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“New Films in Story Form”: Movie Story Magazines and Spectatorship

by Adrienne L. McLean

This essay focuses on a seldom studied but long-lived and robust ancillary product of classical Hollywood cinema, the monthly movie story magazines devoted to article-length fictionizations of feature films. These magazines flourished in a variety of forms from the late 1920s through the 1970s.

Film historians generally agree that the first regularly produced mass-market fan periodical was *Motion Picture Story Magazine*. It began publication as a monthly in 1911 and, as its title suggests, was devoted primarily to “fictionizing” current films into story form and illustrating them with publicity stills. Although it also included brief editorial pages and articles about the mechanics of filmmaking meant to appeal to the middle-class and hobbyist audiences who were then making *Popular Science* profitable, *Motion Picture Story Magazine* was, according to Edward Wagenknecht, “essentially a fiction and picture magazine.”¹

Yet, as Kathryn H. Fuller notes, a short-fiction magazine based on film plots was not “a radically new product but one that drew together several trends in early twentieth-century publishing.” The editors of *Motion Picture Story Magazine* sought to “combine an ample supply of action-packed fiction in the translation of movie melodramas to written prose, with an already existing market eager to read such stories.” The fan market, as yet presumed to be “sexually undifferentiated and geographically diverse,” was already mining the professional trade journals of theater owners for plot descriptions that could be used both as program notes and as a means for movie patrons subsequently to “reexperience” some films in story form.²

By 1914, however, there were fewer, and shorter, stories in *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, and many more photographs of and articles about stars; in 1916, the word “story” was dropped permanently from the name of the magazine. Synopses of films were still provided but only as capsule reviews that appeared in the front advertising sections. Rather than the fictionizations themselves, therefore, Fuller’s interest lies in how the film fan was “redefined” in the early 1910s from someone interested in and educated about the processes of scenario writing and the machinery of filmmaking into a more passive consumer of film, assumed to be an urban female, who was “fascinated with the spectacle of the star system.” *Motion Picture Magazine* and its new competitors, such as *Photoplay*, turned “away from special interest and fan-interactive publishing in another direction, toward the fast-growing, lucrative category of women’s magazines that was incidentally attracting far more consumer-product advertising than fan or hobbyist journals.”³

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Although at least one other movie story magazine emerged, in 1913 (a Universal promotional weekly called *Moving Picture Stories*, which lasted through the 1930s), as a genre the movie story magazine is characterized today in terms that make it seem primitive, preclassical, even quaint. Anthony Slide, for example, writes that story magazines provide a “fascinating glimpse of the almost moribund idea that filmgoers would not only want to see the films but also read the stories, adapted from the screen, in a far more detailed form than the cinema could provide.”⁴ By 1916, Fuller notes, multireel feature films were “increasingly adapted from popular novels, and novelizations of original film screenplays stretched to book length.” One is likely to infer from Fuller’s work that the story-magazine format was a brief detour on the road to the normalization of the fan magazine as a female-oriented forum for discourse about stars in the context of, as Diane Waldman puts it, “romance, marriage and consumption.”⁵

Far from being moribund, however, the genre of the movie story magazine not only persisted from the 1920s on but was one of the most robust and hardy of classical Hollywood cinema’s ancillary products. Indeed, the heyday of the movie story magazine was not the mid-1910s but the “studio years,” stretching from the 1930s through the 1950s. Among the story monthlies founded in the late 1920s and early 1930s were *Movie Digest*, *Movies*, *Romantic Movie Stories*, and *Screen Romances*. *Romantic Movie Stories* became *Movie Story* in 1937 (fig. 1), and *Screen Romances* became *Screen Stories* in 1948. With the exception of *Movies* and *Movie Digest*, all of these magazines were published until the 1960s or 1970s.⁶

To characterize it in general terms, the monthly story magazine fictionized narrative films made or released by Hollywood’s major as well as minor studios. Whether based on hoary classics, Broadway plays, Shakespeare, short stories, children’s books, topical bestsellers, or original screenplays, the digests extend from four or five (for B pictures and programmers) to twelve pages of varying column widths and numbers. Magazines range in length from sixty to a hundred pages per issue, with the number of digests in each issue running from eight to as many as sixteen between the 1930s and the 1950s and to as few as four in the 1960s and 1970s as circulations declined. Each digest is illustrated with star photographs and production stills and lists each film’s cast, studio, and writers (both of the screenplay and of any other source from which the screenplay was adapted). Director, producer, and fictionizer are sometimes named, sometimes not.

Physically, the story magazines closely resemble more conventional fan magazines, with which they often share publishers; they are of roughly the same size and printed on the same sorts of paper (usually a mixture of pulp and coated newsprint, with all-pulp production occurring during paper shortages in the 1930s and 1940s), are similarly priced, and always feature portraits of stars on their full-color covers.⁷ Gossip columns, reports “from the set” and “behind the scenes,” rotogravure pages, film reviews, and sections on fashion and homemaking are truncated versions of the sorts of material found in other fan magazines, as is the advertising, which centers almost exclusively on products presumed to be of interest to young working-class and middle-class women.⁸



Figure 1. *Romantic Movie Stories*, January 1936. That Shirley Temple's smile is rendered perversely provocative in proximity to the magazine's name suggests one possible motive for the title change to *Movie Story* the following year. Collection of the author.

A number of different signifying systems are at work, then, in a typical two-page story spread—story text, photographs, captions, graphics, and advertising. What suggested the need for further work on the phenomenon of the story magazine was, in fact, the variety and intertextuality of its modes of address to reader-spectators. It is not news that Hollywood films based on preexisting texts seldom exhibit complete fidelity to their literary sources. Certainly the digests, like their corresponding films, are all what Edward Branigan would call “simple narratives” in that they consist of a “series of cause and effects collected with a continuing center” that ends when the “cause and effect chains are judged to be totally delineated.”⁹ But I soon found that several story versions of the same film were likely to have been circulating simultaneously, with often substantial differences among them; that the plots of film and story versions frequently differed, sometimes enormously; and that the photographs accompanying the stories operated on levels that seemed to exceed the capacity of the simple cause-and-effect narratives to explain.

And, while the advertising and fashion sections support the conclusion of Fuller and others that by the end of the 1910s fan magazines were aimed primarily at women as consumers, many of the stories fall into genres not associated with women spectators—westerns, war films, adventure films, detective films. I became interested, therefore, in the subjectivities the stories seem to expect from their readers and how the narrational “voice” and point of view of story version and film version differ. Erin Smith, for example, has explored the ways in which hard-boiled detective fiction, especially in pulp magazines, appealed to its working-class white male readers.¹⁰ Many of the same stories appear, readapted from the films that adapted the stories in the first place, in movie story magazines presumably aimed at working- and middle-class women reader-spectators.

Also of interest is the nature of the diachronic relationship of story digest to film. The title of this essay (“New Films in Story Form”), for example, is from *Movie Story’s* masthead in the 1940s. Other slogans used in the 1930s were “Read Your Movies—Then See Them” and “Coming Films in Story Form.” Several of the magazines described themselves explicitly to advertisers as providing “preview fictionizations” of movies.¹¹ This suggests that the impulse driving the production of these story digests was somewhat different from other, more familiar forms of movie and, now, television tie-in, which seem intended to prolong or extend the time-bound experience of the film or television text. If the story magazines appeared before films were in wide release, then the “prereading” of some of the films—not only of their plots but their *mise-en-scène*, their “looks”—might easily have affected spectator response to the films themselves.¹² (Issue dates, which postdated newsstand appearance by several weeks, indicate that in most cases the magazines preceded first-run releases and virtually every release in a second- or third-run market.)

