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Three Approaches to the History of Poverty Row:
Majestic Pictures, 1930-1935

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Three Approaches to the History of Poverty Row: Majestic Pictures, 1930-1935

By

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Three Approaches to the History of Poverty Row:
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By Derek R. Long

This thesis adopts a multifaceted historiographic approach to researching and writing the industrial history of classical Hollywood's low-budget sector, known colloquially as "Poverty Row." It takes as a case study of this approach Majestic Pictures, an independent studio that produced low-budget feature films between 1930 and 1935. Through evidence from industry trade discourse, studio advertising, independent exhibitor reports, and data from theater receipts, I argue that Majestic consciously exploited the chronic shortage of film product that characterized the early 1930s through its selection of stories and genres as well as its allocation of higher budgets for its films. As a result, Majestic's films enjoyed wider distribution, especially in urban areas, than was typical for most low-budget independents. I further offer the various historiographic approaches I use as possible avenues for further research in this understudied sector of the American film industry during the period of the major studios' greatest dominance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Invisible, Other Indies

"Stale bread"—"a host of others"—"Hollywood's other half." All three of these phrases have been used to describe a perpetually maligned, chronically understudied, and too-frequently forgotten sector of the American film industry during the classical period—a slice of Hollywood that at one point in the early 1930s produced nearly 40% of all the feature films made in the United States.[1] This sector was most frequently referred to in industry trade publications as "the independents" or "indies," but its most colorful and enduring sobriquet was and remains "Poverty Row."[2] As their collective name suggests, the companies that inhabited Poverty Row lacked the financial resources, national distribution networks, and lucrative first-run theater chains that allowed the major studios to dominate American cinema from the 1920s until the 1950s. However, Poverty Row filmmaking greased the wheels of the very system that sought to control it by helping to feed what Tino Balio has termed "the maw of exhibition"—the system's need, especially in the 1930s, to provide sufficient film product to fill exhibitors' schedules, which increasingly consisted of double bills changed two or even three times a week.[3]

Yet the above descriptive phrases, coined respectively by an industry producer and two scholars of film history, both consciously and unconsciously suggest an inherent

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[1] Cf. Appendix 1, Table 1.

[2] Rather confusingly, the term "indie" frequently also refers in such publications to independently owned *exhibition* outlets—theaters—that were not affiliated with the major studios. While the distinction is usually made clear by the context of specific articles, the fact that the same term was used to reference very separate entities further bespeaks the frequent "lumping together" of industrial concerns at different levels of the supply chain (exhibition vs. production) that were unified only by their lack of affiliation with the major producer-distributors.

[3] Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 73, 28-30.

"otherness" that surrounds discourses of Poverty Row, an ambivalence about the role of low-budget independent production companies within the studio system.[4] The vast majority of classical "indie" production has been generally (and incorrectly) regarded as a phenomenon too marginal, both in industrial and aesthetic terms, to warrant substantial critical examination.[5] Scholarship on or related to Poverty Row tends to fall along a canon determined rather haphazardly in relation to some other critical category, such as authorship (e.g. John Ford's westerns with Republic, Anthony Mann's 1948 *Raw Deal* from Eagle-Lion), the casting of nascent stars (John Wayne at Mascot, Monogram, and Republic), the "exile" or "downfall" of stars (James Cagney at Grand National), a particular relationship to genre (such as the western in the 30s or *film noir* in the 40s), or blatant excesses of film style or content. Poverty Row's canonic films are familiar: many film scholars, critics, and fans are at least somewhat familiar with Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* (Producers Releasing Corporation, 1945), *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* with Gene Autry (Republic, 1935), or Mascot serials such as *The Shadow of the Eagle* (1932) and *The Phantom Empire* (1935). Paradoxically, Poverty Row's "otherness" and relative obscurity have allowed the sector's films to survive thanks to their tendency to fall out of copyright and into the public domain. Majestic's *The Vampire Bat* (1933) survives intact, if in varying states of print quality, on the DVD and VHS releases of numerous home

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[4] "Stale bread": Steve Broidy, president of Monogram/Allied Artists from 1945-1965, in an interview with Linda May Strawn; Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn, Eds., *Kings of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1975), 275. "A host of others": Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 261; Paul Seale consciously reacts to Balio's terminology in "'A Host of Others': Toward a Nonlinear History of Poverty Row and the Coming of Sound," *Wide Angle* 13:1 (January 1991), 72-103. "Hollywood's other half": Brian Taves, "The B Film: Hollywood's Other Half," in Tino Balio, Ed., *Grand Design*, 313-350.

[5] For the sake of simplicity and to avoid repetition, I have chosen to use the terms "Poverty Row," "independent production," and "indie" interchangeably. However, it should be noted that I am not dealing with independent productions released through United Artists or any other major distributor, nor with the later phenomenon of what Matthew Bernstein has called "Semi-independent production." Cf. Matthew Bernstein, "Hollywood's Semi-Independent Production," *Cinema Journal* 32:3 (Spring 1993), 41-54.

video distributors, while a studio B-film like Paramount's *Ride A Crooked Mile* (1938, currently owned by NBC Universal) remains unavailable in any legal form of public distribution. Academic scholarship's neglect of Poverty Row is not a function of any problem in the textual sample set; yet despite the wide availability of Poverty Row films on the open market, what Paul Seale wrote in 1991 remains true nearly twenty years later: "There is as yet no reliable and well-researched history of Poverty Row."[6]

Why, then, has so little been written on this segment of the industry that was so statistically important at the height of the studio system? One part of the answer lies in the aesthetic component of this discourse of otherness, which stresses the status of the Poverty Row text as inferior to the films of the major studios, or as simply and utterly banal. Poverty Row's industrial status as a ghetto that nascent stars or auteurs "worked their way out of" or to which they were exiled after their stardom had faded further encourages this sensibility. Indeed, to a certain extent, scholarly neglect—perhaps a better term might be *discrimination*—when it comes to Poverty Row has been both appropriate and necessary, and reflects the broader tension in film scholarship between the typical text and the exceptional text. Formulaic narratives, poor acting, or technical shoddiness mar many of the films produced on Poverty Row, and there are often few pleasures to be found in them. Thus, the emphasis, however haphazard, on stars, auteurs, genre, or film style in much of the scholarship that deals with Poverty Row is in many respects an absolutely understandable set of criteria for judging what is notable and researchable in classical indie production. This approach is rational enough for scholars of film theory, authorship, criticism, or aesthetics. However, for the purposes of film history, the bias that results in scholarly attention to exceptional Poverty Row texts over

[6] Seale, 73.

typical ones has led to vast gaps in our knowledge of the sector. Part of the response to these gaps has been to place Poverty Row within the context of the Hollywood studio system; a project that has led to important insights but has also tended to conflate the output of Poverty Row and that of the B-units of the major studios under the moniker of the "B Film"—a conflation not without certain merit, but one that has further marginalized independent low-budget production as a subject of scholarship.

Methodology

In this thesis, I seek to re-examine Poverty Row as an integral but undeniably independent part of the Hollywood studio system during a rather specific historical moment in the genealogy of that system: the period between the end of the transition to sound around 1930 and the adoption of B-units as a standard practice among the major studios beginning in 1935. I have chosen this period for several reasons. First, although Poverty Row as a whole has received a scant amount of scholarly attention, this period in particular remains mostly unresearched. Second, the years 1930-1935 are significant in that they encompass a period in American film history when low-budget independent productions undertaken by companies unaffiliated with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) found distribution even in urban, major-affiliated theaters—some of them first-run. After 1935 (a year that has been described as "the height of quickie filmmaking"),[7] this kind of distribution was increasingly closed off to independents by the B-unit product of the major studios, and by the last years of the 1930s the majors dominated urban first-run markets.[8] Through this periodization, I hope

[7] Taves, 327.
[8] Taves, 316, 321.

to highlight the distinction between the independent productions of Poverty Row and the B-films of the majors, which in the early thirties had not yet become a codified production practice in the minds of studio executives.

Finally, this period roughly coincides with the existence of the Poverty Row studio I have chosen as a case study: Majestic Pictures. I offer in the following pages three separate historiographic approaches to studying Majestic, first and foremost as a means to an end—the study of the studio specifically for its own sake—but also in the hope that these approaches might prove useful in writing a more comprehensive history of this understudied sector of the American film industry. The first approach (Chapter 2) is a traditional industrial history of Majestic through the beginning of 1933, in which I deal with the historical context of the product shortage, Majestic's beginnings, its emergence as a major Poverty Row studio under the financial and creative direction of Phil Goldstone in 1932, and the strategy behind that emergence. In the interest of time and space, I chose not to extend this history much past the end of 1932, but I do deal with the studio's subsequent years in other chapters. The second approach (Chapter 3) takes Rick Altman's "use-value" model of genre discursivity and applies it to Majestic's advertising, concentrating on the studio's framing of itself to exhibitors in 1933 and 1934 as a provider of film product for a wide variety of audiences, especially urban women. Finally, the third approach (chapter 4) draws upon David Bordwell and Maureen Turim's respective work on flashback structure in a narratological analysis of Majestic's most fascinating film, *The Sin of Nora Moran*. All three of these approaches reveal to a greater or lesser extent a common pattern of reception that helps to nuance our understanding of Poverty Row in the early 1930s: contrary to received historiographical accounts that

frame Poverty Row as a static "ghetto" where quickie producers churned out westerns for rural and neighborhood theaters, Majestic produced relatively expensive and sophisticated product that enjoyed dynamic distribution in both subsequent-run theaters and first-run circuits. At various points from its founding in 1930 until reaching its zenith in 1933, the studio was able to successfully exploit the product shortage. However, after the release of *The Sin of Nora Moran*—and possibly due to that film's critical and box office failure—Majestic appears to have modified its strategy to concentrate on rural and neighborhood exhibition as its fortunes declined in 1934 and 1935.

I should emphasize that I am less interested in producing a holistic grand narrative of Majestic (although I hope to eventually produce such a narrative) than I am in attacking the problem of writing Poverty Row history using these different approaches. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate the applicability of what Kristin Thompson, David Bordwell, Paul Seale, and others have termed "nonlinear history" in understanding the causal and material dynamics of Poverty Row's place and function within the American film industry as the classical era of vertical integration was beginning to reach its zenith.[9] Seale has argued that the very fact of Poverty Row's "marginality" meant that its fortunes were more tied to small-scale and localized historical and industrial determinants than the macro-economic and -historical forces that guided the decision-making of the integrated majors. This led Poverty Row to pursue a "variety of strategies and resources which make it resistant to linear models of industrial analysis […] some Poverty Row producers certainly did have long-range plans for growth; others, however, seemed more interested in turning a fast buck; and still others may have used Poverty Row productions to

[9] Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Linearity, Materialism, and the Study of American Cinema," *Wide Angle* 5:3 (1983), 4-15.

showcase themselves, hoping only for a contract with a major producer."[10] Through the various approaches I have laid out, I will show that in 1932, all of the motivations Seale describes were at work—and furthermore, that the heterogeneous nature of exhibition during this period, combined with the independents' ability to both churn out features for the grinds and imitate the majors, allowed Poverty Row to thrive during the early- and mid-thirties.

Although this thesis is not a demography of film exhibition, and it concerns "rural exhibition" as only one facet among many of Majestic's exhibition strategy, I have chosen to include some of the raw data of my research into the studio's urban exhibition and rural/small-town reception. Appendix 2 contains a nearly complete listing of theater receipts from the runs of Majestic's films in first- and second-run theaters—some of them major-affiliated—in urban markets.[11] I have chosen to include this data not only to trace Majestic's success in urban areas, but also in order to emphasize that independent and small-town exhibitors, although they were crucial to the viability and profitability of independent production and often formed the base of Poverty Row's exhibition, did not constitute its only market. Nor were they created equal; as Kathryn Fuller-Seeley has shown in her examination of the *Motion Picture Herald*'s "What the Picture Did For Me" exhibitor reports, small-town exhibitors displayed a diversity of differing and even contradictory tastes, concerns, and interests that, taken together, reveal a decidedly ambivalent relationship between non-metropolitan exhibitors (as a whole) and the

[10] Seale, 77.
[11] Any claim I make regarding the success of a particular Majestic film is taken from this raw data, which I have cited as appropriate in the appendix for the sake of convenience and of reducing footnote space.

Hollywood studios, whose films they often—but not always—criticized as too "urban."[12] Misgivings about misleading titles, "cycle" and "pattern" production, and the generally uneven quality of independent features all bespeak a general dissatisfaction on the part of many exhibitors during this period with the film product they were being sold, whether that product was churned out by Poverty Row or by the major studios. I have included all such exhibitor reports on Majestic's films in Appendix 3.

Although I would argue that the Majestic films produced by Phil Goldstone constitute something of a "house style," I do not intend to make any kind of argument about authorship in this thesis. Rather, I have chosen Majestic for my case study because too much of the limited scholarship that has been done on Poverty Row has focused on the exceptional text, as described above. I would argue that Majestic's films, while they certainly have their own exceptional moments—moments I believe serve to define and delimit the Poverty Row text—nevertheless stand as typical examples of hour-long Poverty Row features, specifically produced to fill the bottom half of double bills or to stand on their own in subsequent-run theaters. Thus, they form a more representative sample of Poverty Row production in the 1930s than the exceptional texts that have been the subject of past scholarship. Furthermore, I believe that Majestic's films trouble the notion of homogeneous non-metropolitan exhibition. As Paul Seale has argued,

> Extant accounts of Poverty Row in the studio period would suggest that Poverty Row became increasingly identified with the Western and the tastes of rural audiences, while the majors became increasingly identified with "sophisticated" material derived from theatrical traditions, at least for a time. We might wish to investigate, then, the validity of these dichotomies (which once again tend to homogenize Poverty Row, if not also the majors) and the degree to which they are grounded in the

[12] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, "'What The Picture Did For Me': Small-Town Exhibitors' Strategies for Surviving the Great Depression," in Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, Ed., *Hollywood in the Neighborhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 186-207.

> economic structure of the industry and the ideological structure of the American cinema.[13]

The goal of this project is in many ways to fulfill Seale's impulse for such a further investigation, and my approach is heavily indebted to his work.

Historiography

As noted above, scholarship on Poverty Row has followed a haphazard trajectory (a trajectory as nonlinear as the sector itself) since the inauguration of film studies as an academic discipline in the 1960s and 70s.[14] While I have attempted to use academic sources wherever possible in this thesis, occasionally I have found it necessary to reference nonacademic work, particularly if it refers specifically to Majestic, with the caveat that citations and verifiable claims in such work are few and far between. Thus, I have avoided making definite arguments based on these sources, pointing to them more as suggestive or supportive rather than authoritative. Unfortunately, the state of Poverty Row scholarship is such that even an ostensibly reliable filmography like Michael R. Pitts' *Poverty Row Studios* contains a surprisingly large number of factual errors.[15] The unreliability and inconsistency of many of these secondary sources has been one factor in my decision to focus as much as possible on primary evidence from trade journals, exhibitor reports, theater receipts, and newspapers. Nevertheless, nonacademic works such as Don Miller's *B Movies* and Gene Fernett's *Poverty Row* (both published in 1973),

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[13] Seale, 97.
[14] While I do not attempt a comprehensive survey of the literature on Poverty Row here, the bibliography lists books and articles either directly or tangentially related to Poverty Row or Majestic.
[15] Michael R. Pitts, *Poverty Row Studios, 1929-1940* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997). Other filmographies consulted for this thesis include: Len D. Martin, *The Republic Pictures Checklist* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998) and Ted Okuda, *The Monogram Checklist* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1987).

though they lack citations, have provided valuable reference narratives of Poverty Row in the 1930s.[16]

For the purposes of this project, most scholarly writing on Poverty Row presents two major problematics. The first is a tendency to easily conflate independent low-budget films with the B-films of the major studios; as discussed above, this ignores indie filmmaking before about 1935, when the "B film" did not formally exist as an industrially constructed and codified category (although trade discourse from the early thirties frequently refers to "B" theaters, what would later be known as the B film was more often referred to as a "quickie" and was more closely associated with the independents than the majors). The second is an overwhelming emphasis on Poverty Row in the postwar period, which (not coincidentally) produced most of the canonic texts of independent studio filmmaking.[17] Because my project seeks to discuss Poverty Row as a sector both integral to and independent from the studio system, it has found historiographic starting points primarily in work that both appreciates and nuances the distinction between those two types of filmmaking. One such work is Brian Taves' chapter, "The B Film: Hollywood's Other Half," in *Grand Design*, edited by Tino Balio. Taves' article distinguishes Poverty Row as a separate yet crucial component of the studio system through a four-part taxonomy of the B film, ranging from "programmers"

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[16] Don Miller, *B Movies* (New York: Ballantine, 1973); Gene Fernett, *Poverty Row* (Satellite Beach, FL: Coral Reef Publications, 1973).

[17] Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn, Eds., *Kings of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1975) is essentially auteurist in its approach and concentrates on the postwar period. James Naremore's chapter on B *films noirs* in *More Than Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 136-166, likewise limits itself to the postwar B *noir*. Doug McClelland's *The Golden Age of "B" Movies* (Nashville, TN: Charter House, 1978) offers little more than a selected filmography of B films from the 1940s. Even recent scholarship such as the fascinating volume on Edgar Ulmer edited by Gary D. Rhodes, *Edgar G. Ulmer:* Detour *on Poverty Row*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008) deals mostly with Ulmer's post-1945 films (1934's *The Black Cat* is explored as a "case study," but that film was produced and distributed by the minor-major Universal).

and studio B films down to Poverty Row features and the quickies of transitory producers.[18] Lea Jacobs, although she writes specifically about the studio B film in her article "The B Film and the Problem of Cultural Distinction," has pointed out the fluidity of the B category among the majors within the marketplace of exhibition. This idea of fluidity has provided a conceptual framework for my own argument about the fluidity and salability of much of Majestic's film product.

While Taves and Jacobs are careful not to conflate the studio B picture with the films of Poverty Row, independent studio filmmaking is not their primary subject. I have discussed the applicability of Paul Seale's work above, and it has served as a primary reference point. Yannis Tzioumakis' *American Independent Cinema* contains a chapter on Poverty Row during the studio era, but argues for Poverty Row's essential difference from major studio filmmaking in its emphasis on action, thrills, and the western.[19] Of the two volumes dedicated specifically to the institutional histories of single Poverty Row studios, Jon Tuska's history of Mascot Pictures lacks citations, while Richard Hurst's *Republic Studios* emphasizes the serial and the western as typical forms of Poverty Row filmmaking.[20] I have therefore consulted both where appropriate, but I do not rely on them methodologically.

Ultimately, the relationship between Poverty Row and the major studios during the classical period was complicated beyond the point of simple antagonism; in many ways it was not dissimilar to the major studios' relationships with each other—nominally

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[18] Taves, 316-329. Taves specifically places Majestic's output in the same category as that of Republic and Monogram.
[19] Yannis Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006).
[20] Jon Tuska, *The Vanishing Legion: A History of Mascot Pictures, 1927-1935* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1982). Richard M. Hurst, *Republic Studios: Between Poverty Row and the Majors* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2007).

competitive, occasionally symbiotic, but in the end comfortably and indifferently profitable (if only in the short term). From the perspective of the majors, the "indies" served the less lucrative neighborhood and rural theaters on a day-to-day basis, helping to feed the maw of exhibition and keeping their own production overheads from ballooning; as long as Poverty Row stayed small and undercapitalized, they posed no significant threat. From the perspective of the independent studios, the key—as Mae D. Huettig and countless other scholars and observers have pointed out—was exhibition.[21] As such, I will return to the indisputable facts of Majestic's exhibition throughout this thesis.

[21] Mae D. Huettig, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944).

Chapter 2: *The History of Majestic Pictures, 1930-1933*

"Pictures of Superlative Excellence" – Majestic Under Sherman and Trop, 1930

Majestic Pictures was born twice. Reincarnation was a common occurrence on Poverty Row; capital could dry up at any moment, profit margins were slim, and a single failure at the box office could spell disaster for even the largest independent studio.[22] Majestic's 1930 birth was met with little fanfare. Organized as "Majestic Pictures Company, Ltd." sometime in the summer of that year, the "studio" was essentially a limited company set up by independent producers Harry Sherman and Jack D. Trop to produce and distribute "pictures of superlative excellence" using rented space at the Tec-Art studios.[23] Majestic released its first feature, *Today*, on November 1.[24] Directed by William Nigh, *Today* was based on a Broadway play by Abraham Schomer and George Broadhurst, starred matinee idol Conrad Nagel, and featured cinematography by James Wong Howe.[25] While the film is believed lost, contemporary press and trade coverage suggests that *Today* was competently produced and directed. Indeed, the fact that it featured a popular star and played at the 2000-seat Rialto—at that time the largest independently-owned theater in the District of Columbia—suggests that Sherman and

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[22] Grand National's James Cagney vehicle *Something to Sing About* (1937), which cost the studio the extravagant—for Poverty Row, at least—sum of $900,000, is a classic example of such a failure, while Monogram had at least one reincarnation after a brief merger with Republic in 1935-1936. Taves, 323.

[23] *The Film Daily Yearbook 1931*, 124, 608. An ad (124) lists Majestic's studios at 5360 Melrose Avenue in Hollywood, the address of Tec-Art. The listing of Majestic's 1930 corporate information is as follows: Majestic Pictures Co., Ltd. (RCA System) 729 7th Ave, New York City. President: Harry Sherman. Exec. Vice-President: J.D. Trop. Secretary: Leonard Ross. Treasurer: Meyer Frank. It is interesting to note that the company's mailing address in New York is the same as that of other independent concerns like Amkino, Artclass, Bray, Capitol Production Exporting, and The Film Exchange. Columbia is also listed at the same address (*Film Daily Yearbook 1931*, 606-610).

[24] "*Today* (1930)," American Film Institute Catalog. URL: http://afi.chadwyck.com. Pitts, 225.

[25] A year later, Howe would photograph *Transatlantic* for Fox and find himself back in demand as a major cinematographer after the rocky transition to sound.

Trop hoped that *Today* might find them work with one of the larger studios.[26] Indeed, beginning in 1935, the pair would produce the popular Hopalong Cassidy series of B-westerns distributed by Paramount.

In contrast to its producers' later work in westerns, however, *Today* took place in a distinctly urban milieu, and was at least partially sold based on the merits of the original Schomer and Broadhurst play. Critical reception of the film emphasized the same discourse of sophistication that was often associated with legitimate theater during this period; the *Film Daily* reviewer called it "fine, classy entertainment" and singled out Nagel's performance as the greatest of his career.[27] One *Washington Post* article, assuming a tone suspiciously similar to a pressbook review, described the film as a "drama of modern marriage […] In this Majestic picture, there appear [sic] an aggregation of stage talent that is convincing proof the talking screen can only come into its own through the trained abilities of the legitimate actor."[28] The film itself was structured around a "fallen woman" plot typical of the period: Fred Warner (Nagel) loses his fortune in the 1929 stock market crash, causing his wife Eve (Catherine Dale Owen) to resort to prostitution in order to support herself. Interestingly, Nelson B. Bell's review of *Today* in *The Washington Post* indicates that the film was shot with two endings: one in which Warner discovers his wife's infidelity, kills her, and turns himself in to the police, and a "happy ending" in which Eve awakens to find the entire ordeal has been a dream.[29] While alternate endings were certainly not uncommon during this period in classical Hollywood (Paramount's 1932 *Farewell to Arms* being a prime example), that

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[26] *The Film Daily Yearbook*, 1933, 719.
[27] "Today," *The Film Daily*, 26 October 1930, 10.
[28] "Popular Play Remade as an Audible Film," *The Washington Post*, 7 December 1930, A2.
[29] Nelson B. Bell, "Rialto" (Review of *Today*), *The Washington Post*, 5 December 1930, 12. Bell's screening of the film employed the happy ending.

Sherman and Trop had the financial means to shoot separate endings—and felt that a positive exhibition and reception of the film was important enough to warrant such a device—indicates that *Today* was no "ordinary" Poverty Row production, at least in the sense that received historiography has led us to expect. The film's producers clearly wanted it to be successful among "sophisticated" urban audiences in metropolitan markets. It is worth emphasizing that at a running time of 80 minutes (only one other Majestic film—*The World Gone Mad*—would ever run that long), *Today* was less suited to double billing than Majestic's later hour-long features.

Indeed, Bell's review also suggests that the film's content was relatively racy: "Piqued, no doubt, that earlier supposedly spicy offerings had been declared by both press and public less risqué than their exploitation would lead one to believe, a rather more successful attempt than usual has been made to be daring."[30] It seems unlikely that an upstart independent company like Majestic would risk the wrath of local censorship boards with such content if they were seeking widespread exhibition in the neighborhood and rural theaters that have typically been associated with Poverty Row's target audience. Nevertheless, *Today*'s success seems to have been quite limited; Majestic would not make another film until 1932. The company's "limited" status indicates that Sherman and Trop may not have had long-term plans for the organization. In any case, by early 1931 a *Film Daily Yearbook* ad for Seton I. Miller, *Today*'s screenwriter, described the film as a "Harry Sherman Production" (instead of "A Majestic Film" or something similar) while listing his other credits for First National, Columbia, and MGM by studio name.[31] Whether Majestic was intended to be a fly-by-night concern from the start or was forced

[30] Bell, 12.
[31] *The 1931 Film Daily Yearbook*, 146.

into insolvency by the failure of *Today*, the studio would be inactive for more than a year.[32]

Though I have devoted what may seem like an inordinate amount of space to a single lost film produced by a company that may have been organized solely to finance that film's production, *Today* instantiates an important pattern that characterizes Majestic's broader history. As the apparently transitory character of the film indicates, we cannot think of Poverty Row in the same terms that we think of the major studios with regard to the industrial structure of production. *Today* was produced at the Tec-Art studios using rented space and time; the 1930 incarnation of Majestic had little or no overhead, no star salaries to pay, and no well-known corporate brand. Without the benefit of guaranteed exhibition enjoyed by the majors, any production intended for "sophisticated" urban audiences was quite risky—yet Sherman and Trop, through Majestic, did it anyway, and to some critical acclaim. This example alone troubles received historiographies that link Poverty Row exhibition closely to rural and neighborhood markets and audiences, but as the individual exhibition histories of Majestic films will show again and again, metropolitan exhibition of independent studio films was quite frequent—at least in the early 30s—and offered opportunities for profit just as rural markets did.

[32] *The 1932 Film Daily Yearbook* does not even list Majestic as extant, let alone active; the status of the company in 1931 is difficult to determine.

Phil Goldstone, the IMPPA, and Independent Production, 1932

Phil Goldstone, c. 1932.
Source: *New England Film News*, 25 August 1932, 13.

At some point in the spring of 1932, the independent producer Phil Goldstone acquired the Majestic name for a new producing-distributing firm. Goldstone is a crucial figure for understanding independent production as a whole during the early thirties, and Majestic's subsequent history requires a brief examination of him. A former real estate developer, Goldstone became an independent producer and formed Phil Goldstone Productions in the early 1920s, producing hour-long features for release through Truart Film Company.[33] In 1925, he became head of production at Tiffany Pictures, a Poverty Row studio that Don Miller has called "the MGM of the independents."[34] Frederica Sagor Maas, a screenwriter who wrote two stories for Tiffany's 1925-1926 season, has described the production model there:

> Phil Goldstone was titular head of the company, in charge of production, and M.H. Hoffman was vice president in charge of sales and distribution. Both were still young men, in their early forties and fifties—intelligent, high-school educated, and indefatigable workers. They quickly established that they could make outstanding productions without featuring big star names. Their successful box-office product was the result of their careful choice of good writers and directors and their ability to prepare a

[33] Pitts, 223.
[34] Miller, 22. The studio's first eight films were actually distributed by MGM.

