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The Pen, The Page & the Screen: British Authorship and Americanization in the Age of Silent Cinema

> "Intelligence can't always be bought to market […]"
> (Storm Jameson, *Love in Winter* [1935])

This article examines the impact of silent cinema upon on the writing of British popular fiction in the early twentieth century. It argues that this impact was both hugely significant in its own terms but also that it accelerated existing trends towards Americanization in the literary marketplace. Work on this subject by the likes of Alan Spiegel (1976), David Trotter (2007) and Jonathan Foltz (2018) has been largely focused on modernist rather than popular writing. It has also tended to isolate cinema from the other aspects of American cultural influence in the period. This is understandable since writers categorised as modernists were generally the most interested in (and critical of) the novel philosophical and cultural implications of the cinema. This article, by contrast, focuses on writers attempting to producing work that cut along the grain of popular trends as well as on the underlying business practices and structural reformations of the culture industry which shaped twentieth-century authorship.

The influence of Americanization on British arts and letters in this period can only be properly understood within a broader sense of emerging American political and economic power. The developments described here represented only a small part of the full-scale realignment of the political and economic relationship between Britain and the United States. America's established industrial productivity and vast natural resources became aligned to emergent imperial aspirations and a more interventionist foreign policy in the early twentieth century. Under Woodrow Wilson's presidency, the country's global power reached new high-water marks when America entered the First World War on the side of the 'entente' powers in 1917 and then again in his post-War advocacy for the League of Nations. These entanglements cast America

and American power in a new light for many European observers. Adam Tooze's *The Deluge* describes America's transformation into "a novel kind of 'super-state', exercising a veto over the financial and security concerns of the other major states of the world" (2014: 6). The full scope of these developments is far beyond the reach of this article, however, they created a context within which the "Americanization" of British culture in the same period was viewed with some alarm. This article focuses upon two representative scenes: first in the periodical and short story marketplace of the early 1900s and, second, in Hollywood film hegemony after the First World War.

For British writers this period began with high hopes for a newly-professionalized field of authorship regulated by increasingly-standardized copyright legislation and bureaucratic oversight from organisations like the Society of Authors (SoA). British writers of fiction had good reason to put their faith in their ability to sell to the burgeoning American book and magazine marketplace. The traditional perception of American culture as being imitative of (or paying homage to) Britain had become deeply entrenched through the nineteenth century.[1] Even positive appraisals of American literature tended to be couched in the language of paternalism. William Francis Collier's *A History of English Literature* began its appendix on American literature with a typical observation that "[u]pon the opposite shores of the Atlantic a branch of *our* [emphasis added] literature is flourishing in green and vigorous youth" (1890: 528).

In fact, in the minds of many commentators, this period would see the first definitive inhibition of Britain's global cultural power as it had been previously constructed and construed. The ceding of its literary authority to American writers, American magazines, American film

[1] A speaker at one of Harriett Beecher Stowe's public appearances in Scotland in 1853 famously stated that "[w]e have long been accustomed to despise American literature […] The Americans have no national literature […T]hey lived entirely on plunder—the plunder of poor slaves, and of poor British authors" (McGill, 2013: 274).

producers and American business practices proved a painful contradiction to British conceptions of national wholeness and self-sufficiency. In consequence, British authorship lost its core, sustaining myth that authors could begin their careers with the plausible (if distant) hope of establishing a domestic readership sufficient to live in gentility. This argument can only be made with reference on the one hand to a set of emerging trends in the global literary marketplace and, on the other, to the professional careers of specific authors who negotiated them. The best record of the latter's private struggles can be found in the SoA's extensive archives while a broad analysis of literary periodicals provides ample records for public iterations of these disputes as they occurred.

I: Professionalization and its Discontents

In 1913 the Scottish author Robert Aitken visited New York. His fiction had acquired a strong reputation and wide circulation within a relatively short time. The publication of *Windfalls* (1903), his collected short fiction, had been quickly followed by a number of novel-length variants on the modern adventure romance genre. These novels featured a distinctive mixture of modern, filmic milieus (car chases and bank thefts) alongside the more traditional terrain of masculine crises experienced in the "the world's outside places" ("Windfalls": 11) including South American jungles, the South African veldt and the North American West. His fiction was propounded in a style of brutal simplicity which contained, in the words of the *Athenaeum*, "no second-hand reflections, no claptrap moralizing, and very few derived mannerisms." Aitken was presented to readers as a man of action, his fiction built upon his own experiences as a "cattleman on a ranche [sic]" in South America and as a transport officer in the Second Boer War ("Literary Notes and News": 486). He travelled to America regularly in search of "schooling in the American market" and, as an author whose fiction sold widely on both sides of

the Atlantic, was well placed to provide a timely reflection on the juxtaposed energy and enervation of the American and British periodical marketplaces:

> English editors complain of being overburdened with [manuscripts]. A week or two in an American magazine would make them more grateful for their own lot. England has a very small population of writers to oppress them, while here every second or third citizen seems to be a 'graduate' of some correspondence school for teaching one how to earn ten cents a word writing stories in their spare time. (18 March 1913, SoA Archive)

Most English magazines, he argued, "seem to be edited in a fog" while American agents and editors were increasingly wary of English "popular fiction" which "does not at once show promise of proving saleable." He was particularly struck by the speed of decision-making in American editorial offices, the efficiency with which contracts were processed and payments delivered swiftly upon acceptance rather than upon publication (11 February 1913, SoA Archive). Aitken's experiences were recorded in a series of letters to George Herbert Thring who served as the General Secretary for the SoA from 1892 until 1930.[2] They record an uncomfortable truth: Britain and America had followed different models of "professionalization" and, in consequence, British authors were in danger of being found redundant in what had previously been a profitable marketplace.

The SoA, originally constituted in 1884 under the chairmanship of Walter Besant, had become a focal point for debates around the rights of authors and the preservation of their intellectual property. As such it plays a central role in the major studies of professionalization in

[2] Thring became the first full-time, paid occupant of the post and also assumed editorship of the SoA's monthly journal, *The Author*, after Walter Besant's death in 1901.

British literature.[3] Many established authors sought a stricter regulation of the print marketplace and a clearer set of labour relations and business practices between publishers, editors and writers. The SoA found it difficult to act as a traditional labour union, though they tried to popularize the use of standard contracts with minimum standards for author payments. Its national and international advocacy was focused primarily upon forcing serious reform to copyright laws which would recognize and protect literary property in a globalizing, multimedia marketplace. From 1890 the SoA also published a monthly journal called *The Author* which Besant edited until his death in 1901. The pages of *The Author* and the SoA archives (from which Aitken's correspondence has been drawn) preserve an invaluable record of the development of British authorship through this period. In practice, since the SoA was never able to institute meaningful industrial action, it instead took on some of the functions of the professional associations which proliferated in Britain and America in the second half of the nineteenth century (See Culver, 1985: 117-9). These associations offered "a middle-class solution to the pervasive anomie" (Wilson, 1985: 13) of modern life by offering professional accreditation and building cohesion through shared publications, regular meetings and the establishment of bureaucratic structures (committees, minutes, official reports and press releases). In short, the idealised image of the author in Britain was transformed from the archetypal "creative genius" (Salmon, 2013: 9-10) to that of a leisured, white-collar professional who, in concert with their various fiduciary agents and partners, would manage the dispersal of a suite of legally-defined rights to their literary work.

