


## Article

# The Image of Women Architects in Films, 1912–1943: New Careers and Stereotyped Femininities

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**Abstract:** Contrary to what might be expected, portrayals of women architects in films can be found as far back as the early decades of the twentieth century. In this article, the authors review a few films released between 1912 and 1943 in which one of the characters is a woman architect, focusing on three of them: *Dr. Monica* (1934), *Woman Chases Man* (1937) and *The Lamp Still Burns* (1943). The article explores the ways in which architecture was used by screenwriters and directors as a suitable vehicle to portray the ‘new woman’, as well as the conflicts that arise when a woman practices a traditionally male profession. It analyses the differences and limitations of these depictions, and the stereotypes regarding femininity that permeated these works of fiction.

**Keywords:** cinema; gender media; women architects; gender stereotypes; modern women

## 1. Introduction: The Road to Roark

It is probably unquestionable that the filmic image of the modern architect most ingrained in our collective imaginary is that of Gary Cooper as Howard Roark in King Vidor’s *The Fountainhead* (1949) (Baxter 1976). An adaptation of Ayn Rand’s 1943 novel of the same name, the film, as well as the book, extolled heroism, self-confidence and professional success as the main goals in life. In both, Roark, the ‘filmic architect’ that has certainly enjoyed the widest scholarly attention, is presented as a young male architect whose ‘human virtue resides in individualism and in the proper appreciation and development of the ego, regardless of immediate consequences to others’ (Saint 1983). Iconic and historically significant as this early portrayal may be, the presence of characters associated with the profession of architecture can, however, be traced back to the early years of the medium. That is the case with films such as the British *The Amateur Architect* (Fitzhamon 1905) and the French *L’apprenti architecte* (Gambart 1908)<sup>1</sup>. Their comedic tone would inspire similar films starring other slapstick pioneers, such as *Calino architecte*, (Durand 1911), translated into English as *Calino as Mason*—with Clément Mégé playing the titular character, or *Polycarpe Commis d’Architecte* (Servaès 1913), with Charles Servaès as Polycarpe<sup>2</sup>. Both belonged to the long list of characters from the silent era—such as *Tontolini* (Ferdinand Guillaume) in Italy, or *Ridolini* (Larry Semon) in the USA—who starred in short films often practicing an array of different professions with usually disastrous and comical results. The profession of architecture provided in these cases a pretext for the physical gag, typically happening during the construction of a building.

Slapstick was not the only venue for architects to appear in films, though. All throughout the silent era, actors played architects in an ample variety of fashions: in comedies and drama films, in starring roles and as supporting characters, or both at a time in the same film. From the 1900s to the end of the 1920s alone we can count well over 80 films featuring characters playing architectural roles. The vast majority were American films, with some entries from the UK, France, and Germany, and a couple of examples from Czechoslovakia.



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In most of them, though, we find characters who are architects in name only. That is, they are seldom shown performing architectural duties. We would have to wait till the 1930s to watch architect characters sitting at their drafting tables, working in architectural offices or visiting the construction site.

Similarly, and contrary to what we might suppose, female leads practicing as architects, or architects of sorts, also date back to the beginnings of cinema. This article examines some films, released between 1912 and 1943, where a woman practicing architecture is featured as a main character. A little later, in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir would state that, 'becoming a woman' requires to take part in the 'mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity' (De Beauvoir [1949] 2010, p. 23). Being a woman and practicing a historically male profession entails, as we will see, a series of tensions that these films exploit for the benefit of fiction.

## 2. The 1910s and the 1920s: Slapstick, 'Nasty Women', and Women in Jobs

In the early decades of the 20th century, comedic silent films featured, together with their male counterparts, quite a few 'nasty women', as Margaret Hennefeld christened them after Donald Trump's unfortunate interruption during his 2016 Presidential Debate with Hilary Clinton (Hennefeld 2018, 2019; Massa 2017). Among these we could find several 'queens of slapstick' (and disaster), such as the 'Tilly Sisters' (Alma Taylor and Chrissie White) in the UK, Lea (Lea Giunchi) and Gigetta (Gigetta Morano) in Italy, or Léontine (translated as 'Betty' in the Anglo-Saxon market), Mistinguett (Jeanne Florentine Bourgeois) and Rosalie, first, and then Petronille (Marie Marguerite Sarah Duhamel), in France. In the latter group belonged the now forgotten but prolific actress commonly known as *Little Chryisia*, who would find international success as *Cunégonde* (Lux Company 1911–1913), known as *Alma* in Germany, and *Caroline*, in the UK, and as *Arabella* in the US (Hennefeld 2018), where new films by James Read would add to the *Cunégonde* series in 1915<sup>3</sup>. As with Calino and Polycarpe before her, *Cunégonde* also tried her hand at building, even if in an informal fashion, in the unfortunately lost short film *Cunégonde Architecte* (1912), which is perhaps the first film in which a female character can be found practicing the profession of architecture in any form (Loné 1994).

Re-released as *A Modern Architect* under the *Arabella* identity on 14 February 1913 in the United States, the film shows the protagonist in the middle of building a house for which she had hired an architect<sup>4</sup>. Soon, however, she loses patience and fires him, deciding to manage the construction herself. Her impatience leads her to drive her workers to build at a faster pace, with surprising results: on the one hand, according to the programme, 'the result is certainly original', however, its solidity leaves much to be desired. At the inauguration party, due to the enormous number of guests, the floor collapses and everyone falls through the living room into the basement. As is *de rigueur*, the injured and outraged guests pummel the hostess in slapstick fashion<sup>5</sup>.

It is clear that *Cunégonde*, despite the film's title, was not, strictly speaking, an architect, but one of those 'nasty women [who] defied their domestic constraints by exploding the kitchen, shattering the dinnerware, dismembering their limbs to revolutionize their labor, tormenting their employers with feminist practical jokes and gleefully transgressing sexual and racial taboos' (Hennefeld and Horak 2017). Domestic destruction was, therefore, a common trope of these short films. The innovation in *Cunégonde Architecte* was, apparently, that almost a decade before Buster Keaton made an early entry in deconstructivism in his classic *One Week* (1921), it showed a woman creating a seemingly innovative design and directing its construction. Ending with similarly catastrophic results, unlike in Keaton's film, in *Cunégonde* the design is not incidental, but the result of the direct in(ter)vention of the main female character.

Before the end of the decade, however, another lost film would feature perhaps the first proper female architect of cinema, paradoxically at the hands of King Vidor. Thirty years before directing Gary Cooper in *The Fountainhead*, Vidor had turned his own wife into a fictional architect in *Poor Relations* (Vidor 1919), one of his first four films, all written by

him and made that same year. As Raymond Durnat and Scott Simmons point out, this, together with the also no longer extant *The Real Adventure* (Vidor 1922), starring his wife in the role of a homemaker who becomes a successful stage dress designer, features ‘pointedly independent professional women’. According to the authors, this underlines Vidor’s nature as a ‘natural feminist’, whose female protagonists ‘drive men crazy, or inspire them, and do what they want, without becoming superior beings’ (Durnat and Simmon 1988), adding that ‘reciprocity [between both sexes] constitutes its mainspring’<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, they add, ‘no other Hollywood director of his era so often called on women collaborators—two thirds of Vidor’s film not written by him alone involved women collaborators. To that extent, Vidor’s women were written by women and watched by women.’

In *Poor Relations*, Florence Vidor played Dorothy Perkins, a small-town girl who travels to the city to study architecture and soon after begins a successful professional career. After winning a competition, Dorothy marries a man of high social standing, Monty Rhodes (Charles Meredith). Dorothy’s professional development is, however, stymied by the constant contempt she suffers from her mother-in-law, due to her low-class origins. Dorothy decides to abandon everything and returns to her small town. Eventually, her husband realizes his mistake and follows her to experience her environment of ‘poor (social) relations’, ultimately finding happiness. This ‘happy ending’ seems less so when one realizes that this outcome inevitably frustrates Dorothy’s desire to have a professional career as an architect in the city.

