

WOMEN SCREENWRITERS

AN INTERNATIONAL GUIDE

EDITED BY

JILL NEMES

JULE SELBO



Women Screenwriters

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An International Guide

Edited by

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University of East London, UK

and

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macmillan



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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Foreward by Cari Beauchamp</i>	xxvii
Introduction	1
<i>Jill Nelmes and Jule Selbo</i>	
Part I Africa	
Burkina Faso	7
<i>Jule Selbo</i>	
Egypt	9
<i>Koen Van Eynde</i>	
Ghana	18
<i>Jule Selbo</i>	
Kenya	21
<i>Jeremy B. Warner</i>	
Morocco	23
<i>Stefanie Van de Peer</i>	
Namibia	29
<i>Jule Selbo</i>	
Nigeria	30
<i>Noah Tsika</i>	
South Africa	39
<i>Haseenah Ebrahim</i>	
Tunisia	45
<i>Ouissal Mejri</i>	
Part II Asia	
China and Hong Kong	55
<i>Cristina Colet, Jule Selbo and Jeremy B. Warner</i>	
India	69
<i>Alexis Krasilovsky, Debashree Mukherjee, Jule Selbo and Anubha Yadav</i>	
Iran	87
<i>Debbie Danielpour</i>	

Israel	104
<i>Jule Selbo</i>	
Japan	108
<i>Lauri Kitsnik, Jule Selbo and Michael Smith</i>	
Korea	131
<i>Jeremy B. Warner and Brian Yecies</i>	
Palestine	143
<i>Jule Selbo</i>	
Russia	145
<i>Michele Leigh, Jule Selbo and Tatiana Tursunova-Tlatov</i>	
Part III Australasia	
Australia	163
<i>Nicolette Freeman, Lisa French, Margot Nash and Mark Poole</i>	
New Zealand	194
<i>Hester Joyce</i>	
Part IV Europe	
Armenia	209
<i>Carl Wilson</i>	
Austria	214
<i>Robert Dassanowsky</i>	
Belgium	238
<i>Ronald Geerts</i>	
Czech Republic	249
<i>Alice Němcová Tejkalová, Filip Šára and David Sorfa</i>	
Denmark	266
<i>Eva Novrup Redvall</i>	
Estonia	288
<i>Margit Keerdo-Dawson</i>	
Finland	302
<i>Riikka Pennanen and Raija Talvio</i>	
France	311
<i>Kelley Conway, Kath Dooley, Mary Harrod, Susan Hayward, Florence Martin, Jule Selbo, Alison Smith, Isabelle Vanderschelden and Elena Von Kassel Siambani</i>	
Germany	363
<i>Andrew Kenneth Gay, Alexis Krasilovsky, Ervin Malakaj, Juliane Scholz and Carl Wilson</i>	
Greece	398
<i>Tonia Kazakopoulou</i>	

Ireland	410
<i>Susan Liddy and Díóg O'Connell</i>	
Italy	433
<i>Mariapia Comand, Alexis Krasilovsky, Bernadette Luciano, Paolo Russo, Jule Selbo and Bridget Tompkins</i>	
Malta	488
<i>Monika Maslowska</i>	
Netherlands	493
<i>Thomas van den Berg, Erik Buikema, Gert Jan Harkema, Annelies van Noortwijk, Jennifer O'Connell, Rianne Pras, Vincent Ros, Johanna Seelbach, Steven Willemsen and Jauke van Wonderen</i>	
Norway	516
<i>Kyja Kristjansson-Nelson</i>	
Poland	523
<i>Jule Selbo</i>	
Romania	526
<i>Monica Mitarcă</i>	
Serbia and Yugoslavia	533
<i>Olga Dimitrijević</i>	
Spain	538
<i>Natalia Sanjuan Bornay, Julia Sabina Gutiérrez and Jeremy B. Warner</i>	
Sweden	550
<i>Johanna Forsman and Kjell Sundstedt</i>	
Switzerland	578
<i>Michael Burri</i>	
Turkey	586
<i>Jule Selbo</i>	
United Kingdom	591
<i>Lavinia Brydon, Marcella Forster, Christine Gledhill, Stella Hockenhull, Susan Liddy, Nathalie Morris, Jill Nelmes, Jamie Sherry and Paul Wells</i>	
Part V North America	
Canada	685
<i>Michael Coutanche, Jule Selbo and J. T. Velikovsky</i>	
Cuba	693
<i>Michelle Leigh Farrell</i>	
Jamaica	700
<i>Tanya Gail Davies</i>	