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[3] See Nigel Cross (1985) and Richard Salmon (2013). Both texts examine the ways in which authorship came to be conceived of as a "profession" in the nineteenth century. Though they differ in the scope of their enquiry, both texts highlight the emergence of the SoA as a key event in contrast to previous attempts for writers to organise such as the Royal Literary Fund and Charles Dicken's Guild of Literature and Art which were severely limited in their impact relative to their goals. The SoA became the "practical champion" of "the literary profession" (Cross 56).

The SoA was, in James West's estimation, "probably the most successful writers' association in the history of literary authorship" (1990: 13) based on their negotiation of the Net Book Agreement of 1899 and their role in the domestic copyright reforms of 1911.[4] West's view is shaped by the example of comparable American organizations like the League of Authors which conspicuously failed to attract a broad membership. Indeed, the US's own Net Book Agreement was quickly struck down under anti-monopoly legislation (1990: 32-33). Aitken's correspondence perfectly illustrates the key asymmetries between British and American professionalization. In America, the process was largely driven from above by developing management and finance strategies. In Britain, by contrast, professionalization was predominantly an author-driven project designed to assert more control over, in the words of Stuart Culver, "the vagaries of the marketplace" (117).

Christopher Wilson has meticulously charted the American process of professionalization as it germinated in newsrooms and spread to magazine offices with consequent effects on book publishing. "Professionalization," in Wilson's telling, was not a unitary process ("a uniform stamp") but rather a set of evolving practices that emerged at the same time as the mass print market itself. In short, "Taylorization" of the newspaper industry, the breaking down of writing into various specializations alongside technological developments in printing and communications "narrowed the distance between the news event and its deadline" (1985: 26). The creation of an accessible mass market meant that there were huge financial incentives for new breeds of editor and publisher who could wrench the business of writing away from the "gentleman amateur" and place it in the hands of younger professionals less in thrall to a

[4] The NBA set minimum book prices and prevented "under selling" in the interests of authors. See Bonham-Carter, 178-180. The 1911 Act, meanwhile, specifically extended the rights of authors to possess a legal copyright for their own lifetime plus fifty years after their death. It also expanded copyright protections to new media such as cinema productions and sound recordings. See Bonham-Carter, 216.

perceived literary esotericism (8). The impact of this was particularly striking upon magazine publishing where new imperatives involved the "disciplining [of] overly 'literary' writers" (59). This profoundly affected the writing of both non-fiction and fiction in different ways. If Aitken's direct, unornate literary style appeared "distinctively American" ("The Golden Horseshoe": 474) to the eyes of British reviewers in 1908 it was precisely because it aped the "popular naturalism" (Wilson, 1985: xi) of writers like Jack London and Upton Sinclair. This style, characterised by "a tendency toward hard, direct prose and factual accuracy" was also, as with Aitken's hard-bitten authorial persona, based on "the cult of real experience" (Strychacz, 1993: 16).

The hyper-competitive, dynamic magazine operations observed by Aitken had been purposefully built against the dominant "collegiate" model of American nineteenth-century magazine publishing which had sought to establish engaged and ideologically-bonded, though relatively limited, communities of readers. Book publishers, too, began to modernize aggressively, pioneering new techniques for generating publicity, reaching a "mass" readership and inaugurating the age of the "bestseller." Congress' passage of copyright legislation (The Chace Act) in 1891 had allowed non-Americans to hold US copyrights to their work and sell or lease them to American publishers. British authors (individually and through the organs of the SoA) had generally voiced qualified praise to the new law which had offered them a degree of copyright protection in America for the first time. Previously, non-American authors were unable to claim copyright over their work in the US and only exceptionally popular or well-connected authors would be able to pre-sell their work to publishers who might hope that "the courtesy of the trade" (Groves, 2009: 140) would preclude the production of rival editions.

Copyright in literature has always been the site of unresolvable tensions, according to Paul K. Saint-Amour, because it allows writers to claim only a "temporary monopoly" (1) which

differentiates it from other more tangible forms of property. Copyright, unlike home or car ownership, expires after a "set term" when the text enters the public domain for the presumed benefit of the commonweal. These accommodations between creativity and ownership, however negotiated, create deep-lying contradictions for the SoA membership. Indeed, the Chace Act offered only marginal protections for British authors. The Act stipulated stringent benchmarks to qualify, including simultaneous publication in America and Britain and a more or less comprehensive ban on the importation of foreign-printed books and printing plates. Nevertheless, the Act marked a decisive moment which enabled British authors to contemplate the selling of their books to the huge American market. The drive towards professionalization on both sides of the Atlantic hastened the application of what Andreas Huyssen has called the "logic of the commodity" (1985: 21) to the printed word and created profound unease in the authors who came to embody the modernist or "antibourgeois" (Strychacz, 1993: 6) attitude familiar from studies of this phenomenon by Strychacz and Saint-Amour. As Aitken suggests, though, many British writers, especially SoA members seeking a broad readership and encultured by their own more genteel "professionalization" process were largely unprepared for the new American-led economic order.

In practice, the new trans-Atlantic copyright regimes did not favour British authors as a general class in the American market. Rather, American readers became increasingly interested in American-authored fiction and reserved increasing judiciousness in their consumption of British writing. American publishers focused more narrowly on their own domestic authors at precisely the point that many had served an apprenticeship of the kind described by Wilson and Strychacz in newspapers and magazines. Alice Payne Hackett's longitudinal study of American bestseller data, for example, records 1906 as the first year featuring a top ten list of "all-

American" novels (1945: 22) with no British or European representation. This marked a notable change from, say, 1895 when only two American texts had made the top ten (1945: 11). For British authors to compete and sell their work across the Atlantic would now involve a more studious attention to American styles, tastes and business practices in order to become one of the favoured few with access to its burgeoning mass market.

II: Authorship in Transition

British consumers had been prepared for the rise of American cultural power for some years. The emergence and subsequent market dominance of the illustrated magazine in the late 1880s and 90s resulted from a kind of cultural mimicry of aspects of the American magazine market described above (Ashley, 2005: 1-2). The most successful iteration of this form, George Henry Newnes' the *Strand Magazine* (1891) was explicitly inspired by the appearance and layout of American titles such as *Harper's* and *Scribner's* (Friedrichs, 1911: 111). This indebtedness progressed further with the appearance of the lavish *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1893. Its proprietor, the transplanted American financier William Waldorf Astor, created what W. T. Stead called "an English magazine which, both in letter press and illustration, need not fear for comparison with the best of the American magazines" (Stead, 1902a: 618). Astor himself was a prototype figure for the American media moguls, like William Randolph Hearst, whose companies would soon begin to knit together the production of different media with global distribution models. Though there were still many differences between the *content* of British and American magazines, it was clear that the British marketplace was responding with increased sensitivity to American trends.

