



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: [The First Gentleman of Hollywood](#)

- From secretary to 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: [Obermann Center for
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/proto-feminist 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: [British Film Institute](#)

- 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:
Bright Lights Film Journal

- 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
<p data-bbox="347 456 753 592">Relationships between women as significant/more significant as romantic heterosexual relationships</p>	<p data-bbox="830 456 1197 692">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.</p>	<p data-bbox="1275 456 1661 692">Female characters who transgress social, sexual, institutional order. Typically played by stars with "strong" persona, like Hepburn, Bow or Russell.</p>