental Honeymoon</i> (1918)	States Rights/High Art Productions Inc.	Elaine Hammerstein/Robert Warwick	Leonce Perret
<i>A Camouflage Kiss</i> (1918)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	June Caprice/Pell Trenton	Harry Millarde
<i>A Rich Man's Darling</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Louise Lovely/Philo McCullough	Edgar Jones
<i>The Danger Game</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist/Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy/Tom Moore	Snub Pollard
<i>The Richest Girl</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Ann Murdock/David Powell	Albert Capellani
<i>Up the Road With Sallie</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Norman Kerry	William Desmond Taylor
<i>Lend Me Your Name</i> (1918)	Metro/Yorke	Harold Lockwood/Pauline Curley	Fred J. Balshofer
<i>Mlle. Paulette</i> (1918)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Claire Anderson/Wallace MacDonald	Raymond Wells
<i>How Could You, Jean?</i> (1918)	Paramount/Arctcraft	Mary Pickford/Casson Ferguson	William Desmond Taylor
<i>Social Quicksands</i> (1918)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Beverly Bayne/Francis X. Bushman	Charles Brabin
<i>The Fair Pretender</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy/Tom Moore	Charles Miller
<i>The Man Hunt</i> (1918)	World/World Film Corp.	Ethel Clayton/Rockcliffe Fellowes	Travers Vale
<i>The Primitive Woman</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer/Jack Mower	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>A Pair of Cupids</i> (1918)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	Charles Brabin
<i>Annexing Bill</i> (1918)	Pathé/Astra	Gladys Hulette/Creighton Hale	Albert Parker
<i>Back to the Woods</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand/Herbert Rawlinson	George Irving
<i>By Proxy</i> (1918)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Roy Stewart/Maude Wayne	Clifford S. Smith
<i>Impossible Susan</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer/Jack Mower	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Demon</i> (1918)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Edith Storey/Lew Cody	George D. Baker
<i>The Golden Wall</i> (1918)	World/World Film Corp.	Carlyle Blackwell/Evelyn Greeley	Del Henderson
<i>Lawless Love</i> (1918)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Jewel Carmen/Henry Woodward	Robert Thornby
<i>Petticoats and Politics</i> (1918)	W.W. Hodkinson Corp./Plaza Pictures	Anita King/R. Henry Grey	Howard Mitchell
<i>The Changing Woman</i> (1918)	Greater Vitaraph/Vitagraph	Hedda Nova/Frank Glendon	David Smith
<i>The Eyes of Julia Deep</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter/Alan Forrest	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Love Swindle</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Edith Roberts/Emmanuel Turner	John Francis Dillon
<i>Waifs</i> (1918)	Pathé/Astra	Gladys Hulette/Creighton Hale	Albert Parker

<i>A Society Sensation</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Carmel Myers/Rudolph Valentino	Paul Powell
<i>Just for Tonight</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Tom Moore/Lucy Fox	Charles Giblyn
<i>Money Isn't Everything</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer/Jack Mower	Edward Sloman
<i>The Brazen Beauty</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Priscilla Dean/Thurston Hall	Tod Browning
<i>The Embarrassment of Riches</i> (1918)	W.W. Hodkinson Corp./Lillian Walker Pictures Corp.	Lillian Walker/Carl Brickert	Edward Dillon
<i>T' Other Dear Charmer</i> (1918)	World/World Film Corp.	Louise Huff/John Bowers	William P.S. Earle
<i>Everybody's Girl</i> (1918)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Alice Joyce/Walter McGrail	Tom Terriss
<i>Hidden Fires</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mae Marsh/Rod La Rocque	George Irving
<i>Marriages Are Made</i> (1918)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Peggy Hyland/Edwin Stanley	Carl Harbaugh
<i>All Night</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Carmel Myers/Rudolph Valentino	Paul Powell
<i>The Gypsy Trail</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Bryant Washburn/Wanda Hawley	Walter Edwards
<i>The Make-Believe Wife</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke/David Powell	John S. Robertson
<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i> (1918)	Paramount/Arctcraft	Elsie Ferguson/Eugene O'Brien	Emile Chautard
<i>Why I Would Not Marry</i> (1918)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Lucy Fox	Richard Stanton
<i>A Lady's Name</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>Caught in the Act</i> (1918)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Peggy Hyland/Leslie Austen	Harry Millarde
<i>Set Free</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Edith Roberts/Harry Hilliard	Tod Browning
<i>The Mantle of Charity</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer/Jack Mower	Edward Sloman
<i>Hoop-La</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole/National Film Corp.	Billie Rhodes/Bertram Grassby	Louis W. Chaudet
<i>In For Thirty Days</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	May Allison/Robert Ellis	Webster Cullison
<i>The Adventure Shop</i> (1919)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Corrine Griffith/Walter McGrail	Kenneth Webb
<i>Molly of the Follies</i> (1919)	Pathé/American	Margarita Fisher/Jack Mower	Edward Sloman
<i>Romance and Arabella</i> (1919)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>The Prodigal Liar</i> (1919)	Pathé/Jesse D. Hampton	William Desmond/Betty Compson	Thomas N. Heffron
<i>Little Comrade</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Vivian Martin/Niles Welch	Chester Withey
<i>Puppy Love</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Lila Lee/Harold Goodwin	Ray William Neill

<i>Satan Junior</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Viola Dana/Milton Sills	John H. Collins
<i>The Rebellious Bride</i> (1919)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Peggy Hyland/Pell Trenton	Lynn Reynolds
<i>Three Men and a Girl</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark/Richard Barthelmess	Marshall Neilan
<i>Getting Mary Married</i> (1919)	Select/Cosmopolitan Prod.	Marion Davies/Norman Kerry	Allan Dwan
<i>The Intrusion of Isabel</i> (1919)	Pathé/American Film Co.	Mary Miles Minter/Allan Forrest	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Love Call</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole/National Film Corp.	Billie Rhodes/T. Lloyd Whitlock	Louis Chaudet
<i>Rustling a Bride</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Lila Lee/Monte Blue	Irving Willat
<i>Three Green Eyes</i> (1919)	World/World Film Corp.	Carlyle Blackwell/Evelyn Greeley	Del Henderson
<i>A Stich in Time</i> (1919)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Gladys Leslie/Eugene Strong	Ralph Ince
<i>Castles in the Air</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	May Allison/Ben Wilson	George D. Baker
<i>Daddy Long Legs</i> (1919)	First National/Mary Pickford Co.	Mary Pickford/Mahlon Hamilton	Marshall Neilan
<i>The Best Man</i> (1919)	Pathé/Jessie D. Hampton	J. Warren Kerrigan/Lois Wilson	Thomas Heffron
<i>The Veiled Adventure</i> (1919)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>Be a Little Sport</i> (1919)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Albert Ray/Elinor Fair	Scott R. Dunlap
<i>Almost Married</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	May Allison/Walter I. Percival	Charles Swickard
<i>Girls</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>In Search of Arcady</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole/National Film Corp.	Billie Rhodes/Wellington Playter	Bertram Bracken
<i>Phil-for-Short</i> (1919)	World/World Film Corp.	Evelyn Greeley/Hugh Thompson	Oscar Apfel
<i>God's Outlaw</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Francis X. Bushman/Beverly Bayne	Christy Cabanne
<i>His Bridal Night</i> (1919)	Select/Selznick	Alice Brady/James Crane	Kenneth Webb/James L. Crane
<i>Through the Wrong Door</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy/John Bowers	Clarence Badger
<i>Coax Me</i> (1919)	World/World Film Corp.	June Elvidge/Earl Metcalfe	Gilbert Hamilton
<i>Love Insurance</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Bryant Washburn/Lois Wilson	Donald Crisp
<i>The Love Cheat</i> (1919)	Pathé/Albert Capellani Prod.	June Caprice/Creighton Hale	George Archainbaud
<i>Over the Garden Wall</i> (1919)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Bessie Love/Allan Forrest	David Smith
<i>The Third Kiss</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Vivian Martin/Harrison Ford	Robert G. Vignola

<i>A Damsel in Distress</i> (1919)	Pathé/Albert Capellani	June Caprice/Creighton Hale	George Archainbaud
<i>A Sporting Chance</i> (1919)	Pathé/American	William Russell/Fritzi Brunette	Henry King
<i>Almost a Husband</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Will Rogers/Peggy Wood	Clarence Badger
<i>Bonnie, Bonnie Lassie</i> (1919)	Universal/Universal Film Manufacturing Co.	Mary MacLaren/David Butler	Tod Browning
<i>His Official Fiancee</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Vivian Martin/Forrest Stanley	Robert G. Vignola
<i>Impossible Catherine</i> (1919)	Pathé/Virginia Pearson Photoplays, Inc.	Virginia Pearson/William B. Davidson	John B. O'Brien
<i>A Fugitive from Matrimony</i> (1919)	Pathé/Jesse D. Hampton Prod.	H.B. Warner/Seena Owen	Henry King
<i>Me and Captain Kidd</i> (1919)	World/World Film Corp.	Evelyn Greeley/Raymond McKee	Oscar Apfel
<i>Under Suspicion</i> (1919)	Universal/Universal Film Manufacturing Co.	Ora Carew/Forrest Stanley	William C. Dowlan
<i>More Deadly Than the Male</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Ethel Clayton/Edward Coxen	Robert G. Vignola
<i>The Beloved Cheater</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole Dist./Astra	Lew Cody/Eileen Percy	Christy Cabanne
<i>Wanted: A Husband</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke/James L. Crane	Lawrence C. Windom
<i>All-of-A-Sudden-Peggy</i> (1920)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark/Jack Mulhall	Walter Edwards
<i>Dangerous Business</i> (1920)	First National/Norma Talmadge Film Corp.	Constance Talmadge/Kenneth Harlan	Roy William Neill
<i>In Search of a Sinner</i> (1920)	First National/Constance Talmadge Film Corp.	Constance Talmadge/Rockcliffe Fellowes	David Kirkland
<i>Jack Straw</i> (1920)	Paramount/Artcraft	Robert Warwick/Carol McComas	William C. DeMille
<i>Mary's Ankle</i> (1920)	Paramount/Artcraft	Douglas MacLean/Doris May	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>Paris Green</i> (1920)	Paramount/Artcraft	Charles Ray/Ann May	Jerome Storm
<i>She Loves and Lies</i> (1920)	Select/Norma Talmadge Film Corp.	Norma Talmadge/Conway Tearle	Chester Withey
<i>Two Weeks</i> (1920)	First National/Joseph Schenck Prod.	Constance Talmadge/Conway Tearle	Sidney Franklin
<i>You Never Can Tell</i> (1920)	Paramount/Realart Film Co.	Bebe Daniels/Jack Mulhall	Chester Franklin
<i>Billions</i> (1920)	Metro/Nazimova Prod.	Alla Nazimova/Charles Bryant	Ray Smallwood
<i>Cupid, the Cowpuncher</i> (1920)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Will Rogers/Helene Chadwick	Clarence Badger
<i>The Dancin' Fool</i> (1920)	Paramount/Famous Players	Wallace Reid/Bebe Daniels	Sam Wood