At the turn of the century, though, relatively few commentators were prepared to contemplate the onset of American global dominance. One example can be found in W. T.

Stead's *The Americanisation of the World* (1902) which identified American literature as "distinct, original and independent" and ready to exercise "increasing influence on the literature of the world" (1902b: 277). He suggested that the robust development of the American daily and periodical presses had forged a literate culture ready to *exert* influence rather than have it conferred upon them. He cited the "yellow press" of Hearst's newspapers and the investigative journalism of *McClure's Magazine* as heralding an age of "government by journalism" (1902b: 295-7). Stead argued in sum that, should the American drive towards industrial productivity continue to be channelled into the production of culture, then its broad foundations of education and mass democracy would ensure American dominance over a sclerotic Britain riven by class prejudice and political disenfranchisement. His typically utopian view was that these developments were inevitable but also that they were in some sense a necessary shock to British complacency.

Stead's views on the superiority and potential dominance of the American press were shared by other observers who compared the contents of British illustrated magazines to their American competitors. An analysis from the *Fortnightly Review* in 1910 described the contents of British magazines as:

> tit-bits […,] articles of cheap personal gossip, addressed for the most part to popular snobbery; articles of pettifogging antiquarianism [...] articles on the Post Office and the Fire Brigade, the Bank of England and the Mint, all gossipy and anecdotic, with a careful avoidance of real information and criticism" ("The American Cheap Magazine": 921).

By contrast, the American monthly magazines were characterised by "sedulous, unflinching realism" (923). Weak libel laws and broad literacy helped make these titles economically viable

in a way that would have been "impossible" in Britain. British authors, however, were paying more attention to the American magazines' growing power as publishers of fiction. These magazines would soon become, in fact, "the golden market for all serious short story writers" ("A Short Story Virtuoso": 208).

The dawning of this realisation in Britain produced intriguing results since a rapidly expanding and newly-professionalized community of authors were being trained (implicitly and explicitly) to study the market and follow its trends (See Hilliard, 2006: 20-25). In general, it was felt amongst critics and commentators that the average standard of authorship in British fiction had never been higher as a result of professionalization. The clergyman *litterateur* W. J. Dawson wrote that "the average of sound literary craftsmanship in fiction has risen in the ratio of increased literary perception and education among the people [...] the number of competent competitors is much larger" (1905: 309). This view could also be found (with various caveats and cavils) in other surveys of the print marketplace such as Percy Russell's *The Literary Manual* ("the standard of average excellence in literature is continually rising […] [1886: 55]), David Christie Murray's *My Contemporaries in Fiction* (1897: 7) and Arnold Bennett's *How to Become an Author* (1903: 9-10, 154). The periodical marketplace had expanded rapidly after the repeal of the taxes on knowledge through the 1850s and a generation of potential readers had been created through the "many forces […]: political, religious, economic, technological" (Altick 1998: 3) that jostled each other through a period of huge population growth and social turmoil. By some measures the number of periodicals published in Britain had doubled between 1864 and 1887 (King and Plunkett 2005: 2) and this proliferation made it appear superficially more possible for new authors from modest backgrounds to aspire to a stable middle-class income in the field of literature.

This sentiment formed the core emotional and financial claim at the heart of the many new guides to authorship, including those by Russell and Bennett, which were published through the *fin-de-siècle* and into the early 1900s. If these literary aspirants could foreswear the lurid attractions of the lowbrow and the opaque self-satisfaction of the highbrow, so they were informed, the market awaited only the refinement of their talent to unlock its rewards. These new writers, however, were in fact placed in precarious and increasingly exploitative relationships to the mass literary market just at the point when it entered the profound period of change identified above. These aspirants were tempted by the promise of monetary success and also by the superficial signifiers of professionalization to believe that authorship could offer comparable stability to other white-collar careers. Yet by the 1910s the number of authors who could live with even passable respectability on their fiction alone were perilously few (Baldick, 2004: 50).

Aspiring popular authors coming of age in the final decade of the nineteenth century faced a clear conundrum: in order to achieve publication, they must shape their fiction to the demands of the market to such an extent that any peculiar seeds of talent (or even genius) would be effaced and thus they might struggle to achieve longevity. Careers could no doubt be made, according to Bennett, but only by the type of author which he classified as the "sagacious mediocrity" who was "too good to excite a mob to admiration, and not good enough to be taken seriously by persons of taste" (1903: 26). Bennett observed that it was now impossible for writers to make a living solely by selling short stories to British magazines, though it could certainly "be accomplished in America" where prices were much higher (22). The popular short story, however, as itemized in advice manuals, would become extraordinarily limited in its scope. Bennett, for example, defined the popular short story as "a tale that tells itself", powered by "a tireless intention to make the story 'go'" and which "must not end unhappily" (97).

Modern short story writers must essentially be a "domestic annalist," (Russell: 32) with their eyes set firmly on contemporary life and the stories almost entirely focused on propulsive plot mechanics. Endings must be happy and no scenes of squalor, strong political views or unseemly extramarital passion should soil the scene.

The sums paid for fiction in the American magazines increased so exponentially in comparison to Britain that the market essentially became bifurcated, with a small elite of authors elevated far beyond the means of their peers. John Davys Beresford began his short story collection *The Imperturbable Duchess and Other Stories* (1923) with a short essay on the subject:

> The easiest way by which a struggling British or American author may make a living wage is to write short stories for the American magazines. He may write twenty novels and find himself at the end of them still struggling for a bare existence. (1923: v)

Those novels would have earned the author "£6,000" but "if those words had been paid for at average magazine rates, assuming acceptance both in England and the United States, they would have produced at least £30,000." Beresford encouraged young authors to "study the [American] magazines" and learn to replicate their contents. In structural terms, the "climax" of the story should be "implicit" from the beginning but not "disclosed" until "as near to the end of the story as possible" (x). The ideal reader response should be an exclamation of "how cute!" The "American magazine public" (as well as the magazines' editors) required swift plot development at the expense of the characterisation: "what goes inside [characters'] heads is of less importance than the things they say and do […] Characterisation must be subsidiary" (xi).