But perhaps the most striking feature of the story magazines is their layout and design, the various ways in which they combine photos and text and foreground the star as multiple role-player through a mixture of fictional narrative, photographs featuring stars as characters and as “themselves,” and sidebars describing the labor undertaken by the actor in assuming each of these guises. What linked the magazines to the studios, to the films, to each other? How did the

fictionizations and their photographic illustrations relate to both finished films and preexisting sources such as novels and plays? In other words, what I find to be the most compelling feature of these magazines is the nominal but seldom-studied reason for their existence, the fictionizations themselves.

As anyone who works with even its more famous variants knows, problems of availability, access, and evidence surround the fan magazine as an object of study and historical investigation. If I am not able to choose at will which digests to examine, or from what years and what magazines, it is because library and archival resources are few and their holdings limited and fragmentary.¹³ Much of what Cathy Davidson writes of the historiography of other “ephemeral, throwaway literature” applies here as well: to try to piece together a composite picture using such fragments of the story magazine as do remain requires that one become a “literary detective” who moves constantly between “material, aesthetic, and ideological planes.”¹⁴ Despite these epistemological constraints—and the usual one, that the meanings these or any mass-media texts had for their remote historical audiences are ultimately beyond the reach of inquiry—enough material exists to engage at least some of the questions raised above and to suggest areas for future exploration.

Below, I extrapolate as much information as I can about the background and production history of story magazines in the context of the market for fiction from the 1910s through the 1950s, drawing on scholarship about a related form of movie tie-in, the novelization, in order first to compare story, screen, and script versions of *Mrs. Miniver* (William Wyler, 1942). I then employ some of the well-known theories of Roland Barthes on the semiotics of the photograph and the illustrated magazine, as well as the distinctions he makes among the “rhetorics” of the photograph, the film still, and the motion picture proper, in order to consider the movie story magazine as an intricate, heterogeneous, and “historical” signifying system. Barthes’s work helps us to account for suggestive incongruities among many story digests and what Lea Jacobs calls the “ideal models” of gender roles, marriage, and family life promulgated by Hollywood films subject to the enforced strictures of the Production Code Administration after 1934.¹⁵

In whatever manner fictionizations were interpreted by audiences in their original contexts, the digests—especially those produced from the mid-1930s through the 1950s—sometimes seem bent on destabilizing rather than reinforcing the normative assumptions made in the films about the basic constituents of identity politics, particularly gender and sexuality. Whether this ambivalence was intentional or, more likely, the inadvertent but inevitable consequence of the complexity of their modes of signification is less important to me than the fact of its existence, given the magazines’ enduring and widespread popularity. The films and fictionizations around which my final discussion will circle include the Jean Harlow star vehicle *Reckless* (Victor Fleming, 1935), from *Movies*; *Sylvia Scarlett* (George Cukor, 1936), in which Katharine Hepburn plays a boy, from *Romantic Movie Stories* (and specifically subtitled “a preview”); and three different story versions of the Rita Hayworth film noir *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946). *Sylvia Scarlett* was based on an older novel by Compton Mackenzie, and *Reckless* and *Gilda* were based on original screenplays.

The Market for Fiction. Kathryn Fuller quotes several scholars to the effect that, “ironically,” by the time *Motion Picture Story Magazine* became *Motion Picture Magazine* in 1916, the “high-water mark of mass market fiction publishing” was past, the popularity of cheap fiction like story papers, dime novels, and genre fiction magazines superseded by the very success of the movies themselves.¹⁶ But a broader survey indicates that fiction remained a significant component of the fan magazine as of the women’s magazine generally.

As Mary Ellen Zuckerman explains in her history of popular women’s magazines in the United States, competition increased for advertisers in the 1920s, but the number of readers for women’s weeklies and monthlies increased also.¹⁷ Because advertising dollars were cut back during the Depression, editors were forced to abandon the “smorgasbord” approach that had characterized magazine content during the 1920s in favor of “features with the broadest appeal, typically the fiction and the service departments.”¹⁸

The importance of fiction to the women’s magazine from the 1920s through the 1940s can hardly be overestimated. Zuckerman cites a *McCall’s* survey from the late 1930s that “confirmed that for female magazine readers, fiction provided a major attraction,” while staffers from *Woman’s Home Companion* wrote that their editors worked from “the assumption that stories make friends for a magazine, whereas the departments and special articles keep them.”¹⁹

Fiction was the mainstay of magazines aimed at working-class women as well. “Love pulps,” whose primary content was romantic fiction, were popular from the late 1910s through the 1950s. All women’s magazines cut back on their fiction after World War II, but this was because of rising advertising and production costs as well as competition from cheap paperback books and eventually television—both of which “offered similar kinds of entertainment” to the stories of the pulps and of the major monthly women’s magazines. Readers who did purchase periodicals from the 1950s on, Zuckerman writes, “turned less and less frequently to them for entertainment and relaxation, looking to them instead for information.”

What this brief outline proposes, then, is that, taken in the wider context of fiction and magazine publishing, the continued existence of movie story magazines past 1916 is not surprising (nor is their decline from the late 1950s on). Even star-based fan magazines like *Photoplay* occasionally included story digests in their pages, such as the two-part “fiction version by Dan Senseney” of *Jane Eyre* that ran in August and September 1943.²⁰

So we might turn now to the question of where the fictionizers got their information about films, and when, for the story digests they were preparing. Were the movie stills and photographs, for example, part of the fictionizing process, or were they only added in the layout stage of production? How much cooperation was there between Hollywood and the story magazines? Unfortunately, there simply is not enough information available to make concrete claims about the editorial composition or policies of the various magazines or whether fictionizers were part of a magazine’s permanent staff. It is difficult even to generalize about the overall content of one story magazine as opposed to another because of the aforementioned

scarcity of archival data. To understand the relationship of the story magazines to the film industry, I have therefore turned to another form of movie tie-in, the film novelization. Its history, more widely documented, offers some clues to the material relationship of the digests to their film versions.

Preview Digests. In his bibliography *Films into Books*, Randall Larson describes three types of movie tie-in book: the reissue of a preexisting novel that has been adapted into a film (for example, the “photoplay editions” produced by Grosset and Dunlap and World Publishing, illustrated with film stills, that began to appear in the silent era); the novelization of a film or television screenplay; and finally an original novel based on the “characters, concept, and setting” of a movie or television series.²¹ The latter category includes studio-sanctioned enterprises like the mystery and adventure novels for teenagers that featured movie stars as their main characters, published by Whitman and others in the 1930s and 1940s (with titles like *Ginger Rogers and the Riddle of the Scarlet Cloak*, *Judy Garland and the Hoodoo Costume*, *John Payne and the Menace at Hawk’s Nest*). The latter category also comprises all of the “unofficial” fan-produced discourse, such as zines and “slash” fiction, in which fans reconfigure and recast commercial products in new and often nonnormative ways, that has been the focus of much scholarly attention over the last decade or so.²² The second category, the one into which movie story magazines fall, has received less attention, partly because, as Larson notes, many consider novelizations to be “hacked-out exploitations of the write-by-numbers, take-the-money-and-run variety.”²³

The reason novelizations exist, claims a writer of *Star Trek* books, is that audiences want “to not only re-live the experience they got in watching the movie, but they want to find out a little more, understand the character a little more, see a scene that wasn’t in the movie but could have been. It’s up to the novelizer to try and give them that value.” The ability to “browse back and forth in the text,” to acquire what Larson calls a “parenthetical perspective” that the film does not have the time or the means to provide, is what gives the novelization its appeal. That the novelization is *different from*, not merely *more of*, the movie seems to be supported by the increased production of novelizations *after* the widespread introduction of the videocassette recorder. If extended access to a film text were all that mattered, then the advent of video, laserdisc, and DVD technologies should have made novelizations obsolete rather than more popular than before.²⁴

Although there was some overlap between novelizers and movie-story fictionizers—Larson mentions one novelizer, Jean Francis Webb, who also claims to have adapted more than nine hundred movie scripts for magazine use—novels are much more amenable than short stories for the expanded characterizations, descriptions, and new plot lines that create the pleasure that these tie-ins provide. It is perhaps not coincidental that, except in the case of *Soap Opera Digest* and its variants, the extended form has outlasted the story digest as an “officially sanctioned” commercial format. The two forms are linked, however, by the speed with which they are produced and the varying degrees of cooperation and consultation provided by the film’s producers.