<i>The Deadlier Sex</i> (1920)	Pathé/Jesse D. Hampton Prod.	Blanche Sweet/Mahlon Hamilton	Robert Thornby
<i>His Temporary Wife</i> (1920)	W.W. Hodkinson Corp./Joseph Levering Prod.	Ruby de Remer/Edmund Breese	Joseph Levering
<i>Husband Hunter</i> (1920)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Eileen Percy/Emory Johnson	Howard Mitchell
<i>The Misleading Lady</i> (1920)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Bert Lytell/Lucy Cotton	George Irving
<i>The Slim Princess</i> (1920)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand/Hugh Thompson	Victor Schertzinger
<i>Smiling All the Way</i> (1920)	States Rights/D.N. Schwab Prod. Inc	David Butler/Leatrice Joy	Fred J. Butler
<i>Sooner or Later</i> (1920)	Select/Selznick	Owen Moore/Seena Owen	Wesley Ruggles
<i>The Walk Offs</i> (1920)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	May Allison/	Herbert Blanche

Reaffirmation Comedies			
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Stars in order of billing	Director
<i>Caprice</i> (1913)	Paramount/Famous Players	Mary Pickford/Owen Moore	J. Searle Dawley
<i>What's His Name?</i> (1914)	Paramount/Lasky	Max Figman/Lolita Robertson	Cecil B. DeMille
<i>The Country Mouse</i> (1914)	Paramount/Bosworth	Adele Farrington/Hobart Bosworth	Hobart Bosworth
<i>Pretty Mrs. Smith</i> (1915)	Paramount/Bosworth	Fritzi Scheff/Owen Moore	Hobart Bosworth
<i>Matrimony</i> (1915)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Julia Dean/Howard Hickman	Scott Sidney
<i>Divorçons</i> (1915)	General Film/Biograph	Gertrude Bambrick/Del Henderson	?
<i>The Heir to the Hoorah</i> (1916)	Paramount/Lasky	Thomas Meighan/Anita King	Cecil B. DeMille
<i>A House Built Upon Sand</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Lillian Gish/Roy Stewart	Edward Morrissey
<i>A School for Husbands</i> (1917)	Paramount/Lasky	Fannie Ward/Jack Dean	George Melford
<i>The Divorce Game</i> (1917)	World/Peerless Films	Alice Brady/John Bowers	Travers Vale
<i>The Man Hater</i> (1917)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Winifred Allen/Joe Stull	Albert Parker
<i>Nearly Married</i> (1917)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy/Richard Barthelmess	Chester Withey
<i>Persuasive Peggy</i> (1917)	Fox/Mayfair Film Corp.	Peggy Hyland/William B. Davidson	Charles Brabin

<i>An American Widow</i> (1917)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Ethel Barrymore/Irving Cummings	Frank Reicher
<i>The Honeymoon</i> (1917)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Earle Foxe	Charles Giblyn
<i>The Marriage Speculation</i> (1917)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Mildred Manning/Wallace MacDonald	Ashley Miller
<i>The Marionettes</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Clara Kimball Young/Nigel Barrie	Emile Chautard
<i>My Wife</i> (1918)	Mutual/Empire	Ann Murdock/Rex MacDougal	Del Henderson
<i>Let's Get a Divorce</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke/John Milern	Charles Giblyn
<i>Journey's End</i> (1918)	World/World Film Corp.	Ethel Clayton/John Bowers	Travers Vale
<i>A Square Deal</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer/Jack Mower	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>A Pair of Silk Stockings</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>Love Watches</i> (1918)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Corinne Griffith/Edmund Burns	Henri Houry
<i>We Can't Have Everything</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Kathlyn Williams/Elliott Dexter	Cecil B. DeMille
<i>Friend Husband</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy/Rockcliffe Fellowes	Clarence Badger
<i>The Kingdom of Youth</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy/Tom Moore	Clarence Badger
<i>For Husbands Only</i> (1918)	Jewel/Lois Weber Productions	Mildred Harris/Fred Goodwins	Lois Weber
<i>Sauce for the Goose</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>His Bonded Wife</i> (1918)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Emmy Whelen/Frank Currier	Charles Brabin
<i>Mrs. Leffingwell's Boots</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>Women's Weapons</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Ethel Clayton/Elliott Dexter	Robert G. Vignola
<i>Don't Change Your Husband</i> (1919)	Paramount/Arctcraft	Gloria Swanson/Elliott Dexter	Cecil B. DeMille
<i>The Common Cause</i> (1919)	Greater Vitagraph/Blackton Prod. Inc.	Effie Shannon	J. Stuart Blackton
<i>The Indestructible Wife</i> (1919)	Select/Selznick	Alice Brady/Saxon Kling	Charles Maigne
<i>Experimental Marriage</i> (1919)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Robert G. Vignola
<i>Good Gracious, Annabelle</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke/Herbert Rawlinson	George Melford
<i>Let's Elope</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark/Frank Mills	John S. Robertson

<i>I'll Get Him Yet</i> (1919)	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish/Richard Barthelmess	Elmer Clifton
<i>The Rescuing Angel</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Shirley Mason/Forrest Stanley	Walter Edwards
<i>The Road Called Straight</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Betzwood Film Co.	Louis Bennison/Ormi Hawley	Ira M. Lowry
<i>The Probation Wife</i> (1919)	Select/Norma Talmadge Film Corp.	Norma Talmadge/Thomas Meighan	Sidney Franklin
<i>All Wrong</i> (1919)	Pathé/Anderson-Brunton Co.	Bryant Washburn/Mildred Davis	Raymond B. West
<i>Happiness a La Mode</i> (1919)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>Charge it to Me</i> (1919)	Pathé/American	Margarita Fischer/Emory Johnson	Ray William Neill
<i>Some Bride</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Viola Dana/Irving Cummings	Henry Otto
<i>Upside Down</i> (1919)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Taylor Holmes/Anna Lehr	Lawrence C. Windom
<i>A Temperamental Wife</i> (1919)	First National/Constance Talmadge Film Co.	Constance Talmadge/Wyndham Standing	David Kirkland
<i>Lord and Lady Algy</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Tom Moore/Naomi Childers	Harry Beaumont
<i>Stepping Out</i> (1919)	Paramount/Thomas H. Ince	Enid Bennett/Niles Welch	Fred Niblo
<i>The Misleading Widow</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke/James L. Crane	John S. Robertson
<i>Sadie Love</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke/James L. Crane	John S. Robertson
<i>Fair and Warmer</i> (1919)	Metro/Screen Classics	May Allison/Pell Trenton	Henry Otto
<i>Civilian Clothes</i> (1920)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Thomas Meighan/Martha Mansfield	Hugh Ford
<i>Easy to Get</i> (1920)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark/Harrison Ford	Walter Edwards
<i>Flying Pat</i> (1920)	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish/James Rennie	F. Richard Jones
<i>Hairpins</i> (1920)	Paramount/Thomas Ince	Enid Bennett/Matt Moore	Fred Niblo
<i>Let's Be Fashionable</i> (1920)	First National/Thomas Ince	Douglas Maclean/Doris May	Lloyd Ingrham
<i>Mrs. Temple's Telegram</i> (1920)	Paramount/Arctcraft	Bryant Washburn/Wanda Hawley	James Cruze
<i>Parlor, Bedroom and Bath</i> (1920)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Eugene Palette/Ruth Stonehouse	Edward Dillon
<i>Remodeling Her Husband</i> (1920)	Paramount/Realart Film Corp.	Dorothy Gish/James Rennie	Lillian Gish
<i>So Long Letty</i> (1920)	Robertson-Cole/Christie Co.	Colleen Moore/T. Roy Barnes	Al Christie

<i>Their Mutual Child</i> (1920)	Pathé/American	Margarita Fischer/Joseph Bennett	George L. Cox
<i>Why Change Your Wife?</i> (1920)	Paramount/Artcraft	Gloria Swanson/Thomas Meighan	Cecil B. DeMille
<i>An Amateur Devil</i> (1920)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Bryant Washburn/Ann May	Maurice Campbell
<i>Fixed By George</i> (1920)	Universal/Universal Film Manufacturing Corp.	Lee Moran/Hazel Howell	Eddie Lyons and Lee Moran
<i>An Old Fashioned Boy</i> (1920)	Paramount/Thomas Ince	Charles Ray/Ethel Shannon	Jerome Storm
<i>The New York Idea</i> (1920)	Paramount/Realart Film Corp.	Alice Brady/Lowell Sherman	Herbert Blache

Appendix V- Female Leads (Hoyden, Shero and Madcap)