Horace Wyndham's scathing memoirs highlighted the popular romance writer Charles Garvice as another author who, while despised by domestic critics, was able to "capture the

American market" and become a "literary phenomenon" (1923: 83).[5] Other successful writers from this transitional period, like E. Phillips Oppenheim, drew huge incomes by selling simultaneously to British and American magazines (Waller 2006: 8-9, 678-9). The short story, and its natural American home, the illustrated monthly magazine, thus effectively became the tip of the spear that would establish American cultural supremacy in Britain. While certain British titles, including the *Strand*, were briefly able to sustain the publication of American editions, the passage of periodical inspiration, trends and material began to flow increasingly in the other direction. British editions of American illustrated magazines began to proliferate in the 1880s and a wider variety of American titles established increasingly firm footholds through the early years of the twentieth century.[6] British magazines could also become investment vehicles for American media capital: the Hearst Corporation established a British arm (the National Magazine Company) in 1910 which acquired the illustrated monthly *Nash's Magazine* in 1911 and merged it with *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1914.

The prominence of American short story writers, the financial power of American fiction magazines and the increasingly global reach of American culture in general were thus beginning to reshape the British literary marketplace even before the global emergence of Hollywood. The archetypal short story for aspiring British authors to emulate, was, explicitly or not, "Americanized" in the sense that it was designed to appease or appeal to an imagined projection of American tastes as expressed first through the dominant tone and style of American magazine fiction and, later, in an emulation of cinematic storytelling.

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[5] Wyndham published his memoirs pseudonymously in Britain under the name Reginald Auberon. This essay refers to the American version.

[6] *Harper's*, *Scribner's* and *Century Magazine* and *Lippincott's* all launched British editions in the 1880s. Different kinds of magazine followed through the 1910s and 20s including *Vogue* in 1916 *Good Housekeeping* in 1922 and *Modern Woman* in 1925. This period also saw the more extensive marketing of magazines like *Cosmopolitan* (a Hearst property from 1905) which found a British market without catering directly to British tastes.

The American writer of Western and detective novels (and progenitor of The League of Authors) Louis Joseph Vance wrote an alarming article in *The Author* in April 1921 which bemoaned the merging (or loose economic alignment) of periodical and book publishing with cinema production. He noted that "prominent motion picture companies having no direct magazine connections are seeking them to-day" (1921: 104). He highlighted a new preference for magazine publishers insisting on the outright purchase of cinematic rights for a set fee as a condition for acceptance. By removing the rights from the free market and from the rightful control of the author, Vance argued that authors were being forced to take a "bad deal" with even worse long-term consequences:

> These publishers in some instances have affiliation with motion picture producers, in others they form part of an organisation which owns a motion picture producing unit […] Since only stories possessing high motion picture visibility will be in demand, that great body of writers whose work has much literary but scant motion picture value will find its market closed altogether [...] the day is conceivably not remote when the editorial policies of our leading magazines will be dictated by 'sweethearts of the screen.' (104-5)

By the 1920s, the basic advice contained in manuals regarding short story writing was largely unchanged from earlier in the century but now also contained specific acknowledgements of how the market for British culture had been both Americanized and cinematized. The anonymous *Authorship*, for example largely replicated Bennett's strictures but went further in suggesting that there are "few better models than those published in the American magazines" (1922: 111-112, 119). Michael Joseph's compendium of advice *Complete Writing for Profit* cautioned aspirant authors that film rights for unknown authors were negligible or unobtainable and also warned British authors that they could no longer aspire to the same level of success as their fathers and

grandfathers who profited from the early fruits of professionalization in the 1880s and 90s. The chief reason for this was the intrusion of American titles and American publishing firms into the British market in the preceding two decades (1930: 140-2).

The mode of storytelling generally proposed in these manuals and essays (deprioritising dialogue, regionality and psychological interiority whilst focusing on the simplistic impression of primary emotional strokes, archetypal characters and relentlessly progressive plot construction), would become an approximate match for early modes of cinematic storytelling in fiction. This was precisely the view held by Virginia Woolf who criticised the phenomenon of "movie novels" where "one picture must follow another without stopping" lest the reader should become bored (1965: 84). The cinema industry was run, according to *Authorship*, by "crude, hard materialists with little education and less taste" and the narratives of popular films were propelled by recognizably archetypal characters, plots based upon short-term crises with happy endings and "continuous action" all the while (1930: 159). A 1919 *Fortnightly Review* article on the reading habits of British soldiers made this connection even more explicit:

> [The modern reader] says, in effect, 'tell me a story' […] unless he is country-bred, he has been a pretty constant patron of the cinema, and has come to regard it as telling his brand of story, swift action, short turnings to the desired end [and] a general sense of bustle and go. ("Soldier as Reader": 755)

Frequent cinema visits constituted a form of narrative "training" (755) which conditioned the consumer to appreciate kindred styles of fiction. In the eyes of many commentators, more or less sceptical of rising American power after the First World War, the most successful new authors would be obliged either to cater implicitly to the cinematic tastes of readers or to directly court the new cinema industry. These trends towards homogenisation and anxieties about the effective

deracination of a distinctively British culture, increased in proportion with the development of the globalized culture industry of the early twentieth century.

III: British Authorship in the Age of Hollywood

The British Copyright Act of 1911 updated existing statutes regarding "dramatic rights" to include technological recordings by "perforated roll, cinematograph film, or other contrivance" ("Copyright Act 1911"). This clause might have appeared incidental to the SoA at the time but it would soon become the focus of intense interest. Just as the SoA was congratulating itself for hammering out a clear legal basis for the demarcation of literary property, a new medium had appeared which would open up new and porous boundaries between the printed page and the projectionist's screen which would prove incredibly difficult to police. The new medium of cinema was on the brink of disrupting the underlying cultural assumptions of the SoA, along with the careers of many of its individual members. The cinema would also fundamentally change British authorship by hugely accelerating the influx of American popular culture into Britain and reshaping the expectations of readers and publishers over the next twenty years.

Richard Fine's invaluable *Hollywood and the Profession of Authorship* connects the developments of America's late-century print marketplace to the Hollywood "scenario department" where writers often found themselves working on precarious contracts within vast economic machines and with very little possibility of autonomy or credit. The "Taylorizing" trends of newsroom and magazine reorganisation perhaps found their final form in the authorial "cells" (1985: 15) described by Nathaniel West and other writers tempted to California by the promise of a reliable salary. Fine challenges what he calls the "Hollywood-as-destroyer myth" (1985: 3) but clearly identifies a recurrent culture clash faced by "professional writers" acculturated to the literary marketplace of Eastern cities who entered the Hollywood studio

system. Cinema in fact posed a series of existential questions that contemporaneous theories of authorship were ill-equipped to answer: authors could sell the rights to their work, leaving the adaptation process in the hands of the studios, or they could produce original work for the studios and risk the destruction of their very artistic identity. The fear of commodification and alienation experienced by Fine's selection of American writers should be understood as occurring in even more acute forms in their British colleagues. Cinema authorship appeared to represent the nightmarish malformation of professionalization: precarious, short term, salaried anonymity.