Larson quotes many writers who state that the production time for a novelization is currently about four to six weeks from assignment to due date. As with other forms of tie-in licensed by a studio (soundtrack recordings, comics, and toys), book-adaptation rights are offered by the studio's marketing department or by the producer's marketing agent. Publishers select the writer, who is usually, though not always, provided with a screenplay. Sometimes he or she is apprised of script changes along the way, sometimes not. One novelizer speaks of the perpetual "dilemma of the film novelist"—not only that "the story already exists, [and] somebody else wrote it," but that "few novelizers get to see the final cut of the movie—their manuscript must be turned in while the film is still being filmed." Others speak of the difficulty novelizers face on two fronts: "lack of cooperation from film companies, indifference from publishing houses," whose only interest is in "getting the book out on the stands in time to promote the film." Nevertheless, some novelizers have worked very closely with studios, as in the case of one who, for a 1937 adaptation of a fifteen-episode serial from Columbia, was supplied with a screenplay, provided with script updates along the way, and given promotional material to use in bookstores carrying the book.²⁵

According to information gleaned from story magazines themselves, it is obvious that the magazine's publishers had access to screenplays, to rough cuts of movies, or to both. For example, an October 1948 *Screen Stories* digest of *The Law and Martin Rome* ends with a note that "as we go to press, 20th Century-Fox tells us there may be a change of title for the above story. If so, we'll tell you—next month—what it is. Watch!" (The title was changed to *Cry of the City*.) Photographs and film stills were, of course, provided by the studios.²⁶ As the case of *Mrs. Miniver* suggests, however, the cooperation of the studios did not necessarily preclude the possibility that a film's digest, in this case from the July 1942 *Movie Story*, could fictionize a substantially different film than the release print.²⁷

The film version of *Mrs. Miniver* opens with Kay Miniver (Greer Garson) running distractedly down a crowded London street (to cheery nondiegetic music), worried about whether or not it would be extravagant to buy a hat she covets. This, however, is how *Movie Story's* version opens:

It was the England of the man with the umbrella, of the peace in our time fallacy, the England smug in its little oasis of security, its eyes held steadfast to the mirage of indolence and easy living. And the man smiled as he looked down from his window at the swarming crowd of shoppers below, at the store windows so enticing with their displays of frivolous luxuries, . . . and turning to his stenographer began dictating.

For years he had been sending these reports to Germany. He had written of the upper class, clinging tenaciously to its ancient privileges, of the poor steeped in their insular prejudices, so blind to the significance of ideological changes in Europe. Now it was of the middle class he was writing, the class which, he pointed out, had once been the bulwark of England's greatness but today, moved by a frantic urge to ape the luxury and ostentation of the class above them, had no aim in life save the preservation of its own material security. There was no doubt, he went on, that self-indulgent as it had become, comfort-loving, materialistic, the middle class of England in its decadence, would offer little resistance to the world domination of a master race.

Given the differences not only in plot detail but in tone, one is certainly tempted to interpret this story version as a reworking of *Mrs. Miniver's* easy sentimentality into an astonishingly overt criticism of the materialism of American culture, thinly disguised as the "middle class of England." Its fictionizer is unnamed, but he or she seems fearlessly to be injecting a political, even censorious point of view into an otherwise conventional story before beginning to describe the film proper in the next paragraph: "Down in the street below, pretty, red-haired Kay Miniver was caught in an agony of uncertainty." If it turns out, however, that the "final" screenplay of *Mrs. Miniver* (dated October 29, 1941, or before America officially entered the Second World War) begins not with the hat-buying scene but with a slight variation of *Movie Story's* version, one can still wonder about the digest's effect on both spectators who saw *Mrs. Miniver* and readers who did not. Screenplay and digest are not identical in the unfolding of their narratives (the former begins with an exchange in a club between two Englishmen, one of whom is revealed to be a spy by his subsequently dictating, in German that "fades in" to English, a longer version of the above rhetoric), but many phrases in the screenplay are reproduced verbatim. (What we still do not know is whether this scene was ever filmed.) The interesting fact remains, then, that regardless of the reasons for it the *Movie Story* digest of *Mrs. Miniver* put into widespread circulation a version that can be read as more caustic and critical than the film text.

Recent scholarship on issues in contemporary film and adaptation has begun to address the problem of what Deborah Cartmell calls "the intertextuality of the adaptation."²⁸ In a "postmodern world" in which "belief in a single meaning is seen to be a fruitless quest," we should not confine ourselves, Cartmell writes, to how well a film borrows, intersects with, or transforms (to use Dudley Andrew's terms) its original literary source.²⁹ Rather, the study of postmodern adaptations needs "to extend to screen-to-text adaptations, as well as multiple adaptations where a multiplicity of sources is not bemoaned but celebrated."³⁰ Whether movie story magazines should be considered historically postmodern is not as important as their intertextuality, their "multiplicity of sources," and the new meanings that these potentially produced. Any text circulates in an ideological context that foregrounds some readings as more logical or normative than others. But I am a firm believer not only in the power of even the inadvertent or the accidental to reconfigure the normative but in what Roland Barthes calls the "terror of uncertain signs"—the peculiar potential for juxtapositions of language and the photographic image *together* to compel "interrogative readings" that go beyond "what the author wanted to say."³¹ (It cannot be that only "postmodern" film fans are "active cultural critics" or become "textual poachers," in Henry Jenkins's reformulation of Michel de Certeau's term.³²) The uncertainty of other of the story magazine's signs, its visual form as well as the story text itself, is what I want to turn to now.