Two years later, Vidor would release *Love Never Dies* (1921), a film which also featured an architect, in this case a male one. In it, the actor Lloyd Hughes—a habitual architect of filmic fiction—plays John Trott, a successful professional who marries Tilly Whaley (Madge Bellamy). Once again, she is haunted by her family past, in the form of an alcoholic mother, and, urged by her father, returns to her father’s home and divorces John, who decides to move to another city. Years later, John returns, and, following the tragic suicide of Tilly’s new husband, it is understood that the two will resume their relationship, return to their country home, and Trott will continue his successful career<sup>7</sup>. Trott’s fate—recounted in the same year that the very real architect Julia Morgan began work on the design of his future patron Randolph Hearst’s extravagant castle-mansion in San Simeon—strongly contrasts with that of Dorothy Perkins, which could not differ more from her future colleague in fiction, Howard Roark<sup>8</sup>.

A somewhat parallel development can be found in *The House of Toys* (Cox 1920)<sup>9</sup>, perhaps the last to show us a woman working in an architecture studio until the 1930s. Based on the homonymous book by Henry Russell Miller, the film told the story of David Quentin (Pell Trenton), a young architect unsuccessfully struggling to make his way in the profession. Once again, a relative, in this case a wealthy aunt of his wife, convinces her, Shirley (Seena Owen), to leave him and search for a better match. Devastated, Quentin decides to leave the profession and work as a draftsman in an architect’s studio. There he meets another worker, Esther Summers (Helen Jerome Eddy), who, as expected, falls for him. Both Esther and her boss will encourage Quentin, given his natural talent, to pursue again his career as an architect, and, in Esther’s case, she will also encourage him to return to his wife, once she learns Shirley wants to reconcile with him. Even though they are not presented here as a dichotomy, it is, once again, the woman’s sacrifice, either of love or the profession, that guarantees the happy ending (Figure 1).

In ‘The Image of Women in Film: Some Suggestions for Future Research’ (Smith 1999), Sharon Smith states that ‘... (i)n the 1920s women were beginning to be employed in a number of fields. Men who confused business power with sexual potency were made insecure by the presence of women in jobs (...). Yet, and as Despina Stratigakos points out, ‘movie reviewers at the time seemed unfazed by the depiction of a woman as an architect in film. Perhaps it was simply accepted as a clever twist to keep the plot moving, or perhaps it was not such a radical notion. The 1939 U.S. Census identified 379 female practicing architects—a not insubstantial number at the time’ (Stratigakos 2016)<sup>10</sup>. Certainly, seen from today’s perspective, and especially compared to the overlooked role of women in

architecture throughout the 20th century, it is surprising how early this apparent ‘normalization’ of the image of the woman architect in movies occurred. Perhaps, we could add, it was accepted because the way in which they were presented did not represent a challenge to the male status, as we have seen.



**Figure 1.** Stills from *The House of Toys* (1920). (Left): Lillian Leighton, Seena Owen, and Pell Trenton. (Right): Esther Summers (Eddy) and David Quentin (Trenton) at the architectural office they work in. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

Women’s portrayals as architects in 1920s films were thus accompanied by a universe of nuances that would extend into the following decades: portrayed as ‘new women’, their lives and professional development would still greatly depend on their feminine condition.

### 3. Enter the 1930s: New Women, Women Architects: Between Normalization and Stereotypes

After the first wave of feminism, American women won suffrage in 1920. The ‘New Women’ (Freedman 1974) wanted similar education to men, equal freedom of movement, and the same economic and political rights. The American films *Dr. Monica* (Keighley 1934) and *Woman Chases Man* (Blystone 1937) represented some of the social tensions over the consequences of women’s emancipation struggle in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s<sup>11</sup>. Female architects gained higher education; however, the films pictured how their sociological situation as women was inseparable from the historical patriarchal roots of North American society. Their professional aptitudes and careers were not in the main narrative of the films. Indeed, patriarchal stereotypes flourish picturing masculine/feminine dilemmas such as: their ‘suspicious’ sexual orientation, their ‘virile’ rationality, and the ‘inevitable’ necessity of a male companion to pursue a successful professional career.

#### 3.1. *Dr. Monica: Implicit Lesbianism, Explicit Rationality and Frigidity*

Despite these early appearances, and the fact that the male architect was a recurring character in the silent film era, it was not until 1934, with the American film *Dr. Monica*, by William Keighley, that women architects would find their voice in cinematic fiction. This time, it was in the role of a supporting character with the status of co-protagonist: Anna Littlefield, played by the American actress Verre Teasdale (Kear and Rossman 2008), who two years earlier had played quite an antithetic role in Edgar Selwyn’s also very architectural *Skyscraper Souls* (1932)<sup>12</sup>. In *Dr. Monica*, Teasdale plays a modern, independent and somewhat frivolous architect who is also the best friend of the leading actress, Monica Brayden, an outstanding and reputable obstetrician played by the then ‘queen of Warner’ Kay Francis. A third prominent woman in the narrative is Mary Hathaway (Jean Muir), their young friend.

The film has grown to be considered one of the first feminist feature films in the history of cinema. Starring three women and one man, with the latter playing a secondary

character, the film's plot centers on motherhood, which is analyzed from their various perspectives. Nevertheless, the film was a suitably sweetened adaptation of the play *Sprawa Moniki* ('The Monica Case'), by Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, first performed in Warsaw on 27 February 1927 (Morozowicz-Szczepkowska 1933, 1958, 1968). Directed in its theatrical debut by Zofia Modrzewska after being rejected by directors such as Arnold Szyfman or Stefan Jaracz, the play has subsequently been claimed as 'the first Polish stage feminist manifesto' (Poskuta-Włodek 2015, pp. 109–10), and an 'expansion of feminist dramaturgy' (Hernik Spalińska 1996, p. 150). *Sprawa Moniki* is possibly the first all-female play in Poland—though not the country's first feminist play in the inter-war period—and met with unprecedented success and social impact due to the various views on motherhood it presented, ranging from lack of maternal desire to motherhood outside marriage, abortion and adoption.

The play focuses on three women: Dr. Moniki, architect Anna and maid Antosia, all of whom are involved in romantic relationships with the same man, Jurek. The action develops in such a way that romanticism and the male figure gradually lose their importance, replaced by female solidarity and the idea of self-realization through professional work. In particular, Moniki's character feels herself evolving from her original status as a 'traditional woman' to a state of full humanity, where she finds the meaning of life in social service, rather than exclusively serving her beloved. Morozowicz-Szczepkowska called this emancipation, not so much in a legal sense, but at a deeply personal level, synonymous with liberation from female biology and the affective model that has been preserved for centuries (Znalowiczówna 1932). Thus, *Sprawa Moniki* opened a debate on the need to redefine new women's relationship with the family, men, and work, aspects that were also central to the critical reaction to the play.

The film was exported to countries such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Germany, and even found a Broadway adaptation, produced by Laura Walker Mayer which, released on 6 November 1933, ran for only two weeks in theatres. A year later, and after passing through the censorship of the Production Code Administration (PCA), the film introduced some isolated but substantial modifications. The issue of the improbable relationships between women from different social positions was suppressed, replacing the character of the maid Antosia by that of a young woman of high social class, Mary Hathaway, who is also training to be a pilot. Also removed from the film were the most controversial aspects from a patriarchal perspective, such as the question of abortion or, the infidelity between maid, master, and architect. In addition, nuances regarding architect Anna Littlefield's indifference to motherhood were introduced. In the film, the two friends, one a practicing architect, and the other, Monica, a doctor and also the main character, devote themselves to traditionally male professions, but from the position of modern but socially privileged white women. As Jeanine Basinger notes in *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930–1960* (1993), the film focuses almost exclusively on women in prestigious male professions: medicine, architecture and—potentially—aviation, with the addition of a brief appearance by Mrs. Hazlitt (Ann Shoemaker), a 'famous literary critic', in the cocktail party shown in the film (Figure 2).

The relationship with motherhood of each of the three friends creates tensions between them and a controversial triangle for the time. Even as a new woman, the doctor plays the most conservative role, as her maternal desire is part of her supposedly feminine essence—as traditionally naturalized by Rousseau, Montesquieu or Freud (Pateman 1980). In keeping with her profession, Dr. Monica has a natural vocation for care and children, unlike her architect friend, who shows no interest in motherhood or, apparently, heterosexual relationships. Monica, on the other hand, is happily married to the successful writer John Braden (Warren William), with whom she wishes to have a child, a wish impossible to fulfil due to her infertility. Mary, the last in this triad, is there to represent the role of unwanted motherhood: both produced out of wedlock and as the result of the infidelity with John. However, replacing the maid Antosia with Mary, the budding pilot, considerably lessened the controversy infidelity might stir up. In the film, Mary is a young woman who is not

only upper class, but also attractive and innocent. Her relationship with John is shown as one of sincere love—mainly on her part—rather than as a sin, and her pregnancy, presented as a problem at the beginning of the film, becomes almost a blessing as the story progresses.