Hoydens			
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Star	Director
<i>The Morals of Marcus</i> (1915)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marie Doro	Edwin S. Porter
<i>Niobe</i> (1915)	Paramount/ Famous Players	Hazel Dawn	Hugh Ford
<i>Kilmeny</i> (1915)	Paramount/Morosco	Leonore Ulrich	Oscar Apfel
<i>Nearly a Lady</i> (1915)	Paramount/Bosworth	Elsie Janis	Hobart Bosworth
<i>A Girl of Yesterday</i> (1915)	Paramount/Famous Players	Mary Pickford	Allan Dwan
<i>The Dust of Egypt</i> (1915)	VLSE/Vitagraph	Edith Storey	George D. Baker
<i>Still Waters</i> (1915)	Paramount/Lasky	Marguerite Clark	J. Searle Dawley
<i>The Adventures of a Madcap</i> (1915)	Pathé/Balboa	Jackie Saunders	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>Kilmeny</i> (1915)	Paramount/Morosco	Leonore Ulrich	Oscar Apfel
<i>The Rugmaker's Daughter</i> (1915)*	Paramount/Morosco	Maud Allan	Oscar Apfel
<i>A Corner in Colleens</i> (1916)*	Triangle/Kay Bee	Bessie Barriscale	Charles Miller
<i>Her Father's Son</i> (1916)	Paramount/Morosco	Vivian Martin	William Desmond Taylor
<i>Plain Jane</i> (1916)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Bessie Barriscale	Charles Miller
<i>The Ragged Princess</i> (1916)	Fox	June Caprice	John G. Adolphi
<i>The Wharf Rat</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Mae Marsh	Chester Whitney
<i>Love Aflame</i> (1917)•	Universal/Red Feather	Ruth Stonehouse	Raymond Wells
<i>Kitty McKay</i> (1917)•	VLSE/Vitagraph	Lillian Walker	Wilfrid North
<i>Polly Redhead</i> (1917)	Universal/Bluebird	Ella Hall	Jack Conway
<i>Pots-and-Pans Peggy</i> (1917)	Pathé/Thanhouser	Gladys Hulette	Eugene Moore
<i>Sunny Jane</i> (1917)	Mutual/Balboa	Jackie Saunders	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>Cheerful Givers</i> (1917)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Bessie Love	Paul Powell
<i>Aladdin's Other Lamp</i> (1917)	Metro/Rolfe	Viola Dana	John H. Collins

<i>Lady Barnacle</i> (1917)	Metro/Rolfe	Viola Dana	John H. Collins
<i>The Little Terror</i> (1917)	Universal/Bluebird	Violet Mersereau	Rex Ingraham
<i>Bab the Fixer</i> (1917)	Mutual/Balboa	Jackie Saunders	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>The Amazons</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marguerite Clark	Joseph Kaufman
<i>Mountain Dew</i> (1917)	Triangle Dist/Triangle Film Corp.	Margery Wilson	Thomas N. Heffron
<i>The Mate of Sally Ann</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter	Henry King
<i>Amarilly of Clothesline-Alley</i> (1918)	Paramount/Artcraft	Mary Pickford	Marshall Neilan
<i>Sunshine Nan</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players	Ann Pennington	Charles Giblyn
<i>Little Miss No-Account</i> (1918)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Gladys Leslie	William P.S. Earle
<i>The Little Runaway</i> (1918)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Gladys Leslie	William P.S. Earle
<i>How Could You, Jean?</i> (1918)	Paramount/Artcraft	Mary Pickford	William Desmond Taylor
<i>The Venus Model</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Clarence Badger
<i>Opportunity</i> (1918)	Metro/	Viola Dana	John H. Collins
<i>The Demon</i> (1918)	Metro/	Edith Storey	George D. Baker
<i>Peck's Bad Girl</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Charles Giblyn
<i>A Perfect 36</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Charles Giblyn
<i>Battling Jane</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>Together</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Violet Mersereau	O.A.C. Lund
<i>Danger---Go Slow</i> (1918)	Universal/Universal Film Manufacturing Corp.	Mae Murray	Robert Leonard
<i>Mirandy Smiles</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Vivian Martin	William C. De Mille
<i>The Hope Chest</i> (1918) *	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>Two-Gun Betty</i> (1918)	Pathé/Robert Brunton	Bessie Barriscale	Howard Hickman
<i>Mickey</i> (1918)	Western Import/W.H. Productions	Mabel Normand	F. Richard Jones
<i>Boots</i> (1919)	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>Maggie Pepper</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Ethel Clayton	Chester Withey
<i>The Little White Savage</i> (1919)	Universal/Bluebird	Carmel Myers	Paul Powell

<i>The Winning Girl</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Shirley Mason	Robert G. Vignola
<i>Put Up Your Hands</i> (1919)	Pathé/American	Margarita Fischer	Edward Sloman
<i>The Lamb and the Lion</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole/National Film Corp.	Billie Rhodes	Francis J. Grandon
<i>A Yankee Princess</i> (1919)	Vitagraph Co./Vitagraph Co.	Bessie Love	David Smith
<i>Captain Kidd, Jr.</i> (1919)	Paramount/Arctcraft	Mary Pickford	William Desmond Taylor
<i>The Homebreaker</i> (1919)	Paramount/Thomas H. Ince	Dorothy Dalton	Victor Schertzinger
<i>The Love Call</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole/National Film Corp.	Billie Rhodes	Louis Chaudet
<i>Daddy Long Legs</i> (1919)	First National/Mary Pickford Corp.	Mary Pickford	Marshall Neilan
<i>When Doctors Disagree</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Victor Schertzinger
<i>Muggsy</i> (1919)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Jackie Saunders	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>Nugget Nell</i> (1919)	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>The Microbe</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Viola Dana	Henry Otto
<i>Upstairs</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Victor Schertzinger
<i>The Hoodlum</i> (1919)	First National/Mary Pickford Corp.	Mary Pickford	Sidney A. Franklin
<i>Anne of Green Gables</i> (1919)	Paramount/ Realart Pictures Corp.	Mary Miles Minter	William Desmond Taylor
<i>Heart O' the Hills</i> (1919)	First National/Mary Pickford Corp.	Mary Pickford	Sidney Franklin
<i>Jinx</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Victor Schertzinger
<i>Peg O' My Heart</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Wanda Hawley	William C. DeMille

<i>Bubbles</i> (1920)	States Rights/Pioneer Film Corp.	Mary Anderson	Wayne Mack
<i>Heart of Twenty</i> (1920)	Robertson-Cole/Brentwood Film Corp.	ZaSu Pitts	Henry Koller
<i>Mary Ellen Comes to Town</i> (1920)	Paramount/Artcraft	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>Pinto</i> (1920)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Victor Schertzinger
<i>Suds</i> (1920)	United Artists/Mary Pickford Corp.	Mary Pickford	Jack Dillon

Shero			
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Star	Director
<i>The Chorus Lady</i> (1915)	Paramount/Lasky	Cleo Ridgely	Frank Riecher
<i>The Yankee Girl</i> (1915)	Paramount/Morosco	Blanche Ring	Phillips Smalley
<i>Love's Pilgrimage to America</i> (1916)	Universal/Broadway Universal Feature	Lulu Glaser	Lawrence Marston
<i>My Lady Incog</i> (1916)	Paramount/Famous Players	Hazel Dawn	Sidney Olcott
<i>Home</i> (1916)	Triangle/Kay-Bee	Bessie Barriscale	Raymond B. West
<i>The Social Secretary</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Norma Talmadge	John Emerson
<i>Her Father's Son</i> (1916)*	Paramount/Morosco	Vivian Martin	William Desmond Taylor
<i>Shadows and Sunshine</i> (1916)	Pathé/Balboa	Baby Marie Osborne	Henry King
<i>The Sultana</i> (1916)	Pathé/Gold Rooster	Ruth Roland	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>The Innocence of Lizette</i> (1916)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter	James Kirkwood
<i>The Right Direction</i> (1916)	Paramount/Pallas	Vivian Martin	E. Mason Hopper
<i>The Heiress at Coffee Dan's</i> (1916)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Bessie Love	Edward Dillon
<i>The Gentle Intruder</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter	James Kirkwood
<i>Polly Redhead</i> (1917)	Universal/Bluebird	Ella Hall	Jack Conway
<i>Pots-and-Pans Peggy</i> (1917)	Pathé/Thanhouser	Gladys Hulette	Eugene Moore
<i>Her Official Fathers</i> (1917)	Triangle/Fine Arts	Dorothy Gish	Joseph Henabery
<i>Sunshine and Gold</i> (1917)	Pathé/Balboa	Baby Marie Osborne	Henry King