> production properly before shooting—instead of rectifying mistakes while the picture was in production or after it was made. While prestigious companies such as MGM swelled production budgets by hiring multiple writers to develop a story, Tiffany did it with one writer whose work they had analyzed and in whom they had confidence. They followed this economical procedure into every aspect of production.[35]

Modern sources explicitly credit Goldstone for only one production at Tiffany (1926's *Lost at Sea*) before John Stahl took over as head of the firm in 1927, but it seems likely that he oversaw all of the studio's production from 1925 until Stahl's takeover. At any rate, by 1929, Goldstone had become a well-known figure among exhibitors.[36] When Stahl left in 1930 after the transition to sound began to spell Tiffany's doom, Goldstone produced fourteen of the studio's final films—a majority of them westerns—in the last two years of its existence.[37]

Thus, by 1932, Goldstone boasted a full decade of experience in "quality" production at reduced budgets as well as cheaper western fare. In a May 17, 1932 article, *Variety* reported that Goldstone was financing some 95% of all independent production on the west coast. Citing his financial interests in certain sound and film equipment providers and commissions received from studio rentals and costuming companies, the article claimed that "his domination of the independent market has no parallel among the majors." His typical financing arrangement, which applied to around 30 independent producers (many of whom had recently entered independent production after leaving the

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[35] Frederica Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 110. Maas also describes Goldstone as "brusque and impatient" under studio pressures (111).

[36] "Indie Sound Test Near," *Variety*, 3 April 1929, 20 (quoted in Seale, 86). The AFI catalog does not provide a producer credit for many of Tiffany's productions from 1925-early 1927. It is possible that Tiffany operated under what Janet Staiger (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, 128) has called the central producer system. That the studio's films had been distributed by MGM before 1925 suggests that Goldstone may have eschewed credit just as Irving Thalberg did; however, this hypothesis is purely speculative and offers an avenue for further research.

[37] For an account of Tiffany's demise after the transition to sound, brought about by its ill-fated partnership with RKO in selling theater subscriptions to RCA's Photophone sound technology, Cf. Seale, 84-88.

major studios), earned the moniker "the Goldstone system": Goldstone would advance up to 50% of the negative cost, with the other half fronted by states rights distributors. All productions were obliged to use resources that Goldstone either partially controlled (such as the Royal Film Laboratory in Hollywood, co-owned with King Charney), or held a financial stake in (RCA Photophone sound equipment and Agfa film stock). In the first half of 1932, Goldstone essentially held a corner on the production market for independent distribution, with Monogram standing as the only producer for states rights that did not rely on his financing. Much of this consolidation came about around the time that Goldstone became the exclusive licensee under RCA for independent productions using the Photophone sound system—whereby all Goldstone-financed productions costing under $35,000 could be recorded using RCA equipment for a flat $2400. RCA hoped to bring in more Poverty Row licenses through Goldstone, reflecting both his importance as an independent financier and his not unfriendly relationship with the majors.[38] Indeed, this relationship helped him to corner the independent market, as Poverty Row firms dissatisfied with their own sound deals with RCA were encouraged to obtain financing through Goldstone.[39] He made quite a profit in the process; *Variety* noted that he was one of the richest individuals in the film industry at the time. "No question that without Goldstone, or someone else prepared to play angel, regardless of terms, there would be no independent boom at present […] He has practically given up

[38] "RCA Ties with Goldstone for Recording Deal," *Variety*, 15 March 1932, 4. "Goldstone Turns Over 31 Producer Accounts to RCA," *Variety*, 10 May 1932, 4.
[39] "Eastern Indie Studios Burn at RCA; Want Same Terms as Goldstone Deal," *Variety*, 24 May 1932, 6. Cf. Seale, 84-88.

his own production activities to devote all his time to being the Santa Claus of the indies."[40]

Furthermore, Goldstone had become the preeminent player in the field of independent production just as that sector was entering a relative boom period. On January 13, 1932, reacting to difficulties with labor unions, a group of thirty-five independent producers including Goldstone, M.H. Hoffman (formerly of Tiffany), Nat Levine (Mascot), Larry Darmour (producer of the Mickey McGuire series of shorts starring Mickey Rooney), and Ralph Like (Action/Mayfair) met at the Tec-Art Studios to organize the Independent Producers Association (IPA), which by February would be renamed the Independent Motion Picture Producers Association (IMPPA). Though *The New York Morning Telegraph* claimed that the group was "tired of having the producer's organization [the Association of Motion Picture Producers] and the Hays group [MPPDA] dictate labor policies and other studio matters," the relationship between the IMPPA and MPPDA was actually quite cordial.[41] By March, the IMPPA—represented by Goldstone—had reached a "one-price" agreement with Will Hays over player loans, overturning (at least temporarily) the previous practice among the majors of collusively pricing their own stars and character actors out of the independent market. The majors also offered location permits and censorship advice to the IMPPA, which was itself drafting a "less severe" equivalent to the Hays code. Censorship concerns brought the two groups together; the IMPPA sought the Hays group's expertise in handling local

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[40] "Phil Goldstone Is Bankrolling Exiting Execs," *Variety*, 1 March 1932, 5. "Goldstone Now Angeling 95% of All Coast Indies," *Variety*, 17 May 1932, 7.

[41] "'Indies' Set Up Own 'Union'," *The New York Morning Telegraph*, 18 January 1932, 1. "Indies' Assoc. Will Fight Unions," *Variety*, 19 January 1932, 7. In contrast to the later Society for Independent Motion Picture Producers (SIMPP, formed in 1941), whose affiliates often distributed through the major studios, the IMPPA almost exclusively represented Poverty Row studios and producers using the states' rights system and/or their own distribution networks (as in the case of Monogram, Republic, PRC, and Grand National).

censorship boards, while the MPPDA hoped that providing such expertise would prevent the image of the film industry as a whole (and most importantly, the affiliated major studios) from being tarnished by any one rogue independent.[42] By April, *Variety* was reporting discussion of giving the five largest independent companies a collective vote in the MPPDA, equivalent to one of the majors; the plan does not appear to have been adopted.[43]

On March 1, 1932, a *Variety* article reported on the new aspirations of Poverty Row, as demonstrated by increased budgets, a generic emphasis on drama over the western, and the uncertain position of the majors. On February 29, IMPPA members had announced their production plans for the 1932-1933 season: a total of 250 films (as compared to 350 by the majors) with a combined budget of $7.5 million—roughly equivalent to the annual budget of an average studio B-unit in the latter half of the 30s, though with a much lower negative cost per film.[44] The article noted that "with the exception of a few westerns, which will be budgeted at around $15,000, few pictures will leave the studios with less than $25,000 charged against them." A few producers even planned productions with budgets as high as $50,000. *Variety* saw the budget increase as the seizing of a newfound opportunity:

> Budget increase is not because the producers want to spend more money but is a matter of making pictures which will give the indies the toe hold they have desired so long. All feel that it will be at least three years before the majors become settled in their effort to produce consistently inexpensive pictures. During that time every indie hopes to get a major

[42] "Camera Indies Hail Hays as Pal," *Variety*, 15 March 1932, 4.
[43] "Indie Overtures For Hays Tieup Meet Opposition," *Variety*, 1 March 1932, 4. "Indies Incline to Hays," *Variety*, 5 April 1932, 5. One explanation for the plan's rejection may be that the independents felt they were getting most of the benefits of Hays membership (censorship advice, location permits, more equitable player pricing) for free already, without the liability of annual dues. Nevertheless, lobbying on the part of the majors should not be discounted as a possibility.
[44] Sol Wurzel, head of the B-unit at Fox, averaged a $6 million annual budget at a few hundred thousand per film. Taves, 318.

> studio offer. Indies' attempt to get away from the usual quickie production is revealed in the drop-off of westerns. Of the 250 features scheduled only 70 are western and the remainder parlor drama. In previous years it has been the opposite.[45]

Indeed, the product shortage created a hole in the exhibition market that the majors had not yet adjusted to fill, and Poverty Row's product offered independent exhibitors something of a cheaper hedge as the depression deepened and the major studios' films appeared riskier and more expensive. That independent product was typically rented for a flat fee rather than a percentage was even more attractive. From Poverty Row's perspective, both higher production budgets and higher rental fees could easily be justified as a result: "Indie producers, while staying off percentage because of exploitation and checking expenses, are set to jack up flat rentals. In many towns where they have been getting $300 for a feature, salesmen are being instructed to use the first run and quality argument in an effort to place same in the $500 class."[46]

However, as was often the case on Poverty Row, pre-production euphoria was tinged with more sobering realities. Optimistic production estimates were part and parcel of Poverty Row's contemporary strategies for obtaining financing; experienced independent exchange owners knew that independent producers, caught in a Catch-22 of being unable to finance pictures that did not yet have guaranteed exhibition, often sold little more than a slate of titles for pictures whose funding had not yet been settled in order to frame their product as a sound investment.[47] *Variety* noted that some of the larger concerns on Poverty Row "point[ed] out that it's even difficult now for majors to secure

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[45] "250 Features From Indies," *Variety*, 1 March 1932, 5. Indeed, the article was prophetic; Poverty Row production in the 1930s would reach its peak in 1935, three years later, before losing market share to the majors' B-units.
[46] "Indie Producers Prepare to Shoot The Works on '32-'33 Schedule," *Variety*, 17 May 1932, 4.
[47] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, 318-319.

proper financing on production"—hardly a good sign for the financing prospects of Poverty Row.[48] That the IMPPA found itself embroiled in a labor dispute in the spring of 1932 further complicated matters; in contrast to its relationship to the MPPDA, the IMPPA's dealings with the studio labor unions were often confrontational. By May, the IMPPA found itself at an impasse in a wage dispute with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employes (IATSE). Goldstone accused the union of discriminating against independent producers and began advocating a 25% cut in the number of features released by IMPPA affiliates, and the association adopted a resolution "urging a campaign to that end." Most significantly, he suspended all of his personal financing of independent productions on the west coast, officially only until the dispute was resolved, though *Variety* pointed to Goldstone's ambivalence over the "shaky condition of the indie field."[49]

Thus, the factors determining the state of Poverty Row in early 1932 were complicated and occasionally contradictory—put simply, non-linear. However, two determinants present themselves as fundamental for both the rise of Majestic's second incarnation under Phil Goldstone and the specific industrial strategy employed by the new firm. The first significant determinant was the consolidation of Poverty Row's interests, both through Goldstone's cornering of the independent distribution market and through the formation of the IMPPA. Though individual Poverty Row producers certainly had their own individual concerns and remained competitors, the formation of an organization for independent producers modeled on the MPPDA reflected a new

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[48] "Difficulties in Financing May Dent Indies' '33 Prod. Optimism," *Variety*, 12 April 1932, 7.
[49] "Most Studios Ignore Soundmen's New Scale Which Hits Indies," *Variety*, 10 May 1932, 7. "Indies Refuse Soundmen's New Wage Scale; Demand Camera Concessions," 31 May 1932, 21. "Goldstone Demands A Union Settlement," *Motion Picture Herald*, 4 June 1932, 10. "With $1,500,00 Involved in Indie Financing, Goldstone Closes Purse," *Variety*, 7 June 1932, 4.

confidence on the part of the low-budget sector that was not completely unfounded. Furthermore, Goldstone's dealings with the major studios, as manifested by his profitable relationship with RCA and his negotiation of more favorable player loan arrangements between the MPPDA and IMPPA, were relatively amicable—a fact that, in the eyes of both the majors and the independents, was necessitated by the economic conditions of the Depression. As reflected in later discourse surrounding the National Recovery Administration, many in the industry likely felt that the survival of the movie business rested, at least partially, on reducing mutually destructive competition among and between the majors and the independents. The formation of the IMPPA in many ways reflected this attitude, which in basic form was not substantially different from the sensibility among the majors in the MPPDA—the difference being that an IMPPA member would not hesitate to join the majors if it became prestigious enough to be invited.

Perhaps the most important determinant, however, was the product shortage; feature production had been steadily decreasing since the late 1920s at the same time that the double bill was becoming standard practice among exhibitors (especially independent exhibitors). As Paul Seale has shown, the cause-effect relationship between the double bill and Poverty Row production presents something of a chicken-and-egg problem, but I would argue (and I think Seale would agree) that at the very least we can see a positive "feedback loop" relationship between the availability of independent product and the viability of the double bill as a profitable exhibition strategy.[50] This feedback loop was in full effect by 1932, and was aided to some extent by an experiment that year among the majors—specifically Paramount, MGM, and Fox—with so-called "exclusive" selling.

[50] Seale, 75.

Under this policy, the majors hoped to limit the area of their films' exhibition by restricting the sale of their product to affiliated theaters in certain markets, mostly in medium-sized cities. In so doing, they hoped to restrict and concentrate exhibition to theaters that they owned outright, where every dollar of income would more efficiently cover overhead and production costs.

A company like Loews generally avoided this practice in densely-populated (and –theatered) areas like New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Cleveland, both because first-runs there were more likely to be owned by another major and because the sheer density of theaters provided far more potential income than the amount that would be saved by exclusive selling in those areas. However, in smaller cities like Atlanta, Indianapolis, Providence, Nashville, Rochester, and Houston, the majors assumed that their films would have enough drawing power to make exclusive selling profitable. Nevertheless, as *Variety* pointed out, the Depression meant that these films often did not draw as well as the majors hoped, and any strategy that consciously restricted the circulation of films also restricted the circulation of stars, reducing their drawing power. This left many of the independently-owned subsequent run theaters and theater circuits—which had traditionally provided the majors with much of the "gravy" of exhibition—with no choice but to run independent product.[51] Under Goldstone, Majestic exploited this newfound market.

Setting the Stage: 1932

On June 13, 1932, a three-day meeting at the Congress Hotel in Chicago concluded, and the Majestic Distributing Corporation was formed. Structured as a

[51] "Exclusive May Boomerang," *Variety*, 27 September 1932, 7.

"cooperative franchise organization," Majestic functioned essentially along the same lines as First National in the late 1910s and 1920s, except it was formed by a group of independent film exchanges—in other words, distributors—rather than exhibitors. Twenty-two exchange owners served as equal partners in the firm and became Majestic franchisees; the most important of these exchanges was Herman Gluckman's Capitol Film Exchange, which distributed the company's product in New York. Though these exchange owners could unambiguously be called "states' rights" distributors, each served subsequent-run theaters in the urban markets of their particular region. These exchanges were located throughout the United States, giving Majestic a semblance of national (if not very profitable) distribution. Gluckman was elected President, while William Shapiro and B.N. Judell (local exchange owners in Boston and Chicago, respectively) served as Vice Presidents. Goldstone served as the company's head of production and "Treasurer"—a title that rather understated his importance as Majestic's primary financial backer. The initial financing setup was similar to the "Goldstone System": ten of the franchisees paid $25,000 each to guarantee Goldstone's capital investment of an additional $250,000, for a total of half a million dollars with which to start production.[52] The former "Santa Claus of the Indies" ceased his scattered financing of various independent productions and directed most of his funds into the new company. At the Congress Hotel meeting, Goldstone and the Majestic franchise holders agreed on ambitious plans for the 1932-1933 season: 26 pictures at a total cost of $3,000,000. Only 13 of those films would eventually be produced, but Majestic's first season would prove a successful one.[53]

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[52] "Franklin Screens Two Majestic Releases," *New England Film News*, 15 September 1932, 14.
[53] "New Indie Firm," *Variety*, 24 May 1932, 4. "Goldstone Launches His New Firm with % System Ruled Out," *Variety*, 14 June 1932, 12. "Majestic Formed By Goldstone On Cooperative Basis," *The Motion Picture Herald*, 18 June 1932, 30.

Majestic's first two releases under Goldstone—*Hearts of Humanity* and *The Phantom Express*—had already been completed by other producers by the time of Majestic's formation, and exemplify received historiography's understanding of Poverty Row. Both films were produced on low budgets, both were distributed primarily through Majestic-franchised states' rights circuits, and both were quite popular in neighborhood and rural theaters (though both also played in urban subsequent-runs to a limited extent).[54] Nevertheless, the films were part of a conscious strategy on Majestic's part to establish the studio as a reliable producer of popular low-budget product *across* lines of genre and audience. Rather than specializing in production for one slice of Poverty Row's traditional exhibition strengths—westerns for rural exhibitors, for instance—Majestic produced films aimed at a variety of audiences. *Hearts of Humanity*, a "mother love" melodrama, was geared toward neighborhood theaters in urban areas and a specifically female "weepie" audience, while *The Phantom Express*, a railroad mystery reminiscent of adventure serials, was meant to appeal to children both urban and rural. In appealing to a variety of the audiences within Poverty Row's admittedly limited grasp, the studio hoped to position itself as a permanent presence in the industry, in contrast to the transitory producers that made up much of the independent sector.[55] However, *Hearts of Humanity* and *The Phantom Express* also instantiated a production and release model that characterized Majestic and Poverty Row as a whole: the exploitation of publicity for contemporary studio releases (and even some Poverty Row releases) through patterned narratives and similar titles. *Film Daily* noticed *Hearts of Humanity*'s debt to *Abie's Irish*

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[54] Taves, 326.

[55] Indeed, Majestic's emergence as a producer-distributor hinged to a great extent on the success of its first films, and the studio marketed them more widely than was typical for Poverty Row. *Hearts of Humanity* and *The Phantom Express* appear to have been the only films that Majestic promoted individually in the major trade journals; subsequent advertising tended to promote the studio's entire release slate.

Rose (Paramount, 1928), while *The Phantom Express* was released almost simultaneously with Mascot's serial *The Hurricane Express*, starring John Wayne.[56] Tino Balio, writing about adherence to production trends as a risk-reducing strategy, has argued that Poverty Row tended to be especially conservative in this regard, frequently resorting to the exploitation of successful cycles.[57] Majestic would release even more blatant examples of such exploitation in 1933.

Reportedly shot in six days, *Hearts of Humanity* was produced for $30,000.[58] The film stars Jean Hersholt as Sol Bloom, a Jewish shopkeeper and widower. When Tom O'Hara (J. Farrell MacDonald), an Irish cop and Bloom's friend, is murdered by a burglar, Sol adopts Tom's son Shandy (Jackie Searl) as his own. The film subsequently focuses on the relationship between Shandy, Sol, and Sol's son Joey (Richard Wallace), who, in contrast to the dutiful Shandy, is mischievous and something of a delinquent. The film might be called a paternal melodrama; *Hearts of Humanity* inverts what reviewers of the time referred to as "mother love"—a sentimentalizing of the relationship between mother and child, common in maternal melodramas of the period—through its complete absence of mother figures (Sol is a widower, and Tom O'Hara becomes one in the first ten minutes of the film). As the *Motion Picture Herald* put it, "father love [attempts] to replace absent mother love."[59] Under the direction of Christy Cabanne, a prolific silent-era veteran, the film's sentimentality is hardly surprising; however, the film's saccharine pathos plays out in a rather striking lower-east-side milieu. The film actually opens with a tracking shot of a New York City street market, complete with representations of Jewish,

[56] *The Film Daily*, 21 September 1932, 6.
[57] Balio, *Grand Design*, 101.
[58] *Variety*, 27 September 1932, 21.
[59] *Motion Picture Herald*, 24 September 1932, 34.

Irish, and Italian merchants, then cuts to a shot of Tom O'Hara, small-talking with two Orthodox Jews:

Although such an atmosphere would not be unexpected in the low-budget "ethnic films" produced for local markets of ethnic minorities—and particularly in the cycle of Yiddish filmmaking for Jewish audiences in the 20s and 30s—this milieu was relatively rare for Poverty Row productions intended for wider release.[60] Furthermore, the film's occasional use of low-key lighting, particularly in scenes set at night, underscores its urban setting:

James Naremore and others have written about the economic imperatives of low-budget filmmaking as one element of the aesthetics of *film noir* in the 1940s; though I do not aim

[60] Taves, 342-343.

to make that connection here, I would emphasize, through this example, that the economically-determined aesthetic phenomenon of low-key lighting such scholarship discusses with reference to *noir* goes back much further than the 1940s.[61] While the tone of *Hearts of Humanity* lies opposite *film noir* on a spectrum of moral sensibility, I would argue that the poetics of darkness offered by the film's low-key shots do not differ drastically from that of the B films—*Detour*, *T-Men* (Eagle-Lion, 1947), and *Gun Crazy* (UA, 1950)—often cited as examples of such a poetics.

Contemporary reviews of *Hearts of Humanity* were mostly lukewarm and recognized the film's status as an independently-produced "weepie"—*Film Daily*, employing a phrase commonly used by trade reviewers to describe Poverty Row's films, called the film a "tear-jerker with good old hoke." *Variety* complained about the film's lighting problems and predicted that it would be held to "the 'B' theaters," but lauded Hersholt's performance: "It is one of the most genuine performances this player has contributed, and the fact that it is an independent production has not led him to slight his work."[62] *The Motion Picture Herald* urged exhibitors to take advantage of the film's wide salability and popular appeal, but also implicitly emphasized the potential for sales among women in neighborhood theaters:

> This is tearful material from start to finish, with a sprinkling of comedy to lighten the load, but definitely and unmistakably a "weeping" film […] a definite appeal to the instincts of mother love and the like. […] It may be well to attempt to gain the cooperation of women's clubs, parent-teacher organizations and the like.[63]

Neighborhood exhibitors, for their part, loved the film. Interestingly, their reports do not specifically emphasize the female audience. For example, Alyce Cornell, a theater owner

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[61] Naremore, 136-140.
[62] *Variety*, 27 September 1932, 21.
[63] *Motion Picture Herald*, 24 September 1932, 34.

in Grand Rapids, Michigan, lauded *Hearts of Humanity* as "one of the best kid pictures we have run…sure gets the kids in."[64] Another exhibitor in Milwaukee urged his fellow exhibitors to play the film based on its broad appeal: "Everybody liked it."[65] The film was still playing in small towns as late as early 1934; E.E. Warner of the Opera House in Augusta, Wisconsin called it "one of the finest pictures it has ever been our privilege to run. Pictures of this type make friends for the theatre."[66]

Though *Hearts of Humanity* was released earlier, *The Phantom Express* was the first Majestic film to appear in the *Motion Picture Herald*'s theater receipts listings, having played a two-week run ending October 1 at the Globe Theater (Broadway and 46th St.) in New York. The film was directed by Emory Johnson, a silent star who switched to directing in 1922; Johnson was apparently well-enough remembered to warrant a central place in Majestic's September full-page ad for *The Phantom Express* in *The Motion Picture Herald*—the second and last ad for a single film Majestic would run in any trade journal.[67] Indeed, the studio promoted the film quite extensively; in a tie-up with Trans World Airlines ("The Lindbergh Air Line"), Majestic even set up a radio contest awarding winners free tickets for "pleasure jaunts" to the cities premiering the film, including New York.[68] The film was relatively successful during its run there; an ad for the Globe in the *New York Times* indicates that the film was popular enough to be held over for a second week, and played continuously from 9:30 AM until midnight—a

[64] *Motion Picture Herald*, 4 February 1933, 52.
[65] *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 March 1933, 36.
[66] *Motion Picture Herald*, 10 February 1934, 60.
[67] *Motion Picture Herald*, 10 September 1932, 39.
[68] "'Phantom Express' Tieup," *The Film Daily*, 16 September 1932, 2.

common "grind-house" exhibition format.[69] *The Phantom Express* was clearly meant as a feature that would appeal to the juvenile audiences and action fans that often frequented such theaters, and industry trade journals generally treated it as such. *Variety* dismissed the film as a "creaky melodrama reminiscent of another day," while *The Film Daily* criticized it as anticlimactic.[70] The *Motion Picture Herald*, ever thoughtful of the concerns of exhibitors, emphasized *The Phantom Express*'s salability to children as well as "the masculine adults who haven't forgotten when they were boys and went to the 'movies' of a Saturday afternoon with a nickel and an unmistakable urge for screen excitement."[71] Among those "masculine adults" may have been Mordaunt Hall, film critic for *The New York Times*, who actually praised the film's performances while admitting the improbability of its conclusion (the titular "phantom express" turns out to be a low-flying plane rigged with a giant spotlight and a gramophone playing train sounds).[72] That Hall actually reviewed *The Phantom Express* further suggests that Majestic was somewhat successful in its promotion of the film toward a larger and more profitable exhibition market than was typical for Poverty Row.

Nevertheless, the studio also hedged its bets. In release roughly contemporaneously with *Hearts of Humanity* and *The Phantom Express* were *Gold* and *Outlaw Justice*, two Majestic westerns starring Jack Hoxie, another star from the silent era. Hoxie's six films with Majestic—including *Law and Lawless* (1932), *Via Pony Express*, *Gun Law*, and *Trouble Busters* (all 1933)—would be his last, as well as the only

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[69] "Held Over 2d Big Week," Ad for *The Phantom Express*, *The New York Times*, 26 September 1932, 18. Despite the Globe Theater's Times Square location, its relatively low admission price (for New York) of 25¢ suggests that it was indeed a "grind" theater, if an upscale one.
[70] *Variety*, 27 September 1932, 17. *The Film Daily*, 21 September 1932, 6.
[71] *Motion Picture Herald*, 24 September 1932, 34-35.
[72] "A Ghost Train," *The New York Times*, 20 September 1932, 26.

sound features he would make. The Hoxie westerns are mostly unremarkable; their star's origins in the silent era are made obvious by his difficulty with dialogue, and their plots are fairly straightforward examples of the genre. Even the few published exhibitor reports on the Hoxie westerns seem to recognize them as programmers. These films received almost no exhibition in first- or even second-run theaters; *The Motion Picture Herald*'s only theater receipt for any of the Hoxie westerns is for an October booking of *Gold* at the Loews Columbia in Washington, D.C., suggesting that Majestic distributed the films directly to neighborhood and rural subsequent-run theaters.[73] At any rate, it is noteworthy that of the 26 features initially planned for the 1932-33 season, six were Hoxie westerns—and all six were actually produced.

Indeed, one of the central facets of Majestic's initial self-marketing was a particular emphasis on its own legitimacy and financial solvency as an independent studio. In early September, William Shapiro of Franklin Productions, Majestic's distributor in Boston, set up a screening of *Hearts of Humanity* and *The Phantom Express* at the Exeter Street Theater. The *New England Film News*, a regional exhibitor journal, reported on the event:

> Following the screening about 100 exhibitors and friends adjourned to the Hotel Lenox to enjoy a luncheon and hear William Shapiro, head of [Majestic distribution] in Boston. He explained why Majestic had bought the two pictures in order that they might have something to offer exhibitors to start the new season. He said that the company is now actually producing features and gave a little inside information as to the financing of the new organization. Ten well-known national distributors put up $25,000 each. Goldstone put up an amount to equal their total investment, making a cash capital of half a million dollars with which to start work. He further stated that Goldstone had agreed to raise another half-million should same be needed to keep production up to release

[73] "Typical Western Melodrama Has a Gold Background," *The Washington Post*, 2 October 1932, A1.