**Figure 2.** Stills from *Dr. Monica*. Dr. Monica talking with the architect Anna Littlefield while she is drawing; Mary Hathaway talking with Anna while she is drawing as well; Mary Hathaway in her plane; Mrs. Hazlitt in a party; Mary with John Braden; Mary with Dr. Monica. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

At the time, much of the criticism focused on these three contrasting relations with motherhood. Joseph I. Breen, director of the Production Code Administration, who just a few months later would begin to apply the *Hays Code*, would speak of the film as starring ‘a lesbian, a nymphomaniac and a prostitute’<sup>13</sup> (Adler 1968). As different authors have pointed out, it is difficult to elucidate who would be the nymphomaniac and who the prostitute, although most possibly, Breen was simply uttering what he understood to be the main negative stereotypes of women at the time. The stereotype of ‘the lesbian’, though, must be unquestionably attributed to the architect, Anna. The only one of the three women with no known romantic relationship with a man, she also works in a traditionally masculine profession—one, unlike Monica’s, unrelated to care, which establishes a double disassociation from her ‘suspicious feminine essence’. Even though the film displayed the aura of the feminist activism of the first wave by presenting women in traditionally masculine professions, lesbian female builders were pictured as ‘uncanny’ and ‘deviant’ women in magazines and periodicals of the time (Stratigakos 2005). As Monique Wittig would point out later, Western societies were uncritically assuming ‘that the basis of society or the beginning of society lies in heterosexuality’ (Wittig [1980] 2016, p. 2).

The character of Anna is portrayed as a rational and cold architect with masculine behaviours usually attributed to men, both in general and particularly in classical Hollywood. Always elegant and impeccably dressed, she is depicted as enjoying a high professional position. In fact, the film opens with a maid answering the phone at ‘Mrs. Littlefield’s apartment’, where a cocktail is taking place (no trace of a ‘Mr. Littlefield’ can be found throughout the film, though). As the camera pans through the space, we can see several drafting tables in the background, with both men and women—presumably her employees—working at them (Figure 3). Later in this scene, Mary and Mrs. Hazlitt chat at one of these tables, soon joined by Monica, who asks the latter: ‘Studying Anna’s plans?’—‘Oh, architects’ plans have always been an unexplained riddle to me’, she answers. Clearly in a position of power, she is also shown getting her hands dirty, with T-square, mechanical pencil, and other drafting utensils, finishing the plans for the standard model of a series of lying-in homes—an idea by Monica—that go ‘to the architectural exhibition tomorrow’. As we learn later, she wins the competition, so she will be the architect, should

Monica's scheme for a gynecological clinic go through. Always busy with professional work—she is repeatedly shown glamorously turning down offers to stay for a drink—Anna is an architect in full: an entrepreneur, a boss, a designer, and—even if not shown—a builder. An intelligent and articulate female character with a remarkable capacity for quick-fire repartee, her profession as an architect, though, works within the film, as a mere tool to underline her rational, cold and calculating character.



**Figure 3.** Stills from *Dr. Monica*. Cocktail at Mrs. Littlefield's apartment. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

Anna's portrayal as an independent, successful professional woman, in a story whose three main characters share these attributes in varying degrees is somewhat tempered by its presence in a film that ultimately departs from the emancipatory message of the original play. As Jeanine Basinger notes, Monica and her husband are part of a 'sophisticated set in which everyone, including women, seems to have a glamorous occupation' (Basinger 1993, p. 414). Thus, professional success, the female protagonists' modern lifestyle, and the challenge of motherhood take a back seat in the film, relegated by the reaffirmation of 'the traditional, normative-heterosexual family'. The character of John—whose nature as an unfaithful husband is side-stepped in favor of his role as a fertilizer—hardly plays a leading role throughout the film; it is his status as a husband that determines the outcome. Upon learning of her pregnancy, Mary turns to Monica, who, as a woman who wants to become a mother, immediately empathizes, offering her help and sisterhood. The possibility of abortion is barely raised: the scene where this is discussed, the script of which is still preserved, was drastically cut in the final edit, still noticeable in the abrupt break that happens in the conversation between Mary and Monica. Yet, the multiple occasions throughout the film when we see Mary take actions that seem designed to induce the loss of the baby remain intact. When Monica accidentally discovers the identity of the father, even feeling cheated, she still believes that the welfare of the future child comes first. This obviously involves growing up in a traditional heterosexual family, so she decides to leave John so that he and Mary can start a new family.

It is at this point that architect Anna enters the scene again, and, after slapping Monica—a typical male resort to physical punishment—acts as the voice of dispassionate, if still conservative, logic. First, she reminds her of her Hippocratic oath as a doctor and her duty to care for the pregnant woman; but secondly, she argues that John does not love Mary, and thus his infidelity is not reason enough to end their marriage. Reality solves Monica's dilemma when Mary dies as a result of an air crash—it is not clear from the film whether it is an accident or suicide—but not before leaving the baby at Monica's house, with a note asking her to look after her. Monica decides to adopt the newborn, in time for John's return. He reappears when all the decisions—made by women but always for his benefit—have been made. Monica makes him aware of her decision, without revealing who the child's biological parents are, and he agrees without discussion. The irony of the film's last sentence only adds more salt to the wound: 'Hold her, John. It's yours'. The last scene presents the happy resolution of the drama: the triumphant image of the traditional heterosexual family, consisting of Monica, John and the baby. As Basinger argues, the film 'is another example of the perfect motherhood film in which the women do it all and the man is little more than a sperm bank' (Basinger 1993, p. 414). It is also, one might add, an example of

the woman in a more disadvantaged situation—pregnant and out of wedlock—acting as a mere surrogate womb for the haute bourgeoisie, just to conveniently disappear afterwards.

### 3.2. *Woman Chases Man and Feminity Denial: Looking for Clients, Finding a Husband*

If in *Dr Monica* the profession of female architect appeared as a secondary element in the plot, used primarily to define the character's pragmatic and calculating character, the opposite could be said of another film from the 1930s, where not only the female architect was the star but her profession became the plot's driving device. This time, it took the form of a romantic comedy, *Woman Chases Man* (Blystone 1937), a title that would replace the provisional and more neutral *The Woman's Touch*<sup>14</sup>. Less offensive than its title might suggest, the film starred two established stars of the day, Miriam Hopkins and Joel McCrea. The film, which would receive a mediocre reception from critics and audiences, had a tortuous pre-production: Bella and Samuel Spewack, who wrote the screenplay, were so ashamed of it that they asked for their names to be removed from the credits and returned their fee. Eric Hatch, hired to review the script, declined after reading it, and so did the directors, with William Wyler, the producer's choice, flatly refusing to shoot it, and Gregory La Cava agreeing to do so, only to disappear without a trace afterwards<sup>15</sup>.

As the reviewer of *TIME magazine* noted at the time of its release, this convoluted tale of successive refusals is surprising given the film's inoffensiveness, one more in the romantic sub-genre of screwball comedy so popular during the Great Depression, with its characteristic but inoffensive critique of social class differences<sup>16</sup>. In this case, the film plays with two film clichés: firstly, the successful millionaire with a prodigal and dissipated heir, and secondly that of 'girl chasing boy', in this case replaced by 'architect chasing client'. The tone of the film and the portrayal of its female architect protagonist could not be more different than those of *Dr. Monica*, fitting to perfection the evolution of the depiction of 'women in jobs' in Hollywood as presented by Sharon Smith:

'As time went on and women took themselves more seriously in jobs, any film about a working woman was at first funny. (...) The message? Why take yourself seriously when all you have to do is be young and pretty to succeed where it really counts—with a man!' (...) 'A woman who 'doesn't know her place' (that is, who has a career besides sex and motherhood) can bring a laugh and move the plot along' (Smith 1999, pp. 15–16).