Rhetoric of the Fictionization. Roland Barthes devoted much scholarly attention to the meaning produced when the "press photograph" is imbedded in or accompanied by written text. In "The Photographic Message," he considers some

of the ways in which connotation, or the imposition of a referential and symbolic “second” meaning onto the “first” concrete or informational meaning, works in the photograph.³³ Later, in considering film stills, Barthes explores an “obtuse” or “third” meaning that he finds to be, though intensely powerful, ultimately “indescribable.”³⁴ This third meaning is ineffable, supplementary, and personal, and it arises from close and pensive examination of the photographic image.³⁵ Crucially, Barthes believes these meanings cannot be “triggered” by the experience of a film “in its natural state” because a spectator lacks the means to examine and to “add” to the images in movies: “I don’t have time: in front of the screen, I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image.” Unlike the film, however, the still “scorns logical time”: it can be scrutinized, regarded pensively. Which is why, to Barthes, “the filmic, very paradoxically,” can be grasped only at the level of the still—as a “quotation” from a film—and only the still can produce “third meanings” related to, but properly distinct from, the film’s ostensible “content.”³⁶

When (as in the movie story magazine) several photographs come together with written text to form a sequence, connotation is not located in any particular “fragment” of the sequence but in the “concatenation” of images and words. It is in the “movement,” Barthes writes, “from one structure to the other [that] second signifieds are inevitably developed.” Moreover, in mass-media images, text rarely simply duplicates the message of the photo, or vice versa; the text may also be employed to contradict or to “invent” what he calls “an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image.”³⁷ In “Rhetoric of the Image,” Barthes continues to explore the ways language can both *anchor* the meaning of a magazine photograph through a caption (“to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds,” to help one to choose “*the correct level of perception*”) and, less frequently, serve as relay among image, text, and overarching story form, anecdote, or diegesis.³⁸

It would be well beyond the scope of this or any essay to “inventoriate” all the levels of meaning—the historical and the cultural “codes”—at work in even one story digest.³⁹ But we can now consider the movie story as a concatenation of stills, other photos, and text, brought together under the primary relay text of the motion picture, that perhaps creates a space, literally and figuratively, in which third meanings can be added to films through compensatory or retroactive viewings as well as readings. Not every story version differs as noticeably from its film as the digest of *Mrs. Miniver*. But all—both “internally” and through their interaction with their films and with other digests and source material—possess the potential to generate, in Imelda Whelehan’s terms, a “plurality of meanings,” as consideration of *Reckless*, *Sylvia Scarlett*, and *Gilda* bears out.

When photos and stills are added to Branigan’s “simple narratives,” the text—including captions—would seem to anchor their purpose and meaning as illustrating what events and characters will “look like” in their filmic form. But sometimes, as in the case of *Reckless* from the July 1935 *Movies*, the photos are unmarked, are unanchored by the (or any) text, and are a mixture of stills (that *might* be linked to narrative events) and glamorous head shots of Jean Harlow, William Powell, and Franchot Tone that exist in the realm of the “star text” rather than in the narrative



Figure 2. Spread from *Movies* digest of *Reckless*, July 1935. Collection of the author.

or even the “film text” (fig. 2). The star photos “connote” their identity as such (rather than as stills depicting narrative action) through framing, posing, lighting, and what Barthes calls “aestheticism.” In other words, in some of the photos, Jean Harlow is Jean Harlow—perfectly coifed platinum hair, satin gown, head down, eyes looking out from under long lashes into the distance; in others, she is ostensibly “Mona Leslie,” a “Broadway dancer, lovely, golden-haired, laughing. An unthinking world deemed her ‘reckless,’ little dreaming of the womanliness, the depth of feeling, the pluck that were hidden beneath the gay exterior.”

Branigan claims that there is “no contradiction” in understanding an actor as at once fictional and real, because “a person in a photograph can be *simultaneously* both specific and (fictionally) nonspecific in the same way that a photograph of a tiger in a dictionary can be both a specific tiger and many tigers.”⁴⁰ An actor in a film is transformed into “a nominal entity—a placeholder—when interpreted fictionally.”⁴¹ But what this formulation leaves out is the “other person” in films and stills, the movie star—not simply an example of a species, or someone impersonating or embodying a character, but an entity whose own meaning always already threatens to define the fictional in new terms. Arguably, movie stars never truly become fictional characters. Instead, the characters become movie stars. And the movie, as the locus of the “living star,” becomes the true author of the fictionization.

With its decorative layout and sixteen uncaptioned photos crammed into two columns on two pages, the digest of *Reckless* functions like a puzzle, the key to which is the film. Although a reader can play at making meaning from the stills, only a viewing of the film itself will identify each still “correctly.” Here, the lushness of

the visual spread—and the length and detail of the story digest, which runs for about six pages and is faithful, scene by scene, to the film—creates a desire for the film text, which functions as an anchor of the “compensatory” or “retroactive” sort. Pleasure comes both from imagining what the stills *might* mean and, after experiencing the film, anchoring their meaning retroactively. (Some of the digests in *Movie*, especially of big-budget films, contain as many as twenty uncaptioned photos across two pages.)

The visual plenty of *Movie*, which is printed on cheap pulp paper, is more typical of the value-for-money ethos of mass-market magazines from the early years of the Depression. From the late 1930s on, most story magazines featured no more than four or five photographs per digest, with “on-the-set” sidebars adding another one or two (there are no such sidebars in *Movies*).

Nevertheless, moving on to the case of the January 1936 *Romantic Movie Stories* digest of *Sylvia Scarlett*, we would virtually have to posit that readers were projecting “new signifieds” onto the film in their movement from and among stills, captions, story form, and film text proper. That is, we know that the film features Katharine Hepburn dressed as a boy (but whom we know to be a woman) for much of its running time, such that visually she is paired “romantically” with the characters played by both Cary Grant and Brian Aherne and also (for comic effect) with women characters who find Hepburn’s “him” attractive.

We also know that, at the end of *Sylvia Scarlett*, Hepburn’s character is recuperated conventionally, in a move Barthes would call the “repression” of other meanings by the dominant ideology, by a heterosexual union with Aherne’s “Michael.” The story version is brief (approximately four pages long) but features four stills of Hepburn as a man (three “fictional,” one “on the set”) and one of her in women’s clothes (fig. 3). This last shot is placed next to a photo of a curly-haired and eye-lined Aherne, who appears to be dressed as a monk for reasons the digest does not explain (and the caption to which is “‘So, you are really a girl,’ Michael marveled. ‘No wonder I was attracted,’” which occurs in the story as “‘What in the name of—Good heavens, boy! What are you up to?’ was his greeting. ‘Oh, I see—really a girl. I wondered why you attracted me as you did.’”). The differences between the film version and the story version lie not only in the necessity for any story to describe verbally what any movie can show visually (the outward appearances of things, places, and people in time and space) but, here, in the overwhelming power of the stills against the short, densely populated, and elliptical narrative (“That night, Maudie disappeared. Henry, dazed by drink, followed her. Through rain-drenched hours, Sylvia and Monkley searched for Henry. They found his body at the foot of a rocky cliff.”)

Rather than providing what a novelization would—*more* about the characters and their backgrounds, a “filled-out” version that takes more time to read than a film does to watch—the story digest of a film with multiple plot lines and characters can become a matter-of-fact rendering of “this happened, then that happened, then this happened.” The accompanying photographs therefore bear more of the burden of signification than they would even in the average “photoplay edition.” If Hollywood adaptations of any sort inevitably end up converted to

But *Sylvia Scarlett* is, from all accounts, an unusual film. A box-office failure and the “worst A picture ever made,” in Rick Jewell’s phrase, it made producer Pandro S. Berman never want to speak to either Hepburn or George Cukor “again.”⁴⁴ Given this, and that other, more conventional stories in the same magazine do not exhibit such gender ambivalence, it could be argued that the *Sylvia Scarlett* digest is an exceptional case—a curiosity or accident rather than a rhetorical strategy. I do not believe this is true.

Ten years separate *Sylvia Scarlett* and *Gilda*. In contrast to *Sylvia Scarlett*, *Gilda* (starring Rita Hayworth, Glenn Ford, and George Macready) was one of Columbia’s biggest grossing films to date. It is nominally based on an “original screenplay by Marion Parsonnet,” but a final draft of the screenplay (dated August 29, 1945), which closely resembles the finished film in structure and dialogue, is by Virginia Van Upp (who was also the film’s producer).