> schedule. This will give practical assurance that Majestic will deliver what it promises, Shapiro said.[74]

Majestic likely hoped that Goldstone's reputation as a financier would serve to assuage the common concern among exhibitors that independent producers could not deliver on their promised production slates. This particular rhetoric of reassurance was by no means limited to Majestic. When Mayfair Pictures, another Poverty Row studio, announced a 24-feature lineup for the 1932-33 season at its first annual convention in New York, executive vice-president Claude McGowan asserted that

> [Mayfair] has not attempted to tie up distributors, or exhibitors, to five or 10-year franchises, promising better pictures or greater profit, with consequent greater working capital for the company, but has simply asked its distributors to take its product for one year, guaranteeing to deliver productions as specified and on the dates scheduled."[75]

Furthermore, in a 1932 ad for Mayfair in *Motion Picture Herald*, a confident quote from President George W. Weeks stated, "We promise only what we will deliver, with every thought of delivering more than we promise."[76] Though Mayfair and Majestic were quite different in terms of industrial structure (Mayfair did not have the distribution network that Majestic enjoyed) and used different rhetorical approaches in selling themselves, their common message of reassurance suggests the extent to which many Poverty Row studios were attempting to counteract exhibitors' negative conceptions of the sector as a whole. Indeed, the amount of doubt and confusion concerning Poverty Row's production announcements was such that the IMPPA organized a meeting in October to discuss the formulation of a code of ethics similar to that of the MPPDA. At the meeting, the organization formally requested that its members "not announce contemplated pictures

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[74] "Franklin Screens Two Majestic Releases," *New England Film News*, 15 September, 1932, 14.
[75] "Mayfair Pictures Is New Name of Action," *Motion Picture Herald*, 5 March 1932, 24.
[76] *Motion Picture Herald*, 18 June 1932.

unless production is certain." *Variety* even claimed that false promises were "bringing an end to the old system of states' righting. False announcements and failure to produce and deliver have convinced many indie exchanges that hooking up with one or two producers, who guarantee a full picture quota, ends a gamble which has continued through the history of the indie industry."[77] In another move intended to appease exhibitors, the IMPPA members discussed issues of censorship, and agreed that "co-operation of censor boards will be asked to assure independent producers little or no difficulty with pictures planned for production, insofar as censors are concerned."[78] Just as was the case with the majors, overtures toward self-regulation and self-censorship had more to do with public relations with exhibitors than with public standards of cinematic morality.

If Mayfair's reassurance to its exhibitors rested on a certain promise of conservative frugality, Majestic's rested on the capital resources of the relatively lavish Goldstone bankroll.[79] As early as August, Goldstone was touting Majestic's increased budget. In a *New England Film News* round up of statements from industry leaders, Goldstone wrote:

> […] it is patent that the 1932-1933 season, now beginning, offers the best prospects in recent years for exhibitors and, so, for producers and distributors. Exhibitors, echoing their public, have been demanding better entertainment—good shows, and the producers' plans for the new season give definite promise that this demand will be well satisfied. Obviously the amount of money that any producer may spend on a production must be determined by an analysis of the potential returns of the picture. We of Majestic Pictures Corporation, bearing this in mind, have increased our production budget materially, for we are confident […] that the Golden Opportunity is here.[80]

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[77] "Distribution Difficulties Again Narrow Indie Production Field; Real Chance for Only 150 Films"; "Premature Pic News Banned in Indie Code; Confusing to Exchanges," *Variety*, 11 October 1932, 29.
[78] "Stricter Code For Movies," *The New York Morning Telegraph*, 17 October 1932, 1.
[79] Significantly, Mayfair would deliver on its promise, while Majestic would not. Mayfair did end up releasing nearly all 24 of its promised features—none of which were westerns. *The 1933 Film Daily Yearbook*, 356. *The 1934 Film Daily Yearbook*, 357.
[80] *New England Film News*, 25 August 1932, 13.

Whether or not Goldstone actually believed that the "Golden Opportunity" had arrived, he had already resumed financing independent productions outside of his personal supervision, and Majestic soon raised its production budgets and arranged conferences with its franchisees in an attempt to synchronize the release dates of its films.[81] The winter of 1932-1933 was a period of growth and consolidation for the studio, which by February had opened numerous offices for distribution in other English-speaking countries, including six offices in Canada, seven in Great Britain, and one in Australia.[82]

Majestic had seven films in release by the end of 1932: *The Phantom Express*, *Hearts of Humanity*, *The Crusader*, *The Unwritten Law*, and three Jack Hoxie westerns. *The Crusader* and *The Unwritten Law*, both produced directly by Goldstone, found their way into major-affiliated theaters; *The Crusader* even ran for six days at the Fox Theater in Philadelphia. Directed by Poverty Row regular Frank Strayer, *The Crusader* (retitled *Should A Woman Tell?* in November) is a prime example of Majestic's exploitation of production patterns among the majors—specifically, the newspaper film.[83] The cycle had to some extent begun with the transition to sound, in films like *Gentlemen of the Press* (Paramount, 1929), but found its archetypical form in 1931 with *The Front Page* (United Artists), *Scandal Sheet* (Paramount), and *Five Star Final* (Warner Bros.).[84] These films tended to feature a curious mixture of generic modes and often interspersed comedic, fast-talking, wisecracking wordplay with urban crime and corruption, blackmail, and cynicism. The cycle was still in full swing by the end of 1932; it is no accident that *The*

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[81] "Goldstone's Special Release Plan; Will Lift Maj. Budgets," *Variety*, 25 October 1932, 6. "Nationalized Sales Planned by Majestic," *Motion Picture Herald*, 5 November 1932, 23. "Majestic Meets on New Budget," *Motion Picture Herald*, 31 December 1932, 28.
[82] "Majestic Speeds Linking of World Sales System," *Motion Picture Herald*, 18 February 1933, 18.
[83] "'Crusader' Renamed," *Film Daily*, 19 November 1932, 2.
[84] Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 187-188.

Crusader was released a mere month after *Blessed Event*, a Warner Bros. newspaper film starring Lee Tracy. *The Crusader* stars H.B. Warner as Phillip Brandon, a District Attorney who has gained a reputation as a "tough-on-crime" reformer. Eddie Crane (Ned Sparks, who also appeared in *Blessed Event*), a wisecracking reporter seeking a lurid story that will ruin Brandon, discovers that Brandon's wife Tess (Evelyn Brent) had previously been in a relationship with reformed gangster and speakeasy operator Jimmy Dale (Lew Cody), and makes his way to Dale's nightclub. There, Brandon's sister Marcia (Marceline Day) shoots notorious blackmailer Joe Carson (Walter Byron) after he tries to rape her. Dale confesses to the murder to protect both Tess and Marcia, while Crane, convinced that Tess is behind the shooting, prints a story implicating her in the murder. Brandon, having discovered the truth, chastises Crane for his scandal-mongering form of journalism and turns his sister over to the police. Marcia is acquitted by a jury, but not before Crane, in search of one last scoop, spies on the jury's deliberations using a telescope and a lip-reader.

Indeed, like *Blessed Event*, *The Crusader* contains rather surprising and daring content, especially by the ostensibly conservative standards of Poverty Row. Don Miller has noticed the film's use of profanity ("Hot Damn! What a story!"; "This is Eddie Crane broadcasting, and you can go to hell!"), which extends even to a certain hand gesture (the film features both the British and American versions):[85]

[85] Miller, 27.


"Pals…just like *that*."
Joe Carson (Walter Byron, left) and Jimmy Dale (Lew Cody, right) express their affection for one another. Both begin the gesture with their index and middle fingers together, then emphatically separate them.

A mute lip-reader gives Eddie Crane (Ned Sparks, offscreen) "the finger" after Crane tells him to get out of his way.

Rude hand gestures aside, contemporary reviewers commented on the film's adult situations and subject matter. *Variety* suggested that the "torrid wrestling" between Walter Byron and Marceline Day during the attempted rape scene might elicit censorship problems, while *Harrison's Reports* objected to a scene between Jimmy Dale, Eddie Crane, and a prostitute.[86] *The Motion Picture Herald* characterized the film as "definitely

[86] *Variety*, 11 October 1932, 20, 33. *Harrison's Reports*, 29 October 1932, 175.

adult screen fare, with nothing to appeal to children." Clearly, the conscious appeal to the juvenile market manifested by *The Phantom Express* and *Hearts of Humanity* was not an element of Majestic's strategy for selling *The Crusader* (the film was released a mere week before the IMPPA met to discuss cooperation with local censorship boards).[87]

However, most reviewers also noticed *The Crusader*'s comparatively solid production values: *The Motion Picture Herald* wrote that the film "compare[d] very favorably with the output of any of the larger studios," while *Film Daily* named it "one of the outstanding independent productions of the year" and suggested that the film "should find its way into the better class of theaters."[88] Even *Harrison's Reports* admitted the "high standard" of the direction, acting, and sets. *The Unwritten Law*, a Hollywood-themed murder mystery that had finished production in mid-October, was likewise noted for its production values; *Variety* praised the sets as "generally suggestive of real money."[89] In general, the independent exhibitors who wrote about *The Crusader* and *The Unwritten Law* in "What The Picture Did For Me" also recognized them as of higher quality than the average independent production.

Despite the relative good fortune of both Majestic and Poverty Row in general in 1932, there was much cause for pessimism. The Depression, which had hit the industry as a whole very hard in 1932, would enter its darkest and deepest phase in the early months of 1933—complete with a 45% drop in already abysmal box office receipts during the

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[87] *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 October 1932, 96.
[88] *Film Daily*, 5 October 1932, 11. The major dailies in New York and Washington, D.C. also reviewed the film, but tended to dismiss its cynical depiction of tabloid journalism and the character of Eddie Crane: "Crime and Scandal," *The New York Times*, 8 October 1932, 15. *The Washington Post*, 12 November 1932, 10.
[89] *Variety*, 20 December 1932, 16. *Film Daily*, 2 November 1932, 4. *Motion Picture Herald*, 14 January 1933, 31. *Harrison's Reports*, 3 December 1932, 194. *Film Daily*, 17 October 1932, 6. Although the film is believed lost, plot synopses in the trade reviews suggest that it may have been inspired by the famous case of Thomas Ince's death aboard William Randolph Hearst's yacht in 1924.

four-day bank moratorium ordered by President Franklin Roosevelt.[90] Of even greater concern to Poverty Row, however, was the municipal banning of double bills in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and other cities throughout the fall of 1932. This produced rumblings among Poverty Row producers for a "war campaign […] not only seeking the aid of the indie exhibitors but a direct threat of efforts for federal intervention." Most independents still regarded double bills as their lifeblood and refused to raise their production budgets, which averaged around $20,000-$30,000 per picture.[91] As shown above, Majestic was an exception to this trend, and the company would release its most lavish and successful films during the following year.

Imitating the Majors: 1933 and Beyond

On January 7, 1933, *The Motion Picture Herald* printed the following story, entitled "Stories to Set Majestic Costs":

> Phil Goldstone, treasurer of Majestic Pictures and producer of its features, gained the approval of the company board of directors at a meeting in New York last week, for a plan of production which eliminates the budgeting of series of pictures. It is the contention of Mr. Goldstone that a series of features should not be budgeted; that the requirements of each individual story should be the sole governing factor in establishing its cost of production.
>
> Later discussing the idea, the producer pointed out as a common fallacy the setting of a definite production cost for each of a series. He believes that many stories might result in excellent pictures at a cost of $75,000 while others might require the expenditure of many times that amount. […][92]

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[90] Balio, *Grand Design*, 14-15.
[91] "Cleveland's Abolishment of Double Feature Bills May Lead to Reduced Dual Bills All Over by Next Season," *Variety*, 15 November 1932, 29. "Fear of Losses with Double Film Stoppage Creating Threatening Gestures from Indie Producers," *Variety*, 8 November 1932, 21. "Dual Bills Indies' Hope," *Variety*, 13 December 1932, 7.
[92] "Stories to Set Majestic Costs," *Motion Picture Herald*, 7 January 1933, 18.

That such a statement came from the head of production at a Poverty Row studio is quite striking. Poverty Row's entire production model hinged on the principle of keeping costs down so that profits could be made from small but highly predictable exhibition returns. Among the independents, a production's budget was in essence its first principle—if a particular story could not be shot or a particular star hired within a certain budget, those elements could be altered or abandoned, but rarely would the budget be made to fit some other privileged element of production. Poverty Row as a whole simply lacked that luxury. Furthermore, the costs Goldstone implies as within the realm of possibility—$75,000 per feature or more—are three times Poverty Row's average expenditure per feature during this period. Although Goldstone and other Majestic executives were never above saying anything to the press that would boost the profile of their organization, Goldstone's statement here suggests two things: first, that at the beginning of 1933 Majestic was planning to spend quite a bit more on their features than was typical for Poverty Row; and second, that Majestic had to some extent abandoned the conservative budgeting approach typical of the independents.

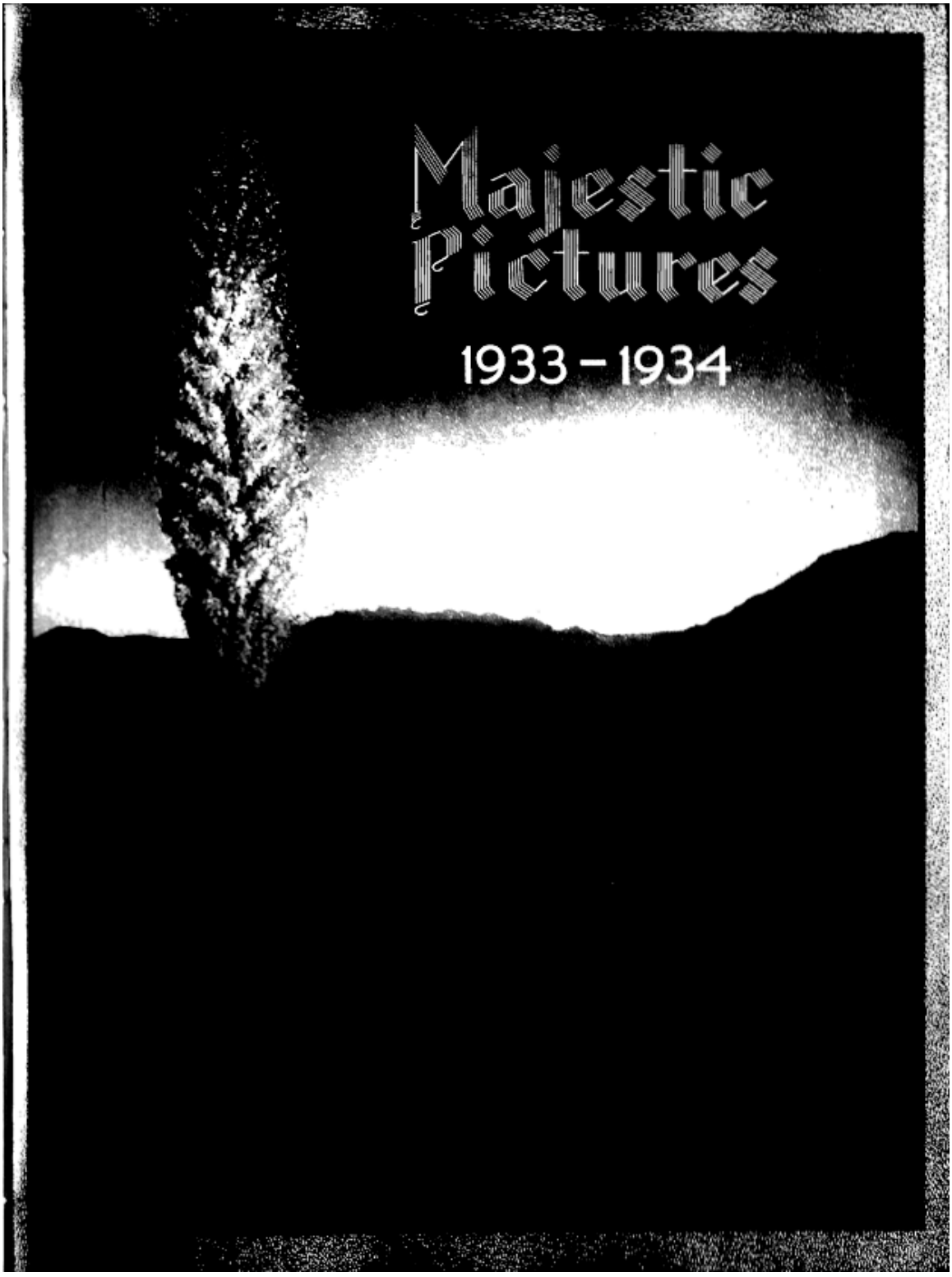
However, Majestic's strategy was more complicated than simply traveling the less-taken road of a two-forked path. Tino Balio, writing about Hollywood's risk-reducing strategies during the Great Depression, has sketched out these two alternatives in the context of "production trends." Quoting Thomas Simonet, who wrote in a 1987 article that "Cautious moviemakers might minimize their risks by emphasizing the familiar—recreating with slight changes films that have proven successful in the past, [while] more risk-oriented moviemakers, on the other hand, might emphasize the original," Balio concludes that "During the thirties, companies with the deepest pockets

proved the most adventuresome, and the Little Three and Poverty Row studios, the most conservative."[93] I would argue that this idea oversimplifies the production strategies of individual Poverty Row companies. To some extent, Majestic's strategy remained quite conservative: its major releases in 1933 and 1934 were all patterned after successful major studio productions in one or more respects. Where Majestic did prove "adventuresome" was not in the realm of story (with the exception of *The Sin of Nora Moran* – see Chapter 4), but rather in the realm of self-promotion. As the following chapter shows, Majestic's advertisements tended to frame its product in terms similar but not identical to the major studios—in keeping with its ambivalent, interstitial position near the top of the "host of others."

[93] Thomas Simonet, "Conglomerates and Content: Remakes, Sequels and Series in the New Hollywood," in Bruce Austin, ed., *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics, and Law*, vol. 3 (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex,, 1987), 154, quoted in Balio, *Grand Design*, 101.

Chapter 3: Majestic's Discursive Strategies and Generic Exploitation, 1933-1935

"Packed with Woman Appeal"



SING SINNER SING

● SING SINNER SING, by the famous Broadway playwright Wilson Collison. Every newspaper reader has followed the headlines of the murder case which suggested the story of the lovely torch singer. With girls—music—tremendous background. Glorious!

AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT WOMAN

● AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT WOMAN, from the celebrated continental novel by Georg Froschel. Sexy, controversial, will arouse word of mouth advertising. Tells the story of a woman whose whole nature is changed by a blood transfusion. Shows the dramatic steps of her downfall—and the powerful climax of her salvation.

THE SIN OF NORA MORAN

● THE SIN OF NORA MORAN, Broadway stage play, by Willis Maxwell Goodhue, with the fascinating "other woman" angle. Sex drama told in heartthrobs. Intimate, emotional, artistic—packed with woman appeal.

THE ROSARY

● THE ROSARY, by Edward Rose. Combination of book, play, song, that have stirred the hearts of millions. Homely drama of the power and glory in every-day life. Pulling power for the masses and the classes—backed by the big name of a top flight male star. Unlimited popular appeal!

THE DIARY OF A BAD WOMAN

● THE DIARY OF A BAD WOMAN, by Lawrence Hazard. Modern melodrama with intense emotional appeal—thrilling action—hair-trigger situations—and a Bad Woman your audiences will hate until she justifies herself—and then they'll adore her.

HUSBAND HUNTERS OF 1934

● HUSBAND HUNTERS OF 1934, by Edmund Lowe, Jr. Girls with gorgeous clothes—and without 'em. Girls—dancing, singing, wise-cracking, making love, marrying—for money. Catchy tunes, extravagant production—a musical hit—a showman's bonanza.

WILD GEESE

● WILD GEESE, $10,000 prize novel, by Martha Ostenso. Beautiful background of primitive North country. Engrossing drama of young love and ambition in conflict with greed and lust. Big as the millions who have read it—a class attraction.

GAILY I SIN

● GAILY I SIN—Anonymous. New light on sex problems in these frank confessions of a modern girl. Drama of young lovers in rebellion against the moral code. Daring theme, outspoken treatment—made to be talked about!

CURTAIN AT EIGHT

● CURTAIN AT EIGHT, by Octavus Roy Cohen, big-name writer. Glamour of back-stage, comedy of quaint characters, allure of mystery—a dozen punchy ingredients combined for a box-office smash!

MY LIFE

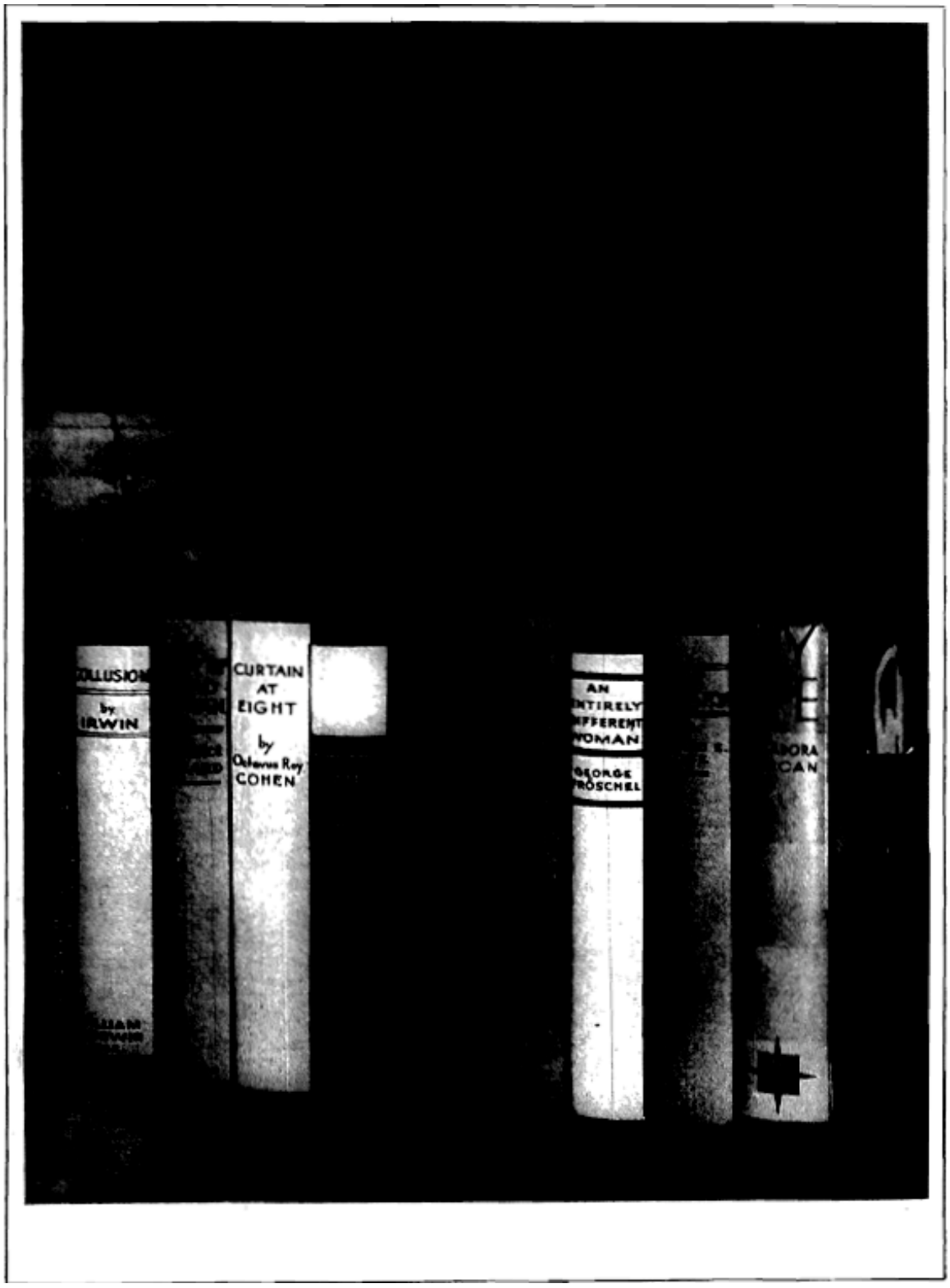
● MY LIFE, by Isadora Duncan. Dignified treatment of a shocking theme. Based on the love life of the international dancer whose flaming career and tragic death made her world-famous. Drawing power of a world personage.

LAUGHING WOMAN

● LAUGHING WOMAN, from the novel by Carlos Keith. Brilliant drama of passion and intrigue on Broadway. Clever men whose manhood is their only weakness—destroyed by a shameless laughing woman. Smart dialogue—daring situations—a sex attraction!

AGE OF INDISCRETION

● AGE OF INDISCRETION—from the startling novel "Collusion" by Theodore D. Irwin. Built for showmanship and exploitation. Based on authentic expose of divorce racket. Class melodrama in a big-time motion picture. Startling production that will back up the most sensational advertising.