These lines could have perfectly been written for *Woman Chases Man*, whose plot follows the story of Virginia Travis (Hopkins), a young, unemployed architect desperate to design a successful project that will resolve her situation. The project she has in mind is *Nolan Heights*, a residential development that millionaire B.J. Nolan (Charles Winninger), intends to develop. At first, Nolan is reluctant, both because of the architect's gender and her youth, but eventually he becomes interested in hiring her. The apparent progressive message that might be read into this change of heart disappears when the film informs us that B.J. Nolan is an eccentric with a bad eye for business and a predilection for outlandish projects with little chance of success. This has caused him to lose his fortune, and he now depends on his son Kenneth, who had inherited part of that fortune after his wife's death, and will become the target of both Travis and B.J. for the rest of the film. As an architect, Virginia Travis is also presented here as a new woman, an aspect that is emphasized in Hopkins's first lines at the beginning of the film. In her introduction to B.J. Nolan, she produces an enthusiastic recommendation letter that presents her as 'a remarkable young architect [without gender specifications] with broad vision and fine artist's background'—signed by a 'Vi Travis'. Impressed by such credentials, Nolan asks who Vi Travis is, to which she replies: 'It's me. Vi is from Virginia'. Seeing her cover blown, Hopkins embarks in a vehement denial of her femininity to reassure him: 'I know what you are thinking. That I'm a girl. Yes ... but I have a man's courage, a man's vision, a man's attack'. 'Well, don't attack me!' replies Nolan (perhaps fearing a slap in the face?). For seven years, I've studied like a man. Researched like a man. There is nothing feminine about my mind,' concludes Hopkins.



This spirited defense of her ‘male intellect’ falls on the classic reason-body duality of Western thought and its gender biases, with rational capacity traditionally considered a masculine virtue, while the corporeal is associated with the ‘woman’—therefore feminized. The film cannot help but fall into this stereotype when, after denying her femininity—with more energy and passion than argument—Virginia faints, betrayed by her fragility and her female body. Accordingly, Old Nolan, falls for it and treats her with affectionate paternalism (Figure 4). Thus, architect Travis wins the favor of her future client, not because of any rational capacity or professional aptitudes, but because of her femininity, accentuated both by her fragility and, of course, her beauty. Inevitably, a recurrent aspect in the film will be its insistent portrayal of Virginia Travis’s femininity as her main professional weapon, an aspect she herself acknowledges: ‘I think like a woman when I have to’. This will translate into her pursuit—teaming with old Nolan—of Kenneth in order to get funding for her project. As the rules of the genre go, she will find herself getting not only a client, but also a lover and—better still—a husband.



**Figure 4.** Stills from *Woman Chases Man*. (Left): Virginia Travis in the office with B.J. Nolan. (Center, Right): Virginia collapses and faints. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

Thus, the portrayal of Virginia as an architect differs greatly from the one Verree Tiesdale offered in *Dr. Monica*. Sometimes, the film uses clichés that highlight Virginia’s alleged masculinity, showing her banging on walls and floors to check the quality of the construction—in a way that reads more clumsy than virile. These are the few moments when Virginia is shown showing something remotely resembling an architect’s attitude. If Anna Littlefield was recurrently featured working with plans at the drafting table, the only remotely comparable moment in *Woman Chases Man* appears eight minutes into the film. Right after she completes her physical evaluation of the qualities of the construction of Nolan’s house—‘Good building job. . . not bad’—she tells him she would like to show him the houses she has designed for Nolan Heights. Opening her purse, she gives him a few wrinkled, napkin-sized sheets of paper: ‘Five rooms. . . seven rooms. . . two baths’, she says as he goes through them. ‘These are great!’ Nolan exclaims. Unfortunately, that is all the information the viewer gets, as no shot of them is shown, a clear departure from the care with which Wyler would display Roark’s perspective drawings a decade later. The same goes for models. If the ultimate portrait of Howard Roark is that of Gary Cooper standing by a desk with the immaculate model of his proposal for the headquarters of the Security Bank of Manhattan, *Woman Chases Man* shows only two models, neither of them made by Vi Travis. One is a contractor’s model of Nolan Heights, in his office at the beginning of the film. The other one appears in a short scene during the dinner where B.J. and Travis are trying to persuade Kenneth to invest in the project. This time, it is in the sweeter and edible form of a cake on top of which Judy (Ella Logan)—one of Virginia’s accomplices posing as a cook—is pouring powdered sugar (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Stills from *Woman Chases Man*. (Left, Center): The model of the housing development as shown at the beginning of the film. (Right): ‘Nolan Heights in the Snow’, according to Judy, in a later scene. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

Thus, we believe that Hopkins’ character is an architect—‘and a darn good one!’—mainly because she says so, with nothing in the film testifying to it. While most of Anna Littlefield’s scenes took place in her office/apartment, surrounded by drafting tables, Virginia spends most of the film organizing the key dinner with Kenneth, with many of her scenes taking place at the kitchen table—the same one where the cake-model was prepared. In the film, her profession is used primarily as a source for comedic moments, and Virginia herself is portrayed as an eccentric and quirky character who finds herself bankrupt and homeless, but not in a heroic way. Virginia stills relies on men to get by, and acknowledges it. Her pitch, at the beginning of the film, ended with a revealing lament: ‘Seven years ago I gave up a perfectly nice engagement with a charming, wealthy old man because I chose a practical career. I left him at the church to become an architect. Now, I’m ready and he’s dead’.

Conversely, the film’s male lead is initially presented as a not particularly bright but sensitive man, thus imbuing him with feminine values. The film follows a classical pattern of rom-com, with opposing personalities attracting each other: in this case, an inevitably heterosexual couple where a middle-class—albeit, in this case, new woman—seeks out the wealthy—albeit sensitive—man, climbing the social ladder as a result. ‘You know any other way to make a living?’ asks, almost rhetorically, Nina Tennyson, another suitor of Nolan junior, in another scene. Both are presented as rational and modern women, yet the female protagonist achieves her goals thanks mainly to her physical beauty. In her commentary on the film, Jeanine Basinger offers however, a more optimistic assessment of its portrayal of Virginia, pointing out that:

‘Hopkins plays out her role as a career person and does not give up her job at the end of the film. Of course, she does end up in the arms of Joel McCrea, but no one ever suggested celibacy was a sensible goal for a liberated woman. [...] Furthermore, it is implied that Hopkins is superior to McCrea because, while she can think like a man, he cannot think like a woman. She can cross over, but he can’t, presumably because [and here the optimism ends] the crossover elevates her but demeans him’ (Basinger 1993, p. 451).

The architect certainly achieves her goal, but by inveigling Kenneth and falling back on the stereotype of the artful woman. At least, the film does not show the protagonist abandoning her profession after getting her man, as would be the norm, because in this case he is her partner both sentimentally and professionally: Virginia and Kenneth team up to build *Nolan Heights*, ‘a new and majestic real estate empire’ among the nature that spreads out before them, revealed in her lines in the last scene as a modern day ‘Adam and Eve’ (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Stills from *Woman Chases Man*. (**Left, Center**): Virginia Travis with Kenneth Nolan meeting. (**Right**): Last scene of the film when Kenneth and Virginia decide to build *Nolan Heights* together as partners and also as a couple. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

#### 4. The 1940s: Second World War and the Return to Stereotyped Femininities

After the gender equality achievements of the 1920s, feminist activism slowed down, and from the mid-1930s through the late 1940s woman's rights was not one of the raging issues; in fact, it was not a popular subject. Post-World War II European and North American societies faced 'a dilemma of women's roles: would the many women who had gone to work during the war return to their hom's?' (Freedman 1974, p. 383). While the previous films showed, arguably despite themselves, a kind of normalizing of women professionals in architecture, *The Lamp Still Burns* (Elvey 1943)<sup>17</sup>, released two years before the end of the Second World War, foreshadowed the regression in the role of women that came to be consolidated during the immediate post-war period. The film had been conceived as part of the wave of propaganda films that, in this case, called for women to enlist as nurses, while also operating as a reaffirmation and return to patriarchal feminine values, where caring for vulnerable citizens, especially sick men, elders, and children were naturalized as a moral duty for women.