Gilda is similar to *Sylvia Scarlett* in that, despite its eponymous heroine, *Gilda* has a homoerotic subtext—here involving two men whose close relationship is “interrupted” by a woman. *Gilda* is narrated in voice-over, at least for its first two-thirds, by Johnny/Ford. Its female lead is not a typical film noir heroine, in that she is not “punished” severely for being sexually active. If one assumes that the writers of each of the story versions had access to the same screenplay, then they should have been similar to one another. But they are not. Of course, producing “new signifieds” may simply have been a marketing strategy designed to demarcate story magazines from their competitors, through differences in visual style, story lengths, organization, and so forth. But even if competition in the fan-magazine marketplace was the impetus, one would still have had to posit that reader-spectators, whether women or men, could have learned from the digests discussed below routinely to question any “ideal models” they may have been presented with on the screen.

The May 1946 *Movie Story* version of *Gilda* is the most conventional, preserving the linear chronology and episodic structure of the film. Although the digest is told not from Johnny’s point of view but in a third-person omniscient voice, it emphasizes Johnny’s feelings and understanding of narrative events and only occasionally injects notes that readers today might construe as supporting the aforementioned homoerotic subtext (for example, references in the second paragraph to the “enticing bulge” in Johnny’s pocket “toward which the gunman’s hand was purposefully reaching”). Two large photos illustrate the story, both production stills: Johnny/Ford is featured prominently in profile on the left, with an eyeline match to Gilda/Hayworth on the right with Ballin/Macready. The power that Gilda exerts over the narrative events of the film—such that Johnny’s voice-over eventually disappears and she becomes the most sympathetic character of the three—is also repressed by the sidebar, entitled “On the Set of *Gilda*,” in which all that is discussed is the cost of Hayworth’s wardrobe and what effect her “simple” coiffure, “the Gilda” (illustrated in a small head shot), would have on the “current push for the short bob.”

The *Gilda* from the May 1946 *Screen Romances*, however, “fictionized by Ladd Banks,” practically begs to be read interrogatively. In the first place, it devotes much less attention to images of women of any sort; there is one uncaptioned

color page of Rita Hayworth, the film's star, as opposed to five of Glenn Ford, four of which show him in the company of the film's other male actors. By far the largest image in the digest proper is of Johnny and Ballin gazing into each other's eyes: Johnny is lighting Ballin's cigarette, and has one in his own mouth, under a tag line describing the "flar[ing]" of their "strange friendship" (fig. 4).

Although the chronology of the film is followed faithfully in this digest as well, and dialogue is apparently pulled from the same screenplay, here there is much more language about Johnny and Ballin's relationship, about how difficult Johnny finds it to "appraise" his elegantly dressed friend, how Ballin leads a "gay life," about how a "man who makes his own luck . . . recognizes it in others," about how Ballin turns his "openly vulnerable" eyes on Johnny, about how he has to be sure that Johnny has "no woman" in his life, to which Johnny replies, "No woman anywhere" (the *Movie Story* version omits this scene and its dialogue entirely, replacing both with terse statements about how Johnny talked himself "straight into a job as Mundson's assistant," his "intense loyalty to the strange Ballin Mundson [born] of genuine admiration"), and finally, on the third page of the five-page story, a mention of Gilda and of Johnny's "dazed, bitter mind," which "refused" to take in the fact that Gilda was Ballin's "wife."

Even when Johnny kisses Gilda, the famous sadomasochistic "I hate you so much that I could die from it" kiss, the story reads (again in contrast to the film and to the tame rendering in *Movie Story*) that after he "crushed his lips down onto hers, . . . abruptly, he pushed her from him, every loyalty in him revolted by what he had done. . . . He cried out, 'Ballin! Ballin!'" There are further references to "a hatred of Gilda that became an obsession. Any psychiatrist could have told him that he was trying to punish her for the thing he himself had done." The ending continues the tone of sexual ambivalence. As the version in *Movie Story* has it, with basic fidelity to the screenplay and film, "In Gilda's shining eyes, [Johnny] saw his future. Arm in arm, they faced north, toward America—toward home." *This* version ends as follows: "Gilda said, unsteadily, 'As you were saying, Johnny, before we were so rudely interrupted—' Obregon smiled—and, his arm linked through Uncle Pio's, went quietly out of the softly darkening room." Obregon is the policeman who has been trying to bring the now-dead Ballin to justice for running an illegal cartel in Argentina, and Uncle Pio is the washroom attendant. Reading this story version, you would never know that the film's final shot is of Johnny and Gilda, much less that Obregon and Uncle Pio never do *anything* arm in arm.

The third version (of which I have only an unattributed photocopy) adds yet another perspective on *Gilda*: her own point of view. Written as a series of numbered and unnumbered captions to a sequence of photographs (this was another means of limning story digests, particularly of animated films), this version also moves, to bizarre effect, between the actors' function as fictional "placeholders" and their extradiegetic existence as stars. Under a posed photo of Hayworth and Ford embracing in costume, for example, the caption reads: "The whole gang, especially Glenn, helped me over the nervousness I felt at my toughest role." Under another posed and costumed shot of the two kissing, "I have a feeling Glenn will emerge from 'Gilda' as a new romantic sensation. He's so earnest, so real."

GILDA

With the scratch of a match flared the strange friendship of Johnny Farrell, gambler, and Ballin Munson. They both loved the same woman—Gilda, the beautiful cheat . . .



FROM the size of the stack of greenbacks in front of him, it looked as though Johnny Farrell's luck were running high on this, his first evening in the Argentine. And, judging from his appearance—his battered hat, his rumpled suit, whose turned-up collar did not conceal the fact that he had no tie—it looked as though he could use both the luck and the money. Lazily, he raked in the greenbacks and pocketed them before the sailors and hangers-on in the Buenos Aires waterfront saloon could voice their suspicion that no dice behaved that way by pure chance.

Johnny sauntered out onto the wharf. There he paused, counted his winnings.

He had not heard footsteps behind him, but a rough voice ordered, "Put your hands up!" The command was emphasized by a jab in the back with a revolver. Johnny recognized his assailant as a rat-faced man who had been in the bar. Slowly, the money still clenched in one fist, Johnny raised his hands.

But, as the hold-up man reached for the bills, a whip-like cane swung through the air, knocked the gun to the ground. A blade—long, slender, glinting—was drawn from the case; its stiletto point-vested with a swordsmen's exquisite precision on the thug's hand. With a scrambling lunge, Johnny's assailant took to his heels.

Johnny wheeled to get a better look at his unknown ally and found him impossible to appraise in one glance. In his forties, perhaps, he was elegant in faultless evening clothes,

and his dark eyes burned with a curious cold fire. He was putting his sword-cane together with fastidious care, saying, in a soft, precise voice, "It is a most faithful and obedient friend. It is silent when I wish it to be silent; talks when I wish it to talk." He smiled briefly. "My idea of a friend."

Johnny commented, "You must lead a gay life."

"I lead the life I like to lead," the other answered composedly. "How did you get the money?"

"Gambling," Johnny answered. They walked in silence to the street. Johnny stopped and said easily, "Well, thanks."

The stranger studied him for a moment. Then: "With your luck, why don't you go where there's some real gambling?" Of course, gambling was illegal here in Buenos Aires. But there was a Casino on the other side of town. He took a card from his pocket, offered it to Johnny. "But they won't let you use your own dice."