CURTAIN
AT
EIGHT
by
Octavus Roy
COHEN
AN
ENTIRELY
DIFFERENT
WOMAN
GEORGE
FROSCHEL

The above ad in the September 16, 1933 issue of *Motion Picture Herald* heralded the 1933-34 season of Majestic's releases through manifold discursive strategies.[94] First, the ad frames the studio's films as titillating and provocative, both through titles like *Sing, Sinner, Sing*, *The Sin of Nora Moran*, *The Diary of a Bad Woman*, *Gaily I Sin*, *Husband Hunters of 1934*, and *Age of Indiscretion* (later produced as *Unknown Blonde*) and through the descriptive text accompanying each title:

- "Sexy, controversial, will arouse word of mouth advertising" (*An Entirely Different Woman*)

- "Girls with gorgeous clothes—and without 'em" (*Husband Hunters of 1934*)

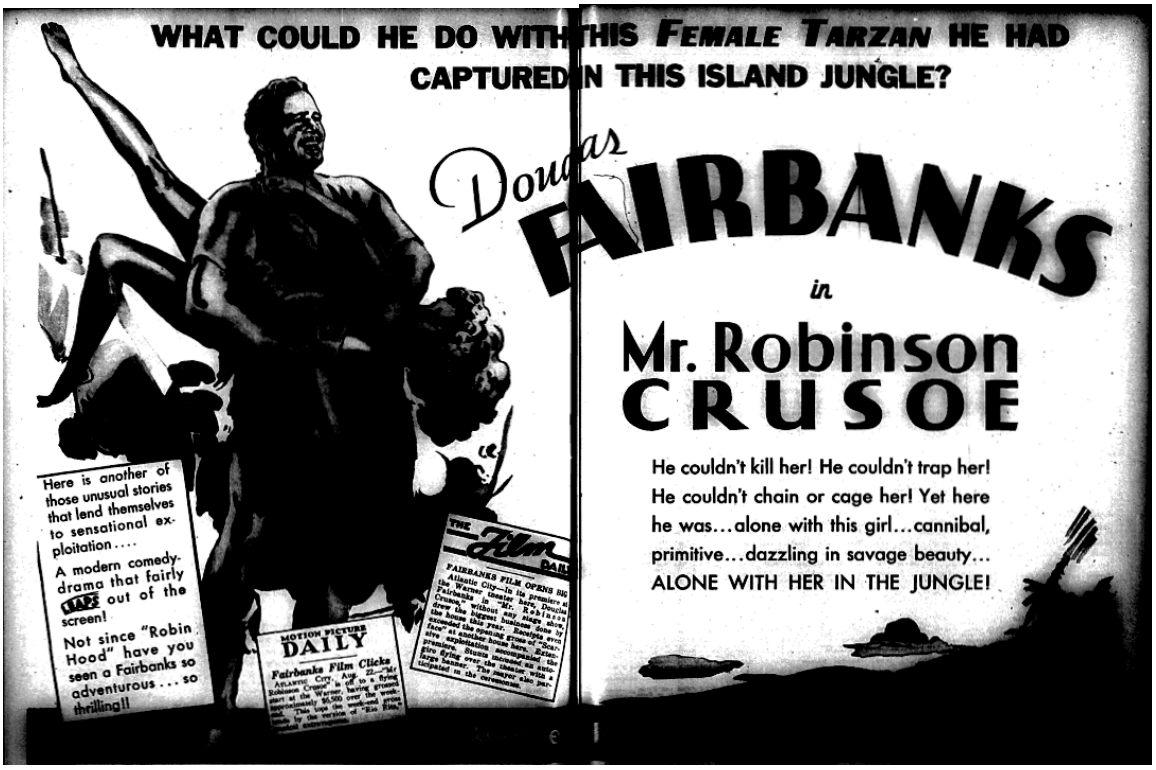
- "[A] new light on sex problems in these frank confessions of a modern girl" (*Gaily I Sin*)

- "Smart dialogue—daring situations—a sex attraction!" (*Laughing Woman*)

At the level of the historically symptomatic, the ad's sexualized rhetoric is a marker of the racy and often sensationalized nature of film advertising in the years just prior to the 1934 establishment of the MPPDA's Production Code Administration (PCA) and that institution's regulation of the content of both films and advertising. The discursive function of this rhetoric is purely economic; it aims to sell a group of films to the exhibitors that made up the primary readership of the *Motion Picture Herald* based on a simple discourse of spectatorship: audiences want to see sex, or at least its implication, on the movie screen.[95] Such a discourse is not particularly unusual in movie advertising from

[94] *The Motion Picture Herald*, 16 September 1933, 23-26.
[95] Note that the "audiences" I refer to are ambivalently male and female (but inevitably heterosexual) under the logic of this rhetoric: "Girls with gorgeous clothes"—a consumerist appeal to heterosexual women; "…and without 'em"—a voyeuristic appeal to heterosexual men.

this period (or indeed in any period); a 1932 ad in the *Motion Picture Herald* for *Mr. Robinson Crusoe* (United Artists) provides another typical example:[96]



What does seem unusual in the Majestic ad, however, is its use of sex to sell the multiple film products of an entire *studio*, rather than simply a single film. The 1933 ad—hereafter referred to as the "bookshelf ad"—reveals a more comprehensive, studio-indicative discursive strategy than the above double-page spread for *Mr. Robinson Crusoe*, which takes advantage of multiple codes of meaning including Douglas Fairbanks' star image, previous textual knowledge of the Defoe novel, intertextuality (the reference to the recently released *Tarzan the Ape-Man*) and generic terminology ("a modern comedy-drama") in addition to the implication of sexuality. Such a rich textual weave is in many ways only possible through the ad's concentration on a single film, but such a format also precludes the selling of a studio's product as a whole—indeed, the presence of Douglas

[96] *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 August 1932.

Fairbanks made explicit mention of the distributing studio unnecessary, as most exhibitors would likely have recognized *Mr. Robinson Crusoe* as a United Artists film.

Second, of the twelve properties listed in Majestic's bookshelf ad, nine were to be adaptations from works of literature or the stage (although only five would eventually be produced as films). The ad explicitly highlights the ostensible literary quality of the studio's forthcoming films in the same descriptive text, emphasizing historical and contemporary authors and playwrights such as Wilson Collison, Georg Froschel, Willis Maxwell Goodhue, Edward Rose, Martha Ostenso, and Octavus Roy Cohen, as well as the autobiography of the American dancer Isadora Duncan. The full-page image of a bookshelf stocked with the titles' respective source volumes on the last page of the ad recapitulates this literary-dramatic rhetoric.

Finally, the ad employs a certain ambivalent discourse of both gender and "sophistication" in its explicit appeal to three separate (not to mention large) demographic groups: the "masses" (rural and small-town audiences served by independently-owned and operated theaters), the "classes" ("sophisticated" urban audiences served by first-run affiliated and independent theaters in cities), and perhaps most significantly, women. Indeed, as Richard Maltby has shown, Hollywood's industry and trade discourse dealt frequently with such differentiated demographic groups during this period.[97] Much of the ad's prose appeals to two or more of these groups simultaneously, emphasizing the salability of the studio's product to a diverse audience:

> Appealing simultaneously to the masses and classes, with an emphasis on a male star:

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[97] Richard Maltby, "Sticks, Hicks, and Flaps: Classical Hollywood's Generic Conception of Its Audiences," in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, Eds., *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 23-41.

> - "Pulling power for the masses and the classes—backed by the big name of a top flight male star. Unlimited popular appeal!" (*The Rosary*)
>
> Emphasizing the urban "class" audience:
> - "Big as the millions who have read it—a class attraction." (*Wild Geese*)
> - "Class melodrama in a big-time motion picture." (*Age of Indiscretion*, AKA *Unknown Blonde*)
>
> Appealing to a specifically female audience:
> - "Sex drama told in heartthrobs. Intimate, emotional, artistic—packed with woman appeal." (*The Sin of Nora Moran*)
>
> Implicit appeal to a mixed-gender audience—note the "emotional appeal" juxtaposed with a "male" conception of melodrama:[98]
> - "Modern melodrama with intense emotional appeal—thrilling action—hair-trigger situations—and a Bad Woman your audiences will hate until she justifies herself—and then they'll adore her." (*The Diary of a Bad Woman*)[99]

In one sense, the various discursive strategies of the ad seem overdetermined; the simultaneous appeal to audiences urban and rural, male and female, and the emphasis on sex as well as the literary-dramatic as a mode of story production seems to preclude any kind of especially distinctive argument about the Majestic's specific exploitation strategies and target audiences. The only language used in the ad that approaches any kind of generic status is "melodrama"—a term that, as Linda Williams has pointed out, serves to describe an entire mode of storytelling (and arguably *the* dominant mode of classical American cinema) rather than a specific, unproblematic "genre" defined by either semantic or syntactic elements.[100] Indeed, as Rick Altman has shown, the major

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[98] See Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 185-188.

[99] The emphasis on "situations"—narrative moments in which coincidence or juxtaposition causes the protagonist to suffer—in promoting both *The Diary of a Bad Woman* and *Laughing Woman* supports Lea Jacobs' argument about the importance of such situations in the critical construction and evaluation of mid-20th-century cinematic melodrama (as exemplified by Minnelli, Sirk, and Preminger) and its "structural similarities with nineteenth-century [theatrical] melodrama," and suggests the need for further examination of the early 1930s in this regard. Cf. Lea Jacobs, "The Woman's Picture and the Poetics of Melodrama, *Camera Obscura* 31 (1993), 138.

[100] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in Nick Browne, ed., *Refiguring American Film Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 42-88.

Hollywood studios regularly eschewed specific generic categorization in the advertising of their product, in contrast to many of the independent production companies for whom generic specification provided a clear discursive connection between product and audience-consumer.[101]

Indeed, what marks this particular ad as striking is that it is *not* selling the product of one of the major Hollywood studios. Given Majestic's industry status as an independent producing/distributing entity, Altman's model would seem to suggest that its advertising discourse would emphasize genre or in some way appeal to a specific audience—yet as I have shown, the bookshelf ad casts a rather wide discursive net. My aim in this chapter is to both highlight and account for this discrepancy and make an argument about Majestic's discursive strategy through an application of Altman's model, nuanced with primary evidence from advertisements, theater receipts, and exhibitor reports. I will argue that Majestic's discursive strategies can be explained in terms of an address to exhibitors' expectations of spectatorship as they were constructed by genre, and to a certain extent, by gender. Through its address to exhibitors, Majestic hedged its economic bets in trying to appeal simultaneously to its independent/rural/neighborhood base as well as to the urban audiences that promised greater revenue and prestige. Whereas the Jack Hoxie westerns and to a certain extent features like *The Phantom Express* identified Majestic as a member of Poverty Row and solidified its income base—however paltry—from independent exhibitors in small towns and rural areas, "class" melodramas, horror films, "sex pictures," and the studio's British imports offered the tantalizing promise of urban, even first-run, exhibition, which the product shortage had made relatively feasible in the early 1930s. Indeed, in its advertising to exhibitors,

[101] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 102-103.

Majestic completely avoided the mention of its Westerns in favor of a certain generic ambiguity more characteristic of the integrated majors.

I would also argue that an essentialized conception of gender formed a central element of Majestic's advertising and production strategy, whereby female audiences provided both a linchpin and a hedge for the studio's attempt to break into the majors. Through the logic of this conception, female audiences served as a kind of universal market—whether they patronized urban first-runs or smaller rural houses, women would likely go to see women's pictures. Indeed, as scholars like Melvyn Stokes have argued, Hollywood considered female audiences a dominant force in exhibition in the late 20s and early 30s, and built up "a discursive apparatus (including fan magazines and a consumerist discourse) that was aimed mainly at women."[102] I would hold that genre was a central element of this apparatus as well—particularly for Poverty Row, which could not boast the glamorous stars and the attendant influence over fan culture enjoyed by the majors. Majestic's production of films like *Sing, Sinner, Sing*, *The Sin of Nora Moran*, and *Unknown Blonde* was therefore both "safe" from the standpoint of satisfying the subsequent-run exhibitor base, but also offered a platform for strategies designed to appeal to the more lucrative urban market.

Majestic and the Discursive Status of Genre

Rick Altman, in *Film/Genre*, argues for a discursive examination of film genre that both reveals and explains some of the industrial strategies and practices of the Hollywood studios through an emphasis on the use-value of genre. As an example of such an approach, Altman compares four ads from the *Film Daily Yearbook* of 1925, and

[102] Melvyn Stokes, "Female Audiences of the 1920s and Early 1930s," in *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences*, 54-55.

argues that the ads depend on generic terminology to varying degrees according to the status of the studio being sold. He points to the generically-identified Westerns sold in an ad for Ward Lascelle Productions, an independent production company, as well as to ads from other independents, and notes that "virtually every independent producer [of the ones advertised] clearly conceives, labels, and advertises films in generically identified batches." By contrast, he notes, ads for the major studios such as Paramount and Warner Bros. employ "self-publicity, including reference to studio stars, properties, and previous successes."[103]

The explanation for this discrepancy, for Altman, lies in circumstances of exhibition. In contrast to the integrated majors, who enjoyed guaranteed showings of their films in the first-run theater chains they owned, the independents distributed through an alternative network of independent and states' rights exchanges, which necessitated that they "try to fit their products into the ready-made categories applied to the only remaining exhibition slots (for short films, second features or inexpensive productions). Because the independents speak to a different audience from the majors, they use generic terminology in a radically divergent manner." Altman nuances what would otherwise be an oversimplified and reductive binary categorization by accounting for ads of companies that existed interstitially between the majors and Poverty Row, including Universal, a "minor major" with no exhibition outlets, and William D. Russell's USLA Company, a Poverty Row concern "working hard to rise above independent status." He argues that both Universal and USLA fluctuate between generic and nongeneric terminology within their ads—Universal in order to fill the independent exhibition needs that sustained it

[103] Altman, 103-104.

despite its major status, and USLA in order to address the prestigious, affiliated theater chains that offered a potential road out of Poverty Row.[104]

An application of Majestic's ads to Altman's discursive use-value model exposes some of its assumptions. Majestic's 1933 "bookshelf" ad, though it does contain some sparse genre terminology ("drama," "sex drama," "class melodrama," "comedy," "a musical hit"), is missing the "generically identified batches" that Altman privileges in his discussion of independent production; the main structuring element of the twelve titles is the literary-dramatic rhetoric described above. The conscious framing of the ad in terms of this rhetoric is even more apparent given that several of the properties are not based on any sort of "legitimate" literary or dramatic source: *Diary of a Bad Woman* ("by Lawrence Hazard") and *Husband Hunters of 1934* ("by Edmund Lowe, Jr.") are simply screenplay properties with the screenwriter listed as author, while *Gaily I Sin*'s attribution to "anonymous" is almost surely a publicity ploy.

Nor is Majestic's shying away from generic terminology an isolated case in the body of its advertising. As a Poverty Row producer, the company's ads during the period of its greatest activity (1932-1935) are few and far between, but they are nevertheless telling. An ad for *Hearts of Humanity* (1932) sells the picture rather vaguely as "A Drama of All Humanity for All Humanity – First of MAJESTIC'S Twenty-Six Money-Makers," while at the same time prominently featuring the names and images of the film's stars: Jean Hersholt, Claudia Dell, and Jackie Searl.[105]

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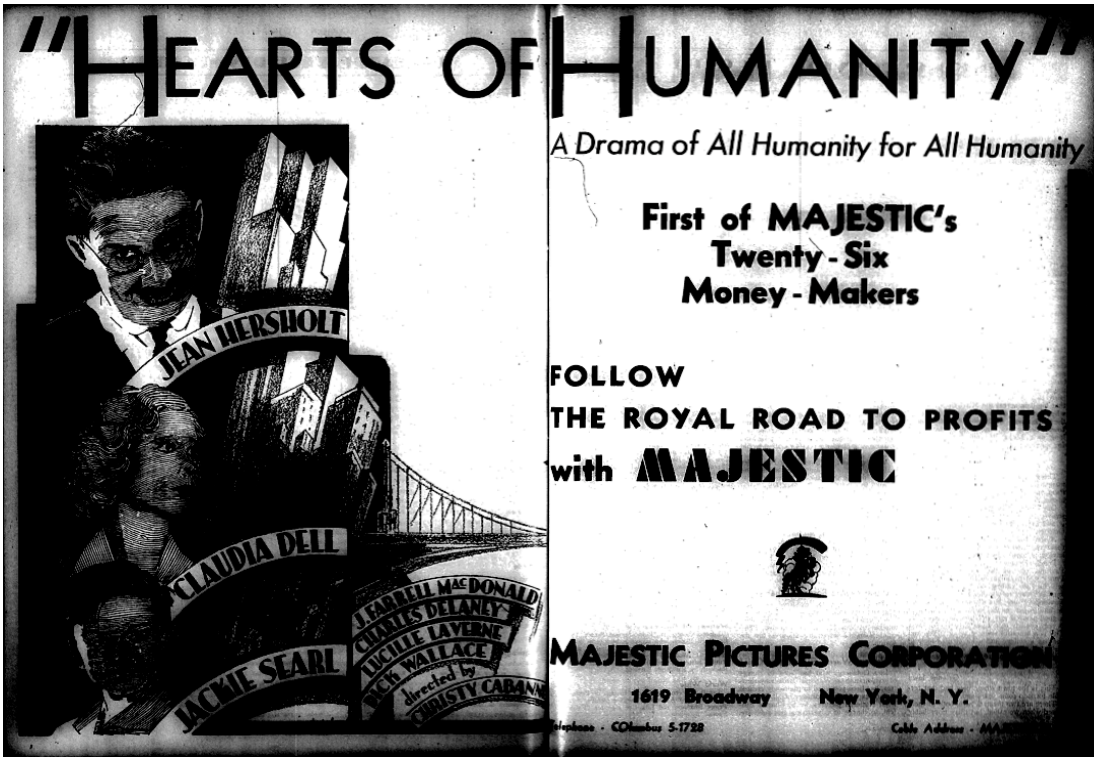
[104] Altman, 103-107.

[105] *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 August 1932, 48-49. Hersholt was a well-known character actor by 1932, having played Senf the Porter in MGM's star-studded *Grand Hotel* released earlier in the year. Dell had starred in a number of early Warner Bros. musicals (*50 Million Frenchmen* and *Sit Tight*, both 1931), while Jackie Searl was a child actor who had played numerous "brat" roles in the late 20s and early 30s.



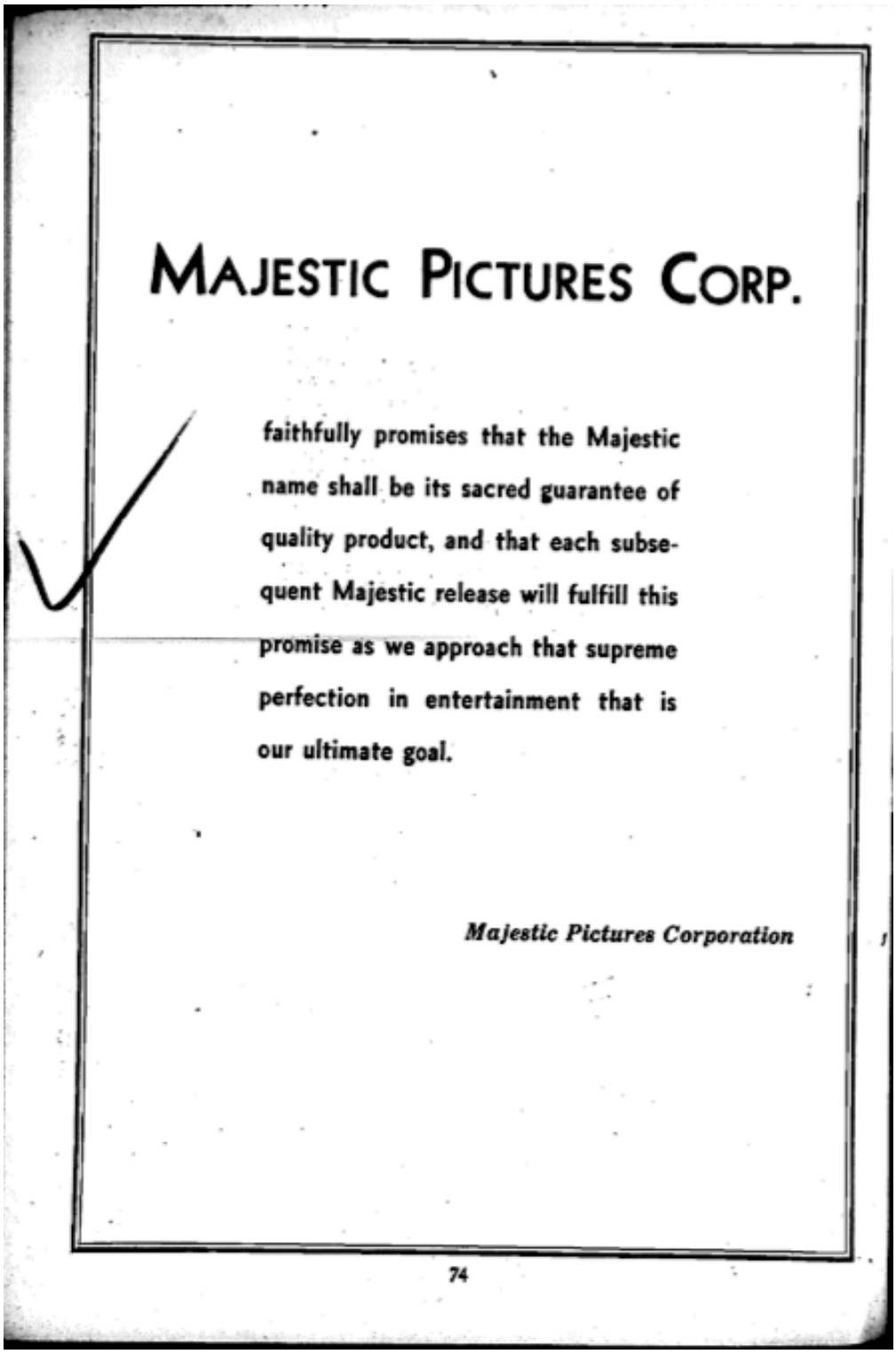
Within Altman's model, this ad seems to fit under the same category as the ads from the major studios in its reference to established stars (albeit rather minor ones) and its emphasis on self-promotion; the studio's name is literally capitalized ("Follow the royal road to profits with MAJESTIC"). An ad for *The Phantom Express* that appeared two weeks later likewise omits any reference to genre, although its image of a roaring locomotive is suggestive enough:[106]

[106] *Motion Picture Herald*, 10 September 1932, 39.

The emphasis in this ad on Emory Johnson, a star and director from the silent era, is itself an appeal to exhibitors whose patrons would have both remembered and enjoyed the "good old hoke" of the silent days—in other words, rural and small-town theater owners.[107] Thus, unlike USLA or Universal in 1925, Majestic seems to have avoided explicit genre terminology for the most part in its 1932 and 1933 advertisements, both in promotions for single films and for the studio as a whole. However, an examination of the company's ads in the *Film Daily Yearbook* from 1933 to 1935 reveals an interesting shift in generic emphasis:

[107] Lea Jacobs, in *The Decline of Sentiment*, has traced the marginalization of this sensibility and the gradual "sophistication" of moviegoing tastes in the 1920s.

1933:[108]



MAJESTIC PICTURES CORP.

faithfully promises that the Majestic name shall be its sacred guarantee of quality product, and that each subsequent Majestic release will fulfill this promise as we approach that supreme perfection in entertainment that is our ultimate goal.

Majestic Pictures Corporation

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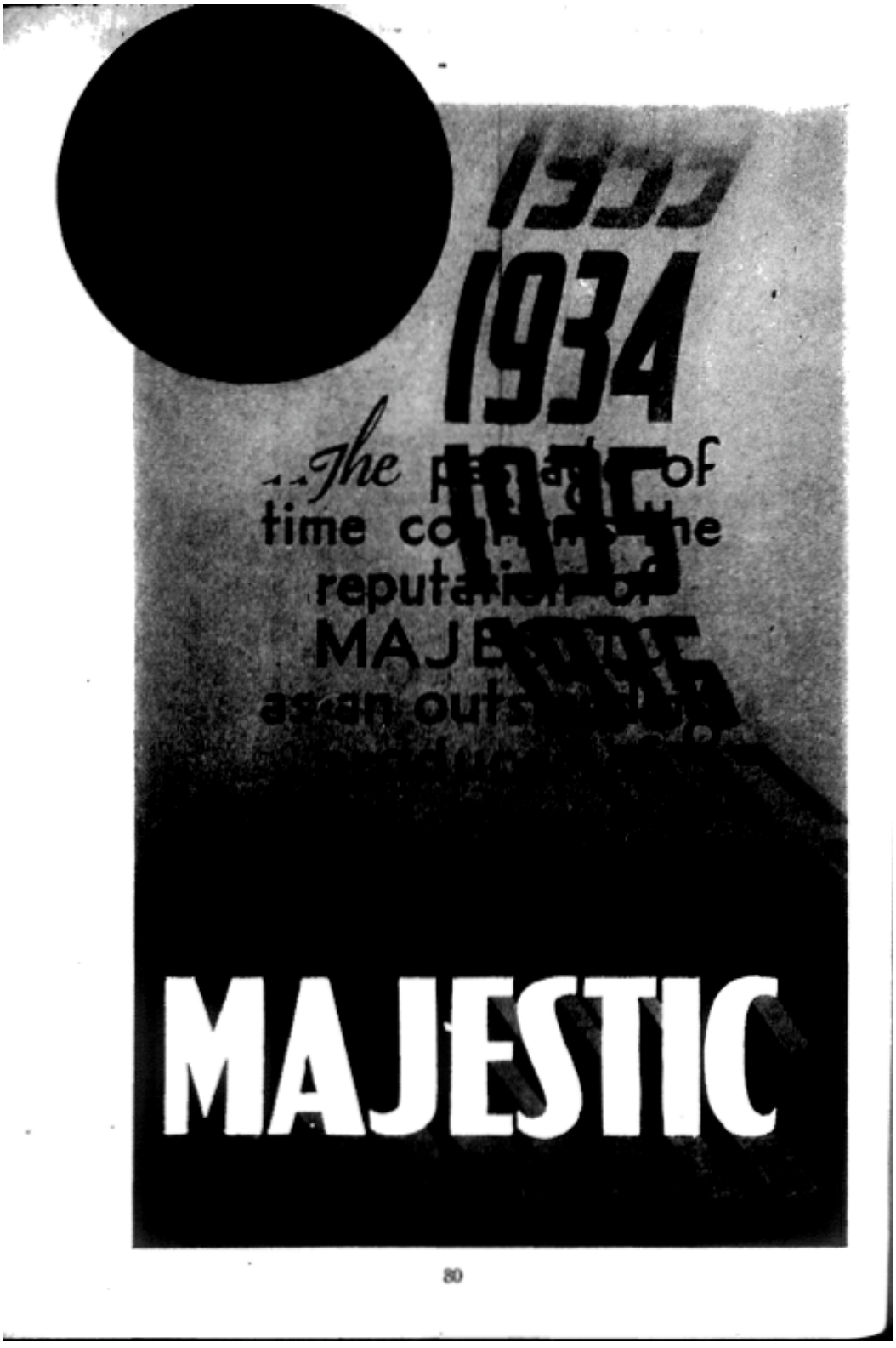
[108] The *Film Daily Yearbook* was actually published near the end of the theatrical season, so the 1933 ad exists in the context of the 1932-33 season of releases, the 1934 ad for the 1933-34 season, etc.

1934:[109]



[109] The copy here reads, "The passage of time confirms the reputation of MAJESTIC as an outstanding producer of motion pictures"

1935:


CONTACT YOUR
LOCAL EXCHANGE
Today
ALBANY
Majestic Pictures, Inc.
ATLANTA
Affiliated Producers, Inc.
BOSTON
Majestic Pictures, Inc.
BUFFALO
Majestic Pictures, Inc.
CHARLOTTE
Affiliated Producers, Inc.
CINCINNATI
Majestic Film Exch. of Ohio, Inc.
CLEVELAND
Selected Pictures Company
CHICAGO
B. N. Judell, Inc.
DALLAS
Majestic Pictures Co. Inc.
DENVER
Capital Film Exchanges, Inc.
DETROIT
Majestic Pictures, Inc.
INDIANAPOLIS
Big Feature Rights Corp.
KANSAS CITY
Majestic Pictures Corp.
LOS ANGELES
Co-operative Film Exchange
LOUISVILLE
Big Feature Rights Corp.
MILWAUKEE
Midwest Pictures Corp.
MINNEAPOLIS
Majestic Pictures Corp.
NEW ORLEANS
Affiliated Producers, Inc.
NEW YORK CITY
Majestic Film Distrib. Corp.
OKLAHOMA CITY
Majestic Pictures Co. Inc.
OMAHA
Majestic Pictures Corp.
PHILADELPHIA
Masterpiece Film Attra., Inc.
PITTSBURGH
Majestic Pictures Corp.
PORTLAND
Majestic Film Co. Inc.
SALT LAKE CITY
Capital Film Exchanges, Inc.
SAN FRANCISCO
Co-operative Film Exchange
SEATTLE
Majestic Pictures Co. Inc.
ST. LOUIS
Majestic Pictures Corp.
TORONTO, CANADA
Empire Films, Ltd.
WASHINGTON, D. C.
Trio Productions, Inc.
MAJESTIC
PRODUCING CORPORATION
OK
Majestic
30 EXCHANGES
STRATEGETICALLY LOCATED
THROUGHOUT AMERICA
DELIVERING ACTION TYPE
OF PRODUCTIONS IN
KEEPING WITH THE PULSE
OF BOX OFFICE DEMAND
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While the ads from 1933 and 1934, published at the height of Majestic's fortunes, emphasize little more than the company's name and a promise of quality features for the upcoming season, the 1935 ad interestingly emphasizes Majestic's concentration on "action-type" productions. Indeed, by mid-1935 "action-type" features like *Night Alarm* and *Mutiny Ahead* formed the bulk of the studio's few features (Majestic would discontinue production and be absorbed by Republic—well-known for its westerns and action pictures—in the summer of 1935).[110] Thus, there seems to be evidence that Majestic shifted toward a more generically-centered advertising strategy as its fortunes declined, perhaps as a reaction to its own overproduction of relatively expensive features such as *The World Gone Mad*, *The Sin of Nora Moran*, and *The Scarlet Letter* in 1933 and 1934.