Mexico	714
<i>Maria-Teresa DePaoli and Felipe Pruneda Senties</i>	
United States of America	726
<i>Jean Ansolabehere, Robert Arnett, Kristiina Hackel, Helen Jacey, Warren Lewis, Sam Lively, Victoria Lucas, Bettina Moss, Claudia Myers, Megan Reilly, Dorin Schumacher, Jule Selbo, Anne Slatton, Tom Stempel, Anna Weinstein and Rosanne Welch</i>	
Part VI South America	
Argentina	859
<i>Linda Craig and Felipe Pruneda Senties</i>	
Brazil	870
<i>Camila Malagolini Gama</i>	
Chile	875
<i>Carmen Sofia Brenes</i>	
Venezuela	889
<i>Belkis Suárez Faillace</i>	
<i>Index</i>	901

List of Figures

4.1	Aksella Luts as the forester's daughter in the <i>Young Eagles</i> (1927). Estonian Film Archives	294
4.2	<i>Morsian yllättää</i> (1941) featuring the film's screenwriters Kersti Bergroth, Lea Joutseno and Valentin Vaala working on the script, accompanied by an unknown typist (left). Valentin Vaala: <i>Morsian yllättää</i> 1941 ©KAVI/Suomi-Filmi Oy33.1	304
4.3	<i>Tot Ziens/Goodbye</i> (1995, Honigmann). Courtesy of Ariel Film	502
4.4	Director and leading man Mauritz Stiller sits centre stage, holding leading lady Ester Julin in the theatre play <i>Bakom Kuopio/Behind Kuopio</i> at Lilla Teatern, Stockholm, 1911. Stiller adapted the play for film in 1912 as <i>Den Tyranniske Fästmannen/The Tyrannical Fiancée</i> and cast Ester Julin to repeat her role. It was her first contact with the film industry	553
5.1	The MPPDA Seal of Approval	730

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Claudia Myers wrote and directed the features *Fort Bliss* and *Kettle of Fish*. The script of the former was an outgrowth of Claudia's extensive work with veterans and soldiers over the last several years. She has produced and directed two award-winning documentaries and a multi-media, interactive feature for the US Army. As a screenwriter, she has won several awards and is an alumna of the Hamptons Screenwriters Lab. Claudia is a professor in the film and media arts division of American University's school of communication in Washington, DC.

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Filip Šára is an MA student of journalism at Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague. Since 2008 he has been working as a freelance editor at the news server Novinky.cz. In recent years he has been the film reviewer and editor at [Kultura 21.cz](http://Kultura21.cz), Filmweb.cz, and Obrazor.cz.

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Raija Talvio is a *doctoral candidate* at Aalto University ELO Film School in Helsinki, where *she* also teaches. The topic of her thesis is the history of screenwriting in 1930s Finland. Talvio is an award-winning screenwriter whose credits include the feature films *Little Sister* (1999) and *August Fools* (2013), several hours of television drama, and a stage play for the Finnish National Theatre. She has also worked as a film editor. Her publications include articles in the *Journal of Screenwriting*.

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Jeremy B. Warner is a scholar, film editor, and film producer and has been integrating theoretical concepts with production for over ten years. His writings and presentations include works on transmedia and the evolution of narrative structure. He received his MFA from Temple University.

Anna Weinstein teaches screenwriting at Auburn University. She is a developmental editor for Cengage Learning, and she has served as editor of the Truman Pierce Institute's peer-reviewed journal, *The Professional Educator*, since 2007. Her *Film International* series 'Diva Directors Across the Globe' has featured interviews with Oscar-winning directors such as Susanne Bier, Marleen Gorris, and Caroline Link. She is currently writing a family comedy for Furthur Films.