<i>Aladdin's Other Lamp</i> (1917)	Metro/Rolfe	Viola Dana	John H. Collins
<i>The Girl Glory</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay-Bee	Enid Bennett	Roy William Neill
<i>A Kiss for Susie</i> (1917)	Paramount/Pallas	Vivian Martin	Robert Thornby
<i>An Even Break</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay-Bee	Olive Thomas	Lambert Hillyer
<i>Captain Kiddo</i> (1917)	Pathé/Lasalida	Baby Marie Osborne	Eugene Moore
<i>Charity Castle</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Calendar Girl</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Juliette Day	Rollin S. Sturgeon
<i>The Ghost House</i> (1917)	Paramount/Lasky	Louise Huff	William C. DeMille
<i>A Game of Wits</i> (1917)*	Mutual/American	Gail Kane	Henry King
<i>The Mate of Sally Ann</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter	Henry King
<i>The Kill-Joy</i> (1917)	Kleine System/Essanay	Mary McAllister	Fred E. Wright
<i>Betty Takes a Hand</i> (1918)	Triangle/Kay-Bee		
<i>A Petticoat Pilot</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Vivian Martin	Rollin S. Sturgeon
<i>American Buds</i> (1918)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Katherine and Jane Lee	Kenean Buel
<i>Limousine Life</i> (1918)	Triangle Dist./Triangle Film Corp.	Olive Thomas	John Francis Dillon
<i>Little Red Decides</i> (1918)	Triangle Dist./Triangle Film Corp.	Barbara Connolly	Jack Conway
<i>The Floor Below</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures Corp.	Mabel Normand	Clarence Badger
<i>A Bit of Jade</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter	Edward Sloman
<i>Dolly Does Her Bit</i> (1918)	Pathé/Diando Film Corp.	Baby Marie Osborne	William Bertram
<i>The Million Dollar Dollies</i> (1918)	Metro/Emerald	Jenny and Rosie Dolly	Léonce Perret
<i>Joan of Plattsburg</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures Corp.	Mabel Normand	William Humphrey
<i>Peg of the Pirates</i> (1918)	Fox Film/Fox Film	Peggy Hyland	O.A.C. Lund
<i>Social Briars</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Mary Miles Minter	Henry King
<i>Winning of Beatrice</i> (1918)	Metro Pictures Corp./Metro Pictures Corp.	May Allison	Harry L. Franklin
<i>A Little Sister of Everybody</i> (1918)	Pathé/Anderson-Brunton Co.	Bessie Love	Robert Thornby
<i>Good Night, Paul</i> (1918)	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge	Walter Edwards
<i>The Venus Model</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures Corp.	Mabel Normand	Clarence Badger

<i>A Successful Adventure</i> (1918)	Metro Pictures Corp./Metro Pictures Corp.	May Allison	Harry L. Franklin
<i>Cupid By Proxy</i> (1918)	Pathé/Diando Film Corp.	Baby Marie Osborne	William Bertram
<i>Neighbors</i> (1918)	World Film/World Film	Madge Evans	Frank Crane
<i>The Dream Lady</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Carmel Meyers	Elsie Jane Wilson
<i>The Vamp</i> (1918)	Paramount/Thomas Ince	Enid Bennett	Jerome Storm
<i>Doing Their Bit</i> (1918)	Fox Film/Fox Film	Katherine and Jane Lee	Kenean Buel
<i>The Midnight Burglar</i> (1918)	General Film/Oakdale	Gloria Joy	Bert Ensminger
<i>Winning Grandma</i> (1918)	Pathé/Diando Film Corp.	Baby Marie Osborne	William Bertram
<i>Beans</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Edith Roberts	John Francis Dillon
<i>Johanna Enlists</i> (1918)	Artcraft/Pickford Film	Mary Pickford	William Desmond Taylor
<i>Battling Jane</i> (1918)*	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>Just Sylvia</i> (1918)	World Film/World Film	Barbara Castleton	Travers Vale
<i>Little Miss Hoover</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark	John S. Robertson
<i>Milady O' the Beanstalk</i> (1918)	Pathé/Diando Film Corp.	Baby Marie Osborne	William Bertram
<i>The Love Net</i> (1918)	World Film/World Film	Madge Evans	Tefft Johnson
<i>Her Country First</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Vivian Martin	James Young
<i>All of a Sudden Norma</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole/Bessie Barriscale Features	Bessie Barriscale	Howard Hickman
<i>Heart of Gold</i> (1919)	World Film/World Film	Louise Huff	Travers Vale
<i>Boots</i> (1919) *	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>Maggie Pepper</i> (1919)*	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Ethel Clayton	Chester Withey
<i>Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark	Hugh Ford
<i>Smiles</i> (1919)	Fox Film/Fox Film	Katherine and Jane Lee	Arvid E. Gillstrom
<i>The Winning Girl</i> (1919) *	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Shirley Mason	Robert G. Vignola
<i>Peppy Polly</i> (1919)	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>Captain Kidd, Jr.</i> (1919)	Artcraft/Pickford Film	Mary Pickford	William Desmond Taylor
<i>The Follies Girl</i> (1919)	Triangle Dist./Triangle Film Corp.	Olive Thomas	John Francis Dillon

<i>The Homebreaker</i> (1919)*	Paramount/Thomas H. Ince	Dorothy Dalton	Victor Schertzinger
<i>The Little Intruder</i> (1919)	World Film/World Film	Louise Huff	Oscar Apfel
<i>Caleb Piper's Girl</i> (1919)	Pathé/Astra Film Corp.	Helene Chadwick	Ernest Traxler
<i>Leave it to Susan</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy	Clarence Badger
<i>A Bachelor's Wife</i> (1919)	Pathé/American	Mary Miles Minter	Emmett J. Flynn
<i>Home Wanted</i> (1919)	World Film/World Film	Madge Evans	Tefft Johnson
<i>The Little Diplomat</i> (1919)	Pathé/Diando Film Corp.	Baby Marie Osborne	Stuart Paton
<i>The Weaker Vessel</i> (1919)	Universal Film/Universal Film	Mary MacLaren	Paul Powell
<i>A Favor to a Friend</i> (1919)	Metro Pictures Corp./Metro Pictures Corp.	Emmy Wehlen	John Ince
<i>Miss Crusoe</i> (1919)	World Film/World Film	Virginia Hammond	Frank Crane
<i>Kitty Kelly, M.D.</i> (1919)	Robertson-Cole/Bessie Barriscale Features	Bessie Barriscale	Howard Hickman
<i>A Regular Girl</i> (1919)	Select/Selznick	Elsie Janis	James Young
<i>Bullin' the Bullsheviki</i> (1919)	States Rights/Eff & Eff Co.	Marguerite Clayton	Frank P. Donovan
<i>Alias Miss Dodd</i> (1920)	Universal Film/Universal Film	Edith Roberts	Harry L. Franklin
<i>Bab's Candidate</i> (1920)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Corinne Griffith	Edward H. Griffith
<i>The Chorus Girl's Romance</i> (1920)	Metro Pictures Corp./Metro Pictures Corp.	Viola Dana	William C. Dowlan
<i>The Frisky Mrs. Johnson</i> (1920)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke	Edward Dillon
<i>Good References</i> (1920)	First National/Constance Talmadge Prod.	Constance Talmadge	Roy William Neill
<i>Help Yourself</i> (1920)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy	Hugo Ballin
<i>Silk Hosiery</i> (1920)	Paramount/Thomas H. Ince	Enid Bennett	Fred Niblo
<i>The Love Expert</i> (1920)	First National/Constance Talmadge Prod.	Constance Talmadge	David Kirkland

Madcap			
Film Title and Release Date	Distribution/Production Company	Star	Director
<i>The Arrival of Perpetua</i> (1915)•	World/Shubert	Vivian Martin	Emile Chautard
<i>The Caprices of Kitty</i> (1915)	Paramount/Bosworth	Elsie Janis	Phillips Smalley/Lois Weber/Elsie Janis

<i>Betty in Search of a Thrill</i> (1915)	Paramount/Bosworth	Elsie Janis	Phillips Smalley/Lois Weber/Elsie Janis
<i>Seven Sisters</i> (1915)	Paramount/Lasky	Marguerite Clark	Sidney Olcott
<i>Peggy</i> (1916)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Billie Burke	Thomas Ince
<i>The Flight of the Duchess</i> (1916)	Mutual/Thanhouser	Gladys Hulette	Eugene Nowland
<i>A Matrimonial Martyr</i> (1916)	Pathé/Balboa	Ruth Roland	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>The Madcap</i> (1916)	Universal/Red Feather	Flora DeHaven	William C. Dowlan
<i>Susie Snowflake</i> (1916)	Paramount/Famous Players	Ann Pennington	James Kirkwood
<i>Miss George Washington</i> (1916)	Paramount/Lasky	Marguerite Clark	J. Searle Dawley
<i>Prudence the Pirate</i> (1916)	Pathé/Thanhouser	Gladys Hulette	William Parke
<i>The Mischief Maker</i> (1916)	Fox Film/Fox Film	June Caprice	John G. Adolfi
<i>Miss Jackie of the Navy</i> (1916)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer	Harry Pollard
<i>Chicken Casey</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Dorothy Dalton	Raymond B. West
<i>Molly Go Get 'Em</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Wildcat</i> (1917) •	Mutual/Balbao	Jackie Saunders	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>An Amateur Orphan</i> (1917)	Pathé/Thanhouser	Gladys Leslie	Van Dyke Brooke
<i>Madcap Madge</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Olive Thomas	Raymond B. West
<i>Betty Be Good</i> (1917)	Mutual/Balboa	Jackie Saunders	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>Miss Deception</i> (1917)	Art Dramas/Van Dyke Film Production Co.	Jean Sothern	Eugene Knowland
<i>The Girl Who Couldn't Grow Up</i> (1917)	Mutual/Pollard	Margarita Fischer	Harry Pollard
<i>The Mysterious Miss Terry</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Billie Burke	J. Searle Dawley
<i>Bab's Burglar</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marguerite Clark	J. Searle Dawley
<i>Bab's Diary</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marguerite Clark	J. Searle Dawley