From the perspective of those ensconced within British print culture, cinema appeared a hollow medium, lacking a strong authorial presence within its mode of mechanised production and industrial divisions of labour. A 1921 editorial in the enthusiast magazine *The Picturegoer* bemoaned what it referred to as the medium's "empty chair:"

> One day the Director shall obey the will of the Creator whom we shall call THE AUTHOR, and who will be as like to the scenario-writer of to-day as Barrow-in-Furness is to Paradise […] The chair is empty. As yet."   ("The Empty Chair" 1921: 9)

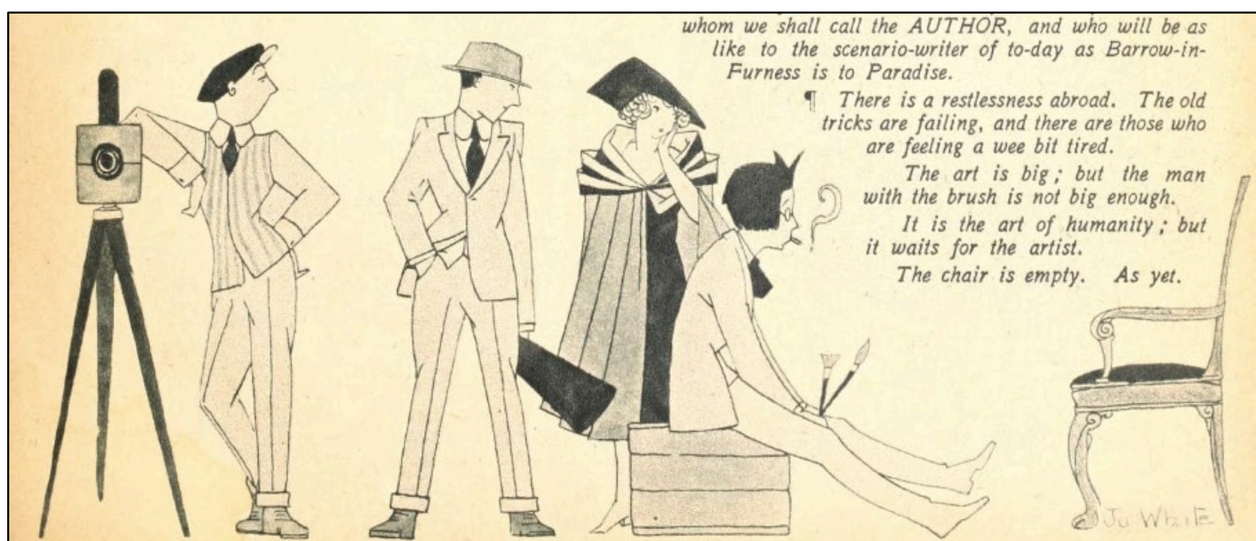

Fig. 1: "The Empty Chair," *The Picturegoer* 1, no. 1 (January 1921): 9.

This hollowness was described and hedged in many different ways that bear examination: some blamed directors, producers or cinema audiences and others the Americanizing tendencies of the industry as a whole.

The gentrification and standardisation of cinema in Britain after 1906, alongside the comparatively weak economic performance of its own domestic film production (Morris 2009: 43-45), would come to make the debate over ‘Americanization’ much more urgent in the minds of British commentators. Tom Gunning has noted that the close connection between cinema and narrative storytelling was not firmly established until 1906-7 (1990: 57) when film productions from France, Germany and Italy drove a dramatic development in cinematic storytelling which led to longer, feature-length films and single, rather than continuous screenings in British cinemas (R Low, 1973: 17-20). The move towards standardization and narrative storytelling forced cinema into a closer and, in some ways, dependent relationship with literature.[7] Soon, however, as the American trade was freed from the regressive control of the ‘Edison’ Trust, began relocating its production sites to the west coast and acquired high levels of outside investment, American films assumed a powerful position in the British market (Wu 2010: 68-71). The First World War made it difficult for British exhibitors to import European films and wartime constraints seriously inhibited British filmmakers. As such, British exhibitors came to rely on American productions at precisely the moment that the American trade was enjoying its first period of capital-rich, global expansion.

This generated a new wave of commentary in the aftermath of the First World War which responded in different ways to a perceived self-confidence and self-sufficiency on the part of the United States: a sense, in the words of Sherwood Anderson, that Americans were “no longer

[7] Woolf, for example, described cinema as “subsist[ing] upon the body of its unfortunate prey [literature]” (1926: 382).

your sons" (1921: 173). The socialist writer W. T. Colyer referred to America and "Americanism" as a "world menace" (1922: 1) and warned that attempting to mimic or keep pace with the US risked erasing the hard-won gains of the nineteenth-century labour movement in favour of "industrial feudalism" (2). Conservative opinion, in the form of J. Ellis Barker's *The Great Problems of British Statesmanship* meanwhile, sought precisely to beat America at its own game. "The British Dominions", he wrote, "have advanced comparatively slowly in wealth and population because life has been too easy for the inhabitants. Men work hard only if compelled" (1917: 11). American productivity, American labour relations, a federated political union between Britain and its colonies and, atop, an American-style executive branch were offered up as the means by which the British empire could remain competitive and avoid becoming dependent upon economic imports from outside its Commonwealth, including the importation of books and films (255).

For Veronica and Paul King, however, the global power of American cinema in the 1920s represented an appalling symbol of degeneracy. Their reactionary tract *The Raven and the Skyscraper* mourned a lost American "race" and blamed the country's high rates of Jewish immigration from central and Eastern Europe (1925: 15). American cinema, like the American stage and American publishing, was in the grip of a "Jewish domination" (146). "Americanization" for the Pauls thus meant the insidious spread of this influence back to Europe in metastasized form. Various passages highlighted the key role that Jewish-American cinema entrepreneurs like Adolph Zukor, Louis B. Meyer, Sam Goldwyn and Marcus Loew exercised in the expansion and internationalisation of American film (See Gabler 1989: 11-21). This reactionary antisemitism was usually laundered from discourse expressing anxiety about American cultural and political power, though less explicit echoes were also visible in other

criticisms of the industry. Louis Joseph Vance, for example, knew to suppress this aspect of his views. His article in the *Author* made no allusions to the power held by many American Jews but in a private letter dated 7 November 1914 to G. H. Thring he had observed that "the majority of those at the head of the American motion-picture business are men of the lowest moral type; in the main they have been recruited from among the low-caste Jews of our ghetto; and they will be found honest only when obliged to be" (SoA Archive, British Library).