Johnny grinned. "I didn't know it showed."

"A man who makes his own luck, as I do, recognizes it in others." He concluded, "By the way, they won't let you in without a tie."

• The next evening, when Johnny entered the fashionable Casino, he not only wore a tie, but his suit had been cleaned and pressed—improvements which pointed up the fact that he was a highly personable young man, though not one to impose on. Not with that fighting jaw, or his mouth whose smile seldom reached his cool eyes. Taking a final look at

Figure 4. *Gilda* from *Screen Romances*, May 1946. Collection of the author.

This is followed by a candid shot of the three stars, all laughing, with Hayworth in street clothes. The caption reads: "Plenty has happened by the time I—Gilda—appear. Johnny Farrell, gambler, was saved from a hold-up man by Ballin Mundson."

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The icy, power-hungry Ballin hired Johnny to work in his gambling casino. Complications begin when Ballin returns from a mysterious trip with me as his bride.” All of the remaining photos are film stills; under two, “Gilda” describes “doing a strip-tease, to shame [Johnny]” but “loathing the work. I’m almost glad when they stop the act and Casey, Johnny’s strong-arm man, drags me away. Facing Johnny, I exult, ‘Now they all know what I am and that you, the mighty John Farrell, got taken. Now they know that he married a—’ He slaps me. At last, I give way to tears and utter hopelessness.” Finally, in the last caption, “she” says, “As I look back on my story now, some of it almost seems like a dream to me—Gilda—but I can remember saying to Johnny, as kindly Uncle Pio looked on, ‘Let’s go home, darling. Let’s go home. We did.’”

New Films. With the weakening of the Production Code in the 1950s, Hollywood films were able to include more overt challenges to normative gender roles, and story digests—which began to be called “condensations” in the 1960s—could as well (as exemplified by *Movie Stories*’ adaptation of *Midnight Cowboy* in May 1969 [fig. 5]). As mentioned, fiction was generally becoming less and less important to magazines by the late 1950s, but the decline of the movie story magazine must also be linked to changes in filmic content and narrative structure. Ironically, the very removal of limits on what films could show and say made their story versions seem mild and straightforward, and circulations for most of the periodicals fell from a high of 500,000–600,000 in the 1940s to less than 100,000 in the 1970s. It seems likely, therefore, that the imposition of the “uniform interpretation” of the Production Code was itself a motivating force in making digests a potential locus for the complicating of their films’ schematic versions of normativity.

Even at their wildest, however, the world constructed by story magazines could never approach the sort of radical revisioning of social roles that a phenomenon like fan-produced “slash” fiction aims for today. And, in many cases, digests were more or less sanitized versions of sexually explicit or morally ambivalent source material. Thus, *Movie Story*’s digest of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett, 1946) was little more than a dialogue-heavy “simple narrative” that not only predictably toned down the sadistic eroticism of James M. Cain’s hard-boiled 1934 novel but also smoothed out most of the contradictions produced by the interaction of style, character motivation, star image, and narration that make the film so fascinating. Nevertheless, this brief foray into the archaeology of the movie story magazine provides a few examples of the subtle unconventionalities that many digests did provide, and certainly reiterates and underscores the fact that Hollywood’s audiences, in this case presumed to be female, have always had to be active reader-spectators rather than passive consumers of films and their tie-in products.

That movie digests seem to produce “entirely new signifieds” now does not mean they did so then. At the same time, there is no reason to think that they did not. As Judith Mayne observes, “Narrative is a process created and shaped by the act of reading, by the interaction between readers, texts, and social reality. Narrative creates imaginary reconciliations between opposing terms. Those reconciliations are not always, however, simple affirmations of dominant ideology.”⁴⁵ In its relentless

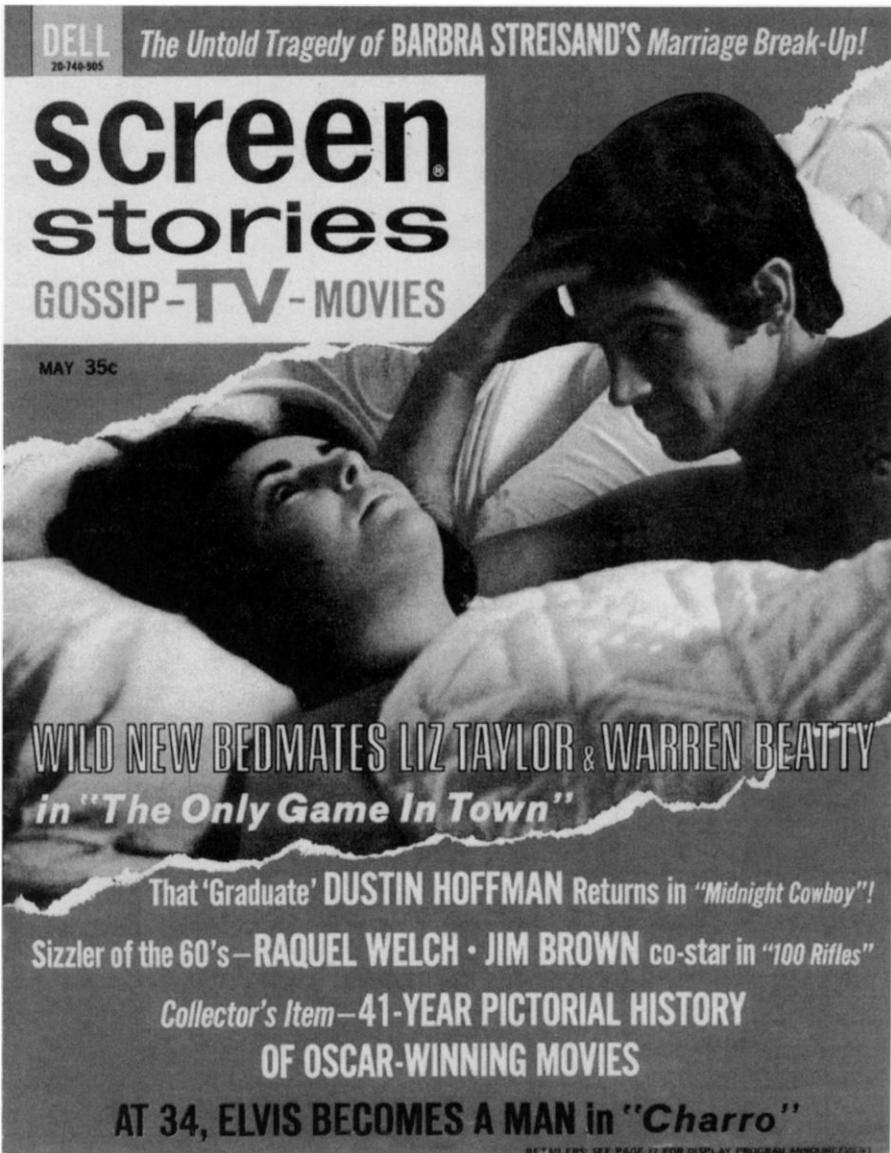


Figure 5. Cover of May 1969 *Screen Stories* issue that features a digest of *Midnight Cowboy*. Much of the magazine is now given over to gossip about celebrities, and this particular issue features a “reader’s poll” in which it asks respondents what they would like “more of” in the magazine—“Stories of Screen Stars, Stories of TV Stars, [or] Movie Condensations”—and to provide “comments for improving *Screen Stories*.” Collection of the author.