<i>A Game of Wits</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Gail Kane	Henry King
<i>Bab's Matinee Idol</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Marguerite Clark	J. Searle Dawley
<i>Indiscreet Corinne</i> (1917)	Triangle/Kay Bee	Olive Thomas	Jack Dillon
<i>Please Help Emily</i> (1917)	Mutual/Empire All Star Corp.	Ann Murdock	Dell Henderson
<i>The Antics of Ann</i> (1917)	Paramount/Famous Players	Ann Pennington	Edward Dillon
<i>Miss Jackie of the Army</i> (1917)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Fair Barbarian</i> (1917)	Paramount/Pallas	Vivian Martin	Robert Thornby
<i>The Wild Strain</i> (1918)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Nell Shipman	William Wolbert
<i>Jilted Janet</i> (1918)•	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>Ann's Finish</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>Nancy Comes Home</i> (1918)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Myrtle Lind	John Francis Dillon (previously Jack Dillon)
<i>Naughty Naughty</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players	Enid Bennett	Jerome Storm
<i>Up the Road with Sallie</i> (1918) •	Select/Selznick	Constance Talmadge	William Desmond Taylor
<i>How Could You, Caroline?</i> (1918)	Pathé,/Pathé	Bessie Love	Frederick Thompson
<i>A Broadway Scandal</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Carmel Myers	Joseph De Grasse
<i>The Fair Pretender</i> * (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy	Charles Miller
<i>The Primitive Woman</i> (1918) *	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>In Pursuit of Polly</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke	Chet Withey
<i>Miss Mischief Maker</i> (1918)	General/Oakdale	Gloria Joy	Sherwood MacDonald
<i>The Girl from Bohemia</i> (1918)	Pathé/Astra	Irene Castle	Lawrence McGill
<i>The Love Swindle</i> (1918) *	Universal/Bluebird	Edith Roberts	John Francis Dillon
<i>Waifs</i> (1918)	Pathé/Astra	Gladys Hulette	Albert Parker
<i>A Society Sensation</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Carmel Myers	Paul Powell
<i>The Brazen Beauty</i> (1918)	Universal/Bluebird	Priscilla Dean	Tod Browning
<i>When Do We Eat?</i> (1918)	Paramount/Famous Players	Enid Bennett	Fred Niblo
<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i> (1918)	Paramount/Artcraft	Elsie Ferguson	Emile Chautard

<i>A Perfect Lady</i> (1918)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy	Clarence Badger
<i>Fair Enough</i> (1918)	Mutual/American	Margarita Fischer	Edward Sloman
<i>The Gold Cure</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Viola Dana	John H. Collins
<i>Hard Boiled</i> (1919)	Paramount/Thomas H. Ince	Dorothy Dalton	Victor Schertzinger
<i>Peggy Does Her Darnedest</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	May Allison	George D. Baker
<i>The Amazing Imposter</i> (1919)	Pathé/American	Mary Miles Minter	Lloyd Ingraham
<i>The Little Rowdy</i> (1919)	Triangle/Triangle Pictures Corp.	Hazel Daly	Harry Beaumont
<i>The Delicious Little Devil</i> (1919)	Universal/Universal Film Manufacturing Co.	Mae Murray	Robert Z. Leonard
<i>Some Bride</i> (1919)*	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Viola Dana	Henry Otto
<i>Too Many Crooks</i> (1919)	Greater Vitagraph/Vitagraph	Gladys Leslie	Ralph Ince
<i>Prudence on Broadway</i> (1919)	Triangle/Triangle Film Corp.	Olive Thomas	Frank Borzage
<i>Yvonne from Paris</i> (1919)	Pathé/American	Mary Miles Minter	Emmett J. Flynn
<i>Strictly Confidential</i> (1919)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy	Clarence Badger
<i>Widow by Proxy</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark	Walter Edwards
<i>Luck in Pawn</i> (1919)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark	Walter Edwards
<i>Turning the Tables</i> (1919)	Paramount/New Art Film Co.	Dorothy Gish	Elmer Clifton
<i>The Amateur Adventuress</i> (1919)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Emmy Whelen	Henry Otto
<i>The Web of Chance</i> (1919)	Fox Film/Fox Film	Peggy Hyland	Alfred E. Green
<i>Away Goes Prudence</i> (1920)	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Billie Burke	John S. Robertson
<i>Beware of the Bride</i> (1920)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Eileen Percy	Howard Mitchell

<i>The Blooming Angel</i> (1920)	Goldwyn Dist./Goldwyn Pictures	Madge Kennedy	Victor Schertzinger
<i>Dangerous to Men</i> (1920)	Metro/Metro Pictures Corp.	Viola Dana	William C. Dowlan
<i>Easy to Get</i> (1920) *	Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky	Marguerite Clark	Walter Edwards
<i>Food for Scandal</i> (1920)	Paramount/Realart Film Corp.	Wanda Hawley	James Cruze
<i>The Flapper</i> (1920)	Selznick/Selznick Pictures	Olive Thomas	Alan Crosland
<i>Help Wanted-XXX Male</i> (1920)*	Pathé/Jesse D. Hampton Productions	Blanche Sweet	Henry King
<i>The Land of Jazz</i> (1920)	Fox/Fox Film Corp.	Eileen Percy	Jules Furthman
<i>Oh, Lady, Lady</i> (1920)	Paramount/Realart Film Corp.	Bebe Daniels	Maurice Campbell
<i>The Weekend</i> (1920)	Pathé/American	Margarita Fischer	George L. Cox
<i>What Happened to Rosa</i> (1920)	Goldwyn Dist./ Goldwyn Pictures	Mabel Normand	Victor Schertzinger

*Denotes films that may be counted in multiple categories, such as a hoyden and shero.

Appendix VI- Filmography of Extant Feature-Length Comedies, 1914-1920

*Films seen by the author personally are color coded purple (150 films). Films not viewed either for being on nitrate or travel/fund limitations are in black print. There are 233 films that 'survive,' and 212 available for viewing. I only counted titles as unviewable if I personally inquired and know they are inaccessible. Some remaining titles that I haven't seen at George Eastman House or GosFilm, may also be unviewable.

YouTube (34 films)

1914

A Florida Enchantment (Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph)- Starring Sidney Drew and Edith Storey. Dir. by Sidney Drew.

Tillie's Punctured Romance (Alco/Keystone)- Starring Marie Dressler. Also has Charles Chaplin and Mabel Normand. Dir. by Mack Sennett.

1916

American Aristocracy (Triangle/Fine Arts)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. by Lloyd Ingraham. Writer: Anita Loos.

Flirting With Fate (Triangle/ Fine Arts)-Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. by W. Christy Cabanne.

His Picture in the Papers (Triangle/Fine Arts)-Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. By W.Christy Cabanne.

Hoo Doo Ann (Triangle/Fine Arts)- Starring Mae Marsh. Dir. by Lloyd Ingraham.

The Innocence of Lizette (Mutual/American)- Starring Mary Miles Minter. Dir. by James Kirkwood. Original scenario by female writer Bessie Boniel.

The Social Secretary (Triangle/Fine Arts)- Starring Norma Talmadge. Directed by John Emerson.

1917

A Girl's Folly (World/Paragon Films Inc.)- Starring June Elvidge. Directed by Maurice Tourneur.

Down to Earth (Paramount/Artcraft)-Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Directed by John Emerson. Written by Anita Loos.

Tom Sawyer (Paramount/Morosco)- Starring Jack Pickford. Dir. by William Desmond Taylor.

Wild and Woolly (Paramount/Artcraft)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Directed John Emerson. Written by Anita Loos.

1918

A Pair of Silk Stockings (Select/Selznick)- Starring Constance Talmadge and Harrison Ford. Dir. Walter Edwards. Written by Edith M. Kennedy.

All Night (Universal/ Bluebird)- Starring Carmel Myers and Rudolph Valentino. Impersonation and imposture, millionaires.

Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley (Paramount/Artcraft)- Starring Mary Pickford. Dir. by Marshall Neilan. Written by Frances Marion.

Johanna Enlists (Paramount/Artcraft)- Starring Mary Pickford. Dir. William Desmond Taylor. Written by Frances Marion.

Mickey (Goldwyn)- Starring Mabel Normand. Dir. by F. Richard Jones.

My Cousin (Paramount/Artcraft)- Starring Enrico Caruso. Dir. Edward Jose. Written by Margaret Trunbell.

The Floor Below (Goldwyn)- Starring Mabel Normand. Also Tom Moore. Dir. Clarence G. Badger.

1919

Daddy Long Legs (First National/Mary Pickford)-Starring Mary Pickford. Dir. Marshall Neilan.

Don't Change Your Husband (Paramount/Artcraft)-Starring Gloria Swanson and Elliot Dexter. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Written by Jeanie Macpherson.

Heart O' the Hills (First National/Mary Pickford Corp.)-Starring Mary Pickford. Dir. Sidney Franklin.

The Delicious Little Devil (Universal)- Starring Mae Murray. Rudolph Valentino also in it. Dir. Robert Z. Leonard.

The Roaring Road (Paramount/Famous Players)-Starring Wallace Reid. Also has Ann Little. Dir. James Cruze.

1920

Down on the Farm (UA/Mack Sennett)-Starring Louise Fazenda. Dir. Eric Kenton.

Excuse My Dust (Paramount/Artcraft)-Starring Wallace Reid. Dir. Sam Wood.

Homer Comes Home (Artcraft/Thomas Ince Corp.)-Starring Charles Ray. Dir. Jerome Storm. Written by Agnes Christine Johnston.

Headin' Home (States Rights/Yankee Film Co.)-Starring Babe Ruth. Dir. by Lawrence C. Windom.

Suds (UA/Mary Pickford Corp.)-Starring Mary Pickford. Dir. Jack Dillon.

The Flapper (Selznick)- Starring Olive Thomas. Dir. Alan Crosland. Writer: Frances Marion.

The Love Expert (First National/Constance Talmadge Prod.)-Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. David Kirkland. Written By: Anita Loos and John Emerson.

The Saphead (Metro)- Starring Buster Keaton. Dir. Herbert Blache. Writer: June Mathis.

What Happened to Rosa (Goldwyn)-Starring in Mabel Normand. Dir. Victor Schertzinger.

Why Change Your Wife? (Paramount/Artcraft)-Starring Gloria Swanson and Thomas Meighan. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille.

DVD (21)

1915

David Harum (Paramount/Famous Players)- Starring William H. Crane and May Allison.

The Lamb (Triangle/Fine Arts)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir by W. Christy Cabanne.

1916

Manhattan Madness (Triangle/Fine Arts)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. by Allan Dwan.