Given that Majestic's role in the industry in 1932-35—that of a larger but by no means dominant independent concern—was comparable to that of USLA in 1925, a nuancing of Altman's model is needed to account for the strategy at work here. What seems at stake is not so much his contention that independent producers tended to rely on generic production or identification; Majestic itself produced and distributed its six Jack Hoxie westerns (though it seems not to have advertised them), while other independents in the early 30s, such as Monogram, follow exactly the generic advertising pattern Altman describes:[111]

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[110] "Liberty Joins Republic," *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 May 1935, 40.
[111] "Book These New 1935 Monogram Hits," *1935 Film Daily Yearbook*, 76.

BOOK THESE NEW 1935 MONOGRAM HITS

THE NUT FARM — Broadway stage success by John C. Brownell. 22 weeks in Chicago, 5 months in New York. With WALLACE FORD.

WOMEN MUST DRESS — Backed by 7 Big National Campaigns. With MINNA GOMBELL, GAVIN GORDON, HARDIE ALBRIGHT. Tie-ups with Celanese Corp., Modern Mdse., Aris Gloves, etc.

GREAT GOD GOLD — Pre-sold through tie-ups with National concerns. With SIDNEY BLACKMER, MARTHA SLEEPER, REGIS TOOMEY and GLORIA SHEA.

MYSTERIOUS MR. WONG — With BELA LUGOSI, ARLINE JUDGE and WALLACE FORD. Suggested by a story by Harry Stephen Keeler. A mystery drama of Frisco's Chinatown.

MYSTERY MAN — With ROBERT ARMSTRONG and MAXINE DOYLE. A romantic thriller on the order of "Front Page" and "Gentlemen of the Press."

COMING ATTRACTIONS

CHEERS OF THE CROWD — based on Tristam Tupper's story.

HOOSIER SCHOOLMASTER — the American classic

HONEYMOON LIMITED — novel by Vida Hurst

RECKLESS ROMEO'S — with Robert Armstrong

2 BIG SPECIALS

THE HEALER — Robert Herrick's novel

KEEPER OF THE BEES — Gene Stratton Porter's novel

8 JOHN **WAYNE** OUTDOOR DRAMAS

MONOGRAM PICTURES

R. K. O. BLDG. ROCKEFELLER CENTER N. Y. C.

W. RAY JOHNSTON, *President*

TREM CARR, *Vice-President in charge of production*

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More problematic seems the assumption of the discursivity model that all independent companies would find the same use-value in the generic distinction of their product; indeed, historical contingency and studio idiosyncrasy may play an even larger role than Altman's otherwise sound approach accounts for.

In the historical moment of 1925 that contextualizes Altman's USLA example, the Hollywood studio system had not yet fully developed into the familiar vertically integrated behemoth, particularly with regard to its control over the exhibition sector. Perhaps most significantly, Warner Bros. had not yet purchased First National (1928), which provided a major distribution and exhibition outlet for independent productions.[112] By the 1930s, vertical integration, much of it brought about by intensified theater acquisition and the coming of sound in the latter half of the previous decade, had more severely limited the independents' access to first-run exhibition. At the same time, however, the product shortage and double featuring opened up new exhibition spaces, some of them first-run. An aspiring company like Majestic had some chance of producing a hit *if* one of its films could find a booking in a first-run theater (*The World Gone Mad* was relatively successful in this regard), but such a booking would likely not occur in the first place if the film were advertised generically. At the other end of the spectrum, a more conservative company like Monogram could likely find plenty of exhibition space in rural, independent theaters in 1933, especially given the product shortage—hence its more hedged advertising strategy, which assured wider, if less potentially lucrative, booking. Thus, the discursive paradigm for independent and "major-minor" companies like Universal that Altman traces in 1925 was even wider by the early 1930s. Finally, it should be noted that unlike both Monogram and Majestic in 1933, USLA produced *only*

[112] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, 399, 401.

Westerns in 1925, and thus framed itself more explicitly through production (as opposed to simply advertising) as catering to a rural audience and independent theaters.

Majestic's Gamble: The Fallen Woman Film and Metropolitan Female Audiences

If Majestic's attempt to break into first-run exhibition through advertising manifested itself through a relatively undifferentiated generic rhetoric, its direct address to exhibitors in both advertising and production took the form of an appeal to the female audience—a group that Hollywood had decidedly differentiated in the early 1930s. Marshalling surveys of high school students, the Lynd anthropological study of Muncie, Indiana, and the sociological studies of Herbert Blumer as examples of Hollywood's contemporary conception of the importance of female spectators (regardless of their basis in empirical truth), Melvyn Stokes has argued that "whether it involved the production of particular kinds of films, the development of the star system, or the attempt to appeal to women as consumers, a weight of evidence suggested that the movie industry of the 1920s and early 1930s was clearly oriented towards serving (and therefore making a profit from) a dominant female audience."[113] Poverty Row, which as a whole lacked both the resources and industry clout for glamorous stars or any kind of consumerist influence over women through fan magazines, was essentially left with what Stokes calls "particular kinds of films" as their primary tool of audience address. This conception—the "kind of film"—can be explained as distinct from genre through Altman's notion of genrification, whereby a cycle of films related via some pragmatically-, industrially-, or critically-constructed semantic or syntactic element becomes a genre only after it has

[113] Stokes, 44.

been recognized as so-constructed, and thus, in Hollywood's eyes, becomes formulaic.[114] In essence, what Stokes is alluding to is not so much a "kind of film" as it is a sensibility or expectation of spectatorship—the core appeal that connects a spectator to the idea of what a particular film will be like *before* the viewing process begins. For the purposes of convention, I will simply refer to this concept as "genre." However, I would emphasize that Majestic's strategy in late 1933 employed two separate and specific understandings of genre, in that it attempted to exploit, often only through titles and advertising copy, both audiences' expectations of the film itself *and* exhibitors' expectations of what kinds of films would appeal to certain patrons. Thus, the advertising works at multiple discursive levels.

Indeed, as discussed above, even a cursory examination of Majestic's bookshelf ad reveals an explicit appeal to women separate from its emphasis on male voyeurism and salaciousness. The copy for *The Sin of Nora Moran* typifies the ad's address to female spectators (as well as exhibitors, regardless of sex), "Intimate, emotional, artistic—packed with woman appeal," and emphasizes the film's status as an "other woman" sex drama. Indeed, if one were merely to judge by their titles, *Sing, Sinner, Sing*, *An Entirely Different Woman*, *The Diary of a Bad Woman*, *Gaily I Sin*, *Age of Indiscretion* (*Unknown Blonde*), *Laughing Woman*, and *The Sin of Nora Moran* would all seem to fall into the generic category Lea Jacobs has termed the "fallen woman film," often referred to in contemporary trade journals as the "sex picture."[115] However, it

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[114] Altman, 64-65.

[115] Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). According to Jacobs, the fallen woman film of the late 20s and early 30s drew upon conventions of 19th century melodrama as well as contemporary literary fiction. The genre's basic plot structure inevitably involved a female protagonist who "transgressed," typically sexually, and was either transformed or punished by the end of the film (the mechanics of which resolution Jacobs takes

seems very likely that most of these films were not examples of the genre at all. Of the twelve films listed in the ad, only five were eventually produced.[116] None of them are "sex pictures," even in the broadest sense of the term. Furthermore, given Majestic's industry status as an independent Poverty Row producer, its appeal to a generic sensibility as modern and censorship-prone as the fallen woman film seems contradictory to the tastes of what received scholarship has defined as the independents' core exhibition market—namely, independently-owned theaters in small towns and rural areas.[117] As Richard Maltby has suggested, the assumption that rural theater patrons disliked films with such subject matter, though perhaps intuitive, is less grounded by empirical evidence than the general understanding among those same patrons that Hollywood's productions, especially those of the integrated majors, were "far too heavily weighted toward allegedly 'sophisticated' metropolitan audiences." Thus, Majestic and other Poverty Row companies may have offered a viable alternative to the "smut" of the majors, especially in the period before the enforcement of the Production Code; indeed, the studio's inoffensive Jack Hoxie westerns played in rural theaters throughout 1932 and 1933, and exhibitor reports of Majestic's films, while noting the occasional feature as "not for children," generally lack the reaction against "sophistication" so common in exhibitor reports for studio films from this period. Of the exhibitor reports for the films listed in the bookshelf ad, only *Unknown Blonde* seems to have elicited a response based on racy content—and the audience enjoyed the film: "too suggestive for Sunday, but good for

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as one approach in her discussion of censorship). Most importantly, these films often contained "plot[s] which criticized or trivialized traditional ideals of female purity."

[116] Of these, only *Sing, Sinner, Sing*, *Curtain at Eight*, and *The Sin of Nora Moran* are available on video.

[117] Lawrence Raw, "The Small-Town *Scarlet Letter (1934)*," in *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 111.

adults any time. Played very late but had good print and good audience comment."[118] While I would not suggest that Majestic never pushed the boundaries of content, it is important to emphasize that, just as was the case with its production announcements, the studio promised more than it could deliver. The discursive function of Majestic's advertising was first and foremost to get *exhibitor* bookings. Under the flat rental policies that usually characterized Poverty Row's contracts with exhibitors, Majestic made money regardless of how many people actually saw a certain film in the theater (though they did have a long-term interest in not being *too* misleading in their advertising). Thus, the studio was itself selling a *discursive strategy* to the exhibitor—an idea of spectatorship—rather selling films themselves.

How then, can we explain the rhetoric of the bookshelf ad? I would argue that Majestic was essentially framing itself as a reliable source of sophisticated product for urban exhibitors. It is possible that a key target of the discursive strategy being offered was the group *Variety* sometimes termed "flaps" (short for flappers)—in Maltby's terms, "young metropolitan women aspiring to the condition of Clara Bow or Alice White."[119] In Hollywood's eyes—and perhaps more importantly, in the eyes of urban exhibitors—the fallen woman genre appealed to this particular audience group, with its challenging of Victorian conceptions of femininity and its simultaneous emphasis with traditionally feminine modes of dramatic address such as "emotion" and "heartthrobs"—modes directly engaged by Majestic's advertising. Indeed, the young "flaps" of the late 20s and early 30s would have been of the same generation as Molly Haskell's famous "frustrated housewives," yet the continuity between the fallen women pictures and later women's

[118] *Motion Picture Herald*, 19 January 1935, 85.
[119] Maltby, 34.

films is by no means solid.[120] Writing about an industry discourse regarding a broader category of films Hollywood addressed to women, the 1920s "romantic drama"—which includes such films as *The Sheik* (Paramount, 1921) and *Flesh and the Devil* (MGM, 1926)—Lea Jacobs argues:

> One way to resolve the disparity between [Haskell's] view of the woman's picture and the one that emerges from an examination of the industry trade discourse in the 1920s is to refine our sense of the plot types associated with feminine taste and to consider how these types might vary over time […] clearly, prior to the advent of sound, other sorts of films [besides the standard 40s women's film paradigm] were associated with feminine viewing preferences, among them the adventure serials of the 1910s described by Ben Singer and Shelley Stamp, and the Orientalist excesses of the romantic drama in the 1920s. In short, I would argue that the "woman's picture" cannot be considered as a single, coherent, and historically stable entity.[121]

Jacobs' argument suggests the historically contingent role of genre during the transition period of the early 30s, and cautions us against making reductive assumptions about exhibitors' construction of a female audience. Indeed, the generally polysemic discursiveness of the bookshelf ad—sophistication, mass, class, woman appeal, salaciousness—offers an extremely wide paradigm for possible audience construction on the part of exhibitors. While I believe that the argument for the fallen woman film as an aspect of Majestic's discursive strategy remains intriguing, further research is needed on the gendered construction of other genres during the period as well as on the spectatorial paradigms of *exhibitors* if we are to gain a better understanding of Poverty Row's audiences.

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[120] Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 155.
[121] Lea Jacobs, *The Decline of Sentiment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 272.

Chapter 4: *The Sin of Nora Moran* – A Narratological Analysis

A Case Study of the Exceptional

The more traditional historical approach employed in chapter 2 and the generically-focused discursive approach of chapter 3 have both sought to contextualize Majestic within the industry and the paradigms of production, distribution, and exhibition open to Poverty Row. I have argued through these approaches that Majestic situated itself above most of its competitors as a producer of relatively ambitious independent features. For the most part, Majestic's ambition was manifested in its film texts through higher production values, more popular "stars" (or at least what passed for stars on Poverty Row), and a certain sophistication in content and milieu. At the same time, I have emphasized the elements that mark Majestic as a member of Poverty Row: pattern production, cycle and title exploitation, and subsequent-run exhibition. Thus, there exists a constant tension in Majestic's texts between the limited, conservative paradigm open to low budget production on the one hand and the risk inherent in cinematic ambition on the other.

This tension is often made visible through formal and stylistic elements, as exemplified by low-key lighting in *Hearts of Humanity* and a few other Majestic films. Limitations, whether in the form of censorship or low production budgets, encourage narrative and stylistic innovation. However, style choices that are at the same time economically efficient and aesthetically compelling soon move into the realm of standardized production practice, expanding Hollywood's paradigm without violating what David Bordwell has termed "the bounds of difference."[122] Although Poverty Row's

[122] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, 70.

films often hovered near these bounds stylistically—hence Godard's dedication of *Breathless* (1960) to Monogram—they rarely broke them when it came to filmic narration. This is not to suggest that Hollywood's narrative paradigm was at all narrow, but rather that the bounds of specifically narrative difference are more sharply defined that those of stylistic difference. Jump cuts, awkward performances, bad sound, and cheap sets were part and parcel of Poverty Row's mode of production to such an extent that the stylistically exuberant independent film often ceased to be exceptional, yet competent and comprehensible *storytelling*—an element crucial to the fundamentally narrative mode of American commercial cinema—was in many ways sacrosanct. Thus, Majestic's production and release in late 1933 of *The Sin of Nora Moran*, directed by none other than Phil Goldstone, is surprising not so much because it experiments with flashback structure—its debt to Jesse Lasky's *The Power and the Glory* (Fox, 1933) in this regard is actually a conservative impulse—but rather that the film strains narrative comprehensibility in such a way that it might reasonably be confused for an art film.

In this chapter, I offer a narratological analysis of *The Sin or Nora Moran*, Majestic's richest and most compelling film. I focus on the exceptional text here because the film instantiates—to an extreme—Majestic's strategy to break into the ranks of the majors and their "sophisticated" audiences through "sophisticated" film product. That Phil Goldstone directed *Nora Moran* is itself quite suggestive and indicates that he took a personal interest in the project; his aesthetic importance in this case is equal to his importance as an industry player. I also offer this analysis as an example of the narrative and stylistic possibilities open to Poverty Row, and as an argument that the discovery and

delimitation of these possibilities can only be afforded by increased scholarly attention to that sector of Hollywood.

Flashbacks in 1930s Hollywood

For many years, received histories of the flashback in classical Hollywood cinema pointed to *Citizen Kane* (RKO, 1941) as a watershed film in the use of flashback-structured narration, setting off a cycle of flashback-obsessed *noir*s and melodramas during the 1940s and 1950s. More recent accounts, however, have shown that flashbacks are nearly as old as the cinema itself, and that convoluted flashback-structured narratives predate *Citizen Kane* by several years.[123] An oft-cited film in this regard is *The Power and the Glory*, a Jesse Lasky-produced melodrama written by Preston Sturges.[124] The film's innovative narrative structure was a key selling point for the studio; Fox executives coined the term "narratage" (a portmanteau of "narrative" and "montage") to publicize it. Specifically, the term referred to the use of voice-over narration to anchor a flashback sequence in time (usually "the past") and to remind the viewer of the presence of a diegetic narrator "in the present." As Maureen Turim has shown, the anchoring function of voice-over in *The Power and the Glory* helps to stabilize an otherwise chaotic narration that jumps continually forward and backward among three separate periods in the life of its deceased protagonist, Thomas Gardner (Spencer Tracy), while the flashback structure as a whole serves to ironically condemn his actions.[125] *Citizen Kane*'s

[123] Maureen Turim, in her book *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History* (New York: Routledge, 1989), places the origin of the technique in the 1910s (21-59).
[124] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 194; David Bordwell, "Grandmaster Flashback," David Bordwell's Website on Cinema (posted 27 January 2009), URL: http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p=3253
[125] Turim, 110-111.

similarities to *The Power and the Glory* are unmistakable, although Welles's film has a more intricate narrative structure and a richer mise-en-scene. Clearly, the notion of a non-chronologically structured *syuzhet* (to use the Formalist term) was not at all foreign to Hollywood by 1941; *Kane* was simply a more baroque example of a long-standing formal tradition.

Furthermore, *The Power and the Glory*'s use of a relatively innovative, specifically-marketed mode of narration outside the Hollywood norm was itself not an unusual strategy. The film's status as a relatively prestigious production headed by Jesse Lasky suggests a certain confidence on the part of Fox executives in its ability to perform at the box office. It should also be noted that other studios during this period were experimenting with new and different narrative techniques; MGM's *Strange Interlude* (1932), based on the experimental play by Eugene O'Neill, employed voiceover soliloquies to narrate the inner thoughts of its characters—to critical acclaim and popular amusement. First National's *Two Seconds* (1932), starring Edward G Robinson, employed a frame story wherein a man sentenced to die by the electric chair sees his crime, arrest, and conviction flash before his eyes in the two seconds it takes for him to die. Nor was narrative innovation during this period strictly a phenomenon of the major studios. Serial production, the majority of which was handled by independent companies on Poverty Row in the 30s, necessitated a narrative strategy different from studio features. For example, in the John Wayne Mascot serial, *The Shadow of the Eagle* (1932), each episode begins with a brief expository segment, followed by a replay of the previous episode's final minute. Since each episode ends with a "cliffhanger"—a precarious narrative situation left unresolved—this replay typically resolves the

cliffhanger and transitions directly into the new narrative material of the current episode (which invariably sets up another cliffhanger).

Although the particularities of the serial form required different strategies of exposition and (ir)resolution, *The Shadow of the Eagle* as a whole adhered to Hollywood's contemporary narrative conventions. The same cannot be said of *The Sin of Nora Moran*, released a mere two months after *The Power and the Glory*. *Nora Moran* directly lifted Sturges' narratage technique, but pushed it toward the very limits of 1930s standards of narrative comprehensibility. *Nora Moran*'s flashback structure is quite convoluted compared to that of *The Power and the Glory*; while a narrative "present" does frame and anchor the plot, the film's narrative "past" is presented in a nested flashback structure that withholds crucial narrative information through ellipsis. Furthermore, the film's narration displays a particular ambivalence between the status of the past as objective or subjective; flashbacks coded as dreams dwell within more objective flashbacks, and the film has at least three separate diegetic "narrators." In both of these respects, the film stretches Hollywood's paradigm of narrative coherence and comprehensibility, as suggested by the film's generally negative reception and critical failure. Below, I employ various narratological strategies to delimit the extent of *Nora Moran*'s formal and narrative transgression, relying primarily on David Bordwell's account of the paradigm of classical narration and Maureen Turim's work on flashback structure.

The plotting of *Nora Moran* is quite complicated and I have included on the following page a listing of the film's *syuzhet* segments for reference. Parenthetical notation denoting numbered sequences refers to this listing.

Syuzhet Segments (Format: Cf. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 195-196). Numbers correspond to sequence order in the *syuzhet*.

Present – Grant's Office	*Recent Past / Oneiric State*	*Past*
1. Grant tells Edith about Nora **(FIRST HERMENEUTIC – WHO IS NORA MORAN AND WHY WAS SHE SENTENCED TO DIE?)**	2. *Montage*: Preparing for Nora's execution	3. Orphanage: Nora, 5 years old, is adopted 4. 8 years later: Nora's parents killed 5. Father Ryan's Office: Nora decides to learn to dance 6. *Montage*: Nora looks for work 7. Employment office: Nora gets a job at the circus 8. Circus: Paulino wrestles a lion 9. Nora is made Paulino's assistant 10. Train: Paulino rapes Nora
11b. The "past" revealed as Nora's dream	11a. Dissolve to Nora, dreaming 12. Nora's cell: Nora's metadream, Sadie **(FIRST H. PARTIALLY ANSWERED)**	13. *Montage*: Nora goes to New York 14. *Montage*: Dick and Nora's romance
15. "Before you judge that girl…"		16. Cottage: Nora happy with Dick - faints
	17. Nora's cell: Nora's haircut – "she seemed to know"	18. Cottage: Nora hears circus music – talks with Dick about it – John Grant enters, Crawford leaves Nora – "Did I do it better that time?"
	19. Nora's wake (*after* execution): "they're going to kill her again" 20. Nora's cell: "I'm not dead, I'm dreaming!"	
21. "When Dick left that night, I stayed to settle with Nora"		22. Cottage: Nora leaving on next train 23. Grant in Hotel Room 24. Cottage: Nora reveals Paulino's body 25. Staging a suicide, Grant drives home **(FIRST H. ANSWERED – WE THINK)** 27. Police HQ: Nora caught, admits guilt
26. "I won't ask you to believe what happened next"		
28. Grant: "I want to read you a letter…" **(SECOND HERMENEUTIC – IS NORA GUILY?)**	29. *Montage*: Newspapers, Moran To Die at 8 30. Dick's office, secretaries haven't hooked telephone lines up 31. Dick's office: VO from Dick, *Montage*: thinking of their relationship	32. Driving Away, Cottage: Dick killed Paulino in self-defense **(SECOND H. ANSWERED – NO.)** 33. Nora convinces Dick to go
	34. Dick's office: Nora's apparition appears 35. Dick's office: Nora executed, Dick writes the letter to Grant, kills himself	
36. Grant: "It ends there. Or does it begin?" Burns letters, THE END.		

Nora Moran: Story, Reception, and Flashback Structure

The plotting of *Nora Moran* is quite complicated and I have included on the preceding page a listing of the film's *syuzhet* segments for reference. Parenthetical notation denoting numbered sequences refers to this listing. What follows is more a synopsis of story than of plot (which I discuss in detail below), but the *fabula* as a whole is thrown into doubt by its very presentation. In 1917, the titular character (played as a child by Cora Sue Collins), a five-year-old orphan, is adopted by the Morans (Otis Harlan and Aggie Herring). When her adopted parents are killed in an auto accident, the now thirteen-year-old Nora (Zita Johann) uses their modest inheritance to move to New York and pay for dancing lessons. Success and employment prove elusive, however, and after months of searching Nora takes a job at a traveling circus as an assistant to the lion-tamer Paulino (John Miljan). One night, Paulino rapes Nora in her train cabin. The resultant trauma leads Nora to contemplate suicide, but her friend Sadie gives her money and convinces her to run away from the circus. Nora finds a job as a chorus line dancer in a New York nightclub, where one night she meets Dick Crawford (Paul Cavanagh), the married governor of New York. The two begin an affair, Dick rents a cottage in the country for them, and Nora is happy for the first time in her life.

However, John Grant (Alan Dinehart), a New York district attorney and the brother of Dick's wife, discovers the affair and threatens to expose it unless Dick leaves Nora. Dick does leave, and Grant offers Nora a one-time payment to keep quiet and stay out of Dick's life. Nora refuses, but Grant tells her he will wait a few hours at a local hotel for her to telephone in case she changes her mind. Meanwhile, Dick has a change of heart and returns to the cottage to reconcile with Nora—only to discover that Paulino has

arrived there first (the circus conveniently happens to be in town), and is threatening to blackmail Dick. A fight breaks out, and Dick, acting in self-defense, accidentally kills Paulino. Nora convinces Dick to leave the cottage and avoid any incrimination in Paulino's death, stating that she has a plan to make it look like an accident, and that she would rather never see Dick again than have their relationship cheapened by newspaper scandal. He leaves, and Nora calls Grant to help her dispose of Paulino's body, telling him that she murdered Paulino and gambling on Grant's desire to keep his sister's name out of the papers. He reluctantly agrees.

Grant drops Nora and the body off at the train tracks, near where the circus train is loading, and leaves. However, Nora and Paulino's body are caught on the train, which heads straight to New York City—Grant's prosecutorial jurisdiction. Resigned to her fate and wishing (again) to keep Dick's name out of the papers, Nora is prosecuted by Grant, convicted, and sentenced to die in the electric chair. In the hours leading up to her execution, Nora dreams about the events of her life while Dick, put in a precarious situation by his role as governor, sweats in his office over whether or not to pardon her. An apparition of Nora appears to him and tells him not to worry—that she is dying "to keep the only happiness I've ever known…and for all the good things you're going to do." Dick attempts to pardon her anyway, but fails when he discovers that the telephone line to his office is dead. Nora's apparition smiles, then disappears to signify her execution. Despondent, Dick kills himself, but not before leaving Grant a letter admitting Nora's innocence and his role in Paulino's death. Months later, Dick's wife Edith (Claire DuBray) discovers anonymous love letters in his safe and goes to her brother's office, where Grant tells her (and us) the whole story.

Released in December 1933, *Nora Moran* was produced and directed by Phil Goldstone. Based on a (possibly unproduced) Willis Maxwell Goodhue stage play, *Burnt Offering*, the film was a critical failure.[126] The two issues most commented on by contemporary reviewers were the film's complicated narrative structure and overall tonal register, which many reviews found too dismal for Depression-era audiences. Mordaunt Hall called *Nora Moran* "a bewildering mass of scenes," "muddled," and "exceedingly depressing" in his *New York Times* review.[127] *Film Daily* echoed Hall's sentiments: "This production is handicapped by a theme too full of grief. Nor is the continuity handled with much effect."[128] *Motion Picture Herald* saw "no beginning and no ending" to the film, while *Harrison's Reports* called it "draggy, and all quite confusing."[129] *Variety* honed in on the central source of confusion in the film's use of narratage:

> Because the continuity often becomes involved in an attempt to bring the technique of narratage to the screen with practicability, it is frequently difficult to follow the story. The most confusing sequence is the footage which deals with the governor, who, conscience-stricken over the fact that the girl is taking the blame for murder, is finally driven to a last minute pardon. This can be taken either as a nightmare or a scene in which the governor is actually trying to do something and finally phones to order a pardon but finds he's too late.[130]

The reviewer here refers to the film's most ambivalent narrative conceit, an understanding of which necessitates an analysis of the film's flashback structure.