Rosanne Welch teaches in the masters of screenwriting programme at California State University, Fullerton and has multiple credits as a television writer/producer in the United States. Her research interests include *Doctor Who*, *The Monkees*, and marriage in the movies. Publications include *Torchwood Declassified: Investigating Mainstream Cult Television*, *Doctor Who and Race: An Anthology*, and the *Journal of Screenwriting*.

Paul Wells is director of the Animation Academy, Loughborough University, a research group dedicated to cutting-edge engagement with animation and related moving-image practices. He is also a screenwriter and director, having published widely in animation and film studies, and written and directed numerous projects for theatre, radio, television and film. Books include *Understanding Animation*, *Animation and America*, *The Fundamentals of Animation*, and *The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons and Culture*.

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Carl Wilson is an associate lecturer in media at the Sheffield College. Writing on a variety of media topics, his work has recently appeared in four volumes of the *Directory of World Cinema* series (*American Hollywood* and *American Independent*), and three volumes of the *World Film Locations* series (*Vancouver, Toronto, and Havana*). Carl looks at UK Heritage film tourism in the forthcoming *Fan Phenomena: Jane Austen*, has an essay on 'Hollywood North, Canada' forthcoming in *Mapping Cinematic Norths*, and is currently developing the multi-media digitization archive project at Kelham Island Museum, Sheffield.

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Brian Yecies is senior lecturer in cultural studies at the University of Wollongong, Australia. He is author of *Korea's Occupied Cinemas, 1893–1948* (2011, with Ae-Gyung Shim) and *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema: Planet Hallyuwood, 1960–2015* (forthcoming, with Ae-Gyung Shim). His writes on transnational film and digital media in Asia.

Foreword

Cari Beauchamp

Here, for the first time, the breadth and depth of the talent of female screenwriters is put front and centre. We see how women screenwriters from around the globe have proven themselves in all genres, entertaining while revealing injustices, hopes, ambitions, tragedies and possibilities – all from a unique, ‘female’ perspective.

The ripple effect of these writers’ lives and work may be impossible to quantify, but it is difficult to overstate the impact their films have had from the very beginnings of the film industry. For instance, French filmmaker Alice Guy, who began in directing in 1895, influenced the work of American Lois Weber who went on to have protégées such as Frances Marion who became the highest-paid American screenwriter – male or female – from 1915 through the mid 1930s. Marion’s work in turn made an impression on female screenwriters in Russia such as Ayn Rand and Zoia Barantsevich who were also influenced by German Thea von Harbou’s *Metropolis* and other women writers from throughout the world including Japan, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Half of all films written in America before 1925 were written by women, and in the silent era, when there was no competition from radio or television, their films were particularly revelatory. At a time when most people had been only a few miles from their birthplace, they could enter their local cinema to witness different lifestyles, cultures and ideas of freedom on the big screen.

The focus on female screenwriters also underscores how international film has been from its very beginnings. Readers may know a lot about Hollywood and a little about Bollywood, but here they will also learn about Nollywood, southern Nigeria’s remarkable film industry, and women’s important role in it. We also see how nuances in culture affect opportunities for female screenwriters in countries such as Jamaica, Malta, Cuba, Mexico and Israel. With over 50 nations represented here, there is so much new to discover and appreciate.

Excavating the history of women writers is a challenging calling – in part because they often did not keep archives – either because they thought so little of their own work or because they were so busy doing other things. Jule Selbo, Jill Nelmes and their over 100 contributors should be commended for what they have unearthed – it is a work of committed scholarship that is also a work of love.

Just like the women whose stories they spotlight, the editors’ perseverance, passion and dedication elevate and illuminate the power and significance of film. Please let this serve not as the last word, but as the beginning of the discussion of the importance of hearing the female voice.

Introduction

Jill Nelmes and Jule Selbo

In this study of female screenwriters, from the first film scenarios produced in 1896 to the present day, we highlight the work of more than 300 writers from over 50 nations. Each entry gives an overview of the history and background of women screenwriters in that country, highlighting its most influential females in individual entries.