The Habit of Happiness (Triangle/Fine Arts) –Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. by Allan Dawn. Screenplay by Shannon Fife.

The Matrimaniac (Triangle/Fine Arts)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks and Constance Talmadge. Dir. by Paul Powell.

Reggie Mixes In (Triangle/Fine Arts)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. by W.Christy Cabanne.

1917

A Modern Musketeer (Paramount/Artcraft)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. by Allan Dwan.

Reaching for the Moon (Paramount/Artcraft)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Directed by John Emerson.

The Pinch Hitter (Triangle/Kay-Bee)-Starring Charles Ray. Director Victor Schertzinger

1918

The Danger Game (Goldwyn)- Starring Madge Kennedy and Tom Moore. Dir. by Harry Pollard.

The Dream Lady (Universal/Bluebird)- Starring Carmel Meyers. Dir. Elsie Jane Wilson.

1919

Burglar by Proxy (First National/Jack Pickford Productions)-Starring Jack Pickford. Dir. John Francis Dillon

Getting Mary Married (Select Pictures/Cosmopolitan Prod.)- Starring Marion Davies. Dir. Allan Dwan.

Hawthorne of the USA (Paramount/Artcraft)-Starring Wallace Reid. Dir. James Cruze. On DVD, but tough to get.

Jubilo (Goldwyn)- Starring Will Rogers. Dir. Clarence G. Badger.

The Busher (Paramount/Thomas H. Ince Prod.)-Starring Charles Ray. Also Colleen Moore and a young John Gilbert. Written by R. Cecil Smith. Dir. Jerome Storm.

When the Clouds Roll By (United Artists/Douglas Fairbanks Pictures)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Dir. By Victor Fleming.

Yankee Doodle in Berlin (States Rights/Mack Sennett Co.)-Starring Ford Sterling. Dir. by F. Richard Jones.

1920

Conrad in Quest of His Youth (Paramount/Famous Players)-Starring Thomas Meighan. Dir. William C. DeMille. Written by Olga Printziau

Huckleberry Finn (Paramount/Famous Players-Survives at George Eastman House)-Dir. By William Desmond Taylor. Written by Julia Crawford Ivers.

Jes' Call Me Jim (Goldwyn-Survives at MOMA)-Starring Will Rogers. Dir. by Clarence Badger.

United States Archives

Library of Congress-Washington D.C. (78 Films)

1915

A Gentleman of Leisure (Paramount/Lasky-complete)- Starring Wallace Eddinger. Also has Carol Holliday. Dir. by George Melford.

Her Shattered Idol (Mutual/Majestic-only some reels available)- Starring Mae Marsh. Dir. by John B. O'Brien. Written by Ella Carter Woods.

It's No Laughing Matter (Paramount/Bosworth-only some reels available)- Starring Maclyn Arbuckle. Directed by Lois Weber.

Jane (Paramount/Morosco-only some reels available)- Starring Charlotte Greenwood. Dir. by Frank Lloyd.

Kilmeny (Paramount/Morosco-only one reel available)- Starring Lenore Ulrich. Directed by Oscar Apfel.

Playing Dead (VSLE/Vitagraph-complete)-Starring the Drews. Directed by Mrs. Sidney Drew.

Snobs (Paramount/Lasky-complete)- Starring Victor Moore. Dir. by Oscar Apfel.

Sunshine Molly (Paramount/Bosworth-only some reels available)- Starring and directed by Lois Weber.

The Caprices of Kitty (Paramount/Bosworth-only some reels available)- Starring and written by Elsie Janis. Dir. by Phillips Smalley.

The Commuters (George Kleine/Kleine Prod.-complete)-Starring Irene Fenwick. Dir. by George Fitzmaurice.

The Cub (World/Brady-on nitrate but apparently available for digital transfer-complete)- Starring Johnny Hines. Dir. by Maurice Tourneur.

The Yankee Girl (Paramount/Morosco-only some reels available)- Starring Blanche Ring. Directed by Phillips Smalley.

1916

A House Built Upon Sand (Triangle/Fine Arts-only some reels available)- Starring Lillian Gish. Dir. Edward Morrissey. Writer: Mary H. O'Connor.

A Son of Erin (Paramount/ Pallas-only some reels available)- Starring Dustin Farnum. Dir.: Julia Crawford Ivers. Writer: Julia Crawford Ivers.

A Stranger from Somewhere (Universal/Bluebird-complete)- Starring Franklyn Farnum. Dir. by William Worthington.

An International Marriage (Paramount/Morosco-complete)- Starring Rita Jolivet. Dir. by Frank Lloyd.

From Broadway to a Throne (Universal/Red Feather-on nitrate and not currently viewable)- Starring Carter De Haven. Dir. by William Bowman.

Her Father's Son (Paramount/Morosco-complete)- Starring Vivian Martin. Dir. by William Desmond Taylor. Written by Anna Fielder Brand.

Rolling Stones (Paramount/Famous Players- only one reel extant)- Starring Owen Moore and Marguerite Courtot. Dir. by Dell Henderson.

The Bluff (Mutual/American-complete)-Starring Clarence Kolb and Max Dill. Dir. by Rae Berger.

The Heir to the Hoorah (Paramount/Lasky-complete)- Starring Thomas Meighan and Anita King. Dir. by William C. DeMille

The Lottery Man (Unity Sales Corp-complete)- Starring Thurlow Bergen. Dir. by Leopold Wharton.

The Madcap (Universal/Red Feather-only some reels available)- Starring Flora De Haven. Dir. by William C. Dowlan.

The Smugglers (Paramount/Famous Players-only one reel available)- Starring Donald Brian and Olive Tell. Directed by Sidney Olcott.

When Love is King (Kleine-Edison/Edison-complete)- Starring Richard Tucker. Also Carol McComas. Dir. by Ben Turbett.

1917

An Even Break (Triangle/Kay-Bee-one reel missing)- Starring Olive Thomas. Dir. by Lambert Hillyer.

Beloved Rogues (Mutual/Mutual Star Productions-only one reel and is on nitrate so unavailable for viewing)- Starring Clarence Dill and Max Kolb. Dir. by Alfred Santell.

Billy and the Big Stick (Conquest/Edison-complete)- Starring Raymond McKee. Dir. by Edward H. Griffith.

Captain Kiddo (Pathé/Lasalida-only one reel available)- Starring Baby Marie Osborne. Dir. by Eugene Moore. Written by Betty Burbridge.

Chicken Casey (Triangle/Kay-Bee-only some reels available)- Starring Dorothy Dalton. Directed Raymond B. West.

Filling His Own Shoes (KESE/Essanay-complete)-Starring Bryant Washburn. Dir. by Harry Beaumont.

Happiness (Triangle/Kay-Bee-complete)- Starring Enid Bennett. Directed by Reginald Barker.

Love Aflame (Universal/Red Feather-only some reels available)-Starring Ruth Stonehouse. Dir. by James Vincent and Raymond Wells.

Mr. Dolan of New York (Universal/Red Feather-only one reel available)-Starring Jack Mulhall. Dir. by Raymond Wells.

Nearly Married (Goldwyn-only on nitrate so not currently viewable)-Starring Madge Kennedy. Dir. by Chester Withey. Written by Margaret Mayo.

One Touch of Nature (KESE/Edison-complete)- Starring John Drew Bennett. Dir. by Edward H. Griffith.

Putting the Bee in Herbert (KESE/Edison-complete)-Starring Harry Benham. Dir. by Floyd France.

The Clodhopper (Triangle/Kay-Bee-complete)- Starring Charles Ray. Directed by Victor Schertzinger.

The Customary Two Weeks (Conquest/Edison-complete)-Starring Craig Ward. Dir. by Saul Harrison.

The Hater of Men (Triangle/Kay-Bee-complete)- Starring Bessie Barriscale. Dir. by Charles Miller. Written by C. Gardner Sullivan.

The Lady of the Photograph (Perfection Pictures/Edison-complete)- Starring Raymond McKee and Shirley Mason. Directed by Ben Turpett.

The Sudden Gentleman (Triangle, Comedy-drama—only one reel available)- Starring William Desmond. Dir. by Thomas N. Heffron. Written by R. Cecil Smith

The Son of His Father (Paramount/Thomas H. Ince-complete)-Starring Charles Ray. Dir. by Victor Schertzinger.

1918

Betty Takes a Hand (Triangle-complete)-Starring Olive Thomas. Dir. by John Francis Dillon.

Denny from Ireland (States Rights/ W. H. Clifford-only some reels available)- Starring Shorty Hamilton. Dir. by William H. Clifford.

Little Miss Hoover (Paramount/Famous Players-complete)- Starring Marguerite Clark. Dir. by John S. Robertson. Written by Maria Thompson Davies.

Swat the Spy (Fox-only one reel available)- Starring the Lee sisters. Dir. by Arvid E. Gilstrom.

The Accidental Honeymoon (States Rights/High Art Productions, Inc-only on nitrate so unavailable for viewing)-Starring Robert Warwick. Also Elaine Hammerstein. Dir. by Leonce Perret.

The Eyes of Julia Deep (Mutual/American-complete)-Starring Mary Miles Minter. Dir. by Lloyd Ingraham.

The Ghost of the Rancho (Pathé/Anderson-Brunton Co.-only one reel survives)-Starring Bryant Washburn. Dir. by William Worthington.

Waifs (Pathé/Astra-only some reels available)-Starring Gladys Hulette. Dir. by Albert Parker. Written by Grace Sartwell Mason.

1919

A Temperamental Wife (First National/Constance Talmadge Film Co.-only on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)- Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. David Kirkland. Written by Anita Loos and John Emerson.

A Virtuous Vamp (First National/Constance Talmadge Prod.-complete)- Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. By David Kirkland and Sidney Franklin. Written by Anita Loos and John Emerson.

In Wrong (First National/Jack Pickford-complete)-Starring Jack Pickford. Dir. by James Kirkwood.