Nora Moran's flashbacks can be divided into three "tenses." I use the term through an admittedly loose analogy to the grammatical category: specific verb tenses denote not only the time in which an event takes/took/will take place, but depending on

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[126] Pitts, 224, 233.
[127] Mordaunt Hall, "A Tale of Woe," *New York Times* review of *The Sin of Nora Moran*, 13 December 1933, 29.
[128] *Film Daily*, 14 December 1933, 6.
[129] *Motion Picture Herald*, 30 December 1933, 34; *Harrison's Reports*, 23 December 1933, 202.
[130] *Variety*, 19 December 1933, 19, 37.

their mode (active or passive) also give a sense of subjectivity. The film's tenses differ both in terms of their relative temporal placement and in the extent to which events are represented as either part of an objective reality or existing solely as a function of character subjectivity. The film's tenses are as follows: 1.) The film's "present tense," which takes place exclusively within Grant's office and serves as an ultimate framing narrative. It is here that Edith Crawford serves as a stand-in for the audience; her knowledge of Nora's life is equivalent to ours. 2.) The film's "past tense" in which the details of Nora's life leading up to her imprisonment are narrated. Covering 15 years and numerous locations, most of the film's 65-minute running time is devoted to this plane, but the reliability of the narration here is problematic due to constant revelations in the other two tenses. 3.) The "recent past," spanning just the few hours leading up to Nora's execution. This tense is by far the most surreal and unstable; the notion that the film's past tense might be Nora's dream is introduced and constantly reiterated for us here. Furthermore, this tense is itself too poetic—that is, too signifier-intensive—for us to easily treat it as a reliable account of Nora's actual recent past. Rather, it exists more as a kind of psychological state or dream—an "oneiric tense." Nora and other characters are fully aware of the past, present, *and* future in this tense.

The film's flashback structure jumps constantly between these three tenses, and narratage is used to anchor this structure, at least on the surface, through voiceover and a specific stylistic device: a diagonal veil-wipe, similar to a device used in *The Power and the Glory*, that accompanies voiceover narration from a different tense. To be clear, narratage does not serve a *transitional* function in the film—in other words, it does not move us from one tense to another (*Nora Moran* tends to use lap dissolves for this,

though not exclusively). Rather, it serves a *clarifying* function, reminding us of the narrated status of what we are seeing before returning to a more invisible style of narration. A typical example comes nearly eight minutes into the film. A dissolve transitions us from Grant's introductory framing narrative in the present to a montage of the preparations for Nora's execution in the recent past. At this point in the film the recent past's ambiguous status has not yet been revealed to us, and we assume what we are seeing is a simple flashback, albeit in montage form. We are eventually given a close-up of a knife, which dissolves to a close-up of a syringe in a graphic match:

The shot of the syringe is then slightly darkened by a diagonal veil, which descends from the upper right to the lower left corner of the frame in the same manner as a wipe. Grant, speaking to Edith in the present, is heard in a voiceover: "Her suffering had been so mute and pitiful that they tried to relieve her." The veil lifts, and we are introduced to Nora. A longer example of narratage occurs just a few moments later, and through its suggestion of Nora's delirium hints that the extended sequence to follow, which narrates Nora's past, exists purely in her mind:

> (First three frame enlargements) Gradually, the opiate quieted her body, but her mind was too disordered. And in her confused state, everything became grotesque and unreal. We've all experienced it, and in our helplessness, we call on the one who means protection to us. (dissolve) For Nora, it was Father Ryan, now as when she was a child…

The veil-wipe device acts as a sort of signifier of narrative soliloquy, distancing viewers from the filmic image and calling attention to the pertinent narrative information located in the voiceover. During this soliloquy, two tenses temporarily coexist, but the narration of one (the present) is privileged over the other (the past), which in this case becomes a kind of visual poetic—signifying very little in its own right. In this sense, narratage was an attempt to distinguish intra-flashback sequences from the narrative as a whole through style—a distinction, it should be noted, that at this point in film history was not frequently made.

As mentioned above, flashbacks in one form or another were at least twenty years old by the release of *Nora Moran*, and possibly older. The flashback was especially common in melodrama, which by the early thirties had acquired a well-codified set of conventions. *Nora Moran* exhibits many of them: a "kept woman" plot, tragic realizations that come too late to be acted upon, a woman's self-sacrifice for those she loves (however problematic), and implausible coincidences that suture the plot together and heighten the tragedy. *The Sin of Madelon Claudet* (MGM, 1931), one of the more

successful melodramas of the early thirties, also featured a flashback structure (though a much simpler one) and was almost certainly an influence on *Nora Moran*, the similarity of the titles notwithstanding. Furthermore, Turim has demonstrated the preponderance of subjective flashbacks in melodramas with trial testimonies during the late silent period, and their typical form highlights the norm against which *The Power and the Glory* and *Nora Moran* distinguished themselves:

> Once these trial flashbacks are underway, the imagery is presented contradictorily, as both narrated testimony and objective account. Although different witnesses may narrate different parts of the story, there is little questioning of subjectivity or faulty memories or development of overlapping and contradictory versions as each unfolds—although later trial testimony flashbacks will exploit these alternatives. The emphasis in the twenties is rather on the reconstruction of past events viewed by a witness with a clarity characteristic of the present. Like many flashbacks, once the trial flashback is under way, it is impossible to distinguish sequences within that flashback from other sequences occurring in the present on formal levels of filmic style.[131]

Narratage served to make this distinction—unavailable in the silent era—by distinguishing separate temporal planes in the narrative through the use of sound; in that sense it was part of an impulse for greater narrative clarity, if at the expense of stylistic obtrusiveness. This helps to explain contemporary critical reaction to *Nora Moran*; *The Power and The Glory* had used narratage to great effect in coherently structuring a non-linear *syuzhet*, while Goldstone's film managed to confuse its viewers *despite* the structure offered by narratage. Why was this the case? One answer may lie in the fact that the narratage in *Nora Moran* is extremely dense; there are no less than twelve veil-wipes in the film. Indeed, the film packs an incredible amount of narrative information into its 65 minutes; the *fabula* covers sixteen years of Nora's life, compressed into a relatively detailed three through six separate montage sequences (compiled using footage from

[131] Turim, 54.

other films, according to Bordwell).[132] Furthermore, the film jumps temporally an astounding twenty times, or an average of about once every three minutes. Though the film is perfectly comprehensible on multiple viewings, it is not surprising that a 1930s audience, living in a time when film was more ephemeral and narrative clarity was the norm above all else, would be confounded by *Nora Moran*'s lack of "continuity."

The real root of the film's narrative transgression, however, lay in the trustworthiness of the narration itself. As described above, dreamlike character subjectivity—focalized particularly around Nora but also around Grant and Dick—is a central conceit of the film's narration of the past and of the hours leading up to Nora's execution. Extended sequences of the film are coded ambivalently through narration as memory, dreams, or objective truth—and the stability of this coding breaks down as the film progresses. Our first hint that something is amiss in the narration arrives concurrently with the film's first use of narratage, in the transition from sequence 2 to sequence 3. In this transition, we enter the film's first nested flashback as Nora, "in her confused state," calls on Father Ryan for spiritual strength in the hours leading up to her execution. The sequences that follow (3-10) are essentially biographical, and we learn about Nora's backstory up to the point that she was raped by Paulino. Crucially, however, Grant continues to narrate the sequence in voiceover—both during moments of narratage *and* during some non-narratage sequences such as the montage (6) where Nora seeks work in New York. This narration codes the past being presented to us as objectively true, despite the fact that we transitioned to this particular temporal plane through Nora's delirious memory. Yet the film also transitions *out* of this sequence after Nora's rape (11a) with a brief dissolve to Nora's tossing and turning in bed, suggesting that she is

[132] Bordwell, "Grandmaster Flashback."

recalling the trauma she suffered, before dissolving again back to Grant's office in the present. Grant's voiceover narration over this first dissolve ("Paulino's brutality and her fear of him were things that she could never forget") further suggests his ultimate omniscience; not only does he know exactly what happened to Nora, he knows exactly how Nora remembers what happened to her.

The next two sequences (11b and 12) are crucial in understanding the ambiguity of the film's narrative logic. After the dissolve back to Grant's office, Grant explains to Edith (and us) the film's narration of the past, explicitly characterizing it as both Nora's dream *and* objective truth:

> When things happen in our lives, we're conscious of them as events. But later, subconsciously, we see our lives as a pattern, and it's easy to recall the events that form that pattern. And so it was with Nora…[dissolve to Nora in her cell, with Mrs. Watts looking on] she was in a cell waiting to die, and yet she was in the circus. She was dreaming, but yet in her subconscious mind, she was reliving the events that formed the pattern of her life.

By this point in the film, Nora's "reliving" of the events of her life has consisted simply of recalling those events, allowing them to be presented to us; there is something of a double focalization here (Grant and Nora), but Grant's voiceover narration and omniscience tend to privilege the objective truth of Nora's dream, despite its status as a subjective imagining. However, a double-exposure wipe—

—that occurs immediately upon the conclusion of this narration commences a scene (12) that throws this assertion into question. The previous image of the sleeping Nora in her cell is replaced by a similar image of her wearing her circus clothes. Nora wakes and asks for Mrs. Watts, her cell nurse, but finds a different woman sitting by her side:

> Woman: No, I'm Sadie. Don't you remember me?
> Nora: No, I don't…everything seems strange.
> Sadie: That's because you're dreaming. And so far you've dreamt things exactly as they've happened, but I thought when you got to me, I would change the dream if you wanted me to.

Sadie goes on to explain that as things actually happened, she found Nora ready to commit suicide but gave her a hundred dollars and convinced her to run away from the circus. "If I hadn't given you the money, you might not be here in jail, waiting to be electrocuted," she says. By this point, however, Nora's clothing and the homey mise-en-scene have indicated that she is definitely not in her cell, and she expresses our confusion: "But I'm not in jail! I'm here!" The film refuses to tell us where "here" is exactly, but it becomes clear that the space in question, while definitely oneiric, also existed at one point in Nora's past and is probably related to the circus. Sadie reveals that if she gives Nora the money, it is likely that history will repeat itself and she will end up killing a man (which we later know will *not* happen—a point to which I will return).

However, Nora seems to know that leaving the circus and moving to New York will bring her some form of happiness, and she takes the money anyway. At this point the film's narration shifts back into an expository past, this time devoid of Grant's narration (13 and 14). From this point forward, the film's narration of the past shifts between registers of simple exposition and meta-reflection, wherein Nora explicitly comments on—and even interacts with other characters about—the choices she made in the past.

As if *Nora Moran*'s metaoneiric narration of the past weren't complicated enough, the film also shifts narrative focalization in the past tense and oneiric tense, occasionally abandoning it altogether. In one scene (19), Dick and Grant stand eerily over Nora's open casket, presumably after her execution:

> Grant: …come to the execution tonight—they're going to kill her again.
> The warden wasn't pleased with the way she died.
> Dick: I won't have it! They can't do that!
> Grant: But they've done it. Don't you understand? She's dead.

Clearly, many viewers and critics *didn't* understand. We are unable to locate this moment in time or space; although a dissolve—

—suggests that it is another of Nora's dreams as she lies in her cell awaiting execution, our uncertainty by this point in the film as to who is narrating it leads us to expect a range of focalization possibilities normally not available in classical narration. This range, coupled with the nearly black mise-en-scene and opaque dialogue, catapult the scene into full-blown surrealism. Indeed, by the last few minutes of the film, where Dick finds himself talking to Nora's disembodied floating head, it seems likely that many audiences had simply given up.

The Significance of Nora Moran

Writing about *Le Silence* (1920) and *Fievre* (1921), two films by the French filmmaker and critic Louis Delluc, Turim has argued that

> In these Delluc films the manipulation of temporality as an element of composition throws into question the status of the narrative event. Events in the past are available only through the filter of a troubled or ambiguous memory; events in the present are subject to the intrusive associations of the past which determine their shape. The kind of subjectivity this implies is not simply a unitary individual's perspective; focalization, while always marked, is itself disordered, impulsive, charged with the forces of desire. Subjectivity here is of a different order then it is in fictions in which a character is assigned a more singular and unified subjective reality and in which conflicts between the characters' perspectives are systematically worked out. Here, instead, filmic narrative becomes the scene in which this tension within the imaginary reality of the fictive individual can be played out.[133]

In many ways, Turim might have been writing about *Nora Moran*. While I am not suggesting a direct or even an indirect influence on the film by French Impressionist filmmaking of the early twenties, I do argue that the film has something of an artistic sensibility in its manipulation of temporality, using Nora's dream as the device of that manipulation. While Nora's memory is never questioned and is in fact anchored as more or less objective truth by Grant's narration, the past does intrude onto the present in the sense that Nora is given a kind of false choice—in her dreams, it is suggested many times that she can change the outcome of events, yet both Grant's narration and numerous oneiric characters remind us constantly that she is *already dead*, a fact established five minutes into the film. The unambiguous narrative truth of the present is constantly set up to be undermined by the ambiguity of the past, only to be just as constantly reaffirmed in the end.

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[133] Turim, 74.

Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of *Nora Moran* is the affinities it shares with the much later *films noir* of the 40s and early 50s. In terms of its dominant tonal register, the film is unquestionably a melodrama, but the moral ambiguity of its characters (especially its male characters), its convoluted plot, and its interest in a kind of pop psychoanalysis are all features that pre-figure *noir* in some fashion. I would argue that the most suggestive element in this regard is the film's elliptical hermeneutic structure. I am using the term "hermeneutic" in the Barthesian sense of "an enigma […] distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed"—in essence, any central question that propels the narrative (Bordwell in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* calls it "hypothesis-forming").[134] *Nora Moran*'s narration is structured around answering one question while at the same time withholding and even deliberately deceiving us about another. Regarding the difference between narration in melodrama and that of the detective story, Bordwell writes:

> Narration [in the melodrama] will be highly communicative about fabula information—specifically, information pertaining to characters' emotional states. There will be fewer focused gaps in fabula information. The narration will also be quite unrestricted in range, closer to an omniscient survey, so that the film can engender pity, irony, and other "dissociated" emotions. Whereas the detective story emphasizes the act of unearthing what has already occurred, the melodrama typically relies on a firm primacy effect, plays down curiosity about the past, and maximizes our urge to know what will happen next—and, especially, how any given character will react to what has happened. Viewer interest is maintained by retardation and carefully timed coincidences that produce surprise.[135]

Nora Moran is an atypical melodrama in that it privileges a certain curiosity about the past, and the film's flashback structure ensures an interest in both unearthing what has already occurred *and* what will happen next. There are two central hermeneutics in the

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[134] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 19; Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 39.
[135] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 70.

film, and (perhaps not surprisingly) they both have to do with Nora. The first hermeneutic/question/enigma is posed indirectly by the title of the film and diegetically when Grant asks Edith (1) whether she has ever heard of Nora Moran and reveals to her that Dick was having an affair with Nora; one half the central question here—"Who is Nora Moran?"—is answered by the more or less biographical account that is the film's first act (1-10), while the second half—"Why was Nora executed?"—is partially answered by Sadie in (12); she killed a man. (13) through (24) detail the circumstances that lead up to that murder, answering several smaller hermeneutics (Who did Nora kill? - Paulino. Where did the murder take place? - The cottage Nora and Dick have been renting). However, in answering the first hermeneutic, the film deliberately withholds the presence of a second. Sadie's statement that Nora killed a man, the presence of Paulino's body in the cottage, and Nora's admission of guilt all contribute to the overwhelming impression by the end of the second act (around 25) that Nora is guilty of the murder, though Paulino's past act of rape suggests that she may have acted in self-defense. However, the film soon poses a second hermeneutic—"Is Nora guilty?"—in the scene (28) where Grant highlights the sheer miscarriage of justice that was Nora's trial and conviction, regardless of her guilt; as he begins to read Edith another letter, we begin to suspect that a crucial part of the story has been withheld from us. The film's final act confirms these suspicions in its depiction of Dick's role in the murder. By withholding from the audience until the end the crucial narrative detail that Dick killed Paulino in self-defense, the film's narrative structure hews closer to the detective story—and hence *film noir*—than to the traditional melodrama.

Ultimately, *The Sin of Nora Moran* offers an example of the structural possibilities of narrative open to Hollywood, and especially to Poverty Row, during the early thirties. Though something of a limit case, the film demonstrates certain precocious proclivities for intricate storytelling, psychological complexity, and moral ambiguity that would only begin to come to the surface in mainstream Hollywood filmmaking a decade later. It should be emphasized that *The Sin of Nora Moran* is by no means a revolutionary film; it still has a fundamental interest in a certain kind of narrative causality and character motivation. However, the film does stretch the Hollywood paradigm toward its extremes—even its concluding lines seem to question the basic Hollywood model of beginning-middle-end: "It ends there. Or does it begin?" For the reviewers of the 1930s, the ambiguity of this question, and the complex exploration of time and space it entailed, was unacceptable. For at least two modern cinephiles, however, *The Sin of Nora Moran* remains "the nuttiest"—and best—"B-film of the 1930s."[136]

[136] Bordwell, "Grandmaster flashback." The author would be the other.

Chapter 5: **A (Brief) Conclusion**

Goldstone's last credit as Majestic's head of production came was for *Unknown Blonde*. In October 1934, he began working for MGM, where he produced a few films including *Age of Indiscretion* (one of the properties listed in the bookshelf ad) and *O'shaughnessy's Boy* with Wallace Beery (both 1935).[137] Larry Darmour, producer of the Mickey McGuire series, became head of production at some point in the spring or summer of 1934. After one relatively lavish production, *The Scarlet Letter*, Darmour produced six features for the studio at reduced budgets; having screened several of these films, I would argue that they were intended for more conservative subsequent-run audiences.[138] They also tend to continue Majestic's trend of pattern production. The plot of *The Perfect Clue* (1935), for instance, shares many similarities with that of Columbia's recently released smash hit *It Happened One Night* (1934)—a fact that *The Film Daily* picked up on.[139] Majestic ceased production and merged with Republic in mid-1935.

Although I have chosen not to write about the period of the studio's greatest success, Majestic's 1933 theater receipts tell much of the story. *The World Gone Mad*, another newspaper-themed film starring Pat O'Brien—*The Front Page*'s Hildy Johnson—was by far the most successful film Majestic ever made, and is similar to *The Crusader* in terms of content and profanity and *Hearts of Humanity* in terms of low-key lighting (both films were directed by Christy Cabanne). *The Vampire Bat*, which today is probably Majestic's most widely-seen film, was likely helped by the strength of its cast,

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[137] "Goldstone At M-G to Prod. 2," *Variety*, 23 October 1934, 5. Goldstone produced only two more independent films: the sex hygiene film *Damaged Goods* (Grand National, 1937) and a Renfrew of the Mounties film, *Sky Bandits* (Monogram, 1940). He ceased producing in 1942 and died in 1963.
[138] Lawrence Raw has written about *The Scarlet Letter*'s appeal to small town audiences in his essay, "The Small-Town *Scarlet Letter* (1934)," in David L. Kranz and Nancy C. Mellerski, Eds., *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 110-121.
[139] *The Film Daily*, 13 March 1935, 7.

which included Lionel Atwill, Fay Wray, and Melvyn Douglas. Atwill and Wray were due to star in Warner Bros.' *Mystery of the Wax Museum*, and Majestic was able to release *The Vampire Bat* mere weeks before the Warners film entered theaters. Shot on Universal's lot using the same sets as *Frankenstein* and *The Old Dark House* (also starring Douglas), *The Vampire Bat* was highly produced and is at times indistinguishable from James Whale's films.[140] *Film Daily* called it "one of the best independent features seen this season," and the *New York Times* even deigned to review it, albeit with the lukewarm conclusion that concludes many a review of Poverty Row's output: "Familiarity has bred indifference."[141] *The Vampire Bat* played numerous first-run theaters, including the Winter Garden in New York, and the theater receipts suggest that the film may have benefited from Fay Wray's starring role in *King Kong* (RKO, 1933), released in mid-March.

Thus, Majestic's relative success in 1933 can be attributed mostly to the ultimately conservative impulse typical of Poverty Row—the recycling of stories, sets, and stars, and the exploitation of production patterns and releases from the major studios. Trade discourse, at least, was fully aware of this strategy. A *Variety* article from February 1933 noted Goldstone's sniping of the title *Curtain at Eight* so that Majestic could release the film a full three months before MGM's star-studded *Dinner at Eight*. It is worth noting that this article was printed almost a *year* before *Dinner at Eight* was released in February 1934—suggesting that Goldstone was thinking long-term about such sniping strategies.[142] A similar incident occurred later in 1933, when Majestic was actually sued

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[140] George E. Turner, *Forgotten Horrors: Early Talkie Chillers from Poverty Row* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1979), 82.
[141] *Film Daily*, 10 January 1933, 7; A.D.S., "Scientific Horror," *The New York Times*, 28 January 1933, 9.
[142] "Goldstone Nabs 'Eight' Title Ahead of Metro," *Variety*, 28 February 1933, 11.

by Warner Bros. for attempting to make a film entitled *Gold Diggers of Paris* in the aftermath of Warners' *Gold Diggers of 1933*. The matter was eventually settled out of court and Majestic made the film in October through its Equitable subsidiary under the title *Gigolettes of Paris*.[143]

As has perpetually been the case with Poverty Row scholarship, there remains much more to be done. For instance, what function did Majestic's British-produced releases serve in selling the studio to both urban and rural exhibitors? That films like *You Made Me Love You* and *Charming Deceiver* actually played in small-town theaters (see Appendix 3) offers a tantalizing glimpse into potential areas for further research in Poverty Row and non-metropolitan exhibition. However, the problems posed by almost all Poverty Row research are daunting: sample sizes are low, and trade discourse is often misleading. Although the major studios certainly released their share of misleading press and planted stories, such tactics seem to have been proportionally more important for Poverty Row. Indeed, short-term publicity and exposure in nationally syndicated trade discourse, regardless of its context or importance, may have been seen by many low-budget producers as worth the potential long-term undermining of their particular organization or of the sector as a whole. In many ways, however, this explains Majestic's own apparent impetus to leave Poverty Row, and in the historical context of the early 1930s such upward mobility may not have seemed as impossible as it does to modern researchers accustomed to the absolute power of the studio system. Indeed, Columbia, until the late 1920s, had itself been an archetypical Poverty Row studio.

Each of the approaches employed in this thesis has its own strengths and weaknesses. The more traditional industrial history of Chapter 2 has the advantage of

[143] "Indie's Gesture," *Variety*, 6 June 1933, 6.

being able to trace the specific historical contingencies of Majestic's development as an organization as well as to contextualize a linear institutional history within the non-linear sector that was Poverty Row. However, its reliance on trade discourse leads it to run up against the problem presented by Poverty Row's manipulation of that discourse. Such problems are averted in the discursive model employed in Chapter 3, where such manipulation is foregrounded as a function of advertisement. Nevertheless, the sample size of Majestic's advertising is simply too small to come to definite conclusions about the company's strategy as a whole. The more textually analytic approach of Chapter 4's narratology reveals the paradigms of film and narrative form that were both open to and employed by Poverty Row, and suggests the need for applying such approaches to films outside of the traditional Poverty Row canon represented by *Detour*. Ultimately, the approach I found most revelatory is not taken in any one of the above chapters, but is manifested throughout this thesis and in the appendices that follow: the empirical study of exhibition and reception. An approach resting on theater receipts and exhibitor reports produces a sample size large enough to begin making more definite conclusions about how Poverty Row's films were received in actual theaters.

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Number of Domestically Produced Feature Films Released in the U.S., 1927-1960. Source: *The 1961 Film Daily Yearbook*, 103.

Year	Total	Major	Independent	% Indie-produced
1927	678	501	177	26%
1928	641	429	212	33%
1929	562	379	183	33%
1930	509	356	153	30%
1931	501	307	194	39%
1932	489	300	189	39%
1933	507	317	190	37%
1934	480	350	130	27%
1935	525	340	185	35%
1936	522	348	174	33%
1937	538	393	145	27%
1938	455	346	109	24%
1939	483	367	116	24%
1940	477	348	129	27%
1941	492	368	124	25%
1942	488	346	142	29%
1943	397	279	118	30%
1944	401	262	139	35%
1945	350	228	122	35%
1946	378	239	139	37%
1947	369	234	135	37%
1948	366	225	141	39%
1949	356	224	132	37%
1950	383	242	141	37%
1951	391	277	114	29%
1952	324	252	72	22%
1953	344	285	59	17%
1954	253	197	56	22%
1955	254	189	65	26%
1956	272	210	62	23%
1957	300	220	80	27%
1958	241	174	67	28%
1959	187	148	39	21%
1960	154	119	35	23%
Avg. (1927-1960)	414	288	126	30%
Avg. (1930-1936)	505	331	174	34%
Avg. (1944-1950)	372	236	136	36%

Table 2: Total Number of Releases in U.S. Market, 1927-1960.
Source: *The 1961 Film Daily Yearbook*, 103.

Year	Total Releases	Major	Independent	% Indie-distributed
1927	743	510	233	31%
1928	834	462	372	45%
1929	707	393	314	44%
1930	595	362	233	39%
1931	622	324	298	48%
1932	685	318	367	54%
1933	644	338	306	48%
1934	662	361	301	45%
1935	766	356	410	54%
1936	735	362	373	51%
1937	778	408	370	48%
1938	769	362	407	53%
1939	761	388	373	49%
1940	673	363	310	46%
1941	598	379	219	37%
1942	533	359	175	33%
1943	427	289	138	32%
1944	442	270	172	39%
1945	377	234	143	38%
1946	467	252	215	46%
1947	486	249	237	49%
1948	459	248	211	46%
1949	479	234	245	51%
1950	622	263	359	58%
1951	654	320	334	51%
1952	463	278	185	40%
1953	534	301	233	44%
1954	427	225	202	47%
1955	392	215	177	45%
1956	479	237	242	51%
1957	533	268	265	50%
1958	507	237	270	53%
1959	439	189	250	57%
1960	387	184	203	52%
Avg. (1927-1960)	579	310	269	46%
Avg. (1930-1936)	673	346	327	48%
Avg. (1944-1950)	476	250	226	47%

Appendix 2: Theater receipts for Majestic films in major markets, independent and affiliated theaters

What follows is an extensive but not exhaustive list of theater receipts for films distributed by Majestic. The data was culled from the weekly theater receipts columns of the *Motion Picture Herald* and *Variety* and is essentially complete from 1932 to 1935. Most receipts are from the *Motion Picture Herald*, but some are from *Variety* and have been so noted in footnotes.

Affiliated theaters are designated in bold parentheses as such where not obvious, according to *The 1933 Film Daily Yearbook*, pp. 707-819:

L = Loews
P = Paramount
F = Fox
W = Warner Bros.
R = RKO

Additional abbreviations:

NL = The film set a new yearly low in its week's gross for that particular theater.
d/f = double feature
Roxy (Ind.) = The independent Roxy in New York, as distinct from the RKO Roxy.

(*) denotes additional qualifying or noteworthy information contained in the theater receipts. Cities where a film played as part of a double feature have an asterisk after the city name.

[***Film***]
[City] [Date] [Theater] (Capacity; Tickets) **Gross** (house high/low)

The Phantom Express
New York 10-1-32: Globe (1050; 25¢-75¢) **$6300** (N/A)
San Francisco 10-1-32: President (1440; 25¢-40¢) **$5750** (N/A)
* This theater would be closed by the publication date of the 1933 *Film Daily Yearbook*
Seattle 2-4-33: Liberty (2000; 10¢-25¢) **$4250** ($11,500/$3000)

Gold
New York[144]
Washington, D.C. 10-8-32: Columbia (1232; 25¢-40¢); **$1750** (?)