##### *The Lamp Still Burns. Losing Authority, Glorifying Care*

'The *Lamp Still Burns* [1943] is about obedience, sacrifice and reform—obedience to the authorities, sacrifice of a woman's will and a reformed social order stripped bare of desire' (Harper 2000).

The film also, to a lesser extent, functioned as a denunciation of the much-improved working conditions of nurses at the time. The call to enlist is obvious from the fact that, before the name of the film, could be read: 'A tribute to all who nurse, made with the assistance and collaboration of the Ministry of Health', superimposed on a statuette of the founder of modern nursing, Florence Nightingale<sup>18</sup>. In the film, the lead character, the young architect Hilary Clarke—played by Rosamund John—decides to voluntarily leave her position as a junior partner at the firm *Hargreaves, Clarke & Clarke* (Registered Architects) to become a 'good nurse'. In a way, the film could be read in a double manner. On the one hand, it presents the fall of the previous women's emancipation movement, and, on the other hand, it anticipated the 'problem that has no name' that Betty Friedan would discuss two decades later in *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan [1963] 2001, pp. 44–60): highly educated women who abandon their professional careers to devote themselves to family care and, once their children leave home, find themselves with neither career nor family.

This dilemma, which was to become one of the touchstones of the women's liberation movement in its denunciation of the post-war patriarchal propaganda of the 1950s, can be seen reflected in *The Lamp Still Burns*, but with a couple of added twists. In the film, Hilary Clarke is effectively forced to choose between private and professional life; however, this career is the traditional epitome of the caring profession, nursing; which is, in fact, where women have been traditionally considered naturally appropriate for their 'female approach to ethics of care' (Kuhse 1995). Moreover, in order to devote herself to it—presented in the film, from an essentialist point of view, as her true *vocation*—she is forced to give up

another career, that of architecture, which is of a clearly higher social status and therefore traditionally reserved for men.

The film is based on the semi-autobiographical novel by Monica Dickens *One Pair of Feet: The Entertaining Memoirs of a Young Nurse During World War II*, published the previous year (Dickens 1942)<sup>19</sup>. In the book, the protagonist is portrayed as a middle-class woman who chooses nursing after discarding other options. In the book we meet a non-vocational nurse, who shows a total lack of empathy for her patients, particularly those from the wealthy classes. As a review in *The Listener* of the 1957 edition noted, ‘Miss Dickens succeeds, almost in spite of herself, in conveying the essential nobility of the profession and the supreme satisfaction of a life saved’<sup>20</sup> (Hallam 2000). This is just one of the aspects in which the book differs from the film, where the protagonist is drawn with a natural vocation for care. In a way, even though it was based on the book, the film turned its message on its head, becoming a paean in praise of the ‘feminine essence’—as understood from the patriarchal tradition—absent in the book. The most significant change is precisely the fact that Hilary Clarke abandons architecture to be trained as a nurse: a call to abandon the ideal of the emancipated woman in order to recover a femininity that this ideal, in her opinion, calls into question. Years later, Dickens herself questioned the film’s adaptation:

‘The book was made into a film, with Rosamund John as the nurse and a newcomer, Stewart Granger, with his pyjama jacket open to show bristly black chest hairs. It was called *The Lamp Still Burns*, because *Vigil in the Night* was considered bad propaganda for nursing. They used nothing from the book except a brief bit of dialogue with a gastric patient’ (Dickens 1978, p. 42).

Furthermore, while the text is a lacerating critique of authority and the leaden bureaucracy of the hospital system in England, this argument becomes secondary in the film. Against the backdrop of the war, *The Lamp Still Burns* presents Hilary Clarke’s decision not simply as one choice among others, but as a patriotic duty, as befitting its spirit as a propaganda film. Produced by the company *Two Cities*, it followed the ethos of propaganda films made by the Film Division of the British Ministry of Industry during the second world war, in the line of other films also centered on female figures and released that same year: *The Gentle Sex*<sup>21</sup> (Howard 1943), which shared some of the crew of *The Lamp Still Burns*, and *The Demi-Paradise*<sup>22</sup> (Asquith 1943), a war comedy designed to strengthen the recent Russo-British alliance.

In the case of *The Lamp Still Burns*, Hilary’s change of profession would on the screen evidently be to the detriment of her authority. As an architect, Hilary Clarke is portrayed as a strong and self-confident woman in her working environment, where men surround her. The film begins with a business meeting between Hilary and businessman Laurence Rains—played by Stewart Granger—which will result, as the film later reveals, in him falling in love with her. In the meeting, Hilary confidently defends her calculations for the construction of a new first aid room—a sign of the professional transformation to come. A condescending Rains, dismayed by the extent of the required work, questions her skeptically without having yet deigned to look her in the eye:

- ‘Where did you get your figures for the space for the first aid room?’
- ‘Factories’ act.’
- ‘I need that space for production. If your figures are correct...’
- ‘They are. Your present first aid room just isn’t big enough. Even after these alterations it will be scarcely adequate.’
- ‘For your information, our factory has the lowest extant rate of any in the country. I suppose it’s asking too much of you to take that into account.’
- ‘It isn’t a question of my taking anything into account. First, because it’s based on the cubic space of the plant, the number of people employed...’

Hilary presents the clichés usually associated with the image of the professional woman: somewhat uptight, permanently on the defensive, discreet in appearance but sexually attractive, and constantly striving to prove that her capacity for work is equal,

if not superior to that of the male. This is evident at the end of the scene, in which Rains finally gives in and accepts the proposal, while stressing that he does so only 'by legal imperative'. The next scene, set in the offices of Hargreaves, Clarke & Clarke, builds on the theme, showing her again as a woman of character, determined to prove that she is as capable as any male architect. The scene in question shows the protagonist working on plans with a compass against a background of bookshelves, drawing boards and scale models of buildings (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Stills from *The Lamp Still Burns*. Hilary Clarke with her uncle in the architecture office Hargreaves, Clarke & Clarke. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

Thus, Rosamund Jones' character is portrayed as a hard-working woman and a dedicated and competent technician, but less creative than efficient and organized, and far removed from the tempestuous genius-creator that six years later Howard Roark, played by a dynamic Gary Cooper, would establish as the quintessential image of the modern (male) architect in *The Fountainhead* (Vidor 1949). Despite her portrayal as a modern new woman in the opening minutes of the film, her authority as an architect differs radically from that of the modern male architect played by Cooper. She has only become a junior partner through family inheritance, not through successes achieved, as in Roark's case, after a hard struggle against clients and society in general. She is also part of a team with other male architects, tacitly questioning her personal ability as a professional, and, of course, her genius. While the ultimate goal is to make nursing a more suitable profession for Hilary, the film shows the problems she faces in her daily work as an architect as insignificant: the adaptation of a space as a first aid room, or the change in the layout of a door.

This occurs in a later scene. After witnessing and intervening energetically and decisively in the rescue of Jimmy, her studio assistant, who is involved in a serious car accident outside the office, she meets with another client, Sir Marshall Freyne. Sir Marshall has called her a few minutes before to tell her about a 'great idea he's had' for the project she is designing for his new house, but, despite being terribly busy, she decides to go once he informs her that he will not be back until after Christmas. It is when Jimmy goes out into the street to hail a taxi that the accident takes place. In the meeting, it is the client who proposes the change: 'About these plans of yours. I'm afraid I've changed my mind again about the position of the door. I've sketched in my alternative and dictated a few notes'. This is an architect-client relationship that could not contrast more with the absolutist position that we will see later in *Roark*, and which shows the architect as a professional who does not impose her criteria and who is capable of listening to and attending to her client. It is in this conversation that she reveals to Sir Marshall, who is also a doctor, her epiphany on the way to this meeting, after going to the hospital to accompany her assistant, revealing that she wants to become a nurse. When an incredulous Sir Marshall asks her why she would leave her job as an architect for an implicitly lesser one, she confesses: 'I went into the firm to please my father. You know: the family business, there being no son to carry on. I took it on out of a sense of duty. But it's never been what I really wanted to

do, and it's getting me down.' By contrast, she goes on: 'this afternoon, in the ambulance, watching that nurse... so calm, so efficient, so quietly confident of herself... I realized Jimmy probably owed his life to the few minutes he spent in her care<sup>23</sup>.'