More generally, there was a feeling of unease at the speed with which American culture was beginning to dominating British markets. In an August 1919 issue of the *Saturday Review*, Sidney Low deprecated that "nine tenths or more of the bioscopic pictures exhibited [in Britain] are of American creation" (1919a: 195). The cinema had become the most powerful medium of the new century, he observed, and had "superseded the pulpit, the stage, the printed novel and even the newspaper" (195). Low described himself as an admirer of America and as committed to a close "mutual comprehension" between the two countries but strongly objected to American dominance of British screens since

> [i]f our masses are so constantly steeped in an American atmosphere, may they not lose a little of their Britannic consciousness [if they] breath exclusively American air. (196)

He discussed the then-recent decision of Adolph Zukor's enormous production and exhibition chain, Famous Players Lasky/Paramount, to launch a production arm in Britain. He saw, like many of Zukor's American critics, an attempt to establish an anticompetitive "chain" which vertically integrated production with exhibition. The work of British actors, British writers and technical staff would be put solely for "American stories" (195). Low's anxieties echoed that of the short story enthusiasts who feared that American magazines and American cinema were

locked together in a particularly limited artistic trajectory which, nevertheless, was exerting ever-greater control over British culture.[8]

In a longer piece the following month, Low elaborated upon the subject observing that victory in the War had spared Europe from the victory of "German *kultur*" but that "our apostles of culture are to come from another quarter:"

> America is "out" to supply us with this commodity as with so many others […] She has also turned her attention to those things which powerfully influence tastes, thoughts and habits […] The Americanisation of this country goes on at a great pace. American stories and magazines are stacked on every bookstall […] (1919b: 56)

Low identified the cinema as a particular problem, referring to it as "the greatest American 'spiritual' conquest of all" (57) and found its consequences everywhere from the language of young people to the brash tone of post-war advertising which adopted the "exhortations" of the "American publicity expert": "the language, the mode of thought, would have been unintelligible to most Britons a few years ago. But O. Henry, and the American magazines, and […] most of all the cinema, have made it familiar in our mouths as household words" (58). Low's invocation of Dickens' magazine *Household Words* (1850-59) refers back to a time when domestic culture could expect to dominate the attention of British consumers as well as positively influence American markets.

Mass audiences in Britain passionately adopted cinema as the dominant medium of popular expression and new generations of readers would appraise magazines and novels using criteria shaped to some extent by their cinematic tastes. These anxieties preoccupied a number of the short pieces which populated Meredith Starr's compendium *The Future of the Novel* where Andrew Soutar had to argue against the proposal that "cinema is killing the novel" (1921: 135)

[8] The expansion of Famous Players Lasky into British film production was not successful but did provide the first break into the film business for the young Alfred Hitchcock (see Taylor 1981: 14-16).

and Lucas Malet suggested that "film is certainly exercising a bad effect upon much of the popular fiction" (184). Under these circumstances, new writers could be forgiven either for "writing with one eye on the cinema" (184) or for fully devoting their energies to the production of "photo plays." Indeed, a new trade for advice manuals in scenario writing emerged to sit alongside those offering advice to fiction writers. Ernest A. Dench's *Playwriting for the Cinema* (1914) and J. Farquharson's *Picture Plays and How to Write Them* (1916) were amongst the earliest to arrive and offer encouragement to such authors: "There was never a better time for author-aspirants than the present. The big plays and the big novels are well on the way to being used up" (Farquharson 1916: 19). From the perspective of established authors, however, this attitude was dangerously close to a declaration of war since they struggled to conceive of cinema writing as being a legitimate branch of authorship in any meaningful sense.

Cinema opened up a new stream of income for authors who otherwise despised the entire medium, and crude adaptations of their work often offended their aesthetic and narrative sensibilities. Their dilemma over whether and how to incorporate the cinema in their working lives offer helpful illustrations of the cross-cutting imperatives wrought by professionalization. If fiction was to become part of the new 'quaternary' industries, a knowledge-based asset floated on a global market, then authors might well be required to yield up increasing portions of their cherished autonomy including personal, nationalistic and aesthetic commitments in order to do reliable business. The SoA archives contain correspondence from a number of authors as they began to negotiate this new terrain. In the mind of his peers, E. Phillips Oppenheim was one of the British authors most associated with global success in American periodicals and in having his work adapted for the screen. Oppenheim's thrillers "were set in grand hotels, casinos, and foreign embassies, with a cast of rich and titled characters travelling to exotic and mysterious

locations via luxury liners and transcontinental trains" all of which "served cinema spectacle" (Waller: 9). Oppenheim, however, had to be led reluctantly to the cinema business. He wrote to Thring on the subject on 21 May 1913:

> Some years ago I sold the copyright of several of my novels, reserving the dramatic rights. No mention was made of cinema rights - in fact they didn't exist at the time. Should I be justified in considering that under the term 'dramatic rights' the cinema rights are my property? (SoA Archive)

In response, Thring asked Oppenheim to join a new SoA sub-committee devoted to "the question of cinema production" and its relation to authors and authorship. Oppenheim, as a "tax exile," (Waller: 9) spent his time moving languorously around Mediterranean golfing resorts and would prove to be the sub-committee's most grievous absentee.

Oppenheim hated the cinema but was happy enough in 1915 to sign a five-year deal with William Randolph Hearst's multimedia empire which included book publishing, short and serialized magazine fiction and a first option on film rights. He considered the process of 'adaptation' to be a form of invisible labour for which the practitioner should be grateful on their own terms. In 1926 he could be found in the American film magazine *Motion Picture Classic* underscoring this view: "[N]o firm will allow you to put on your own story. A novelist is always encumbered by someone who must be paid for mutilating his story." His solution was that "a technical adviser" to the author would allow the direct transmission of his auratic *imprimatur* onto the screen ("Four Writers", 1926: 68). Oppenheim later fell into a dispute on precisely this matter which was mediated by the SoA. A cinema actress and aspiring scenarist named Betty Fairfax traded upon an acquaintance with Oppenheim's secretary to meet the author in Nice and suggested producing scenarios for several of his then-recent novels. Both would have cause to regret the ambiguity of the subsequent agreement which included a promise of "fair compensation for any work that you have done" (17 March 1933, SoA Archive). Despite

numerous enthusiastic letters about meetings and promising leads, over eighteen months Fairfax failed to secure a single deal to Oppenheim's satisfaction. This, in itself, is a good indication that only Hollywood was paying prices for literary property that Oppenheim was prepared to accept. Fairfax wrote to Oppenheim in increasingly desperate terms:

> It is needless to say I have spent a considerable amount of money as well as time trying to place the stories and if in your great kindness you feel you can make me some allowance for this, I should naturally be very grateful […]. (14 November 1933, SoA Archive)

Oppenheim, outraged, refused and Fairfax hired a solicitor to manage the dispute. Summarising the case in a letter dated 25 January 1935 Oppenheim wrote: "[i]t is not within the limits of my experience that a principal is ever asked by his agent to pay or help to pay for unaccomplished work" (SoA Archive). In all likelihood, though, the labour of adapting the stories into functional scenarios was not "unaccomplished" since Fairfax's letters provide ample evidence that she had completed a number of such texts. Yet the completed scenarios vanished into the gulf that still existed between recognised forms of authorship. During mediation with Fairfax's solicitor, the SoA's legal adviser observed to Oppenheim that, whilst correct in point of law, his phrasing had been loose enough to suggest that he was morally responsible for compensating his litigant. Oppenheim again refused. The notion of cinema writing as a legitimate branch of authorship itself would prove difficult to establish in the face of such prejudices.