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drive for profits, the commercial film industry generated several forms of address to its audiences that both promulgated “ideal models” of gender roles and family life and also, maybe coincidentally, opened up different paths to interpretation and identification. Although each story digest may have been intended to render an ostensibly *more* complex array of material into a simpler, easier, and handier format—à la *Reader’s Digest*—the cases discussed here indicate that complexity need not always arise from more characters, more plot lines, and more detailed renderings of time and space. In story form, some films could indeed become “new.”

Unfortunately, because I have not yet found any complete collection of more than one run of any movie story magazine, it is difficult to make more systematic claims about the genre—that *Movie Story*, for example, might be the one that tended toward the most literal rendering of the film narrative—much less about content or the representation of other components of identity politics such as race and class. I can proffer only a few hard conclusions based on this limited sample.

First, readers were offered an astonishingly wide range of subject matters in the story digests, ranging from horror to detective fiction to westerns and war stories, and thus someone assumed that women were interested in and spectators of films of these genres as well. Second, perhaps as a corollary, the format of all the magazines insistently foregrounded the notion that both male and female identities are a sort of masquerade. Stars are role players who act, who are, and who perform as part of their jobs as well as in their “real lives.” This works to suggest the mutability of each of these guises and must have encouraged readers to create distance(s) between role, star, image, and performance, in both Hollywood discourse and their own lives. (One has to believe that men read the magazines too, but whether the queer reading performed by Ladd Banks on *Gilda*, for example, reached a queer male audience is impossible to determine.)

Finally, despite their archival scarcity, these magazines are not exactly rare. I am constantly coming across issues (and bits of issues) at venues all over the country—at flea markets, junk and antique shops, secondhand bookstores, and online auction houses. Despite the gaps and blank spots, then, I cannot help but be cheered by the ubiquity and longevity of the story magazines themselves, their presence as what Barthes would call “spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority,” their illogical but compelling conjunction of the “*here-now*” and the “*there-then*.”⁴⁶ Barthes claims that the cinema does not invite scrutiny of itself, of its images, because everything “which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond.” The story magazine, however, does invite scrutiny, the sort of contemplation, identification, and fantasizing that can produce “a whole life external” to its anchoring films. What I *know* about these magazines, and what really makes them important, is that they are still around, saved for decades by fans apparently unwilling to discard their particular obtuse, personal, and indescribable textual pleasures.

Notes

I would like to thank Larry Thomas and Michael Wilson for their support and encouragement during the preparation of this essay, and *Cinema Journal’s* two anonymous readers for their very helpful suggestions and advice.

1. Edward Wagenknecht, quoted in Anthony Slide, "Fan Magazines," in Slide, ed., *International Film, Radio, and Television Journals* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 383–84.
2. All the quotations in this paragraph are from Kathryn H. Fuller, "Motion Picture Story Magazine and the Gendered Construction of the Movie Fan," in Gary R. Edgerton, Michael T. Marsden, and Jack Nachbar, eds., *In the Eye of the Beholder: Critical Perspectives in Popular Film and Television* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 98–99, 105. Fuller's essay also appears in slightly different form in her *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 143–49.
3. Fuller, *In the Eye of the Beholder*, 107.
4. Slide, "Fan Magazines," 385.
5. Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, 145, and Diane Waldman, "From Midnight Shows to Marriage Vows: Women, Exploitation, and Exhibition," *Wide Angle* 6, no. 2 (1984): 48. For more on the history of fan magazines, see also Slide, "Fan Magazines"; Fuller, "Photoplay Magazine, Movie Fans, and the Marketplace," in *At the Picture Show*, 150–68; Gaylyn Studlar, "The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s," *Wide Angle* 13, no. 1 (January 1991): 6–33; and Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 37–40.
6. *Romantic Movie Stories* and *Screen Romances* began publication in 1929, *Movies* in 1934. A major source of information for this essay was the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), located in Schaumburg, Illinois. As its name suggests, the ABC was founded to provide independent audits of the circulation of magazines and of their publishers' methods in reporting them and therefore to set rates for advertisers based on the type of readers reached and by what means a magazine was sold (newsstand sales were considered more "valuable" than subscriptions, for example).

The ABC has audit reports on microfilm going back to 1915. Most of the story magazines were members at one time or another, and thus reports can be used to determine when a magazine began and, in some cases, ceased publication; how its circulation figures varied over time (audit reports provide very detailed information about this—by state and country, number of newsstand copies sold, number of subscriptions, numbers of issues returned, etc.); and issue and subscription prices. One can also compare subscription and sales figures for story magazines with those of other fan and mass-market magazines and, perhaps most important, learn how the magazines' publishers described the story magazines to advertisers. Unfortunately, not all magazines were ABC members (I could find no records for *Photoplay*, for example), and members often "dropped in and out," as one of the ABC employees told me. Sometimes one is fortunate enough to find a date for a magazine's "cessation of issuance" or a full "termination of membership," signaling that a magazine was on its way out. Thus, I know that *Movie Story* ceased publication in 1963 and *Screen Stories* in 1979 but must guess about the rest. *Movie Story* and *Screen Stories* had their highest circulation figures in the 1940s, when they passed 500,000—a very respectable figure compared with other movie fan magazines (*Screen Romances* hovered at 300,000 during the early 1940s).

Unfortunately, the ABC is a fully functioning business and has little interest in magazines that have folded. Although its personnel are very helpful, there is no archivist. There is a single microfilm reader-printer. Audit reports, which tended to run to four or more pages through the 1960s, must be searched individually since they are

not indexed, and only ABC members are allowed to print reports (at a cost, as of this writing, of ten dollars each).

Because of these limitations, some of the magazines, like *Movie Digest*, remain essentially unknown to me (*Movie Digest* is not to be confused with another *Movie Digest* that began publication in the 1970s as a gossip magazine). Nevertheless, its name suggests an important precedent for the genre: the hugely popular *Reader's Digest*, which began publication in 1922. *Reader's Digest* anthologized digests of nonfiction as well as fiction articles, but editors seeking to generate similar circulation figures probably imitated at least some of its editorial practices. The "genius" of *Reader's Digest* was the "discovery that the mass reader doesn't care who wrote what as long as the information is useful or interesting to him [sic]." As is true of the movie story magazines, "the writers are little known, because their style is so flattened out that it doesn't make much difference who wrote an article." Samuel A. Schreiner, Jr., quoting a contributor, *The Condensed World of the Reader's Digest* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 152–53.

7. *Romantic Movie Stories* and *Movie Story* were published by Fawcett, as was the fan magazine *Motion Picture*; *Screen Romances* and *Screen Stories* by Dell, publisher of *Modern Screen*; and the shorter-lived *Movies* by Ultem Publications. The price for fan and story magazines was typically ten cents per issue in the 1930s, rising to thirty-five cents by the 1960s. A glossier magazine, such as the early *Screen Romances* (which sometimes included "novel-length" fictionizations of twenty-plus pages as well as more color pages, heavier paper, and fewer ads) and the large-format *Photoplay*, might cost as much as twenty-five cents initially, but the price dropped to ten cents in the second half of the decade, when the production quality was lowered and the proportion of ad space was increased.
8. What is missing, unfortunately, from most of the story magazines are letters from readers about the fictionizations. Although *Romantic Movie Stories* had a letters section (which was dropped with the name change to *Movie Story* in 1937), as did *Screen Romances* and *Screen Stories* at various points, the letters chosen for publication (and rewarded with prize money) tended to be about stars and vehicles they would be suited for rather than responses to story digests themselves. Conclusions about the assumed age, class, and gender composition of the magazines' readership are drawn from ABC reports (see note 6), the magazines' descriptions of themselves to advertisers (see example in note 11), and the format and content of the print advertisements. For more on ads as gauges of advertisers' beliefs about the demographics of a given vehicle's readership, see Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). See also Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, and Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*.
9. Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 19–20.
10. Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). Smith's research on "marginal" readers of pulp fiction is an excellent example of the valuable work that can be performed around what she calls "the hole in the archival record," which occurs when there is an "absence of documents meeting traditional historical standards of proof" (9).
11. According to audit reports, *Movie Story* described its contents in 1937 as "fictionizations of current motion pictures." In 1938, this was changed to "Preview Fictionizations of current Motion Pictures, Intimate News Items about the Motion Picture Stars and Beauty Articles of particular interest to younger women" and in 1950 to "preview fictionizations of outstanding motion pictures, amplified by news about motion

picture stars and the industry in general. *Movie Story* features beauty and household articles of particular interest to younger women.”