Soon after, she has an interview with the midwife who reviews the applications. When the latter notes she is an architect, she assures this is not intended a war job, but as a permanent change. Thus, Hilary Clarke decides to leave a profession in which she seems condemned to menial tasks for one in which she will devote herself to saving the lives of sick men, young mothers and helpless children. The film strives to present the nursing profession as a tough, highly responsible, disciplined and highly hierarchical job, more than casually comparable to a military career, albeit without the authority of the military. Thus, if as an architect, Hilary Clarke still enjoyed some autonomy, as a nurse she will lose it completely, with her authority being progressively eroded throughout the film, as the protagonist recovers her lost femininity. Hence, the film subliminally prepares the viewer to accept this transition as natural. In her work as an architect, Clarke's tasks are always necessary subordinate tasks, related to the day-to-day, the smooth running—the position of a door—and also to caring: the largest project we see her involved in is, after all, the extension of a first-aid room. Significantly, at both stages, as a junior architect and as a student nurse, Hilary will be surrounded by male companions and protectors: her father and uncle in the former, and her former client, Dr Marshall, now as a mentor in her new life as a student nurse.

This paternalistic approach, in which the natural order of things is subordination to the male, is masterfully staged in a later scene, in which the still apprentice nurse turns to one of the hospital doctors to resolve some doubts about a patient. Quickly, the head nurse calls her to account for her lack of discipline: nurses are not allowed to speak directly to doctors. A hierarchical order is thus made explicit, both in a professional and symbolic sense: opposite the doctor as a nurse, and opposite the man as a woman, since all the nurses in the film are women and the doctors are almost exclusively male. Except for the fleeting appearance of a woman in a white coat who passes Hilary in a corridor, the honorable exception to this rule is one of the instructors, Dr. Joan Barrett, M.D., M.R.C.P., who is called, along with Clarke, to attend to an injured person in a factory. Of course, this is none other than Rains' factory, who has the opportunity here to show his chauvinism again and at the same time be patronized by a professional woman. As she approaches the patient, the doctor gestures with her hand for him to move away, to which he reacts by asking:

- 'Oh, are you the doctor?
- Yes. Why not? [Barrett replies smiling, apparently more amused than offended].
- Oh, no reason. (...)'

Shortly after this exchange, Rains recognizes Clarke, taking advantage of the situation to engage her in conversation:

- 'Mind you get that chap back quickly. He's a key man. I can't spare him.
- He's a very sick man.
- Yes, I know, but we have government contracts to fulfill.
- That's your business. Getting him well again is ours.'

This self-affirmation allows Rains to make a veiled reference to her former career and to their previous encounter, in a brief exchange that function almost as an echo of the previous one.

- 'Oh, well, what do you think of our first-aid room now it's finished?
- Oh, it's fine... what's there of it.'

This momentary return to their respective former roles only serves as a prelude to Clarke's self-assertion in her decision: 'So why did you chuck up such a good work', asks Rains. 'I've got a better job', she replies<sup>24</sup>. When Rains is caught by his friend, the attractive violinist Pamela Sidell, watching Clarke walk away, and she asks him about her identity, he responds: 'Well, the last time I saw that nurse she was... she was an architect'. It is unclear whether Rains is sincerely surprised, or simply trying to placate her friend/love interest's

jealousy by underlining the lack of femininity implicit in her original profession—perhaps both. In any case, this is corrected in Clarke’s new situation, who leaves behind the manly—and modern—shirt and jacket, to wear her nurse’s uniform, with a coif included (Figure 8); an outfit which, with few changes, could well belong to the previous century and which, situated halfway between the habit of a nun and the costume of a servant, functions as an external—visual—expression of her new situation of subordination.



**Figure 8.** Stills from *The Lamp Still Burns*. Hilary Clarke dresses as a nurse. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

From here on, the film focuses on Hilary’s tough training, as well as her lack of discipline—the only glimmer, perhaps, of her former identity as an architect. The script also emphasizes some of the mistakes made by the inexperienced nurse Clarke, which show the viewer the importance of professional good practice, on which life or death depends. In one scene Clarke gives the wrong food to a diabetic patient, which could have been catastrophic had it not been for the quick reaction of a more experienced nurse (Figure 9). In addition to extolling the virtues of nursing is added the unlikely love story between Rains and Hilary, which resurfaces in the wake of an accident at Rains’ factory. Rains and Pamela are hospitalized, and he is placed in Clarke’s care. It is during his spell in hospital that Laurence asks her to marry him. To the viewer’s surprise, Hilary, who has never shown the slightest sentimental interest in him, considers the possibility.



**Figure 9.** Stills from *The Lamp Still Burns*. (Left): Hilary being reprimanded by her nurse-superior. (Center, Right): Hilary talking with her nurse-friend about marriage. Image copyright: all images in public domain.

Torn with doubts, Hilary shares her concerns with a fellow nurse in a similar situation: in love with one of the doctors, she raises the impossibility of reconciling marriage and

profession (Figure 9). She chooses to give up nursing in order to start a family and devote herself exclusively to caring for her husband and future children, thus aligning with her supposedly 'natural' feminine essence, for which heterosexual marriage is, of course, the highest possible aspiration.

Hilary, however, chooses nursing, a new hard-won profession, thus completing the double renunciation referred to earlier: of architecture, a higher status profession, and of personal life, replacing marriage with a profession equally devoted to caring for others. Hilary therefore makes a 'sacrifice' of a quasi-religious character, as, perhaps, might be deduced from the very title of the film, which resonates with echoes of the Christian hymn *Is Your Lamp Still Burning?* and, consequently, of the biblical parable of the ten virgins. This is Hilary's chosen destiny, that of self-sacrificial waiting, replenishing the oil in the lamp so that it never stops burning.

### 5. Conclusions: Modern Architect vs/as Woman Architect

In the three films, women architects are represented in their relationship with their feminine condition. Motherhood, marriage and care are the dominant concepts to situate and define them, while their education (and condition) as architects works as the masculine profession that helps show the tensions and contradictions of being simultaneously a woman and modern. Anna Littlefield is a woman architect with a masculine behavior of unclear heterosexuality and sensibility. On the other hand, Virginia Travis is a young and inexperienced architect who is madly looking for the right man that can help her dreams come true. Finally, Hilary Clarke is an unwilling architect, ready to abandon her career and become a nurse, who recovers with this transitioning her feminine essence.

As has already been mentioned, all these portraits of women architects are a far cry from the archetype of the (male) modern architect epitomized by Howard Roark, as described by Ayn Rand in 1943 and immortalized for the big screen by Gary Cooper in King Vidor's 1949 film. Instead of appearing as a character dependent on others to progress, Roark will embody not only both the American dream and Randian individualism, but also the archetype of the invariably male creative genius, associated with the image of the modern architect. In the case of *Dr. Monica*, Anna Littlefield is a secondary character, and although we see her arranging plans and using technical drawing materials: rulers, compasses, etc., we never get to see her work. Where the architect is the film's main character, the situation is no better: Virginia Travis is presented as a funny character, whose status as an architect is known to us only because she claims to be one. Hilary Clarke, on the other hand, is always shown performing minor tasks, more related to interior design, traditionally associated with the feminine, than with large projects or major formal decisions.

This contrast sharply with *The Fountainhead*, where Roark is recurrently surrounded by plans and models, and his designs are shown to the viewer as drawings or even already built, thanks to the magic of visual effects. The same difference can be seen in his relationship with his clients, as reflected in one of the best-known scenes in Vidor's film: in it, Roark is summoned by the board of directors of the Security Bank of Manhattan, who have selected his proposal, a skyscraper of steel, concrete and glass, as the winner for their new headquarters. They only ask for a few 'small' changes which they make themselves on the spot on Roark's elegant model: the addition of a plinth built in a classical language, and an art deco façade instead of the plain concrete façade proposed by the architect: 'now there's a touch of the new and a touch of the old, so it's sure to please everybody; the middle of the road'. Outraged to see the integrity of his vision trampled, Roark vehemently refuses them and leaves the room, slamming the door with the plans under his arm: 'A building has integrity, just as a man and just as seldom!' It must be true to its own idea, have its own form, and serve its own purpose'. Compare this with Hilary Clarke's attitude, willing to go to a client's house to discuss the client's 'brilliant idea' about something as insubstantial as the position of a door. Roark's vindication of independence, and his subsequent struggle, are presented as heroic: working in a quarry with a drill in



his hand, as a fitting surrogate for a gun or, perhaps, more obvious male attributes. By contrast, Anna Teasdale works with collaborators, and Virginia Travis's attempts at starting a career as an architect seem rather pathetic, even if in a charming way. Her struggles are played for laughs, and, when she despairs, her first reaction is to long for a lost—and economically sound—marriage. Lastly, women are presented either as designers of homes (family) or health-related facilities (care); Roark, on the other hand, is, of course, a creator of iconic buildings, who 'prefers skyscrapers to all other building types'<sup>25</sup> (Schleier 2002, p. 312). The final scene in Vidor's film, with Roark at the top of the *Wynand Building*, the tallest structure in the world whose construction is nearing completion, as his wife ascends by lift towards him, shows not the image of 'a modern Adam and Eve', but of a modern Prometheus about to steal the fire of the gods.