Similarly acrid attitudes towards cinema writing were evident in the career of Edgar Jepson who served as the chair of the SoA's Cinema Sub-Committee. His scabrous memoir (1938) ended with a jeremiad against the whole cultural and political landscape of the post-war period:

> The cheaper the age the brighter the spectacle […] Consider the bumptious shrilling of the empty young, the bumptious blather of the powerless press, of car merchants, film merchants, politicians, dictators, fascists and communists, all striving to push, with loud

> shouting, their pretentious punk into the sieve-like interior of that noodle the man in the street. They call the eighteen-nineties decadent; observe the heartening spectacle of the nineteen-thirties. (1938: 273)

After finding himself, to his disgust, "rather in the middle" of the cinema industry (201) his memoirs capture the bizarre cultural early co-mingling of literature and film: a series of comic misunderstandings, culture clashes and bitterly-fought disputes over intellectual property. Jepson reserved particular scorn for American "producers" who refused to recognise the deep-seated hierarchies that persisted in his mind between British literature and American film:

> [I]n those days a film producer had to be a Temperamental Genius […] it enabled [them] to put without a qualm into pictures he was making, from the stories of quite decent English writers, about as piffling slush as the mind could ooze […] when they should be blacking his boots (1938: 203, 207)

As such, Jepson "never went to see any of the films which were made out of [his] books" apart from *Lady Noggs* (1920) which had been ostensibly adapted from the theatrical interpretation of his popular children's book about the tearaway adopted daughter of a British Prime Minister. Jepson remembered that he had granted "performance rights" for the theatre and, foolishly, had foresworn future film rights. *The Lady Noggs, Peeress* (1905) had been adapted for the stage by Cicely Hamilton and first performed in 1912 immediately after the passage of the new Copyright Act. Jepson remembered with glee that Hamilton had "helped herself" to incidents from other books of his which the film also contained. He concluded his anecdote by observing that his experience watching the film had been "painful" but that he had at least been "paid a hundred pounds for enduring [it]" (204). Jepson was satisfied with his position as an established writer who would sanguinely sell his film rights to any production company willing to pay for them and was certainly never tempted to write for the screen directly.

By contrast, some major writers were keen to take this step. Elinor Glyn was one of Horace Wyndham's lucky few British writers whose then-*risqué* work appealed sufficiently to American magazine readers. Glyn's membership of the SoA would prove to be controversial. Thring's public attempt to prosecute a pirated theatrical performance of her novel *Three Weeks* (1907) led to the resignation of at least one SoA member who considered the book to be "vile and demoralizing" (10 December 1915, SoA Archive). Glyn began licensing her fiction for film productions in the 1910s and then, after relocating to America after the War, adapted her own work, wrote original screenplays and directed films for various studios including Famous Players-Lasky, MGM and Cosmopolitan Pictures. Her successful film projects featured the likes of Gloria Swanson and Clara Bow. Her film career was effectively ended by a disastrous move back to England to establish her own studio. She did, however, publish a volume of authorship self-help called *The Elinor Glyn System of Writing* (1922). The controversy that attended her membership of the SoA illustrates the emerging cultural divide between those seeking to assimilate to the new American-led marketplace and those seeking to buttress a British cultural identity against those imperatives. Glyn's extraordinary career was *sui generis* both in terms of her transmedial and trans-Atlantic success and in terms of the high level of scholarly attention that she received in the last decade, primarily in the scholarship of Vincent Barnett and Alexis Wheedon.[9]

Other notable authors like W. Somerset Maugham and Arnold Bennett made more cautious overtures to the cinema trade. In the early 1920s, Maugham made a series of trips to America in order to oversee productions of his plays, begin writing scenarios for the film

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[9] See *Elinor Glyn as Novelist, Moviemaker, Glamour Icon and Businesswoman* (London: Routledge, 2014). Other British writers, like Lorna Moon, who found success in Hollywood were generally less interested in SoA membership or in laying claim to the professional identity associated with membership (see Norquay, 2002).

industry and sign lucrative short story contracts with Ray Long, editor-in-chief of various Hearst magazine properties including *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar* (Hastings, 2010: 294). Writing in the *Times Cinema Supplement* of February 1922 about his stay in Hollywood, Maugham claimed to have observed a sea change in the "vast" film companies there as they attempted to respond to a perceived consumer malaise:

> The public is growing restless. They will not go to see the sort of pictures to which a few years ago they flocked […] The managers of the cinema companies are men of business. They have thought furiously: some of them even have thought effectively […] They made a face, perhaps their hearts sank; but they were brave men (and the company's shares were falling), so they pulled themselves together and said: Let there be authors. (Maugham 1922: v)

Maugham, like Jepson, was repulsed by the autocratic, uncultured men who wielded power in the American film industry, though his ire was focused on directors rather than producers. He regretted that he was unable to carry around a "step-ladder" so as to "converse with them on terms of some equality." His argument was that cinema authorship had become more or less automated within each production company. He described a comic anxiety at beholding "all those doors in a long passage behind which industrious creatures were busily tap-tapping scenarios on a typewriter" (v). This kind of salaried authorship was offensive to Maugham who felt that films needed stronger material, less homogenised by the studios in order to rise from an "industry" to an "art."

Maugham viewed cinema as being wholly reliant upon existing art forms for the kind of creative input necessary to be taken seriously. He thus forcefully advocated for a hostile literary takeover of film production ("they must give authors their heads" [vi]) which would take the new medium in hand and break its already staid and repetitive constraints. Directors, like Jepson's producers, delighted in annexing and dismembering the stories that they were striving to adapt:

“One director told me with gusto that after he had finished with a certain play nothing whatever remained of it but the title” (v). Maugham was confident that a “competent writer of plays or novels should have little difficulty in learning the limitations and the capabilities of the screen and in devising his story to meet them.” He identified a hollowness at the centre of the young medium and straightforwardly projected a vision of already-existing authorship imported from the world of letters. The idea of a new, hybrid figure with overlapping but distinct skills and sensitivities did not occur to him.

Those inside the cinema trade, however, were duly cautious about allowing authors this kind of freedom. Maugham’s belief that producers and directors had a “duty” to “faithfully interpret the author” was antithetical to much of their practice even whilst many of them relied upon intellectual property that had become well-known through other media. Bennett embraced the cinema rather more wholeheartedly, though his experiences can hardly be described as typical:

> Yesterday I went to London and, with Lasky and Pinker at lunch, made a contract for a film. Lasky asked me to go and stay with him in the cinema city in California and offered to pay my fares […] I have to deliver this film in 6 months. (1932: 707)

This timeframe and remuneration, in the context of the wider industry recorded by the likes of Fine and Patrick McGilligan (1985), were absurdly protracted and inflated. This indicates the unsustainability of Maugham’s proposed author’s revolution. His and Bennett’s reputations provided a precise admixture of acclaim and popularity which made them appropriate candidates for this kind of wooing by the larger cinema firms but the ranks of future cinema authors would still need to be filled by authors whose primary focus was the screen rather than the printed page. Neither the salaried, anonymous film writing that horrified Maugham nor the transplanted *hauteur* of the fiction writer would prove durable in the long term.