The scope and range of the book is ambitious and there is no existing work that gives such coverage of the subject. The guide is divided into six sections by continent: Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, North America and South America. There are entries for the more frequently written about nations such as the US, the UK, France and Australia, as well as countries like Malta, Romania, Korea, Poland, South Africa and Switzerland where we have found a rich but rarely discussed tradition of female screenwriting. Indeed the entries for individual countries show how varied the experience of female screenwriters is – experiences that are very dependent on historical, social and political factors. We have tried to include entries on all the film-producing countries, although unfortunately it has not been possible to do this where there is very little information available or where we were unable to find a contributor. We hope that publication of the book will encourage discussion of these omissions as well as promoting the subject further. In subsequent editions, we hope to include information on more females who have used their talents as screenwriters in the feature film industry.

Women screenwriters were at the forefront of the film industry in its earliest days in many nations around the world. The sudden popularity of early filmmaking created opportunities for women in key creative positions; early screenwriters and filmmakers such as the Frenchwoman Alice Guy, Americans Gene Gauntier and Lois Weber, Australian Lottie Lyell, and Fatma Begum in India were writing, directing, producing and creating their own film companies.

In most countries the myriad opportunities for women in the film industry changed after a relatively short period. By the coming of sound in 1928, it had become evident how much money might be made in the industry. This meant that corporate interests (dominated by males) began to dictate, more males were drawn to the industry and the ranks of female screenwriters diminished. Even in Sweden, a country with a strong tradition of female writers, women only wrote

6.5 per cent of the 240 films made during the 1930s. In the UK, for instance, a small number of talented women writers such as Muriel Box and Janet Green were very successful in the 1940s and 1950s, but most women only wrote one or two films. The decline of the studio system in the 1950s in Hollywood and parts of Europe did little to help women writers and, as audiences fell, fewer films were made. At the same time, television began to attract millions of viewers and some female screenwriters moved their careers to the new medium, not only in the United States but wherever television programmes were produced. In Sweden, Astrid Lindgren adapted her very popular Pippi Longstocking children's books for film and television in a career that lasted 33 years.

More recently there are grounds for optimism; in countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark the gender balance is now almost even. In South Africa, for example, television has provided a platform for women writers like Sara Blecher (*Zero Tolerance*, 2011); she has gone on to make feature films and documentaries. Indeed it is noticeable how many women now move from film to television with ease. However, there are still nations that pose restrictions and strong censorship; Iran levies severe constraints on women's freedom, yet some of its female writers and filmmakers, like Rakhshan Bani-Etemad and Samira Makhmalbaf, have received worldwide acclaim for their films. In the Soviet Union, after World War II, countries like Estonia, Czechoslovakia and Romania had strict censorship imposed on the content of screenplays. Greater freedom following Stalin's death in 1953 allowed women writers and directors to work, and Perestroika, in 1985, ended state control of the studios. When Estonia gained independence in 1991, it took some time for women screenwriters to gain a foothold, but by the 2000s a new generation of women had emerged.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries brought a greater awareness of gender inequity in the film industry, particularly regarding writing and directing. Many countries are now trying to redress this imbalance and some have initiated quotas to ensure there are more women film writers; in the Netherlands many of their most successful films are written and directed by women. In Argentina, of 64 films made in 2005, 13 were by women; however, the numbers have not remained this high; in 2012, of 51 films produced, only five were by women. Unfortunately, for every success, or partial success, there are other countries, such as Romania, where very few scripts written by women are produced.

Despite difficulties along the way, a great many outstanding women screenwriters from across the world have emerged in the last 110 years and there is reason for celebration. Poland boasts award-winning screenwriters such as Agnieszka Holland, Italy celebrates Suso Cecchi d'Amico and others, and China claims Li Yu and Ann Hui among their talents. Women screenwriters in the Middle East are exploring difficult narratives of identity and freedoms, and female filmmakers in Africa are contributing stories that are shining lights on social and political situations.

There is still a need to encourage the film industry in the majority of nations to be more receptive to women writers and women's stories. We hope this volume will inform and inspire and point to the fact that women screenwriters have