Hearts of Humanity
New York[145]
Montreal, Canada 12-24-32: Princess (2272; 25¢-60¢) **$6000** ($22,500/**NL**)

San Francisco* 5-20-33: **Fox** (4600; 10¢-35¢) **$9600** ($70,000/$9300)
* Bottom half of a d/f with Columbia's *State Trooper*

The Crusader
New York[146]
Philadelphia 11-5-32: **Fox** (3000; 35¢-75¢) **$19,500** ($40,000/$15,000)
* 6 day run
Washington, D.C. 11-19-32: Columbia (**L**) (1232; 25¢-40¢) **$2875** (?)
Montreal 12-24-32: Princess (2272; 25¢-60¢) **$6000** ($22,500/**NL**)
* Top half of a d/f with Majestic's *Hearts of Humanity*
Buffalo* 2-25-33: Lafayette (3300; 25¢) **$6800** ($24,100/$5100)
* Bottom half of a d/f with World Wide's *The Death Kiss*
San Francisco* 4-8-33: **Fox** (4600; 25¢) **$15,500** ($70,000/**NL**)
* Billed as *Should a Woman Tell?*; bottom half of a d/f with World Wide's *The Death Kiss*
Birmingham 6-1-33: Empire (1100; 15¢-25¢) **$1100** ($12,000/$1000)
* Billed as *Should a Woman Tell?*

[144] The film's review in *Variety* (11 October 1932, 20) indicates that it played one day (October 4, 1932) at the Loews New York as half of a double feature.
[145] A *Variety* article reports that the film played one day (September 29, 1932) at the Loews New York as the bottom half of a double feature. *Variety*, 27 September 1932, 21.
[146] The *New York Times* review of the film (8 October 1932, 15) indicates that it played the week of October 8 at the independently owned Beacon Theater on Broadway (2,673 seats).

The Unwritten Law

Cleveland	12-31-32: Hippodrome (**R)** (3,000; 15¢-40¢)		**$7500** (?)
Seattle	1-21-33: Liberty	(2000; 10¢-35¢)	**$3750** ($11,300/3000)
Philadelphia	1-28-33: Keith's (**R**)	(2300; 15¢-35¢)	**$8200** ($27,000/$6500)
Indianapolis	2-18-33: Lyric	(1892; 25¢-40¢)	**$7000** (?)
Buffalo*	3-11-33: Lafayette	(3000; 25¢)	**$7900** ($24,100/$5100)
	* Bottom half of d/f with Columbia's *Man Against Woman*		
San Francisco*	4-29-33: **Fox**	(4600; 10¢-35¢)	**$10,350** (70,000/**NL**)
	* Top half of a d/f with Allied's *Iron Master*		

The Vampire Bat

New York	1-28-33: Winter Garden (**W**) (1300; 25¢-75¢)		**$6892** ($59,782/$3209)
Cleveland*	2-11-33: Allen (**L**)	(3300; 15¢-35¢)	**$5200** ($26,000/$3000)
	* Top half of a d/f with Chesterfield's *Thrill of Youth*		
Providence*[147]	2-11-33: **Paramount** (2200; 10¢-40¢)		$**6500** ($18,000/$3200)
	* Bottom half of a d/f with Paramount's *She Done Him Wrong*		
Hollywood*	2-18-33: Pantages (**F**) (3000; 25¢-50¢)		**$4100** ($22,400/**NL**)
	* Top half of a d/f with Principal's *Devil's Playground*		
Brooklyn[148]	3-4-33: **Fox**	(4,000; 25¢-30¢-50¢)	**$13,500** (?)
Buffalo*	3-11-33: Shea's Century (3000; 25¢)		**$6700** ($25,000/$4700)
	* Bottom half of a d/f with Fox's *Dangerously Yours*		
Boston	4-15-33: Orpheum (**L**) (2200; 25¢-50¢)		**$16,000** ($32,500/$9500)
Washington, D.C.	4-15-33: Columbia (**L**) (1232; 25¢-40¢)		**$2800** (?)
Minneapolis	4-30-33: **RKO** Orpheum (2900; 25¢-50¢)		**$10,000** (?)
	* $4000 better than RKO's *The Great Jasper* from the previous week)		
	* Stage show: *George White's Scandals*[149]		
Omaha *	9-9-33: World Theater (2500; 25¢-35¢);		**$5500** ($16,000/$4500)
	* Bottom of d/f with Paramount's *Big Executive*		
Oklahoma City	2-9-35: Liberty (**W**)	(900; 10¢-35¢)	**$900** ($5000/$1100)
	* 3-day run		

[147] *Variety*, 21 February 1933, 27.
[148] *Variety*, 21 March 1933, 11.
[149] *George White's Scandals*: *Variety*, 30 May 1933, 10.

The World Gone Mad

New York	4-22-33: Roxy (**R**) (3500; 35¢-1.65¢)	**$30,873** (?)
	* Stage show[150]	
Washington, D.C.*	4-29-33: Keith's (**R**) (1000; 25¢-50¢)	**$3000** (?)
	5-6-33: Keith's (**R**)	**$2500** (?)
	* Top of two successive d/fs: Columbia's *Below the Sea* and *Mussolini Speaks!*[151]	
Boston	5-13-33: Keith's (**R**) (2900; 25¢-50¢)	**$17,000** ($25,000/$11,000)
Omaha	5-20-33: Orpheum (**R**) (3000; 25¢-40¢)	**$14,250** ($25,550/5000)
	* Special ticket prices: 25¢-55¢; Stage show	
Providence*[152]	5-25-33: **Paramount** (2200; 15¢-40¢);	**$2900** ($18,000/$2,200)
	* Top half of a d/f with Universal's *The Cohens and Kellys in Trouble*	
New Haven*[153]	6-8-33: Roger Sherman (**W**) (2200; 35¢-50¢)	**$5800** ($15,000/$1500)
	* Bottom half of a d/f with First National's *Lilly Turner*	
Philadelphia[154]	6-8-33: Earle (**W**) (2000; 40¢-65¢)	**$14,500** ($27,000/$11,500)
Minneapolis[155]	6-8-33: Orpheum (**R**) (2800, 35¢-50¢)	**$10,500** ($25,000/$2200)
	* Stage show: Cab Calloway and His Orchestra (special 55¢ price)	
Buffalo*	6-17-33: Lafayette (3300; 25¢)	**$6600** ($24,100/$5100)
	* Top of a d/f with Principal's *Blame the Woman*	
Detroit	6-17-33: **RKO** (3000; 25¢-40¢)	**$5800** (?)
Pittsburgh[156]	7-27-33: Fulton (1730; 15¢-25¢-40¢)	**$2000** ($12,000/$1900)
	* Five-day run	
Kansas City*[157]	8-10-33: Liberty (800; 10¢-15¢-20¢)	**$2200** ($13,400/$1500)
	* Bottom half of a d/f with Warner Bros.' *Mystery of the Wax Museum*	
Montreal*	8-12-33: **Loews** (3115; 25¢-65¢)	**$9000** ($16,500/$8500)
	* Bottom half of a d/f with Universal's *Don't Bet On Love*	
Denver	9-16-33: Donham (1392; 15¢-25¢)	**$4500** (?)
Seattle*	10-14-33: Liberty (2000; 10¢-25¢)	**$3500** ($5500/$3000)
	* Bottom of a d/f with Columbia's *Below the Sea*	
Portland	4-7-34: Pantages (1700; 15¢-25¢)	**$2500** ($10,200/$1700)

[150] Stage show: *Variety*, 30 May 1933, 10.
[151] Double feature data: *Variety*, 30 May 1933, 22.
[152] *Variety*, 27 June 1933, 23.
[153] *Variety*, 27 June 1933, 10.
[154] *Variety*, 27 June 1933, 23.
[155] *Variety*, 27 June 1933, 27. Another article bemoaned the fact that *The World Gone Mad* was not much in the way of "box office assistance" for Calloway: *Variety*, 30 May 1933, 9.
[156] *Variety*, 15 August 1933, 50.
[157] *Variety*, 15 August 1933, 21.

Cheating Blondes

Cleveland*	5-13-33: Allen (**L**)	(3300; 25¢-35¢)	**$2900** ($26,000/$1800)
	* Bottom half of a d/f with Allied's *Shriek in the Night*		
New York[158]	6-1-33: Roxy (ind.)	(5856; 25¢-55¢)	**$15,000** ($55,190/$10,590)

Sing, Sinner, Sing

New York	8-19-33: Rialto	(2200; 40¢-65¢)	**$17,000** ($64,600/$4500)
	* 11-day run		
Los Angeles	8-26-33: Los Angeles	(3000; 15¢-25¢)	**$3000** (?)
San Francisco*	8-26-33: **Fox**	(5000; 10¢-35¢)	**$8000** ($70,000/$7500)
	* Top of a d/f with Monogram's *Return of Casey Jones*		
Detroit	9-17-33: **Fox**	(5100; 25¢-40¢)	**$32,300** (?)
	* Special price: 25¢-50¢		
Cleveland	10-7-33: Allen (**L**)	(3300; 20¢-40¢)	**$2950** (?)
Omaha*	12-17-33: World	(2500; 25¢-35¢)	**$5850** ($7500/$4500)
	* Bottom of d/f with MGM's *The Prizefighter and the Lady*		
Montreal*	12-23-33: Princess	(2272; 25¢-60¢)	**$5000** ($12,000/$5000)
	* Top of a d/f with MGM's *The Chief*		
Kansas City	12-31-33: Uptown	(2000; 25¢-40¢)	
	* New Year's Eve Show		
Portland*	2-17-34: Pantages	(1700; 25¢-35¢)	**$1900** (?)
	* Special ticket price of 15¢-25¢; bottom of a d/f with Principal's *Thunder Over Mexico*		
Buffalo*	7-28-34: Lafayette	(3300; 25¢)	**$5100** ($16,700/$4800)
	* Bottom of d/f with Columbia's *The Most Precious Thing In Life*		

Curtain at Eight

Los Angeles*	10-14-33: Los Angeles	(3000; 15¢-25¢)	**$3500** ($6200/$2200)
	* Top of a d/f with Blackton's *The Film Parade*		
San Francisco	10-21-33: **Fox**	(4000; 10¢-35¢)	**$8,000** ($15,500/$7000)
Seattle	10-21-33: Liberty	(2000; 10¢-25¢)	**$4250** (?)
Philadelphia	11-25-33: Keith's (**R**)	(2000; 25¢-40¢)	**$6000** ($11,500/$4500)
	* Same week, *Dinner at Eight* (MGM) is playing at the Chestnut, a first-run		
Portland	6-30-34: Pantages	(1700; 15¢-25¢)	**$1700** ($10,200/$1500)

[158] *Variety*, 27 June 1933, 10.

You Made Me Love You (State's Rights Dist. – British International Pictures)

Los Angeles	12-16-33: Filmarte	(850; 40¢-50¢)	**$3000** ($3950/$1800)
Montreal*	1-27-34: Palace	(2570; 25¢-75¢)	**$10,000** ($15,500/$9000)
	* Top of a d/f with Universal's *The Invisible Man*		
Portland*	2-10-34: Pantages	(1700; 25¢-35¢)	**$1800** ($10,200/**NL**)
	* Bottom of a d/f with Columbia's *Before Midnight*		
Cleveland*	3-3-34: Stillman	(1900; 25¢-35¢)	**$3900** ($9000/$2500)
	* Bottom of d/f with Paramount's *Four Frightened People*		
Buffalo*	3-17-34: Hollywood Theater (300; 25¢-40¢) **$1000** ($2600/$400)		
	3-24-34: Hollywood Theater (300; 25¢-40¢) **$800**		
	*Both weeks, bottom of a d/f with Principal's *Thunder Over Mexico*		

Charming Deceiver (State's Rights Dist. – British International Pictures)

New York	12-16-33: Roxy (Ind.) (5856; 25¢-55¢) **$17,100** ($55,190/$10,590)		
San Francisco*	1-6-34: **Fox**	(4600; 10¢-35¢)	**$12,000** ($15,500/$7000)
	* Top of a d/f with the independent *Under Secret Orders*		
Philadelphia	2-17-34: Keith's (**R)** (2000, 25¢-40¢)		**$7000** ($11,500/$4500)
	* 6-day run		
Cleveland*	3-24-34: Stillman	(1900; 25¢-35¢)	$**4200** ($9000/$2500)
	* Bottom of d/f with Paramount's *Six of a Kind*		
Kansas City	4-7-34: Royal (**P**)	(900; 25¢)	**$700** ($6500/$2000)
	* 3-day run		
Buffalo*	5-5-34: Lafayette	(3300; 25¢)	**$6500** ($16,700/$4800)
	* Bottom of d/f with Columbia's *No Greater Glory*		

The Sin of Nora Moran

New York	12-23-33: Strand (**W**) (2758; 25¢-$1.10)		**$6850** ($55,190/***NL**)
Cleveland*	2-17-34: Stillman	(1900; 25¢-35¢)	**$3500** ($9000/$2500)
	* Bottom of a d/f with Paramount's *Miss Fane's Baby Is Stolen*		
Philadelphia	3-10-34: Walnut	(1600; 25¢-50¢)	**$4500** (?)
Buffalo*	3-31-34: Lafayette	(3000; 25¢)	**$6500** ($16,700/$4800)
	* Bottom of a d/f with Universal's *I Like It That Way*		
Omaha*	3-31-34: World	(2500; 25¢-35¢)	**$3750** ($7500/$3750)
	* Bottom of a d/f with Chesterfield's *In the Money*		
Montreal*	7-21-34: Imperial	(1916; 25¢-50¢)	**$4000** ($6500/$1500)
	* Top of d/f with Monogram's *Manhattan Love Song*		
Portland*	7-21-34: Pantages	(1700; 15¢-25¢)	**$1600** ($10,200/$1500)
San Francisco*	8-18-34: **Fox**	(4600; 10¢-35¢)	**$4500** ($15,500/$4500)
	* Top of a d/f w/Gaumont's *Along Came Sally*		

I Spy (State's Rights Dist. – British International Pictures)

San Francisco*	2-17-34: **Fox**	(4000; 10¢-35¢)	**$10,400** ($15,500/$7000)
	* Top of a d/f with Monogram's *Beggars in Ermine*		
Portland	6-16-34: Pantages	(1700; 15¢-25¢)	**$1900** ($10,200/$1500)
Cleveland*	6-23-34: Lake (**W**)	(800; 30¢-40¢)	**$1500** ($10,000/**NL**)
	* Bottom of a d/f with First National's *The Merry Frinks*		

Unknown Blonde

Portland	9-1-34: Pantages	(1700; 15¢-25¢)	**$1700** ($10,200/$1700)

The Scarlet Letter

Boston	9-29-34: Boston	(2900; 25¢-50¢)	**$17,500** ($25,500/$11,000)
Philadelphia	11-17-34: Locust	(1300; 40¢-65¢)	**$2500** (13,000/2500)
	* 6-day run		

The Perfect Clue

Minneapolis	1-12-35: Palace (**P**)	(900; 15¢-25¢)	**$2500** (?)

She Had to Choose

Minneapolis	2-2-35: Palace (**P**)	(900; 15¢-25¢)	**$2000** (?)

Mutiny Ahead

Minneapolis	4-13-35: Palace (**P**)	(900; 15¢-25¢)	**$2,000** ($3000/$2000)

Motive for Revenge

Montreal	8-3-35: Imperial	(1914; 20¢-34¢)	**$3000** ($6500/$1500)

Appendix 3: Exhibitor Reports of Majestic Films, Culled from *The Motion Picture Herald*'s "What The Picture Did For Me" Column

All entries listed in chronological order, with issue and page number noted for reference.

Hearts of Humanity

2-4-33 (p. 52): Jackie Searl—One of the best kid pictures we have run. Fine feature for Friday and Saturday. Sure gets the kids in. We ran a cowboy picture with it and it went over with a bang. Played Jan. 21-22. Running time, 70 minutes.—Alyce Cornell, Galewood Theatre, Grand Rapids, Mich. Neighborhood patronage.

3-11-33 (p. 36): Jean Hersholt, Jackie Searle [sic], Claudia Dell—Don't fail to play this one. Everybody liked it. Played Sunday to good business.—Paul J. Oresic, Grace Theatre, Milwaukee, Wis. Neighborhood patronage.

3-25-33 (p. 38): Jean Hersholt, Jackie Searl—A mighty good picture. Acting and story good. If some of the big companies had this feature, it would be classed a special.—Bert Silver, Silver Family Theatre, Greenville, Mich. Town and country patronage.

2-3-34 (p. 69): Jean Hersholt, Jackie Searl—This picture has good story and cast, but poor directing and recording. Ran it one day, Wednesday, Jan. 10, and made almost enough to pay the usher. Running time, 65 minutes.—R.F. Russ, Camera Theatre, Stillwater, Okla. Small town and college patronage.

2-10-34 (p. 60): Jean Hersholt, Jackie Searle [sic]—One of the finest pictures it has ever been our privilege to run. Pictures of this type make friends for the theatre. Running time, 70 minutes. Played New Year's.—E. E. Warner, Opera House, Augusta, Wis. Small town and country patronage.

The Phantom Express

1-7-33 (p. 43): William Collier, Jr. and Sally Blane—This is a very good railroad melodrama. Everybody liked it, plenty of action and a good story. Both sound and photography fine. Played two days to very good business.—John Honthaner, Comet Theatre, Milwaukee, Wis. General patronage.

2-25-33 (p. 58): (1) Sally Blane, William Collier, Jr.—Very good for Saturdays. Has nice plot and keeps them guessing to the end. Sound very good. Business good.—L.V. Gucker, Dawn Theatre, Hartford City, Ind. General patronage.

(2) Sally Blane, William Collier, Jr.—Fair picture. Children liked it. Not much drawing power due to zero weather. Played Feb. 8-9. Running time, 70 minutes.—Alyce Cornell, Galewood Theatre, Grand Rapids, Mich. Neighborhood patronage.

3-11-33 (p. 36): (1) Sally Blane, William Collier, Jr., J. Farrell Macdonald—A mighty good action picture. Story good and splendid cast of old-timers. If one of the big companies had this one it would have been sold as a special.—Bert Silver, Silver Family Theatre, Greenville, Mich. Town and country patronage.

(2) William Collier, Jr., Sally Blane, J. Farrell Macdonald—One of the best railroad pictures produced. Played to splendid business on Sunday. Everyone well satisfied. Recording O.K.—Charles Washicheck, Pearl Theatre, Milwaukee, Wis. Neighborhood patronage.

4-15-33 (p. 46): Sally Blane, William Collier, Jr.—A railroad melodrama with a moderate amount of laughs and thrills. Fine performances rendered by Farrell Macdonald, Sally Blane, William Collier, Jr., and Hobart Bosworth, who fit their individual roles to perfection. This undoubtedly is the best independent action picture to date. The only criticism on this as usual is bad sound. Good end of week program. Played Mar. 22-23. Running time, 64 minutes.—Wm. Dabb, Lyric Theatre, Shenandoah, Pa. Small town patronage.

The Crusader

3-11-33 (p. 36): All star—A mighty good picture. Satisfied all that saw it.—Bert Silver, Silver Family Theatre, Greenville, Mich. Town and country patronage.

3-25-33 (p. 38): H.B. Warner, Evelyn Brent—Fair picture. Ned Sparks is the whole show. Otherwise an ordinary programmer. Sound rather poor. Acting at its best that could be done in this type of a picture. Played March 13-14. Running time, 65 minutes.—William Dabb, Lyric Theatre, Shenandoah, Pa.

4-1-33 (p. 34): Evelyn Brent, H.B. Warner—The title of this is misleading. It should be "A Wife's Secret" or "A Woman With a Past" or some such title. A well made independent picture, nicely cast, photographed, and good recording. Drawing power average.—J. E. Stocker, Myrtle Theatre, Detroit, Mich. General patronage.

9-9-33 (p. 42) [As *Should a Woman Tell?*]: Lew Cody, H.B. Warner, Evelyn Brent—Good enough for any theatre. Good names. Well handled and well acted. Will not appeal to children.—C. D. Armentrout, Iowa Theatre, Mason City, Iowa. General patronage.

Outlaw Justice

4-15-33 (p. 45-46): Jack Hoxie, Dorothy Gulliver—Ordinary western material with its usual array of riding, fighting, shooting and stealing. Hoxie is getting old but still remembered by enough western fans to produce a sizable audience. Gulliver sadly miscast in this one. Too many westerns produced on the same location with the same background from house to barn and a change of scenery would do justice. Played Mar.

31-Apr. 1. Running time, 55 minutes.—William Dabb, Lyric Theatre, Shenandoah, Pa. Small town patronage.

The Unwritten Law

4-22-33 (p. 53): Mary Brian, Lew Cody—Well, fellas, we're back in that grinding cycle again. This time the film is a story of betrayal and vengeance, motion picture studio as a background, with a supposedly new mystery angle. The majority of the cast have unconsequential [sic] roles and play them that way. Every possibility of the story has been taken advantage of, but no satisfactory results. Everything about the direction and producing, with the possible exception of the settings, has the brand of amateurism. The chief source of poor picture material lies in the fact that the producers of independent pictures have tried to pattern pictures after some successful feature released recently, giving the above results, with a few changes, of course. It's not like you, Majestic. It's best that you amend your methods. Just a fair picture. Played Apr. 10-11. Running time, 65 minutes.—William Dabb, Lyric Theatre, Shenandoah, Pa. Small town patronage.

4-29-33 (p. 38): Greta Nissen, Skeets Galhagher—A very good, entertaining picture.—Bert Silver, Silver Family Theater, Greenville, Mich. Town and country patronage.

9-23-33 (p. 45): Greta Nissen, Skeets Gallagher—Well cast and well acted. Possibly a little draggy in one or two spots.—C.D. Armentrout, Iowa Theatre, Mason City, Iowa. General patronage.

The Vampire Bat

7-29-33 (p. 52): Lionel Atwill, Fay Wray—Not so good. Just a picture. Played on Saturday program with "Haunted Gold," Warner.—Bert Silver, Silver Family Theatre, Greenville, Mich. General Patronage.

9-9-33 (p. 42): Lionel Atwill, Fay Wray—A good mystery story. Spooky, with plenty thrills and chills. Patrons well pleased. Played three days to excellent business. Admission matinee 15 cents, evening 20 cents.—C.D. Armentrout, Iowa Theatre, Mason City, Iowa. General patronage.

The World Gone Mad

9-16-33 (p. 58): Pat O'Brien, Evelyn Brent—Played on double bill with "Drum Taps" (World Wide) and gave a good Saturday show. A good action picture.—Bert Silver, Silver Family Theatre, Greenville, Mich. General patronage.

9-23-33 (p. 45): Pat O'Brien, Mary Brian, Neil Hamilton, Evelyn Brent—Good enough for any theatre. Some might consider a little strange. Pleased our patrons.—C.D. Armentrout, Iowa Theatre, Mason City, Iowa. General patronage.

2-10-34 (p. 60): Pat O'Brien, Evelyn Brent—A dandy picture. Just the right kind of a story at just the right time. Play it by all means. Your best people as well as the rougher element will say "It's a dandy picture." Running time, 80 minutes. Played Jan. 7.—E. E. Warner, Opera House, Augusta, Wis. Small town and country patronage.

9-1-1934 (p. 50): Pat O'Brien, Evelyn Brent—Fair picture, good cast. Something short in these pictures; what is it? Recording not so good either. Running time, 74 minutes. Played Aug. 10-11.—R. W. Corbin, Grand Theatre, Desloge, Mo. Small town patronage.

11-24-34 (p. 58): Pat O'Brien—This is a nice little picture and more entertainment than lots of the high price ones. Played Nov. 7-8. H.J. Stallings, Moon Theatre, Henderson, N.C. General patronage.

Sing, Sinner, Sing

10-21-33 (p. 51): Paul Lukas, Leila Hyams—A fair picture of a torch singer but nothing to rave about. It will get by in some spots. Recording not so good. Running time, 65 minutes. Played October 8-9-10.—William Dabb, Lyric Theatre, Shenandoah, Pa. General patronage.

Cheating Blondes

3-17-33 (p. 55): Thelma Todd—Well, this picture was terrible. Played it on a double bill and got out alive, but it is too bad we have to show this kind of picture. I could not find one redeeming feature in it. I wonder just how green they think we are out in the sticks.—Bert Silver, Silver Family Theatre, Greenville, Mich. Town and country patronage.

Curtain at Eight

6-9-34 (p. 68): Dorothy Mackaill—Fair, but nothing to brag about. Don't think any of the patrons will exactly dislike it. Running time, 68 minutes.—L.D. Brown, Queen Theatre, Brownwood, Tex. Small town patronage.

You Made Me Love You

6-9-1934 (p. 68): Thelma Todd—This is an English picture. Recording and dialogue are a little indistinct, but the story and action are very funny. It is a modern version of "The Taming of the Shrew." Played May 25-26.—Roy W. Adams, Mason Theatre, Mason, Mich. Small town patronage.

7-21-34 (p. 62): Thelma Todd—The funniest comedy feature I have run this year. It will take your customers for an evening of laughs that come from away [sic] down low. Played June 20-21.—M.D. Utterback, Lyric Theatre, Wellington, Kan. General patronage.

What Price Decency?

6-16-1934 (p. 100): Dorothy Burgess, Alan Hale—A poor story but will do for fill-in on program. Running time, 65 minutes.—L.D. Brown, Queen Theatre, Brownwood, Texas. General patronage.

Unknown Blonde

11-3-34 (p.62): [As *Broken Lives*] Edward Arnold—Had this picture been properly handled would have been good, but poorly put together. "Unknown Blonde" did not mean anything at the box office. Think "Broken Lives" a much better title. Running time, 67 minutes. Played Oct. 5-6.—R.W. Corbin, New Gran Theatre, Desloge, Mo. Small town patronage.

1-19-35 (p. 85): Edward Arnold, John Miljan, Barbara Barondess, Dorothy Revier—Too suggestive for Sunday, but good for adults any time. Played very late but had good print and good audience comment. Played December 28.—Carnett Stancil, Opera House, Ft. Payne, Ala. Small town patronage.

The Scarlet Letter

11-17-34 (p. 67): Colleen Moore, Hardie Albright, Henry B. Walthall—An old classic, well done. A tieup with the schools would do well to help put this over, especially with the English departments. Majestic may well be proud of their work on this one. Business satisfying.—Antonio C. Balducci, Avon Theatre, Canastota, N.Y. General patronage.

3-30-35 (p. 61-62): Colleen Moore—Did a nice business on this picture account of so many having read the book and to these who had read the book, the picture satisfied. To the others, it was a disappointment. Recording poor. Played January 31-February 1.—Henry Sparks, Grand Theatre, Cooper, Texas. Small town and rural patronage.

Gun Law

12-8-34 (p. 74): Jack Hoxie—A so-so western. Hasn't much action, but it will get by. Running time, 50 minutes. Played November 16-17.—H.J. Stallings, Moon Theatre, Henderson, N.C. General patronage.

The Morning After

8-25-34 (p. 50): Ben Lyon—The worst picture that Ben Lyon has ever shown in. Of course, it isn't his fault. The picture has a poor story and is terrible in general. Running time, 62 minutes.—L.D. Brown, Queen Theatre, Brownwood, Texas. General patronage.

1-19-35 (p. 84-85): Ben Lyon, Sally Eilers—Although my patrons pass up English made pictures, this is an excellent picture, good sound and photography. I just couldn't convince 'em of its merits. Running time, 59 minutes. Played December 19.—Garnett Stancil, Opera House, Ft. Payne, Ala. Small town patronage.

Night Alarm

2-16-35 (p. 69): Bruce Cabot, Judith Allen, H.B. Warner—Played this a[s] part of a double bill on Bargain Nights and barely drew film rental. And they sold it to me as a special. The only thing special about it was the rental. A fairly good action picture but have seen a lot better for less money. Running time, 65 minutes. Played January 10-11. M.S. Porter, Orpheum Theatre, Nelsonville, Ohio. Small town and rural patronage.