Thring believed that the best legislative protection for his authors would be an outright ban on American film imports and he repeatedly toyed with this idea in his correspondence with the film producer Cecil Hepworth in the early 1920s. Many of the SoA's most prominent members assumed that the Society's natural role would be to preserve author's assumed role as the chief artistic influence over the cinematic medium. The SoA did, however, include among its members at least two prominent figures, Eliot Stannard and Herbert Langford Reed, who argued vigorously for the recognition of cinema writing as a legitimate and aesthetically discrete field of authorship, albeit from different perspectives. Stannard is now mostly famous as the 'scenarist' behind many early films directed by Alfred Hitchcock though he wrote screenplays and scenarios for over 150 films between 1914 and 1933. Hitchcock's partnership with Stannard ended as soon as the director transitioned to sound productions with *Blackmail* (1929) and Stannard's fate after this point is somewhat mysterious, though he certainly left the industry (Sweet 2005: 22-3). Unfortunately, none of his correspondence survives in the SoA archive, though he was briefly listed as a member of the Cinema Sub-Committee and contributed a series of philosophically-minded essays to the *Author* and to the nascent cinema press on the craft of writing scenarios. He argued in a 1915 *Kinematograph Weekly* article that the "writing of film scenarios is the supreme test of authorship." The silent scenario, he continued, was composed under "enormous handicaps" as compared with prose writers and traditional dramatists. With no voice-acting, no linguistic trickery to "gloss over" unconvincing situations and no readerly discretion for the pace at which the story was consumed, the scenarist's work was laid open to unmerciful scrutiny. Stannard developed his own ornate theories for the silent scenarist who was obliged to cater for a general audience still craving "action" but whose tastes had sharpened since the first "novelty" (1915: 82) of cinematography had worn off. His work primarily

consisted of literary adaptations and, perhaps unsurprisingly as the Godson of John Ruskin and the son of the novelist "John Strange Winter" (*née* Henrietta Stannard), he prized the artistic adaptation of literary work onto the screen as the highest aim of the scenarist.

By contrast, the most prolific and energetic 'cinematic' member of the SoA was certainly Langford Reed who generally disdained adaptations in favour of original compositions for the screen. He authored a bewildering array of films for British film studios during his career while he also worked as a British publicity agent for the Chicago-based Essanay Studios. Reed introduced himself to Thring in 1914 as the progenitor of a "press campaign urging that picture-playwrights have as much right to have their names attached to their original work, as have other writers" (27 July 1914, SoA Archive). In other letters he bemoaned "the very low prices accepted by nearly all picture playwrights" and saw the SoA as a natural bulwark against what he deemed low quality and unskilled work: "There are not more than five or six men in the whole country who understand the technique" (29 October 1915, SoA Archive). Reed embodied his own ideal of the 'cinema author' though his career in film did not survive long after the First World War.

Whether the skill of the silent cinema author lay in their ability to translate literary work for the screen or in producing original material, any attempt to establish the professional credentials of the silent cinema scenarist were doomed first by the indifference of established authors and, from a modern vantage point, by the looming onset of sound film production at the end of the 1920s. The shift from movies to talkies, in the minds of many commentators, constituted such a profound development in film production as to represent the creation of an entirely new medium. The need for sound productions to rely on written dialogue helped transform the more nondescript "scenario" into a *script*: a product of artistic labour with a more

plausible claim to independent aesthetic value and hastened the emergence of the 'screenwriter' as a more distinct cultural figure.

The subparallel debates over literature's relative autonomy from cinema and Britain's relative autonomy from America were also fundamentally changed by the aggressively protectionist 1927 Cinematograph Films Act which followed the complete collapse of the domestic film industry in the early 1920s. The Act imposed quotas on the number of "foreign" (implicitly American) films which could be exhibited in British cinemas and boosted the flagging British industry even as many of the dominant production firms of the silent era were wound up. Indeed, the twin revolutions of sound production and protectionism generated such a profound turnover of writers, actors, technical staff and entire firms that it can seem as if the entire edifice of British silent film slid quietly into the abyss. As the film historian Patrick McGilligan observed, "[b]efore 1926, at least to judge by the official credits, there were no screenwriters. The expression per se scarcely existed" while the silent "ditch-diggers" like Stannard and Reed that preceded them "have not left much of a trail in memoirs or histories" (1986: 1-2). The age of the talkie also ushered in a new set of dynamic tensions between writers, literature and film. Whatever professional indignities the new 'screenwriter' would go on to endure (and McGilligan's later volumes testify that they were considerable) they could at least count on the generally-accepted legitimacy of their role within the medium of cinema. This legitimacy was formally recognised in Britain by the formation of the Screenwriter's Association in 1937. The Association initially operated within the SoA before speciating in 1959 as the Television and Screen Writer's Guild.

Conclusion

This article has examined the various forces which pulled British authorship in different, sometimes contradictory directions through the early decades of the twentieth century. The grand promises of a more egalitarian and meritocratic literary marketplace that dilated the expectations of new authors in the late century ran up against obstacles from within and without the publishing houses and editorial offices which controlled the print industry. The whole business of writing and reading became swiftly enmeshed with globalized trade networks which were themselves constantly reshaped by shifting political and economic trends. This was exacerbated by the emergence of the cinema which, in the eyes of many authors, shunted fiction from its plinth at the centre of the mass market.

More broadly it is helpful to situate these dynamics within the broader discourses of national "decline" and recent elaborations of "declinism" in the work of Jed Esty (2004) and David Edgerton (2018). According to Esty, the interwar period saw British national discourse caught in frantic search for a national identity "disembedded from the Manichean logic of empire" (36). This generated a mixture of anxiety at a perceived loss of prestige on the one hand and the desire to resurrect England as "a self-sufficient symbolic system" which no longer depended upon vertiginous and elaborate global structures. This defensive posture reflected a renewed desire to both narrate new social realities and resurrect a mixture of pastoral, folkloric and romantic traditions in mainstream 1930s fiction as a kind of bulwark against outside cultural influences.

Writing in the shadow of apparently eroding national greatness gave the post-war intellectual climate one of its dominant topics and aesthetic motifs. To be British, and in particular to be English, in an Americanized age risked a degree of humiliation but also offered varied possibilities for assimilation, retrenchment and renewal. As domestic markets for fiction

and film contracted, the remaining cultural landscape was made up of, as one character in John Galsworthy's *The White Monkey* memorably remarked, "no big schemes, no great principles […] small men in small hats" (1924: 4).

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