

Introducing Dorothy Arzner



Biography



Image source: Film Reference

- Born 1900 in San Francisco
- Parents moved to L.A. when Arzner a child and opened café popular with silent film stars and directors
- Studied medicine at USC and worked as ambulance driver during WWI (1917-1918)



Early Career

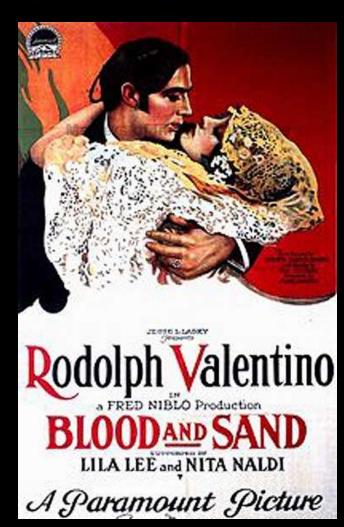


Image source: <u>The First</u> <u>Gentleman of Hollywood</u>

- From <u>secretary to</u> filmmaker
 - Typist for director William C. De Mille at Famous Players/Lasky, owner of Paramount (1919)
 - Editor, *Blood and Sand* (1922)
 - Writer, Inez from Hollywood (1924, also editor), The Red Kimono (1925)
- Threatened to go to Columbia if not made director



Career as Director



Still from *The Wild Party* (1929). Image source: <u>Obermann Center for</u> Advanced Studies

- Paramount films include:
 - Fashions for Women (1927, first as director)
 - The Wild Party (1929, studio's first talkie, for which she created a boom microphone)
- Left Paramount in 1932 to work as director for hire (Christopher Strong, RKO, 1933)
- "Starmaker" for young actresses like Hepburn, Russell and Ball



Approaches to Arzner

- Feminist film historian search for "foremothers"
- Feminist/protofeminist leanings in Arzner's studio work?
- Feminist and queer theorist examinations of Arzner's life and relationships between women in films

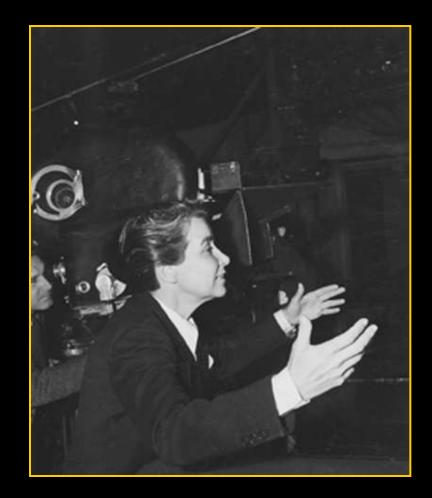


Image source: The Kinsey Institute



Narrative in *Christopher Strong*

- Applying Bordwell and Thompson
 - Plot versus story
 - Restricted and unrestricted narration
 - Objective and subjective narration
 - Cause and effect
 - Patterns of development



Image source: MG Poster



Complicating Narrative in Christopher Strong



Still from *Christopher Strong* (1933). Image source: <u>British Film Institute</u>

- Determining cause
 - What is the cause of the attraction between Cynthia and Christopher?
 - What is the cause of Lady Strong's seeming approval of the affair?
 - What is cause of Cynthia's suicide?
- Effects as critique?



Complicating Narrative in Christopher Strong

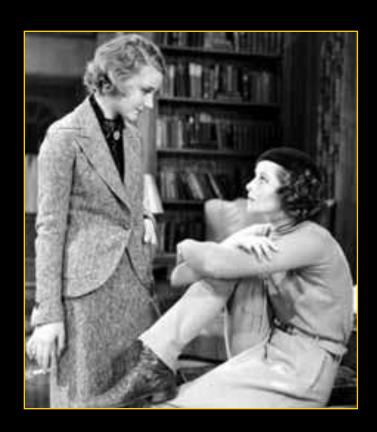


Image source:
<u>Bright Lights Film Journal</u>

- Examining the Monica/Cynthia subplot
- Identifying patterns of development, particularly in the melodrama
 - Mulvey: Female point-of-view and desire structuring and problematizing narrative



Patterns in Arzner's Work

Thematic	Narrative	Character/Star
Relationships between women as significant/more significant as romantic heterosexual relationships	Subplot not as peripheral to the main plot as it is in typical Hollywood narratives. Subplot key to or almost important as the main plot.	Female characters who transgress social, sexual, institutional order. Typically played by stars with "strong" persona, like Hepburn, Bow or Russell.