It could be argued that *The Fountainhead* is a film that already belongs to a different era, in which the myth of the modern architect has been established in books such as *Space, Time, and Architecture* (1942), by Sigfried Giedion, and when the 'masters' of the first generation—Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, Le Corbusier—had already built some of their key works. However, the male hero-architect figure can often be found in films contemporaneous to these we are discussing here. In 1937, after refusing to direct *Woman Chases Man*, William Wyler would get to direct none other than Joel MacCrea in the film *Dead End*, where he leaves his role as a client (Kenneth Nolan in the previous film) to play an architect<sup>26</sup>. Based on the Broadway play of the same title, *Dead End* (Kingsley 1935) was a pre-noir underworld drama about the return to New York's East End of a gangster, 'Baby Face' Martin (Humphrey Bogart), and his confrontation with Dave Connell (McCrea). Dave is a frustrated architect who makes a living doing odd jobs while carrying on an affair with the mistress of a wealthy businessman.

Despite his situation, Dave will embody the architect's 'heroic' status in more than one way: firstly, and quite literally when he takes down Martin and his gang in a showdown, ridding the neighborhood of their influence. Secondly, when he shows his allegiance to the modern vision of the architect as social reformer. Referring to the *Dead End* boys, he states: 'What chance have they got in a place like this?' Enemies of society, it says in the papers. Why not?' In his review of the film, Neil Sinyard mentions how Graham Greene's critique of the film (*Night and Day*, 25 November 1937), 'immediately establishes that the setting is not simply background but a metaphoric statement of its main themes: (...) the impact of environment on character and social opportunity.' The same could be said of Dave: 'As an architect, Dave's solution to the problem of delinquency would be to pull down the slums and build a better environment that would foster opportunity and social mobility, and cease to be a breeding ground for people like Martin (...)' (Sinyard 2013, p. 50). Moreover, like Roark, Martin feels disenchanted with authority, in this case represented by a police force as repressive as the conservative owners of capital in *The Fountainhead*. And the same goes for the money: when he receives a reward for taking down the gangsters, he decides to spend it on paying a lawyer for another of the film's repentant characters instead of using it to escape from misery, making the end of the film a 'dead end' for himself as well. Significantly, in the play the character of Dave was actually an invalid artist named Gimpty, who would be transformed into the more appropriately heroic figure of an architect in the film adaptation, played, as with Roark, by an actor with an imposing physique.

The 1940s would still leave a few more insubstantial examples of professional women in the field of architecture. In the same year that the war propaganda of *The Lamp Still Burns* was released, German screens were showing Hubert Marischka's inoffensive—albeit chauvinistic—*Ein Mann für meine Frau* (A Man for My Wife), an adaptation of the play of the same name (1942) by Georg Zoch and Karl Lebs. As in the previous cases, the female character is an architect, but the narrative of the film focuses on her personal life and, specifically, on her role as 'the other woman', per example the lover at fault for a marital breakdown: the film stars Magda Schneider and Johannes Riemann as the married couple Dagmar and Robert Stollberg. The couple has been married for seven years when Dagmar

feels that something is now lacking. Robert has fallen in love with another woman, Manon, a sophisticated interior designer played by Clementia Egies.

The second example, back on the Allied side, would be the equally innocuous *Blondie's Lucky Day*, directed by Abby Berlin in 1946 (Lynn 2014). It was number seventeen in the series of twenty-eight films about the popular comic book character created by Chic Young in 1930 produced by Columbia Pictures between 1938 and 1950. It tells the story of Dagwood Bumstead, the male lead played by Arthur Lake, who is the husband of Blondie, played by Penny Lane Singleton. Dagwood is the office manager for Mr Dithers, a developer who is usually abroad. Pressed by a visit from the city's authorities, he hires a young WAC, a war veteran<sup>27</sup> who is also an architect, the attractive Sergeant Betty Jane McDermott, played by Angelyn Orr. Unusually for Blondie, usually jealous of the women who enter the orbit of the not-quite-competent Dagwood, she embraces her cause and welcomes McDermott into her home, only to see her dismissed when Mr Dithers returns from his travels and discovers a woman doing a man's work. Making common cause—and bypassing Dagwood—Blondie decides that he too should resign, and start his own company. In this case, Betty Jane's character is strengthened, although, as in the previous films, her work as an architect is not represented in the film, her personal life being the main part of the plot. After three decades of apparent normalization, Blondie's *Lucky Day* will chart the course of post-war conservatism. Although the figure of the woman architect will appear in other countries' cinematic output, it will be several decades before she returns to Hollywood.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *L'apprenti architecte* was released as *Jim gets a new job* in the English market; it starred André Deed as the architect Boireau (1906–1913). The word architect can be found in the title of earlier films, such as *Comment Fabien devient architecte* (Fabien becomes an architect) by Ferdinand Zecca (France: Pathé Frères, 1901). In this case, however, it is a version of *The House that Jack Built* by George Smith (UK: Smith, 1900), which shows two children playing with a construction set. *The Amateur Architect* was directed by Lewin Fitzhamon in 1905 (UK: Hepworth Studios) and *L'apprenti architecte* by Henri Gambart in 1908 (France: Pathé Frères). The film *The Fountainhead* was directed by King W. Vidor in 1949 (USA: Warner Bros.).
- <sup>2</sup> Of all these, *Polycarpe* is the only one that has survived intact, and also, uniquely, in which the protagonist can be seen working (that's putting it mildly) in the studio, among plans and drawing materials. From the descriptions of the previous films, it is highly probable that *L'apprenti architecte* followed a similar pattern, and that *Polycarpe* was inspired by the latter. *Calino architecte* was directed by Jean Durand in 1911 (France: Société des Etablissements L. Gaumont) and *Polycarpe Commis d'Architecte* by Ernest Servaès in 1913 (Éclipse: France).
- <sup>3</sup> Since information about these films is scarce, and has only surfaced recently, the data provided should be taken as a first approximation.
- <sup>4</sup> In a 1912 pamphlet, the synopsis of the film appeared as follows: '*Cunégonde veut bâtir pour ses vieux jour une maison où elle vieillira en paix, mais elle entend diriger elle-même les travaux, et méprise les conseils de son architecte. Sur une observation que lui fait cet homme, Cunégonde s'impatiente, et le jette en bas de la maison en construction. Desormais elle est seule à diriger. Il lui arrive bien quelques aventures au milieu de échafaudages et des tas de pierres et de sable, mai elle n'en tient pas compte, el sous sa direction, les travaux avancent avec une rapidité surprenante. En fin, le jour vient de pendre la crémaillère dans son Nouveau logis. Cunégonde convoque ses amis qui accourent en*

foule admirer la nouvelle demeure élevée sur ses plans. Le résultat est certainement original, mais ne paraît pas d'une solidité à toute épreuve. Sous le poids des invités, le plancher bascule, et Cunégonde et ses amis passent du salon à la Cave, plus rapidement qu'ils le désiraient' (Bulletin Hebdomanaire no. 47, 8 November 1912).