John Petticoats (Paramount/Artcraft—only some reels available)-Starring William S. Hart. Dir. Lambert Hillyer. Written by C. Gardner Sullivan.

Luck in Pawn (Paramount/Famous Players-only one reel available)-Starring Marguerite Clark. Dir. Walter Edwards.

Me and Captain Kidd (World—only on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)- Starring Evelyn Greeley. Dir. Oscar Apfel.

Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch (Paramount/Famous Players-complete)- Starring Marguerite Clark. Dir. Hugh Ford. Writer: Eve Unsell.

Phil-for-Short (World Corp.-complete)-Starring Evelyn Greeley. Dir. Oscar Apfel. Writer: Clara S. Beranger.

Strictly Confidential (Goldwyn-only on nitrate so currently unavailable)-Starring Madge Kennedy. Dir. Clarence Badger

The Imp (Select/Selznick- only on nitrate so currently unavailable)- Starring and written by Elsie Janis. Dir. by Robert Ellis.

The Probation Wife (Select/Norma Talmadge Film Corp.-one reel is missing)-Starring Norma Talmadge. Also Thomas Meighan. Dir. by Sydney A. Franklin.

Whitewashed Walls (Mutual/Roberston-Cole Prod.-only on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)-Starring William Desmond. Also Fritzi Brunette.

Why Smith Left Home (Paramount/Famous Players-on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)- Starring Bryant Washburn. Also Lois Wilson. Dir. Donald Crisp.

1920

Alarm Clock Andy (Paramount/Artcraft-complete)-Starring Charles Ray. Dir. Jerome Storm. Prod. Thomas H. Ince. Writer: Agnes C. Johnson.

His Pajama Girl (States Rights/Southern California Prod.-complete)- Starring Billie Rhodes. Dir. by Donald Edwards.

In Search of a Sinner (First National/Constance Talmadge Film Co.—complete)-Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. by David Kirkland. Written by John Emerson and Anita Loos.

Jack Straw (Paramount/Artcraft—complete)-Starring Robert Warwick. Also Carol McComas. Written by Olga Printziau. Dir. William C. DeMille.

Love, Honor and Behave (First National/Mack Sennett—complete)-Starring Ford Sterling. Dir. by F. Richard Jones.

Mary's Ankle (Paramount/Artcraft-only one reel available)-Starring Douglas MacLean and Doris May. Dir. by Lloyd Ingraham.

Mrs. Temple's Telegram (Paramount/Artcraft—complete)-Starring Bryant Washburn. Also Wanda Hawley. Dir. James Cruze.

The Rookie's Return (Paramount/Thomas H. Ince Corp —complete)-Starring Douglas MacLean and Doris May.

She Loves and Lies (Select/Norma Talmadge-one reel missing)-Starring Norma Talmadge. Dir. Chester Withey.

Sick Abed (Paramount/Artcraft—complete)-Starring Wallace Reid. Also Bebe Daniels. Written by Clara G. Kennedy.

Silk Hosiery (Paramount/Thomas H. Ince Prod.—complete)-Starring Enid Bennett. Dir. Fred Niblo.

Two Weeks (First National/ Joseph Schneck Prod.-only on nitrate so currently unavailable) Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. Sidney Franklin. Written by Anita Loos and John Emerson.

What's Your Husband Doing? (Paramount/Artcraft—only on nitrate so currently unavailable)- Starring Douglas MacLean and Doris May. Dir. Lloyd Ingraham. Prod. Thomas Ince. Writer: R. Cecil Smith.

You Never Can Tell (Paramount/Realart-complete)-Starring Bebe Daniels. Dir. Chester Franklin.

George Eastman House (20 films)

1914

What's His Name? (Paramount/Lasky, Comedy-complete)- Starring Max Figman. Dir. by Cecil B. DeMille.

1915

The Incurable Dukane (Famous Players, Comedy-only some reels available)-Starring John Barrymore.

1916

A Daughter of the Poor (Triangle/Fine Arts, Comedy—only some reels available)- Starring Bessie Love. Written by Anita Loos. Directed by Edward Dillon.

Plain Jane (Triangle/Kay-Bee-complete)- Starring Bessie Barriscale. Also Charles Ray. Written by C. Gardner Sullivan

1917

Arms and the Girl (Paramount/Famous Players-only some reels available)- Starring Billie Burke. Dir. by Joseph Kaufman.

Broadway Arizona (Triangle/Kay-Bee—only some reels available)- Starring Olive Thomas. Directed by Lynn Reynolds.

Madcap Madge (Triangle/Kay-Bee—complete)- Starring Olive Thomas. Directed by Raymond B. West. Written by R. Cecil Smith.

The Haunted Pajamas (Metro/Yorke-complete)- Starring Harold Lockwood. Dir. by Fred J. Balshofer.

1918

Humdrum Brown (Parlata Plays-only some reels available)- Starring Henry B. Walthall. Dir. by Rex Ingram.

Mr. Fix-It (Paramount/Artcraft Comedy—complete)- Starring Douglas Fairbanks and Wanda Hawley. Dir. by Allan Dwan.

Opportunity (Metro, Comedy-drama—complete)- Starring Viola Dana. Dir. and written by John H. Collins.

The Hired Man (Paramount/Thomas Ince Productions-Status unknown here but BFI seems to have an access holding)-Starring Charles Ray. Dir. by Victor Schertzinger.

When Do We Eat? (Paramount/Famous Players, Comedy-viewable print but completeness unknown)- Starring Enid Bennett. Prod. Thomas Ince. Written by C. Gardner Sullivan. Dir. Fred Niblo.

1919

A Regular Fellow (Triangle- copy is non-access. Viewability uncertain)-Starring Taylor Holmes. Dir. Christy Cabanne.

Heart of Gold (World-viewable print but completeness unknown)-Starring Louise Huff. Dir. Travers Vale. Written by Clara S. Beranger.

Lombardi, Ltd. (Metro- viewable print but completeness unknown)- Starring Bert Lytell. Written by June Mathis. Dir. Jack Conway.

Red Hot Dollars (Paramount/Artcraft- copy is non-access so viewability uncertain. Other copies at GosFilm and Eye Film)-Starring Charles Ray. Dir. Jerome Storm.

The Follies Girl (Triangle-access here unlisted but Cineteca del Friuli has a viewable copy)- Starring Olive Thomas. Dir. By Jack Dillon.

1920

Paris Green (Paramount/Artcraft/Thomas Ince Corp. -copy is non-access. Viewability uncertain.)-Starring Charles Ray. Dir. Jerome Storm.

Stop Thief (Goldwyn-viewable print but completeness unknown)- Starring Tom Moore. Also Hazel Daly. Dir. Harry Beaumont.

MOMA-New York City (16 films)

1915

Excuse Me (Pathé/Henry W. Savage Inc.-viewability uncertain)- Starring George F. Marion. Dir. by Henry W. Savage.

1916

The Gilded Youth (Mutual/American-complete)- Starring Richard Bennett. Dir. George L. Sargent.

1917

Tillie Wakes Up (World--complete)- Starring Marie Dressler. Also Johnny Hines. Dir. by Harry Davenport. Written by Frances Marion.

Betsy's Burglar (Triangle/Fine Arts-complete)- Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. by Paul Powell.

In Again—Out Again (Paramount/Artcraft-complete)-Starring Douglas Fairbanks. Directed by John Emerson.

Scandal (Select/Selznick-only some reels available)- Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. by Charles Giblyn. Written by Bess Meredith.

The Sixteenth Wife (VLSE/ Vitagraph-viewability uncertain)- Starring Peggy Hyland and Marc McDermott. Dir. by Charles Brabin. Author is Molly E. Seawell.

The Clean-Up (Universal/Bluebird-complete)- Starring Franklyn Farnum. Dir. by William Worthington.

1918

Branding Broadway (Paramount/Artcraft)-viewable copy but completeness uncertain)- Starring William S. Hart and Seena Owen. Dir. By William S. Hart.

Eight Bells (World -one reel available)- Starring the Bryne Brothers. Dir. by John F. Byrne.

Oh, Johnny! (Goldwyn Corp./Betzwood-viewability uncertain)-Starring Louis Bennison. Dir. by Ira M. Lowry.

The Fighting Grin (Universal/Bluebird-viewability uncertain)- Starring Franklyn Farnum. Dir. by Joseph De Grasse.

1919

A Man and His Money (Goldwyn-viewability uncertain)-Starring Tom Moore and Seena Owen. Dir. Harry Beaumont.

A Misfit Earl (Goldwyn/Betzwood Film Co.-viewability uncertain)- Starring Louis Bennison. Dir. Ira M. Lowry.

Put Up Your Hands (Pathé/American-complete. Another copy at Library of Congress)- Starring Margarita Fischer. Dir. Edward Sloman.

1920

Nothing But Lies (Metro/Taylor Holmes Prod.-viewability uncertain)-Starring Taylor Holmes. Dir. by Lawrence C. Windom.

UCLA-Los Angeles, California (5 films)**1915**

Young Romance (Paramount/Lasky-complete)- Starring Edith Taliaferro. Dir. by George Melford.

1916

Madame Le Presidente (Paramount/Famous Players-complete)-Starring Anna Held. Dir. by Frank Lloyd.

The Microscope Mystery (Triangle/Fine Arts-on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)- Starring Wilfred Lucas. Has Constance Talmadge in it as well. Dir. by Paul Powell.

1918

Up the Road with Sallie (Select/Selznick-complete)- Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. William Desmond Taylor. Written by Julia Ivers Crawford.

1920

Up in Mary's Attic (States Rights/Fine Arts Pictures-only on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)-Starring Eva Novak. Dir. William Watson.

Academy Film Archive-Berkeley, California (4 films)**1916**

Peggy (Triangle/Kay Bee-only some reels)- Starring Billie Burke. Directed by Thomas Ince.