Trouble Busters

2-16-35 (p. 69): Jack Hoxie, Lane Chandler—Good western; fair photography and sound. Played January 12.—Garnett Stancil, Opera House, Fort Payne, Ala. Small town patronage.

Charming Deceiver

6-1-35 (p. 70): Constance Cummings, Frank Lawton—This was a picture made in England and has a very decided English accent. The picture was clean and well done. Very fine recording. Everybody liked it and asked us to play more of that kind as it was different from the average cinema. Running time, 65 minutes. Played May 17-18.—Albert Hufferan, Owl Theatre, Grand Rapids, Mich. Special patronage.

Filmography

Majestic Pictures

Unless otherwise noted, all films:
Released by Majestic Pictures Corporation. Black and white. Aspect ratio: academy (1.37:1). Sound: RCA Photophone.

Production information culled from Michael R. Pitts, *Poverty Row Studios, 1929-1940* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997), 225-238, and the AFI online catalog. In the case of discrepancy, I have considered AFI the authoritative source.

Films listed in order of release date. Release dates are approximate; I have recorded here the earliest reported date, whether found in secondary sources or through my own research, but in no case did a film premiere *after* the indicated date.

(*) Indicates that the film is available on home video. The author screened all available films.

Harry Sherman and Jack Trop as Producers

Today 1 November 1930. Producers: Harry Sherman and Jack D. Trop. Director: William Nigh. Screenplay: Seton I. Miller, based on the play *Today* by Abraham Schomer and George H. Broadhurst (New York, 6 October 1913). Director of Photography: James Wong Howe. Art Direction: Al D'Agostino. Recording Engineer: Lester E. Tope. Assistant Director: Melville Shyer. Production Manager: Walter Ford Tilford. Production Assistant: Leonard Ross. Cast: Conrad Nagel (Fred Warner), Catherine Dale Owen (Eve Warner), Sarah Padden (Emma Warner), John Maurice Sullivan (Henry Warner), Judith Vosselli (Marian Garland), Julia Swayne Gordon (Mrs. Farringdon), William Bailey (Gregory), Edna Marion (Gloria Vernon), Robert Thornby (Telka), Drew Demarest (Pierre). Aspect ratio: 1.2:1. 80 minutes.

Phil Goldstone as Head of Production

****The Phantom Express*** 15 September 1932. Producers: Irving C. Franklin and Donald M. Stoner. Director: Emory Johnson. Scenario: Emory Johnson and Laird Doyle. Director of Photography: Ross Fisher. Art Director: Mack D'Agostino. Editor: S. Roy Luby. Recording Engineer: L.E. Tope. Production Manager: Robert Ross.
Cast: William Collier, Jr. (Bruce Harrington), Sally Blane (Carolyn Nolan), J. Farrell MacDonald (Smoky Nolan), Hobart Bosworth (President Harrington), Axel Axelson (Axel), Lina Basquette (Betty), Eddie Phillips (Dick), Robert Ellis (rival owner), Claire McDowell (Mrs. Nolan), David Rollins (Jack Nolan), Tom O'Brien (telegraph operator), Huntley Gordon (rival company president), Carl Stockdale (chief radio operator), Alice Dahl (Miss Calhoun), Brandy Kline, Jack Pennick (thugs), Alan Forrest, Jack Mower, Tom Wilson, Jack Trent, Bob Littlefield. 70 minutes.

Gold 15 September 1932. Producer: Henry L. Goldstone. Director: Otto Brower. Screenplay: W. Scott Darling. Story: John Francis Natteford. Continuity: Scott Darling. Photography: Arthur Reed and Charles Marshall. Editor: S. Roy Luby. Sound: Earl Crain. Cast: Jack Hoxie (Jack Tarrant), Alice Day (Marion), Hooper Atchley (Kraemer), Matthew Betz, Lafe McKee (Jeff Sellers), Jack Clifford, Tony London, Robert Kortman, Jack Byron, Hank Bell, Jack Kirk, Harry Todd, Archie Ricks, Dynamite the Horse (Dynamite). 58 minutes.

Outlaw Justice Working title ***Alias Panamint Jack***. 1 October 1932. Producer: Henry L. Goldstone. Director: Armand Schaefer. Screenplay: Oliver Drake. Story: W. Scott Darling. Camera: William Nobles.
Cast: Jack Hoxie, Dorothy Gulliver, Donald Keith, Charles King, Chris Pin Martin, Jack Trent, Walter Shumway, Tom London, Kermit Maynard, Dynamite the Horse. 61 minutes.

Hearts of Humanity 21 September 1932. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Christy Cabanne. Screenplay: Edward T. Lowe. Story: Olga Printzlau. Director of Photography: Charles Stumar. Art Director: Jack Schultz. Editor: Don Lindberg. Music: Brown and Spencer.
Cast: Jean Hersholt (Sol Bloom), Jackie Searl (Shandy), J. Farrell MacDonald (Tom O'Hara), Claudia Dell (Ruth Sneider), Charles Delaney (Tom Varney), Lucille LaVerne (Mrs. Sneider), Dick Wallace (Joey Bloom), George Humbert (Tony), Betty Jane Graham (Hilda), John Vosburgh (Dave Haller), Tom McGuire (Mr. Wells). 65 minutes.

The Crusader Also released as ***Should a Woman Tell?*** 1 October 1932. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Frank Strayer. Scenario: Edward T. Lowe, from the play by Wilson Collison. Director of Photography: Ira Morgan. Art Director: Daniel Hall. Editor: Otis Garrett. Sound recording: Earl Crain.
Cast: Evelyn Brent (Tess Brandon), H.B Warner (Phillip Brandon), Lew Cody (Jimmy Dale), Ned Sparks (Eddie Crane), Walter Byron (Joe Carson), Marceline Day (Marcia Brandon), John St. Polis (Robert Henley), Arthur Hoyt (Oscar Shane), Ara Haswell (Madge), Joseph Girard (Corrigan), Syd Saylor (Harry Smaltz), Lloyd Ingraham (Alton). 78 minutes.

The Unwritten Law 15 November 1932. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Christy Cabanne. Screenplay: Edward T. Lowe. Story: John Krafft. Director of Photography: Ira Morgan. Editor: Otis Garrett. Recording Engineer: Earl Crain.
Cast: Greta Nissen (Fifi La Rue), Skeets Gallagher (Pete Brown), Mary Brian (Ruth Evans), Louise Fazenda (Lulu Potts), Lew Cody (Roger Morgan), Hedda Hopper (Jean Evans), Purnell Pratt (Stephen McBain), Theodore Von Eltz (Val Lewis), Mischa Auer (Abu Zeyd), Arthur Rankin (Frank Woods), Wilfred Lucas (Captain Kane), Ernie Adams (Ed Riley), Harold Foshay (Steward), Betty Tyree (script girl). 70 minutes.

Law and Lawless 30 November 1932. Producer: Henry L. Goldstone. Director: Armand Schaefer. Screenplay: Oliver Drake. Camera: William Nobles. Editor: S. Roy Luby. Sound Engineer: Earl N. Crane.
Cast: Jack Hoxie (Montana), Hilda Moreno (Rosita Lopez), Julian Rivero (Pancho Gonzales), Yakima Canutt (Tex Barnes), Jack Mower, Wally Wales (Buck Daggett), J. Frank Glendon, Edith Fellows (Betty Kelly), Bob Burns, Helen Gibson (Molly), Fred Burns (Blane), Alma Rayford, Joe de la Cruz, Elvira Sanchez, William Quilan, Al Taylor, Dixie Starr, Slim Whitaker, Hank Bell, Ben Corbett, Gracia Granada and his Orchestra, Dynamite the Horse. 62 minutes.

The Vampire Bat Re-released as ***Blood Sucker*** or ***Forced to Sin***. 20 January 1933. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Frank Strayer. Screenplay: Edward T. Lowe. Director of Photography: Ira Morgan. Art Director: Daniel Hall. Editor: Otis Garrett. Sound Engineer: Dick Tyler.
Cast: Lionel Atwill (Dr. Otto von Niemann), Fay Wray (Ruth Bertin), Melvyn Douglas (Karl Brettscheider), Maude Eburne (Gussie Schnappman), George E. Stone (Kringen), Dwight Frye (Herman Gleib), Robert Frazer (Emil Borst), Rita Carlisle (Martha Mueller), Lionel Belmore (Gustav Schoen), William V. Mong (Sauer), Stella Adams (Georgiana), Harrison Greene (Weingarten), Paul Weigel (Holdstadt), William Humphrey (Haupt), Fern Emmett (Gertrude). 71 minutes.

Via Pony Express 6 February 1933. Producer: Henry L. Goldstone. Director: Lew Collins. Story and Dialogue: Oliver Drake. Camera: William Nobles. Editor S. Roy Luby. Sound Design: Homer Ackerman.
Cast: Jack Hoxie (Bud Carson), Marceline Day, Matthew Betz, Julian Rivero, Doris Hill, Joseph Gerard, Charles French, Lane Chandler (Bud Carson), Yakima Canutt, Bill Quinlan, Ben Corbett. 62 minutes.

What Price Decency? 1 March 1933. Produced by Equitable Pictures, a subsidiary of Majestic. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Arthur Gregor. Screenplay and Dialogue: Arthur Gregor, from his play (production undetermined). Director of Photography: Chester Lyons. Editor: Otis Garrett. Sound Engineer: Earl Crain.
Cast: Dorothy Burgess (Norma), Alan Hale (Klaus Van Leyden), Walter Byron (Tom O'Neil), Val Duran (Pimo), Henry Durant (Matizzi), Zeppo the Monkey. 67 minutes.

The World Gone Mad Working title: ***The Public Be Damned***. 1 April 1933. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Christy Cabanne. Screenplay: Edward T. Lowe. Director of Photography: Ira Morgan. Art Director: Daniel Hall. Editor: Otis Garrett. Sound Engineer: Dean C. Daily.
Cast: Pat O'Brien (Andy Terrell), Evelyn Brent (Carlotta/Nina Lamont), Neil Hamilton (Lionel Houston), Mary Brian (Diana Cromwell), Louis Calhern (Christopher Bruno), J. Carrol Naish (Raymond/Salvatore), Buster Phelps (Ralph Henderson), Richard Tucker (Graham Gaines), John St. Polis (Grover Cromwell), Geneva Mitchell (Evelyn Henderson) Wallis Clark (Avery Henderson), Huntley Gordon (Osborne), Max Davidson (Cohen), Joe Girard (Nichols), Lloyd Ingraham (Baird), Inez Courtney (Susan Bibens), Hooper Atchley (Harley Kemp), Syd Saylor (Collins). 80 minutes.

Cheating Blondes 1 April 1933. Produced by Equitable Pictures, a subsidiary of Majestic. Director: Joseph Levering. Assistant Director: J.A. Duffy. Adaptation and Dialogue: Lewis R. Foster and Islin Auster. Director of Photography: James S. Brown, Jr. Editor: Dwight Caldwell. Music Director: Lee Zahler. Recording Engineer: Charles Franklin.
Cast: Thelma Todd (Anne Merric/Elaine Manners), Ralf Harolde (Lawson Rolt), Inez Courtney (Polly), Milton Wallis ("Mike" Goldfish), Mae Busch (Mrs. Jennie Carter), Earl McCarthy (Gilbert Frayle), William Humphries (city editor), Dorothy Gulliver (Lita), Brooks Benedict (Jim Carter), Eddie Fetherstone (Mitch), Ben Savage (Ferdie). 66 minutes.

Gun Law 15 April 1933. Producer: Henry L. Goldstone. Director: Lew Collins. Story and Dialogue: Oliver Drake. Camera: William Nobles. Editor: S. Roy Luby. Sound Engineer; Earl Crain.
Cast: Jack Hoxie (Sonora Kid), Betty Boyd (Nita Hammond), Mary Carr (Mother Andrews), Paul Fix (Tony Andrews), Harry Todd (Black Jack), J. Frank Glendon (Nevada), Edmond Cobb, Dick Boteiller, Jack Kirk, Horace B. Carpenter, Ben Corbett, William T. Burt, Robert Burns, Otto Lederer, Archie Ricks, Dynamite the Horse. 62 minutes.

Trouble Busters 15 May 1933. Producer: Henry L. Goldstone. Director: Lew Collins. Story and Dialogue: Oliver Drake. Camera: William Nobles. Editor: S. Roy Luby. Sound: Earl Crain.
Cast: Jack Hoxie (Tex Blaine), Lane Chandler (Jim Perkins), Kaye Edward (Mary Ann Perkins). Harry Todd (Skinny Cassidy), Ben Corbett (Windy Wallace), Charles Whittaker (Big Bill Jarvis), William T. Burt (Dan Allen), Roger Williams (Sheriff), Dynamite the Horse (Dynamite). 55 minutes.

Sing Sinner Sing Re-issued as ***Clip Joint*** or ***Queen of Joy***. 1 August 1933. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Howard Christy. Screenplay: Edward T. Lowe, from the play by Wilson Collison. Director of Photography: Ira Morgan. Art Director: Ralph Oberg. Editor: Otis Garrett. Music Supervisor: Abe Meyer. Orchestra Director: S.K. Wineland. Sound engineer: Dean C. Daily.
Cast: Paul Lukas (Phil Carida), Leila Hyams (Lela Larson), Donald Dillaway (Ted Rendon), Ruth Donnelly (Margaret Flannigan), George E. Stone (Spats), Joyce Compton (Gwen), Jill Dennett (Sadie), Arthur Hoyt (Uncle Homer), Walter McGrail (Louis), Gladys Blake (Cecily Gordon), Arthur Houseman (Jerry), Edgar Norton, John St. Polis (James Parks), Stella Adams (Ann Emily), Pat O'Malley (Conley), Walter Brennan, William Humphrey. 74 minutes.

Curtain at Eight 1 October 1933. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: E. Mason Hopper. Assistant Director: J.H. McCloskey. Screenplay: Edward T. Lowe, from the novel *The Back Stage Mystery* by Octavus Roy Cohen. Photography: Ira Morgan. Art Director: Ralph Oberg. Editor: Earl Crain. Sound: Earl Crain.

Cast: Dorothy Mackaill (Lola Cresmer), C. Aubrey Smith (Jim Hanvey), Paul Cavanagh (Wylie Thornton), Sam Hardy (Marty Gallagher), Marion Shilling (Anice Cresmer), Natalie Moorhead (Alma Jenkins), Russell Hopton (Terry Mooney), Hale Hamilton (Major Manning), Ruthelma Stevens (Doris Manning), Jack Mulhall (Carey Weldon), Sid Saylor, Herman Bing, Dot Farley, William Humphries, Jane Keckley, Cornelius O'Keefe, Arthur Hoyt, Mathew Betz, Joe Girard. 74 minutes.

Gigolettes of Paris 6 October 1933. Produced by Equitable Pictures, a subsidiary of Majestic. Director: Alphonse Martell. Story: Alphonse Martell, with additional dialogue by Mary Flannery. Photography: Henry Cronjager and Herman Schopp. Art Director: Mack D'Agostino. Filmed at Tec-Art Studios. Editing: Thomas Persons and Otis Garrett. Sound Recording: L.E. Tope. Production manager: J.E. Petral.
Cast: Madge Bellamy (Suzanne Ricord), Gilbert Roland (Antoine "Tony" Ferand), Natalie Moorhead, Theodore von Eltz (Albert Valraine), Molly O'Day (Paulette), Henry Kolker (police interrogator), Paul Porcasi, Albert Coti, F. Schumann-Heink, Maude Truax, Lester New, Robert Bolder. 64 minutes.

The Charming Deceiver 9 December 1933. Produced 1933 in Great Britain as ***Heads We Go*** by British International Pictures (BIP), distributed there by Wardour Films. Distributed in the United States by Majestic Pictures. Director: Monty Banks. Screenplay: Victor Kendall. Story: Fred Thompson.
Cast: Constance Cummings (Betty Smith/Dorothy Kay), Frank Lawton (Toby Tyrrell), Binnie Barnes (Lil Pickering), Gus McNaughton (Otis Dove), Iris Ashley (Singer), Claude Hulbert (Reggie). 86 minutes (UK) / 72 minutes (US).

****The Sin of Nora Moran*** Working title: ***The Woman in the Chair***. 13 December 1933. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Phil Goldstone. Assistant Director: J.H. McClosky. Screenplay: Frances Hyland, from the play *Burnt Offerings* by Willis Maxwell Goodhue. Director of Photography: Ira Morgan. Art Director: Ralph Oberg. Editor: Otis Garrett. Music Supervisor: Abe Meyer. Additional music: Heinz Roemheld (uncredited) Orchestra Director: S.K. Wineland. Sound Engineer: Earl Crain.
Cast: Zita Johann (Nora Moran), Cora Sue Collins (Nora Moran as a child), Alan Dinehart (John Grant), Paul Cavanagh (Dick Crawford), Claire DuBrey (Edith Crawford), John Miljian (Paulino), Henry B. Walthall (Father Ryan), Sarah Padden (Mrs. Watts), Ann Brody, Harvey Clark, Sid Saylor, Aggie Herring (Mrs. Noran), Otis Harlan (Mr. Moran). 65 minutes.

Unknown Blonde Working title: ***Age of Indiscretion***. Alternate title: ***Broken Lives***. 23 April 1934. Producer: Phil Goldstone. Director: Hobart Henley. Screenplay: Leonard Fields. Screenplay: Leonard Fields and David Silverstein, from the novel *Collusion* by Theodore D. Irwin. Director of Photography: Ira Morgan. Art Director: Ralph Oberg. Editor: Otis Garrett. Sound Engineer: Louis Myers.
Cast: Edward Arnold (Frank Rodie), Barbara Barondess (Mrs. Sari Van Brunt, Jr.), Barry Norton (Bob Parker), John Miljian (Raymond F. Wilson), Dorothy Revier (Helen Rodie Wilson), Leila Bennett (the maid), Walter Catlett (publicity man), Helen Jerome Eddy (Miss Adams), Claude Gillingwater (Papa Van Brunt, Sr.), Arletta Duncan (Judith Rodie

Parker), Maidel Turner (Mrs. Parker), Franklin Pangborn (male correspondent), Esther Muir (Mrs. Vail), Clarence Wilson (Max Keibel), Arthur Hoyt (Mr. Vail). 67 minutes.

You Made Me Love You 31 May 1934. Produced 1933 in Great Britain by British International Pictures (BIP), distributed there by Wardour Films. Distributed in the United States by Majestic Pictures. Director: Monty Banks. Screenplay: Frank Launder. Story: Stanley Lupino. Director of Photography: John J. Cox. Editor: A.S. Bates.
Cast: Stanley Lupino (Tom Daly), Thelma Todd (Pamela Berne), John Loder (Harry Berne), Gerald Rawlinson (Jerry), James Carew (Oliver Berne), Charles Mortimer (Mr. Daly), Hugh E. Wright (Father), Charlotte Parry (Mother), Arthur Rigby (Brother), Syd Crossley (Bleak), Monty Banks (Taxi Driver). 70 minutes (UK) / 65 minutes (US).

Larry Darmour Productions

The Morning After 27 August 1934. Produced 1933 in Great Britain as ***I Spy*** by British International Pictures (BIP), distributed there by Wardour Films. Distributed in the United States by Majestic Pictures. Producer: Walter C. Mycroft. Director: Allan Dwan. Screenplay: Allan Dwan and Arthur Woods. Story: Fred Thompson. Director of Photography: James Wilson. Music: Sidney Barnes and Joseph Gilbert.
Cast: Sally Eilers (Thelma Coldwater), Ben Lyon (Wally Sawyer), Harry Tate (George), H.F. Maltby (Herr Doctor), Harold Warender (NBG), Andrews Engelmann (CO), Dennis Hoey (MNT), Henry Victor (KPO), Marcelle Rogez (Girl). 62 minutes.

****The Scarlet Letter*** 14 September 1934. Produced by Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic, distributed by Majestic. PCA Certificate no. 158. Passed by the National Board of Review. Producer: Larry Darmour. Director: Robert G. Vignola. Assistant Director: J.A. Duffy. Screenplay: Leonard Fields and David Silverstein, from the novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Director of Photography: James S. Brown, Jr. Settings: Frank Dexter. Editor: Charles Harris. Sound Engineer: Thomas J. Lambert. Music: Heinz Roemheld.
Cast: Colleen Moore (Hester Prynne), Hardie Albright (Arthur Dimmesdale), Henry B. Walthall (Roger Prynne / Roger Chillingworth), Cora Sue Collins (Pearl Prynne), Alan Hale (Bartholemew Hockings), Virginia Howell (Abigail Crakstone), William T. Kent (Sampson Goodfellow), William Farnum (Governor Bellingham), Betty Blythe (Innkeeper), Al C. Henderson (Master Wilson), Jules Cowles (Beadle), Miche Rentschler (Digerie Crakstone), Shirley Jean Rickert (Humility Crakstone), Flora Finch (Faith Bartle), Dorothea Wolbert (Mistress Allerton), Iron Eyes Cody (Indian Guide). 70 minutes.

****She Had to Choose*** 18 September 1934. Produced by Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic, distributed by Majestic. PCA Certificate no. 170. Producer: Larry Darmour. Director: Ralph Cedar. Assistant Director: J.A. Duffy. Original Story by Mann Page and Izola Forrester. Screenplay: Houston Branch. Director of Photography: James S. Brown, Jr. Editor: Charles Harris. Sound Engineer: Tom Lambert.
Cast: Larry ‘Buster” Crabbe (Bill Cutler), Isabel Jewell (Sally Bates), Sally Blane (Clara Berry)< Regis Toomey (Jack Berry), Maidel Turner (Mrs. Cutler), Fuzzy Night (Wally),

Arthur Stone (Pop), Edward Gargan (Higgins), Huntley Gordon (Attorney), Wallis Clark (District attorney), Kenneth Howell (Announcer), Eddie Featherston (Hold-up man #1), Max Wagner (Hold-up man #2). 65 minutes.

Night Alarm 22 September 1934. Produced by Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic, distributed by Majestic. PCA Certificate no. 251. Producer: Larry Darmour. Director: Spencer Gordon Bennet. Screenplay: Earle Snell. Story: Jack Stanley. Director of Photography: James S. Brown, Jr. Editor: Dwight Caldwell. Sound Engineer: Tom Lambert. Stunts: George Gray.
Cast: Bruce Cabot (Hal Ashby), Judith Allen (Helen Smith), H.B. Warner (Henry B. Smith), Sam Hardy (Caldwell), Betty Blythe (Mrs. Van Dusen), Fuzzy Knight (Entertainer), Tom Hanlon (Vincent Van Dusen), Harold Minjir (Mosley), Harry Holman (Mayor), John Bleifer (Dexter). 65 minutes.

Mutiny Ahead 1 March 1935. Produced by Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic, distributed by Majestic. PCA certificate no. 598. Passed by the National Board of Review. Producer: Larry Darmour. Director: Tommy Atkins. Screenplay: Stuart Anthony. Director of Photography: Herbert Kirkpatrick. Settings: Frank Dexter. Editor: Dwight Caldwell. Music Director: Lee Zahler. Sound Recording: Thomas Lambert.
Cast: Neil Hamilton (Kent Brewster), Kathleen Burke (Carol Bixby), Leon Ames (McMurtrie), Reginald Barlow (Captain Martin), Noel Francis (Mimi), Paul Fix (Teeter), Dick Curtis (Steve), Ray Turner (Sassafras), Katherine Jackson (Glory Bell), Maidel Turner (Mrs. Vanderpool), Joe Young (Darby), Edward Earle (Barnes), Booth Howard (Gambler), Matthew Betz (Dixon), Dick Dye, Vic Alexander. 68 minutes.

The Perfect Clue 10 Mar 1935. Produced by Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic, distributed by Majestic. PCA Certificate no. 437. Passed by the National Board of Review. Producer: Larry Darmour. Director: Robert G. Vignola. Assistant Director: J.A. Duffy. Screenplay: Albert De Mond, from the story "Lawless Honeymoon" by Lolita Ann Westman. Additional dialogue by Donald H. Brown and Ralph Ceder. Director of Photography: Herbert Kirkpatrick. Settings: Frank Dexter. Editor: Dwight Caldwell. Sound Recording: Thomas Lambert.
Cast: David Manners (David Mannering), Skeets Gallagher (Ronnie Van Zandt), Dorothy Libaire (Mona Stewart), Betty Blythe (Ursula Chesebrough), William P. Carleton (Jerome Stewart), Raif Harolde (Sid Barkley), Ernie Adams (Butch Carter), Robert Gleckler (Delaney), Frank Darien (Stationmaster), Charles C. Wilson (District Attorney), Jack Richardson (Simms), Pat O'Malley (Police officer). 69 minutes.

Motive for Revenge Working title: ***Thunder in the Streets***. 25 May 1935. Produced by Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic, distributed by Majestic. PCA Certificate no. 693. Producer: Larry Darmour. Director: Burt Lynwood. Screenplay: Stuart Anthony. Director of Photography: Herbert Kirkpatrick. Settings: Frank Dexter. Editor: Dwight Caldwell. Music: Lee Zahler. Sound Recording: Thomas Lambert.
Cast: Donald Cook (Barry Webster), Irene Hervey (Muriel Webster), Doris Lloyd (Mrs. Fleming), Edwin Maxwell (William King), William L'Estrange Millman (Milroy), Russell Simpson (McAllister), John Kelly (Larkin), Edwin Argus (Red), Billy West

(Ray), Wheeler Oakman (Doane), Frank LaRue (Warden), Fern Emmett (Mrs. Kenilworthy), Dorothea Wolbert (Annie). 65 minutes.

Struggle for Life 18 June 1935. Documentary produced by Foy Productions, Ltd. (British), distributed by Majestic. Producer-Director:Major C. Court Treatt. Camera: Errol Herds. Music: Adolph Tandler. 56 minutes.

Reckless Roads Working title: ***Street of Shadows***. 11 July 1935. Produced by Larry Darmour Productions/Majestic, distributed by Majestic. PCA Certificate no. 943. Producer: Larry Darmour. Director: Burt Lynwood. Screenplay: Betty Burbridge. Story: L.E. Heifetz and H.A. Carlisle. Camera: James S. Brown, Jr. Editor: Dwight Caldwell. Music Director: Lee Zahler.
Cast: Judith Allen (Edith Adams), Regis Toomey (Speed Demming), Lloyd Hughes (Fred Truslow), Ben Alexander (Wade Adams), Louise Carter (Mrs. Adams), Gilbert Emery (Amos Truslow), Matthew Betz, Dorothea Wolbert, Kit Guard. 66 minutes.

Other Films Cited

50 Million Frenchmen. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. Warner Bros., 1931.

Age of Indiscretion. Directed by Edward Ludwig. MGM, 1935.

Blessed Event. Directed by Roy Del Ruth. Warner Bros., 1932.

Citizen Kane. Directed by Orson Welles. RKO, 1941.

Detour. Directed by Edgar G. Ulmer. Producers Releasing Corporation, 1945.

Five Star Final. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Warner Bros./First National., 1931.

Flesh and the Devil. Directed by Clarence Brown. Paramount, 1926.

Frankenstein. Directed by James Whale. Universal, 1931.

The Front Page. Directed by Lewis Milestone. United Artists, 1931.

Gentlemen of the Press. Directed by Millard Webb. Paramount, 1929.

Gold Diggers of 1933. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Warner Bros., 1933.

Grand Hotel. Directed by Edmund Goulding. MGM, 1932.

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