- 5 The synopsis here is from [imdb.com](#), which in turn has taken it from *Moving Picture World synopsis*. According to this website, the production company was *Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France*, with US distribution handled by the Film Supply Company. Little else is known about this film apart from the fact that it was screened in a double bill with the short film, also humorous, *Leopold and the Leopard* ([Gorostiza 2018](#)).
- 6 In his 1976 biography of Vidor, John Baxter adds his 1922 film *Woman, Wake Up!* to this string of early arguably 'feminist films' by Vidor, with Florence Vidor and Charles Meredith again in starring roles, together this time with Louis Calhern. The film *Poor Relations* was directed by King W. Vidor in 1919 (USA: Brentwood Film Corporation) and *The Real Adventure* in 1922 (USA: Florence Vidor Productions, Cameo Pictures).
- 7 The film *Love Never Dies* was directed by Vidor in 1921 (USA: King W. Vidor Productions). It was based on the story *The Cottage of Delight* (1919) by William Nathaniel Harben.
- 8 In his autobiography, *A Tree is a Tree* ([Vidor 1953](#)), Vidor recalls his first visit to San Simeon, accompanying Hearst and the 'woman architect' (he never includes her name) as Hearst made decisions about the building (p. 106). Julia Morgan was no minor character: a graduate in civil engineering from the University of California at Berkeley, she became the first woman to graduate from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The relationship between Vidor and Hearst began in 1928, when Vidor agreed to direct Hearst's lover Marion Davis in three comedies for Cosmopolitan Pictures. Hearst owned the film company, and distribution at the time was handled by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where Vidor was employed.
- 9 The film *The House of Toys* was directed by George L. Cox in 1920 (USA: American Film Company).
- 10 This supposed 'breakthrough' is, however, less impressive when put in context and the women's roles are analysed. Until 1939, only three films had featured a female architect, either as a main or supporting character. The number of male architects we have been able to identify in this period is 40—4 in the 1910s, 10 in the 1920s, and 26 in the 1930s—and would continue to grow at a similar rate in the following decades.
- 11 *Dr. Monica* was exported to several countries, such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Germany, and was even produced for Broadway by Laura Walker Mayer, opening on 6 November 1933. Significantly, it would barely last two weeks in theatres. The film *Dr. Monica* was directed by William J. Keighley in 1934 (USA: Warner Bros.). Available online: <https://www.justwatch.com/us/movie/dr-monica> (accessed on 20 October 2022).
- 12 The film *Skyscraper Souls* was directed by Edgar Selwyn in 1932 (Cosmopolitan Productions).
- 13 *Dr. Monica* is, very narrowly, a 'pre-code' film. Released on 21 June 1934, just before the introduction of the Hays Code (Motion Picture Productions Code), on 1 July 1934, which would impose increasingly strict restrictions on what could be shown on screen. This did not prevent it from being affected by censorship. The film was advertised with a running time of 65 min, whereas the only surviving print on display is only 53 min long.
- 14 Before that, the working title, eventually abandoned in favour of *Woman's Touch*, was *The Princess and the Pauper*.
- 15 *Woman Chases Man* is a film that was made because of the 'stubbornness' of Samuel Goldwyn, who had to deal with a whole series of refusals during its hectic pre-production. Bella and Samuel Spewack, who wrote the screenplay, were so ashamed of it that they asked for their names to be removed from the credits and returned their fee. Screenwriter Eric Hatch, whom Goldwyn hired to review it, declined once he read it, as did the directors: Goldwyn wanted his favourite and still under exclusive contract to the company, William Wyler, to direct it, but Wyler refused, claiming that the script 'was just stupid', and urging him to fire him ([Scott Berg 1989](#)). Hopkins had made it a condition of acting in the film that it be directed by Gregory La Cava, who in 1936 had released the hit *My Man Godfrey* (1936), and Goldwyn apparently hired him, only to see him disappear without a word once he read the script. Even authors under contract, selected for supporting roles, refused to participate in the film ([Ellenberger 2018](#)). Goldwyn eventually hired the prolific but not particularly brilliant John Blystone, a regular director of Westerns and comedies, and the film was released that same year to a mediocre critical and public reaction. The film *Woman Chases Man* was directed by John G. Blystone in 1937 (USA: Samuel Goldwyn Productions). Available online: <https://www.justwatch.com/us/movie/woman-chases-man> (accessed on 20 October 2022) The film *My Man Godfrey* was directed by G. Gregory La Cava in 1936 (USA: Universal Pictures).
- 16 'What, after viewing the results of these endeavors, astounded those who knew the picture's history was not Mr. Goldwyn's superior foresight but the fact that anybody should be moved either to violent objection to the material in hand or to stubborn faith in it. *Woman Chases Man* is a haywire story made in the mould of the current vogue for haywire stories. After wavering on the fringes of light comedy for a little while, it sheds its inhibitions and goes whole hog into farce.' ([Woman Chases Man 1937](#), p. 26).
- 17 The film *The Lamp Still Burns* was directed by Maurice Elvey in 1943 (UK: Two Cities Films). Available online: <https://www.justwatch.com/us/movie/the-lamp-still-burns> (accessed on 20 October 2022). The film *Vigil in the Night* was directed by George Stevens in 1940 (USA: RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.).

- 18 Significantly, in *One Pair of Feet* Monica Dickens herself placed the origin of her (relative) vocation in the cinema, and more specifically, in the film *Vigil in the Night*, with Carole Lombard (mistakenly identified by Dickens as Madeleine Carroll) in the role of the nurse.
- 19 The adaptation was to be directed by Elizabeth Baron, though heavily overseen by actor Leslie Howard, who was to act as producer and, possibly, uncredited co-director. Howard would die on the front lines a few months before the film's release. Baron was an Australian writer who worked in British cinema during the 1940s, and was a regular collaborator of Elvey, with whom she worked on six occasions, including *The Gentle Sex*, directed by Leslie Howard in 1943 (UK: Derrick De Marney Productions, Two Cities Films) with the latter's uncredited assistance (Wood 1987).
- 20 After *The Lamp Still Burns* (1943), Monica Dickens was called upon, this time, to collaborate on the script for a propaganda film, *Life in her Hands*, directly by Philip Leacock in 1951 (UK: United Artists), produced with the support of the Crown Film Unit to promote the profession.
- 21 *The Gentle Sex*, which would again feature Leslie Howard as director and narrator and Maurice Elvey as uncredited director, focused on the experiences of seven women who decided to enlist in the Auxiliary Territorial Services (ATS). Among them was Rosamund John, replacing her nurse's attire with a military uniform. In *The Demi-Paradise*, also known as *Adventure for Two*, the lead role this time went to a man, Laurence Olivier, who played an unlikely Russian naval engineer (Ivan Kouznetsoff) working with the British navy on the development of a new propellant. His love interest, Ann Tisdall (Penelope Dudley-Ward), however, played an important role in the outcome of the plot, convincing local builders to implement against the clock the modifications designed by the lead actor, which were eventually successfully implemented on a new line of ships.
- 22 The film *The Demi-Paradise* was directed by Anthony Asquith in 1943 (UK: Two Cities Films).
- 23 The conversation goes as follows: (Hilary): 'I want to be a nurse.' (Sir Marshall): 'A nurse? My dear girl, with your job?' (Hilary): 'Oh, I went into the firm to please my father. You know: the family business, there being no son to carry on. I took it on out of a sense of duty. But it's never been what I really wanted to do, and it's getting me down. I'm getting bad tempered! (...) Oh, yes, I got a temper and I can lose it! This afternoon, in the ambulance, watching that nurse... so calm, so efficient, so quietly confident of herself... I realised Jimmy probably owed his life to the few minutes he spent in her care. I asked if there was anything I could do to help. (...) Looking at me she said: 'No, there's nothing you can do. 'And then in the hospital, the same air of calm efficiency, the same unhurried speed with which they did everything...'
- 24 In fact, the conversation continues to dwell on the subject: Rains: 'You like your new work?' Clarke: 'Very much, thank you. Rains: 'I still don't understand. Weren't you a junior parner, very successful?' Clarke: 'Success isn't everything'. 'No', agrees Rains.
- 25 This is, as Schleier notes, the screenplay's most significant departure from the novel, both written by Rand herself: 'Perhaps the most significant change from the original was in Roark him-self: in the book, he is an architect who works on a variety of commissions; in the film, he prefers skyscrapers to all other building types.'
- 26 To round it up, three years earlier, McCrea had been one of the casting options considered for the role of John in *Dr. Monica*. The film *Dead End* was directed by William Wyler in 1937 (USA: Samuel Goldwyn Productions).
- 27 A member of a U.S. Army unit created for women during World War II and discontinued in the 1970s.

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