1917

The Duchess of Doubt (Metro/Rolfe-on nitrate. Unavailable for viewing)- Starring Emmy Whelen. Dir. by George D. Baker.

1918

Good Night, Paul (Select, 1918-complete)-Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. by Walter Edwards.

1919

Where the West Begins (American/ William Russell Prod.-viewability uncertain)-Starring William Russell. Dir. Henry King.

1920

The Perfect Woman (First National/Constance Talmadge Prod.-complete)-Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. David Kirkland.

WCFTR (Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research) (2 films)**1914**

The Man on the Box (Paramount/Lasky-complete)- Starring Max Figman and Lolita Robertson. Dir. by Oscar Apfel and Cecil B. DeMille.

1916

Sunshine Dad (Triangle/Fine Arts-complete)- Starring DeWolf Hopper and Fay Tincher. Directed by Edward Dillon.

European Archives**France (30 Films)****1915**

The Adventures of a Madcap (Pathé//Balboa-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewability uncertain)-Starring Jackie Saunders. Dir. by Sherwood MacDonald.

1916

A Matrimonial Martyr (Pathé/Gold Rooster - Survives at Cinémathèque Française, complete)- Starring Ruth Roland. Dir. by Sherwood MacDonald.

Little Eve Edgerton (Universal/Bluebird - Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, complete)- Starring Ella Hall. Dir. by Robert Z. Leonard.

The River of Romance (Metro - Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewability uncertain)- Starring Harold Lockwood and May Allison. Dir. by Henry Otto.

1917

Baby Mine (Goldwyn --Survives at the Cinémathèque Française, only one reel)-Starring Madge Kennedy. Dir. by John S. Robertson. Written by Margaret Mayo.

His Father's Son (Metro/Rolfe--Survives in CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewability uncertain)- Starring Lionel Barrymore and Irene Howley. Dir. by George D. Baker. Written by June Mathis.

Indiscreet Corinne (Triangle/Kay-Bee—Some ambiguity about this film's survival status. It is listed among the film's archival holdings and some websites also list this as an 'extant' Thomas film, but I was told the archive did

not have it when I contacted them. I would appreciate any further information-Survives at the CNC-Bois d'Arcy)- Starring Olive Thomas. Directed by Jack Dillon.

Sunshine and Gold (Pathé/Balboa, Comedy-drama—one reel survives at Cinémathèque Française,)- Starring Baby Marie Osborne. Dir. by Henry King.

The Fair Barbarian (Paramount/Pallas, Comedy—complete at Cinémathèque Française,)- Starring Vivian Martin. Dir. by Robert Thornby. Written by Edith M. Kennedy.

The Girl Glory (Triangle/Kay-Bee-complete at the Cinémathèque Française,)-Starring Enid Bennett. Dir. by Roy William Neill. Written by C. Gardner Sullivan.

1918

Cupid by Proxy (Pathé/Diando-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewability uncertain)- Starring Baby Marie Osborne. Dir. by William Bertram. Written by Isabel Johnston.

Dolly Does Her Bit (Pathé/Diando-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy and EYE Film in Amsterdam, viewability uncertain)- Starring Baby Marie Osborne. Dir. by William Bertram. Written by Clara S. Beranger.

Go West, Young Man (Goldwyn-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, complete)- Starring Tom Moore and Ora Carew. Dir. by Harry Beaumont.

Lend Me Your Name (Metro/Yorke-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewable but completeness uncertain)- Starring Harold Lockwood. Dir. by Fred. J. Balshofer.

Mrs. Slacker (Pathé/Astra-Survives at Cinémathèque Française, and CNC Bois d'Arcy, complete)- Starring Gladys Hulette. Dir. by Hobart Henley. Written by Agnes Christine Johnston.

Sunshine Nan (Paramount/Famous Players-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, only some reels available)- Starring Ann Pennington and Richard Barthelmess. Dir. Charles Giblyn. Written by Eve Ursell.

The Girl from Bohemia (Pathé/Astra-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewability uncertain)-Starring Irene Castle. Dir. by Lawrence McGill.

The Love Swindle (Universal/Bluebird-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewable but completeness uncertain)-Starring Edith Roberts. Dir. by John Francis Dillon.

The Million Dollar Dollies (Metro/Emerald-complete at Cinémathèque Française,, complete)- Starring Jenny and Rosie Dolly. Dir. by Leonce Perret.

1919

After His Own Heart (Metro/-complete at Cinémathèque Française, complete)-Starring Hale Hamilton. Dir. By Harry Franklin.

Brass Buttons (Pathé/American-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy and in Copenhagen. Copenhagen has a positive, viewable print)-Starring William Russell. Dir. By Henry King.

Hoop-La (National Film Corp.-Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy and Lobster, viewability uncertain)- Starring Billie Rhodes. Dir. by Louis Chaudet.

Johnny-on-the-Spot (Metro- Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, complete)-Starring Hale Hamilton. Dir. by Harry L. Franklin. Written by June Mathis.

Kitty Kelly, M.D. (Mutual/Robertson-Cole- Survives at the CNC Bois d'Arcy, viewability uncertain)-Starring Bessie Barriscale.

Oh, Boy! (Pathé/Albert Capellani Prod.-Said to survive at Lobster Films but the archivist did not have a record of it)-Starring June Caprice. Dir. by Albert Capellani.

Marie Ltd. (Select- Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, complete)-Starring Alice Brady. Dir. Kenneth Webb. Written by Jane Murfin.

The Uplifters (Metro- complete at Cinémathèque Française, complete)-Starring May Allison. Dir. Herbert Blanche.

1920

Fixed by George (Universal—Survives at CNC Bois d'Arcy, only some reels available)-Starring Eddie Lyons and Lee Moran. Dir. by Eddie Lyons and Lee Moran.

Flying Pat (Paramount/New Art Film Co.-Survives at the Cinémathèque Française, one reel available)-Starring Dorothy Gish. Dir. F. Richard Jones. Written by Virginia Philley Withey.

United Kingdom-British Film Institute (9 films)

1915

The Rugmaker's Daughter (Paramount/Morosco-only one reel available)- Starring Maude Allan. Directed by Oscar Apfel.

1916

In the Diplomatic Service (Metro-only on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)- Starring Francis X. Bushman and Beverly Bayne. Dir. by Francis X. Bushman.

Little Meena's Romance (Triangle/Fine Arts-only on nitrate so currently unavailable for viewing)- Starring Dorothy Gish. Supported by Owen Moore. Dir. by Paul Powell.

1918

The Demon (Metro, Comedy-complete)- Starring Edith Storey. Dir. by George D. Baker.

The Beloved Blackmailer (World-complete)- Starring Carlyle Blackwell. Directed by Dell Henderson.

The Great Adventure (Pathé-on nitrate so currently unavailable)-Starring Bessie Love. Dir. by Alice Guy Blanche.

1919

Satan Junior (Metro-complete)-Starring Viola Dana. Dir. By John H. Collins. Writers: June Mathis and John Collins.

The Indestructible Wife (Select-only one reel survives)-Starring Alice Brady. Dir. by Charles Maigne. Written by Fanny and Frederic Hatton.

You're Fired (Paramount/Famous Players-listed in FIAF but archivists there do not have a record of it. Some confusion. Also supposedly at GosFilm)-Starring Wallace Reid. Also has Wanda Hawley. Dir. James Cruze. Written by Clara G. Kennedy.

Russia-GosFilm (5 films)

1919

Bill Henry (Paramount/Famous Players, viewability uncertain)- Starring Charles Ray. Dir. by Jerome Storm.

Greased Lightning (First National/Thomas H. Ince Prod., viewability uncertain)-Starring Charles Ray. Also Wanda Hawley. Dir. Jerome Storm.

The Egg Crate Wallop (Paramount/Famous Players, viewability uncertain)-Starring Charles Ray and Colleen Moore.

1920

Bubbles (States Rights/Pioneer Film Corp., viewability uncertain)-Starring Mary Anderson. Dir. by Wayne Mack.

Civilian Clothes (Paramount/Famous-Players, viewability uncertain)-Starring Thomas Meighan. Also Martha Mansfield. Dir. Hugh Ford. Writer: Clara S. Beranger.

Netherlands-EYE Film Museum (3 films)

1914

Goodness, Gracious (Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph, complete)-Starring Sidney Drew and Clara Kimball Young. Dir. by James Young.

1916

Love's Lariat (Universal/Bluebird, Western Comedy, viewability uncertain)-Starring Harry Carey. Dir. by George Marshall and Harry Carey.

1917

The Gentle Intruder (Mutual/American, viewability uncertain)-Starring Mary Miles Minter. Dir. by James Kirkwood.

Belgium (1 film)

1919

When Doctors Disagree (Goldwyn-Survives at Cinémathèque Royale, viewability uncertain)-Starring Mabel Normand. Dir. By Victor Schertzinger.

Italy (2 films)

1915

How Cissy Made Good (Broadway Star Features/Vitagraph- Survives at Cineteca del Friuli, appeared in earlier FIAF searches but is no longer listed)- Starring Cissy Fitzgerald.

1920

Go and Get It (First National/Marshall Neilan- Survives at Fondazione Cineteca Italiana in Milan, viewability uncertain)-Starring Pat Malley. Dir. Marshall Neilan. Written by Marion Fairfax.

Spain (1 film)

1917

The Cinderella Man (Goldwyn, Comedy—Survives at Filmoteca de Valencia, viewability uncertain)- Starring Mae Marsh. Also Tom Moore. Directed by George Loane Tucker.

Denmark (1 film)

1918

The Midnight Trail (Mutual/American, comedy-drama-Survive Danish Film Institute, viewability uncertain)- Starring William Russell. Dir. by Edward Sloman.

Czech Republic (1 film)

Good References (First National/ Constance Talmadge Film Co.—Národní Filmový Archiv in Prague, complete)- Starring Constance Talmadge. Dir. by Roy William Neill.

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