12. Another sort of digest that needs further exploration is, of course, the half-hour radio show based on current motion pictures, which sometimes, though not always, featured the film's stars. Like the story digests, the radio shows streamlined the narrative, using music and sound effects to indicate the passage of time and other ellipses while providing opportunities for audiences to exercise their visual imaginations. Unlike the story digests, however, the radio shows were still bounded experiences, available only at specific times and in specific places.
13. I did much of this research at the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, in Beverly Hills, California, which has one issue of *Best Screen Stories* (a yearbook) from 1942 (volume 1); one issue of *Movie Story* from 1939 and a broken run of the years from 1941 to 1947 and 1950; and miscellaneous issues (in their words) of *Screen Stories* from 1957 to 1965.

Unfortunately, even libraries that appear to have more extensive runs often do not. For example, the online library catalog of the University of Texas at Austin lists *Movie Story*, *Screen Romances*, and *Screen Stories* as part of the holdings of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. These holdings turn out to comprise a single issue of *Movie Story*, one of *Screen Romances* (in “terrible condition”), and five of *Screen Stories*.

14. Cathy N. Davidson, ed., *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 2, 8.
15. Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928–1942* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), examines how Hollywood defined these ideal models and learned to promote them in the codification of the industry's self-regulatory practices. An area that plainly deserves further study is the precise nature of the effects of the enforcement of the Production Code after 1934 on both the appearance and narrative content of story digests. What I can say is that certain conspicuous changes seem tied schematically to the more rigid application of the letter of the code itself. In other words, in magazines I examined from 1930 and 1933, women's clothing is more revealing, especially in star portraits; racial epithets are used freely; descriptions of hard drinking and its effects are common; and there are more overt references to sexuality that are not in themselves sexually explicit (e.g., a man “wanting” a woman or a woman unable to “resist” a man's “hard arms”).
16. Fuller, *In the Eye of the Beholder*, 98. The sources Fuller cites for her statements are Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987); Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1978); and Davidson, *Reading in America*. For more on the antecedents of the story magazine, see Mary Noel, *Villains Galore: The Heyday of the Popular Story Weekly* (New York: Macmillan, 1954). For more on the importance of the short story to narrative filmmaking in America before 1915, see Kristin Thompson, “Novel, Short Story, Drama,” in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 163–75.
17. Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792–1995* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998). For information on magazines, see also Smith, *Hard-Boiled*, 18–20; Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1905–1930* (volume 5 of a five-volume series) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); and James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1971).

18. Zuckerman, *Popular Women's Magazines*, 102.
19. All quotations in this and the subsequent paragraph *ibid.*, 117–21, 180, 203.
20. Since one cannot imagine what a “nonfiction version” of *Jane Eyre* (or most Hollywood films) might be, I take this redundancy in the terminology as a sign of the generic status of the fictionization—that readers know by now that a “fiction version” is a story digest.
21. Randall D. Larson, *Films into Books: An Analytical Bibliography of Film Novelizations, Movie, and TV Tie-Ins* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 3–23.
22. A small sampling of this literature includes Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Lisa Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Constance Penley, “Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture,” in Norman Bryson, Holly Ann Michael, and Keith Moxey, eds., *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). See also one of the foundational texts for all of this work, namely Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
23. Larson, *Films into Books*, 9–10.
24. *Ibid.*, 14–17, 40.
25. *Ibid.*, 3–23, 162–63. For more about movie tie-ins involving the “ready-made customers” for serials that had been published first in newspapers or fiction magazines, see Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 105–6.
26. Only *Movie Story* had a Hollywood as well as a New York editorial office.
27. The 1939 novel *Mrs. Miniver*, by Jan Struther, bears no resemblance to either the film or the screenplay, being a series of sketches about the Miniver family before the war.
28. Deborah Cartmell, “Text to Screen: Introduction,” in Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, eds., *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), 28.
29. *Ibid.* Dudley Andrew’s terms are from his discussion of adaptation in his *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 96–106.
30. Cartmell, “Text to Screen,” 28.
31. All the citations of Barthes’s work in this paragraph come from “Rhetoric of the Image” and “The Third Meaning: Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills,” in Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 39, 53, 54.
32. Jenkins adapted Michel de Certeau’s use of the term “poaching” from de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven R. Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). See Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*.
33. According to Barthes, the connotation of any magazine photograph is realized not only at “the different levels of the production of the photograph (choice [of subject], technical treatment, framing, lay-out)” but also through the placement and signification of text in relation to it: “The photographic paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the ‘art,’ or the treatment, or the ‘writing,’ or the rhetoric, of the photograph).” Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” 19, 20.
34. Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” 53–68. Similar to his subsequent characterization of the photographic punctum (“it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there”), the third meaning, unlike the first or even the second, is not “intentional.” The thickness of someone’s nails, the flabbiness of his or her hands and mouth, and the way the light hits someone’s hat do not represent or copy anything. The punctum is discussed throughout Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

35. Whether Barthes is describing frame enlargements (actual “frozen” moments of a film text) or production stills (still photos of the same subject matter taken “on the set” but not necessarily at the same time or from the same vantage point as the movie camera) is not clear from his discussion or the images he reproduces. The stills in movie story magazines are the latter exclusively, and that is what I refer to when I use the term.
36. Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” 53–68.
37. Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” 19–27.
38. Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 39–41.
39. This task is taken up in Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974). Nevertheless, I believe that Barthes’s work on the visual image is more theoretically useful for my purposes than the distinction he makes in *S/Z* between “readerly” (classic realist) and “writerly” (deconstructivist) texts. As Judith Mayne points out, Barthes seems to advocate reading classic realist texts “in a ‘writerly’ fashion against the ‘readerly’ grain,” which raises some “perplexing questions about the ambivalent status of classical narrative” and whether the appellations “readerly” and “writerly” inhere in texts or reading strategies. Mayne, *Private Novels, Public Films* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 8–9. And, of course, Imelda Whelehan reminds us that the immensity of *S/Z* as a project illustrates “the obstacles preventing the same intimate analysis of a large piece of work—let alone a comparison across two narrative forms.” Whelehan, “Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemmas,” in Cartmell and Whelehan, *Adaptations*, 11.
40. Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension*, 198.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Geoffrey Wagner, quoted in Whelehan, “Adaptations,” 9.
43. In *Ibid.*, 11.
44. Richard B. Jewell, *The RKO Story* (New York: Arlington House, 1982), 92–93.
45. Mayne, *Private Novels, Public Films*, 9.
46. Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 44–45.